Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture

Volume I: Tibet and the Himalaya

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Namgyal Institute of Tibetology - Sikkim
**BUDDHIST HIMALAYA:**
**STUDIES IN RELIGION, HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE CONFERENCE OF THE NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY**
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**VOLUME 1: TIBET AND THE HIMALAYA**

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Conference Participant

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The collection of articles presented in these three volumes were read at the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, *Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture*, held in Gangtok 1-5 October 2008. The idea of holding an international conference at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) had been brewing for a number of years and the Institute’s Golden Jubilee celebrations eventually provided the perfect opportunity to do so. Under the leadership of NIT director Tashi Densapa, Alex Mckay was appointed Conference Convenor, funds were raised, invitations were sent out and in due course, a program of over 70 papers was drawn up reflecting the varied histories and cultures of the region to be presented by a formidable assembly of scholars from no less than eighteen nations. The renowned Gene Smith served as our Senior Presiding Scholar. The planning team initially consisted of Tashi Densapa and ourselves but as the conference drew closer, the team eventually grew to include the whole of NIT staff.

In an effort to honour the institute’s Founder Members, Princess of Sikkim Pema Tsedeun Yabshi Phunkhang Lhacham was invited to attend as Guest of Honour. Unfortunately, she had to decline due to poor health and instead contributed a letter which was published in the Institute’s souvenir book prepared by Tina Tashi commemorating its 50 years of existence.

As Senior Presiding Scholars, we also sought to invite scholars who had been pioneers in the field of Sikkim and Himalayan/Tibetan Studies. Chief among them was Gene Smith who had spent time in Sikkim in the late 1960s, and indeed at the Institute where he was lodged in its hostel, collecting Tibetan manuscripts as refugees were poring out of Tibet. Tibetologist Samten Karmay and Japanese anthropologist Chie Nakane, who had carried out fieldwork research in Sikkim in 1955, were also invited but eventually had to decline.

The conference was inaugurated at Chintan Bhavan by the President of the NIT, His Excellency the Governor of Sikkim Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh with the Chief Minister of Sikkim Shri Pawan Chamling as Guest of Honour. A message from Sonia Gandhi was read and addresses were also delivered by Gene Smith, Ven. Lama Zotpo and Ashok Sinha, son of former NIT Director N.C. Sinha (1958-71 and again 1976-78). A number of books written, compiled or translated by NIT staff were released on the occasion (in alphabetical order):


The conference went off splendidly with three parallel sessions and lively discussions, interspersed with an afternoon of sightseeing, a series of workshops, a dinner hosted by His Excellency the Governor at Raj Bhavan and a performance of the Sikkim Cultural Department in addition to dinner hosted by the Honourable Culture Minister Gargaman Gurung.
We would like to herewith extend our gratitude to all those who contributed in making the NIT Golden Jubilee Conference a success:

1. Sonia Gandhi
2. His Excellency the Governor of Sikkim Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh and his staff
3. Chief Minister of Sikkim Shri Pawan Chamling
4. The Honourable Culture Minister Gargaman Gurung
5. The Late Gene Smith
6. Ven. Lama Zotpa
7. Mr Ashok Sinha

We thank the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, Govt of India, the Chief Minister of Sikkim Shri Pawan Chamling and the Department of Culture, Govt of Sikkim, for the financial support which enabled us to host the Golden Jubilee Conference.

Behind the scenes, making it all possible, were a wide range of people. Thank you to the NIT staff members who all showed a great deal of dedication in ensuring a successful conference. Foremost among them were Kelsang Choden and Kunga Hochotshang. Throughout the conference they dealt with an enormous range of issues with grace and humour, from banners to conference folders and badges to meal tickets; Tenzin C. Tashi (Tina) who has given so much of her time and laboured so hard in dusty archives to produce the Golden Jubilee celebration book; Tashi Chuki who handled all the conference accounts together with Tashi Wangyal and Prescilla as office staff; Thupten Tenzin in the conference office had to turn his hand to just about everything; Tenzin Samphel, Lama Tsultsem Gyatso, Sonam Thinley and Gyaltsen Lepcha, the resourceful staff at Bagdogra Airport, NJP railway station, Rangpo and then in Gangtok; Phurba Tshering our cameraman; Angee in the book sales department; Gyaltsen on the sound system; Kesang and Suk Bahadur our skillful drivers; and Yeshe Wangchuk and Palden Lepcha among the staff already mentioned above deputed to coordinate and assist in the hotels as well as Karuna and Passangkit who made sure we were all well supplied with tea.

Thank you also to the many other scholars who assisted us in various ways in organising this gathering, not least NIT Consultant Tashi Tsering, Francoise Pommaret, and John Bray. And to Francoise, Mark Turin, Karma Phuntsho, Heleen Plaisier and Ann Shaftel for giving their time to make the teaching workshops such a success. We also thank our respective spouses Jeri and Jigme who not only contributed in their own way but also put up with both of us labouring long hours over a period of several months prior to the event.

We would also like to acknowledge the participants who for various reasons were unable to submit a paper for these volumes (in alphabetical order): Vibha Arora, Olivier Chiron, George van Driem, Julien Garcia, Vijaya Kumar, Sherap Raldi, Prem Saran, Ajay Kumar Singh, Kishore Kumar Thapa, the Late Tashi Tobden, Ngawang Tsering, Mynak Tulku, M. Veerender.

And last but not least, we thank our director Tashi Densapa for inviting us to organise the conference in the first place; Tashi Densapa not only remained a constant source of ideas, energy, and encouragement throughout but also an ocean of calm. We all owe him a great deal, not least for his ability to raise the necessary funds to make all this possible.

Alex McKay
Anna Balikci-Denjongpa
INTRODUCTION

ALEX MCKAY
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The Sikkim mandala has traditionally been surrounded by Bhutan in the east, Tibet in the north, Nepal in the west and India to the south. Situated on the main trade route from India to Lhasa, Sikkim has been a cross-roads of civilisations and cultures, sometimes contested, sometimes a buffer-state between its neighbours in their expansionist phases. The nature of the modern Sikkimese state of India reflects this location and history, just as it reflects the diverse environmental conditions of a land that stretches from the plains of Bengal to the highlands of Tibet. Given the diverse range of environments, cultures, and histories that have impacted upon Sikkim, we may approach its study through many different disciplines, and in this volume the articles represent a selection of historical and cultural phenomena that have been manifest in the wider Indo-Tibetan regions and which impact upon Sikkim in the wider context.

It has been a weakness of Tibetan studies, and indeed the study of many cultures, that they have been treated in isolation rather than as unbounded worlds influenced by, and influencing, neighbouring cultures and lands. But here pasts, present, and indeed futures of Sikkim and its neighbours are considered, for the actions and ideas of Rin chen bzung po, the Fifth Dalai Lama, Chinese tea merchants, and the Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Naess, to take just a few examples, may all be considered in regard to Sikkim.

In bringing together specialists in both Sikkim and its neighbouring lands, the 2008 Jubilee Conference of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok fostered, as intended, a dialogue concerning the study of Sikkim and its place in the wider region. Given the current foundational nature of Sikkim Studies (discussed by Balikci; Volume 11), it is hoped that these conference proceedings will, in conjunction with the forthcoming volumes on the history of Sikkim (Saul Mullard) and the Namgyal dynasty (edited by Anna Balikci) as well as the emergence of studies from the new Sikkim University, provide a firm foundation for the future development of the field.

The volume opens with a discursive piece by David Germano, centred on the realities of academic engagement with China in the context of the Tibetan human rights issue. Tibetan exile identities, which embrace both unity and difference, are discussed within the wider framework of the rights of minority groups world-wide. Reflecting on how academics might foster Tibetan self-empowerment, Germano points to the use of digital technology, and specifically the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library, as a means by which Tibetans may engage in self-representation and participatory knowledge creation, using this outlet to express Tibetan forms of knowledge rather than these being imposed by outsiders. This, he suggests, enables Tibetans—and by extension other minority groups—to participate “in a fully dimensional world with dimensions that are uniquely and wholly their own in character.” If that expression currently seems at odds with political realities, we may remember a Tibetan saying: “Even though the whole world is covered with snow and ice, some rabbits still inhale the smell of green grass in their dreams.”

Karma Phuntsho then outlines his developing researches into the Tibetan culture of the book, the subject of his forthcoming monograph. He begins with a critique of academic
boundaries, an argument for the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach, with subjects of the complexity of, for example, Tibetan Buddhism requiring more varied perspectives for proper understanding. Indeed, as he notes, the growth of digital technology is transforming the organisation of knowledge and breaking down these artificial conceptual boundaries. He then illustrates the necessity of varied approaches to the study of the book, discussing such issues as how the role and function of the book permeates Tibetan culture, the question of what a book means to a Tibetan Buddhist, how books serve as a historical tool through which to examine Tibetan Buddhism, and how they function as sacred objects, as art, and as manifestations of the historical Buddha.

With several hundred languages and dialects in use throughout the Himalayas, the question of a single language being required at state level is very relevant, and the issue has implications elsewhere, as in India, where the imposition of Hindi has proved controversial. Lopen Lungtaen Gyatso discusses the challenges and opportunities posed by the development of Dzongkha as the lingua franca of Bhutan. First transformed into a written language as recently as the late 1960s, it is considered an important part of the promotion of Bhutanese national identity. English, however, remains a status language, and fluency in Dzongkha is far from universal even at graduate level. A shortage of Dzongkha teachers hinders its progress, while English is fostered by globalisation. Thus the aims of institutionalising Dzongkha are ongoing, but yet to be achieved.

Staying with Bhutan, the article by Yongten Dargye provides an overview of modern Bhutanese funeral procedures and their regional variations. Cremation, sky-, water-, ground- and cave-burial are all practiced in different parts of the country depending on both social and environmental factors, as is the case elsewhere in the Himalayan region. Dargye also describes the religious procedures from the time of approaching death until final disposal of the body, and records the recent endeavours by the 70th Je Khenpo which have removed the increasing modern tendency to grander and more expensive funerals, a situation with parallels in Sikkim.

Lopen Ngawang Jamtsho then describes the particular character of the Aolay (A'o legs) harvest festival in Laya (La yag), northern Bhutan. This event brings together the yak-herding pastoralists of the region, and is distinguished by its being associated with the visit to the region by the unifier of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, in 1616. This three day communal festival also celebrates the local yul lha (mountain deity), and while modernity may lead to its decline, the festival has been preserved on film, having been, in 2005, documented by the ILCS and also the subject of a Bhutanese television programme.

Akiko Ueda's article examines recent socio-political changes in Bhutan around the transition to constitutional monarchy and discusses modernity in Bhutan with reference to the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu. It focuses on changing hierarchies, particularly the perceptions of young Bhutanese in this time of great change, and discerns a legitimacy deriving from H.M. the King of Bhutan that ensures that, "modernity is firmly in the hands of tradition". Bhutan is unusual in that democracy has been introduced at the behest of the king, and not in response to popular demand, contradicting the theories of social scientists such as Bourdieu. Ueda also examines the social implications of the new political careers available as a result of democratisation, and discusses the attraction of a political career to the youth of Bhutan.

Two articles on art and material culture then follow. In the first, Lopen Tobgye and Françoise Pommaret provide a much-needed in-depth analysis of the cult of phallic representations so common in Bhutan. This aspect of Bhutanese culture has long exerted a
fascination on outsiders, with various theories suggested in regard to its origins. But while a variety of Buddhist and non-Buddhist formulations of this ancient fertility symbol have crystallised around the ‘divine madman’ figure of Drukpa Kinley, the authors conclude that this phenomena has earlier origins. They demonstrate that it is part of a “multi-layered socio-religious matrix”, one that has, in recent times, proved useful in allowing open discussion within Bhutanese society in the fight against HIV-Aids.

Susanne von der Heide then reports, with bountiful illustrations, on art investigations carried out by the author and the late Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Rinpoche at two early cave temple sites in Upper Mustang; Mentsün Lhakhang and Dagrangang. With wall paintings provisionally dating from around the eleventh century, and clay statues from the eleventh-twelfth centuries, these indicate an earlier date for Buddhist art development in Mustang than has previously been assumed. Situated on the old trade route from Guge, taken by such luminaries as Milarepa and Atisha, these sites also raise the possibility of their indicating local influence by Rin chen bzang po.

Biographical accounts of female medical practitioners in Tibet are extremely rare, and Therese Hofer’s study of the Tibetan medical doctor (am chi) Yangchen Lhamo, popularly known as Khandro Yangkar (1907-73) contributes to both medical history and gender studies. Khandro Yangkar practiced not only in Tibet (and Bhutan), but in Sikkim in the 1940s, enjoying particular repute in the field of eye surgery. Hofer situates her work within the wider context of the history of sowa rigpa (the Tibetan ‘science of healing’), where female practitioners were extremely rare, and also discusses the techniques for cataract removal under this system. But gender restrictions surface again after the Chinese take-over of Tibet, when Khandro Yangkar was able to continue practicing but was apparently forced to give up her speciality and focus on women and children’s health, see as more appropriate to a female practitioner.

Before we move into the historical section of the volume, we firstly consider the device for linking Buddhist and modern ecological understandings proposed by Rhyddhi Chakraborty and Chhanda Chakraborti. They compare the philosophy advanced by the famous Lotus Sutra with the Deep Ecology platform of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in order to suggest a culturally appropriate platform for Sikkimese environmental approaches. Both systems postulate a non-duality between humans and their environment, and both require a transformation of the self through a specific platform of ethical development in order to obtain an ultimate goal that embraces a relationship between the natural and human worlds. The fragility of the Sikkimese environment in the context of modern development makes such issues of considerable relevance.

Recent decades have seen considerable advances in the field of Tantric studies, which have, however, tended to focus on the elite stratas of society and religion, or what Sheldon Pollock has called the ‘Sanskrit cosmopolis’. To counter this tendency to homogenise, and thus erase, important distinctions in Tantric sources, Ronald Davidson proposes a biogeographical approach as a heuristic devise enabling us to situate sources in time and space. As Davidson states, “different areas of tantric practice had different characteristics, some of which, at the very least, have made these areas highly distinctive.” The biogeography model brings out the diversity of Tantric forms shaped by regional cultural environments, as demonstrated here by the examples of four regions—Oddiyana, Kashmir, Kangra, and Nepal—and their variations in Tantric Buddhist history and practice. Tantric Buddhism thus emerges as a series of “complex systems of possibilities in dialogue with the
escaping the emic and elite paradigms that exclude so many observable realities of Tantric history and practice.

The Cakrasamvara Tantric cycles are the subject of the following paper by Andrea Loseries. This cycle is fundamental to an understanding of Tibetan Buddhist landscape conversion as it occurred in the tenth-thirteenth century, particularly in the Ti se (Kailas), La-phyi, Tsari sacred mountain sites. Loseries outlines the history of the various Cakrasamvara formulations in their transmission, discusses the question of their origins in the Vajrayana/Saivite overlap, and considers the pitha traditions associated with these teachings. The relevance of Davidson’s biogeographical approach is immediately apparent here, with the importance of the Cakrasamvara Tantric cycles to the western Himalayan region.

We then turn to the much-debated question of the origins of Bon, with an article by Henk Blezer that is part of his continuing enquiries into this problematic issue. He concludes that the emergence of identities distinct from the Buddhist seems to first arise in documents from around the turn of the first millennium CE., and focuses here on narrative cycles concerning the shifting realm of Myi yul skYi mthing. This suggests that the projection of Bon origins as being from the far west of Tibet, in Zhang zhung or Ta zig, seems late, and Blezer’s structural analysis of Bon narratives suggests earlier elements are more associated with central locations.

David Holmberg examines the distinct western Tamang socio-cultural formation of non-monastic Buddhism. This arose within a clan-based subsistence agricultural society and thus provides a counterpoint to anthropological models of Buddhism as arising as a product of urban development and in association with state formation. Holmberg describes the cosmogonic mythology of the Tamang and its production of the Buddhist social order and the rituals and understandings that reinforce the ‘naturalisation’ of other-worldly powers. Increased contact with the modern world, however, has made the Tamang aware of the distinct nature of their religious practice, and Holmberg explores the tensions that exist between the newly apparent ‘orthodox’ lamas, who are transforming ritual and associated social practices in line with textual practice, and the lamas following Tamang formulations, who may be locally preferred as manifestations of a distinct Tamang identity.

Our knowledge of the phyi dar and the processes of state formulation consequent upon that phase owe much to the work of Roberto Vitali. Here he discusses the mes rabs of the Nyingma gter ston (‘Treasure-finder’), rig ’dzin rGod ldem can dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337-1408). He was well known in Sikkim, where he was active from 1374-1384 and Vitali is particularly concerned to discuss rGod ldem can’s family origins among the Turkic and Tangut tribes of Central Asia, and in particular the consequences of the southern migrations from Mi nyag after the Mongol destruction of the Si hia (Xixia) kingdom (also see, Sperling: Volume II.).

Our knowledge of the life and achievements of Rin chen bzang po is then enhanced by Laxman Thakur’s study of his life and achievements based on a previously neglected source, local folk-songs, allied to Thakur’s own archaeological researches at sites associated with the ‘Great Translator’. This approach provides an unjustly neglected counterpoint to the study of a culture’s texts, which are generally elite discourses, and, as Thakur states, “democratises the study of history.” Folk-songs in the western Himalayas describe such aspects as Rin chen bzang po’s relationships with local deities and with local communities rather than with the elites referred to in the texts. The songs also describe in fascinating detail the actual processes involved in monastic construction, such as the transportation of wood and clay, and
provide versions of the chronology of monastic construction in the region that can be supported by site investigation, and ultimately compared to textual accounts.

Staying with this formative period, the role of imperial legacies in the life of princess Chos kyi sgron ma (1422-1455), is discussed by Hildegard Diemberger. From the royal family of Gung thang, whose status was considerably enhanced by their claim to origin and associations among Yarlung dynasty royalty, the princess was the founding figure in the bSam sdings rDo rje Phag mo tradition. Her life was thus interpreted in her biography as a manifestation of the divine, and while as a woman she was unable to “fully enact the imperial legacies associated with her lineage”, the princess was of considerable importance both in the ‘Hidden Lands’ movement and in that her followers ensured the establishment of her incarnation lineage.

From these formative figures we then come forward to the seventeenth century, when, the dGa’ ldan pho brang government was established against the background of a tri-partite struggle between Manchu China, Mongolia and Tibet. This government was to rule Tibet until the Chinese invasion in 1950. Its consolidation was achieved, as is well known, under the rule of one of Tibetan history’s outstanding personalities, the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682). While earlier studies have highlighted his activities in central Tibet, and in the centralisation of power there, Peter Schwieger’s article examines his expansion of Tibetan power—with Mongol support—to what became the south-eastern districts of Tibet. It is notable that, as Schwieger describes, this saw the dGe lugs pa sect established as dominant there through the “systematic suppression of other Buddhist schools, especially the bKa’ brgyud. Henceforth the dGe lugs pa in that area were closely linked to the religio-political centre of Tibet.

More recent expansion by the Tibetan state is then discussed in the article by Toni Huber, which examines their political and economic movements into the fragmented and stateless regions of the far eastern Himalayas in the first half of the twentieth century. In three case studies of Tibetan activities in the regions from Tawang to Pemakö, which draw on texts and oral histories from field work in this frontier region, Huber’s focus is on what actually happened on the ground in the encounter between Tibetan agents and local peoples. The sense of cultural and religious superiority felt by the Tibetans over the non-Buddhist ‘Loba’ inhabitants of this region enabled a primary concern with ‘exploitation and profit’ rather than the more usually mentioned religious, or political-diplomatic goals of Tibetans in border contacts. The lands of the ‘Loba’, largely beyond the administrative control of British India, were a region from which the Tibetans took slaves, and used armed force to impose their will.

The focus of the next article is the social and political history of tea, the staple beverage of Tibetan culture. As Patrick Booz’s article shows, tea was of considerable significance—both actual and symbolic—in nineteenth and early twentieth century regional geopolitics. China’s tea trade with Tibet was not only of great economic importance, but part of the Chinese control mechanisms in Tibet. Chinese sources persist in promoting a myth that British Indian attempts to export tea to Tibet had significant effects, and that tea was the thin end of the wedge of British efforts to take-over Tibet. But British-Indian efforts to promote Indian tea in Tibet were a total failure, not least because Tibetans simply preferred the taste of Chinese tea, and as Booz concludes: “Indian tea rarely entered Tibet, and never posed a threat to the Sichuan tea industry.”

Localised versions of the life(s) of the historical Buddha were one of the key features of the indigenisation of Buddhism throughout Asia, and in this context Todd Lewis discusses a
Newar version of the Buddha’s life story, the *Sugat Saurabh* (‘The Fragrance of the Buddha’). This was composed by the great Nepali poet Chittadhar Hridaya in the 1940s, and while in traditional idioms from the Indic *kāvyā* tradition his composition reflects both the local cultural setting and modernist influence. Lewis demonstrates these influences—the latter broadly within the Buddhist modernism movement in such aspects as the de-emphasising of the miraculous—while celebrating the great literary command and achievements of the poet.

The Buddhist encounter with modernity is also the background to Malgorzata Gdok-Klafkowski’s account of the Roerich family, which discusses their relationship with Sikkim as well as providing a valuable bibliographical resource on this remarkable family, with particular reference to Russian research. Nicholas Roerich, artist, mystic and Central Asian traveller, had considerable influence on Western imaginal constructions of Tibet as Shangri-la, while his painting style was widely influential, not least it has been suggested, in regard to the delicate landscapes painted by the last Chogyal of Sikkim. With Nicholas Roerich’s wife Helena, a Theosophist, and their sons being the Oriental scholar Yuri and the painter and botanist Svyatoslav, this extraordinarily talented family had a lasting impact on Western, not least Russian, understandings of Indo-Tibetan world. Not least among the noteworthy features of his career is that Nicholas was one of the very few outsiders who largely rejected the status of the Dalai Lama in favour of the Panchen Lama. There is much still be to written about the Roerich’s, and this article provides an invaluable bibliographical starting point.

Finally we turn to a sacred site that is renowned throughout the Indo-Tibetan world; the sacred complex of Kailas-Manasarovar in what is now the Ngari region of western Tibet. Herself recently returned from a visit to the site, Kumkum Roy’s article analyses four twentieth century travel accounts by Indian visitors to the region, uniquely in Kailas pilgrimage literature and studies, she is concerned not only with her subject’s disparate reactions to landscape and populations, but with the often overlooked service class, porters, guides and suchlike; the “other’ of the *yatris*. Relations with the local populations and these servants were often “marked by ambivalences and fears”, their humanity both acknowledged and denied.

**NOTES**

1 Bodleian library, Richardson Collection, MS. Or. Richardson 32: 1-99, Sonam T. Kazi to Hugh Richardson, 18 April 1994.
LOCALITY, PARTICIPATION, AND MORALITY IN OUR ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH TIBET

DAVID GERMANO
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A DREAM

On August 11th, 2009, early in the morning, I had a dream. I had just gotten back from Eastern Tibet working on a project on responsible tourism with a team of architects and tourism experts, and my nights were still restless. In the dream I was back in Kham in eastern Tibet, probably at a community in which I have lived before, though as is often the case with dreams, it looked little like the actual community. I was part of a group of visitors, and as we drove into a compound, we were impressed by some system of mechanical parking areas that lifted the car from one level to another, almost like a series of canals and locks. When we disembarked and entered the buildings, which seemed to be a school, I felt a familiar pleasure as we begin to see the local Tibetan kids and interact with them...

Sometime later I was in a large rustic building, like a barn, or a rough and ready community meeting hall, with the others, when suddenly it filled with Tibetans who, oddly, were all from the diaspora community and who were agitated. They presented me with a newspaper whose headlines read, ‘THE RED UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA’, with the rest of the front page seemingly consisting of attacks on UVa and the work it has been doing in Tibet, indeed work I have been doing in Tibet. I glanced at the rest of the newspaper, and it seemed to be cookie cutter content cut and paste in from some other utterly unrelated publication. I felt upset, but also filled with a desire to address them. I began talking as I walked up and down the central corridor. But I was unsure as to whether to speak Tibetan or English, and kept switching back and forth; in addition, there were a lot of people, and no microphone, so I found myself almost shouting. I started out by saying I wanted to communicate something to them with three points, after which I was happy to answer any and all questions. Even in a dream, I found myself resorting to Tibetan Buddhist modes of presentation, with their tendency towards detailed outlines, or sa bcad....

My three points were (i) why and how what UVa was doing was beneficial for Tibetans, (ii) why we believed in a program of engagement with China and Chinese, and finally, (iii) the bigger picture in which at least we had a hope, a possibility, for a sustainable future of well-being for Tibetans all across the plateau. As I struggled to express myself—lost in one of those frustrating confusions and gaps that we are all familiar with in dreams—I temporarily got lost in a side room and lost a minute or two as I tried to figure out what had happened and find my way back to the others. When I returned to the main space, somehow everyone but a few Tibetans had left, having lost interest in any sustained conversation the moment I had lost my way. I started talking to the remaining few Tibetans, complaining that the others wouldn't spend the time to have a conversation about these issues or their complaints....
Newar version of the Buddha’s life story, the 
Sugat Saurabh  (‘The Fragrance of the 
Buddha’). This was composed by the great Nepali poet Chittadhar Hridaya in the 1940s, and 
while in traditional idioms from the Indic kavya tradition his composition reflects both the 
local cultural setting and modernist influence. Lewis demonstrates these influences—the 
latter broadly within the Buddhist modernism movement in such aspects as the de-
emphasis of the miraculous—while celebrating the great literary command and 
achievements of the poet.

The Buddhist encounter with modernity is also the background to Małgorzata Gdok-
Klafkowska’s account of the Roerich family, which discusses their relationship with Sikkim as 
well as providing a valuable bibliographical resource on this remarkable family, with 
particular reference to Russian research. Nicholas Roerich, artist, mystic and Central Asian 
traveller, had considerable influence on Western imaginal constructions of Tibet as Shangri-
la, while his painting style was widely influential, not least it has been suggested, in regard to 
the delicate landscapes painted by the last Chogyal of Sikkim. With Nicholas Roerich’s wife 
Helena, a Theosophist, and their sons being the Oriental scholar Yuri and the painter and botanist Svyatoslav, this extraordinarily talented family had a lasting impact on Western, not 
least Russian, understandings of Indo-Tibetan world. Not least among the noteworthy 
features of his career is that Nicholas was one of the very few outsiders who largely rejected 
the status of the Dalai Lama in favour of the Panchen Lama. There is much still be to written 
about the Roerich’s, and this article provides an invaluable bibliographical starting point.

Finally we turn to a sacred site that is renowned throughout the Indo-Tibetan world; the 
sacred complex of Kailas-Manasarovar in what is now the Ngari region of western Tibet. 
Herself recently returned from a visit to the site, Kumkum Roy’s article analyses four 
twentieth century travel accounts by Indian visitors to the region, uniquely in Kailas 
pilgrimage literature and studies, she is concerned not only with her subject’s disparate 
reactions to landscape and populations, but with the often overlooked service class, porters, 
guides and suchlike; the “‘other’ of the yatris.” Relations with the local populations and these 
servants were often “marked by ambivalences and fears”, their humanity both acknowledged 
and denied.

NOTES

1 Bodlen library, Richardson Collection, MS. Or. Richardson 32: 1-99, Sonam T. Kazi to Hugh Richardson, 

2 Also see, for a recent complementary study, Erberto Lo Bue, ‘Notes on Sky-Burial in Indian, Chinese and 
Nepalese Tibet’, in John Bray and Elena De Rossi Filineck (eds), Mountains, Monasteries and Mosques: 
Recent Research on Ladakh and the Western Himalaya. Proceedings of the 13th Colloquium of the 
On August 11th, 2009, early in the morning, I had a dream. I had just gotten back from Eastern Tibet working on a project on responsible tourism with a team of architects and tourism experts, and my nights were still restless. In the dream I was back in Kham in eastern Tibet, probably at a community in which I have lived before, though as is often the case with dreams, it looked little like the actual community. I was part of a group of visitors, and as we drove into a compound, we were impressed by some system of mechanical parking areas that lifted the car from one level to another, almost like a series of canals and locks. When we disembarked and entered the buildings, which seemed to be a school, I felt a familiar pleasure as we begin to see the local Tibetan kids and interact with them...

Sometime later I was in a large rustic building, like a barn, or a rough and ready community meeting hall, with the others, when suddenly it filled with Tibetans who, oddly, were all from the diaspora community and who were agitated. They presented me with a newspaper whose headlines read, ‘THE RED UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA’, with the rest of the front page seemingly consisting of attacks on UVa and the work it has been doing in Tibet, indeed work I have been doing in Tibet. I glanced at the rest of the newspaper, and it seemed to be cookie cutter content cut and paste in from some other utterly unrelated publication. I felt upset, but also filled with a desire to address them. I began talking as I walked up and down the central corridor. But I was unsure as to whether to speak Tibetan or English, and kept switching back and forth; in addition, there were a lot of people, and no microphone, so I found myself almost shouting. I started out by saying I wanted to communicate something to them with three points, after which I was happy to answer any and all questions. Even in a dream, I found myself resorting to Tibetan Buddhist modes of presentation, with their tendency towards detailed outlines, or sa bcad....

My three points were (i) why and how what UVa was doing was beneficial for Tibetans, (ii) why we believed in a program of engagement with China and Chinese, and finally, (iii) the bigger picture in which at least we had a hope, a possibility, for a sustainable future of well-being for Tibetans all across the plateau. As I struggled to express myself—lost in one of those frustrating confusions and gaps that we are all familiar with in dreams—I temporarily got lost in a side room and lost a minute or two as I tried to figure out what had happened and find my way back to the others. When I returned to the main space, somehow everyone but a few Tibetans had left, having lost interest in any sustained conversation the moment I had lost my way. I started talking to the remaining few Tibetans, complaining that the others wouldn't spend the time to have a conversation about these issues or their complaints....
A MEMORY

I would like to share a memory, a memory from a time when I began the work I will show you today. In 1996, I was living in India, then Nepal, and then Lhasa over the year, and my older daughter, Anna Yeshe, had just turned five. While she lived her first year of life in Lhasa, she had just spent the last two years in Charlottesville, and in the process had forgotten all her Tibetan and turned into a totally American creature, a state in which she arrived in Lhasa and entered the Zhol primary school, a Tibetan school run by her uncle and located behind the Potala. It was a wonderful school in which kids studied Tibetan writing, Tibetan songs, and Tibetan dance. Over the course of the year, Anna Yeshe transformed before our eyes, shedding her American language, food, habits, postures, and becoming a fully Tibetan little girl, speaking Tibetan, eating her ball of barley in the morning, to the point that in mid-year her Italian-Irish American grandparents called, and she had no idea what they were talking about. Watching her and her young class mates, who were undergoing only slightly less astonishing transformations as the written Tibetan language and newly acquired cultural traditions swept over them, I wondered about my future, the future of Tibetans, the future of my daughter, and the future of Tibetan Studies, and increasingly began to feel there lay a fundamental key in the nexus of education, Tibetan language, children, and the collective transformation of awareness in specifically Tibetan ways, across sectors, across divides.

Later in the year, shortly before we were to return to the US, her uncle, the school's principal and driving force, was removed from his post, and the next morning my daughter expelled from school for the remainder of our stay. My daughter went on to transform yet again, this time back in a US school with English and American ways.

DAILY REALITIES

Against this background of memories and dreams, of past sufferings and future hopes, of the reality of conflict and the possibility of reconciliation, I would like to pose a question. From the rabjung chudün to the rabjung chogyé, the seventeenth sixty year cycle to the eighteenth sixty year cycle, from the chakta lo to the chakyo lo, from the iron tiger to the iron hare year, from the end of one bönda to the beginning of the next bönda, from the end of one Tibetan lunar month to the beginning of the next, from za mikmar to za lhakpa, from Tuesday to Wednesday, from cutso cupa to cutso cucikpa, from ten o'clock to eleven o'clock from this moment to the next moment, from this second to the next second, every day Tibetans all across the plateau live their lives. Tibetan students go to school, nomads lead their herds, farmers cultivate their crops, business women sell their wares, people fight, people rejoice, Tibetans are born, Tibetans die, an NGO collapses, a house is built. Every day, every single day. In this small hamlet of a few households nestled against the hills in Lhoka; in that scattering of nomadic tents in a particular stretch of the grasslands in Serta, in a crowded Karmakunsang neighbourhood in Lhasa, in the monastic village of Garta, in this room, in that hermitage up on the mountain side of Zhara, in this office in Dartsedo, and in thousands of other such locales across the immense Tibetan plateau.

And yet, our attention to these daily lived realities is ruptured, incomplete, a few scattered glimpses, while for millions of Tibetans, it is seamlessly continuous hour after hour, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. And in every moment, hundreds of decisions are made; hundreds of failures, hundreds of hopes, hundreds of
successes, hundreds of fears. And in the balances of these moments, the future of Tibetans as individuals, as communities, as families, as collectives is determined, one after another, again and again. Whether we are there or not, whether we care or not, day after day, lives are broken, children are liberated, an organization of hope is created, an organization of hope is betrayed.

In the face of these profoundly human moments that have just happened, that right now are happening, that will happen in a profusion over the next few minutes in which you read these words ... what do we do? What can we do? What should we do? That is our essential question.

What is the One Road to Life?

*Tibet: A Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong* is a contemporary short story written by the Tibetan novelist Tashi Dawa. It tells the story of two Tibetans on a journey, perhaps a pilgrimage, across the Tibetan plateau in terms of spatial geography, and across recent Tibetan memory and trauma in terms of emotional geography, compelled by hidden forces to journey, yet not at all sure of their ultimate destination or desires. They finally arrive at a mountain amidst a complex network of gullies shaped like the palm print of Padmasambhva, the Lotus Master, the famous Indian saint who many centuries ago first tamed the Tibetan landscape, and the indigenous spirits haunting it, to pave the way for Buddhism to take hold in Tibet. From these gullies, the author tells us, there is one road that leads to life, and a hundred roads that lead to death. And that single road leading to life is unmarked. Traditional Buddhist imagery would suggest that this road leads to nirvana, to the pure land where Buddhas greet one upon death, or perhaps the splendid tantric mandala where the inner purity of our ordinary lives, landscapes and communities stand revealed. Yet in the context in which Tashi Dawa writes—the late twentieth century as Tibetans face an uncertain future—what are those 100 roads that lead to death? And, even more importantly, what is that single unmarked road that leads to life?

Today, Tibetans find themselves at such a cross roads as a people, as a series of mostly rural communities, agrarian and nomadic in character, scattered across the vast Tibetan plateau and Himalayan range. Like so many other minority cultures around the world, they are under pressure from the forces of both globalization and dominant neighbours, and in the process have become spatially and temporally 'knotted'. Unable to pursue their own agendas, they find the spaces and times that constitute their world increasingly defined by external agents domestically and internationally. Limited in their ability to express their own distinctive worlds, and constrained in agency on multiple fronts—economic, cultural, linguistic, political—Tibetans, and other communities like them, stand at a point in the wilderness where 100 roads lead to death, as a people, as a culture, as sustainable communities, while a single road, at times impossible to discern, leads to the possibility of continued vitality, of sustainable existence as who they are as a people—with their languages, their spaces, their times, their agencies, their values.

The Flat Earth

In *The World is Flat*, Thomas Freidman describes how new information technologies and market forces level the world so that emerging economies can compete with developed economies, such that a greater number of individuals and communities across the world can
participate in the global economy on equal footing. A simple example, we call Dell technical help and talk to workers in Bangalore, India. Thus Freidman stresses the aspiration of millions still living in rural communities around the world beyond the reach of these transformations, who he describes as aspiring to that same flat world.

Do local communities around the world aspire to a flat world? Is that the one road to life Tibetans seek? If it is, it would seem odd to describe it as unmarked, since Freidman, among others, has marked its path so clearly through the landscape of contemporary times. Or perhaps, instead, the flat earth, is just one of the many roads to death from the intersecting gullies shaped like the palm print of the Lotus Master.

SUSTAINABLE WORLDS

What such communities aspire to, I believe, in addition to participation in a global economy, physical well-being, education, security, legal services, and other basic elements that should be provided by government in an accountable and transparent fashion, is expression, representation, and agency on their own terms—a fully dimensional world where space, time, and agency are inherently Tibetan, or Kurdish, or Mongolian, or American Indian, or Palestinian, or Kashmiri, in their details and rhythms, a world that protrudes out from the global norm as they engage in their own self-expression and agency from day to day, week to week, year to year, in a world that is irreducibly their own, and yet which engages and relates to the other worlds—Chinese, American, French, Indian. They want to participate in a flat world, yes, but also in a fully dimensional world with dimensions that are uniquely and wholly their own in character. This, perhaps, is the one road to life that lies somewhere amongst the other hundred roads leading to death. For the purely flat world, is, without question, the death of these local worlds, and all other highly distinctive worlds that are constituted, and sustained, on the basis of unique languages, ethics, geographies, temporalities, values, architectures, religions, and far more.

So the question, then, is if market forces and information technologies are creating and sustaining this emergent flat world, how might Universities, colleges, high schools, and beyond, help use new information technologies to partner with local communities around the world to help them, in a sustainable fashion, maintain the dimensionality of their world, and express it on a broader scale beyond their communities, even as they increasingly inhabit the spaces where their world intersects those other worlds which surround, and at times, threaten to envelop them.

LOCAL TRUTHS

We are one—one physical world, one species, one global economy, one, perhaps, in heart and spirit. And yet we are never the same—and sometimes this wisdom of difference is harder to appreciate than the wisdom of sameness. Even the Tibetan world itself is not one world—different in Qinghai from Ganzi, different in Golok from Kham, different in Lhasa from Ta'u, much less one with the Chinese world, or the American world, or any of the other worlds we find in each locality, in each village, in each home, an infinity of worlds that stands revealed when we open ourselves to difference. We may stand as one people across the world, and yet our differences are that which allow us to unite—and in those differences lies the richness, specificity, and uniqueness of human experiences across space, and time.
We rush to knit our worlds together by embracing globalization, nationalism, trans-regional infrastructures, the convertibility of standards, and other dynamics that facilitate integration, and sameness across the borders that divide us. There can be, without doubt, a wisdom and a power in such movements towards sameness, and yet, there is an irreducible profundity to each local place, each local community, infinite in their depth, bewildering in their complexity, and absolutely unique in their self-expression.

One of my favourite quotes of Thomas Jefferson, the third American President and founder of my University, is this, "the important truths, that knowledge is power, that knowledge is safety, and that knowledge is happiness." And yet we might ask, then, whose knowledge? and consequently, whose power? whose safety? whose happiness?

Participatory Knowledge

A group of Universities and research institutions in China and outside China has thus for a decade led a sustained initiative to harness digital technology, and the forces of higher education, to build global, and local, networks to facilitate the documentation of Tibetan forms of knowledge, of local Tibetan worlds, and to aid Tibetans in engaging in self-representation and participatory knowledge creation. These local acts of agency reach beyond local boundaries into the wider national and international worlds that shape them, but which, in turn, must also be shaped by them. It is an experiment to replace elite models of knowledge production and publication that focuses exclusively on University researchers, their publications, and their institutions, with radically distributed knowledge creation, and dissemination that flows out of, and reaches back into, the local communities at the heart of Tibet.

Peace, the resolution of human conflict, will come from the intersection of knowledge and care, when we care enough to enable, and appreciate, the sustenance of local knowledge and being around the world, and view the larger world as a series of smaller worlds, unfathomable in their depth, and unknowable in their complexity. Knowledge, if it is to be a path to a better tomorrow, must be those knowledges, and our educational system must aspire to more than speaking for others in voices we deny them. In this intersection of profoundly local Knowledge and Community lay our better past, and our better future.

Thus with the Tibetan and Himalayan Library (www.thlib.org) we are now ending a decade of building a technical and human infrastructure to support this work. This new infrastructure allows people to contribute online from all over the world, and will allow institutions and individuals to use the data and tools within their own web sites rather than link to some other web site. Back in Tibet, we are in the process of shifting to focus primarily on participatory knowledge movements, a new Tibetan language digital library, new Tibetan language informational services, and the support of local centres of knowledge production, dissemination, and use in the form of community libraries, schools, and local groups on the plateau. Participatory knowledge is particularly important, since it enables local Tibetan or Himalayan individuals or groups to be the eyes behind the camera, the hands that write the script, and the voices and faces that perform before the lens. The result draws upon their own insights, experiences, passions, inspiration, and hard work to create new forms of knowledge flowing from the locality out into the world around them as profoundly local acts of agency and representation.
I would like to share another personal moment with you. Two decades ago I lived in a small hermitage behind a sacred mountain in a town in Eastern Tibet called Ba Lhagang, literally the glorious divine ridge. There I studied the intricacies of tantric Buddhism with one of the last great teachers of his generation, Khenpo Chodrak, who day after day spoke to me about Rikpa, this primordial and innate awareness said to govern all life, and to hold within it the key to contemplative realization, and thus enlightenment. I studied and meditated there in that lovely spot, off the grid of electricity and phones, much less an internet that none of us had even heard of at that point. At the time, there was also a Tibetan student roughly of my age named Dorje Tashi, who had come from a fatherless, poor background to become Khenpo's greatest student.

A decade later I returned to Lhagang, Khenpo now already in his final years no longer teaching, to visit Dorje Tashi. I found him in an orphanage he had just established by taking 108 Tibetan children off the streets, children who were the doomed, many already physically and mentally scarred. A child kept in a cage there, a young girl with cigarette burns on her face here. The scars, still fresh, had resulted in these children literally becoming knotted, young examples of the souls knotted on a leather thong that Tashi Dawa's story describes. And as I talked with these children, watched them study and watched them play, and saw the vibrant, open, luminous space that Dorje Tashi was opening up for them, I witnessed the tentative unravelling of those knots, the beginnings of transformation, which would later become an extraordinary community of young women and men, educated and caring, motivated and capable. And in that moment I remembered our teacher's words, about the mystic transformation of awareness, the extraordinary potential of the human spirit, and the path to its realization. In those kids, in those moments, awareness is being transformed, and a profound human potential is being realized; and these moments are being repeated, not in the grand, pompous pageantry of lamas more concerned about their monastic purity than the Tibetan communities around them, or scholars more concerned about their scholarly purity and obsessions than the well-being of those they study, but in such schools, in such spaces of well-being, knowledge, and care that dedicated individuals each day work tirelessly to create and sustain.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the time has come for uncommon expertise, immense patience, and an infinite willingness to share the vantage point of our Tibetan brothers and sisters not just for a moment, or for an anniversary, but year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute, second after second. The future requires knowledge and care; the powerful and extraordinarily difficult knowledge of how to build sustainable solutions to complex human problems, and the care to share the plights of those less fortunate not for a moment, but for a life time. These choices are ours, to make or not to make, but the time for ignorance and passion, without profound knowledge measured by equally profound care, has passed and is no longer excusable, and is certainly no longer moral.

We live in an extraordinarily complex world—nothing is simple. Such complexity demands equally complex understanding and complex actions. It demands, in traditional Buddhist terms, wisdom and compassion, the wisdom of understanding complex patterns of
similarity and difference in a bewildering array of contexts, and the compassion of caring enough to apply that understanding in finely tuned and long-term strategic actions tuned to the key of reality, a human reality that is always already much more complex than we can possibly understand. So the question we should ponder is this: do we care enough? do we care enough to patiently cultivate such efficacious understanding and action moment after moment, in a world that is as complex and permeated by suffering, but also by hope, as has been the case since the dawn of time? Or do we not care enough?

There are those who have made their choices, and manifestations of their knowledge, and their care, have produced evolving answers in educational circles all across the plateau, even if they remain wildly inadequate in the face of the massive challenges faced by the Tibetan people: in Dorje Tashi, with his teachers and his students, now a school at Dorakarmo for over a thousand children with Tibetan immersion education of the highest order; in the Sichuan Provincial Tibetan Institute, a school in Dartsedo founded by Zenkar Rinpoche and Tashi Tsering, now passed away, that for three decades has produced new generations of Tibetan leaders educated in Tibetan ways now found all across Kham; in the remarkable efforts of Lodro Phuntsok, Khenpo Phuntsok Namgyal, Gabo, and others in Dzongsar, where villages are empowered with Tibetan artisan traditions, while the monastery has taken the lead in cleaning up the environment, fostering self-empowerment, and changing people's mind sets; in the efforts of Machik led by diaspora Tibetans Losang and Tashi Rabgey at creating an exceptional school system in Chungba valley in Lithang, and a network of young women supported through the school systems across Eastern Tibet; in the efforts of Tsering Perlo and his partners at Rabsel, spreading the gospel of participatory knowledge and putting Tibetan eyes, minds and hearts behind the machines that record Tibetan realities; and in the heroic efforts of so many other men and women, boys and girls, who singly, and in organizations, are making brave efforts to build new realities against great odds, trusting in knowledge, care, and ability to win a better tomorrow. They deserve not just our rhetorical support, but our own intelligence, competency, care, commitment, funding, and time; in short our lives, as much as we care to give of them, which in turn is the true measure of our individual and collective commitment to Tibet and Tibetans.

I would like to conclude with lines from a traditional Tibetan work song, performed in the middle of work day by a group of Tibetan women from Lhoka who were restoring buildings in the Barkor, in Lhasa, as part of the wonderful work done there by the Tibet Heritage Fund in the year 2000. It takes the form of a prayer:

Indeed, may we all have auspiciousness and long life,
May our stallions not run on rocky mountains,
May we not build small houses of sand in Tibet,
And may we all have the winged power of the sacred vulture and the small fish in the coming years.
A very well known topic of discourse and debate in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy is the ontological enquiry into the objectivity of a bowl of water (chu phor gang). The question is not just about whether the bowl is half full or half empty, although that too is a matter of individual perspective, but about the very perception of water. In Mahāyāna philosophy, water is said to be only a human perception. The same liquid we think of as water is perceived as nectar by celestial beings, home by fishes, pus by hungry ghosts and so forth. To dogmatically argue that the liquid is essentially water and to claim that seeing it as water has a higher ontological veracity than anything else, is to argue that one perspective, i.e. the perception of water, is true. This assumes superiority of the human species over others and is necessarily prejudiced.

In order to fully understand the ultimate nature of the entity which humans perceive as water, one must transcend the human perception and the limitations set by the physical and cultural conditioning of a human being. Only from a higher vantage point, from where one can have a more open, comprehensive, holistic and integrative viewpoint, can one get a full picture of the object or scheme of things and come to appreciate the significance as a whole. The understanding of the ultimate nature of things such as a bowl of water requires such unbiased and unconstrained viewpoint. In the case of the water, the ultimate nature perceived through such an open and unrestricted enquiry is the emptiness or lack of a fixed, intrinsic substance which paradoxically manifest in multiple empirical forms to different viewers.

Such arguments of perspectivism and the need for multilateral thinking may sound worthwhile pursuits only in the realm of philosophy and may be shunned as too conceptual in dealing with issues relevant to the real world. But for all we know, even what that real world is varies from people to people, from culture to culture and from time to time. The world, as it is, is not singularly one way or the other but is a sum of multiplicity. Cultural and historical topics we deal with are not mono-characteristic but composites of a wide variety of properties and values, or otherwise known as causes and conditions in the Buddhist idiom. Thus, they cannot be properly understood from a single perspective. A multilateral perspectivism is crucial in our approach to religious, historical and cultural studies. It is in the approach involving acknowledgement, integration, synthesis of multiple perspectives, or in other words, a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach that we may find the best research and pedagogic tool to tackle the topics belonging to the Buddhist Himalayas.

This paper is a part of the presentation entitled Multidisciplinary Approach in Himalayan Studies: A Case of the Book, which I made at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology Jubilee Conference in October 2008. The presentation dwelt mainly on the study of the Tibetan Buddhist book using a multidisciplinary approach. It was a survey of the diverse roles and functions of the book, its religious and social significances and the practices and rituals in which it is used. The story of the book has since taken a greater shape and is now being planned as a separate monograph on the book in Himalayan Buddhist culture. I shall not be discussing the roles and significances of the book in any detail here. The first half of this
article is an elongated version of the preliminary remarks I have made in that presentation in favour of a multidisciplinary approach in Himalayan studies. I argue that a multidisciplinary approach is crucial for the academic research and study of the Himalayan history and culture for academic, social and political reasons. In the latter part of the article, I have included a summary of my study of the Tibetan Buddhist book as a prelude to a separate illustrated book on the book.

**Why Multidisciplinarism?**

It is perhaps not an overstatement to say that the subject of Buddhist Himalayan studies is considered to be a highly exotic and colourful one. The Tibetan Buddhist tradition throughout its intercourse with the outside world has been viewed as a very rich, and even a highly perplexing and confusing system of ideas and practices. This impression is largely due to the very complex nature of Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhists, including the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, often claim that Tibetan Buddhism encapsulates the entire range of Buddhist philosophical and religious traditions from the basic *pratimoksa* precepts to the most secret Vajrayāna mysticism. It is seen as an amalgam of seemingly divergent traditions skilfully accommodated in one system. Tibet inherited, to put it in a Tibetan idiom, ‘the entire teachings of the Buddha’ (*rgyal bstan yongs rdogs*) which originated in India.

Buddhism reached Tibet only after over a millennium of its formation and growth in India. When it did, it came in gradually continuing for almost a millennium until Buddhism ceased to exist in India. This has no doubt contributed enormously for both the volume and variety of Buddhist teachings and practices in Tibet. However, the complexity of Tibetan Buddhism did not come about only due to the diversity of Buddhist systems it received. Central Tibet, where Tibetan Buddhism first took its shape, was the melting pot of civilizations and cultures coming from India, China and Central Asia at that time. Neither did Buddhist teachings arrive in Tibet without the cultural trappings of its Indian, Central Asian or Chinese origins, nor did it remain untouched by the cultural practices existing in Tibet. Its incorporation of and assimilation into the local Tibetan practices including the Bon tradition was considerable, so much so that today a Bon monastery can be even mistaken for a Buddhist one in its external structures and routines as well as doctrinal exegeses. Furthermore, the Buddhist system in Tibet has evolved throughout the one and half millennia of its existence. The history of Tibetan Buddhism with its successive accretions and developments accounts for much of the complexity and colour of Tibetan Buddhist systems.

Our area of study is an exceptionally complex field, and such complexity, according to William Newell, a leading theorist of Interdisciplinary Studies, necessitates a multidisciplinary approach. It is through dealing with our subjects from various angles and methods and by adopting the eye of different disciplines that we can challenge the complexity of the subject that confronts us. The complex structures and behaviours of our subject give us the rationale for an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach.

The parts of the complex structure that is the Buddhist Himalayan culture are not disjointed isolates, which can be taken apart and studied independently in total seclusion from other parts. As underscored by the Buddha’s doctrine of causation or theory of interdependence (*rten ’brel*), the many parts, values, properties and behaviours which make up the complex structures are intricately intertwined in interdependence and any understanding of them can only come from understanding this connection. Across all disciplines, our subjects are clusters of multiple strands. They present themselves as a nexus
of multiple qualities, values and behaviours which are interconnected. The most viable method to unpack the interconnected features of our subjects of study lies in a varied but interconnected approach. The interdependence of the social, historical, religious, political, epistemological aspects of the topic calls for the interdependence of approaches from these different disciplines.

When confronted by a complex subject, complex not only in having many parts and aspects but also in having several levels of ontological, epistemological, social and political existences, the student/inquirer risks adopting a specialized narrow approach and subsequently being inclined to present the findings about the part as though it were about the whole. A typical example is our reading of hagiographical literature such as a *rnam thar*. While an academic historian is generally preoccupied with finding out the socio-political facts about the subject, a traditional reader is mainly interested in the inner spiritual and magical achievements of the subject. Where an academic discusses spiritual and religious aspects of the subject, it is often with an attempt to explain them purely in secular and worldly terms, sometimes even by going to the extent of speculating a hidden political agenda. The traditional reader on the other hand mythologizes the life of the subject with an oversight of even glaring facts about worldly desires and concerns. They each come up, perhaps unwittingly, with narrow conclusions giving a one-sided picture of the subject, whose life can only be properly appreciated by looking at an amalgam of lives and personalities. A good example of such partisan work and subsequent controversy is the study of the life of the Bhutanese religious figure Padma Gling pa (1450-1521) by Michael Aris, who adopts a very critical rationalist approach on the one hand and Pema Tshewang and Sarah Harding, who take a very devotional attitude on the other.

Another good example is art history. No Tibetan Buddhist art can be fully understood and explained without looking into its philosophical and religious underpinning, the socio-political and economic circumstances for its production and the physical process of its development. Yet, true to the Buddhist teachings on non-self and modesty, the artefact normally does not even bear a signature of the artist and an art historian is often left with only the physical description. Meanwhile, a lot of information on the art and its production may be found in the middle of a text, which may not be of any obvious use to the textual scholar. It is often the case that biographies and catalogues contain a detailed inventory about the production of art including the artists and patrons. Similarly, the iconographic description of a deity and its symbolism are often embedded in liturgical chants and exegetical literature. A multidisciplinary approach not only remedies the affects of excessive specialization and helps us obtain a bigger and more accurate picture but helps us bring together various expertise. It can lead us to a mutually beneficial scheme of sharing of knowledge and information. In this process, a multidisciplinary approach can infuse us with a regard for knowledge. It inculcates a culture of appreciation for all kinds of knowledge in which no information is useless. It also helps us develop a scheme to share information.

Excessive specialization can be also damaging politically for scholars whose financial needs are dependent on funding bodies and philanthropic individuals. Funding for highly focused studies with no outcome of interest to the general public is becoming rare as less and less people believe in learning for learning's sake and in the advancement of knowledge without practical purpose or readership. As modern economy compels higher education institutions to produce outputs that are relevant to the wider communities, subjects which are of no or little significance to the contemporary world are swiftly getting antiquated. The case of diminishing Latin and Sanskrit studies and the growth of economics and development
studies is sufficient evidence for this trend. Unless reasonably general and comprehensible, remote fields like ours can be easily confined to the ivory towers being viewed as having no direct relevance and relation to the real world, especially in the West. Thus, it is important that the progress of our studies is not constrained by the limitation set by specialised knowledge.

The electronic and digital technology has transformed the way we organize and seek knowledge today. With a whole library now available in a pocket size hard drive and information available on the internet at the click of the mouse, the digital technology has made multidisciplinary approach all the more easy. It has led to dynamic changes in knowledge construction, blurring disciplinary boundaries and replaced linear models with advantages such as hypertext links that disregard disciplinary boundaries. The digital technology has also made communication between scholars very easy. Thus, a multidisciplinary approach is not only crucial for the success of our study but opportune for our time.

If the successful study of any topic requires sound contextual knowledge and an understanding of its place in the greater scheme of things, a multidisciplinary approach remains indispensable for such a successful study. The multiple approaches elucidate the topic that is under scrutiny, just as a thorough going knowledge of the topic presupposes the understanding of its various realities, aspects and functions. Thus, to know one thing well is to know all things around it. The mastery of one topic presupposes and unpacks the knowledge of all (gcig shes kun grol). The Tibetan pedagogic analogy of the mountain-view presents a striking case for multidisciplinarity. To know any part of the mountain adequately, one must get a commanding view of the whole mountain. It is only through having a holistic view from the summit of the mountain that one can appreciate the full scale and significance of its parts. Karma pa Dus gsum mKhyen pa (1110-1193) takes the analogy even further to argue that for a good view of the other mountain, one must see from this mountain (pha ri lta 'dod na tshur ri nas ltos). In other words, one must step outside the perspectival and disciplinary boundaries of one’s work in order to get an unbiased and comprehensive picture of the subject. To use the analogy of the ancient Greek poet Archilochus, one has to be a ‘fox’ who knows many things in order to be a ‘hedgehog’ who knows one big thing for full knowledge of any topic must come from the comparison and contrast of many things around it. Although one could agree with Isaiah Berlin in the general classification of literary figures into the fox-like and hedgehog-like and also apply such generalization in Tibetan and Himalayan scholarship, it may be argued that a fox-like approach involving an extensive study and knowledge of many things is essential to a hedgehog-like mastery of any particular topic. The knowledge of one big thing requires looking at it from all possible disciplinary and methodological angles.

Indeed a great deal has been written on interdisciplinary studies in general so much so that it has ironically even become a separate discipline. A lot can be also said about the applicability of multidisciplinary approach in Himalayan studies. In my current work, I take the case of the book for such a multidisciplinary study. The book makes a perfect topic for a multidisciplinary approach as its study involves history, philosophy, religion, art, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, politics, technology and economy. A partial approach to the book cannot effectuate a complete picture of the book. Hence, a hedgehog-like approach to one aspect of the book would be inept in capturing a comprehensive understanding of the book although one has to be aware that a fox-like approach can become scattered and disconnected if knowledge of the various aspects are not coherently consolidated. Here, I
shall merely present a summary of my account of the Tibetan Buddhist book which I hope
will soon be available separately as an illustrated work.

THE CASE OF THE BOOK

In the following passages, I present a synoptic survey of the Tibetan Buddhist book culture. We have seen recently a sudden rise of interest in the book and manuscript culture. Two major works on the culture of Buddhist manuscripts and books have appeared in 2009 alone. While Buddhist Manuscript Cultures published by Routledge is a collection of essays on the history and culture of manuscripts in many Buddhist communities, Schaeffer’s The Culture of the Book in Tibet discusses book production and usage in Tibet through the lives of a few literary figures. Ancient Treasure, New Discoveries, put together by Hildegard Diemberger and myself also contains several articles on the recovery and use of rare manuscripts and books.

My interest in the physical book stems from my work on the Tibetan manuscripts in the British libraries and the ongoing programme of digitizing manuscripts in Bhutan supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library. It was while working on these projects that my academic interest and occupation, which until then concentrated on religious philosophy and practice, gradually veered to the study of the physical book itself. It was also in the course of these projects that I encountered a large number of beautiful manuscripts, which deserve to be treated as much as exceptional works of art as special texts. I was intrigued by how the book, with its roles and functions, permeated the Tibetan Buddhist culture. One could even ambitiously claim that the understanding of the Himalayan Buddhist culture needs a good understanding of the book and a good understanding of the book lies in the good understanding of the many aspects of the Tibetan Buddhist culture. By looking at the book from various disciplinary angles, I hope to gain a holistic and complete picture of the book. This paper, however, is only a synoptic preview, which hopefully will stimulate further thoughts and discussions on the diverse and dynamic role of the book in the Tibetan Buddhist communities as it did during the conference in Gangtok.

The use of the book or dpe cha pervades the Himalayan Buddhist world. The Tibetan Buddhist culture, to quote Prof. Germano, is a culture of the text. For a land sparsely populated and where the majority of the population was illiterate, the Tibetan Buddhist world has produced a significantly high volume of texts of both translation and original writings. Tibetan writers, however few there may have been in comparison to the illiterate masses, almost always possessed a strong zest for writing. Writing (rtsom pa) as one of the three activities of the learned, beside exegesis (bshad pa) and debate (rtsod pa), is a mark of a scholar. Thus, we have an astounding size of literary heritage in both manuscripts and xylographic prints. However, it is not merely as a literary production that the book is valued. The book is a Buddha in one context, a scripture in another and a ritual tool, community relic, a political icon or an economic commodity in yet another context. The book is many things to many people. This study attempts to survey these various realities, roles and ramifications of the book and answer the basic question of what the book means to different Tibetan Buddhists.
From a historian’s perspective, the book is first and foremost a historical tool. Historical writing is one of the outstanding characteristics of the Tibetan Buddhist literary culture. Unlike the Indic world, to which the Tibetan Buddhist looks up with awe and reverence as the source of sacred knowledge, and as a literary exemplary and intellectual authority but is impoverished in the tradition of historical literature, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is rich in its historical books. Historical writings in the form of biographical and hagiographical literature (rnam thar), religious histories (chos byung), political histories (rgyal rabs), annals (deb ther), genealogy of throne-holders (gdan rabs), chronicles (byung ba), spiritual narratives (rtogs brjods), study records (gsan yig), guide books (gnas yig) and catalogues (dkar chag) comprise the wealth of Tibetan Buddhist historical literature.

However, what is even more interesting is that beside the instrumentality of these historical writings in recording and reconstructing Tibetan Buddhist history or part thereof, the Tibetan Buddhist history can be almost entirely told through the book, through its rise and fall, its increase and decrease. From the use of the book as historical trope in the legend of the reliquary which fell from the sky during 27th Yar lung King Tho tho gNyan btsan to the outburst of literary activity in Tibet in recent years, the rise and fall of Tibetan Buddhist civilization is inextricably linked to the situation of the book. It forms an important yardstick to measure historical transformations and the main historical criterion for periodization of Tibetan Buddhist history when we look at eras such as snga dar or early propagation, phyi dar or later propagation, and the modern phrase yang dar or further propagation and what Seyfort Ruegg calls classical and commentarial periods. The designations Earlier Translation (snga 'gyur) and Later Translation (phyi 'gyur), from which arose the distinction of the Ancient School (rnying ma) and New School (gsar ma), are based on the different translations of books. The period of Yar lung dynasty spanning the reign of Srong btsan sGam po, Khri srong lDe btsan and Khri Ral pa can is remembered as golden age of Tibet and it is no coincidence that this period also saw the introduction, diffusion and consolidation of the book under the three great emperors.

The formation of most Tibetan Buddhist traditions took place around particular books, which became their focal sources of doctrinal teachings and spiritual practices. Similarly, the early religious controversies between the adherents of old and new schools in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were on the authenticity of certain books just as the sectarian conflicts in the nineteenth century leading to the ris med ecumenical movement were mostly about scholastic and doctrinal exchanges in the form of books. In the story of the book, we see the tension and conflicts between received tradition and innovation, between exotericism and esotericism and between tradition and modernity. We also see how treasures books such as the Ma ni bka' 'bum and Padma bka' thang changed the Tibetan religious and political imagination of themselves and their identity by introducing new narratives about their past and by propagating the culture of spiritual figures such as Avalokiteshvara and Padmasambhava. The growth of printing technology around the seventeenth century had significant impact on the social and religious life as did the scholastic yig cha literature on religious education and scholarship. In brief, the book is a fascinating lens throughout which one can see the rise and fall, the contests and conversions, the conflicts and conciliations of the Tibetan Buddhist systems.
THE BOOK AND THE BUDDHA

If the book can encapsulate Tibetan Buddhist history, it certainly is an epitome of the Tibetan Buddhist religious system. Although the Buddhist tradition in general does not have a central scripture comparable to the Bible, Koran or the Gita, the role of the book is pivotal so much so that it sometimes even surpasses the Buddha in its importance. The book represents the actual path to enlightenment; the Buddha is only a guide. So, the book is attributed a deep religious significance and spiritual sanctity. The sanctity is mainly due to the sacred content of the book. As religious topics form the subject matter of the vast majority of the books in the Tibetan Buddhist world, the book has come to be seen as almost synonymous to religious scriptures. Even books on secular sciences such as grammar, poetry, politics and profane literature are viewed as sacred, produced in the format of the holy scriptures and given the same treatment as religious books. However, it will be an oversimplification to say the book is holy merely because of its religious content. The Tibetan Buddhist book-view and the attitudes and practices associated with it have a deeply philosophical and religious underpinning.

The book is the word of the Buddha in one context, an emanation of the Buddha in another and a relic of the Buddha in yet another one. The most common understanding of the book however is certainly as the physical embodiment of dharma—the words of the Buddha. It contains the Buddha’s teachings, the path to enlightenment. The book is a salvific tool with a soteriological significance. It is the ultimate object of refuge because it actually takes a person to enlightenment; the Buddha and Sangha are only guides and companions. Due to this centrality, Indo-Tibetan Buddhist scholars have extensively broached the topic of the book qua dharma and developed different theories and taxonomies of dharma. The book as embodied dharma remains at the heart of Buddhist soteriology and informs a wide range of religious behaviours and practices.

However, the most interesting view of the book is the book as the Buddha. This is not just a case of personification or anthropomorphization of the book. We see this book-view in a range of doctrinal and philosophical discourses. The ultimate Buddha is the dharma-kāya—the body of dharma. He who sees the dharma sees the Buddha.9 Similarly, in the early canons, the vinaya is given the status of the teacher, the Buddha. In the Mahāyāna system, we see the elevation of several sūtras, as well as a rigorous theory of Buddhahood and its power to emanate and a certain belief that the Buddha will emanate as words in the degenerate era.10 The tantric tradition takes the Buddhicization of the book even further with its theory and practice of mantras and divine words and syllables. The word even precedes the body in being the emanation of the enlightened state of the Buddha as it is seen in most Tibetan tantric practices. In addition to the theories of the book as embodiment of doctrinal teachings and extensions of enlightened ontological/existential realities, the book is also viewed as a holy relic, the dharma śarira, and as one of three receptacles or supports (rten gsum) of the enlightened body, speech and mind. The book, thus, has very important doctrinal and philosophical dimensions, which needs to be understood in order to fully appreciate the religious and spiritual value of the book.

LIFE AROUND THE BOOK

The religious, philosophical and spiritual dimensions of the book I have touched upon constitute the cultural ethos which underpins the diverse behaviours and customs of
individuals as well as communities in relation to the book. It is largely due to the profound religious and spiritual significance that the book has a wide range of roles and uses in the society as both educational and ritual tools. The book is, first of all, a reading object and an educational tool. The concept of education is so intricately linked with the book that to study in some Himalayan languages is to 'look at the book' (dpe cha lta). From the first lessons of learning alphabets to very advanced training in abstruse philosophy, the book is used as an essential instrument of education and learning. Even scholarly achievements are measured in terms of books and academic qualifications named after books. The composition of a book is seen as the ultimate mark of scholarship.

Yet for the majority of the population, the book is a holy object of worship and veneration. Following the cult of the book in ancient India, the book is attributed a transcendental power capable of sacralizing the place where it is kept, warding off evil spirits, misfortunes and natural calamities and bestowing positive blessings to the devotees. This has subsequently led to the elaborate traditions of production, storage, veneration and use in which the book is treated almost like a holy person. The books are nicely wrapped in 'clothes', offerings of food, drinks, incense and flowers are made to them. The devotees make prostrations to them and receive blessing and even the temple where the books are stored is often called the house of the book (gtsug lag khang).

The book is therefore not just an inanimate object but living entity with a quasi-psychical power and life of its own. It is a ritual object attributed with transcendental agency and the best examples of this role of the book as a ritual object is seen in the culture of ritual reading and the parade of books, two very common ritual practices in Himalayan Buddhist communities. These rituals have led to the formation of different social patterns, norms and structures and have left significant political and economic ramifications. Another social characteristic of the book is its power to empower people. From the devotees who receive its blessing from the book and soldiers who carry booklets as amulets through scribes, carvers, commissioners and readers of books to the discoverers of hidden books, we see the book empower the person psychologically, spiritually, socially, economically or politically. The function of the book in society spans a person's life from use of astrological text during birth to the funerary rituals when intensive use of books such as the Tibetan Book of Dead is made.

**THE BOOK AS KNOWLEDGE AND ART**

The book represents the organization and presentation of human knowledge and information in their finest form. However, the book is not merely valuable as a medium of knowledge and information it contains; the book is itself knowledge and information. Like art, architecture and landscape, the book tells us a great deal about the human experience and about the events and thoughts which shaped them. The book is a cultural product and as such its features including the shape or design, the base on which it is written or printed, the script, ink, pen, decorations, illuminations, physical organisation and layout provide us plenty of information about the broader socio-historical context of its production and use. The long poti format of the book, for instance, tells us about its origins in the Indic palm leaf manuscripts while books in scrolls (shog dril) indicate Chinese influence and the bound gos tshem suggests imitation of codices from Central Asia and Europe. The various scripts tell us about the historical and regional development just as the quality of illuminations, ink and paper tell us about the economic circumstances of its production.
A single leaf of the book can thus contain a trove of information about human ideas, experiences and endeavours involved in the production of the book and the state of craftsmanship, technology and economy at the time of its creation. The story of the book and the information it embodies becomes even more intriguing and extensive if one starts to unravel the history and properties of the individual aspects of the book such as script, ink, paper, pen, wood block and covers. Paper and ink, for example, are important subjects of study in their own right and a proper study of these two can provide good insight into the human knowledge of the environment, the state of technology, and even tax structures and trade arrangements.

In the Tibetan Buddhist book, we also find a very special scheme of organizing ideas and knowledge, which is heavily influenced by the Indian Buddhist models. The physical book shows us how ideas and knowledge are structured, presented and preserved as well as an implicit evaluation of the significance of the knowledge it contains. The colophons of the book often contain a great deal of ethnographic and bibliographical information, which in turn helps us understand the life of the scribes, carvers and patrons and the prevailing political and cultural climate. Such information proves vital for historical, codicological and philological studies.

A very important component of the book is illumination. Illuminations not only beautify the book aesthetically but also provide a lot of additional information. Often the illuminations in the Tibetan Buddhist book give a good clue to the origin and background of the book as well as the socio-political and economic circumstance of the production. They also give the first hint as to the content and significance of the book and draw the attention of the reader to the salient features. The illuminations on the book remind us of the interplay between art and text and the shifting boundary between them. Where does art end and text begin? Many artworks include bits of text and numerous manuscripts are aesthetically as valuable as paintings and sculptures because of their illuminations and calligraphic beauty. The book is thus a work of art and writers, scribes and carvers are no less artists than painters, dancers and calligraphers.

The Book as Person and Person as Book

Like the relationship between art and the book, we also see a conceptual interplay between the book and person. We have seen in the earlier passages how the book is attributed manifold agency. From its role as educational tool and ritual object to its function as soteriological expedient, the book is considered as an active agent in different processes of educational, cultural and spiritual transformation and development. This agency is heightened in the theory of the book as the Buddha. The book is seen as an extension of the personhood and intentionality of the Buddha and treated like a person in many cultural practices involving the book. Most of the vocabulary used for the book comprises honorific terms used for people and the book is viewed as a sacred ‘living’ entity. The personification of the book becomes even more intense and complex with the portrayal of certain texts or cycle of teachings in Mahāyāna and tantric Buddhism as deities and divine beings in ritual and iconography.

If the personification of the book and thought of the book as being person-like is fascinating, the reverse portrayal of a person as the book is even more so. Intellectuals are generally considered bookish (dpe cha ba) and they are shown with a book in iconographic representation but the Tibetan Buddhist allegory takes it even further. An erudite scholar is
sometimes figuratively thought of and described as the book \(\textit{glegs bam}\). There are also cases where great scholars even dressed themselves as a book to show off their erudition. Thus, we see the book metaphorically turn into a person and vice versa. These allegorical presentations give us interesting insights into people’s ideas about the book and persons and their view of the relations between people and things.

Another such idea which the culture of the book brings out is the Tibetan notion of totality and integrity. As suggested by the concept of \(\textit{gsung ’bum}\), literally a hundred thousand speeches, and \(\textit{bka’ bum}\) or a hundred thousand words, which are all-inclusive collections of writings, the notion of totality and integrity forms the driving motive for the book culture and the numerous book projects. Various methods including enumeration of syllables, stanzas and leaves and inclusion of catalogues and lists also point to the importance of the integrity of the book. The book provides us in these different ways an excellent window to the many aspects of the Tibetan Buddhist culture and society.

The second half of the twentieth century saw perhaps one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of the book in the Tibetan Buddhist world. First, the rich literary heritage of Tibet faced a wide spread destruction and dispersal during the Chinese invasion and the Cultural Revolution. This was then followed, particularly in the final decades, by numerous projects of reproduction, documentation and digitisation of texts as corrective efforts to preserve and consolidate the damaged and fragmented texts. It was also during this critical period that the Tibetan book culture encountered modern technology, which in many ways facilitated the resurgence of the Tibetan literary culture both in Tibet and outside. Yet this meeting with the dominant Western tradition of the book and modern printing and digital technology was not without problems and challenges.

The exposure to the Western book culture and access to advanced technology brought dramatic changes to the ways in which Tibet Buddhists constructed, reproduced, accessed and disseminated knowledge and information. Today, most Tibetan Buddhist books are published in modern Western format of a bound book in spite of fears among some conservative quarters that the sanctity of book and other cultural practices based on the traditional book are being lost with the disuse of the \(\textit{poti}\) design. Furthermore, the advancements and proliferation of computer and digital technology are bringing fundamental changes to the concept and use of the book. Books are now easily and rapidly being produced in very malleable, transferable and reproducible formats such as digital images, e-books, websites and databases.

The electronic technology and internet facilities are transforming the way we organize and access knowledge and the very idea of the book. Although the Tibetan Buddhist book culture has not been affected by the usual challenges including copyright violations and plagiarism, it is confronted with other cultural problems such as the difficulty to impose censorship on books with esoteric content and to retain socio-religious authority over knowledge transmission.

The rich culture of the book in Tibetan Buddhism is today at a critical juncture. Whether or not the book will survive and be of expedient use in its traditional \(\textit{poti}\) format and what major changes will reshape the Tibetan Buddhist book are questions I will discuss in my forthcoming book. For now, one can only surmise that the Tibetan Buddhist book in this digital era, when a large library can fit in small hard drive or a book can be obtained from the
ethereal cyberspace at the click of a mouse, is bound to change with far reaching implications on our concept of and approach to the Tibetan book.

NOTES

1 The perspectivist debates on what is the shared object of perception among beings of the six realms when they converge to look at the bowl of water starts with Candrakirti’s Madhyamakāvatāra, VI/71. In Tibetan, this debate has continued ever since the 13th century with a range of answers. Mipham treats this as one of the seven major Madhyamika points of discussion in his treatise, Ngas shes rin po che’i sgron me. See Mipham (1987). See also Padmakara Translation Group (2002), pp.241-4.


3 I am using the words interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary interchangeably although there is in some cases an implicit understanding of interdisciplinary study as an approach involving persons from multiple disciplines whereas multidisciplinary study implies a person or persons adopting many disciplinary approaches to study a subject. The former can connote a cross-disciplinary approach and the latter a pan-disciplinary approach although this is very much a nominal distinction.


5 See Karma Maṇi, rGyal ba’i dbang po thams cad mkhyen pa karma pa’i gsung gi phyag chen sngon ’gro bzhi shyor nyams len cig tu bril ba, 2r. Karma Maṇi attributes the saying to Dus gsum mKhyen pa.

6 See Berlin (1999). Berlin cites from a fragment of Archilochus’s poem: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing”.

7 See Germano (2002), History and Knowledge of The Collected Tantras of the Ancients, p.1, http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/ngb/#wiki=/access/wiki/site/6a0a05fe-de5e-40f7-80f2-1cfca2ab7d8e/history%20of%20tantras.html (accessed on 8 September, 2009).


9 See Śaṃyutta Nikāya, 22.87 PTS: S iii, where the Buddha advises Vakkali.

10 I have not been able to trace the origin of this verse in a sūtra although Tibetan scholars often cite this claiming it to be from a sūtra. mkhan po kun bzang dpal ldan cites this from a certain sNyan gyi gong rgyan. See Kunzang Paldan, Byang chub sms dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa’i tshig ’gle’i jam dbyangs bla ma’i zhal lung bshad brtsi’i thig pa, Chengdu: Si khron Mi rigs dPe skrun khang, 1995, p. 249.


12 See for instance the description of bsTan ’dzin Grags pa as the sole book or volume of the entire collection of scriptures and tantras by Tshul khrims rDo rje. Tshul khrims rDo rje (n.p.n.d), dPal bsthan ’dzin grags pa’i rnam thar pad pa’i sding rta bzang po, 19v.

13 An example is Gling ras pa Padma rDo rje, who dressed up as a book after he was unsurpassed in debates. See dGe ’dun Rin chen (nd.n.p), Lho ’brug chos byung, f.42. The follower of Ni ma Grags pa is also said to have dressed as a book and challenged Kong sprul Blo gros mTha’ yas to a debate.

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DZONGKHA LANGUAGE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Bhutan is a tiny country, situated along the southern slopes of the Himalayas. It is bordered by the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China in the north and India in the south. Bhutan is also known to the world by the name ‘the land of the peaceful dragon’.

Bhutan’s culture is largely influenced by Buddhism. While, the Drukpa Kagyu and the Nyingma traditions are the main practicing schools in northern and eastern Bhutan, southern Bhutanese are mainly Hindus.

One of the most striking aspects of Bhutan which defines its uniqueness is its tradition and culture. This is overtly reflected in the dress code, etiquette, architecture and language.

DZONGKHA: THE LINGUA FRANCA

Despite its small geographical and population size, Bhutan has 19 vernacular languages spoken in different regions. In the past, because of the steep mountains, cliffs, gorges, dense forests, and turbulent rivers, they proved natural barriers and prevented the movement of people from one region to the other. These communities remained isolated from each other for many years. As a result vernaculars of each community could not spread far to other regions and thus remained confined to their own locality. Even today these languages exist, of which some are spoken only by a handful of people.

Dzongkha is spoken as a native language in the eight western districts. Initially Dzongkha was used as the language of the ~zon~s, courts, the military elite, and erudite scholars irrespective of location. Nowadays, it is established as the lingua franca of the country.

EVOLUTION OF DZONGKHA

Ever since Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal established the dual system of government in the seventeenth century, Dzongkha was adopted as the court language of the ~zon~s. The recorded songs of Gaylong Sumdar Tashi and the story of Gasa Lamai Singye, which dates back to 1837 stand as a testimony that an oral Dzongkha literature existed in the nineteenth century.

However, it was only in the 1960s that the importance of a national language was felt. The Third King Jigme Dorje Wangchuck (1952-1972), saw the possibility of a total unification and integration of his people through a common national language; especially when so many different vernaculars were spoken in different parts of the country.

Taking into consideration all these aspects, Dzongkha was introduced as the national language of Bhutan and initiated a process of committing the language to script in 1971. Until the early 60s Dzongkha was a spoken language, and for official communication and correspondences Chos skad was used. But slowly the importance of Dzongkha both as a spoken and written language was strongly felt. Dzongkha is the only established language
having more than 160,000 native speakers out of the total population and it is the only Tibeto-Burman language in the country that has a written form.

Consequently, the Department of Education published the Dzongkha grammar text called *rDzong kha'i sgra bshed rab gsel sky a ren g dang po* in 1971 for the first time. This grammar book was largely based on the sound system used by the native speakers of Thimphu and Punakha, drawing in possible relevance from the Chos skad orthography. Therefore, the influence of Chos skad especially in the written form of Dzongkha could be paralleled to what Latin was to Roman languages and Sanskrit to Indian languages.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Dzongkha has been a powerful force for unifying the country by establishing a common language among diverse ethnic groups. It has served as an instrument for fostering national identity in ways that promote sovereignty and security. It is reckoned as an important aspect of Bhutanese thought, character, and identity especially when Bhutan finds itself almost insignificant in geography wedged between two giant-nations of the world. Yet Bhutan has managed to make its presence felt in the global community owing to its unique culture and ideology. The Royal Government of Bhutan is cognizant of the fact that cultural identity is Bhutan’s greatest strength and language is an important aspect of culture. The government has a policy to pursue the development and promotion of Dzongkha. This intent has come out clearly in the form of formal circulars both from the cabinet and Dzongkha Development Commission. Its importance has been extensively debated in various forums, and resolutions have been passed in different forms and levels. It is the interest and will of the government to use Dzongkha as the language of discussion and communication in various formal settings including the National Assembly and the National Council deliberations.

**CHALLENGES**

The meeting point between what is deemed and what is being implemented and practiced is almost a far-removed reality; in fact it is in many ways a paradoxical dilemma. With Bhutan’s sound education policy, the literacy rate is pushing up each year. The government is on the track towards achieving the so called ‘education for all’ goal by 2020 or even earlier. Today, almost 97-98% of children go to schools out of which only a negligible percentage go to monastic institutions for education. Children in schools study five subjects in classes pp to III, 6 subjects in classes IV-VI, seven subjects in VII and VIII, twelve subjects in IX and X, and fourteen subjects in XI and XII, out of which only one subject is taught in Dzongkha. Now a few selected schools have started offering the Rigzhung course as an experiment or a pilot project.

This clearly indicates, that children get to hear and interact more in English than in Dzongkha in schools. The school curriculum is dominated by subjects that are taught in English. School children do not pick up much Dzongkha as much as they learn English. Equivalent Dzongkha terms are limited and children are not able to express in Dzongkha what is learnt in English. This creates the notion of difficulty in using Dzongkha as a language of communication. Sometimes, competence in English language shakes the very foundation of Dzongkha. As a result Dzongkha is best known by people’s incompetence and the general notion of difficulty to learn the language.
Yearly, out of a large number of students graduating out of the colleges, only an insignificant percentage is competent in Dzongkha. Even though the Royal University of Bhutan has made it a university-wide policy that each graduate of the colleges of the university should have minimum competence in Dzongkha, English and IT, the fact remains that the standards are just basics. On the other hand, the English language skills of the general Bhutanese who come out of the modern education system is, by and large, better than their Dzongkha. English has now become a working language in Bhutan and the majority of the Bhutanese literate population feels more comfortable in English than in Dzongkha.

The notion of difficulty in learning Dzongkha coupled with scarcity in opportunities to pursue higher education and lack of attraction have resulted so far in a sense of withdrawal in many young Bhutanese from studying Dzongkha. The number of people pursuing Dzongkha studies is dwindling as compared to other forms of studies. Bhutanese are becoming more and more literate in English, thus increasing the population base of this language.

THE STATUS OF TEACHING PROFESSION

Teacher shortage is a problem in Bhutanese schools. Dzongkha teacher shortage is even worse. Some schools are said to be functioning without Dzongkha teachers and often general teachers are assigned to teach Dzongkha. The causes to this problem are many fold. Firstly, there is not enough supply against the demand. There are not many colleges that offer Dzongkha courses and the student number is also small. The number of Dzongkha graduates produced by ILCS and Sherubtse College, is not more than 100 per year. This figure is far less compared to graduates of other streams. Further, the situation is worsened by the fact that not many of these graduates opt for the teaching profession. In fact most of the otherwise potential candidates opt for positions that are outside the teaching profession. Teaching is considered by many in Bhutan, as a non-glamorous and less attractive profession.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS

There are two general notions: the notion of difficulty; and its outdated status. The orthographic structure of Dzongkha and chos sked is unique and complex. Comparatively more time is required to study the different characters and their orthographic structure. But the irony is that children do not get adequate time to study. Therefore, the notion of difficulty is created in people’s mind.

Many Bhutanese look at Dzongkha as an outdated language. It is looked down on as a language that is not of the twenty-first century. People, even though not in spirit but in practice tend to discard the importance attached to Dzongkha by the government and therefore, some even think that it should be left to the choice of the people to use whatever language they are competent in rather than making Dzongkha a compulsory language of communication even in formal settings. For some Bhutanese, incompetence in Dzongkha is equally considered as a status commodity as that of having competence in English language. Owing to this notion of social status attached with the knowledge of English language there are people who seem to be proud of not knowing Dzongkha. This has pushed Dzongkha to the periphery making it comparatively less glamorous and fashionable.

Lastly, pedagogical skills while teaching Dzongkha are usually non-existent as modern ways of teaching Dzongkha are rather poor.
DILEMMA

The critical Bhutanese mass understands that Dzongkha is a key support of Bhutanese identity. Strong political will is manifested in the form of aggressive policies. Yet results are not encouraging. One of the reasons assumed for poor performance in Dzongkha is less teacher-student contact hours and the Bhutanese attitude towards Dzongkha.

Schools are the sources of imparting Dzongkha language skills and colleges are refineries. But the schools have their plates already full with so many subject matters and so are the colleges with their own area of specialization. Schools are in dire need of Dzongkha language teachers. Despite a great deal of demand there is no supply. The unemployment problem is increasing, yet the vacancies are never filled in.

WAY FORWARD

The situation of Dzongkha is nothing more than a dilemma that suggests that a lot more needs to be done than what really is happening today in order to win this losing battle. Policies need to be drawn up in a manner that can be implemented and put into right perspective. Create a favourable atmosphere for its growth and dissemination. Ensure policies are truly implemented and the right measures are taken to make things work in favour of Dzongkha. Make it more trendy, fashionable and attractive to learn so that people take pride in knowing it and consider it a national disgrace if it is not known.

CONCLUSION

Bhutan is a distinguished and sovereign state with a unique identity. Dzongkha is one of the important aspects of Bhutanese characteristics. Therefore, it is a matter of decision to set national priorities that give meaning to the country’s philosophy of development. It is a matter of decision to ensure that Dzongkha stands high and firm against all challenges at all times to come. Dzongkha should not be just notionally ranked in the list of national priorities.

All said and done, we must not forget that with the changing face of time, globalization and modernization are fast creeping into the life of many nations wherein, the English language is set to conquer everything. Science and technology have made it even more lethal. In such a situation, how local languages withstand the onslaught of this international force is something that needs to be tackled.

NOTES

1 Director, Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS), Royal University of Bhutan, Semtokha, Thimphu.
2 Thimphu, Punakha, Paro, Wangdue Phodrang, Gasa, Haa, Dagana and Chukha
3 Fortresses which are still used as the centre of administration both by central and local Governments.
4 Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal. The 17th century principal spiritual figure of Bhutan who unified the country and put law and order into place.
5 Fortresses which some are now used as the residence of the monk body as well as the centre of district administration.
6 A legendary figure in one of the famous Dzongkha literature poems during the 18th century.
7 A very famous legend reflected in the form of a love story called Gasa Lama'i Singye.
Classical Tibetan, the textual language of religion, philosophy, medicine and scientific treatises. It is an independent and autonomous agency that is mandated with the task to look into Dzongkha language development affairs through research, publication and most importantly to frame healthy and effective language policies for the country.


Additional Dzongkha offered as elective.

Beyond the school hours, depending on the language spoken by family members, it is not always English that is being spoken but more and more literate families tend to adopt English as the medium of communication.

A total of just 81 graduates (26 from ILCS, 25 from Sherubtse College and 30 from the College of Education) enter into the job market of which just a few would prefer to join the teaching profession.

The scale of budget allocation and human resource development support from the government for Dzongkha activities against others, stand as an evidence that Dzongkha is just an aggressively deemed national priority but that concrete implementation is not pursued actively.

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This paper attempts to describe the death rituals of Bhutan—the way they are currently practised with some mention of recent trends. It is not a fully researched paper, but simply intended to provide a broad overview of the funeral procedures in Bhutan. Due to ethno-geographical conditions, each region has different social and traditional customs, varying in one or other form. The most interesting and unique social custom is funeral rites which evolved over the years into indispensable social practices. As Bhutan is a Vajrayana Buddhist country, its funeral practices, being based on Vajrayana Buddhist tradition, are—unlike other social practices—generally the same in almost all district-valleys. However, there are certain ethnic communities—for example the eastern nomadic community of Merak and Sakten, the south-western Lhop community and the southern Hindu community—whose funeral customs differ from those in the rest of the country, according to their own social and religious beliefs.

In general, there are five different funeral methods which include:

1. Cremation, the most widely practised method;
2. Sky Burial, where the body is placed at a particular spot (i.e. on a high mountain top) for natural disposal through natural predation;
3. Water burial, where the body is immersed in water to be ‘washed away’;
4. Ground burial, where the body is put underground; and
5. Cave burial, where the body is deposited or hidden in caves on cliff faces

One of these five methods is followed to dispose of dead bodies in any society in the world. 
Funeral entitlements vary according to a person’s social status and official rank. The differences are mainly to do with the choice of elaborate, moderate or simple forms of arrangements that would lead up to the final conduct of the funeral.

Due to limitation of the scope of this paper, here I shall not delve into the details of the funeral entitlements of different individuals at various social levels, but shall rather attempt to provide some aspects of general funeral procedures that prevail in Bhutan.

DEATH RITUALS FOR COMMON PEOPLE

1. When a patient is about to die, droplets of sacred pills soaked in the water are put into the mouth of the patient. A lama-monk is invited to conduct ‘pho ba (consciousness transferring rite) and dedication prayers; the lama sits by the patient’s pillow-side and then conducts ‘pho ba. The family members and relatives must try to refrain from weeping and crying in the room as this might disturb smooth transmigration of the deceased’s consciousness. In the interim period when the external breathing has stopped but internal breathing has not yet stopped, the body is not touched or disturbed at any cost. Soon after death, the nine bodily doors/orifices are blocked with butter in order to avoid dripping fluids; there is also a system
of pulling hairs from the crown of the head, at the point where the spirit is believed to exit the body.

2. Immediately after cessation of breathing, a white sheet of cloth, preferably one with a hand or foot print of the Buddha printed on it, is thrown over the face. Then the body is screened from view with a curtain, over which are placed scarves of the five different colours (white, blue, green, red and yellow). Above the head of the deceased is hung a thangka of Chenrezig (Avalokitesvara) or other relevant thangkas. On a table (lcog sgrom) placed before the curtain, food and drinks such as water, tea and wine or whatever is available are set out. A butter lamp and other offering articles are also placed there; also the rosary and other personal effects used daily when the person was alive are placed there.

The sur (gsur) or smoke of burning food offering is made at the doorway, and this is offered to a deceased person for many weeks after his or her death.

The butter lamp offering and ‘merit-dedication-request’ (bsngo zhu) are sent to nearby temples and lhakhang and to holy lamas residing at different places for their bsngo smon-prayers at the earliest possible time. Reading the text of thos grol starts immediately after death. And also if the family can afford it, the performance of death rituals starts from the day [of death] and continues till the 21st day (i.e. a total of three weeks).

3. An astrologer is called upon to provide a death-horoscope (shin rtsis), in order to ascertain the requisite ages and birth years of those persons who may approach and touch the dead body, and also to provide necessary particulars concerning date and mode of cremation, and the conducting of virtuous ritual performance for the deceased (gshin don dge rtsa) and remedial rituals for the living relatives (gson don rim 'gro).

The body is kept at home from one day to one week, or even more, until the favourable astrological date for cremation. During this period the people (usually men), constantly keep watch over the dead body round the clock.

4. While approaching the dead body to tie it up, the person indicated by the horoscope would speak out by the deceased’s name or by family appellation: “Come on most cheerfully! I will carry your dead body, please do not get angry.” Telling this in a most gentle and respectful manner, the dead body-bearer touches the upper part of the body. Before tying up the body, the body must be given a proper bath with saffron water, or if this is not possible, with clean water. While the body is being bathed, it should not be permitted to touch the ground or floor; it is believed that if the body touches the floor/ground, dire misfortune (dreaded disease, epidemic, death and so on) will befall both the surviving family members and that village.

5. A sacred knot called jagdud (ljags mdud) is made in a silken-scarf or a white sheet of cloth, the cloth is then blessed (zhal sngags) by mantra (by a lama), and then the two ends are joined with ropes. The neck is then tied up with the knot of jagdud at the throat and the ropes on the two ends are let go downward along the chest by way of criss-crossed (wound around the chest), and then tied to hold the body in a cross-legged position with the two arms crossed at the chest and head bent down—like the sitting posture of a holy hermit—with the end-knot allowed to fall at the back. Sacred amulets like htags grol (liberation by wearing) and shyar grol (liberation by sticking/fastening) are fixed to the body in the proper fashion and the six precious medicinal substances (if available) are sprayed on the body. Then the
body is put into a bag stitched out of a white sheet of cloth, and placed in a wooden box specially prepared to contain it. The body is now ready to be carried to the cremation ground.

6. Before taking out the body from the house, rituals to ward off obstacles are performed as per the instruction given by the astrologer, who also advises the time and direction to be observed when taking the body out. There is a tradition of making offerings to the altar and the protective deity on behalf of the deceased before the body is being taken out from the house.

Also before taking out the body, the *g.yang* *'phyag* or 'wealth retention' process has to be performed. This is done by rubbing the dead body from head to toe with a set of cloths three times. Then the cloth, which represents wealth, is kept in the store-room. The main purpose of this symbolic rite, especially if the dying person is the main breadwinner or the main source of income, is to ensure that the flow of wealth into the house is unhindered. While taking out the body it is customary to hang a scarf above the door on behalf of the deceased, symbolizing 'prayers of good luck for the surviving family'.

While taking the body to the cremation ground, the astrologer leads the procession, followed by the monks/clerics, simultaneously reciting prayers as they proceed. Then, persons carrying a bunch of blazing torches being held aloft and other people carrying swinging censers of smoking incense, have to follow before and after the dead body. In recent decades, especially in towns it has become customary to take the body to the cremation ground in a car procession, in which case the above sequence in the procession is not followed.

7. The common people are not entitled to have a raised funeral pyre (*thab khung*). The funeral pyres of common people are simply built out of logs. First a mandala-drawing printed on a paper is placed at the base (ground level), upon which is placed a pitcher filled with oil held by logs at four ends. Upon this, logs are piled up one upon other in a more systematic manner, and the dead body is placed on top with its head facing towards the Choekhang (Shrine Room). Finally, scarves of the five different colours or the deceased's used clothes are placed over the body.

Different kinds of food and drinks as well as the deceased's personal effects are displayed on a table in front of the pyre.

8. It is the tradition in Bhutan that a person from each household of the village visits the bereaved family to offer condolence with tea, *ara* (local wine) and other items. In addition they help the bereaved family in whatever possible way they can until the end of the last rites [i.e. 21st day or 49th day].

Before the funeral pyre is set alight, the deceased is served food along with relatives and friends gathered there. Because this ritual marks the time of separation of the deceased from relatives, friends and acquaintances; it is called the *kha bral lto* or 'meal of separation'.

9. After the meal is finished, the funeral pyre is lit. The person who lights the fire should be a monk, but if none is available any religious person (*sgom chen*) will do; if no religious person is available, a family member should light the fire. As it is believed that a deceased person with too much attachment/clinging to kith and kin will not burn, it is customary for one of the close family members to pray and then cast a scarf and *snyan dar* (usually cash-offering) on the funeral pyre.
At that time, it is very important that everyone present recite mani-mantra led by an experienced monk or religious person who could lead melodic recitation. All those present pray and offer cash-offering and scarf to the deceased [i.e. to the pyre], and then circumambulate the funeral pyre.

10. If the funeral takes place in the cremation grounds of the district, the funeral rites are presided over by the Je Khenpo (Supreme Abbot of Bhutan) or one of the senior masters. The rites are usually carried out based on the text nGan song sbyong ba (Durgatiparishodana) which is commonly known as Mi 'khrug pa (Aksobhya).

If the funeral takes place in a local cremation ground, it is presided over by Nyingma Lamas and the rites are usually based on the texts Bar do thos grol which is popularly called Kar gling zhi khro, Thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me or rDo rje sens dpa', etc.

11. If the Lama who presides over the ritual is Drukpa Kagyu then the ritual is performed based on Mi 'khrug pa, if the lama is Nyingmapa then the ritual is based on Ka gling zhi khro and other relevant texts.

Generally, the ritual prayer is performed on the 4th day, 7th day and 14th day and the full service completed on the 21st day, thus concluding this service in about three weeks. However, rich families perform ritual prayers continuously from the day of death until the 49th day—the full term of forty-nine days.

12. After completion of funeral rites, and when the body has been burned down completely, the embers are extinguished by water mixed with milk, blessed with the mantra of nGan song sbyong ba'i gzungs sngags. Usually in the local cremation ground, remains of ashes are collected only the next day.

The ash remains are collected up and then put into a bag, following which food is served to the deceased (i.e. the ashes) by conducting ritual prayers, and then finally the ashes are taken to the river nearby to be immersed in water.

Before immersing the ashes, tea is served and sngo smon-prayers are conducted at the riverside; and then a cash present is distributed to all those gathered there, symbolizing a last present/gift called 'shul bzhag' from the deceased. Thereafter, the ashes are immersed in the water.

Any pieces of bones or flesh left un-burnt are not immersed in the water but are respectfully collected up; and after performing rus chog (bone rituals), these remains are ground into powder and made into tsha tshas and then either thrown into the river or deposited in secured caves. It is believed that the deceased’s bla or ‘subtle energy’ remains on the spot where cremation was held, and in order to symbolize that, a flag is hoisted there.

13. The cremation of the dead body does in fact not conclude the death rites. An effigy of the deceased still needs to be made, and the formal burning of the mask representing the dead person’s face and the expulsion from the house of the death-demon as well as other rites need to be carried out at home.

On the day on which the dead body is removed from the house, an effigy of the deceased has to be made. There are elaborate, moderate and simple ways of making it. In case of an elaborate one, the effigy is placed in a model of a divine mansion with a gilded roof; in case of moderate one, the effigy is placed under a silken canopy; and in case of a simpler one, a mere effigy is made over which a scarf is placed. Be it elaborate, moderate or simple, at the
centre of the effigy is kept a bre-full (a measure) of either rice or wheat on top of which is placed the bone remains of the deceased wrapped in cotton cloth or silk. Some people keep an egg on it in order to settle the bla (spirit or life force) of the deceased. The entire figure should then be dressed in the clothing of the deceased, and as a face, a mask is put on a trimmed bamboo with printed paper. In front of the effigy a mirror is placed, and underneath the effigy is placed a mat. If the deceased is a common/lay person a rosary is hung around the neck of the effigy, and if the deceased is a lama or senior official, it is kept on the table placed in front.

The effigy is merely intended to represent the spirit/consciousness of the deceased person. It sits or kneels, and sometimes with legs bound, in an attitude of adoration. And before this figure, at the level of its face, are set all sorts of food and drink as was done to the actual dead body. This figure remains in the house in its sitting posture, and is given a share of each meal until the service is concluded by the burning of the paper mask.

14. On the conclusion of the full series of services, i.e. 21st day, the effigy of the deceased is dismantled. The paper-mask is ceremoniously burned in the flame of a butter-lamp, and the spirit is thus given its final send-off. The fate of the spirit of the deceased is determined by observation of the colour and quality of the flame and mode of burning, and this process usually reveals the necessity for further courses of performing virtuous deeds/prayers.

The ashes of this burned paper are carefully collected in a plate and are then mixed with clay to form one or more tsha tshas which are carried to any hill near at hand, where they are deposited under a projecting ledge of a rock, to shelter them from being disintegrated by rain.

The death anniversary is observed one year after the death. This comprises the performing of one to two days of ritual prayers and offering butter lamps at nearby temples in honour of the deceased.

ADVANTAGE OF THE DEAD BODY BEING CREMATED

The most widely practised and preferred method of disposing of dead bodies in Bhutan is cremation. Cremating the dead bodies is supposed to be the best from a spiritual as well as from an environmental point of view. It is believed that there exist numerous beings invisible to the naked eye, which undergo severe hardships without food and water. When dead bodies are being washed and then burnt, these beings are benefited considerably by the smell of the burning flesh. This sets them free from hunger and thirst. When the dead body is being blessed (dbang bskur) by the presiding lama through ritual prayers dedicated to a particular deity [such as Mi 'khrug pa, rDo rje sms dpa', sPyan ras gzigs, etc.], and then consigned to flames (to the god of fire), it is no longer considered a dead body but a pure offering, and even flames are considered wisdom teeth whereby the deceased person’s negative deeds are believed to have gnawed to purity.

It is also believed that both visible and invisible dakas and dakinis reside at the cremation ground where they feed on the dead bodies brought there for cremation, and they guide the deceased towards the path of birth in the higher realm. Being cremated at a sacred cremation site brings the immediate benefit of higher rebirth in the heavenly realm, with the ultimate benefit of attainment of the omniscient state of Buddhahood.

Cremating or burning the dead bodies is a very natural process and it is also something closest to natural processes. As we all know, our body is composed of four elements—earth, water, fire and air. The process of cremation is the quick process of naturally allowing the
four elements of the dead body to return to their natural form. Thus, the earth component of
the body is reduced to ashes, the water component gets reduced to vapor, the fire component
gets converted to heat energy and the air component gets released as the smoke and gases
which are released into the atmosphere.

Environmentally speaking, the cremation method is a very non-destructive and friendly
way of offering the dead body back to mother earth. All the four elements that constituted
the body return to their natural form or state. The earth becomes earth, the water becomes
the water, the fire becomes heat, and the wind becomes air.

After cremation, remains such as the ashes are thrown into the river or ocean. Even this
practice is a very environmentally friendly way of disposal. The finely particled ash remains
are easily assimilated by the river.

**Types of Dead Bodies Which Cannot be Cremated**

Depending on good and bad astrological signs, some dead bodies are buried. For instance, a
tradition has it that persons who die at the age of eighty-one, lepers, those who die of chicken
pox or any epidemic, and children who die before they are nine years old are not cremated.
They are disposed of through one of four methods: sky burial, water burial, ground burial and
cave burial. It is said that in olden days, even sterile women and serfs were barred by society
from cremation but today this is no longer the case.

A person who dies at the age of 81, which is astrologically considered an ‘obstacle year’
for dying, is barred from cremation by the society due to the social stigma that death at 81
indicates ‘81 types of bad omens’. If the body of a deceased person of 81 is burnt, it is
believed that smoke ensuing from it will not only cause the wrath of local deities but will
harm whoever encounters this smoke, and will bring misfortune in the form of epidemics and
so on in that locality.

Similar is the case with those who die of leprosy or some dreaded infectious disease.
When their bodies are burnt, it is believed that the smoke ensuing from them will spread the
diseases and cause the wrath of the local deities, and on that account there will be misfortune
in the locality.

The bodies of those who have died of such causes are either buried or hidden securely in
caves on cliff faces. While carrying out this process, a rich family will conduct elaborate
rituals, building a cell in the form of a magnificent palace and putting inside all requisite and
personal effects along with the dead body; families of more modest means simply make a
wooden box, placing inside only the dead body wrapped in white cloth.

If a child below the age of nine dies, the body is either buried in a cave near the high
bank of a river, or buried under a suitable ground. Although, the death rituals may not be
required, nonetheless some affluent families might opt to request for ‘child astrology’. However, in general, the blanket-wrapped dead body of a child is placed in a suitable boxlike container. On the right side of the body is kept a container containing milk, while on the
left is kept the water container, and also other edible items such as sweets, butter, etc.

**Preparation During Funerals**

At the cremation grounds of the capital and the district headquarters, funeral arrangements
are made according to one’s entitlement on the basis of position/rank. However, at the
cremation grounds of other places, one may make arrangements as one wishes. In earlier
times, dead bodies were carried to the cremation ground by the people themselves, but with modernization, nowadays the body is taken to the cremation ground in a car convoy.

People express their view that funeral arrangements should be kept simple, and not be accompanied by superfluous ceremonies occasioning unnecessary expenses. Usually at the cremation only vegetarian food is served. Non-vegetarian food is not encouraged when entertaining the guests, for to take life is to sadden the departed with more karmic obstructions and 'heavy baggage', making his liberation that much more difficult. Even if the deceased has already been reborn in the higher realm, his/her grade of rebirth may be lowered as a result. However, the bereaved may make more elaborate arrangements at their residences, according to their means and wishes.

**Types of Funerals Performed by the State Monastic Body**

According to astrological signs for the dead (shin rtsis), whoever the deceased may be, the funerals are not performed on the 8th, 18th and 28th days of a month which are considered dur sgo, and 9th, 19th and 29th days of a month which are considered shi sgo and or on Sundays and ngan pa dgu 'dzoms (Meeting of Nine Evils). If funerals are performed on these days, it is believed that misfortune will come to surviving family members as well as to the deceased.

At the cremation grounds of district headquarters, the funerals are performed only by the monks of the local monastic body. Except entitlements for funeral pyre (thab khung), the way funeral rites are performed is the same, for a minister down to common people. Especially at the cremation grounds of Thimphu and Punakha, different types of funerals such as state, official and ordinary funerals are performed. In accordance with the wishes of the family members of the deceased and the last will of the deceased, sometimes H.H. Je Khenpo is invited to preside over the funerals, while at other times one of the senior masters of the Central Monastic Body is invited to preside over the funerals.

During the time of Lha mo'i sgrub chen in Thimphu and mGon po'i sgrub chen in Punakha, H.H. Je Khenpo usually does not preside over the funeral rites at the cremation ground, and it is at that time that one of the senior masters preside over the funerals. In winter when the Central Monastic Body resides at Punakha for six months, a specially appointed abbot called Günzhug Neten (dGun bzhugs gnas brtan) presides over the funerals at the Thimphu cremation ground, while in summer when the Monk Body resides at Thimphu for another six months, an abbot called Byarzhug Neten (dByar bzhugs gnas brtan) presides over the funerals at the Punakha cremation ground.

**Reduction of Funeral Costs**

In the past funerals were expensive, specially for poor families. The bereaved family had to serve lunch and frequent tea to 100 to 200 monks while they performed the funeral rituals. In addition they had to offer chagyed (cash offering) to each monk. It is reported that rich families competed with one another in the mounting of increasingly elaborate funeral rituals, and the less fortunate ones often landed in debt.

For the welfare and good of the general people, from 26 July 1999 onward, H.H. the 70th Je Khenpo Trülku Jigme Chödra has banned the serving of food, drinks, and any type of offerings to monks including Je Khenpo himself during funerals. The family members of a deceased have to bear only the costs for firewood and other minor expenses. The reduction in costs has greatly benefited the less well off people.
At one’s family home, one could carry on the weekly ritual performance in whatever manner one could afford. It is up to the family to decide how many monks to invite and for how many days.

**OTHER BELIEFS CONNECTED WITH DEATH**

It is considered inappropriate to do agricultural or other field works in a village where a dead body is lying un-cremated. Moreover, if the dead body has to be taken across large rivers, it is considered inappropriate to take it over a bridge. It is believed that the dead body’s contamination would affect the ‘bridge deity’ and thereby upset the protecting deities. Hence, the dead body is slid along rope or cables stretched across the river. It is also said that the dead body must not be taken out through the main outer gates of the large mansions of high lamas and noble families. Rather, it should be taken out through a side or back gate. As the Earth Deity (*sa bdag*) resides in the main doorway of the house, it is considered inappropriate to take the body out through it. Since there are numerous similar formalities and customs to be observed, it is highly recommended that an astrologer be consulted and his instructions followed accordingly.

In some communities custom has it that whoever carried out the dead body cannot enter the neighbouring houses until the next solstice. In some villages the body-bearer cannot enter others’ houses until the 21st day of the rites and cannot do any household chores or touch household items until then. These and similar beliefs are widespread, varying in detail from valley to valley and district to district.
The Aolay (A’o legs) Festival takes place in the remote northern region of Laya in Bhutan (La yag, Gasa district). The people of Laya (Layaps) are yak pastoralists and they take great pride in the fact that the unifier of Bhutan, the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (Zhabs drung Ngag dbang mam rgyal, 1594-1651) stopped there in 1616 on his way from the ‘Brug pa monastery of Ralung in south Tibet to the central valleys of Bhutan. The people of this region welcomed him with barley offerings and he prayed that they would always have abundant cattle and timely rain. Every year, after the harvest, the Layaps commemorate this event and pray for continuous prosperity. On the 15th day of the 9th lunar month, they bring out of the Trashichoeling (bKra shis chos gling) temple a statue of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to offer him the first harvest.

Later, during three consecutive nights, groups of men and young women visit the houses of the five hamlets which compose the Laya community. The men sing A’o legs and dance in each household, where they are offered ample drinks and snacks. This is considered a symbol of prosperity. Besides praying for prosperity, A’o legs is a get-together festival when all the community assemble and rejoice as one, as usually men spend most of the year travelling for trade or looking after the yaks in the high pastures.

LAYA: AN OVERVIEW

Bhutan is a landlocked and mountainous country which is situated along the southern slopes of the great Himalayan range. It lies between the Tibetan Autonomous region (TAR), China to the north and India to the south. The total land area of the country is approximately 38,890 square kilometres with 650,000 inhabitants. Laya is a small community under Gasa district in northern Bhutan located at an altitude of 3840 metres; it has a population of about 3,000 scattered in different hamlets. Since this community is located at high altitude in a difficult terrain, there is no access road yet, and it is officially two days walk from the Gasa district.

The Laya community is one of the closest human settlements to the glaciers, which feed the country’s perennial rivers. The Masagang (Ma gza’ sgang or Ma sangs sgang) is a mountain just located north of Laya, closing the landscape with its towering and icy summit at 7,194 m. The people of Laya worship this mountain as their local deity. It could belong to the group of nine brothers (Ma sangs dpun dgu) including a monk, from gTsang in central Tibet. According to Nebesky-Wojkowitz, the nine brothers “were killed by enemies, and their spirits changed into harmful demons, the spirit of the monk becoming their leader. They were later bound by oath and placed into the parivara of rDor rje legs pa”. The deity rDor rje legs pa himself bore the title of Ma sangs and was also known as Ma sangs g.ya spangs skyes, g.ya spangs being verdigris (cupric acetate), used in Tibetan medicine to cure leprosy.” However, Ma sangs seems to be a rather widely spread appellation as according to Nebesky-Wojkowitz, “a class of pre-Buddhist deities which counts numerous mountain-gods as its members are the Ma sangs”. Whatever the exact origin of the mountain-god of
Laya, it appears to belong to the category of ancient deities from Tibet, and is held in great respect by the community. However, we have so far not been able to trace a text relating the origin of the Layap, or their date of migration to their present settlements. Their oral tradition says that their ancestors came from Central Tibet, some say Samye, as ‘effigies’, sent away after the gtor rgyab ritual. They were the Mo gCrud, the ‘female effigies’ while the people of Sakteng, in extreme east Bhutan were the Pho gCrud, the ‘male effigies’. This oral tradition is interesting as we know about this human expulsion ritual in pre-1959 Tibet. Further research needs to be done on this subject.

The people of Laya are known as ‘Layaps’ and have kept distinctive customs, dress and rituals. They are mainly traders and yak herders. Because of the high altitude, Laya people can grow only barley, radish and turnip in their cold valley. However, Laya is often called the ‘land of plenty’ as the traditional houses are stocked with grain bags in sufficient quantity to last for years as they trade yak products against rice with the central valleys of Bhutan.

People of Laya mainly depend on yak and sheep products for their livelihood as well as recently on tourism and cordyceps collection. Semi-nomadic, they spend all seasons migrating to places of different elevations in search of pasture for their yak and sheep. As one of their proverbs says “More profitable for male to move around and for women to stay put”; the men travel on trading trips with dairy products to exchange for necessary household items, salt and rice, while women generally stay at home to do the household works and most of the field works.

According to the local oral tradition, ‘Laya’ got its name from the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal who was the hierarch of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud pa school based in Rva lung in Tibet in the seventeenth century. There was a prophecy attributed to Guru Rinpoche as well as to the Dharma protectors mGon po and dPal ldan Iha mo, that he would make the 'Brug pa bka' Brgyud School flourish in Bhutan. Before leaving Tibet, he threw a yak shaped stone in the direction of the south in order to find the prophesised place. When in 1616 he arrived at Laya, he saw his yak-shaped stone on the hill overlooking the Laya village. As ‘la’ means the hill and ‘yag’ is the animal, the village got the name ‘La yag’.

THE A’O LEGS FESTIVAL

Though Bhutan shares many religious and spiritual similarities with the neighbouring Himalayan Buddhist world, the A’o legs festival has a sequence of events different to the other festivals recorded in the region. Ever since its advent in Laya in the seventeenth century, the A’o legs festival reflects particularly the cultural and religious identity of the community of Laya.

As noted, in 1616, when the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal travelled to Bhutan, he arrived at Laya where the people of the community warmly received him, and arranged his night halt at Tongra Chukpo’s house, one of the richest households in Tongra village—as the name Chukpo (phyug po, rich) infers. The people from Toka, Lubsa, Nyelug, Pazhing and Tongra villages of Laya gathered to offer him the first yield of the barley harvest. In appreciation he composed the A’o legs to bless the people of Laya with bountiful harvest, seasonal precipitations and healthy cattle. Since then, the Layaps observe a local festival every year from the 15th to the 17th day of the 9th month of the Bhutanese calendar. This festival is called ‘Layap’s A’o legs’, A’o legs meaning ‘good fortune’.

The original text recounting this, which was said to exist and was attributed to the Zhabdrung himself, is no longer available, but according to the people, it survived as an oral
transmission for more than 400 years. The A'o legs festival is celebrated as a thanksgiving to bring peace and prosperity to the people and fertility to the crops and livestock. It is also performed to honour the local deities and spirits, such as Masagang, who protect the valley from natural calamities and under whose jurisdiction the Layaps fall. If the Layaps fail to perform the festival in time, they believe that they would become ill or suffer, would not have timely rain or snow, and misfortune would happen to people, crops and livestock, as the displeased local deities would take revenge.5

As we have seen earlier, Tongra Chukpo (Tong rag phyug po) was the main host when the Zhabdrung came to Laya. He was thus blessed by precious gifts of turquoise and a huge copper container, which is still preserved by the Tongra family, and it is in their house that the A'o legs festival commence.

To observe this festival in the 9th Bhutanese month, people wind up the harvesting of barley within three days commencing from the auspicious day that the astrologer has identified. The first part of the festival, which is thanksgiving to the Zhabdrung and the local deities, takes place after completing the harvest. The head of the village called the Gup (rgap) and his assistant collect five 'bras (measurement container of a little more than 1.5 kgs) from each household, which comes to eight kgs of barley per household. Then the people of Toka, Lubsa, Nyelug, Pazhing and Tongra villages of Laya, offer the first yield of barley to the image of the Zhabdrung. It is taken out of the temple and displayed in front of the Laya Trashicholing (La yag bKra shis chos gling) temple with the Masagang as background. The offering is accompanied by these words:

His Holiness Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal
Who was born in Tibet
Our good fortune brought him to Bhutan.
Upon his arrival,
Offerings of multi-layered traditional textiles were made to Him.
Wishing Him longevity and good health.
Offerings of the first harvest were made to the gods,
Who descended from the middle heaven to receive the offerings
Then, offerings of the first harvest were made
To the seven siblings of local deities, and to the king of Nagas.

Fumigation offerings are then made to the local deities, and men sing verses starting with A'o legs to which other men reply A'o legs. Women are not involved in this exchange but they watch the ceremony. The second part of the A'o legs festival takes place only during the night and on three consecutive nights. Young and old, men and women, all participate in that part of the festival which really involves the whole community and renews their identity. The A'o legs participants visit each house except houses where recent death has occurred and houses where someone is sick. One of the elder men leads the festival. Men spend more than an hour in each house where they are offered drinks and snacks. They recite the beautiful verses starting with A'o legs and dance while praising the house, the house lady, the living conditions, telling how the Zhabdrung built the dzongs and temples, and end with an auspicious prayer for the future.

May your luck multiply and shower all the people
in the community with longevity and prosperity.
May you be blessed with a good harvest and your granary be filled to the brim.
May your house be blessed with people and good health to its occupants.
May cattle fill your pasture lands,
Let not your lands be fallow and barren.
May your stables always have horses.
Pray it never remains empty.
Today we gather here with the prayer to meet next year!

At the end of the celebrations, the A'ō legs party narrate the following words as they present a parting gift to the owner of the house.

We are presenting our farewell gifts
For Love of the dear father of the house
We are offering gift of cloths and Boel-tog (soda)
For the love of the dear mother of the house
We are offering gift of Dzong-boed (textiles?) and Pako (pelt)
For love of the dear sons of the family
We are offering you the gift of scarf and brocades
For the love of dear daughters of the family
We are offering you the gift of turquoise and gems.

During the three night’s procession, participants are warmly welcomed by each household and are served food and drinks while they sing, dance and drink. Every day as dawn breaks, people retire in their respective houses to sleep or rest wherever they can.

In the social culture of Laya, women do not often visit other houses, except during this festival; in Laya the society is patrilocal while in most of Bhutan it is matrilocal. Therefore, for young women, the festival is a golden opportunity to visit their neighbours’ houses. They follow the men in each house but do not dance or sing and hide their face with their black capes made of yak wool. They say that the reason for covering their face is that they can assess the wealth and the family status of their prospective partners as rice bags and thick woollen blankets are stacked along the walls of the rooms. Moreover during the A'ō legs festival, the men, married or unmarried, are free to spend the night with married or unmarried partners. Both women and men have equal freedom during the A'ō legs, including married couples, part of the Layaps’ social customs. Socialisation and teasing, helped by alcohol, is considered as an important part of this festival as the community rarely gets the chance to gather because of its way of life.

Indeed, as Layaps rely for their part of their livelihood on animal products, men are in the pastures or go out of the valley to trade these products for other commodities. In winter, most of the young families come down to Punakha valley (1,300 metres) and exchange their animal products, the butter, cheese, hard cheese and meat with rice and other provisions. In July, men also bring down the collected cordyceps for auction. Layaps take three days to transport the rations from Punakha to Laya via Gasa by horses, and these dearly acquired rice bags are an essential part of the wealth that each Laya household proudly displays.

The A'ō legs festival, a thanksgiving and harvesting festival performed to protect the Laya valley against diseases and natural disasters, is a time of great celebration and of unity.
of this specific community as all the members are invited to join in the celebration. The growth of the community is reflected in the fact that while the A'o legs celebration traditionally lasts for three nights, the increase in the number of households means the festival now lasts longer. However, like in other parts of the Himalayas, due to modern development, the tradition and culture of the Layaps are fading although they do believe in the value of the A'o legs festival. With modernization and development, many Layaps started going to school, some have joined civil service or the armed forces and live away from the community. Consequently, the number of participants is reducing each year although the number of households increases.

Therefore, in the year 2005, with the financial support from UNESCO, the ILCS audio-visual team went to Laya to film the entire festival in order to document it and archive it for researchers and for the future generations of Bhutanese. Besides, a 26 minute documentary was produced for the Bhutan Broadcasting service (BBS) television.

NOTES

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Informants: Chimi Tshering of Pazhing village; Laya, Lhakpa Tshering, clerk of the Laya Gup (Head of Villagers); Damchoe of Tongra village, Laya.

MODERNITY IN TRADITION: IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGES IN PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES DURING THE RECENT TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN BHUTAN

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INTRODUCTION

In my previous work, *Culture and Modernisation: From the Perspectives of Young People in Bhutan*, I analysed tradition and modernity in the eyes of the younger generation in Bhutan. The book also examines the desirable career path for educated young people in Bhutan, and reveals, to a certain extent, social hierarchy and values. The fieldwork for this earlier work was carried out from 1996 to 1998. This article is a kind of a follow-up with a particular reference to the recent political changes in the country. The article will look at changes to social hierarchy in its perceived form, which have been revealed during the process of the political changes in Bhutan, namely the abdication of the Fourth King of Bhutan, the elections of the new parliament (both the National Council and the National Assembly) with the involvement of political parties, and the enactment of the written constitution. The article will firstly illustrate the recent political changes in Bhutan very briefly, and try to capture some of the features of modernity in the country, with reference to a theoretical framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu. Secondly, it will examine some of the changes in people's perceptions of hierarchy in Bhutan, and explore how the new political system is legitimized. The paper will particularly refer to modernization theories on social development. Thirdly, it will explore a possible change in young people's perception of desirable career paths as a result of political transition in the country. From these analyses the paper will conclude that modernity in Bhutan, represented as the new political system and participation in it, has legitimacy derived from His Majesty the King of Bhutan.

I need to caution readers on one term used in this article. Throughout the article, the Fourth and Fifth Kings of Bhutan are referred as HM the King. It may not be easy for those who are not very familiar with Bhutan's political scene to identify which king is referred to. In such places, however, the identity of the individual monarch is usually not the issue: the term is only used to indicate the (then) monarch of the country.

Attention should also be drawn to the main sources of information for this article. The article relies mainly on reports from Bhutanese media, especially *Kuensel*, the oldest newspaper of the country and a public corporation. The *Bhutan Observer* and the *Bhutan Times*, two of the three private newspapers in Bhutan, and Bhutan Broadcasting Services (BBS), are also referenced to a lesser extent. Other sources include personal correspondences. The assessment of the available information is based on the author's acquaintance with Bhutan since 1996, including a one year stay in the country between 1997 and 1998 as a researcher, and a three year stay between 2004 and 2007 as a staff member of an international organization. The readers are, however, reminded that the article may not provide a full-picture, owing to this limited number of sources consulted.
The recent political changes in Bhutan have been initiated by His Majesty the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. On 17 December 2005 (the national day in Bhutan), he announced in Trashi Yangtse that he would hand over the throne to his son in 2008. The entire nation was shocked by this sudden announcement. Kuensel reports that "a shocked nation has received this news in stunned silence" (Kuensel, 21 December 2005). Much earlier than this, in September 2001, he commanded the drafting of a Constitution, and a Constitutional drafting committee was formed in November 2001 (Kuensel, 8 November 2003; 23 March 2005). The drafting process took more than three years. The draft Constitution was distributed to the public on 26 March 2005, and the Fourth King and the present King, HM Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck went to all twenty dzongkhags3 for consultations with the people. The Constitution was also discussed in the newly elected National Assembly and adopted on 18 July 2008 (Kuensel, 19 July 2008).

The most important part of the Constitution, as HM the Fourth King explains, is to create a democratic political system best suited to Bhutan. He said that, if Bhutan had a good and capable king, he would be able to serve the country and the people meaningfully and ensure that the national interests were safeguarded and the aspirations of the people fulfilled. At the same time, according to him, if a king did not have the capacity or the commitment to discharge this sacred responsibility, he would not be able to compromise the interests of the nation and the people (Kuensel, 23 March 2005). This was not the first time the King had highlighted possible short-comings of the system of monarchy. Crossette reports that HM the King told her during an audience in the early 1990s that "the flaw with monarchy is that too much depends on one individual, and in Bhutan we cannot hope that for all time to come we will have a wise and good king" (Crossette 1995: 42).4 According to the Constitution, the Houses of parliament consist of the National Council and the National Assembly. The National Council has twenty elected members, one from each dzongkhag, and five members nominated by HM the King, and acts as a house of review on matters concerning the sovereignty and the interest of the people (Kuensel, 23 March 2005). The National Assembly has forty-seven elected members. The elections to choose the National Assembly members are to be contested between two political parties, while other political parties, if they are formed, are to be eliminated during the first stage of the election through voting by the people.

The history of the political changes in the direction of devolution, as the Fourth King explains, began in 1981 with a decentralization process and formation of Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdu (DYT; Dzongkhag Development Committee) where people discuss the development of their own localities (Kuensel, 21 December 2005). This was followed by the establishment of Gewog Yargay Tshogchung (GYT; Gewog Development Committee) in 1991. It was therefore the King’s long term intention to transfer power to the people step by step, and the process reached its culmination with the introduction of the democratic political system and adoption of the written Constitution.

The first election for the National Council members was held on 31 December 2007 (and later on 29 January 2008 for the remaining five Dzongkhags) and for the National Assembly on 24 March 2008. With the adoption of the new political system, ‘democracy’ has become one of the most prominent symbols of modernity in Bhutan. In this context, modernity is simply meant to be ‘new’ and ‘the latest’. Participation in the democratic system, in one form or another, became the centre of the attention in the society. Readers have to be reminded that
it was not the first time the Bhutanese elected their representatives. *Chimis* (members of the National Assembly in the old system) and *gups* (a head of a *gewog*, a group of several villages and the administrative unit one level below each *dzongkhag*) were elected from constituencies and communities, respectively. One clear distinction is the involvement of political parties in the new National Assembly Election. Furthermore, another significant difference between the new and the old system is perhaps the level of importance of the new parliament, which is incomparable with that of the old National Assembly, as the new Constitution states that sovereign power belongs to the people of Bhutan. Accordingly, the social and economic status attached to the members of the new parliament is significantly higher than the ones in the previous system. In particular, the minimum qualification required to run for the election, that is, a Bachelor’s degree, explicitly indicates the differences between the new and the old system.

Particular attention has to be paid to the fact that this process of political change was initiated by HM the King. In many countries, a transformation of political system involving a transfer of power is rarely initiated by the leader of the present (or former) political system. Whether that is a move from monarchy to democracy, or from a military government to a civilian government, there is usually strong pressure from within or outside the country for a change. In the case of Bhutan, there was no notable pressure for a change. In fact there was a resistance against such change. His Majesty the Fourth King himself acknowledged in March 2005 that there are opinions in the society that Bhutan was not ready for democracy and that it was too early to enact the Constitution (*Kuensel*, 23 March 2005). As far as Bhutan is concerned, however, it was not the first time that the highest authority has introduced new practices which signify modernity. Mathou also seems to agree on this point. He says that, “contrary to most countries where monarchy is assimilated to immobility, the Bhutanese monarchy has always been the leading force of change” (Mathou 1999: 115). Some of the important earlier examples are the establishment of the National Assembly in 1953, the abolishment of serfdom in 1956 and the introduction of development programmes with the formulation of five year plans in 1961.

Theoretical works on social analysis tend to argue that new discourses and practices which challenge the status quo discourses and practices are usually produced outside the authority. The theoretical framework presented by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is one such example. Bhutan’s case, however, is clearly different. I argued in my earlier work that, in the Bhutanese context, the new discourse on modernity and tradition was introduced with the launch of development programmes initiated by the state. Yet again, Bhutan’s transition to democracy testifies that the introduction of new discourses does not always come from the outside of the authority. As for the change in 1961, it primarily concerned people’s economic and social lives, whereas this time it concerned their political lives, namely how the country is governed. In the next section, I will look at what influence the launch of the new political system has had on people’s perceptions of hierarchy, and how the new system is legitimized.

**Changes in People’s Perspective**

My earlier work illustrated ‘the ladder of success’ among young people as steps of their desirable careers. In that career ladder, becoming a civil servant was the most desirable career path for most of them, and *dasho* was a symbol of the top of the career ladder. I argued that a *dasho*, with his red scarf, signifies power, privilege, and respect in society (Ueda 2003: 128). Ministers, with a title of *Lyonpo*, are generally considered to be the highest rank in the
bureaucracy one can attain. One can safely say that desirable careers among young people reflect the social hierarchy. Generally, the Bhutanese people attribute a positive sense to ‘serving the country’. The civil service is considered to be the way to serve the country and HM the King. There is a counter-discourse against this, saying that one can serve the country even if you are in the private sector. But being in the private sector is generally considered to be a second choice, and thus this counter-discourse is a relatively weak voice. The emphasis on the civil servant, I would argue, is derived from the notion, and also the historical fact, that civil service has entailed working under kings, who have received unchallenged trust and respect for generations. Furthermore, dasho, even now, is a rank awarded by the King, and until just before the introduction of the new political system Lyonpos were nominated by the King and voted for in the National Assembly (Kuensel, 4 July 2003). Therefore the titles of Dasho and Lyonpo signify recognition from HM the King.

Let us look at whether the political changes have affected this social hierarchy. Some people might say that it would be symbolic that two former ministers lost in the recent National Assembly elections against opponents whose age and social status are much junior in the Bhutanese context. During the election in 2008, there were several former ministers (Lyonpos) and former high-ranking officials who competed for seats in the parliament. The election was carried out using the system of a simple majority in each constituency, and fought between the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). In the constituency where the former health minister stood, for example, his opponent from the DPT was a former school teacher who was twenty-nine years old. In a newspaper report, those with a ‘white scarf’ (a common people’s colour) are described as challengers, and it says that most people were of the opinion that the former minister (with an orange scarf) would win easily (Kuensel, 11 August, 2007). A person in eastern Bhutan told a newspaper: “By becoming a minister, he did all of us in the region proud. It displays the trust His Majesty has in him and his abilities. When he decides to represent us, it would be foolish not to vote for him.” (Kuensel, 5 September 2007)

The reports of the election results reveal a landslide victory of the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT), including several unexpected results at the constituency level. Two former ministers from the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and almost all the former civil servants (several of whom held important positions) in PDP lost to the opponents who, in terms of the conventional Bhutanese social hierarchy, are not comparable. To give a wider-picture, similar-ranking former officials and ministers in the DPT secured seats in the parliament. Thus, loss of the two former ministers of the PDP in the election does not necessarily mean that respect and social status attached to Lyonpo is declining.

The results seem to show that people voted for the party, not for the individual candidate. The newspaper analyses of the results of individual constituencies state the same trend (Kuensel, 26 March 2008; Bhutan Observer, 29 March 2008). If this is true, the next question is, what are the important factors which gave the DPT a landslide victory? It is said that there was not much difference between party manifestos. In terms of candidates, the PDP had two former ministers while the DPT had five. This might favour the DPT, but there was a perception before the election that, excluding former ministers, the PDP had more high-profile candidates (i.e. middle- to high-ranking former civil servants). Some people interviewed by newspapers said that they voted for the party president. What perceptions did people have of each party president? The People’s Democratic Party is headed by the former agriculture minister, who is the elder brother of the Queens of the Fourth King. The president of the DPT is the former home minister, who is a strong advocate of the concept of Gross
National Happiness (GNH). At least in these terms, there are not many striking differences between them. If we would like to know more, it will lead to a detailed analysis of voting behaviour, which is beyond the scope of this paper. For now, it seems at least true that the individual candidate’s social status in each constituency may not have been the only factor which affected people’s voting behaviour.

The more important issue here seems to be the matter of legitimacy. Historically, legitimacy in Bhutan has derived and still derives largely from HM the King. The launch of the development programmes in 1961 and the introduction of democracy in 2008 had legitimacy in society, despite some voices of concern, exactly because these reforms were ordered by HM the King. However, there are hints of changes. One instance was from the selection of a chairperson for the newly elected National Council. The National Council consists of twenty-five members, out of which twenty were elected from each dzongkhag by popular vote, while five members were nominated by the King. The person who won the chairmanship (with thirteen votes) is an elected member. He defeated another member (with ten votes) who is a nominee of HM the King and holds the title of dasho. After the election of the chairperson, a councillor said to a newspaper, “We could not overrule the fact that most members wanted to reserve the post for an elected member. That’s democracy” (Kuensel, 30 April 2008). Here, whether to appoint a direct royal nominee or an elected member of the National Council seems to be a point of contestation.

The whole situation, however, is not as simple as it sounds. The very system of democracy has been initiated by HM the King. There was a general air of apprehension among the Bhutanese public when the transition to democracy was announced. During the process of preparation for the elections, people generally seemed to be very cautious about the new process. The chief election commissioner of the Bhutan Election Commission expressed concern at not seeing any ‘serious political activity’ towards forming political parties ninety days before the registration of the new parties (Kuensel, 21 March 2007). Some people told me that informal consultations were taking place at the point of this comment. Therefore it was not that Bhutanese people were not interested in taking part in the democratic transition, but that they were generally cautious. On 22 March 2008, two days before the National Assembly elections, HM the King issued a royal decree (Kasho) to remind the people that it is their duty to vote. Although people had already begun to return to the registered electorate to vote, it is said that this Kasho strongly encouraged more people to cast votes. In fact, several people living in Thimphu later told me that the royal decree finally made them decide to go back and vote in their village, where they were registered. Around election day, according to my personal correspondences, Thimphu was “like a deserted town with very few cars and people on the streets”: most of them had gone back to their own villages to vote. The very system of democracy has legitimacy derived from HM the King, who has tremendous respect in society.

Here I refer to modernization theories in order to compare the relationship between modernity and democracy both in theory and in the case of Bhutan. According to Talcott Parsons, a prominent scholar of modernization theory, modernity is characterized by more efficient social arrangements, with bureaucracy, money markets and democratic associations. In his view, democracy has four characteristics: the institutionalization of leaders in elective office, the franchise, procedural rules for voting, and membership on a voluntary basis (Harrison 1988: 36). The interesting difference between this conceptual understanding and the reality in Bhutan is that in Bhutan the system, which in theory is represented as ‘modern’,
has a legitimacy that is derived from the monarchy, the very institution that represents 'tradition' in the same theory.

Furthermore, Talcott Parsons suggests that people in non-industrialized societies see social objects in terms of their backgrounds, while those in industrial society see them in terms of their performance (Harrison 1988: 9; Hulme and Turner 1990: 40; Parsons and Shils 1951: 82-3). His Majesty the Fourth King is quoted in the Kuensel as saying that monarchy is not the best form of government for Bhutan because a small nation cannot depend on one individual who is chosen by birth and not by merit (Kuensel, 21 December 2005). One of the reasons to introduce democracy, according to HM the King, is to establish a government which is formed by people who are selected on the basis of competency, not background. This resonates with what modernization theories say. Here again, there are mismatches between the theories and the reality. Modernization theory is pronounced by the authority which embodies 'tradition' in the theory. In modernization theories, tradition gives way to modernity, but in Bhutan it is tradition that gives legitimacy to modernity. Tradition is a guardian of modernity.

**YOUNG PEOPLE’S CAREER PATHS**

There is now a new career opportunity: the path of becoming a member of parliament. This is not only for young people but for the whole population. However, considering there is a minimum qualification to run for election (a bachelor’s degree), more young people would qualify than older people, as enrolment rates have been increasing at all levels of education. I would like to briefly examine how this will affect the perception of careers among young people.

In the National Assembly election in 2008, there were ten candidates (out of ninety-four) under thirty years old. Out of these ten candidates, six made their way into the Parliament. (As for the National Council election, out of twenty people who won the election, four were under thirty years old.) Member of parliament (MP) seems to be a prestigious position in society. A newspaper article points out that it has long been the case that Bhutanese people’s perceptions were occupied by so-called ‘grade mentality’. “Social status was being assessed in terms of our grade” in the civil service, the article says (Kuensel, 26 July 2008). This is also something which I pointed out in my earlier work. For young people who have just completed their education, what is important is entering at a higher grade in the civil service, as this makes it easier for them to climb up ‘the ladder of success’ during the course of their career. The difference of one grade is normally a difference of five years of career (Ueda 2003: 149). The above newspaper article also says, “the grade mentality has, to an extent, stretched into models of Toyota cars. At the higher levels of government we can almost tell a person’s job and status by the model of the car he or she drives.” The newspaper continues that education means academic qualifications and aspiration for government jobs.

This is why those outside the civil service feel ‘left out’, including those retiring from the civil service and armed forces. ... In recent months, a new section of society has emerged in Bhutan. The politicians currently form the government with the responsibility for the immediate future of the nation. This development has loosened the political hierarchy to an extent and it is changing the dynamics of the social structure. (Kuensel, 26 July 2008)
Parliamentarians are entitled to a monthly salary of Nu. 30,000, which is at a similar level to that of high officials in the ministries. In addition, they are entitled to various allowances. While both financial compensation and social status are high, they might lack job security, which, according to my earlier work, is an important criterion for young people in choosing a job. The term of a member of the National Council and the National Assembly is five years, and the National Assembly can be dissolved before the completion of the tenure.

Whether becoming an MP is going to be a new desirable career path for young people remains to be seen. Some factors which will determine the trend will be, firstly, how many MPs are re-elected in the next election, and secondly, whether the experience of being an MP leads to opportunities with similar or higher social status and financial compensation for those not re-elected.

The above newspaper article states that the recent change in the political system has loosened the political hierarchy to an extent, and is changing the dynamics of the social structure. The article does not explain any further how the political hierarchy has been loosened and how the social structure has been changed. However, if I add my own interpretation to this, I would say that it should mean that it is not only red scarf dashos, lyonpos, and other high officials in the bureaucracy who can effectively influence the policies of the country. A window is now established for those who have a bachelor’s degree to become members of the highest decision-making body in the country. From young people’s perspectives, if one joins the civil service it takes years until he or she rises to a high enough rank to influence national policy. On the other hand, if one becomes an MP, he or she will be instantly in a position to discuss national policy. Even in this first round of the election and the process of forming the government, there are instances where a person has obtained the position of minister and has staff who were formerly senior to him in the hierarchy of the bureaucracy.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to argue that democracy in Bhutan is legitimized by HM the King. With reference to modernization theories presented earlier, the monarchy is an institution which is associated with tradition. We have, however, looked at the case in Bhutan, where modernity is legitimised by the institution described in the classical theories as ‘traditional’. Needless to say, we have well passed the time when development studies and social science at large discussed various issues in the framework of ‘modernity versus tradition’. A number of anthropological works have already testified very firmly that it is not the discussion of modernity versus tradition that we need to look at, but how these two elements are blended and become hybrid. The case of Bhutan can be added to these examples. Modernity is firmly in the hands of tradition.

As for a question of how the new practices have influenced the status quo practices and perceptions of people, I have laid out only a few hints of changes. The political changes have just begun, and it largely remains to be seen.

NOTES

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The third private newspaper, Bhutan Today, started only in October 2008, well after the period this article covers.

Dzongkha is an administrative unit and is often translated as ‘district’. The country is divided into twenty dzongkhags and each dzongkhag is divided into several gewogs. The transliteration of Dzongkha words into the Roman alphabet in this article generally follows those found in Kuensel.

To add the context of this statement, HM the Fourth King told to Crossette as follows.

In Bhutan, myself feel disillusioned both about the democratic system of governance as well as monarchy, because both have very serious flaws. ... Like Democracy, for instance, only works when you have a perfect society. You have to have a society which is highly literate, politically very conscious, and also enjoy a very high level of economic well-being and prosperity. Then at the same time, when it comes to monarchy, if you have a good king, then he can do a lot of good. And if you don’t have a very good king, then he can do a lot of harm. The flaw with monarchy is that too much depends on one individual, and in Bhutan, we cannot hope that for all time to come we will have a wise and good king. (Crossette 1995: 42)

For example, during the eighty-first session of the National Assembly in 2003, the six serving ministers survived a vote of confidence on 28 June when the electorate of 145 Assembly members gave the Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley, 127 ‘yes’ votes, the Finance Minister, Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, 125 votes, the Health and Education Minister, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, 124 votes, the Minister for Trade and Industry, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, 111 votes, the Agriculture Minister, Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, 103 votes, and the Home Minister, Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho, seventy-nine votes. Seven new candidates were nominated by His Majesty the King on 30 June 2003 in accordance with the lhengye zhungtsho chathrim of 1999 which required candidates to have held government posts at the rank of secretary to the government and above. Among the candidates the Deputy Minister for Communications, Dasho Leki Dorji, won 125 votes, the RCSC (Royal Civil Service Commission) Secretary, Dasho Jigmi Singay, won 109 votes, the Finance Secretary, Dasho Wangdi Norbu, won 107 votes, and the Foreign Secretary, Dasho Ugyen Tshering, won ninety-six votes. A total of 148 Assembly members cast the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote for each candidate in the secret ballot (Kuensel, 4 July 2003).

For example, Kilkarthan-Mendelgang constituency in Tsirang dzongkhag, Nubi-Tangsibji constituency in Trongsa dzongkhag, and Thrimshing-Kangpara constituency in Trashigang dzongkhag (Kuensel, 26 March 2008).

Through several personal correspondences between August 2007 to March 2008.

The concept of Gross National Happiness was first coined by the Fourth King of Bhutan in the 1970s. As his words, “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product”, signify, it is a concept, and policy of Bhutanese government, to follow a balanced path between material progress and cultural and spiritual development of society and individuals. For more information on GNH, the web-site of the Centre for Bhutan Studies (http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/main/index.php) and GNH Commission: (http://www.pc.gov.bt/) would be useful.

Please refer to, for example, a Kuensel report on 19 March 2008. It states that in one day more than one thousand people arrived in Samdrup Jongkhar to go back to their registered villages to vote on the election day.

The voter turn-out was 79.4%, according to the press release from the Election Commission of Bhutan dated 25 March, 2008.

Kuensel reports that in 2006, Deputy Minister’s salary was increased from Nu. 25,590 to Nu.39,500 per month. (Kuensel, 14 May 2008).

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BHUTAN'S PERVERSIVE PHALLUS: 
IS DRUKPA KUNLEY REALLY RESPONSIBLE?

FRANÇOISE POMMARET (CNRS & ILCS) and TASHI TOBGAY (ILCS) 
Royal University of Bhutan

As the Bhutanese scholar Sonam Kinga has written, in Bhutan "phalluses are everywhere". Phalluses are drawn on the outside walls on each side of entrance-doors or modelled in wood and hung at the corners of houses, planted in the fields, and held as an attribute by the jesters (atsara) at religious festivals. They are also shaped as gtor ma for certain rituals (Plate 1) or as fountains such as that found in Dechenphu (bDe chen phu) temple near Thimphu (Plate 2). The ubiquity of such representations is striking in Bhutan, and seems to contrast sharply with Tibetan or northern Himalayan areas. However, we will see that this assumption has to be qualified. This article presents different aspects of the subject based on oral, textual and visual material.

The topic was chosen in part to mark the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, as the first article on phallic symbols appeared in the institute's Bulletin of Tibetology, written by the great scholar Hugh E. Richardson (1905-2000). Richardson wrote that "phallic symbols are by no means an obstrusive feature, in the Tibetan scene." He did not connect them with the Shiva linga worship but described them as "part of ancient geomantic practices, influenced perhaps by those of China."

Overt phallic signs were the realistic representation of the male organs, often painted red and surrounded by a bush of yak-hair, set over the main door of some farm houses in Tibet and Bhutan. These, I was told, were intended to avert bad influences in the immediate neighborhood. […]

A rather surprising example existed on the roof of the Jo-khang, the Cathedral of Lhasa. Its presence and purpose are explained by a story in several Tibetan histories […] It relates that when the Nepalese queen of Srong-brtsan sgam-po wanted to build the 'Phrul-snang (the Jo-khang) at Lhasa and was looking for a suitable site, she consulted Srong-brtan's Chinese queen who had already built the Ra-mo-che. The latter had recourse to occult divination (spor thang) to ascertain in the geomantic auspices. It was revealed that Tibet was like a female demon lying on her back and that chapels—known as the mtha' 'dul yang 'dul lha khang rnam s—should be built at vital points on the extremities and the limbs of the demon in order to keep her in subjection. The 'Phrul-snang itself was to be built on the O-ma-thang, over the demon's heart. Eight specific topographic features around the site harbored hostile influences that had to be countered in different ways. While some which were the haunts of 'dre, bdud and btsan spirits could be controlled by building a chapel or a mchod-rten, the evil omen emanating from a cave on the hillside to the east which resembled the private parts of the she-demon had to be opposed by setting up a phallus—dbang-phug chen-po or dbang phyug mtsan—pointing in that direction. I was told that that sign, together with different apotropaic objects—a conch shell, a garuda image, a stone mchod-rten and a stone lion—prescribed to repel dangerous influences from other sources, was placed in semi-concealment under the gilded pagoda rooflet (rgya-phibs) on the east side of the Jo-khang roof. […]

Following that example, phallic signs were placed, unobtrusively and always on the east side, in several of the great houses of Lhasa; and there is one of stone, rudimentary but unmistakable,
on the east side of the perimeter wall of the Dalai Lama’s summer palace of Norbu Lingka, built in the 19th century.\(^5\)

Victor Chan in his guidebook on Tibet describes a stone phallus next to a carved lion in the north-east corner of the main roof of the Jokhang.\(^6\) As for Heather Stoddard, she recently published photos as well as dedicated one sub-chapter to ‘the geomantic stones of the Jokhang’ already studied by Richardson, in her chapter ‘From Rasa to Lhasa’, part of a book on the Jokhang.\(^7\) She relies on the text of the Chos ’byung by Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (1124/36-1192) who considers these stones as Earth elemental opposing forces (’byung ba’i dgra).\(^8\) One of them is a phallus which opposes the female genitals of a demoness: “To the east, in the Empty Valley of Sand Island, thee is an ‘earth elemental opposing force’ (sa dgra), like a demoness holding her genitals up in receptive fashion (srin mo ‘doms bzed pa). Plant a phallus of great Ishvara (dbang phyug chen po’i ling t~hu~s).”\(^9\) As Stoddard concludes if these stones are the proof that geomancy was used in the early historical period to build structures, they seem to point to an ‘Indian cultural matrix’.\(^10\)

While travelling throughout Tibet, one seldom observes phallic representations and nowhere are they as obvious as they are in Bhutan. However, they can still be seen in Amdo and Kongpo regions where they seemingly play the same role as in the Jokhang construction. The first example from Amdo was kindly forwarded to me by a friend. It is a stone erected about 50 years ago, according to the oral tradition, to counterbalance the influence of a rock having the shape of the female vulva (Plate 3).

In that case, at least, we can see that the phallus was believed to have been able to subjugate or tame female influence, which is perceived as negative or wild, a well-known theme which has been studied elsewhere.\(^11\) This perception is implicit in the well-known story told in the Rgyal rab gsal ba’i me long (fourteenth century), where we are told that “Srong btsan sgam po sought geomantic instruction from the Chinese princess Weng chen kong jo, who divined that the land of Tibet was like a she-demon lying on her back, filled with inauspicious element^.”\(^12\)

Janet Gyatso proposed one interpretation of this account, based on psychoanalytical analysis:

Part and parcel of the relationship between the demoness land and the architectural structures upon her seem to be certain sexual innuendoes. If the srin mo is a Mother Earth, then the architectural structures that hold her down must be seen as overtly masculine. At one point in the srin mo myth this is quite explicit: one of the pinning structures is a siva linga, to be set on the ‘earth-enemy’ (sa dgra) in the east, a place which is ‘like the srin mo’s pubic hair.’ Vertical buildings, imposing structures ... erections; in contrast, the feminine earth is associated with fertility, nurturing, receptivity.\(^13\)

Other contemporary examples are visible in Kongpo, in the south-eastern forested region of central Tibet which central Tibetans sometimes associated with wilderness. The phallus can be found there in two places established or restored by the great Nyingmapa master the Second Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987) Brag gsum mtsho\(^14\) at the monastery called Mtsho rdzong and Bla ma gling. The representations are realistic and placed near the entrances of both places (Plate 4). Dudjom Rinpoche spent a large part of his life in Bhutan and may have ‘revitalised’ the phallic representations in Kongpo. But he may also have found that people of this region were using these representations.
The lack of field research and documented data in such Tibetan areas hampers any conclusive statement about the prevalence of phallic representations in Tibet, but it is noticeable that the practice today survives in areas remote from the centralising influence of Lhasa.

If we go back to Richardson, whose article was the starting-point of this study, he also wrote that "although anthropologists may see phallic undertones in the white stone set up by farmers at the centre of each cultivated field in honour of the sa bday—the 'lord of the land'—or in the tall pillars erected at the royal tombs, these have no such overt association in Tibetan minds but are magical 'navel stones' or 'earth pegs'."15

While this statement was valid in Richardson's time, it could now be qualified by recent ethnographic data and field research in Bhutan and other areas. In fact, certain stone pillars such as the one in Nabji in Trongsa district, clearly have a phallic appearance.16 They are very similar to the stone pillars observed in Amdo in north-east Tibet, or the recently published photo of a stone of Zhwa lu in central Tibet.17

**OCCURRENCES OF THE PHALLUS IN BHUTAN**

The obscene and sacred are intertwined in Bhutan, as Sonam Chhoki made clear in her ground-breaking 1994 study of this interaction.18 This paper will simply try to examine some examples of phallic representations in the country and link them to a multi-layered socio-religious matrix.

In Bhutan, these representations are referred to by many different names. These include Pho chen, dBang phyug chen po (all over Bhutan), Kharam Shing (in eastern Bhutan), Tenpola and Miling (in Trongsa and Khyen regions of central Bhutan), Andaligpa (in Trashiyangtse), and since the 1970s, Gyelwey Lodroe (Rgyal ba'i blo bros) throughout Bhutan. They are found in different spheres of life, one of the most visible being on houses, carved in wood at the comers of the roof, or brightly painted in a humorous, ornate or realistic way on the outside wall on each side of the entrance door (Plate 5 and 6). The Bhutanese believe that they prevent the house and its inhabitants from being harmed by any kind of evil, or from mishaps due to water, air, fire and earth, and finally from slanderous gossip.

Chime Wongmo describes the ritual of installing the phallus at the corners of the roof:

In the afternoon of the same day, the lamas who are performing the consecration ceremony go round the house in a procession playing their musical instruments, while the lady or the daughter of the house follows carrying a basket containing five wooden phallic symbols on her back. After completing their circuit the lamas continue their prayer as the basket is pulled up with a rope to the roof. This is also accompanied by singing, and the ceremony is complete when four of these wooden carvings are hung, one at each of the comers of the roof. This is done, it is said, to avert mi kha (malicious gossip). The fifth will be kept in the house; it is considered a sign of good luck, a sign that boys will be born here and that the house will be wealthy.19

In his book on Bhutanese architecture,20 Chang Dorji details the rituals of a house construction, and especially those related to the zur chen ('large comers', the name given to the large wooden phallus hanging from the roofs) (Plate 7).

**AMONG THE FIVE zurchen gyalwai lodroe [phallus], four should have a head shaped like a penis and the base like a ritual dagger (phur pa or kila). If it is possible the base of the reldri [sword]...**
crossed with the zurchen should be shaped like a vajra with five tips. One of the zurchen does not require reldri since this is the resource of the patron (male), it should be kept separately with a knotted silken scarf. Once they are all painted, they should be kept in five different yellow bags in the chhoesham [mchod bsham, altar room of the house]. [...] Then male dancers come into the house, and five girls receive the zurchen from the chhoesham. [...] When the chant leader recites each verse, the rest should respond in chorus shouting the word ‘karya’ [dkar ya] loudly. The verses are as follows:

The Buddha wisdom, that the Zurchen is,
It is not appropriate that you stay here,
You must ascend the beautiful house,
You must overwhelm the land with your brilliance,
Rain must fall on time,
Crops and cattle must thrive forever,
The waist rests on a saddle like an ant,
Without being distracted by the saddle,
The Zurchen must ascend onto the roof.
The curly hair is skilled in upthrust,
Without being distracted by that who is skilled in upthrust,
The Zurchen must ascend onto the roof.
The clever one has a comfortable sexual union,
Without being distracted by the comfortable union,
The Zurchen must ascend onto the roof.
The one full of smile has lust,
Without being distracted by the lustful,
The Zurchen must ascend onto the roof.
You must grant the boon of sons,
You must grant the boon of wealth,
You must fill the main entrance with horses,
You must fill the ground floor with cows,
You must fill the middle floor with grains,
To let people and cattle flourish,
You must grant this boon.21

After everybody has gone out of the house and circumambulated it three times, the lady of the house takes one zurchen wrapped in silk back into the altar room where it remains as the deity of wealth. The remaining four zurchen are pulled up on the roof by men while women pretend to pull them down amidst songs22 and laughter.

While these rituals have a non-Buddhist origin, the phallus, the sword and the ritual dagger (in other words, the shape of the zurchen) are considered in Buddhist terms as the representations of the Rigs gsum mgon po (Three Bodhisattva). The phallus represents Avalokiteshvara, the sword Manjusri and the ritual dagger, Vajrapani. Moreover, a narrative of origin of the zurchen reinforces the Buddhist aspect, as well as attributing a prestigious geographical origin—Tibet—to it:

I, the great phallus, Gylelwa Lodroe,
I will climb up to the great corners.
When I came down from the realms of gods,
I came through Lhasa, the land of gods,
That is why the phallus looks better than gods.
The road was through the centre of Gyantse,
That is why the phallus is so famous [Gyang and rgyang, meaning famous are pronounced almost the same way, hence the pun].
The road passed through Phari,
That is why the phallus has huge ears.[Pha and phag the hog, which has big ears, are homophonous]
I passed through Chimela at Phari,
That is why I have a bald head.
I passed by Paro dzong,
That is why I am joyful.
My way took me through Wangdi dzong,
That is why I am so powerful.
I went to Punakha dzong,
That is why I resemble the wish-fulfilling jewel.23
I have vowed to grant protection from falling meteors,
I have vowed to grant protection from famine,
I have vowed to grant protection from spewing lava,
I am the hammer to subdue ghosts and demons,
I am the lord to repel misfortunes.
My kind friend, the sword of Manjushri,
It can protect from external enemies,
For humans, there is no bloodshed.
I have vowed to grant protection from fire,
No misfortune will arise from crimson fire,
It is a sword full of wisdom,
Ignorance is cut at the base,
It is the manifestation of Manjushri,
It is the mirror that foresees the future.
I have vowed to grant protection from slanders,
The sword whose base rises like a meteor,
Inside this auspicious house,
All evils cannot be fathomed,
It is the ritual dagger to crush all enemies,
To dispel all misfortunes and enemies,
I am the manifestation of Hayagriva,
The sword of Manjushri,
The arrogant and powerful phallus,
The symbolic dagger rising like a meteor,
I am the manifestation of Rigsum Goenpo,
In the house where children and cattle will flourish,
I have come to bestow power and blessings! 24

These verses tell about concerns which are immediate in this life for the people and which form the basis for the community rituals:25 prosperity, fertility, well-being, harmony. They convey ‘grass-root priorities’: good crops, abundant cattle and children, no natural or evil-provoked calamities, no slander. None of the soteriological concerns so important in textual Buddhism are apparent here.

The phallus, sublimated as the emanation of the Three Protectors, is an all-powerful weapon and appears as an important element in any ritual against malicious gossip and slander (mi kha). A wooden phallus is at the centre of a wooden structure called Kharam
shing in the Tsangla language. It is erected with a ritual near houses in eastern Bhutan in order to protect the household against slander and evil influences (Pelgen26) (Plate 8).

The ritual of Gyanak chi doe (rGya nag sphyi mdos) is performed annually in the first Bhutanese month by the Drukpa monks of the Astrology Institute in Panrizampa (Thimphu),27 in order to repel enemies of the country and for the well-being of the royal family. One of the numerous offering cakes on the altar has the shape of a phallus and is directed against malicious gossip.

This is a ritual practice which is well documented. The Gold Manuscript of the Fifth Dalai Lama contains images of ritual cakes in the shape of a “Human penis representing Shiva, used in the rite for dealing with evil omens that occur”.28 The Indian reference to the Shiva linga is also explicit in Bhutan as the phallus is referred to by one of the names of Shiva: Wangchuk chenpo (dBang phyug chenpo). This is clear evidence that the phallic symbol echoes its association with the Hindu deity Shiva channelled through Buddhism.

Tandin Dorji in his unpublished PhD on the Iha ’bod ritual of Bjena village in Western Bhutan, writes:

Le phallus en bois est un objet qui a un rôle significatif dans plusieurs rituels : dans le rituel de chodpa il est porté par le gadpupa, un officiant qui exécute une danse pour la prospérité, la longévité et la fertilité; il est un stylo lors du jeu de rôle dans le rituel de roop et signifie la fertilité; il a sa place parmi les gâteaux du rituel dans le rituel de lhabon du village de Chendenbji pour chasser le malheur; il est le plus important objet dans les structures érigées pour chasser les calomnies (kharam shing); il est placé sur la tête de toutes les personnes pour les bénir et chasser le malheur dans le rituel de khar phud; et dans le Iha ’bod du village de Bjena, le phallus est planté dans un conteneur de riz non-décoriqué; il est même gardé dans l’autel familial comme un signe de la fertilité et d’antidote au malheur.

In these community rituals, which take place in the village and which are associated with Bon beliefs, as understood in the Bhutanese context, that is non-Buddhist.30 Many of these community rituals also have a sexual component, which for the Bhutanese has several functions: avoiding malicious gossip (mi kha) in order to keep harmonious relationships in the community,31 atoning one’s misdeeds, and wishing fertility, especially to childless women. This component is materialised by ritual cakes and wooden sticks in the shape of a phallus called by the honorific term of sPo [Pho?] chen rgyal ba blo gros32 as well as the exchange of obscene words and songs. Conversation taboos between family members are also broken during some rituals, and this is believed to remove all the ‘shame’ (Dzongkha Ngo tshao) of the year.

The action of removing shame by uttering obscene words or displaying phallus is carried out by the atsara, the jesters, who entertain the crowd with their antics during religious festivals.33 Their characteristic red or black masks are often adorned with a dangling phallus and they hold a wooden phallus which they brandish in front of young and elderly women alike, to remove their ‘shame’, embarrassment and to purify them (Plate 9 and 10).

This behaviour reminds us of an anecdote from the life of the ‘divine madman’ Drukpa Kunley (’Brug pa Kun legs 1455-1529). He convinced his mother to sleep with him, the act of incest par excellence, and when she finally relented, he left. The next day he went to the market and told everybody about this incident. Thus, “by exposing the hidden foibles of his mother, her faults were eradicated, her sins expiated and her troubles and afflictions removed.”34
The **atsara** also use a wooden phallus to bless women who want to have children; these 'blessings' have even become popular in recent times with some tourists after several of them are said to have had a child after travelling to Bhutan. Again, this is widely associated with the powers of Drukpa Kunley.

Chime lhakhang (Kyi med lha khang) at the southern entrance of Punakha valley contains phallic objects made out of stone, bamboo and ivory attributed to the saint himself as well as miniature replica of his bow and arrow. These are used to bless childless women, and couples sometimes spend the night at the temple. Parents can also ask protection for the child the mother is bearing, for the well-being of their already born children, as well as personal names for the babies.

Contemporary Bhutanese associate the protective role of the phallus—its ability to ward off evil spirits or obstacles—with Drukpa Kunley who subdued demonesses with his 'thunderbolt' (*rdo rje/vajra*), meaning his male organ. Tiny phallus (called *srung ma*) are carved from special trees for the protection of children, but are also hung around the necks of animals, and nowadays on the inside mirrors of cars.

From these examples, it could be assumed that the **raison d'etre** for phallic symbols is protection against evil of all kinds and blessings for fertility linked to Drukpa Kunley, the cultural hero. However, could this linkage to a prestigious and popular saint be a rather modern rationale? What about phallic symbols prevalent in regions where Drukpa Kunley never set foot? What about the **atsara** who claim not to be associated to the saint but to Indian 'realised' teachers, hence their name? Why are these symbols so important in the Bhutanese mental and physical spaces? While it might not be possible to answer these questions in a definite manner, some hypotheses can be considered.

**WHY ARE THE PHALLUS SO PREVALENT IN BHUTAN?**

The sexual liberties and customs of the Bhutanese seem to have always been an attraction or a subject of curiosity among Tibetan and British writers, including the great Tibetan intellectual Amdo Gedun Choephel (1903-1951). However his trip to eastern Bhutan is still unconfirmed. As early as the fourteenth century, a Tibetan who had been to Lho Mon, as Bhutan was then known, was regarded with suspicion, partly because for central Tibetans this was a wild forested and uncivilized area south of the Great Himalaya.

Karmay mentioned how the great Treasure-Discoverer Dorje Lingpa (*rDo rje gling pa* 1346-1405) was chided by Barawa Gyeltshen Pelzang ('Ba ra ba rgyal mtshan dpal bzang 1310-1391) when he arrived in central Tibet on his return from Bhutan:

> When Dorje Lingpa arrived at the Shang valley in Tibet, Barawa came to meet him bringing a pot of *chang*, a carcass of mutton and a roll of white *nambu* cloth as gifts. He said to Dorje Lingpa: “Our country Shang is a place where Buddhism flourishes. You have been for too long in Lho môn, ‘the unlit land’. Your clothes are worn out. Tomorrow morning when you come up, the monks and nuns will pay you their respects. You must dress yourself properly. Otherwise our people will be shocked. I request you and your entourage all to come well dressed.”

As already mentioned, most modern Bhutanese attribute the importance of the phallus to Drukpa Kunley, the unconventional and irreverent saint who subdued the demonesses of Bhutan with his male organ and practised Buddhism in an heterodox way. His fame was reinforced by a biography written in 1966 by Je Geduen Rinchen (*rJe dGe 'dun rin chen alias*...)
DGe shes brag phug, 1926-1997) and later among English educated Bhutanese by Keith Dowman’s English translation of this work.

Drukpa Kunley has become in Bhutan almost a timeless figure presenting similarities with two other folk heroes, Ap Wang Drugye of western Bhutan and the Tibetan Akhu Tonpa (A khu ston pa). Stories of Akhu Tonpa are widely popular throughout the Himalayan world and across the plateau where Akhu Tonpa is an archetypal trickster figure (he now has a blog dedicated to him). They have their share of ribaldry and illicit sexual adventures, so it is clear that sexuality in Tibet was part, at least, of the popular discourse as it is in Bhutan.

Except among scholars, Drukpa Kunley is practically detached from his historical and religious context; traces of his deeds are present in the landscape in the same way as those of Guru Rinpoche, including in places where there are no textual records of his passage, such as in the sacred site of Ajaney (A rgya gnas) in eastern Bhutan. One of the many traces of his passage is at the ruins of Langdu (Glang bdud) monastery in Thimphu district where a large, penis-shaped rock is attributed to the saint. There he tamed an ox-headed demon, hence the name of the place. Subduing the demonesses with his ‘thunderbolt’ and taking consorts wherever he went, Drukpa Kunley seems to appeal to the Bhutanese male psyche.

This superficial observation has in fact several ancient resonances in the Tibetan cultural world, which might explain why Drukpa Kunley has become such an embodiment of manhood. According to Drukpa Kunley’s biography, “the lama carried a bow and arrow—representing penetrating insight and skilful means—to slay the Ten Enemies of the Ten Directions.”

The metaphor between the bow and arrow and the shes rab and thabs leads to another well-known correspondence in Tantric Buddhism: insight and skilful means are also represented by the bell, which is described as feminine, and the thunderbolt (dorje, vajra), which is masculine. These two rituals objects are omnipresent in Bhutanese religious life. However as a male symbol, the arrow goes back long before Buddhism made its way into the Himalayan world. Karmay shows clearly the association of the arrow with pre-Buddhist beliefs which are still prevalent today. He quotes an archaic Bon marriage ritual text in which the bride is given an arrow by her father when she leaves his house.

This text also tells the origin myth of the arrow: “From the bursting of the golden egg a golden arrow with turquoise tail feathers appeared”, and its importance is spelt out: “The life of the male depends on the arrow, the life of the female depends on the spindle, we entrust them to the gods.” The association of arrow with men and its ritual importance in pleasing the local deities have survived centuries of religio-historical changes throughout the Himalayan world.

As elsewhere, in Bhutan an arrow is placed on the house altar in order to bring good fortune and blessings to the occupants of the house, and it is an important object in many rituals associated to good fortune and longevity. The rules and customs associated with the traditional sport of archery, elevated to the rank of national game in 1971, sum up the symbolism of the arrow as a male representation. Women are not allowed to touch the arrows and bows and, on the eve of a game the players do not stay in their house or sleep with their wives. Instead, they meet to perform rituals to please the local deities, as well as discreetly cast spells on their opponents with the help of a tsip (rtsis pa). The role of women during archery is solely to sing, dance and pass witty or ribald comments on the archers.
Drukpa Kunley is usually depicted with a bow, an arrow, and a dog, like a hunter (Plate 11). In fact his arrow has a spiritual value as it helped him fulfil a famous prophecy foretelling his travel to Bhutan for the benefit of sentient beings.

He dreamt that a woman dressed in a yellow skirt, and holding a flaming sword, said to him: “Drukpa Kunley, it is time that you fulfilled the prophecy that foretold the conversion of the people of Bhutan, and the magical purification of that land. In Bhutan you will establish a family which will serve the Drukpa tradition to great advantage in the future. You must shoot an arrow to the south early in the morning as a harbinger of your coming.”

Viewed in a historical perspective, this prophecy has great importance. Drukpa Kunley in fact came from a prestigious religious lineage, the Gya (rGya) ruling family ofRalung (Rva lung) which was the stronghold of the Drukpa Kagyu school in Tibet and the prophecy meant that the Drukpa Kagyu would flourish in Bhutan. The story has it that Drukpa Kunley’s arrow landed in a house in Toebesa (sTod sbe sa) in Punakha. When he went to retrieve it, he fathered a son with the lady of the house. This child was to become the grandfather of Tenzin Rabgye (bsTan 'dzin rab rgyas 1638-1696), the famous Drukpa hierarch and Forth Temporal Ruler of Bhutan. In effect Tenzin Rabgye controlled Bhutan in the second half of the seventeenth century, after the death of his relative, the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (Zhabs drung Ngag dbang mnam rgyal 1594-1651), who unified the southern valleys to create Bhutan under Drukpa rule.

The figure of Drukpa Kunley is therefore here at the centre of a nexus combining powerful historical and religious forces. As a cultural hero, he touches the core identity of the state and carries out the male subjugation of demons. At the same time he incorporates ancient non-Buddhist beliefs and demonstrates the Tantric Buddhist concept of non-duality.

The adoption of Tantric Buddhism and especially Mahayoga, from India, and its assimilation within Tibetan Buddhism is well-known and can be seen in some of the Dunhuang manuscripts (ninth and tenth centuries). The texts, which are classified as belonging to Mahayoga Tantra—among them the Guhyasamaja Tantra (which had already been translated by the eighth century)—caused some concern because of the outlandish behaviour they engendered among some Tibetan yogins. This can been seen from the edict of King Ye shes 'od (947-1024) denouncing them:

You Tantric specialists, who live in our villages,
have no connection with the Three ways of Buddhism
and yet you claim to follow the Mahayana.
Without keeping the moral rules of the Mahayana
You say ‘We are Mahayanicists.’
This is like a beggar saying he is king
Or like a donkey dressed in the skin of a lion [...] You are more greedy for meat than a hawk or a wolf
You are more subject to lust than a donkey or an ox on heat [...].

Such criticisms were directed not against the Tantric texts or practices themselves but rather against their misuse by some yogins, pointing to an early origin of the cleavage between the orthodox scholastics and the heterodoxy of the ‘free spirits’, with each claiming to follow the right path, which remains a current debate within Tibetan Buddhism.

Although Drukpa Kunley was one of the ‘Divine Madmen’ who constituted the fifteenth
century movement of that name so well described by E. Gene Smith, he can also be seen, in
another socio-historical context, as the heir of the early Tibetan yogins so disapproved of by
King Ye shes 'od. His significance, and his opposition to his cousin, the Drukpa hierach
Ngawang Choegyel (Ngag dbang chos rgyal 1465-1540), cannot be understood without
taking into consideration these centuries of antinomic behaviour and controversy in Tibetan
Buddhism.

While there may be no doubt that Drukpa Kunley’s stories had a great impact, we are left
without an explanation as to why in the eastern and south central parts of Bhutan where there
are no textual records of Drukpa Kunley’s travels, phallus are present in the landscape as
well as in many of the community rituals considered in Bhutan to have stemmed from Bon
beliefs.

Besides the ubiquitous Karam shing structure in the fields, one story in eastern Bhutan,
among different variants, tells how a bat called Bjatsi tonpa gom chen (Bya rtsi ston pa sgom
chen) was sent to the heaven of the god Wa lidan gungs ldan ['Od lde gung rgyal ?] to request
one of his sons to come and rule the earth. Finally the youngest son had to go and:

a day was fixed for his descent. The King sent his three sons and a retinue of gods to accompany
his youngest son to earth. On the way the demi gods and devils heard of the descent. They were
surprised to see that a small creature like Bya rtsi ston pa sgom chen had been able to persuade
the god to send his son to earth. The demi gods and the devils watched the whole retinue with
surprise and laughed at them. Bya rtsi ston pa sgom chen felt annoyed and wanted the lesser
gods and devils to go away. He hit upon a plan and removed his undergarments. The demi gods
and the devils, seeing him naked with his penis dangling, cursed him and went away in utter
shame and disgrace leaving the entourage in peace. The entourage at last reached earth safely.

This myth of origin legitimizes the Karphu (mKar phud) ritual of Tsamang (rTsa mang)
village in eastern Bhutan where phalluses play a central role, as Ugyen Pelgen has
described.

In his article on the festival of Goshing in the Khyen region of south-central Bhutan
Phuntsho Rabten describes the figure of the Gadpupa who shares many traits found in the
atsara of the Buddhist religious festivals:

In local dialect, Gadpupa means an old man. According to the text, he was sent by Lha Jajin
(Lord Indra) to earth to bless people with longevity, prosperity and fertility. He originally came
to Goshing from Ura, Bumthang as revealed in verse recitations of his encounter with Ura Nadmo
(female host). Gadpupa dance is performed at the dawn of the fifteenth day of Chodpa inside the
Ihakhang. He offers prayers of longevity, wisdom, and wealth for his root lama, luminous persons
and gracious parent, utters exhaustive mockery comments on the genital organs and human body,
narrates about his travel from Ura to Goshing and his encounter with some local wrathful spirits
and how he subdued them, and eventually tosses auspicious grains of rice. [...].] Gadpupa has a
wooden phallus hung from the waist. The phallus, which is symbolic of many things, is explained
exhaustively in Gadpupa’s recital text:

The old trunk of the phallus, born long ago in Tsari,
Sits on the throne of two eggs.
Although it has no legs, it can rise
To the heroic one, I prostrate.
Although it has no eyes, it can penetrate
To the mobile one, I prostrate.
Although it has no bone, it is hard
To the ferocious one, I prostrate.\(^{61}\)

Describing the Ha festival of Gortshom in Lhuntshe district of north-eastern Bhutan witnessed in 2002, Tashi Choeden\(^{62}\) explains that:

Most of the couplets contain lewd and ribald phrases and expressions. The symbols and images used are mainly of male and female genitals. These expressions echo the spirit of Ha celebration, which is the absence or shedding of inhibition of sexual behaviour. The expression "For the three nights of the Ha, there is no shame" (zhag gsum Ha bang ngo mi tshas)\(^{63}\) is self explanatory and the whole community recite verses such as this:

May not the hills raise white obstructions,    
May not the valleys raise dark obstructions.  
May all the lands enjoy good year,            
I am not speaking these words,               
They are said by lha Jajin.                  
For three nights, the mother does not close the door,  
For three nights, the daughter does not close the thighs. 
Mothers are spattered with pus,              
Daughters are spattered with blood.          
Do not dig waterways, cleft lipped lady,     
Do not pull the drill, deep holed lady.      
The phallus is implanting a target in the vagina, 
The target is not implanted, the penis is.     
The Bonpo's phallus is a wooden phallus,      
The wooden phallus never breaks.             
The Bonmo's [the female Bon practitioner] vagina is a leather vagina, 
The leather vagina never wears.              
Oh Bonpo, do not let your mind go astray,     
Others are taking your Bonmo away.\(^{64}\)

Many more examples of such ribald poetry and images are found in almost all the community rituals throughout Bhutan. This graphic poetry has a common theme: the complementary symbolic function of the phallus that we already noted earlier. It brings fertility and protects by warding off or subjugating evil spirits which are embarrassed by obscene behaviour or words.

If formulated in a Buddhist context, these spirits are hampered from becoming enlightened because they cling to appearances and do not go beyond duality. All these verses are close in style and contents to those attributed to Drukpa Kunley in the biography by Je Geduen Rinchen. It might be a case of ancient folk poetry influencing writings, which because of the great personalities of both the writer and the hero, became in turn very popular nationwide and initiated an updated discourse of an ancient theme.

It is likely, as shown earlier, that the figure of Drukpa Kunley crystallised different dimensions of Bhutanese culture and beliefs. It contributed to the persistence of the phallic representations in the country, a custom which might have been revived by Je Geduen Rinchen's biography of the divine madman, a point underlined by several informants.

However, this was also connected with a book published in the 1970s and banned shortly after by the then Home Minister Tamshing Jagar. Written or compiled by Damchoela from Ura in Bumthang, it was a book of rituals to the phallus which he named Gyalway Lodroe
Rgyal ba'i blo gros) and which included all the ritual elements such as stod pa, dbang, men dre, bkra shis. Since then, this name for the phallus has become very popular in Bhutan, especially among people literate in Dzongkha such as Chang Dorji who used it for his work on architecture and on archery.

The book, which unfortunately we have never seen, seems to have been a compilation or an amended version of a set of rituals found in Bumthang called Atsara cho ga. These Atsara cho ga texts, whose origin is so far unknown, are used during the festivals of Buli Choepa (rnchodpa) and of Thangbi Mani (ma ni) in Bumthang. At these occasions during a dance called Jachung Michung in Buli and Atsara cho ga in Thangbi, phalluses are vividly represented by sacrificial cakes, which are carried by women.

The festival of Jampey lhakhang in Bumthang and the festival of Nabji in south Trongsa, which are both led by the Chakhar (lcags mkhar) Lama, have naked dances performed by men. They are considered as ‘treasure dances’ (gter cham) and they are also associated with the great treasure-discoverer Dorje Lingpa who was Bonpo as well as Nyingmapa. According to Chakhar Lam Dorji, the dance was introduced by Dorje Lingpa after a prophecy by Guru Rinpoche in the eighth century and was first performed in Nabji Korpuh in Trongsa district. A band of devils was causing havoc and misery during the construction of a temple in the area, destroying the work and delaying it. To distract the devils, Dorje Lingpa started a naked dance. The outrageous antics of the naked performers during the dance are said to have kept the devils spellbound and the temple was completed. Dorje Lingpa, who also consecrated Jampa lhakhang in Bumthang, introduced the same dance there.

There are elements in Dorje Lingpa’s behaviour and religious views which are very similar to those of Drukpa Kunley one century later when the religious movement of the Crazy Saints (smyon pa) was at its height. Dorje Lingpa’s heterodox behaviour is self-proclaimed when he comes back to see Barawa:

The next morning a procession came along with the chief ladies wearing tiger and leopard masks led by Lamas and learned monks. Thereupon, Dorje Lingpa said: “All the Samsaric and Nirvanic elements are much alike, but men of religion here have taken the notion of acceptance and rejection as their main religion. Today I shall sing a song. Each man must hold the hands of a woman and make a chain!” He led the Lamas by holding the hands of Lama Tongdenpa with his right hand and the hands of the chief lady wearing a mask with his left hand. The lap of their dresses were trussed up on their right and left hand sides and they began to dance. He started to sing a song called ‘the brewing of the chang ale using the annual provision’:

Say that Dorje Lingpa, the chief of impostors, has come to this land.
Say that all the [barley], the provision to last all the year round are now being used for brewing the chang.
Say that those who have faith in him are performing the rite of the sacrificial cake.
Say that those who gather here are joyous in singing and dancing.
Say that those who regard him as heretical are vexed [by his presence].

Besides preaching non-duality, promoting fun between men and women in a religious gathering, and having self-deprecating humour, Dorje Lingpa encourages people to use all their grain to make alcohol in a society where food security was paramount. This discourse, outrageous for Dorje Lingpa’s contemporaries, underlines the refusal of conventions much before the movement of the divine madmen.
The role of this religious figure in many religious aspects of Bhutan is still to be studied but Dorje Lingpa seems to have had a greater impact in Bhutanese religious life, including rituals, than previously assumed.

Other naked dances, also called tercham, but not attributed to Dorje Lingpa, exist in places such as Nindukha in Dagana district or Sakteng in Trashigang district in the extreme east of Bhutan. There, naked dancers wear skeleton masks guaranteeing them anonymity. They have an origin story of their dance: their ancestors in Tibet were selected by the King Trisongdetsen (Khri srong lde btsan; eighth century) to perform this dance in order to safeguard his domain against calamities and invaders. The whole story bears certain similarities with the well-known Lügong Gyalpo (glud 'gong rgyal po) ritual in Tibet, where the person is sent as ransom and banished. The Sakteng dancers resemble in particular the Lügong of Gyantse. Richardson published his photo and describes him as “a strange figure, half-naked with sheep’s intestines around his neck, a sheep’s stomach over his head like a mask, and an exaggerated phallus below his waist.” Nowadays in the Sakteng region, once every three years, the dancers visit all the houses for two days in order to ensure the well-being of the entire community.

These naked dances are simply mentioned here to demonstrate that in Bhutan, phallus are part of a wide cultural and geographical context which probably goes much beyond Dorje Lingpa or Drukpa Kunley. Fertility and absence of embarrassment or shame are two associated ideas which in the society translate into phallic representations and obscene discourse.

CONCLUSION

The phallus representations are viewed as part of Bhutanese culture and a subject of pride. On 26 September 2008 the newspaper Bhutan Observer published an article on ‘Ideal and phallus’ referring to the policy of ‘Gross National Happiness’. The young journalist, Phuntshok Rabten, wrote “Like the handsome Bhutanese phallus - Let us erect an edifice that goes beyond all notions of high and low, good and bad, praise and blame, loss and gain to a radical utopia”, therefore praising the non-duality dear to Tantrists while using the metaphor of the phallus for a very contemporary idea.

In Bhutan, Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious concepts, folk stories, textual resources and rituals appear to have combined in a matrix which sustains phallic representations to this day. Although the figure of Drukpa Kunley is generally associated with them, the evidence presented in this paper leans towards an earlier origin, and perhaps to a relatively more recent nationwide popularity of Drukpa Kunley than generally assumed.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, tourism and campaigns for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and for contraception contributed to the acceptance of phallic symbols by people in general: tourists are amused or bemused by the atsara and some of them want blessings in order to have children; atsara play with wooden phallus to demonstrate the use of condoms; billboards at the entrance of schools, hospitals or fairs give graphic health messages. The most ancient fertility symbol in the world which, in Bhutan, is loaded with several layers of interpretations, now carries additional significance to tackle global problems.
NOTES

We would like to thank the Royal University of Bhutan for its encouragements and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Sikkim which invited us to the conference.

1 Sonam Kings, 2005: 157-171. Sonam Kings was elected in 2008 National Councillor in the Parliament for the Trashigang district.

2 In Japan there are several festivals where phalluses are worshipped, especially in the spring. Amongst them, the Kanamara Matsuri in Kawasaki south of Tokyo, the first Sunday of April and the Hounen Matsuri at the Tagata Jinja Shinto shrine in Komaki, north of Nagoya on the 15th of March.


4 Richardson, 1972: 25.

5 Richardson, 1972: 25-27.


7 Published by Hansjorg Mayer, London.

8 Stoddard, 2010: 171.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 175.

11 Among others, see Janet Gyatso, 1987; Marko, 2003; and Mills 2007: 31.

12 Mills, 2007: 3.


14 Birth-place of the great gter ston Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396).


17 Xie Bin, 2005: 093.


19 Chime Wongmo, 1984: 114.


23 While some of the metaphors of this passage are easily understood, some remain obscure.


31 Kapstein translated a text from Humla in north-west Nepal attributed to Padmasambhava (1997: 529-537). In this interesting short text, the cause of malicious gossip is attributed to a girl from China: “Girl with black griny, tangled hair, when you first arrived where did you come from? You came from the borders of Tibet and China, where malicious gossip afflicted the Chinese, so that the Chinese king sent you to Tibet.”

The main purpose of the Kharamshing ritual in Eastern Bhutan (documented by ILCS) is to keep gossip and curses away from the house. Its sequences differ slightly from one place to another (Pelgen 2000 & Galay 2004). Two texts are believed to be at the origin of the ritual, the Mi kha dgra bsgyur and the Mi kha'i gto bsgyur (Pelgen 2000: 673).

32 On this subject, see Tashi Tobgye 2006: 11-12.

33 However the atsara are not mere jokers, they are also social critics breaking the hierarchy of Bhutanese society. They assist the dancers in case of problems and they nowadays promote contraceptive and health messages. Bhutanese trace the word atsara to the Sanskrit term acarya; they represent enlightened beings who incarnate in this world to teach the essence of religion and the disregard for mundane appearance and conventions.

34 Dowman, 1980: 41, following Je Geduen Rinchen’s version.
Although Gedun Choephel was photographed with the lord of the Eastern province of Tashigang (bkra shis sgang) at an unidentified place in the 1940s.

Pommaret, 1999.

Karmay, 2000: 15.

69th Chief-Abbot (rje mkhan po) of Bhutan (1990-1996).


Stuart et al. wrote in their article on Tibetan tricksters (1999: 5) in Amdo: “Aa khu bstan pa, Aa tsi byivu mg and Ston pa shes rab, Rdzun khrlo lo, Nyi chos bzang bo, Vbrug pa kun legs, and Ge sar are Tibetan characters who act at times as tricksters. Aa khu bstan pa appears to be the best known of these, according to a survey of 53 Tibetan students from Qinghai Province, China.”

It is interesting to note that according to Heimbel (2008: 6-8) and based on an article A khu ston pa'i byung bar thog ma'i bsam gzhi s by the modern 'Bri gung bKa' bryud scholar Ra se dKon mchog rgya mtsho (b. 1968). Akhu ston pa was a follower of the Drikung Kagyu ('Bri gung bka' bryud) “A khu himself was a genuine religious person who lived in the fourth 60 year cycle [1207-1266]” and “his family lineage was the same as the lineage of Chos rje 'Bri gung pa.”

http://akhustonpa.blogspot.com

http://akhustonpa.blogspot.com/2008/03/on-historicity-of-tibetan-folk-tale.html

There, a cave of Drukpa Kunley contains stones shaped as bow, arrow and dog. Oral communication of Lam Kunzhang Chocheple. 11.05.09. Thimphu.

Dowman, 1980: 47.


Chang Dorji attributes one of the origin of archery to Dpal gyi seng ge and his assassination of the King Glang dar ma, or to Gesar of Ling. 2000: 16

Bhutan Times, ‘Archery: the money, the Tsips and the dancing girls’ 2006/7/23:

The game of archery is incomplete without the presence of women. While it is considered taboo for women to touch the bow and arrow of an archer, their role in the games is to entertain spectators and disarm archers through wit and wile. By tradition they are called ‘Dha-lo’, meaning girls who cheer for their teams through dance. Only these cheerleaders act as a source of distraction for the opposing team. No archer is spared their pompous and vicious barrage of insults. As for their archers, they transform into angels who, short of flying, will attempt to guide the archer’s arrow to the target. Such is the power of the women folk in a contest. They evoke laughter from the crowds and are never viewed offensively and taken seriously. It is all part of the game of archery.

Dowman, 1980: 118.

Snellgrove 2002: 160-161 and 288-291 explains the Tantric specificites concerning the “refusal to distinguish between the everyday world (samsara) and the experience of nirvana.”


Snellgrove, 2002: 463. This class of Tantra, was later called Anuttara yoga Tantra and became “prevalent in Tibet during the latter part of the so-called 'second diffusion' of Buddhism in Tibet, when eastern India (modern Bihar and Bengal) became the main source of Buddhism teaching for Tibetan itinerant scholars.”

Smith, 2001: 59-60: “The smyon pa is a phenomenon that suddenly flowered during the fifteenth century during an age of fervent religious reform and doctrinal systematization. The smyon pa is the antithesis of the scholastic monk [...] so the smyon pa represents an attempt to re-dedicate the bKa' bryud pa sects to old truths and insights that were being forgotten [...]. The evidence is fairly conclusive that the smyon pa phenomenon was at least in part a reaction against the great prestige and wealth of the hereditary lineages. It was an attempt to re-invest the Bka' bryud tradition with some of its former religious fervor, to re-kindle the incandescent spirituality of the early yogis.”


Further enquiries should be made, looking for written sources as well as oral traditions attributed to this treasure-discoverer.

Sonam Kinga, 2005: 165.


Richardson, 1993: 71.

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Rgya nag skag zlog, Tashichodzong, Thimphu, 10 folios (new print by Bla ma Bkra bskyid and printer Ngag dbang brtson grus).
Plate 1. Phalluses shaped as gior ma for certain rituals, Bhutan (photo Yannick Jooris)

Plate 2. Fountain shaped as a phallus, Dechenphu temple near Thimphu, Bhutan

Plate 3. Phallic representation in Amdo, Eastern Tibet
Plate 4. Phallic representation outside a temple in Kongpo, Tibet

Plate 5. Phallus painted by an entrance door, Thimphu, Bhutan

Plate 6. Phallus painted on the outside wall on each side of the entrance door, Bhutan
Plate 7. *Zur chen*, wooden phallus hanging from the roof of a Bhutanese rural house

Plate 8. *Kharam shing* erected for protection near houses in eastern Bhutan (photo Yannick Jooris)

Plate 9. *Atsara* with a wooden phallus at the religious festival of Thimphu
Plate 10. *Atsara* brandish a wooden phallus in front of young and elderly women, central Bhutan

Plate 11. Drukpa Kunley with his trademarks: a bow, an arrow, and a dog, Thimphu dzong
ASPECTS OF EARLY BUDDHIST ART DEVELOPMENT IN MUSTANG

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The purpose of the study was to ascertain the art-historical relations and iconography of wall and ceiling paintings, as well as cult objects in two early cave temple sites in Upper Mustang, Mentsün Lhakhang and Dagrangjang, and to document these. This study is presented now in more detail, after having been published briefly in 1998 and 2006 by the late Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Rinpoche and the author, in order to indicate that the ritual art objects and other paraphernalia of one of the two temple sites, which are unattended, are now safely kept.¹

THE ROCK CAVE TEMPLE MENTSÜN LHAKHANG

During their earlier visits in the 1997 in the area of Tetang and Tshuksang, two villages in Mustang, the authors had registered the exceptionally remarkable wall paintings in the cave temple Mentsün Lhakhang (Plate 1), which they thought to be older than, for example, the wall and ceiling paintings of the Konchog Ling cave, Tashi Gelling and of Luri Gonpa in northern Mustang, which were presumably carried out in the early thirteenth century and middle of the fourteenth century. Having been requested by the local families affiliated to the cave temple it was then possible to conduct an art historical study in Mentsün Lhakhang (see Thingo, v.d. Heide 1998a, 1998b).

Their investigation underlined the assumption that the statues and mural paintings are earlier evidence of Buddhist art than previously assumed in general for Mustang, harbouring the currently oldest known paintings and clay statues of early Buddhist artistic development in the Mustang region, with wall paintings apparently dating from the eleventh century and clay statues from the eleventh and twelfth century.

ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF MENTSÜN LHAKHANG

Originally, according to a bemchag, a written scroll, (lcags yig ben chags log bshus he) in the possession of the six families that ritually tend the Mentsün Lhakhang (the author is not known), the temple was consecrated to five mountain goddesses, Mamo Sherchen Ma (ma mo gser can ma), Mamo Yuchen Ma (ma mo g.yu can ma), Kordagma (dkor bdag ma), Jachung Karmo (bya khyung dkar mo) and Jachung Marmo (bya khyung dmar mo). Mamo Serchen Ma, is regarded as the seniormost of these five mountain goddesses. She was probably originally worshipped aniconically in the form of a stone that can still be seen in the central altar room of the temple. Here butter lamp offerings are still brought daily.

In the bemchag it is further mentioned that Mentsün Lhakhang was named after Lama Mentsün Yönten, who is supposedly the founder of the temple site. He designated the goddess Mamo Serchen Ma to be the protective deity of the temple.

In different biographies, the late Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Tulku was able to find references to Lama Mentsün Yönten. His name is mentioned, for example, in the biography of Gampopa (1079-1153) (Vgl. sgam po pa’i rnam thar yid bzhin nor bu, Fo. 48r, 5.), a
disciple of the famous yogi and poet Milarepa (1040-1123), who also visited Mustang and stayed there one year on his way to lake Manasarovar, (vgl. mi la ras pa ’i rnam mgur 1999: 365-369).

In the biography of Gampopa it was, moreover, mentioned that Lama Yerangpa was one of the masters of Lama Mentsün Yönten Sherab. Lama Yerangpa was originally from Layag Lho in southern Tibet and received consecrations from Marpa (1012-1097), one of the great founders of the Kagyu School, as late Rinpoche could ascertain from another text (vgl. mar lo rnam thar lha yi ranga bo che, 142). Furthermore, from one biography of the great Bengali scholar Atisha (982-1054), it was learned that Lama Mentsün Yönten and Atisha had a philosophical debate (vgl. mar me mdzad rnam thar rgyas pa, 135), but it is not mentioned where and when this took place.

From a different biography on Marpa, it was understood that Atisha on his way to Mangyul, West Tibet, met with Marpa in Garphu, Mustang, (there Gerphu) at the end of the wintertime of the first cycle of sixty years in the female snake iron year (rab byung) which corresponds to the year 1041 (vgl. mar lo rnam thar dad pa ’i my gu, Fo. 36, 4-6). From Chattopadhyaya (1981: 414-420) and Klimburg-Salter (1997: 36) we know that in 1042 Atisha stayed for three years in Guge-Purang in Ngari, West Tibet, the neighbouring areas of Mangyul, as Lha Lama Yeshe Ö and his nephew Jangchub Ö had invited him to teach and help disseminate Buddhism. His stay there was instrumental in assembling the greatest Tibetan scholars of those days, among them the great Lotsawa Rinchen Sangpo (958-1055), who had been sent by Lha Lama Yeshe Ö to Kashmir for further Buddhist studies and later also for introducing Kashmirian artists to Purang-Guge (Handa 1994: 70). This paved the way for a great Buddhist Renaissance in that area, and the establishment of many Buddhist temples and monasteries in and around Purang-Guge followed (see Vitali 1996). In particular Rinchen Sangpo’s foundation of temples became famous, for example Tholing, the religious centre in Guge, Nyarma in Ladakh and Kojarnath in Purang, all of which are also attributed to King Yeshe Ö (see Luczanitz 2004: 28). These were also followed by the foundation of temples presumably by students and schools influenced by Richen Sangpo—as for example the complex of Tabo in the Spiti Valley (which some scholars attribute to him) and Alchi in Ladakh. Rinchen Sangpo also introduced the cult of Vairocana in Tibet in the late tenth century—after he was initiated into that cult during his stay in India.

As late Ngari Rinpoche came to know from a third biography on Marpa (vgl. mar lo rnam thar mthong ba don yod, Fo. 9r, 19 und Fo. 10v, 1-9), Atisha travelled to Guge via the old trading route of Lo Mustang and met Marpa, who was serving the great Tibetan scholar Nyö Lotsawa (gNyos lo) in Garphu (Gerphu) and Nyephu at that time.

If Atisha also met with Lama Mentsün Yönten during his stay in Mustang it is not written (it is not said where their philosophical debate took place) in any of the previously mentioned biographies. We only know that Atisha had a disciple from Lo during his three year visit to Ngari, whose name was Lama Tönpa Yangrab (sTon pa yang rab), who later became well known in West Tibet (see Roerich 1976: 262, Dhungel 2002: 49). It is interesting in this context that Atisha, who is also characterised in his biography as a talented artist, had spent around one year in the Kathmandu Valley before his journey to Purang-Guge via Mustang. There he also met with different sculptors and artists, many of whom were influenced by Indian Pala art at that time (see also Martin 2001: 142-144). It can therefore be assumed that Atisha paved the way for the diffusion of Indian Pala art in West Tibet and for Nepalese artists to visit this prosperous kingdom.
But we certainly know that the great Buddhist masters Atisha, Marpa and Milarepa as well as Rinchen Sangpo (Klimburg-Salter 1997: 34), were contemporaries of Lama Mentsün Yönten, having all spent some time in the eleventh century in Lo Mustang area, partly on their way to Guge-Purang, helping to create a renaissance of Buddhism on the initiative of Yeshe O and his nephew Jangchub O, who continued the legacy of his uncle.

This had an enormous influence on the neighbouring areas of Guge-Purang and also Mustang, the southernmost region, where new spiritual Buddhist life was spreading, including the foundation of monasteries and temples from different Buddhist schools. Famous Buddhist scholars from the Nyingma and Kadampa Tradition as well as from the Sakya and Kagyü Schools travelled through Mustang on their way to or from West Tibet. In the same way scholars travelled through other regions like Ladakh, Kinnaur and Spiti on the way to Guge-Purang which was the dominant regional power in these areas during the tenth to the twelfth century.

Interestingly, during this time also the Bon religion was able to survive in Northern Mustang and spread from there towards southern Mustang. And in the eleventh century a centre for the Yen Ngal Bon (yan ngal) seems to have existed there, followed by the foundation of temples, for example Lubrak (see Dhungel 2002: 52).

In this prosperous time with many changes and new impulses mainly from West Tibet but also from the Kathmandu Valley, the Mentsün temple also seems to have been founded.

**THE ALTAR ROOM**

The altar room of the temple lies in the second storey of a rock complex and is entered from a wide anteroom (height: 3.10 m; width: 10.10 m; depth: 5.00 m). The altar room (height: 3.50 m; width: 3.05 m; depth: 2.90 m) is surrounded by an ambulatory.

The central cult figure, at the front side of the altar room, is the clay sculpture of the crowned (Plate 2) Tathagata Buddha (meditative Buddha) Vairocana (height: 1.00 m). The rather coarse white colouring of the body derives from later repainting. Seated on a throne, borne by two lions, he is surrounded by a fully three-dimensional, elaborate richly adorned mandorla (height: 1.90 m; width: 2.05 m), which symbolizes the six Mahayana virtues, also called *paramitas*. The last and highest among the six *paramita* virtues, *prajnaparamita* (transcendent wisdom), is symbolized here by a Garuda at the top of the mandorla.

Similar ornamented throne frames embracing Vairocana, symbolizing the *paramitas*, are found, for example, at Sumda, Alchi and Lamayuru in Ladakh, Nako and Lalung in the Spiti Valley, which have been carried out presumably between the eleventh and early thirteenth century and are attributed to the tradition of West Tibet (see also Luczanitz 2004).

To the right of the mandorla, and at the same height, a stele is placed with an early representation of Buddha Shakyamuni. Further, on the ground at the front side beneath the central shrine, and to the right of the mandorla, is found a presumably early Indian stone relief (height: 0.55 m; width: 0.45 m), depicting Bodhisattva Lokeshvara.

In the middle of the front side, under the Buddha Vairocana, is a smaller clay statue (height: 0.68 m), probably dating from the eleventh century, of the future Buddha, the crowned Bodhisattva Maitreya on a plain throne.

In addition, at the front, to the left of the mandorla beneath the central shrine, is found a clay statue of the Dharmapala Vajrasadhu, who is sitting on his mount, a goat, likewise of clay (height: 0.93 m). At the request of the local populace, this figure was not photographed, since it is the tutelary deity of the Mentsün Lhakhang. On each of two wooden shelf-like...
ledges along the walls to the right and left are found three crowned clay statues sitting on a lotus throne, showing extremely even and harmonious modelled figures with contemplative faces, probably done with the help of moulds, with large half open eyes, high eyebrows and small noses. Also the jewellery of the figures seems to consist of moulded elements.

At the entrance are standing ferocious faced Bodhisattvas, one each to the right and left, represented as yidams. The one to the left is Vajrapani (height: 0.92 m); the one to the right is Hayagriva (height: 0.85 m). It seems that these images have undergone several repairs and repaintings.

The first figure on the left-side wall is a representation of the green-coloured Tathagata Buddha Amoghasiddhi (height: 0.85 m). Next to him is a very beautiful four-armed figure representing the embodiment of transcendent wisdom, (Plate 3) Prajnaparamita (height: 0.92 m), the supreme virtue and highest knowledge. Interesting here is that two arms branch out from the elbows of the Prajnaparamita statue; such representations are known only among early Buddhist paintings from approximately the twelfth century—for example, from Khara Khotok on the Silk Road (cf. the representation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara on a Thangka dated by K. F. Samosyuk to the twelfth century 1993:128) and from Ladakh, Alchi, the Samtse temple (see Goepper 1996).

Next to Prajnaparamita is seated another Tathagata Buddha, the yellow Ratnasambhava (height: 0.90 m). The first figure on the right-side wall also represents the crowned, green-coloured Tathagata Buddha Amoghasiddhi (height: 0.85 m), a broken-off arm of which lies along the body. Next to him is the Tathagata Buddha Akshobhya, who is generally painted blue but here is found yellow.

There is, however, as Roger Goepper describes in his article on Akshobya and his Paradise: Murals in the Dukhang of Alchi (1999: 16-21), a tradition of representing Akshobhya in yellow (also found in the Senggye Temple of Lamyuru). However, he can also be identified in Mentsun Lhakhang on the basis of his characteristic hand gestures (height: 0.90 m). The third figure on the right-hand wall is the red-coloured (Plate 4) Tathagata Buddha Amitabha (height: 0.87 m).

The iconographic arrangement of the entire temple, with the central image of Vairocana, whose hand gestures are here very untypical, as well as two statues of Amoghasiddhi and the other iconographic images, recall very similar representations with identical iconography—for example, the specific hand gestures—found in the interior of the Gyantse Stupa in Central Tibet, which are said to have been erected in the fifteenth century (cf. chapels 3 E a, p. 284, and 3 N, p. 276, in the Gyantse stupa, described by F. Ricca and E. Lo Bue 1993). Similarly, two representations (in chapels 2 E a, p. 260; 2 W a, p. 251) of the ferocious-faced yidam Vajrapani are found in the Gyantse stupa that bear a striking resemblance to the yidam figure of Vajrapani seen in Mentsun Lhakhang; likewise, there is also a representation of the wrathful-looking and (in this case) blue yidam Hayagriva in the Gyantse Stupa, and so it may be assumed that the image in Mentsun Lhakhang is a blue-coloured Hayagriva. It is of great help to us that these later representations are in each case accompanied by inscriptions, so that an exact identification of the figures in the Gyantse stupa is possible; helpful, too, because the corresponding figures in Mentsun Lhakhang constructed much earlier, can be positively identified by means of an iconographical comparison.

The age of the figures that were found in Mentsun Lhakhang corresponds, for example, in part to the clay statues familiar from the main monastic complex of Tabo in the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh, even though the statues of Mentsun Lhakhang are not as elaborately decorated and are carried out in a more provincial style. As in Tabo, the clay
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Statues of Mentsün Lhakhang seem to have been carried out in the so-called Kashmirian style that was introduced by the great Translator Rinchen Sangpo to West Tibet in the tenth/eleventh century. The monastery of Tabo was founded in the year 996 by Lha Lama Yeshe Ö (Tabo is usually attributed to Rinchen Sangpo, even though there is no clear evidence for his involvement), and was renovated under the patronage of his nephew Jangchub Ö in the year 1042 (see Luczanitz, 2004: 33-56; Klimburg-Salter 1997: 62 et passim; Handa 1994: 72, 73).

WALL PAINTINGS IN MENTSÜN LHAKHANG

The wall paintings in Mentsün Lhakhang are striking: each of the total of six clay figures on the right- and left-hand sides of the wall are surrounded by a mandorla painted on the wall—in some cases already destroyed. But these mandorlas must have been applied later, since they are rather roughly executed. Above the individual clay figures there are in turn two rows of eight Buddha representations, and each with a different hand gesture. These Buddha representations beneath the ceiling differ clearly in their style of painting, (Plate 5)—having been endowed with fine outlines and contours—from the much coarser painting of the mandorlas that surround the clay figures. Nearly identical Buddha representations are known from the early Buddhist Thangka paintings in the Zimmermann collection in New York. These have been dated to the tenth/eleventh century (P. Pal 1991: 142).

Furthermore, a Thangka from Tibet that dates from the eleventh century and one from Ladakh painted approximately in the twelfth century, each with very similar representations of the Buddha, have been described by S. L. and J. C. Huntington (Plate 106 and 109, 1990) in their book on the art of Pala India (see also Chakravarty 2006, Ajanta cave 2, Buddha images, sixth century).

Only the complex of eight Buddha representations on the right-hand wall above the Tathagata Buddha Amoghasiddhi is showing much coarser contours, so that it seems to have been painted over later.

The central Tathagata Buddha Vairocana at the front side together with his mandorla is flanked to the right and left by two less refined paintings of as yet unidentified beings, that could be Bodhisattvas. It may be stated, however, that both their contouring and colouration are similar to those of the mandorla paintings surrounding the six clay figures. It would appear that the representations of the deities and the painted mandorlas were done over the original paintings.

Of particular interest are the wall paintings found beneath the shelf-like ledges on the left-hand side of the wall, and also to the front, showing also influences of Pala art. The pictures that were originally painted on the lower right-hand side of the wall have without exception disintegrated. The colours used for painting are limited to a palette of light pink and green, as well as ochre and red with highlights in white and strong black outlining. It could be ascertained that these paintings are depictions of events in the life of the Buddha Shakyamuni in early Indian style. Still recognizable are the very finely painted events ‘Riding out and Carriage Ride’ (Plate 6) and ‘Test of Strength and Bow and Arrow Shooting’ (Plate 7). Recently restored, for example, was the scene, where Siddharta is cutting his hair (Plate 8). Other scenes are not yet identified. HimalAsia, the Foundation of the late Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Rinpoche, is currently trying to restore these scenes of Buddha’s Life and other wall paintings in the temple.
The appearance of the clothing and the powerfully but delicately portrayed faces of the figures appearing in the illustrations recall a number of wall frescoes in the cave complex of Ajanta, India, particularly the frescoes in Caves I and XVII containing representations of the Mahajanaka Jataka—presumably executed in the fifth/sixth century (see, for example, J. Auboyer and J. L. Nou 1992: Figs. 26, 33, 34, 35, with representations of the so-called Jataka stories from the Buddha’s previous lives in Cave XVII of the rock temple site of Ajanta, p. 86; the paintings of this cave have been dated to the fifth century).

In addition, stylistic affinities, as well as formal and iconographic similarities can be seen with the wall paintings in the monastery of Tabo, especially with those executed during the renovation period in the eleventh century under the patronage of Jangchub Ö, for example, those scenes containing the stages of the Buddha’s life (for example see Klimburg-Salter 1997: 181, Fig. 202, where the procession to Lumbini is depicted; and also p.123, Fig. 119, with tree motives represented in an archaic manner similar to that in Mentsün Lhakhang). Besides, there are also stylistical influences from the early period of Tabo under Yeshe Ö, represented particularly in the entry hall of the main temple of Tabo (see Klimburg-Salter 1997: 46, fig.15, 16; p. 50, fig.19).

The investigations in Mentsün Lhakhang underline the assumption that the statues, ritual objects and wall paintings are earlier evidence of Buddhist art than previously assumed in general for Mustang (see also Bista, v.d.Heide 1997). A result of the latest investigations in this regard is the fact that Mentsün Lhakhang must have arisen earlier than the establishment of other temples in Mustang containing wall paintings, which apparently date from the eleventh century and clay statues from the eleventh and twelfth century. The rock-hewn temple Mentsün Lhakhang therefore is the site in Mustang that harbours the currently oldest known paintings and clay statues of early Buddhist artistic development in the Mustang region.

**THE CAVE TEMPLE DAGRANGJANG**

It proved to be very difficult to reach the cave temple site Dagrangjang (‘self manifested rock’ or ‘self created rock’), located in a side valley not far from Tetang and Tsuksang. Even with suitable equipment, the conglomerate rock that surrounds the complex being distinctly loose, there was scarcely a single firm support during the whole of the climb. Rock fragments quickly broke free and rolled down at the team, in some cases like an avalanche, and consequently there was absolutely no question of doing further research at the upper level of the rock complex.

It was discovered that the temple site had also sadly suffered great internal damage from the extreme weather conditions and erosion in this region. A frieze with four rosettes and a few other fragmentary representations aside, the wall paintings, and so most paintings, together with a stupa located in the middle of the complex, were almost completely destroyed and had fallen to pieces (Plate 9). It could be detected that the site in its original configuration—with a Stupa in the middle and the formal adornment of the approximately six-metre-wide cult room—was nearly identical with the cliff cave temple of Luri Gonpa and the rock temple of Tashi Gelling. In the temple site Dabrangjang, however, only the upper portion (approx. 1.50 m) of the stupa (cakra, chattrra and ketu) is left to view, as a result of collapse; the whole of the cult room is filled with rubble up to the harmika of the stupa.

The wall paintings in Luri Gonpa were dated to the fourteenth century by Henss on the basis of a stylistic comparison with the paintings in the Tibetan Shalu monastery (1306/30)
and in the Jonang-Kumbum Stupa near Lhatse (ca. 1330), and so described as the "oldest remaining pieces of Buddhist art and culture in Mustang" (Henss 1993: 103, 107, 108). The wall paintings of Dagrangjang appear to have been produced earlier, and exhibit stylistically great similarities with paintings from the early thirteenth century, as can be seen for example, from a thangka in the Los Angeles County Museum described by P. Pal, who dates the represented figure, a Buddha Ratnasambhava, to the early thirteenth century (P. Pal 1985: 60).

The frieze with the four preserved rosettes (diameter: approx. 30 cm) and the moulding beneath, which imitates a Tibetan curtain of the kind found at the entrances to houses and sacred precincts, with double pennants (*phurma*) and a garland with voluted floral motifs, seems to have originally led around the cult room beneath the dome. This can also be established on the basis of further fragmentarily preserved representations at the same height within the room. Inside the four medallions, figures of deities surrounded by flame-like floral ornamentation are represented in a style of painting similar to the Indian Pala School, sharply outlined forms taking clear precedence in them over the restrained use of paint. (In this context, it may be further pointed out that apparently the colours red, black and ochre, which are particularly resistant to the influence of weathering, have been preserved.)

The first two images, viewed from left to right, are the so-called offering goddesses (*chopi lhamos*) Sparsa, with a scarf in her hands, and Rasa, who is offering fruits (Plate 10). These two representations number most probably among the category of the so-called five offering goddesses who ‘bring gifts to the Buddha that are a joy to the senses’; the scarf in Sparsa’s hands thus symbolizes that she is offering the ‘softness of its touch’ while the fruits of the goddess Rasa are meant to signify the ‘sweetness of their taste’.

The third medallion from the left shows the Hindu deity Brahma, in dark bodily hue, with the Wheel of the Law, which is surrounded by redly flaming floral ornamentation, in contrast to the white flaming ornaments with which the representation of the Hindu god Indra, with the conch in his hands, is provided to the right (Plate 11).

It may be presumed that the complete frieze exhibited eleven or twelve medallions with representations of goddesses presenting offerings, apart from the two rosettes with Brahma and Indra. The five offering goddesses who ‘bring gifts for the Buddha that are a joy to the senses’ have been mentioned above. Also belonging to this category is a sixth representation, Dharmadhatu, the offering goddess of the ‘nascent sphere’, who is not, however, always shown together with the other five deities of the category. Further, the six offering goddesses who belong to the category of those who ‘present life quality’ also probably were to be seen on the frieze.

The early Buddhist iconography recurringly shows paintings of the Buddha frequently accompanied by Brahma and Indra. According to Buddhist narratives, it is said that the first teaching of Buddha was given at the request of Brahma and Indra, due to which the attributes of Brahma and Indra, the wheel and the conch shell, have become the most well known symbols of Buddhism. In Dagrangjang, the two Hindu deities are both reverentially facing the Stupa, which symbolizes the embodiment of the Buddha’s thoughts (see, for example, P. Pal, 1985: 193, who describes an illuminated manuscript with similar representations from the year 1054), paying in this way their respect to him.
CONCLUSION

The development of Buddhism in Mustang and the related history of this region have up to now been firmly datable only from the fifteenth century on (see, for example, G. Tucci 1956; D. Jackson 1976: 39-56; D. Jackson 1979: 133-137). From the fourteenth century, the rock hermitage Luri Gonpa with its paintings and unique architecture has been described (M. Henss 1993: 103-108; N. Gutschow 1993: 59-62; Neumann 1994: 79-91; 1997: 178-85). From the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century, the cave temple Tashi Gelling, rediscovered by Bishop and Slusser, has been compared by the same authors in an article published in 1999 with Luri Gonpa (Slusser and Bishop, 1999: 18-27).

The investigations in Mentsün Lhakhang and the studies into the temple site Dagrangjang underline the assumption that the statues and wall paintings of both temples are earlier evidence of Buddhist art than previously assumed in general for Mustang. A result of the latest investigations is the fact that Mentsün Lhakhang must have arisen earlier than the establishment of Dagrangjang (both temples showing Pala influences), as can be seen from a comparison of the early Buddhist wall paintings of these two rock temples. Accordingly, the representations in Dagrangjang appear to have been in place before the fourteenth century, but not as early as the wall paintings in Mentsün Lhakhang, which apparently date from the eleventh century. It may be supposed that the paintings in Dagrangjang site were executed as early as at the beginning of thirteenth century.

OTHER CAVES TEMPLES IN MUSTANG

In order to be able to define a continual, immanent artistic development over several centuries in this region, the documentation and scientific study of several other cave rock temple sites, for example the Konchog Ling cave and Choedzong Monastic complex, that the late Ngari Thingo Rinpoche and the author rediscovered at the end of the 90s, are further missing pieces of evidence for the corresponding development of early Buddhist art in Mustang. The iconographical and stylistical similarities of the Mentsün Lhakhang with early Buddhist foundations as Tabo or temple sites in Ladakh in particular demonstrate the religious and artistic influence of West-Tibet on Mustang, which consequently developed further.

Choedzong is, for example, a complex that comprises various temple sites that were in part hewed into the rock. The authors have found wall paintings from different centuries in various decaying temple sites there. The earliest paintings were discovered in the lower level of the complex that most probably date from the period of the twelfth century, showing a Buddhist scholar from the ancient Kadampa School and mural paintings of Avalokiteshvara, Amitayus and Vajrapani (Plate 12).

Threatened by decay but still reachable is another temple site at Choedzong which comprises a Lhakhang and a particularly interesting protective deity and initiation temple (shhrungma) with paintings of meditative deities from the Mahayoga Tantra, most probably from the fourteenth century (Plate 14). In addition, in front of the paintings clay figures from Caturbujha Mahakala and his retinue can be found (Plate 13).

Moreover, above this complex a small initiation temple was rediscovered which was badly damaged. (Plate 15) Here, images of Thatagata Vairocana and Amithaba and his entourage as well as Hevajra in Yab Yum with his partner could be identified, presumably dating from the end of the twelfth century, with influences of Pala style (Plate 16).
The Konchog Ling cave is another interesting example for the different influences of styles in Mustang, which were developing and radiating from the centre of Purang-Guge and partly from the Kathmandu Valley.

The great Lotsawa Rinchen Sango, for example, had sent after one of his visits to Kashmir, artists from there to Purang-Guge at the request of La Lhama Yeshe Ö. And today we find traces of the work of these artists and their schools in Guge, Purang, Ladakh, Spiti and Kinnaur, for example mainly dating from the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth century, partly blended with influences from Central Asian art. The Konchog Ling cave is showing some of the later traces of the Kashmir School—representations of animals and figures with subtle contours and delicate shades, as one can make out from the mural paintings of the 84 Mahasiddhas there, broad shoulders and almond shaped eyes which have merged with influences of Central Tibetan and even Pala style, reminding us for example of the aesthetics of the Shalu Temple complex and the Tashi Gelling site in Mustang (Plate 17). In fact, the Konchog Ling cave paintings are representing an amalgamate of styles expressed in the Western Tibetan or Guge School, whereas in comparison the earlier murals and idols at Mentsün Lhakhang cave seem to represent a conglomerate of different aesthetic influences not yet merged into the Western Tibetan School.

We believe that further research has to be carried out as to which extent, for example, the influence of Lotsawa Rinchen Sangpo, his disciples and their workshops also played a role in this early art development in Mustang.

Up to now, besides the Rinchen Ling Temple of the Limi region in western Nepal, the rock-hewn temple Mentsün Lhakhang seems to be the site in Mustang that currently harbours the oldest known paintings and clay statues of early Buddhist artistic development in Nepal with influences from the Schools of Kashmir, Central Asia and Pala art. We can now better understand how a Buddhist spiritual and cultural centre was able to develop so quickly following the founding of the Kingdom of Mustang by King Ameal in the fifteenth century, inasmuch as a firm basis for it had been laid long before. Besides, it seems that this important old trade path thought Mustang is one of the ancient Northern Routes (Uttar Pata) linking the Gangetic plains to Western Tibet and the Silk Route.

With this short overview we wanted to offer proof of a continuous development of early Buddhism and Buddhist art in Mustang along the old trade route, radiating from the area of Guge-Purang from the tenth/eleventh century onwards, with influences from the Kathmandu Valley, contributing to the enormous intellectual and cultural process that paved the way for the Later Diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet.

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Plate 1. Mentsün Lhakhang cave temple

Plate 2. Tathagata Buddha Vairochana, made of clay, surrounded by a fully three-dimensional, richly adorned mandorla, symbolizing the six Mahayana virtues

Plate 3. Four armed Prajnaparamita, the embodiment of transcendent wisdom

Plate 2. Tathagata Buddha Vairochana, made of clay, surrounded by a fully three-dimensional, richly adorned mandorla, symbolizing the six Mahayana virtues
Plate 4. Red coloured Tathagata Buddha Amitabha

Plate 5. Representations of the 1000 Buddhas

Plate 6. Scenes of the Life of the Buddha: Carriage Ride, after restoration by HimalAsia Foundation
Plate 7. Scenes of the Life of the Buddha: Test of Strength and Bow and Arrow Shooting, after restoration by HimalAsia Foundation

Plate 8. Scenes of the Life of the Buddha: Plate 9. Dagrangjang temple site with a frieze with four rosettes

Plate 8. Scenes of the Life of the Buddha: Hair Cutting
Plate 10. Goddess Rasa, who is offering fruits

Plate 11. Hindu Deity Brahma, in dark bodily hue, with the wheel of law.
Plate 12. Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara, Amitayus and Vajrapani and unknown scholar of the Kadampa School

Plate 13. Caturbudha Mahakala and his retinue

Plate 14. Meditative deity Vajradhatu in Yab Yum
Plate 15. Amitabha and his retinue

Plate 16. Hevajra in Yab Yum

Plate 17. Detail of 84 Mahasiddhas at Konchog Ling cave
New primary sources are used here to re-investigate the life and work of the female Tibetan doctor Yangchen Lhamo (dByangs can IHa mo), whom Tibetans refer to as Khandro Yangkar (Khan dro dByangs dga’). Diary entries of British visitors who met with Khandro Yangkar in Bhutan in 1949, Chinese newspaper reports dating from 1963 and an eyewitness account of her medical aid to wounded Tibetans during the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in 1968, enrich her existing biographies in English and Tibetan. Moreover, a comparative study of these primary sources serves to contextualise the different observers within their particular historical and political moments in the twentieth century’s history of Tibet and Bhutan. Special consideration is given to show how these accounts represent her expertise and her significance to the history of Tibetan cataract surgery, the emergence of ‘women’s medicine’ and representations of Khandro Yangkar’s courage.

More generally this article opens up new avenues to study the roles and perspectives of women doctors and their contributions to—broadly defined—‘medical’ practice and theories of medicine and healing in Tibetan and Himalayan societies.

As a starting point for this enterprise it has to be noted that twentieth century accounts, both from within the Chinese communist discourse as well as from Tibetan historical writings are similar in their denial of a wider prevalence of female doctors in the first half of the twentieth century in Tibet and before. Only one (Tibetan) writer has so far provided a list of the names of about a dozen female Tibetan and Bhutanese doctors who lived during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century and practiced Sowa Rigpa—the Tibetan ‘Science of Healing’. Since then I have added to our understanding of a number of female doctors and their biographical details. The choice of Khandro Yangkar out of these women doctors for this article was determined by the current availability of more varied sources on her life and work and hence the possibility of a useful comparison and evaluation. For many other female doctors—particularly those women who practiced outside of the elite institutions of Tibetan medicine—this is not yet possible.

It was due to her family background that Khandro Yangkar became well enough connected to those working for the Tibetan government in Lhasa, which was not only the centre of religious and political power, but also medical power. This latter followed firstly the foundation of the Chakpori Medical College in 1696 and secondly the Mentsikhang, or ‘Medical and Astrology Institute’ in 1916. These institutes had government-sponsored teachers who passed on certain medical techniques which were sometimes unavailable elsewhere, and they not least provided most personal physicians to the highest reincarnate Lamas of Tibet. It comes as no surprise that the doctors and students who worked in close proximity to the Tibetan governmental and religious institutions were therefore also more likely to be noticed by the people writing the history of medicine in Tibet, who were more often than not working for the government and religious elite.

In contrast, the female doctors in remote rural areas of Tibet, who had not studied with high ranking government officials or who did not belong to great religious lineages, were...
usually left out of the writings on medical history. They may well have been more or less skilled or knowledgeable than Khandro Yangkar, but this is something we will only be able to ascertain once we have done the hard work of travelling the vast Tibetan plateau in search of them. If we do not embark on this undertaking soon enough, the knowledge of such practitioners will either die with them or it will lose its colour with the fading memories of those who survive them.

Among the three biographies on Khandro Yangkar, Adams and Dovchin have made available a personal perspective from within the family of this woman doctor. They translated an oral account from one of Khandro Yangkar’s children, which alerts us to the concerns and interests from within her own family. This is placed within a larger discussion of ‘women’s medicine’ and the question of the ‘first female doctor of Tibet’. It forms part of the edited volume entitled *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, which is dedicated to drawing attention to women and their roles and contributions to Buddhism and Buddhist societies. This publication can be seen as part of a large body of work, engaged in the post-modern enterprise of deconstructing Western notions of representing the ‘oriental’ and ‘women’ giving voice to previously underrepresented and so-called subaltern groups, including ‘women’. In a similar vein is the edited volume *Women in Tibet*, in which we find a contribution on ‘Outstanding Women in Tibetan Medicine’, by the exiled Tibetan historian, Tashi Tsering. This is based both on the oral accounts he collected and a translation of the Tibetan biography of Khandro Yangkar by the Tibetan doctor and historian Byams pa 'Phrin las.

The latter forms part of a collection of biographies of 155 Tibetan doctors from throughout the ages entitled ‘*Namthar of Famous Doctors of Sowa Rigpa in the Snowland*’. It has become a popular work of reference for Tibetans (in Tibet and in Exile) and foreign scholars. It needs to be understood in the context of the period in which it was written. Its first publication in the year 1990 in Lhasa, followed years of research and writing during the 1980s, when the revitalisation of Tibetan culture, religious and scholarship came to the fore. As part of this larger enterprise, there were efforts by Tibetan scholars, doctors and government institutions to revitalize Tibetan medicine, from the mid-1970s onwards, with a peak in the 1980s. Along with their very real concern about the transmission of Tibetan medical techniques (following the destructions and annihilation of much medical heritage), their reclaiming and writing about Tibet’s medical past—already an established genre in the Tibetan literature—took on a new importance and a new form. Writings on the history of medicine now not only had to praise the accomplishments of the doctors of the past, but also in some cases the communist party, and if not outspoken, they had to serve the future of a ‘minority nationality medicine’ within the larger Chinese nation-state. Although I will sometimes translate the Tibetan word namthar (*nam thar*), as biography, I think that the translation ‘modern hagiography’ is more fitting. Such modern hagiographies draw on the rich Tibetan traditional literature of religious biography and legend, for instance, *namthar*, which lauded a person’s achievement, particularly those of a religious nature.

Given the position of authors of modern hagiographies in Tibet, who are often working in government offices and who publish with the regional ‘People’s Publishing Houses’, it is noted that they have to be sensitive to the censorship of the communist state. In the case of the medical biographies written by Byams pa 'Phrin las, such concerns meant that key moments in many of Byams pa 'Phrin las biographies had to be left out. It also meant that certain doctors whom he knew very well, who had escaped into exile, had therefore been omitted, although he may have found them well worth including. Nonetheless, the Byams pa
'Phrin las collection is still a most useful work of reference when used in conjunction with other sources.

**OPENING THE EYE** AND **KHANDRO YANGKAR**’S **MEDICAL PRACTICE IN BHUTAN**

The two existing English language accounts on the life and work of Khandro Yangkar both report that this outstanding female doctor—originally from Kham or Eastern Tibet—travelled widely and among other places to Bhutan. This is well known in the Tibetan secondary literature, for instance in what I call a modern hagiography written by the Tibetan scholar-physician, Byams pa 'Phrin las mentioned above. In these three modern sources, one of Khandro Yangkar’s trips to Bhutan is linked to her medically treating the eyes of the Second King of Bhutan, King Jigme Wangchuk (1905-1952), at his court in Bumthang (Bhutan), even though the details of the descriptions vary to some extent. In the Tibetan biography by Byams pa 'Phrin las we find the following entry on this incident in Khandro Yangkar’s eventful life:

In the [Tibetan] earth-mouse year (1948) the Bhutanese King Jigme Wangchuk lost his eyesight, so he sent a messenger to Lhasa to invite expert doctor Yangchen Lhamo to Bhutan. She ‘opened his eyes’ [spyan phye] and stayed on providing many people in Bhutan with medical treatments. Her success was evident and her name became famous in Bhutan as well. After that, when she had returned to Lhasa, in the [Tibetan] water-dragon year (1951), the late Director [of the Mentsikhang] Khenrab Norbu gave her a first position certificate for her skill in ‘opening eyes’ [mig 'byed lag rtsal], and together with doctor Ngawang Phuntsok sent her to eighteen districts, including Taktse, Reting, Mendro, Drigung and Sangri, to ‘open people’s eyes’ [mig 'byed]. He also gave them donations of medicines to take with.

What in this Tibetan biography and in Tibetan medicine more generally is called ‘opening the eye’ (Tib. mig 'byed, hon. spyan 'byed) in English is usually referred to as ‘cataract surgery’ or ‘couching the cataract’. I will hence use ‘cataract surgery’ and ‘opening the eyes’ interchangeably, despite the differences in techniques and understandings of the condition, which I hope to clarify in more detail at a later stage. The medical technique of ‘opening of the eye’ in Tibetan medicine is—to my knowledge—first mentioned in a biography of the seventeenth century doctor Darmo Menrampa (Dar mo sMan rams pa bLo bzang Chos grags), who worked at the court of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso (Nga dbang bLo bzang rGya mtsho 1617-1682). Darmo Menrampa is said to have learned a kind of surgical technique in Lhasa from the Nepalese doctor, Manaho (rMa na Ho), and he subsequently applied it when operating on the eyes of the 59 year-old Fifth Dalai Lama (in 1675) and other people. Be that as it may, a preliminary investigation indicates that the technique of ‘opening of the eye’ is also found in a medical work on ophthalmology in one of the editions of the Tibetan Tengyur as well as in an unpublished manuscript from a private Tibetan medical collection. There is also a recent description of the practice of Tibetan eye surgery in the biography of the Tibetan doctor Lobsang Wangyal, who in his lifetime learned and practiced this technique.

One of the English accounts, albeit with probably erroneous dates, provides the angle on Khandro Yangkar’s work as cataract surgeon to the king of Bhutan, from within Khandro Yangkar’s family, derived from the transcript of an account and from memory ‘... told in rather glowing terms by one of her children.'
In either 1952 or 1953, she [Khandro Yangkar] was called to Bhutan by the then king, ... At this time the king was suffering from eye problems and he called Khandro Yangkar to come and treat him. He told her that he had invited many Western doctors to look at his eyes but none of them could help. He requested her to stay at his court until he could again shoot an arrow right at the target, for only then would he be satisfied that his eyesight was perfect. Yangkar [...] went to help the king, and did, in fact, take care of his eyes until he could shoot an arrow accurately at the target.18

Both the Tibetan biography as well as the oral narrative can be matched to a contemporary historical record; the diary entry of Dr. Hicks from October 1949, which reports on Khandro Yangkar’s work as a doctor in Bhutan.

European Reports on Indigenous Medicine and Cataract Surgery in Tibet and Bhutan

The East India Company and the Christian church had sent envoys to Tibet as early as the eighteenth century. Early British visitors included, for example, the British missions led by George Bogle and Alexander Hamilton (1774-75), and Samuel Turner and Robert Saunders (1783). In the vein of naturalist explorers-cum-diplomats and agents of commerce, they built contacts with local aristocrats to improve trade and diplomatic relations and to add to the knowledge about ‘blank spots’ on their maps. Relations with Britain came to a halt when Tibet and Bhutan closed their frontiers to Europeans in 1792.19 In 1864 war broke out between Britain and Bhutan, with the Bhutanese offering stern resistance. A settlement was agreed in 1865, with the Bhutanese ceding parts of their territory to the British Government against an annual financial allowance. In 1885, Urgyen Wangchuk, the then Trongsa Penlop, helped by one of his relatives, the Paro Penlop, emerged victorious in the last civil war of Bhutan and he became the intermediary in negotiations between Britain, Bhutan and Tibet. His decision to accompany the Younghusband Mission to Tibet in 1904 gained him imperial support and in 1905 the British bestowed the insignia of KCIE (Knight Commander of the India Empire) upon him.20 In 1907, the people of Bhutan chose Urgyen Wangchuk as their hereditary king, or as the British would call him, their ‘Maharaja’.21

In the same year 1907, Bhutan came under the responsibility of the Political Officers of Sikkim, who worked as part of the extended administrative structure controlled by the British Raj.22 John Claude White was the first Political Officer of Sikkim to visit Bhutan regularly, following his first trip in 1905 to convey the above British honour to Urgyen Wangchuk. John Claude White and subsequent Political Officers paid several visits to Bhutan and doctors of the Indian Medical Service accompanied them.23 Unlike in Tibet and Sikkim, medical work did not, however, become formalised and institutionalised in Bhutan as part of these early twentieth century political missions of the British.24

Many of the political officers to Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan and their medical colleagues, left behind a vast collection of diaries, memoirs, various official records, photographs and most valuable colour film footage. These have been partly published, or are held as unpublished materials in several archives, libraries and private collections in England25 and other countries. In the publications and the parts of the collections that I have studied, descriptions and images of indigenous medical practice are rare. This situation is comparable with the general scarcity of records by European travellers and British doctors on indigenous medical practices throughout the areas, McKay termed, the ‘Tibetan Frontier’: “European language accounts of indigenous medical practice in pre-modern Bhutan are almost non-
existent. As in Tibet and Sikkim, the British doctors wrote little or nothing about it and the few references by European travellers are brief and superficial.26

A general overview and analysis of the broad spectrum of accounts, reports and visual documentation on indigenous medical practices in the Tibetan and Bhutanese medical world is beyond the scope of this article, here I can only point out some general trends. What stands out is that where indigenous medical practices were mentioned in twentieth century British accounts of Bhutan and Tibet, they are hardly ever portrayed in a positive light. Accounts of earlier foreign visitors to Tibet in the eighteenth century were more likely to give a positive picture of indigenous medicine. The diary of the Jesuit missionary Ippolito Desideri, who lived in Tibet from 1715 to 1721, in a chapter Concerning the Letters and the Alphabet of the Thibettan Language, and the Proficiency of the Thibettans in Learning and the Arts, provides a useful example. After explaining that there is hardly any specialisation in Tibetan arts and crafts, he eulogizes a combination of professional status and skill of Tibetan medical doctors:

Medicine is the only profession which has qualified members, and in Thibet they are many and excellent. It is not their custom to ask the patient how he is or what is his pain, but they feel first one pulse, then the other, then both together, and then say what ails the sick man. They have not many drugs, but good medicinal herbs, either indigenous or brought from China, the Lhoba country, which I have already mentioned, Nepal or Hindustan, or shall we say Mogol. These are generally given in pills or in powders, and often effect cures. The professors are well paid and generally stipulate what their fee is to be before undertaking a cure.27

From among early British travellers, the surgeon Robert Saunders who accompanied Captain Samuel Turner on his mission to Bhutan and Tibet in 1783, goes as far as stating that:

I have dwelt long on this subject, because I think the knowledge and observations of these people on the diseases of their country, with their medical practice, keep pace with a refinement and state of civilization, which struck me with wonder, and, no doubt, will give rise to much curious speculation, when known to be the manners of a people, holding so little intercourse, with what we term civilized nations.28

A rather more mixed report regarding medicine and cataract treatment was written by Alexander Hamilton (1750-1777). He accompanied George Bogle as surgeon on the first of the East India Company’s missions sent by Warren Hastings to Tibet and Bhutan (1774-75), and he was a leading member of later diplomatic missions in the area. In a letter to George Bogle, his superior who is travelling back to Calcutta ahead of him, Hamilton, on 6 of November 1775 reports on the state of medicine in Tibet as follows:

I shall have it in my power by the time we get to Dinajpur to supply you with the remarks upon the state of medicine in Tibet which you have often wished me to give you. I am however afraid that this science will benefit but little by any knowledge of the Tibetan practice as the inhabitants of that country seem to be much further behind the Europeans on the progress they have made towards the advancement of medical knowledge than in most other arts or sciences. Though their method of treating some disorders of the eye is more successful than the one we follow, we cannot infer from thence that they have a more powerful knowledge of the nature of the disorder or are better acquainted with the structure of the organ upon which they operate than we are; in reality they are entirely ignorant of both, this remarkable success which attends their method of couching the cataract being solely owing to their instruments being much better calculated for that purpose than those we use. Inclosed I send you the only two instruments used in the
operation. The copper one for depressing the crystalline lens, I believe may be made in Calcutta. I could wish to have three or four of them in silver as that metal is less liable to be corroded than copper, and I should be happy to have two or three lancets like the enclosed which is used for dividing the external coats of the eye. Any of your sircars [senior servants] could get both in the [Calcutta] Bazaar. I shall send you an account of the operation for the Governor from Dinajpur and wish to send him the instruments at the same time.29

In summary, Hamilton was impressed by the Tibetan cataract surgery instruments, but criticised the doctors for neither having a theory of the aetiology and essence of the condition, nor an understanding of the anatomy of the eye. However, we are left uninformed about the basis for his criticisms.

Following the Indian Rebellion (‘Mutiny’) in 1857, the British Crown first nationalised the East India Company, then in 1858 assumed direct administration of India under the newly installed British Raj. Previously, exploratory visits to surrounding areas on the north-eastern frontier of India had mainly been concerned with building diplomatic relationships, trade agreements and new discoveries.30 However, with the onset of the ‘Great game’—the struggle between the British and Russia over dominance in Central Asia—such ‘visits’ took on more overtly political functions. In Tibet, this culminated in the British invasion of Tibet in 1903-04—commissioned by Lord Curzon and led by Colonel Francis Younghusband—which forced the Tibetans into diplomatic ties with the British to the exclusion of Russia, and allowed the British to establish a permanent trade agency in Tibet.

From at least the 1870s, informed by a wider post-Darwinian process of scientific and technological modernisation, aspects of ‘Western medicine’, itself hardly a unified or standardised tradition, underwent major changes in its theory, practice and social organisation, while it continued to expand with colonialism. Medicine in Europe became increasingly state-sponsored and professionalised (hence more the preserve of the educated middle and higher social classes), and it was accompanied by public health and hygiene campaigns.31 In its own understandings of human ailments, ‘Western medicine’ became increasingly distinct from ‘non-Western’ medical practices and theories, as well as its own past.32

This is well reflected in the tone of British reports on indigenous medicine in Tibet and Bhutan from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards.33 References to local medicine are either completely absent, or if at all present, largely negative and locate medical practices exclusively amongst the monks. For David MacDonald, a British officer who visited Lhasa in 1920, “Every doctor in Tibet is a ~ama”,34 and for Morgan, supposedly informed by his Sikkimese medical assistant Bo Tsering:

... the [Medical College] Chakpori’s sole contribution was that to the prestige and mystique of the lamas. ... Behind the façade of window dressing and make believe, the Chakpori was no more than a pretence and mockery, a gigantic swindle perpetrated on the superstitious, fearful and credulous, in the lamas unceasing quest for filthy lucre.35

Opposition to the uptake of biomedicine in Tibet was blamed on the ‘Lamas’, “… as the dispensaries interferes with the fees of the Lamas who are exorcists for all manner of ghosts and demons to whom disease and even injury are universally inscribed”.36

The British failed to identify that local medical practices they came across were sometimes part of the elite and scholarly medical system called Sowa Rigpa, which is based on a large corpus of medical literature and the oral transmission of medical practices and
techniques. Grave misconceptions about the indigenous medical practices and practitioners, prevented the British from taking notice, or even meeting with the practitioners of Sowa Rigpa—known locally as amchi or menpa—outside of the Chakpori Medical College. For instance, the doctors who worked privately or who were working and studying Sowa Rigpa at the Mentsikhang or ‘Medicine and Astrology House’ were, at least according to British records, never encountered. The only exceptions were Jampa Thubwang and Khenrab Norbu, who are mentioned in various editions of the British ‘Who is Who in Tibet’ records and who are mentioned in writings by Bell and Kennedy. The Mentsikhang was an architectural landmark in the close vicinity of Lhasa’s main temple or Jhokhang, where it had been newly established under the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1916 in an effort to modernise Tibetan society and to widen access to government-sponsored medicine by including lay students from the aristocracy and the army. This institute was not noted by the British. In British photographs we only have photographs referred to as the Mentsipa’s dispensary, which probably refers to the Mentsikhang itself. This institute was certainly noticed by other visitors to Lhasa, for example Peter Aufschnaiter, who lived in Lhasa and worked for the Tibetan government for eight years (1944-1952), and recorded it on his map of Lhasa, and by a Chinese who was based in Lhasa until 1949, in latter years as part of Kuomintang Government Commission on Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs. It is also found on a map commissioned by Laden La, probably the first visual record we have of the Institute. Tibetan medical historians refer extensively to the activities of the Mentsikhang and the building is still found today in its original location in central Lhasa. Meyer holds that the monastic Chakpori, by the end of the nineteenth century, had lost most of its glory and reputation and that the efforts made by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to give new impetus to medicine eventually led to the establishment of the Mentsikhang.

In common with other British records regarding Tibet, the memoirs of the Indian Medical Service surgeon, William Stanley Morgan, on Bhutan (where he accompanied Sir Basil Gould on his trip in the year 1937/8), offer further surprising statements about the state of medicine in Bhutan. “[Bhutan] did not possess a state surgeon, not even an S.A.S. [Sub Assistant Surgeon]—in other words they were doctorless”. This statement on the one hand correctly indicates the much later introduction and indigenisation of biomedicine in Bhutan as compared to Tibet and Sikkim, but taken together with the glaring absence of any remark by Morgan on local medical practices in Bhutan, this has to be interpreted as one of the many expressions of the perceived British superiority over indigenous expertise and culture. Bizarrely, the information Morgan gives on indigenous medicine in Tibet and Bhutan supposedly derives from Morgan’s informants, his assisting Sikkimese doctor, Bo Tsering in Tibet, and Dorje (or Dorge) in Bhutan.

There is now sufficient evidence from recently published histories as well as oral history knowledge of this period on Sowa Rigpa in Bhutan, that contradict Morgan’s claims and show that there were indeed doctors of Sowa Rigpa in the country, referred to by their title drungtsho, as well as many other ritual specialists and healers who were sought after for care and cure.

An unusual British Account of Tibetan Cataract Surgery

Noting the absence of records or the negative view in the aforementioned British accounts of indigenous medicine in the Tibetan frontier area, including Sikkim and Bhutan, it is refreshing to find the following account in the diary of a British doctor John H. Hicks. He
made an unusually positive and detailed statement about cataract surgery, as he saw it performed by none other than Khandro Yangkar, one of the few Tibetan women doctors in this period of history. Doctor John H. Hicks was physician accompanying the botanist, George Sherriff, and his party who collected and documented thousands of plants in Bhutan. The encounter between him, Major Sherriff and Khandro Yangkar took place on 12 of October 1949, in Bumthang, Central Bhutan:

Most of the doctoring here consists of such procedures as placing red hot irons on the patient's head but in this case the operation was quite a scientific one though entirely different from ours. She makes an incision or rather a mere puncture a sixteenth of an inch long through the sclera, inserts a flat gold probe across and behind the iris and then scoops the cataract away in one dexterous movement. She does not remove it—she says this cannot be done—but leaves it somewhere out of the way in the medial part of the eye. It is all done in five minutes and really nicely if I am a judge of surgery. There is no anaesthetic but the old priest upon whom she was operating never flinched. Neither is there any antisepsis but this is compensated for by speed, simplicity and a 'no-touch' technique. It was all carried out in the weird surroundings of a Buddhist temple with the pictures of various gods leering down upon us from the walls. There was no 'jardu' or magic ceremony about it except perhaps the 'medicine' with which the eye was drenched and this was made from saffron, musk and bear's liver. And there was an assistant who tapped two stones together by the patient's ear but this was really to attract his attention and cause him to deviate his eye. I was intrigued at the discovery that the West had not the monopoly of inventing surgical operations.47

Hicks's account is extremely important in at least two ways: firstly, it provides a contemporary record of Khandro Yangkar's stay and work in Bhutan as a doctor and confirms in more detail her work as cataract surgeon. Her technique of cataract surgery is observed and praised: a puncture of a sixteenth of an inch long through the sclera is made, through which a flat gold probe is inserted to depress the lens, all completed in five minutes. This description of instruments and—one may deduce therefore technique—differs from that on Tibetan cataract surgery made by Hamilton in the eighteenth century,48 who as we have already seen speaks of two instruments in use by the Tibetans; namely a lancet to divide the eye and a copper instrument to depress the crystalline lens. The materials of the instruments used in Khandro Yangkar's time are different. More importantly, however, Hamilton attributes Tibetan medical success in this activity to the use of superior and more sophisticated instruments than those used by the East India Company's surgeons, rather than to the Tibetan technique or understanding of the eye's anatomy. That said, Hicks does attribute elements of the success to this woman doctor's technique and dexterity, her "speed, simplicity and 'no-touch' technique".49

Hicks's diary entry is outstanding for a second reason: it acknowledges the existence and success of surgical techniques among Tibetans. After summarising what he heard about the woman's life story, he ends his entry:

... Now where fiction ends and fact begins in this story I cannot tell, but there was the woman, looking well-dressed and prosperous, here was her word that she had done over eighty cases and here was the undeniable fact that she had very neatly just done her eighty-seventh. What is more, she had only eight failures—so she said, and who in England is a good enough liar or a good enough surgeon to make such a claim for his workmanship.50
A number of British officers and doctors in Tibet and Bhutan before Sherriff and Hicks had claimed that there was no local form of surgery (MacDonald, "Of surgery the lamas have no knowledge").52 Morgan, although interested to find out about Tibetan surgery and having seen Indian couching techniques at work in Bundelkhand district, concluded there was no surgery in the repertoire of the Tibetan lamas.53 However, we have no record of either MacDonald or Morgan ever having seen or described a Tibetan-style cataract surgery, or indeed different styles that may have been prevalent at various times in various places.

The perceived absence of indigenous surgery or at least the unwillingness to write about it may well be related to the British providing and promoting their own medicine as part of their political mission to garner Tibetan support. Cataract surgery was one of the most sought-after medical treatments from their clinics, people travelling from far-flung places to have their eyes operated on at the British dispensary in Lhasa.54 In their accounts of eye surgery and of the gratitude of their patients one cannot help but notice the British presenting themselves as ‘enlightening’ the Tibetan people, for whom the act of clearing away obstructions to study—literally and figuratively—took on particular relevance in the context of literate Buddhism.

British medicine, including surgery, had been institutionalised in Tibet from 1905 in Gyantse, 1922 in Yatung and 1936 in Lhasa, when a permanent British mission in the capital had been established. As opposed to any writings about local medical practices, their own medical work received ample attention in diaries and reports written by the British doctors working there. They also write at length about the prevailing conditions they dealt with, which included goitres, gastric troubles, syphilis and gonorrhoea, malaria, minor injuries, coughs and colds, minor ailments, joint pains, cataract and others.

However, for Bhutan not a single case of a British doctor carrying out cataract surgery was recorded, or written about in their diaries and memoirs. This disparity of the application of cataract surgery by the British in Tibet and Bhutan begs an explanation, but also raises more general questions about the healthcare available in Bhutan in the first half of the twentieth century, a topic we hardly know anything about. It is not known whether there were or had been other cataract surgeons in Bhutan in the first half of the twentieth century, or whether their lack of good surgeons contributed to the Bhutanese King being operated on by a Tibetan doctor. A great deal of exchange in medical practice and of indigenous physicians between Tibet and Bhutan did occur: Bhutanese studied at the medical institutes in Lhasa and doctors from Tibet worked in Bhutan.55 A majority of doctors both in Tibet and Bhutan were still trained in family and religious medical lineages with some of them studying at the Tibetan centres of medical learning, such as the Chakpori and the Mentsikhang. In Bhutan, a traditional medical institute was set up in the capital only in 1967, followed by a training programme at a general training institute in Simthoka. Both were preceded by Western style hospitals and training courses.

Although traditional medicine in Bhutan (a local version of Sowa Rigpa) forms part of the nation’s official health care system, the overall number of their physicians and the kinds of medicine and techniques—at least in the formalised government institutions—seems smaller than in Tibet, and private traditional medical practice is almost non-existent in Bhutan. To what extent these differences between Bhutan and Tibet existed before the first half of the twentieth century and whether there was greater diversity in medical practices and a greater number of privately practicing physicians in Bhutan we do not yet know.
It does, however, seem that in Tibet medical institutions and learning were more formalised than in Bhutan and were possibly more advanced in certain techniques and in medical scholarship. Yet in the early twentieth century, cataract surgery was still a rare skill known to and practiced by only a few in Tibet. It was not acquired as part of the more general medical curriculum at the Chakpori or Mentsikhang, and it is not mentioned in the Tibetan medical core text, *Gyu Shi* or ‘Four Tantras’.

Although Khenrab Norbu is reported to have taught medicine, astrology and other subjects to hundreds of students, only three or four are said to have gained knowledge on ‘opening of the eye’ from him. According to Lobsang Wangyal, these comprised himself, Kunga Phuntsok and Khandro Yangkar. In Byams pa ’Phrin las we also find reference to Ngawang Chötrak being among this group. What kind of medical texts these four students may have been exposed to during their training in this specialised technique, let alone where their teacher had learned this technique remains obscure. All we can ascertain is that by studying the theory, the anatomy of the eye and its treatments, his explanations were made to his students by using sheep’s eyes, on which he showed how much pressure one needed to apply to a lancet in cataract surgery. Hicks states that Khandro Yangkar practiced on animal eyes herself, when “…she had practised scores of times on animals’ eyes she was at last declared competent and allowed to embark upon her life of healing.”

One of the students, Lobsang Wangyal, left a description of the prerequisites and main stages of the operation, as he had learned it from Khenrab Norbu in about 1945/46, and practiced it for a while after. I summarise his explanation here, which in parts is notably similar to that described by Hicks:

An astrologically calculated auspicious day should be chosen in the second or third, or eighth or ninth Tibetan lunar month, when the weather is cool and temperate. The patient needed to be wrapped tightly in white cloth from the lower body up, to avoid trembling and shaking, and to make the eyeballs protrude. His head was supported by an assistant from behind. The physician was seated on a bag of grains, and operated on the left eye of the patient first, whilst blind-folding the right with a black cloth. Then, in a fraction of a second, an incision was made at about one grain’s distance from the pupil or iris (where the white cloud-like cataract was situated), whilst another assistant was striking two marbles, so that the patient looked towards direction of the clapping sound, towards the right. After the incision was made, the thin skin of the eyeball was pulled back by the physician’s left hand, while with his right he extracted the cataract with the operating spoon. As an auspicious sign, the patient was made to look at the lancet and a part of a plough. The patient was then made to cough a couple of times, and a concoction prepared from bile of bear, saffron flower and musk was applied to the operated eye. After the second eye was operated upon and cared for in the same way, the patient had to relax, avoid hard work, solid food and catching a common cold. Once a week the dressing was changed in a dark room, and if successful, within one week the patient would regain their eyesight. During and after the operation, the patient needed to chant the mantra of the Medicine Buddha as many times as possible, to accumulate merit.

Here we are alerted to yet a different technique in Tibetan cataract surgery, one in which the cataract is extracted by the use of a medical spoon.
Process of selecting students for training in cataract surgery

The Byams pa 'Phrin las collection of biographies does not reveal where Khenrab Norbu learned cataract surgery, who his teachers were or what kinds of texts he may have had at his disposal. Although he wrote many commentaries and short texts on various aspects of medicine and astrology, his writings do not include a treatise on cataract surgery. It seems that 'opening the eyes' was one of the many aspects in the medical traditions of Tibet, that were passed on in oral transmissions, for which purpose a practitioner needed to be chosen by their teacher. This was the case with Lobsang Wangyal, whom Khenrab Norbu considered compassionate enough to learn this technique.

Khandro Yangkar was the only female student to have learnt cataract surgery from Khenrab Norbu. Indeed, she was probably the only woman among all of his hundreds of students, and one cannot but want to know how it was possible that a lay woman from Kham, admittedly of higher class and well-connected, was taught this technique by a monk physician in Lhasa, who had been no less than the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s personal physician. Hicks’s entry from 1949 gives the following reason:

The woman’s story is that she is doing this as a sort of penance. When she was young she was travelling with her father’s caravan—for he was a trader—when it was attacked by robbers and she was knocked down. Her father’s servants got the better of their assailants and caught one and put out his eyes. This act the father, in time, came to regret and when he asked a Lama how he could obtain forgiveness he was told that he must give his daughter to a life of curing blindness.

This was achieved by Khandro’s grandfather sending a letter of request to Khenrab Norbu, asking him whether he would teach his granddaughter the technique of ‘opening of the eyes’, in exchange for two of Norbu’s students receiving tuition from Khandro Yangkar’s grandfather, Jedrung Jampa Jungne (rJe drung Byams pa ‘Byung gnas), himself a famous Lama and doctor from Kham. But in both this and her colleague’s case, this was granted only after they had assisted the teacher for some time.

Out of this group of students, at least one was put in prison following the failed rebellion of the Tibetans against the Chinese occupation in March 1959. This was Lobsang Wangyal who, in 1960, was accused of six crimes—among them having worked as a medical doctor for the Tibetan government—and he received a prison sentence, as his conviction document states.

ON THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM: KHANDRO YANGKAR, THE FATE OF CATARACT SURGERY AND THE EMERGENCE OF ‘WOMEN’S MEDICINE’

After Khandro Yangkar had worked in Bhutan and her native region of Kham, she returned to Lhasa in 1958 to care for the eyes of her teacher, Khenrab Norbu. The 1950s had been a time of great political upheaval following the occupation of Central Tibet by the communist Chinese People’s Liberation Army in 1951. In the period leading up to the Tibetan rebellion against the occupying forces in March 1959, and the subsequent escape of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans, the communists adopted a more gradualist political approach to bringing socialism to Tibet than they did in many other parts of China.

In the field of medicine between the 1949-53, Mao experimented and instated various policies on the ‘unification of Chinese and Western medicine’ (Chin: zhong xi yi tuanjie).
Tibetan medicine on the whole and its foremost institute in Lhasa, the Mentsikhang remained, however, largely unaffected by these. Director Khenrab Norbu remained in charge of teaching and increased the clinical work of the institute. After a series of decisive meetings on the future of Tibetan medicine held in Lhasa in 1961, possibly facilitated by the personal contacts of the director, the Mentsikhang ‘dodged the anti-feudal bullet’ and emerged with moderate funding and as a fully legitimised medical institute under the Lhasa City Health Bureau. Khenrab Norbu died in December 1962, but the then recently appointed assistant director and Khenrab Norbu’s student, then young doctor Jampa Thrinley, skillfully and diplomatically navigated a new path for Tibetan medicine under Chinese rule from 1961 onwards. He attempted to create an institution, which organisationally matched a biomedical hospital, made efforts to increase its utilisation rates and secularise Tibetan medicine so as to make it a scientifically based ‘medical system’—yet he intended to not entirely surrender it to the new regime.70

While a number of excellent studies are available on the history of Chinese medicine during early communist reforms,71 so far we lack a comprehensive and critical history of Tibetan medicine in this period. The extreme policy swings that affected Tibetan medicine as a practice, as well as its practitioners and institutions, played out differently at the Tibetan ‘Medicine and Astrology House’ in the capital, from the vast numbers of lay and religious medical lineage practitioners in private and religious institutions throughout Tibet. Unlike the practitioners at the Mentsikhang, most of the latter immediately lost the basis for their livelihoods in 1959, with the beginning of so-called ‘Democratic Reforms’.72

In 1958, Khandro Yangkar became employed at the Mentsikhang, paid for by the secular branch of the Tibetan government,73 which at the time was still officially co-governing with the communist party under ‘United Front’ policies. In 1959, however, rather than being dismissed from her job or punished for her class background, her medical work for the Tibetan government continued, and she remained

... as before and worked at the Mentsikhang. She became an official employee [las byed pa] of the Chinese Communist government [mi dmangs sri gshung]. At that time, Yangchen Lhamo worked in the outpatient department every day and sometimes according to the orders of Khenrab Norbu she worked with serious patients in the inpatient department, as well as [on medical rounds] outside of Lhasa. She received everything for survival from the People’s government.74

What exactly her medical work at the Mentsikhang entailed is not known either from the biography of her by Byam pa ’Phrin las, or from the memory of one of Khandro Yangkar’s children. From the latter, one does at least get a sense of the increasing importance of clinical practice at the Mentsikhang itself and the newly introduced organisational principle of in- and outpatient sections in the hospital. The establishment of different departments was to take place shortly afterwards. In any case, this new emphasis on clinical practice contrasted with the Mentsikhang’s initial function of serving mainly as a training institute for medical students. Only in 1963 was a new batch taken on, consisting of students, including women, with mixed social and class backgrounds. Before being dismissed at the beginning of the ‘Cultural Revolution’, they were taught an entirely new curriculum. In the new communist authorities’ view, such measures would distance Tibetan medicine from its feudal and backward past of ‘serving only the nobility’75 and they considered that it should seek to balance the previously existing gender bias towards the training of male amchi or menpa only. The gender bias—at least as far as the more formalised layers of the elite system of
Sowa Rigpa are concerned—has been acknowledged, although ambiguously, by both Tibetan and Chinese writers.

On 29 July 1963, in a news report from the New China News Agency (NCNA)—the main Chinese news and propaganda outlet under the administration of the State Council and the Communist Party—it was acknowledged that Khandro Yangkar was admitted as a student of a senior Tibetan physician, but it noted that: "It was almost impossible for a woman to learn Tibetan medicine in the old society". Byams pa 'Phrin las qualifies his position on the question of female doctors in pre-1959 Tibetan society in the context of writing about Khandro Yangkar’s contribution to ‘women’s and children’s medicine’ in Sowa Rigpa. He writes that although there had been an understanding and treatment of ‘women’s and children’s diseases’, and that many experts had been transmitting such knowledge, at some point it diminished:

… in the past there were few female doctors. But over time due to various reasons, most Tibetan doctors were among the monks (gra btun nam). Female doctors were very rare. Gradually due to paying less attention on the methods for cure for women and children’s disease, there appeared serious problems. … Even some people regarded the study of Tibetan medicine by woman as not right. However, director Khenrab Norbu ignored all these ideologies and supported Yangchen Lhamo from the beginning to the end to study the Tibetan medicine. In the end she became a very famous and an expert female doctor, whom people called Yangkar.

Should this then be interpreted as a decline of lay female practitioners, a lack of historical evidence available to the above writer, or maybe even as outright misogyny? After all, out of a collection of 155 biographies of doctors stretching across all periods of the history of Sowa Rigpa, only one is on a female practitioner, namely Khandro Yangkar.

Just one Tibetan writer has so far made the effort to discover—at least the names—of female Tibetan doctors in Tibet’s past, both more distant and recent. By advancing our knowledge about these women, we can start tackling the outstanding questions pertaining to the social history of medicine and healing in Tibet and women and gender in medicine more broadly: Who actually carried out what kinds of medical practices in specific contexts? Were women’s health promoting and medical practices located largely outside of the elite ‘medical’ domain? Was there in Sowa Rigpa, something that could be called ‘women’s medicine’? If so, was this a field of expertise guarded and transmitted by doctors of both sexes? Finally, one may here re-iterate Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik’s intriguing question, as to whether in Tibet there were certain vocational or social settings in which the relative absence of androcentric social status made for special fostering of women and if so, whether Tibetan medicine—at least in the twentieth century—may have been one of them.

From my oral historical inquiries in Central and Western Tibet so far, and preliminary research in Sikkim and Bhutan, it emerges that there have been quite a number of female amchi, furthermore that in the pre-1959 Tibetan society a higher rate of female amchi was found amongst the nuns than amongst the lay population. This research is ongoing. The larger questions surrounding the medical practitioners, their changing social, religious and institutional affiliations and ethics, as well as medical practices and knowledge transmission in the twentieth century will be addressed in much greater detail in my forthcoming work.

For the purposes of this article, let us now turn to news reports making claims about the ‘improvement’ of traditional medicine and its achievements by Tibetans in Central Tibet following the take-over by the communists, especially during and after the ‘Democratic Reforms’. More specifically we will focus on the news-cum-propaganda items that also
include sections concerning the development of ‘Tibetan traditional medicine’ and on Khandro Yangkar.

The New Chinese News Agency and Khandro Yangkar

On 29 July 1963, under the heading ‘Tibetan Woman Doctor Completes Book on Women’s Diseases’, we find the following news report from Lhasa in the Beijing-based New Chinese News Agency:

The first book dealing with the treatment of women’s diseases by Tibetan traditional medicine has been completed here by Yangke, 56-year-old woman doctor.

The manuscript, based on her 30 years experiences of treating gynaecological diseases, analyses in detail and suggests treatment for 23 diseases afflicting women on the Tibetan Plateau. Formerly Tibetan Medical Literature rarely mentioned such diseases, as women were despised under serfdom.

Yangke is now in charge of the Gynaecological Department of the Lhasa Hospital for Tibetan Traditional Medicine, established 4 years ago after the democratic reform.

Born into a family that for generations had provided physicians of traditional medicine, Yangke had some contact with Tibetan medicine in her childhood. But when she was 11 her parents were exiled by the Local Government on a false charge and she had to become a wanderer.

It was almost impossible for a woman to learn Tibetan medicine in the old society. Finally she was accepted by a famous Tibetan physician and became a trained woman doctor. Though full of enthusiasm, she got no support from the authorities, nor could she carry on research.

After the democratic reforms many hospitals and health centres were set up by the Communist Party Organisations and the government to treat the inhabitants free of charge. Tibetan Traditional Medicine was developed simultaneously.

Six times as many people are working in the Lhasa Hospital for Tibetan Traditional Medicine as before the democratic reform when it served only the nobility and big serf owners.

The Gynaecological department headed by Yangke has now three qualified physicians treating more than a hundred people a day.

There are clearly many fascinating facets to this representation of a new socialist heroine, an independently spirited woman, icon of Chinese reforms in Tibet and guardian of Tibetan medicine in the ‘New Society’. However, we will have to leave most of these aside here and instead, focus on the kind of expertise that is beginning to be singularly ascribed to Khandro Yangkar, and that is: ‘women’s and children’s medicine’.

This report contrasts with one made by Khandro Yangkar’s family, where Khandro’s multiple skills are praised. They range from her successful dealing with common complaints to more specialised skills such as cataract surgery; and from her expertise in ‘women’s and children’s medicine’ to that of compounding medicines. Tashi Tsering adds to this list, her expertise in dealing with disorders caused by an imbalance of wind or rlung.

From various points in this oral account, it emerges that her range of medical work became narrower with the implementation of new departmentalization at the Mentsikhang. Within this, Khandro’s shift of responsibility into the Department of ‘Women’s and Children’s Medicine’ was not necessarily a voluntary move. According to her family, it was in fact, they say, due to her great success in eye surgery—and consequent professional jealousy from the biomedical hospital—that the eye surgery department of the Mentsikhang shut down in 1962. This is corroborated by other accounts.
More varied sources such as the oral account from her family and the communist news reports add new dimensions to what we know from the secondary literature, where Khandro Yangkar's promotion to be the head of the ‘Women’s and Children’s Department’ is portrayed—in modern hagiographical style—as yet another one of her many achievements. New evidence such as that presented here, can therefore help to see existing work in a new light and raise further important questions for subsequent inquiry. Why was it that Khandro Yangkar’s personal medical work priorities shifted or were shifted from eye care to ‘women’s and children’s medicine’? What were the circumstances surrounding her professional promotion and her scholarly work in this field and how did a communist-cum-feminist propaganda affect this? Who were the doctors at the People’s Hospital performing the eye surgery that is reported for the period from 1959 to 1964? According to which tradition of techniques and skills did they perform cataract surgery? How successful were the different prevalent techniques? Did traditional Tibetan eye surgery come to an end with the institutional re-organisation and rapid almost complete cessation of clinical work at the Mentsikhang (and possibly other hospitals in Lhasa) that followed the beginning of the ‘Cultural Revolution’?

Her family’s account portrays Khandro Yangkar as a brave and charismatic woman doctor. Despite the closure of the eye department, and the attempt to confine her medical work and expertise to newly drawn boundaries, instances are told in which she did not comply with these restrictions and she experienced repercussions as a result. For instance, after the closing of the eye department and her shift to the women’s and children’s section of the Mentsikhang, she privately and at her own expense paid for the lodging of a poor farmer who had come to Lhasa with his family to have his eyes treated. When this act of compassion, a required aspect of the ethical behaviour of a Tibetan doctor, became known to official administrators, she was reprimanded, told not to repeat such actions and thereafter she never practiced privately again.

With the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the work and personal lives of Khandro Yangkar and those of her colleagues who had remained at the Mentsikhang became increasingly difficult and the reprimands and criticisms intensified, as the following and last episode of Khandro’s life shows.

**Cultural Revolution and Khandro Yangkar**

Until 1968, Khandro Yangkar had remained an official member of staff at the Mentsikhang, which meanwhile (instigated by the fervour of a meeting of Tibetan Red Guards from the TAR in August 1966 in Lhasa), had been renamed with revolutionary names along with all other main sites in Lhasa. It was now called the ‘Labour People’s Hospital’. Many of the Tibetan physicians, in particular the older ones, were put in a group known as ‘gods, ghosts, and evil spirits’, that was singled out for particularly harsh treatment and became one of the main targets in attacking the ‘Four Olds’ (old ideas, old culture, old customs, old habits). Many had already been sent to prison and labour camps. The Mentsikhang, although it never closed down, came under attack and its staff became involved in constant meetings and struggle sessions. It had neither a sufficient number of well-trained staff, nor did they have enough time between meetings to actually practice or teach medicine. In an official textbook on the history of Tibetan medicine, published for medical students in 2004 at Beijing People’s Publishing House, Byams pa ’Phrin las summarises the effects of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ on Tibetan medicine as such:
Then started the ‘Cultural Revolution’, which was a dark phase in Tibetan history; like when clouds cast black shadows everywhere. Tibetan culture, education and work all diminished and deteriorated, and so did Tibetan medical theory and practice. Many precious cultural objects were destroyed. Those who upheld Tibetan medicine, encountered many problems and obstacles. The young students who studied Tibetan medicine, were made part of the ‘youths who are endowed with education’ who needed to be sent to nomadic and farming areas for re-education among common people. Because of these students being sent far away, almost all hope for Tibetan medicine was lost.

Although Khandro Yangkar remained dedicated to her work at the hospital, she experienced great difficulties during the ‘Cultural Revolution’, as recounted by her son: “This was a time of terrible turmoil during which Yangkar was not allowed to work as a physician. Because she was from a family connected to the aristocracy, she was considered to be from a ‘bad family’. Being classified that way placed her among the people who were prohibited from working at all between 1968 and 1970.”

How much of the reasoning for this prohibition was due to the more general attack on anyone of her professional expertise, social background and status; or how much of it was a direct consequence of her brave stance, particularly in the 7 June 1969 incident, remains an open question—we now turn to a report on the events of that day and Khandro Yangkar’s involvement with it.

June 7, 1968 and Khandro Yangkar’s medical care to ‘Tibetan Reactionaries’

The source I am going to present here on this incident was written by the exiled Tibetan writer Kunsang Paljor. It was first published in Tibetan in 1970, and then in 1977 in English, both times by the Information & Publicity Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, India. In the author’s foreword we learn that Kunsang Paljor was born in 1942 in the Shigatse area of Central Tibet. In 1959, his family experienced great hardship during the onset of the ‘Democratic Reforms’, while he himself in 1956, had become a student at the Minority Nationalities Institute in Beijing, returning to Tibet in 1961. From 1962 to 1969, he worked first as a translator and then as a reporter for the Tibet Daily (Xizang Ribao), the provincial news organ of the national communist party controlled New China News Agency, Xinhua. During these years, Kunsang Paljor travelled extensively, and he writes in his foreword “... I could see for myself innumerable examples of the atrocities and deceptions perpetrated by the Chinese in Tibet”. His knowledge and experience in Tibet and China, so he goes on to say, form the basis of his book, ‘Tibet – The Undying Flame’, in which events that occurred in Lhasa and its vicinity between 1968 and 1969 are dealt with in greater detail. Most of the incidents were witnessed by himself while others are based on first-hand accounts by ‘reliable witnesses’. Chapter six entitled ‘The Massacre of June Seventh’, deals with an occurrence, where we come across Khandro Yangkar.

Summarising Kunsang Paljor on this event, we learn about a fight that had broken out between a group of Tibetan youths and a division of the Chinese Army that led to two fatalities, one on each side. The Tibetan youths then fled into Lhasa’s main temple, the Jhokhang, soon to find themselves surrounded by 300 troops, who entered and “… turned the Tsugla Khang, that holy place of worship, into a gory, blood splattered butcher’s shop”. After this the ‘Tibetan reactionaries’ were denied medical attention and Kunsang Paljor reports:
In desperation the Tibetan Medical College was then approached and a team of medical workers was despatched to bring the bodies, dead and wounded, for medical attention at the centre. [...]. The Tibetan Medical College provided food and medical attention to the wounded for two days, while the relatives and neighbours of those killed performed the burial rites. In the meantime, the Medical Centre publicised a list of those wounded and killed, and issued the following bulletin: “Those killed on 7 June were not only attacked with guns but with other weapons. Although some of them did not die immediately of bullet wounds, they were killed slowly with bayonets and blows. For example Dawa Tsering’s legs, despite having been shot through, were smashed to a pulp with a heavy metal weapon. In this emergency situation we have dispensed whatever aid was possible and legally within our means. We realise and regret, however, that nothing more could be done to the full satisfaction of our unfortunate patients. We also, according to internationally accepted canons of medical conduct, observe full solidarity with the dead and wounded”.

Following this, Khandro Yangkar, the ‘Chief Medical Officer’, was interrogated by the Chinese: “You have without the permission of the party treated the reactionaries of 7 June who oppose our policies they said ‘Why have you done this?’ After lengthy questioning, she was subjected to thamzing.”

Needless to say, the concern with eye surgery and ‘women’s and children’s medicine’, both in representation and practice, had by that point completely disappeared. The lives of almost everybody in Tibet, and for that matter elsewhere in China, became filled with worries about one’s mere survival. There was no place for more sophisticated traditional medical practice as this was associated with the feudal past of China and Tibet, which had to be stamped out to facilitate Tibet’s so-called ‘New Society’. There was even hardly a place for general medical practice in Tibet, as the infamous barefoot doctor campaign barely reached the plateau.

The radical politics of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ have had an irreversible impact on the survival of certain aspects and techniques of the Tibetan ‘Science of Healing’. A surgical technique, such as ‘opening the eyes’ (mig byad), already a rare skill limited to only a few doctors in Tibet and passed on along relatively fragile medical lineages, would have needed institutional support to survive. Not only in this particular political situation, but also in the wake of the arrival of new ophthalmological techniques, introduced first by the British and then practiced and taught to Tibetans by the Chinese.

Even the communist concern with ‘women’s and children’s medicine’ came to a bitter end in the ‘Cultural Revolution’, when in midst of the turmoil, the socialist heroine Khandro’s previously celebrated and promoted works on women’s and children’s medicine were destroyed. That said, the specialisation did not die out entirely—there is once again a ‘Women’s and Children’s Department’ at the Mentsikhang, and very recently a textbook for medical students and a general treatise on this subject have been published.

CONCLUSION

The various views on the charisma, medical work and professional achievement of the female Tibetan doctor Khandro Yangkar that I have presented here, show considerable and nuanced differences that depend on the source and context of the original writings. However, common to each account is a positive appreciation of her medical, scholarly and humanistic achievements, despite stark shifts in the political history of Tibet during Khandro’s lifetime.

This should indeed be noted by scholars of the history of modern Tibet, a field, which I agree with Tsering Shakya, has, with few exceptions, been “left to the realms of a polemical
debate between those who support either the Tibetan or the Chinese claims”. Speaking of the wider field of the modern political history of Tibet, Tsering’s statement “the gulf between the two positions is as wide as heaven and earth, and it is impossible to reconcile them” also holds true to positions on the impact of communist reforms on other areas of Tibetan culture, such as medicine or women’s roles in society. I hope that the newly found sources and their careful comparison contribute to some degree, to a more nuanced understanding of the modern history of Tibet, fostered by politically and culturally sensitive readings of Tibetan, Chinese and European sources.

NOTES

11. On the history and diversity of cataract surgery, see Hirschberg 1982. On Indian techniques of couching the cataract, see Elliot 1917.
15. Its title is Tshi mdo bdud rtzi 'i bum bzang las mig 'byed gsal pa'i sgron me zhes bya ba legs pa bzhugs yod. It contains a treatise on the eye and on various practices of eye treatments among them the technique of 'opening of the eye'.
22. For an excellent study of the relationship between Tibet and British India 1904-1947, see McKay 1997.
23. The Indian Medical service was established in 1896. By the beginning of the 20th century it had approximately 600 members.
27. Ippolito Desideri, MS. A pp. 77-83, as translated and quoted in De Fillipi 1932, pp. 186-87.
29. This is part of letter from Hamilton to Bogle that survived among the Bogle papers, published in Lamb 2002, pp. 388-9. Note that the promised full report on the state of medicine unfortunately cannot be found there. It may never have been written or did not arrive as many other letters. We only find an apology in a letter from Hamilton to Bogle on 1st of March 1776 for having found the task to write about indigenous medicine in more depth more arduous than he first imagined, promising to make one more attempt. See Lamb 2000, pp. 398-9.
CHANGING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TIBETAN WOMAN DOCTOR


For a general problematisation of terms such as ‘Western medicine’, ‘Non-Western medicine’ or ‘medical system’, see Worsley 1982. For a history of the ‘Western Medical Tradition’, see Lawrence et al. 1995.


MacDonald 1929, p. 179.

Morgan-Rybacki 2007, p. 119.


Drauschke 2008: 53 and 172.


http://tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk

Aufschnaiter 2000, supplement.

Personal communication of Roger Croston with relatives of Li Yonyi. I thank Roger Croston for finding this out.

Meyer 1995, p. 120.

Morgan, MS 32, p. 27.

Morgan-Rybacki 2007, p. 119, Morgan MS 32.


Fletcher 1975, p. 359.

Fletcher 1975, p. 359. I would like to thank Mr Anthony Aris for kindly pointing out this reference to me.


Fletcher 1975, p. 359.

Fletcher 1975, p. 360.

Ibid., p. 360.

MacDonald 1929, p. 180.


Fletcher 1975, p. 360.


Bod rang-skyong ljongs sman-rtsis-khang 2006.


Fletcher 1975, p. 359.


This document was signed by a Chinese military commander and two Tibetans. See Wangyal 2007, p. 17.


On the impact of ‘Democratic Reforms’ on medical practices and practitioners among private medical practitioners, see Hofer (forthcoming).


NCNA 1963, p. 592.

Ibid.
Note that *btzin* in some cases also refers to nuns, but that the more commonly used term for Tibetan nuns is *ani*.

It would be interesting to know whether there were any female practitioners recorded in a 19th century catalogue of 1022 Tibetan doctors by Rana Darma Kidi. This is held at the library of the Mentsikhang in Lhasa, Bod rangs-kyong ljongs sman-tsis-khang 2006, p. 119-20.

For an extensive account on the female doctor Lobsang Dolma (1935-1989), see Nor-bu Chos-phel 2008.

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Byams-pa 'Phrin-las 2004, p. 134. Also, see Byams-pa 'Phrin-las 2000, pp. 456 on Ngawang Choetrak, whose responsibilities are said to have shifted from the eye department to become general vice-director of the Mentsikhang in 1963.

NCNA 1964 provides a report, lauding the increased numbers of medical units and medical personnel, among them, ‘high on the honours list are the surgeons of the Eye Department of the People’s Hospital in Lhasa, where over the past 5 years 600 patients have been treated for cataracts and have recovered their eye sight.’ Although the Mentsikhang, according to a later report was termed ‘Labour People’s Hospital’ in August 1966, this report refers to the eye surgery department in one of the newly established biomedical hospitals in Lhasa, either the Municipal Hospital or the People’s Hospital.

Adams and Dovchin 2000, p. 448.

Kunsang Paljor 1977, Foreword.


During the ‘Cultural Revolution, *thamsing*, Chinese for ‘struggle session’, was a common means to publicly attack people of feudal family background or those opposed to party policies. The attacked person had to defend themselves and offer extensive public self-criticisms.
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Drawing relevance from the Sikkim Himalayan mountain eco-system this paper is founded on the premise that improvement in the existing relation between man and environment requires not just a cosmetic change in behaviour but requires a change in approach, a change from within, a change in mind-set. Towards that change the article discusses Deep Ecology as one of the directions: an effort to transcend from ego-self to eco-self, an endeavour to transcend to biocentrism from anthropocentrism. However, the article argues that the Mahāyāna Buddhist text of The Lotus Aphorism or Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra too may be interpreted along this line of thought.

INTRODUCTION

India's 22nd state, Sikkim, is situated in an 'ecological hotspot'1 of the lower Himalayas and is one of the eco-regions of India. The forested regions of the state exhibit a remarkable biodiversity. Owing to its spread over different altitudes the state is gifted with a wide variation of plants of tropical, temperate, alpine, and tundra kinds and is one of the few regions to exhibit such a rich diversity within such a small area. However, the growing presence of industrialization and the increasing pressure of urbanization have contributed to the environmental problems in the state. Increased human population has led to an increase in demand for land for shelter, agriculture, road construction, hydro-electric projects and other so-called developmental activities. Simultaneously, the increase in livestock population has caused increased grazing in the forest areas. Hence, there has followed the destruction of the forest land. Due to the negligence of the local people, these factors have contributed enough to pollute the air of the state which has been worsened due to the increased vehicular pollution. In addition, it can also be said that the cost of the environmental degradation being heavy in the state there has been increase in the frequency of landslides.

Like the forest and air elements, the water bodies of the state are also facing the same problems. According to the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) report (2004),2 the pollution level of the Teesta, the main river of the state, is above the standard parameter i.e., 3mg/litre. And the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) reports that the main cause of the pollution is the direct dumping of wastes and garbage in the river by the local people. The dumping starts from Chungthang in North Sikkim and gradually increases as the Teesta flows through Gangtok, Ranipool, Singtam, and Rangpo. With the lack of adequate sewage treatment and waste management facilities, Teesta is losing its 'natural balance and purity'.3 Ironically, Teesta, which flows through the state from north to south, is described as the 'lifeline of Sikkim' for making about a third of the state's land heavily forested and being the main source of drinking water.
These are some of the facts of the status of land, air, and water from the state of Sikkim alone, but the same also depicts the situation in the whole of India. Along with the rest of the world, India has its share of immense environmental problems. The root of these environmental problems is very deep and it is within human beings. It is us, Homo sapiens, who are creating the environmental hazards today. It is we, who pollute and spoil the natural environment, and often we do so out of our ignorance and negligence.

The submission of the present authors is that for the change of attitude one need a spiritual change from within, a change shown by the Deep Ecological movement. Moreover, the paper claims that following the implications of the Mahāyāna Buddhist Sanskrit text of The Lotus Aphorism or Saddharma pundarīka Sūtra (hereafter SS), this change of attitude can also contribute to the solution of the environmental crisis. With this intention the paper will be divided into three sections, of which the first will deal with Deep Ecology, the second with the particular Mahāyāna Buddhist text of SS, and the third and last section will try to bring a contrast by comparing the earlier two sections with an attempt to state a proper solution.

I

The necessity of the change in the existing relation between Nature and humans was hinted by Henry David Thoreau (1854), George Perkins Marsh (1864), John Muir (1867), Aldo Leopold (1949), Rachel Carson (1962), Lynn White (1967), Rene Dubos (1973), and many others, though not through the particular terminologies of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and egalitarianism. As Timothy O’Riordan (1981) mentions, this change of attitude towards Nature and natural elements has its root also in the writings of the mid-nineteenth century American romantic transcendentalists who claimed that nature has its own morality, which when understood helps one to be a considerate, compassionate, and responsive human being with a new spiritual consciousness of our own ‘potentials’, obligations to others, and responsibilities to the life-supporting processes of natural surroundings. Burch (1971, pp.67-108), states that

their philosophies provided a powerfully credible account of the relationship between nature and society, an interpretation that straddled the fierce individualism (freedom without equality) of the frontier and the balanced homogeneity (equally without freedom) of the agrarian landscape and the suburb.4

Again with reference to the observation of Tuan (1968, p.181)

knowledge of the earth elucidates the world of man for to know the world is to know oneself.5

In the twentieth century, this change of attitude as a solution to the environmental problems is emphasized by Deep Ecology,6 an environmental movement opposite to Shallow Ecology7 (the term coined by Arne Naess). The main objectives of Shallow Ecology as per Naess are fighting against pollution and combating depletion of the natural resources keeping in mind the health and affluence of the citizens of developed countries.8 As Naess represents, Shallow Ecology is a movement of humans from outward ornamental behavior to cope with the surface level ecological problems. Against this view Deep Ecology comes forward with the way of transformation from within; a transformation of ‘self’ at all levels,
be it behavioural, cultural, or attitudinal. It suggests a modification of anthropocentric approach towards a biocentric and egalitarian approach.

The anthropocentric manner or the human oriented mind-set is said to be the product of the ‘ego-self’. The ego-self is that self which gives rise to an ‘I-consciousnesses, or the self with the narrow vision, the self with the shrunken perception of ‘mine’ only. Naess argued for an upliftment of this ‘ego self’ to ‘eco-self’, a self which identifies itself with others, through the realization of biocentrism and egalitarianism. For this transformation of self from ego level to eco level, Naess mentions that self gains maturity by its gradual development through the stages of ego self, social self, metaphysical self and lastly to the ecological self. In the words of Naess “the ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies”. Naess also mentions that with the increasing maturity of the self, the self is widened and deepened. And this widening and deepening of self occurs with the process of identification with others. Furthermore, this identification of self with others is what Naess claimed as self-realization, that is, “the fulfillment of potentials each of us has...” Thus for Naess, ‘self-realization’ is the realization of the extension of the inherent potentialities, which are not the momentary human impulses but the innate virtues within us. In other words, the estimation of the extension and broadness of our potentialities, otherwise underestimated due to ignorance and misunderstandings, is self-realization. Through this self-realization, Naess proposes that one could have satisfactory coexistence with other humans and non-human beings because self-realization occurs by placing oneself in the position of others and is directed by compassion and empathy.

Following this, it can be said that Deep Ecology, through its message of the extension of the self, understands ‘existence’ as a whole, comprising all the surrounding components. It advocates that human beings are not the rulers of the eco-system and are not separate from all other beings of Nature, but are rather a part of the entire cosmos. It proposes that we human beings are related to one another and also to non-human natural entities and Nature as a whole. In other words, it focuses on the relation of interdependence among the components of the eco-system. In this way Deep Ecology helps in the transformation of consciousness to feel that all life forms within an eco-system have an inherent or intrinsic value i.e. the right to exist; regardless of their instrumental, functional, and utilitarian values and that they share a symbiotic relation with each other. Therefore, Deep Ecology can be said to work as a rite of passage by showing a path of transformation of mind-set necessary for the protection of our surrounding environment.

Unlike the surface level scientific ‘Shallow Ecology’, ‘Deep Ecology’ is indeed deep in nature. The word ‘deep’ here refers to the level of depth at which environmental concerns and values are addressed, the crucial level of making decisions. And the word ‘ecology’ here refers to the concern for the ‘ultimate level’, the origin where all beings are equal in status. Hence, ‘ultimate level’ signifies not only inter and intra components’ relationship in an eco-system but also human beings’ mode of relationship with Earth, that is, how we live on it. Together the term ‘Deep Ecology’ implies a kind of ethical wisdom for a change of life style. It is the wisdom of taking the biocentric and egalitarian view points, that is, the perspective of equal status of co-living which implies that there should be reverence for all life forms, which have the inherent value of being a part of the existential web (‘web of life’). In this way, Deep Ecology suggests that there should be transcendence from ego-oriented anthropocentrism to biocentrism, the view of considering the fact that the life quality of humans depends not only on the close partnership with humans but also on the
symbiotic relationship with other life forms. It is a kind of wisdom which helps one to shed off one's own self-centeredness to think of others as equal. And the Enlightened self, capable of having these qualities is called 'eco-self' by Arne Naess.

According to Naess, the modern era needs an ethical wisdom to deal with the environmental crisis. It is the deep ecological concern which provides and develops this wisdom. It is the wisdom of rejecting the 'man-in-environment' image and accepting the 'total-field image', that is wisdom of reorienting anthropocentric mind-set to biocentric egalitarian mind-set. It is a wisdom of 'self-realization', that is to understand one's innate potentialities of making oneself to be a part of the widest living community of the world and thereby bringing a change in attitude and actions. According to Naess, the task of Deep Ecology is to make a life of committed actions for Earth by conserving and restoring ecosystems, by reduction of human consumptions, by analyzing the root cause of unsustainable practices, and by making an inquiry into the appropriate human roles on our planet. Hence, Deep Ecology supports regular practices and workshops. To support Deep Ecological workshops, out of his own ultimate premise of eco-centric philosophy Naess suggests an 'eight point platform principles', proposing that other persons from their own platforms and from their own ultimate premises may use the principles, with same logical techniques.

The platform principles as suggested by Naess are as follows:

1. Rejection of man-in-environment image
   The premise suggests that in this world of totality, each and every individual should be considered as essential in the 'thing-in-milieu' concept. In other words, the organisms should be conceived as part of the biospherical network through the intrinsic relations, that is, the relation which exists between two objects having the same basic constituents.

2. Biospherical egalitarianism-in-principle
   This principle of equal status of co-living implies that there should be reverence for all life forms. Each and every life form has inherent value as being a part of the existential web. Therefore, there should be transcendence from ego-centrism to biocentrism.

3. Principles of diversity and symbiosis
   This principle seeks to implement the ideology of 'Live and let live,' rather than choosing between oneself and others. Diversity enhances the potentialities of survival, the chances of new modes of life, the richness of forms, and that of symbiotic relations. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute much on the realizations of the values of inherent quality of life-forms.

4. Anti-class posture
   Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive and the situation is rapidly worsening. Diversity of human ways of life is in part due to (intended/unintended) exploitation and suppression on the part of certain groups. Therefore, it may be said that the flourishing of varieties of lives and cultures are compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. Hence, the flourishing of human life also requires such a decrease of population, which can be done by controlling birth rates.

5. Fight against pollution and resource depletion
   This platform principle hints that in aiming to eradicate the problems of surface level ecology, rather shallow ecology, by means of scientific knowledge, the particular knowledge is sometimes used as an end instead of means. As for example, when attention is
focused solely on pollution and resource depletion, and projects are implemented to deal with pollutions, then there are increases in evils of other kinds too. With the installation of anti-pollution devices, there are increased prices of life necessities thereby affecting the increase of class differences. Hence, policies are to be changed to alter the present state of affairs for these policies are affecting basic economical, technological, and ideological structures.

6. **Complexity, not complication**  
This principle favours integrated actions in which the whole person is active. A multiplicity of more or less lawful, interacting factors may operate together to form a compounded unit, a system, a complex whole. Awareness is to be created among humans to make them understand the difference between big and great, excess and sufficient, extreme and deficient.

7. **Local autonomy and decentralization**  
Problems concerning pollution of sound in eco-system have many kinds of origin—local, regional, and global. Of these, local problems are those which are caused by loud noise. To eradicate these kinds of problems, there is a need to strengthen local self-government and material and mental self-sufficiency. Naess proposes decentralization and local autonomy for this, as it can reduce local energy consumption, and thereby minimize the global energy problem. In this context he specifically mentions the thermal pollution and recirculation of materials.

8. In the eighth principle, Naess suggests that if a decision follows majority rule then at each step many local interests may be dropped along the line if it is too long and that those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation, directly or indirectly, to try to implement the necessary changes.

Considering these platform principles, Naess specified following four levels of questioning and articulation of environmental problems:

- **Level I: Ultimate Premises**, e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Ecosophy, etc.
- **Level II: Platform Principles** e.g., Eco-feminist Movement, Deep Ecology Movement, etc.
- **Level III: Specific Policies** (with general normative consequences and factual hypotheses).
- **Level IV: Practical Actions** (following particular rules or decisions accepted to particular situations).

In short, it can be said that Deep Ecology is a kind of wisdom which helps one to realize that human beings all are part of, but not the master of the world eco-system. It is a kind of wisdom which helps one to understand that components of our surroundings have values in themselves, irrespective of human usages. They have the same right to exist as the humans do. It is a kind of wisdom which helps one to realise that we, the humans are dependent on each other for our happiness, life, survival, and above all existence. It asks one to cultivate virtues of compassion, reverence, humility, responsibility, and care. And thus follows the message of Deep Ecology.

Like the Deep Ecology of Naess, the ancient Mahāyāna Buddhist text, **SS** discusses the path of self-transformation—though in a different manner. We shall argue that although this ancient text does not directly refer to the ego-self, eco-self, anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and egalitarianism in the context of environmental problems, yet it can be viewed from that
perspective also with its message of attaining Buddhahood by all. Hence, follows the next section with reference to this particular text.

II

The widely popular Mahāyāna Buddhist text of SS (ICE) conveys the message that though Buddha teaches different doctrines to different aspirants, they all show the way to the single path of ekavaya; a path of compassion, which can be attained by all, irrespective of class and gender.

Buddhism propounds that we create our own world by our own minds and also that we destroy our own world by our own minds. It states that poisons which pollute one’s mind are greed, anger, ignorance, jealousy, self-centeredness, self-indulgence, and arrogance. All these negative qualities are cultivated in the mind when we care less about our fellow beings and think much about ourselves. Hence, these can be said to be the product of ‘I’-ness or egoself. SS conveys the message that this ‘I’-ness or egoself causes nothing but pain and sufferings. It leads to evil paths. To get rid of pains and sufferings, the text of SS suggests adopting the Mahāyāna sūtra, or the Great vehicle sūtra of karunā and maitrī with the help of which one can travel to the shore of biocentric egalitarianism through proper self-realization.

SS propounds that everyone has the capability of having self-realizations and those who have the self-realizations are considered as Buddhas. It suggests that anybody and everybody has the potential to attain the wisdom of Buddha, the right wisdom in order to be free from suffering. However, the text suggests that in order to achieve Buddhahood one has to follow a course of discipline and cultivate some good qualities like that of patience (ksānti), benevolence (maitrī), and compassion (karunā) towards all life species and that its benefits are innumerable. Now the question arises how to cultivate such qualities? In this regard the text mentions that it can be cultivated through the practice of five pāramītas of dāna, sīla, ksānti, virya, dhyāna excluding the prajñā pāramīta with a single mind and only then one can have the vision of considering all beings as equal (that is, the concept of egalitarianism). Such is hinted in the text.

Suppose there are good men or god women who, for the sake of anuttara-samyak- sambodhi, over a period of eight hundred thousand million nayūtas of kalpas practice the five pāramītās—the pāramītās of dāna (almsgiving), sīla (keeping of the precepts), ksānti (forbearance), virya (assiduousness) and dhyāna (meditation), the pāramītā of prajñā being omitted—the benefits they obtain will not measure up to even a hundredth part, a thousandth part, a hundred thousand, ten thousand, millionth part of the benefits...

Like a beacon in the darkness, the SS points at arousing the quality of compassion as the only way to end the worldly sufferings. Using the analogy of a burning house, the sūtra conveys the message that this world is our house but we burn it by our inner fire of jealousy (dvesa), grudge (moha), aggression (rāga) and also by the pains of birth, old age, sickness, and death. In order to show the way out of these miseries, SS states that tathāgata (a would be Buddha with the quality of awakening in the transcendental state of overcoming mundane existences) like a father, rescued all his children of this world out of compassion by using His own wisdom and had shown them the path of anuttara-samyak-samādhi, the highest perfect state of meditation/concentration which is considered as a higher state than
that of nirvāṇa, where complete cessation of all kinds of sufferings occurs. Thus it hints that in nirvāṇa, some desires and passions still linger, and therefore sufferings also do not completely stop. In other words, it can be said that through this passage the text implies that the cultivation of compassion is a requirement for the stage of anuttara-samyak-samādhi, stage of self-realization which can be attained by using the proper wisdom.

This particular text of SS repeatedly mentions the wisdom of Buddha and in its tenth parivarta, it states that\footnote{129}

...one who is desirous of attaining Buddhahood and thinks for the earliest possible way to reach there, should learn the sūtra thoroughly or should honour those who know it\footnote{24}

Thus the passage implies that to gain the wisdom of Buddha, to attain the self-realization like that of Buddha, one should adopt this sūtra to possess the quality of compassion.

From what have been discussed above, it may be said that SS tries to suggest that out of the wisdom if one cultivates compassion and love for all beings and extends that to others surrounding oneself, then one can free oneself from the sufferings and miseries. In other words, it hints that we suffer as we make ourselves suffer by ignoring the values of other beings surrounding us and also by neglecting the cultivation of the qualities like love, compassion, pity, patience, etc. The way out of this problem is a deep set inner change. If we can change our very own approach, if we stop thinking of our anthropocentric gains, that is, if we can axe off our ego-selves then only we can save ourselves by saving our surroundings through compassion and love. It also reminds us that to have a vision for all species of life is a kind of wisdom, which results in the cultivation of some values within us. It is by the cultivation of the virtues we can extend ourselves to our surroundings by having self-realization and identification with others.

Now, in relevance to Deep Ecology, it may be said that by following the four levels of Questioning and Articulation as specified by Arne Naess, if this Buddhist text is considered as Ultimate Premise, then its Platform Principle could be Deep Ecology especially when it discusses about self-realizations, and cultivation of qualities like compassion for other beings. The question now arises what could be the specific policies following SS regarding environmental problems?

In reply it can be said that by axing off ignorance and negligence one can transcend to eco-self, the self thinking for all fellow living beings, the enlightened self like that of Buddha, “by making pity and compassion as the room, gentleness and patience as the robe and sūnyatā of all phenomenon as the seat”.\footnote{25} It is only by making one’s mind capable of adopting these views, that one can look after all species of life as equal. In addition, what one needs is the regular practice of five pāramitās as mentioned earlier. It is only then one can uphold bio-spherical egalitarianism, the chief factor of Deep-Ecology.

In other words, it can be said that considering the text as Ultimate Premise and Deep Ecology as the Platform Principle, the specific policy of the text is to show benevolence, compassion, and love. One can combat the sufferings and miseries of life and can find true happiness only by acquiring these qualities. Therefore, both Deep Ecology and the ancient text of SS, promote that it is not the case that we are without wisdom, but that we lack is the right kind of knowledge about ourselves, sufficient wisdom to know the surroundings to combat any kind of miseries. To remedy this defect, what one needs is the cultivation of some qualities to express that particular wisdom.
Although there exist some similarities between the Deep Ecology of Naess and Mahâyâna text of SS, yet there lie certain dissimilarities. In the next following section both Deep Ecology and SS are compared and contrasted. And on the basis of the extracted commonness, the third section attempts to suggest a proper solution for the modern days' environmental problems, especially of the Sikkim Himalayan Mountain System.

III

Though both Deep Ecology and SS talk about attaining wisdom and self-realization, there is a difference in the contexts of attaining self-realization. Deep Ecology talks about self-realization in the context of broadening the self, to share others' feelings, pains and emotions, to show the path of helping others through the prescribed ‘Platform Principles’. SS on the other hand, talks about self realization for attaining the highest state of meditation/concentration by being in service to others, by making others happy. Again while SS speaks of attaining Buddhahood, it talks about ego-self as leading to evil paths, causing pains and miseries, Deep Ecology states nothing about that. Unlike these differences, the similarity that exists is that both of them suggest that everybody has the potentialities to have self-realization, be it by the understanding of innate potentialities or by cultivation. Moreover, both of them state that cultivation of compassion as a necessary measure for self-realization.

Now, Buddhism as a practical religion suggests the view that suffering is the nature of lives lived in ignorance. And this suffering is the product of the wrong perception of self. So in order to alleviate suffering to others as well as in oneself, one should come out of the ignorance of I, me, and myself. Radhakrishnan rightly points out

the self in Buddhism is neither the same as nor entirely different from the skandhas. It is not a mere composite of mind and body, nor is it the eternal substance, exempt from the vicissitudes of change.26

Therefore, self becomes momentary by bearing the fruits of the earlier moments. Hence, it needs some cultivation of good qualities to bear some good fruits. Again, the Buddhist view of ‘no self’ (anâtmâ) undercuts any clinging to individualistic gain and suggests that since the idea of a separately existing self is false, one should give up selfishly motivated actions. And therein lies the importance of the text which shows the cultivation of compassion as the way to bear some good fruits. Moreover, Buddhist environmentalists assert that the mindful awareness of the universality of suffering produces compassionate empathy for all forms of life, particularly for all sentient beings. They extend loving kindness and compassion beyond humans and animals to include plants and the earth as a whole. The text of SS is not an exception to this line of thought.

Finally, while sorting practical actions following Deep Ecological levels of Questions and Articulations within the text of SS, it can be mentioned that today’s age is the age of turmoil and natural imbalances. It is an age which requires a change of humanistic attitude. A global unity irrespective of class, caste and creed is required to fight against any kinds of environmental challenges. In this century while we are affected by drastic environmental changes, we have nothing left with us, except the various kinds of diseases disturbing our health and life. And in its root cause, we the humans are to be placed as we are disturbing the natural balances for our own purposes while placing other life species in the danger
zone. If these environmental disturbances are seen as sufferings then to get rid of this modern crisis, this ancient text mentions that we need to change ourselves to protect nature, to save all kinds of living beings, including us. And so, it suggests having the wisdom of having self-realization and compassion as a quality like that of the Buddha.

Moreover, in the context of the modern day’s environmental problems it may be said that suggests that to end the environmental sufferings quickly, one should adopt its message of embracing the qualities of love, compassion, pity, benevolence, forbearance, and patience. The text mentions that when this message is followed then the results and the benefits of adopting this vision automatically flows in. The whole of the seventeenth parivarta, that is, anumodanapunyanirdesa parivartah\(^{27}\) is dedicated to this view. It mentions that a person following this sūtra would not be affected by any kind of diseases of tongue, mouth, teeth, nose, and lips. Moreover, the text claims that by following this sūtra properly one can have a healthy mind and body with perfect sense organs and heightened abilities such as detecting different varieties of fragrances, from top, from bottom and also from a far distance, or detecting incense blended from a thousand, ten thousand ingredients (powdered incense, pellet incense or paste incense). Such will be one’s strong faculty of smell that one would be able to detect the sex of the child of a woman in early pregnancy, whether she will give birth to a healthy child safely or not, and when she had first became pregnant. The text also warns that one who criticises the sūtra, or does not accept the message of the sūtra, will have impaired sense organs. This message of the text may be interpreted as implying that if we adapt the biocentric egalitarian viewpoint then we will gain not only health but also acuity of sensory abilities, decreasing the chances of diseases.

Now, while the Sikkim Himalayan mountain range is in degradation zone with its flora and fauna, the environmental disturbances of this region can be seen as sufferings arising out of our ignorance and negligence. And in this regard, this particular text of Buddhism conveys the message of the rectification and transformation of our very own natures. To combat the man-made environmental challenges, while Deep Ecology suggests what we should do for combating the environmental challenges, the ancient text of SS suggests what and why we should do for our surroundings and also states the benefits of adopting such views.

In the concluding lines it may be said that according to the World Health Organization, by preventing environmental hazards like that of unsafe water and polluted air in the developing countries, every year we can save the lives of four million children under five years of age. For the paradise of Sikkim it can be mentioned that it has significant cases of communicable diseases such as acute diarrhoeal diseases (including gastroenteritis & cholera), acute respiratory infection, and pulmonary tuberculosis from 2000-2005.\(^{28}\) All of these diseases become more painful when the condition of the medium of air and water degrades from the normal level. Therefore, while the beautiful state of Sikkim is going through crises of fresh air, pure water, and nutrient land leading to the environmental miseries, this ancient Mahāyāna Buddhist text conveying the message of the beautiful path of cultivating patience, forbearance, love, compassion, and benevolence for combating any kinds of miseries cannot be discarded merely as a religious text.
To qualify as a biodiversity hotspot, a region must meet two strict criteria: it must contain at least 1,500 species of vascular plants as endemics, and it has to have lost at least 70% of its original habitat. Around the world, at least 25 areas qualify under this definition, with nine others possible candidates. These sites support nearly 60% of the world’s plant, bird, mammal, reptile, and amphibian species, with a very high share of endemic species.

The report is named as ‘Highlights 2004’.


Ibid., p.vii.

In 1973 the term was first introduced by the Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer Professor Arne Naess.


Naess has given the name after the place called Tvergastein (meaning crossed stones) on the Hallings Karvet Mountain in central Norway, where he built a simple cabin in 1937.

In Samyutta Nikāya (1.39) it is said that, “Cittena niyyati loko cittena parikisatti, cittasa eka dhammasa sabbeva vasam anvagu.” That is, “the world is led by the mind; it is dragged hither and thither by the mind. The mind is one reality under the power of which everything goes.” Lily de Silva, Essays on Buddhism Culture and Ecology, for Peace and Survival, Buddhist Cultural Centre, Sri Lanka, 2001.

The evil paths are hell, the realm of hungry spirits, that of beasts and also the realm of asuras. Watson Burton (trans.), The Lotus Sūtra, (1999) p.329.

The text is so named to describe its essence. As a lotus flower cleans the water, the text also is for the purification of the humans, showing them the right way. Henceforth referred to as SS.

Pāramitās are the qualities that the Bodhisattvas cultivate on the path to attain wisdom of Buddha, i.e. Buddhahood. They are numbered from six to ten depending on the nature of aspirants. The text in discussion mentions five pāramitās. Here it seems that prajñā is excluded because it is the result to be attained by the practice of other pāramitās.

Taddhāthāpi nāma ajita kāscīdeva kūlapūtra va kūladhikītā va
anuttarāṁ samyakṣambodhiḥmahākānksāṁnam pañcasā
pāramitāsvaṁtvā kalpakotinayūtāsasahasatraṁ caretaṁ/
taddhāthā dāna pāramitāyāṁ śīla pāramitāyāṁ ksanti pāramitāyāṁ virya pāramitāyāṁ dhvana
pāramitāyāṁ virahitaḥ prajñā pāramitāyā, yena ca ajita kūlapūtreṇa va kūladhikītraṁ viśīmām tathāgataṁ
yuspramāṇanīrdeśāṁ dharmaṁ parantayaṁ
śrūtvā evaicitotpādikāpradhimuktiṁputātmā abhiśriṣṭaddhānātaṁ vā kṛtā,.... SS 16; 199:1960.


Sarvajñatvam ca yo icchetaḥ kattham sighram bhaveditiḥ/
sa imam dhāreyataḥ sūtraṁ sakuryāvāpi dhārakāmāḥ // SS 10.2; 143:1960.
Here, ‘Sarvaññatvam’ means like that of Buddha who has the pure, subtle, wonderful wisdom of considering all beings as equal.

25 maññīlalām ca layavanī kshāntī souratya viharaṃ/


27 It is translated as ‘The Benefits of Responding with Joy’ by Burton Watson.


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The sociological modelling of tantric traditions both within and outside of India often runs into difficulties through the predisposition of researchers to project their own interests or personal socio-cultural circumstances into the historical record. In certain instances—for example in the case of some feminist authors, as noted by the well-known feminist theoretician Joan Scott (Scott 2001)—there is the seeking of personal validation through reading self into the record. Others may assume that one socio-cultural level, usually the most sophisticated level, is the authentic position of tantrism—linguistic, cultural and theological evidence to the contrary. Finally, we find in almost all situations, a tendency to homogenize the materials at our disposal, erasing important distinctions. This paper will argue that such efforts fundamentally distort the complexity of the field, and that the record of tantric traditions is thematically and socially more complicated than has often been identified, a complexity that paradoxically includes some very simple (village, outcaste or tribal) levels of discourse and praxis yet also some exceedingly sophisticated ones. Modelling such complexity of aggregate behaviours challenges our standard paradigms, and such pan-Indian models as Sanskritization, great-and-little tradition, pan-Indian substrate, to name but a few, have been found to be either poorly focused—often subsuming multiple situations under a single tension—or so reified and attenuated as to be unrecognizable in the Indian and Himalayan landscapes.

This paper will propose that the discipline of biogeography be employed as a heuristic devise, not as an end, but to afford a moment in which paradigms from the empirical sciences may be suggested to contribute some sense of how complexity could be envisioned. Both benefits and liabilities attend this application, and a somewhat rudimentary case study of four Himalayan regions will be employed to illustrate and evaluate the proposal. It is not my goal to subsume all theoretical systems under the rubric of biogeography, for I believe both theoretical complexity and evidentiary complexity to be virtues rather than vices. Rather it is to suggest one of many alternative ways to envision the difficult topic of tantrism in India and the Himalayas without the problems associated with *emic* theological or ideological paradigms that have so often impeded rather than facilitated understanding.

**The Theoretical Problem**

The supposition of some current writing about tantrism is that it is fundamentally a uniform, elite endeavour, in which sophisticated intellectual systems were encoded in various forms of language, including language that is both grammatically and intellectually crude and ritually astonishing. The rationale provided in some of the traditional Sanskrit literature, and more frequently by modern apologetics, is that such language is put forward for the purposes of weaning followers from attachment to the elite values of the world, and the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakra-tantra* is but one example of such statements. Alternatively, it is claimed that tantric expressions intentionally seek to obfuscate the significance of their statements, either through a system of coded signs or charged declarations that do not mean
what they say. Consequently, modern interpreters for either Hindu or Buddhist tantric traditions have sometimes represented their respective systems as intellectual achievements, which have been misunderstood by later Indians, occasional Tibetans and many western scholars. This position is buttressed, in their opinion, by the presence of ingenious and sophisticated interpretive systems, which were developed from the eighth century forward to validate this perspective. Accordingly, the tantric systems would necessarily be located in the Sanskrit Cosmopolis recently espoused in the work of Sheldon Pollock (Pollock 1996, 1998). This model argues that the high court culture of the Sanskrit speaking elites was indistinguishable from one place to another, rendering any attempt for specificity in time and space to become irrelevant. The elite systems, according to this view, are definitive, with the articulation of unsophisticated language forms and appropriation of village rituals merely being appearances employed by the elites to further religious goals and not for any other purpose. If actual tantrikas argued differently, as some historically have, then their arguments are but the failure of the untutored emulating the elites.

There is little to recommend such a social reading of tantrism, and most who have proposed this or analogous models appear to be satisfied with theologically or phenomenologically sophisticated but socially naive interpretive systems. Moreover, I would argue that the single-frame discourse of specifically tantric Buddhism as an elite system is propelled by a combination of political, theological, philosophical and ideological factors, which should be separated from the claims of rigorous historical-critical analysis. In distinction, from the perspective of exclusively historical methodology, one must look at the texts, their languages and ritual menus in time and place rather than from the position of later hermeneuticists, who themselves must be looked at as representative of their own times and places.

There are many reasons to embrace a program that recognizes and accounts for geographical, temporal, and sociological distinctions. For one thing, the respective scriptures themselves encourage us to do so, given the religious geographies invoked in the lists of pithas or in the descriptions of pilgrimage sites (mahāmyas), the indigenous ideology of a temporal fixation of such texts (as in the Guhyasamāja-tantra), and the acknowledgment that certain elements—such as the sign-language or coded communication (chommā)—were initially practiced in rural villages (palli) or tribal environments (āṭavika). Moreover, neither the language of the scriptures nor the interpretive systems are uniform, whether we are speaking of grammatical forms, symbolic structures, vocabulary or hermeneutical strategies. Some scriptural languages certainly do not represent either elite language or symbolic interpretation in any sense, and the texts overall espouse a high degree of variation, recognized within different tantras by their appeal to different varieties of language and within the commentaries by their having to deal with the wide variety of socio-linguistic levels encoded in the texts. The references in such tantras as the Mañjuśrīmūlakāpā and the Sārdhatriśatikālottara to vernacular language identities is buttressed by the inclusion in tantric literature of some of the earliest examples of early modern Indic languages, such as Apabhramśa, Old Bengali, as well as Dravidian language based terminology.6

If we take these matters seriously—recognizing a high variation in language, in interpretive forms, in social register, and in temporal and spatial locales—then we may also seek to follow the lead of many of the scriptural texts themselves and to situate our material in time and space. Indeed, situating the material in geographical terms has the added benefit of providing the potential for a culture-zone description, in which the parameters of the tantric materials change according to the factors exhibited in their related environments.
There may be many benefits in such an attempt, even if we cannot control all variables and must retain some degree of dissatisfaction with the results. It is clear, for example, from the historical record that different areas of tantric practice had different characteristics, some of which, at the very least, have made these areas highly distinctive. Some medieval purānic and tantric texts situate themselves in places—the Nilamatta purāṇa in Kaśmir, the Yogini-tantra in Kāmākhya, the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa in both Bihar and Bengal, etc. Other texts may be situated in specific areas by virtue of their references. The Viṣṇudharmottara has been argued as from Kaśmir or environs, the Śāradātilaka-tantra from Orissa, and multiple Śākta tantras have been associated with Assam.

Consequently, if we ignore the range of variation evident in the texts, and focus exclusively on phenomenological or other thematic concerns, we will simply ignore most of the data that the tantras and related documents themselves provide. We will be unable to assess their evidence in light of current anthropology or linguistics, since everything will be viewed through the lens of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis, the vernaculars markers, temporal and regional associations notwithstanding. If we wish to pursue historical enquiry, then, metaphysical assumptions must be put aside for theologians rather than employed by social or religious historians.

**Some Salient Constituents of Buddhist Tantrism**

My field is Buddhist tantrism, and I will focus on that material as much as I may. So let us begin by observing that Buddhist tantrism, as disputed as its origins may be, is most firmly situated in the Gangetic valley in North India. The earliest Buddhist tantric system, that of the Ekākṣaroṣṇācakravartin—identified in perhaps two dozen Chinese translations—is first introduced in the Dhāraṇīsamgraha (T. 901, 654 C.E.) translated by Atīkūṭa, Kaśyapa, and TT*Saṅgāṇandamokṣa, all three of whom are described as from Bodhgaya. Furthermore, the sites overwhelmingly associated with Buddhist tantrikas are in the Gangetic valley, and the languages and caste terms identified with them are indicative of the caste or tribal structures from that area (dom, candāla, matanga, śābara, etc.). Second, it is equally clear that the attributes associated with normative Gangetic valley tantrism are not all associated with all other areas in which it has been nonetheless practiced. To ascertain this, I would argue that tantric Buddhism exhibited the following salient characteristics, although others were surely present:

1. Scriptural composition: It was a system that included remarkable depth and variation in scriptural composition, especially in regional or Prakritized Sanskrit, but also in normative Sanskrit and in Apabhraṃśa. In certain circumstances, the designation ‘scripture’ should be extended to certain texts—such as the late siddha upadeśa texts—that in some instances were considered superior to the tantras themselves. Thus, tantric composition featured many genres: tantra, kalpa, upadeśa, dohā, tilaka, samuccaya, dhāraṇī, vidhi, vidhāna, sādhana to mention but the most important of these. The respective weight and validity of tantric texts not only varied according to genre category but also according to lineage and individual proclivity. Thus, an authoritative scripture for one lineage was by no means an authoritative scripture for another. So, for a newly composed regional tantra that claims to be the word of the Buddha, we need to expect that it was accorded at least the same validity in the sponsoring group that we find that same group giving prior texts of a wider acceptance. These are, overall, the same claims to authenticity we find in Buddhist scriptural composition since the beginning of Buddhist writing.
2. Intellectual variation and innovation: Tantric Buddhism retained a facet of a larger Buddhist culture (especially Mahāyānist dhāranī diction) that included highly sophisticated components, whether philosophically constructive or interpretive, although this aspect is only intermittently evident in tantrism and is especially present in high-status exegesis. Nonetheless, this should not be discounted, and recent studies of the significant tantric contribution to the doctrines of bodhicitta highlight this aspect of the Buddhist tantrism overall (Wangchuk 2007). Because we are looking for variation, however, it is germane to note that many tantric statements are both philosophically crude and, in some measure, violate the fundamentals of Buddhist doctrine, especially notable in the doctrine of karma but also observable in other doctrinal areas, where we find tantric authorities engaging in various forms of essentialism.

3. Ritual variation and appropriation: Tantrism was part of a culture that appropriated and included less sophisticated marginalized, outcaste or tribal components and rituals, often introducing hybrid forms into the ritual vocabulary by means of language indicative of the ‘great secret of all the Buddhas.’ Many of these were based on rites associated with nāga or yakṣa cults, while others involved village witchcraft, criminal association rites and rituals of the metropolitan under-classes, or rites appropriated from other organized religious traditions, either all or in part. We see different circumstances in such inclusions as well, and the denial of the village or tribal association of many rites is a hallmark of modern exegesis. While the strategies for appropriation had been already outlined in both the Vinaya rules and Mahāyāna scriptures, under the rubric ‘skill in means’ (upāyakauśalya), these were put into greater effect in tantric literature.

4. Institutional stratification: Tantrism was part of a culture that had monasteries, but some of which were modified to include the newly emerging siddha sociological form. The siddha centres, if we follow the descriptions found in hagiographical literature surviving in Chinese and Tibetan, were most often in relative proximity to elite monastic centres, but had a mixed clientele. One example, the hermitage founded by Buddhañānapāda about 25 miles from Bodhgayā, was said to have three monks and a siddha as the designated community. Conversely, the centre of Balipāda or Rakṣapāda in Kāśmer had five siddhas from the four castes and two prostitutes in the entourage. We may expect that other regional centres of note—lower Swat valley (the teachers Vilāsavajra and Indrabhūti), Śrī-saila (Nāgabodhi), Kāṇḍra (Jālandharapāda), Dakṣina Kośala (Vairocanavajra), Ujjain (Kukuripāda), Phullahari (Nāropa), Deviśa (Kāṇha), Draksarāma (Virūpa), etc.,—represented analogous constituents.

5. Ideological polymorphism: Buddhist tantrism was part of a subculture that had strong political and religious language intertwined, a strong sense of place and a strong association of both group-based and individualistic discourse paradoxically invoked in a single tradition. These values yielded a concomitant lack of clarity and focus, so that we continually find overlapping and disparate models of divinity and religious culture, with cognitive dissonance a leitmotif of the tradition. Sometimes the models of reality are complementary, sometimes they are conflicting, but most frequently they represent a continually shifting archive of different symbolic structures to be used or applied as needed in a non-linear manner, which may be interpreted as alternatively creative or indecisive. The archive of symbols differed in time and place as well, providing a strong sense of locality to each iteration.
When we see these and other parameters mapped against a grid of cultural diversity and geographical extension, a central issue becomes representational methodology. That is, what are some ways that we can model both developmental relationship and behavioural diversity? Now, one commonplace in the discipline of the sociology of culture is to employ evolutionary models. As Boyd and Richardson have stated its advantages,

Recently, there has been a fair amount of interest in applying concepts drawn from evolutionary biology to the problem of cultural evolution. Despite the fact that cultural and genetic evolution differ in important ways, this methodological borrowing has been fruitful because genes and culture both have population-level properties. That is, individual behavior depends in part on the cultural variation in the population from which individuals acquire cultural variants. At the same time, which cultural variants are available in the population to be acquired depends on what happened to individuals with different variants in the population in the past.10

I would like to explore this as a heuristic device, even while acknowledging and affirming the differences between neo-Darwinian, neo-Lamarckian (acquired evolutionary), and standard models of socio-cultural transmission systems. Yet, in this neo-Darwinian metaphorical usage we can see that, if tantric Buddhism establishes vitality within certain cultural environments, it adapts to the requirements of the local cultural zone, and at the same time often appropriates elements from resident or indigenous cultures. The Tibetan and Japanese cases are well known, with local divinities being appropriated (klu, gnyen, kami) and local rites (gcod, mdos, etc.) being brought into the ritual syllabus with limited polemics, although we may question if the exact systems employed in those environments are actually applicable to India; this is especially questionable in the Japanese instance, where the honji-suijaku formulation of Buddhas being the sources of the gods has no direct analogue in India.11 Moreover, the polemical field and state responses were different in Tibet as well. So even though the well known neo-conservative Tibetan polemicists—D Gos lo Khug pa lhas brtse, Chags lo, Sa paņ, etc.—may have complained about the process of local appropriation, nonetheless when the Tibetan prohibition of writings actually occurred, the suppression of texts was generally limited to doctrinal authors (Ser ldog paņ chen, Jo nang authors), rather than ritual initiators (gter ston, Ma gcig lab sgron). Even before tantrism in India, hybridism was tacitly authorized in Mahāyānist scriptures, like the Tathāgatagarbha, but its statements were largely narrative and iconological, appropriating images of the gods as emissaries of the Buddhas, and thus differ both ideologically and sociologically from either the Japanese or Tibetan instances. Curiously closer to the use found in tantric systems were the ritual appropriations found in the five Vinayas in Chinese, where we have some of the earliest descriptions of Vētāla rites and a series of decisions on the use of mantras that foreshadow the ritual opportunism of the tantras (Davidson 2009).

Now if we are to employ ecological metaphors for the distribution of tantrism, then we would need to understand the limits of this model. The current proposal does not assume, as is done by the bio-illiterate, that genetics represents invariant destiny, as Wilson and Wilson (2007) have again eloquently cautioned. Let me give an example. The discipline of Socio-biology was initially met with—and indeed still meets—great scepticism by some sociologists, who have often assumed that socio-biologists were arguing some simple biological coding scheme. Socio-biologists like Edward O. Wilson were systematically

**BIOGEOGRAPHY AS A HEURISTIC THEORETICAL MODEL**
misunderstood as proposing a deterministic model of human behaviour, which could by no means account for the variation observable within Homo sapiens sapiens. The problem with such derogative estimates of socio-biology were that they were wrong in most respects, with the exception that the data base was not well explored for socio-biology's proposals when they were first made in the 1970s. Now that much data has validated the neo-Darwinian model of epigenesis, we can see that the basis of current genetic theory is the observation that environment interacts with the genetic potential of a species to produce both individual and group characteristics. Technically, this is known as the norm of reaction, that the phenotype (the expressed characteristic) is the consequence of the interaction of the genotype (the genetic potential in DNA) and the environment encountered by the individual or the group.12

In terms of group development, this becomes quite complex, because both genetic drift and natural selection may occur within an individual, within a small group, between groups and between larger populations, resulting in diversified individuals, diversified groups, and potentially new species. There are moreover, different factors in such diversification or speciation, that is, the formation and development of species, whether through divergent speciation or recombinant speciation, such as hybridism. One kind of speciation, allopatric speciation, is the process whereby a population becomes in some measure dissociated from others of its same species, either because it has colonized a new ecosystem, or because geographic or ecological separation has occurred, and such processes are the domain of biogeography (Myers and Giller 1988).

There are many patterns for this kind of development, but one is of greatest interest. This happens when a species' population colonizes a separate valley or ecological area close to the parent population in the process of adaptive radiation (Schluter 2000). That is shooting off of the greater mass of the species are radiating nodes of smaller groups. In this form, despite the requirements of the new ecological zone, the daughter population may not be entirely cut off from the parent population, in a process technically known as parapatric speciation (Gavrilets 2003).13 Under these circumstances, a series of ring sub-species is likely to occur, which still may mate with the larger population but assume new characteristics because of the new environments; such sub-species are technically known as new clines. Archer's reaffirmation (Archer 1993) of Vidal de la Blache's model of regional geographies as the source for the emergence and characteristics of social organisms yet again demonstrates the validity of biodiversity as a model of sociological differentiation, much as regional ecologies require the emergence of clines exhibiting potentials for the development of a single species.

Daughter populations

Radial adaptation model including parapatric speciation
Classic examples of adaptive radiation involving parapatric speciation are doubtless known to my readers: the domestic cow, the yak, the gaur and the wild ox may interchangeably mate, but have developed into different clines for environmental reasons. Dogs represent about four hundred recognized clines (or breeds) world wide, and display the artifice of human involvement accelerating a process already well established in nature. In some instances, speciation may be the consequence of hybridization—particularly in areas where ecological zones may border and in which different clines mate—so that a new cline emerges. Eventually, the processes of mutation, genetic drift or predation may take the species out of the gene flow of the parent species, resulting in a new species. In these instances, a new species may seek a new ecosystem to better satisfy its special needs or characteristics.

**Potential Benefits of Such a Model**

I would argue that this is one way to model the relationship between the forms of Himalayan valley Buddhist tantrism and Gangetic Valley Buddhist tantrism. In the event, I would recognize that I am not proposing that tantrism is a genetically configured system, although others may eventually argue that according to the principles of socio-biology or evolutionary psychology. My purpose is different, to employ speciation as a heuristic metaphor for socio-cultural processes, specifically the religious process of missionary colonization by charismatic tantric individuals or groups. This model is similar to that articulated by Abbot (Abbot 2005), who has argued that universities, for example, represent ‘linked ecologies,’ replicating themselves as culturally emergent systems that continue to interact and change based on both the local-specific circumstance and the disciplinary and professional requirements of centralized systems. That is, the nature of the specific iteration of the social system is contingent on both the genetic content inherited by the groups in question and their epigenetic expression within the limits and possibilities of the environment in question.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to such a heuristic model, but let us begin with the advantages. First and foremost the model highlights the very human process of adaptation, and there is no better example than tantrism in all its forms, for it has proven to be arguably the most adaptive and resilient of all religious expressions. In my estimation, its only competitors in an adaptation contest would be very specific ritual behaviours, like fire ceremonies, spirit possession or dance. But these, while they have been adapted to a wide variety of circumstances, do not bring with themselves either the complexity of perspective or cultural content as does tantrism in all its forms. Buddhist tantrism specifically communicates astrology, linguistics, medical models, social models, political models, artistic and aesthetic imperatives, small group structure, psychological content, narrative dynamics, mathematical formulae, and a host of other factors that are not communicated by any single ritual event, for this latter may be consistently reinterpreted in light of local narratives. In distinction, tantric groups or institutions incorporate enormous quantities of content, extending well beyond single icons, liturgies, or rites. Thus, tantrism’s adaptive strength is anomalous by any standard and represents an extreme version (statistical outlier) of the larger fact of religious adaptation.

Second, the model highlights diversification, so that we can understand questions of both descent and diversity of response based on local circumstances. It has been often noted, for example, that most forms of tantrism appropriate local cultic systems, so that indigenous or autochthonous rites, divinities, sacraments and behavioural restrictions become part of the
reservoir of tantric symbol systems. However, this is seldom done willy-nilly, and I have been impressed that the incorporation of various theological objects or ritual enterprises has been done with a mixture of opportunism and selectivity. One test case of this occurs outside of the Himalayas, in the interaction between institutionalized tantrism in Mongolia and native Buryat shamanism. Since the wholesale effort to evangelize the Buryats in the eighteenth century, Geluk monks have systematically suppressed the observation of shamanic rites in BuryatanIA, especially in proximity to the Altai mountains and Lake Baikal. Thus, there is a decided selectivity in the process, one that is sometimes informed by agonistic small-group relations and competition, and this factor is not generally recognized in scholarly literature on tantric Buddhism although it is quite evident in the historical record.

Another benefit of the model is that it also allows us to see whether there is such an entity as ‘pan-Indic religious substrate’ as argued by David Seyfort Ruegg (Reugg 2008), apparently defending a Buddhist theological agenda as a social or historical fact. If we extrapolate from the Buddhist cases examined here into the greater complexity of Indian tantrism overall, it would seem that the existence of such a totalizing entity is an unwarranted proposition, and I believe that this theoretical enterprise will help reaffirm the primacy of locality in Indian religion. So, just as there is no such thing as a ‘pan-Asian ungulate genetic system’ but there are the diverse species and clines of hoofed animals with individual traits, habitats and genetic content, I would argue that there is also no such thing as a ‘pan-Indian religious substrate,’ but instead identifiable groups exist within cultural zones that have their individual parameters of ethnic mixes, language environments, and institutions. Social and ideological realities may in part be shared, with religious forms present in certain strata—whether homa in grhya rites or the Prātimokṣa among Buddhist monks—but even then there may be alternative versions (homa differentiation for different traditions, or Mahāsāṃghika vs. Mūlasarvāstivāda Prātimokṣas) present in the same culture zone, sometimes precipitating polemics or agonistic responses.

FOUR TRANS-HIMALAYAN CASE STUDIES

Consequently, while it may be valuable to try to gain a sense of the major threads and variations for the whole of the Gangetic valley, perhaps another way of approaching the tantric Buddhist problem is by viewing it from the regional locale up, observing the degree of fit of the rudimentary menu of themes mentioned before within specific locales. So let us try to survey our social ecologies and see what they tell us.

1. Odīyāṇa

Buddhism was said to be present from the time of Aśoka forward, although the evidence for actual Aśokan Buddhism is meagre. Nonetheless, Odīyāṇa clearly participated in the larger phenomenon of Gāndhāran Buddhism, especially notable with the extensive monastic remains in the lower Swat valley. By the sixth century, much of monastic Buddhism was withering, whether in the aftermath of the late fifth century Ephthalite incursions as has been generally acknowledged or because of the pressure of the Turks in the Amu Darya basin, as has been argued by Kuwayama. Nonetheless, the region continued to be notable for its development of spells, dhārānīs and the local popularity of Vajrapāṇi, to become the main figure in emerging tantric Buddhism. By the late eighth century, Vīlāsavājra and Indrabhūti were the major esoteric figures in Odīyāṇa, so much so that individuals like Buddhajñānapāda travelled long distances from Mahārāṣṭra to Odīyāṇa to study with
Vilasavajra; similarly Kukuripāda relied on Indrabhūti to unravel the meaning of the Sarvabuddhasamayoga-tantra. Indeed, Vilasavajra’s surviving archive, especially his commentary to the Mañjuśrīnāmasamgiti, the Nāmanantarāthāvalokini, and his other works in Tibetan translation, provide one of the most important snapshots of Buddhist tantric materials known at the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth century. Thus, Odīyāna’s reputation was based on the combination of Gandhāran heritage, on the rumours of strange peoples on the frontier, on the learning of selected inhabitants and their contributions to the tantras, as well as the continued influence that these masters had on others. The last notable Odīyāna master with which I am familiar was very much in the model of Vilasavajra and lived at the turn of the twelfth century; Prajñāgupta, also known as the Red Ācārya in Tibet, was reputedly from Odīyāna and was accused of fabricating the Mahāmudrātilaka-tantra by Lha bla ma Pho brang zhi ba ’od in his open letter, written around 1090 CE. Thus, for approximately three hundred years, Odīyāna represented a source of tantric lore, probable tantric composition, learning associated with a spectrum of materials, and the intersection of both siddha residences and monastic institutions.

2. Kaśmir

Kaśmir has a lengthy Buddhist history, reputedly from the time of the missionary activity of Madhyāntika forward, and Przyluski (1914) has already published the Mulasarvāstivāda mythology of the founding of Buddhist activity in Kaśmir. The valley was so important for Buddhists that an seemingly apocryphal ‘fourth council’ of Kaṇiṣṭha was set there, evidently recorded only in the late telling found in the materials worked on by Xuan-zang. What was not apocryphal was the vitality of the Kaśmirī intellectual life of the period, with the valley being the setting for the most important section of the Vaibhāṣika tradition of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma. Unlike Gandhāra, Kaśmir was not strongly affected by the Ephthalites or the Turks, and continued to play an important intellectual position through the twelfth century (Goetz 1969). That being said, one of the great curiosities of Kaśmir is that it was not featured in tantric geography until rather late. It is not listed in our earliest list of pīthas, although it is mentioned in the Mahāmudrātilaka and in the late study by Śākyaraksita, but I have noticed no mention of the sites now well known, like the Sāradā-pīṭha. Nonetheless, Kaśmir is arguably the source for the Bhūtaḍāmara-tantra and at least parts of the Nilāmbhara-vajrapāni cycle. The argument is that the former employs the Kaśmirī political office of the local feudal lords, the Dāmarā, as a metaphor for the position of Vajrapāṇi as feudal lord in the centre of gods and spirits. Likewise, the Nilāmbhara-vajrapāni system, found in several tantras and ritual texts, appears associated with the nilāmbaras, a Kaśmirī group specified in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist writing, and apparently having roots in practices observable in the very early Kaśmirī Nilamatapurāṇa. Both the Bhūtaḍāmara-tantra and the Nilāmbhara-vajrapāni cycle are from the eighth century, being mentioned already in Vilasavajra’s Nāmanantarāthāvalokini.

3. Kāṅgra

Kāṅgra was the location of the Jālandhara-pīṭha, often classed as one of the four mahāpīṭhas. Jālandhara-pīṭha was not in the current city of Jālandhara but at or close to the site now occupied by the Vajreśvarī temple, which has been destroyed many times, from the assault of Mahmud of Ghazni to the April 4, 1905 earthquake that levelled most of the town. Despite its proximity to the larger Gangetic plain, the entire area of Himāchal and Uttarakāhal was much more modest in terms of learning and textual activity. While Buddhists produced siddhas
identified with the area, like the notable Jālandhara-pāda, it is not clear that there was ever much Buddhist activity in either Kāṅgra per se or in the neighboring sites of Kullū, Jvālāmukhi, or Maṇḍī. Thus, the areas of Jālandhara-pīṭha, Kulanta-upakṣeta (and I would associate Himādri-upakṣeta there as well, with the current site of Jāgeśvar outside of Almora or Brahmor close to Chamba being their possible locales) and are strongly contrasted with Odīyāna and Kaśmīr. We find exhibited in Kāṅgra little sense of philosophical expertise or non-ritual learning; we see little evidence of scriptural composition or anything remotely approaching it, excepting only a few small sādhanas. The sites are the locus of siddhas, probably much as they are often the residence of some less-than-learned Nāthpānthis today.

4. Nepalmaṇḍala

Given its importance as the repository of Sanskrit materials in the modern period, and one of the few places where Sanskrit Buddhist ritual is still employed, it is curious that Nepāl does not figure in early tantric literature. Nor do I know of any important Nepalese figure in tantric systems prior to the late ninth century, despite its close proximity to the Gangetic valley home of tantrism. After that, we find individuals like Vajrapāṇi, Ḍvādu Karpo, *Maṇḍujodipa, Asu, the Phamthingpa brothers in Pharping, to mention but the more important. Most of these figures appear domesticated, with family or caste associations, and Locke’s observation that Nepalese Buddhism may have always emphasized the laity seems to me germane. This period coincides with the rise of the Bhāro office as an appointment to political power often wedded with Buddhist activity, so one may conclude that the visibility of Nepalese tantrikas was facilitated by the visibility of Bhāro Buddhist politics and patronage in Pāthān. The only Buddhist pīṭha list I have seen include Nepāl is, like Kaśmīr, in the late Mahāmudrātilaka, a fact that reinforces the later tantric importance of Nepāl, after most of the pīṭha lists had been composed. Even when they became important, it would appear that Nepalese were most concerned with ritual rather than with other Buddhist practices or with scriptural development per se. Rwa lo tsā ba’s master, *Kuṇḍa Bhāro, for example, is represented in Rwa lo’s hagiography as being disinterested in philosophical texts when Rwa lo asked him about such topics; Kuṇḍa Bhāro was a ritualist and apparently drew the line there. As a corollary to the Nepalese emphasis on ritual, I know of no intellectual school that took root in Nepal, in the manner of the Gandhāra or Kaśmīr Vaibhāṣikas. Nor have I seen any evidence of a tantra that can be said to have been composed by Nepalese in Nepāl, although this may be more muted, given the possibility that Indians on their way to Tibet may have composed some of the short tantras in Nepal, as Rong zom chos kyi bzang po accused them of having done. When we find materials most representative of Nepāl, they are in the mode of the Kriyāsamgraha or Kriyāsamuccaya—later ritual manuals that synthesize and refine the systems. Bari Lo tsā ba was known to have relied on Nepalese expertise to put together his Hundred Sādhanas collection in the late eleventh century. I would even suggest that the survival of Nepalese Sanskrit practice is strongly associated with domesticated ritual in a manner not observed elsewhere in India, but certainly on a par with practices seen among Buddhist brāhmans in Indonesia, as reported by Hooykaas (Hooykaas 1973).

Evaluation

So what does this mean and how is this evidence related to the understanding of tantric Buddhism? Each of these areas seems to have developed public personas that demonstrated a
specific intellectual and ritual niche. In sum, in Odiyâna we find very early tantric activity, pride of place in the piṭha lists, sustained tantric scholarship and scriptural composition through the eleventh century activity of Prajnâgupta. In distinction, Kâsmîr appears to have had limited scriptural composition, the strongest intellectual history of the four, less close association with siddha activity as measured by its very late piṭha status (and concomitantly greater emphasis on monastic orthodoxy), a tendency to evaluate deities in terms of politics, and a tendency to synthetic hermeneutics employing the vocabulary of pramâṇavâdâ, the late great strength of the valley. Kângra demonstrates little intellectual or monastic activity in the period, no evidence of scriptural composition, strong association with the siddha activities as the piṭha menus list at least two and arguably three tantric zones in the immediate area, with local gods like Jvâlâmukhi eventually gaining a measure of status. For its part, Nepâl has historically demonstrated modest intellectual activity almost exclusively situated in ritual exegesis, scant evidence of philosophical activity or tantric composition, and was primarily focused on late siddha association and an emphasis on domestic ritual. I have seen no evidence of eighth century esoteric masters involved with Nepâl, and the greatest evidence associated with Nepalese masters appears to come from the late ninth century forward.

If we resume our species metaphor, it is understandable that the genetic codes of any one species contain more possible behaviours and differentiations than are exhibited by any one community or even by all members of the species at any one time. The environmental demands sometimes bring these out; at other times, the genetic drift, natural selection or other means will emphasize one or another behaviour in a particular locality, so that population movement to another environment may be considered the solution to the problem that genetic change has caused. Group selection, both between groups and within groups, seems to have played a part as well. Were we to apply the analogy, we can see that the procedure to become an important member of the Nepalese tantric community—an alpha dominant position—is seemingly different in many particulars from that to become an important member of the Odiyâna tantric community, and the differences grow over time.

Thus we may envision that the menu of rituals, statements, linguistic expressions, philosophical concerns, and other items are more diverse than can be employed in any one locale, and the range of variation is precipitated by the cultural environment. Linguistically, for example, we find North Indians associated with vernacular expressions, but none of our locales use these, or at least not directly—we have little formal, ritual use of Swat language, Kâsmîr, Pahari or Nepal-bhâṣâ (Newar) during the medieval period in the way that we find with Apabhraṃśa in India. To indicate that some, at least of these employ North Indian Apabhraṃśa or Old Bengali as a ritual language is still to indicate that their own vernacular languages do not become ritually sanctified in mantras and other performative expressions. The employment or eclipse of esoteric monasticism appears to be specific to locale as well: monasticism is eclipsed in Kângra and Nepâl, but not in Kâsmîr or Odiyâna until Buddhism is extinct in these locales. This is similar to other sites: we find Phullahari with no monasticism but it is present in Vikramaśila and Somapura.

Perhaps the principle advantage of this heuristic device is to consider tantric Buddhism as complex systems of possibilities in dialogue with the environment, analogous to species’ behaviour. Like such behaviour, changes happen with regularity and there is not one essential structure but there are multiple defining structures, of greater or lesser importance, operating in coordination. When we see the elimination of too many defining structures, we must begin to question whether we are seeing the evolution of a new cultural form or simply the
emergence of latent traces. Like all such models, the prototypical centre is better represented than the peripheries, so that mutations, drifts, hybrid forms and other aberrations are sometimes not immediately recognizable as definitively new types, and in select instances only the winnowing out of time affords us the intellectual luxury of ascertaining the degree of fit of the new systems with the older forms after their emergence is a fait accompli.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE MODEL AND A CONCLUSION

Now to the disadvantages of such a heuristic model, since no model is without disadvantages, and I spend much time with my students examining the degrees of fit between models and data. In this instance, and as socio-biologists have themselves observed in their stronger reading of genes, not as models but as realities, the problem with reading culture through genetic systems is the overwhelming force of culture. Whether we are speaking of mate selection, clothing, the predisposition of humans to engage in dangerous even deadly activity for no observable genetic purpose, most facets of human culture exceed the parameters of genetics, were we to take those as the baseline for estimation.

In this instance as well, we find patterns of activity exceeding observed biological patterns of complexity in other species, and I would like to mention the two most glaring. There is no specific speciation analogue to scriptural composition, for textual production exceeds any other form of ritualized behaviour. So, while one may argue that ritualization is observable in several species, none but us seem to write down their thoughts on the matter and then argue about it, with commentaries and sub-commentaries, until the original point appears lost in the field of hermeneutics and polemics. Second, we seldom find elaborate and diverse forms of stratification within clines in the manner that we do in tantric Buddhism, particularly notable in the relationship between charismatic master and community, between siddhas and monastics, between the genders within a single community, within genders in a single community and between communities. Thus, the biogeographical model fails in some of the specific parameters of religious complexity, particularly those having to do with the elaborate forms and icons of communication evident in tantric subcultures.

This failure of the model to account for all levels of complexity is not surprising, but in the end it curiously reinforces my initial point. If the theological or phenomenological paradigms proposed to date cannot even account for the rather simple series of variables seen in our model discussing the interaction between environment and tantric activity—which itself cannot account for the greater complexity of the actual evidence before us—then more sophistication in model construction, not less, would seem a desideratum. Thus, any socio-cultural analysis that claims to depict tantrism accurately must, at the very minimum, represent both the range and variation of a great number of specific items that have been left off almost all lists to date—language, place, time, group placement and identity, received records, actual behaviour, etc.—and be able to account for differentiations between such items in geographical and temporal distribution. Himalayan tantric locales represent excellent cases for the invalidation or falsification of theoretical models said to be applicable to pan-Asian tantrism, for the data obtainable function in tight clusters of characteristics, and without the ability to differentiate between them, scholarly hypothesis and analysis will not succeed in its task.
NOTES

1 I wish to thank Dr Alex McKay, Dr Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, and Mr Tashi Densapa for their kind invitation to participate in the Namgyal Institute Jubilee.

2 This problem has been well described in Gupta, et al, 1979, pp. 30-32.

3 This position has been discussed and affirmed by Newman 1988. I have called it into question in Davidson 2002, pp. 270-71, but there is much more to be said on this issue.

4 This is the principal supposition of Wedemeyer 2007.


6 Sārdhotrasatīkālottara 1.6cd: āgopālānganā bālā mlecchāḥ prākrtabhāśīnaḥ. Much more extensively, Maṇḍūṣrīmūlakāpa chapters 20 and 22-23 are all dedicated to the discussion of language and the articulation of alternative language questions. I thank Fred Smith for attracting my attention to some of these passages. He and I are currently working on a presentation of some of this material.

7 Biernacki’s (Biernacki 2007) recent examination of tantras associated with Kānakhyā is a case study in the changing values associated with different times in a single place.

8 Davidson 1990 on such standards and strategies of textual composition.

9 Davidson 2002, pp. 242-5, 303-322.

10 Boyd and Richardson, p. 105; for a historical view, see Nye 1985; for a discussion of typologies, Nielsen 2004.

11 Matsunaga 1969, pp. 211-84; Teeuwen and Rambelli 2002, pp. 1-53. Ruegg 2008, pp. x-xi, 39, 47, 52, 135-6, 161-6, appears to believe that these directly correspond to the Indian Buddhist ideology of laukika/lokottara or nirmāna. Yet the Indian model does not affirm that the gods are—in their entirety—manifestations of the Buddha. A closer, but still quite distinct, example would be the Bhāvavatārā of Viṣṇu, where the Buddha is nothing other than Viṣṇu, and even this does not implicate the ancestral nature of the kami cult in Japan, as well as its political valence, all quite different from anything in India.

12 See Machalek and Martin, 2004, p. 460, for a further explanation.

13 A good introduction to the conception problems of speciation is Hey 2001, and for our purposes, pp. 96-101 is germane; Hey also points out, pp. 82-6, the replicative power of fractals might be applied to speciation issues. Gavrilets 2003 tests the parameters of received models in an illuminating discussion of the power of selection over drift.

14 Hessig 1980.

15 Ruegg 2008 is particularly troubling for its similarity with hindutva of the Saṅghaparivār. With reference to biological models, Ruegg frequently invokes the idea of ‘symbiosis’ (title, pp. x, xi. 1, 2, 5, 15, etc.). However, it is unfortunate that he does not explore this empirical, ecologically defined system, as normative models of symbiosis undercut most aspects of his position, which appears based on an imprecise, popular notion of symbiosis; see Law and Dieckmann 1998, Frank 1997, Clay 2001. I have published a review of Ruegg 2008 in the Journal of the American Oriental Society. 129 (1), 2009, pp. 115-117.

16 On this principle, see the illuminating discussion of phylogeny in Hey 2001, pp. 133-44.

17 Callieri 2003, p. 74; Salomon 1999, p. 5.

18 Kuwayama 2006, pp. 125-6, although it is fair to say the question remains open.

19 The best discussion on Vajrapāṇi’s origin remains Lamotte 1966, now out of date in many ways; I would argue that the art historical evidence suggests Vajrapāṇi’s origin in Gandhāra rather than in Magadha, although this is debatable.


22 Mahāmudrātilaka fol. 73b4, Pīṭhādinirnaya fol. 133a4. Tokunaga 1994 provides a convenient list of the holy sites in the valley according to the Nilāmata-purāṇa.

23 Eight scriptural works, seven tantras and a dhārani (To. 454, 456, 457, 461, 498, 499, 501, 768) focus on Nilāmbara-Vajrapāṇi.

24 Stein vol. II pp. 304-08, appendix G; we do find dāmara occurring as the designation of a spirit type outside of Kaśmir, but not as an organizing metaphor.

25 Nāmamandrārthāvalokini, fol. 47a3; this ms. reads śrīvajraprākālantre, but To. 2533, fol. 67a3 reads dpal rdo rje sa ‘og gi rgyud las so, suggesting vajrapātāla, identifying To. 499.
Xuan-zang's description of Jālandhara (Beal, pp. 175-7, fifty vihāras with 2000 monks) appears hearsay, as there is no archaeological substantiation or other verification; see Postel, et al, 1985, pp. 48, 73, 85, 87, 89, 103-4. The great claims to antiquity for Rawalsar lake are modern, so far as I have been able to discover.

Locke 1985, p. 484a; on Nepal in general, see Slusser 1982.

Mahāmudrātīlaka fol. 73b4. Piṭhādinirnaya fol. 133a5.


Davidson 2005, p. 298.

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CAKRASAMVARA AND SYNCRETISM IN THE NORTHWESTERN HIMALAYA

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The Cakrasamvara Tantra Cycles are one of the most popular and important Tantrik traditions of Tibetan Buddhism practiced not only in Tibet, but also in Nepal and the Himalayan regions till today. Categorized within the Mahāyoga Tantra or ‘Highest Yoga Tantra’ (Anuttarayogatantra) classes as ‘Mother Tantras’ (ma rgyud) or Yogini Tantras due to their emphasis of generating the Bliss Void (bde stong) by internal and psychosexual yogic meditations the Cycle of Cakrasamvara was very popular in North India during the late tenth until the thirteenth century. At that time it was also introduced in Tibet during the ‘later’ spread of Buddhism (phyi dar), where it became an integral part of the three ‘New Tantra’ (gsar ma) schools, namely the bKa’ brgyud, Sa skya and dGe lugs. Hundreds of texts associated with Cakrasamvara (‘Khor lo bDe mchog) were translated at that time.

As for the origin of the Cakrasamvara Tantra it is said that the Buddha at the request of Vajrapāṇi and Vajravārāhī originally taught those instructions in three root and five explanatory Tantras. There are divided into three groups. The original Tantras (rtsa gyud) in three versions: extended (300,000 verses), middle (Khasoma Tantra in 100,000 verses) and short (Laghu Samvara in 51 chapters). Furthermore we find explaining and parallel Tantras. Two root texts of Cakrasamvara the Tantrarāja-srī Laghu Samvara (T. 368) and the Laghusamvara Tantrarāja were translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan at least twice by Rinchen Zangpo and Padmākaravarmā during Rinchen Zangpo’s studies in India from 975-988, and through the Tibetan medium they were also translated into Mongolian.

The earliest form of the Tantra had emerged by the late eighth century, and eventually three main liturgies coalesced. The one accredited to Luipa with accurate and complex descriptions of deities in the Mandala was handed down via Rinchen Zangpo to the bKa’ dam pa who developed the ritual (dbang) system of which there are 108 different (dbang). They rely on the 62 Deities Mandala, with the four faced and 12 armed Cakrasamvara in the centre, later taken over by Tsongkhapa and the dGe lugs pa order and the Sa skya pa by Kun dga’ bzang po (fifteenth century). Another Mandala of Luipa has 102 deities. Further there are the liturgies of Kāṇhapa or Kṛṣṇacārya and of Ghantapa, the latter a system, which has two instructions: the outer Mandala of Five Deities with a three faced and two-armed Cakrasamvara practiced by the bKa’ rgyud pa, and the inner Mandala of 62 deities. Other methods by Maitrīpa, Indrabhuti, Kambala and Nagārjuna are not so widely diffused. The bKa’ rgyud pa in the tradition of Marpa also practice the Five Deity Mandala as expounded by Nagpopa.

All of them developed a sacred geography through the Mandala and its myth of origin maintaining that the primordial Buddha Vajradhāra emanated as the wrathful Heruka, to control Maheśvāra, a form of Śiva, and his twenty four Bhairavas and their consorts. Eventually Maheśvāra was defeated and bDe mchog He ru ka took his place on top of Mount Sumeru, with the twenty-four Bhairavas controlling the twenty-four pilgrimage sites in India. The Mandala features around Cakrasamvara in the centre three concentric rings of Bhairavas and Bhairavīs representing the Wheels of Body, Speech and Mind.
It is well known that Samvara Tantra and in general the Yoginī Tantras drew inspiration from both Hindu and Buddhist sources, crossing sectarian boundaries. With the emergence of the Siddha movement in medieval India a new spirituality for ‘accomplishment’ (siddha) developed far from the centralized monastic institutions and trading centres at that time on the margins of society, encountering and infiltrating with the customs and practices of tribal people and out caste groups.9

There was considerable overlap between Vajrayāna Siddhas and Śāiva ascetics of the Kāpālikas, Kālāmukha and similar traditions,10 including textual borrowing by Buddhists from Śāiva sources and probably sharing of ritual tradition. Many Siddhas and Kāpālika ascetics made a living, at least in the earlier period, as travelling ritual performers, but over the time there was a growth of permanent centres and of formal patron-client relations between Tantrik practitioners and the upper social strata.11

Alexis Sanderson has argued that the Buddhist Yoginī Tantras are intertextually dependent on the Śāiva-Kāpālika.12 And David Gray13 concludes that the Buddhist Yoginī Tantras, like the Hindu Tantrik traditions to which they were closely related, appear to have originated in a distinctive subculture which he calls ‘the cult of the charnel ground’, consisting of Yogis and Yoganīṣ with a transgressive lifestyle. The Śāiva Kāpālikas constituted the best known group in this subculture, as attested by numerous references to them in Sanskrit literature.14 The Buddhists certainly share with them the habit of speaking sandhā or ‘twilight’ language and expressing themselves in songs (cāryās) and also in their ritual paraphernalia such as bone ornaments and skulls.15

Certainly Luipa, also called Matsyendranath or Minanath—as most Māhasiddhas—practiced Tantra in symbiosis with Sahajayāna, without drifting into the distinction of ‘Buddhist’ and ‘Hindu’ traditions as the essence of Tantra does not focus on perceptual analysis but on the physical body and its energy. Luipa’s spiritual son was Göranath. From him the Nathasiddhas took up Tantrik practice.

There is one common link to these spiritual layers, which are the 24 sacred sites or pithas. Lists of interconnected pithas are a general feature in Indian religion.16 Especially in the Śāiva and Saṅkta cults, lists combining all pilgrimage places belonging to a certain deity play an important role. There is f. i. the list of the twelve jyotirlingas of Śiva and other lists of pithas of goddess worship. The 24 pithas of Cakrasamvara have also connection with geographical places and with the limbs of the body of the meditator.17 A similar list we find in the Bonpo tradition in connection with the Ma rgyud of the deity gSang mchog rGyal po situated as geographical sites in the sacred landscape of Tibet.18

The three-fold Mandala of Cakrasamvara with the 24 pithas lists several places situated in the Northwestern Himalaya, such as Himalaya, Jalandhara, Nagara and Kuluta. Herrmann-Pfandt19 has rightly pointed out that not a single place or region in the list of the 24 Cakrasamvara pithas according to the list compiled by Buton is purely or mainly known for its Buddhist affiliation, following Alexis Sanderson who argued that this list might have been copied from the Kashmir Śaivaite text Śrī Tantrasadhbhāva.20

Herrmann-Pfandt in her controversial article concludes in respect to ‘religious politics’ that by integrating unmistakably Śaivaite and śaṅkta pilgrimage places into the Cakrasamvara Mandala and into the centre of a major iconographical system of Buddhism, Buddhism establishes its claim on these places, inhabiting as they are with Buddhist deities, the Hindu pithas are already conquered and buddhicized. She interprets the Śaivist and śaṅkti traditions
as a threat to Buddhism, also elaborating on the iconography of Cakrasamvara, trampling on Kaliratri and Isvara.

This question of syncretism or symbiosis, or assimilation of Buddhism with Brahmanism/Hinduism and with ‘local cults’ in Tibet and the Himalaya region was widely discussed by Ruegg.\(^{21}\) He argues that when studying the relations between Buddhism and the civilizations of India and Tibet, one has to consider the concept of substration or universalism. The idea of a partly common religious and cultural substratum, background or heritage helps to accounting for common features when studying Buddhism in the context of the religions of India.

The Northwestern Himalaya and generally West Tibet is a whirlpool of spiritual layers going back far into prehistoric time, where Śivaite traditions, Bon and Svastika Bon as well as Buddhist Tantras were and are practiced in symbiosis. In particular one has to pay attention to the fact that according to local experts the Śaivaite and Natha traditions or their traces are preserved in Simla, Kulu, Lahaul and Kashmir, but they are not found in Kinnaur and Spiti, as there the people believed to have belonged to Zhang zhung, which is related to Bon.\(^{22}\)

Due to Rinchen Zangpo the Cult of Cakrasamvara gained special importance in the Northwestern Himalaya, a tradition that is alive till today, especially in Lahaul and Kulu. The special significance of Cakrasamvara for the region was stated by H.H. Dalai Lama at the beginning of the initiation held at Kinnaur in July 2007, saying that there are many sacred sites of Cakrasamvara (bde mchog) in the region and that Rinchen Zangpo himself was a great practitioner of bDe mchog. Also in Ladakh Śivaite traces are found. And one has also to take into consideration that Naropa, probably in the company of his Tibetan disciple Marpa, both lineage holders of Cakrasamvara stayed in Lhadak, in Lama Yuru as well as in Zanskar.

Although the 24 pithas of Cakrasamvara—as mentioned above—spreads over the whole Indian subcontinent and even beyond, its special significance in the NorthWestern Himalayan and Transhimalayan regions is further substantiated by the three sacred Kailasas in these areas, venerated since ancient times as the abode of Cakrasamvara and his consort Vajravārāhi as well as Śiva and Parvati.

Near Kalpa town in the Sutlej river valley there is Kinnaur Kailash (6050 m) which is sacred to Buddhist, Hindus and Bonpos alike, there is Chota Kailash in Gangotri and Manasasarovar. Kailāsa in mngag 'ri, West Tibet, as main pilgrimage centres for Cakrasamvara.\(^{23}\) At Tsaparang, on top of the rock cave castle now in ruins, there are still to be seen the remains of a three-dimensional Cakrasamvara Mandala in wood and stucco.

As Buffetrille has mentioned,\(^{24}\) Vajrayana is represented mainly with the cult of Cakrasamvara and its numerous pilgrimage sites, situated on strategically important power places and on mountain passes, which show signs of buddhification of earlier Śivaite or Bonpo sites. At the same time originally Buddhist pilgrimage sites have turned into Hindu Pitha. Sometimes there is a confrontation between two ideologies, sometimes a peaceful cohabitation, sometimes the transformation of one by the other.

Certainly one should not overlook the fact that the North-Western Himalaya and generally West Tibet is a whirlpool of spiritual layers going back far into prehistoric times, where Śivaite traditions, Bon and Svastika Bon as well as Buddhist Tantra were and are practiced in symbiosis or in spiritual layers.

In any case the Tantrik system is a system of internalization, where the outer Mandala is but a reflection of the inner Mandala. The mundane or laukika is transcended by the transmundane (lokattāra), ritually, geographically, iconologically. It is always an
internalized vertical stratification and internalized centrality in the pure vision. While the mass believes in the objectivity of the multitudeness of Devatas, the initiate is aware that they exist only in the mind and by means of the mind that gives them life.

Tantra is a method by which the Sādhaka is practicing to realize that he is one with all at the base of Śunyatā or Pāramama Pratyakṣa (experience).

There the question of syncretism or symbiosis is only relevant on the mundane and relative plane. It may be studied on the existing text sources and in field surveys, but it hits the target only by inner practice.

NOTES


3. On premodern and modern translations into Uighur and Chinese, see Gray 2007: 3ff.


17. Detailed graphics of the 24 Sacred Places of Cakrasamvara in regard to Mind, Speech and Body, was kindly provided by the courtesy of Adelheid Herman-Pfandt. She discussed the topic in, ‘Iconography and Buddhist Religious Politics in Medieval Bengal’, *International Journal of Bengal Art, Proceedings of the 5th International Conference of the Association of Bengal Art*, Dakka, 2009.


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IT ALL HAPPENED IN MYI YUL SKYI MTHING: A CRUCIAL NEXUS OF NARRATIVES POINTING AT THE PROTO-HEARTLAND OF BON?

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INTRODUCTION

This is a survey of the earliest visualisations of possible ‘locations’ of origin, both geographical and cultural, of a small minority religion in Tibet, called Bon. At the turn of the first millennium AD, the time when the major Buddhist sectarian outlines were first drawn in Tibet, some groups begged to differ and rallied around an alternative identity, Bon. While doing so, they left curious and not rarely inconsistent traces of their budding identity discourses, in various documents. The following is a brief inventory, based on systematic investigation of the first self-conscious references to Bon that have survived in Tibetan literature.

In a lecture at the Oriental Institute in Oxford, March 2008, I discussed some preliminary ideas on the apparent and intriguing centrality of sMra, rMa & sMa names and a sKyi (mthing) realm in the earliest extant narratives that appear relevant to a gShen rab(s) (kyi) myi bo figure (notably in Tibetan-language Dunhuang sources). My thesis is that the earliest gShen rab(s) and 'Dur gshen rma da (etc.) stories are from a narrative environment where almost mythic-sounding sMra (myi), rMa & sMa folks and a ditto realm called (Myi yul) sKyi mthing also appear in a narrative nexus. That remarkable coincidence is confirmed by later Bon sources, in most interesting ways. Myi yul sKyi mthing may in fact be the closest we may ever hope to get to visualisations of an early heartland of ‘Bon’—if we, surely anachronistically, would project Bon back to a period before the tenth century AD.

Here, I shall review the evidence for a nexus of narratives in (Myi yul) sKyi mthing and, based on earlier work by my colleagues Karmay and Ramble, also briefly discuss how that may relate to present-day Mi yul skyi(d) mthing, located near Kong po Bon ri. A preamble on emerging Bon in Tibet, in the first few pages, may be necessary for appreciating that discussion. Most of this introductory material is discussed at greater length in other publications.

Tropes of far western origins: 'Ol mo lung ring, 'Ta zig', and Zhang zhung. As is well known, bon po-s, adherents of Bon, project their origins into far western Tibetan regions called Zhang zhung and ultimately beyond that, even further west, into 'Ol mo lung ring, Ta zig (cf. Tajikistan and ancient Persia?). Due to insufficient data it is difficult to sift fact from fiction. In any case, according to Buddhist, Bon and probably also Chinese sources, Zhang zhung was a powerful kingdom, somewhere in larger western Tibet. In some accounts it even included parts of present-day India and Nepal. Zhang zhung presumably had its own king or even lineages of kings, Zhang zhung languages and Bon religion, and it is believed to have existed relatively independently from the ‘Central Tibetan’ Yar lung dynasty, until the seventh to eighth centuries AD.

Elsewhere, I have argued that tropes of far-western origins of Bon, in regions such as Zhang zhung and ‘Ta zig’, quite surprisingly, become thematic relatively late in Bon identity discourse. In fact, the earliest self-consciously Bon narratives (e.g. in the mDo 'dus and the
quite interestingly—by and large ignore ‘Ta zig’ and Zhang zhung, which, later, became so intricately involved with Bon identity. At the same time, I have had to conclude that the earliest traceable narrative elements for a founder and a heartland of Bon, which later identity discourse engages in its narratives, curiously, all seem to imply locations more centrally in Tibet, at least for the origins of the narratives that the elements hail from, if not for their referents. With a bit of luck, we may be able to trace the earliest occurrences of old names back to their original contexts, and there they may imply early topographical realities. But we should always keep in mind that the relevance of those early identifications for the later Bon contexts, into which they are recycled, may be limited. In any case, these antecedents should not detain us here.

Bon sources. Bon written sources are relatively late to appear on the Tibetan scene: in the eleventh or tenth century AD, at the very earliest. That late date probably reflects the late rise of ‘organised Bon’. There are sources relevant to Bon that are at least partly earlier. These are texts that were serendipitously discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century (i.e., 1907) and collected by Sir Aurel Stein, Paul Pelliot, and others, somewhat off-centre to Tibet, in the so-called ‘Library’ Cave #17, in Dunhuang, Eastern Turkestan: the western end of present-day Gansu province. Some of its Tibetan-language sources evidently are not Buddhist and resonate with later ‘organised Bon’: continuities in names, narratives and ritual elements are apparent, but the differences perhaps even more so. Note that these documents do not contain ‘self-references’ to Bon, as a self-conscious entity, at least not in the sense that the name Bon has now.

Dunhuang sources have an upper limit in the early eleventh century, which puts them not too far apart from early Bon sources, such as the Klu ’bum, or, perhaps even the mDo ’dus. Informed opinion about the antiquity of Dunhuang Tibetan documents varies, but if convincing additional palaeographical or historical evidence does not emerge, it would be wise to remain prudent and assume that most Tibetan-language Dunhuang documents were composed within one or perhaps two centuries of the sealing of the cave (early eleventh century?). There is a small problem: these sources are preserved somewhat off-centre, in north-eastern Buddhist Dunhuang, as opposed to a presumed western heartland of Bon. Some of the narratives preserved in Dunhuang therefore partly may find their origins in that area (cf. Thomas 1957).

These literary relics of Dunhuang-period narratives provide a foggy but unique and historically reliable eye lens into presumed Bon antecedents. Here we will attempt a structural analysis of narrremes and narrative elements, based on the observation that the origins of many of these stories appear opaque and that they may have matured in the cauldron of narration for quite some time (centuries?). The image that appears through that foggy lens is nonetheless revealing and moreover receives confirmation from the earliest (i.e., starting the early period of the second diffusion or phyi dar) self-consciously Bon sources, which were hitherto ignored. The earliest Bon sources do not agree with later, run-of-the-mill Bon narratives and their grand come-from-the-west story, which invokes Zhang zhung, ‘Ol mo lung ring, and Ta zig. As said, tropes of far western origins in fact are conspicuously absent in early phyi dar Bon sources.

We will examine here the earliest evidence for the ‘location’ of origin of Bon, or at least for the origins of the narratives involved, in non-Buddhist ritualistic narratives of the Dunhuang period. Analyses of historical narratives I present elsewhere. Analysis of ritualistic narratives is significantly more involved than that of historical sources. It requires connecting clusters of narrative elements that appear loosely assembled in Dunhuang sources
to important names and locations that are familiar from later, self-consciously Bon sources. Important evidence for the presence or 'survival' of similar narratives in other quarters of Tibet does occasionally surface; such as in some of the texts recovered from dGa’ thang 'bum pa in southern Tibet.5

Two interlinked strands of narremes, on rMa folks & skyi realms. In this article, I will mainly focus on the syllable skyi, the second of two prominent clusters of early names rma and skyi. Both clusters show clear narrative association with bon and gshen-type ritual specialists and their areas of origin. The rMa cluster I discuss elsewhere.6 By simply tracing these two syllables and their narrative environments in ritualistic Dunhuang narratives, perhaps for the first time in Bon studies, we are able ‘to put a foot down’ in a period before the turn of the first millennium AD! The patterns that emerge upon analysis of these two clusters of narrative elements, rma and skyi, are truly ‘amazing’.

Yet, when we sort out the maze, they confirm to a surprising degree so-called ambiguities regarding the heartland of Bon that are also apparent from the earliest self-consciously Bon sources, such as the mDo ‘dus.7 rMa names seem to point to Central (and Eastern!) Tibetan origins of Dunhuang narratives on superior gshen and bon ritual specialists. Most likely the profusion of rma, sma and smra names in Dunhuang narratives finds its earliest origins in the nearby rMa river or valley area (to wit, rMa chu and rMa rong). Based on IOL734 and a few other sources, one may argue that rma, smra & smra at some point were considered synonymous with myi, “man”.

The epitome of these ritual specialists are those two most famous, Dunhuang period, legendary gshen: Pha Dur gshen rma da (na) and Pha gShen rab(s) (kyi) myi bo. These two famous gshen from Dunhuang-period documents probably are related narrative entities.9 Elsewhere, I show that rMa narremes reveal the origins of those two gshen types, and by extension also of the later hagiography of the founder of Bon.10

In other publication again, I will show that the rMa name was there to stay in Bon.11 It seems to continue into the rMa ston family lineage of Bon teachers and treasure discoverers or gter ston, who preserved and developed the Gling grags historical narratives, which are among the earliest and most influential surviving, comprehensive Bon historical identity narratives.12 A rMa name, rMa ston srid ’dzin, also appears associated with another prop of Bon identity, the Srid pa’i mdzod phug, the authoritative incorporation of Buddhist Abhidharma into Bon. The rMa family is also closely connected to the mainly gter ma origins of Bon literature. Thus the rMa ston lineage is close to the origins of Bon, specifically as a cluster of traditions in active dialogue with Buddhism, at the beginning of the second millennium AD. It may in fact embody the earliest traces of what later (approximately by the fourteenth century AD?) has been styled gter gsar and still later (approximately from the eighteenth century), bon gsar.

From non-Buddhist Dunhuang sources, a skyi region appears as an area where rMa, but also gshen or bon folks are from. More accurately it seems to be the heartland where generally mythic humans (sMra, r/sMa, Myi) are believed to hail from. skyi mthing, as sMra/rMa yul, is equivalent to Myi yul, the ‘human’ world. The contexts of these narratives all mainly point to Central Tibet and occasionally Eastern Tibet. This cluster of narremes and the involved place names may underlie later narrativisations of a heartland of Bon. We discern a virtual centre, where Bon-related narremes are from, a proto-heartland, as it were. Later sources (such as the Kun ’bum) suggest, surprisingly, that the skyi realm is Ta zig with ’Ol mo lung ring as its centre!
The SKyi Cluster: SKyi mthing, SMra yul and gShen yul

Introduction

The second cluster has the Tibetan syllable skyi at its hub. SKyi mainly appears in place names. Those places relate in interesting ways to people of a rma, gshen and bon kind. Thanks to IOL734, discussed by Thomas (1957) and Stein (1971 & 1988), and thanks to a few other early sources, we now know that the folks called SMra or rMa myi in PT1136 indeed hail from an area called SKyi (mthing), which may be the same entity as SMra yul (SMra country) or, perhaps, SMra yul thag brgyad. In other words—reading, as I have discussed elsewhere, smra as myi—SMra myi are ‘human folk’ from the human (myi, rma or smra) world: SMra yul or Myi yul. They may, at some point, have been perceived as mythic early Tibetans, perhaps a generic self-reference for people who know how to speak (smra) and how to perform ritual recitation, smrang, properly. As we shall see later in this section, in the Kun 'bum (p. 43.3), the SKyi country is indeed also called the “human world”: Myi yul SKyi mthing.

SMra yul thag [or: thang] brgyad, in turn, may be a narrative entity that is identical, or at least comparable, to the Yul gShen yul Thang brgyad and gShan [read: gShen] yul Thang mo gru bzhi, mentioned in the Kluk 'bum. The name gShen yul signifies a country where gshen folks, such as those of the Dur gshen rMa da and gShen rab(s)-type, are from. In the mentioned passage of the Kun 'bum, 'Ol mo lung ring is also qualified as gShen [gShen] yul 'Ol mo lung ring.

In the skyi cluster we may have found an early clue as to where the legendary Vorlage for the sTon pa gshen rabs myth was born, probably fictionally—a story character would only need a fictional birthplace after all. According to traditional narratives, that location would have to be 'Ol mo lung ring. Thus, we may also gradually be closing in on the earliest fictional location for that mysterious 'Ol mo lung ring: the long valley or country with 'ol mo trees? And it indeed may be in religious fiction that we have to search the origins of 'Ol mo lung ring. By narrative association, 'Ol mo lung ring may be located in a SKyi (mthing) realm, in a Myi or SMra yul: the human world, which is the place where gshen are from. It starts to make ‘narratological’ sense.

SKyi mthing may be a tad easier to locate in time and space than 'Ol mo lung ring. According to Stein (1971), in the Ge sar epic, SKyi mthing appears as the name of a country to the south of bSam yas and to the east of mKho mthing, at the border of Tibet with Bhutan. In the Kluk 'bum it is also mentioned, as a place where a deity SKyi mthing ma supposedly is from.

Karmay and Ramble on rKong po Bon ri and Mi yul skyi(d) mthing

In 1992, Samten Karmay published an intriguing discussion of Mount Bon ri and its associations with early myths. There, he incidentally also identifies the possible tomb of Gri gsum bsan po. Ramble (1997), in a long article, a monograph in fact, on the creation of the Bon Mountain of Kongpo, continuous unravelling the tangle of many interesting narrative associations of the area.

Particularly thought-provoking are Karmay’s observations that, according to the late Bon ri'i dkar chag, gto rites are supposed to have been classified at Mi yul skyi mthing, and also his titillating brief reference to the northern and southern banks of the rTsan gpo River, just a little way downstream from SKyi mthing, named Chab dkar and Chab nag, successively. This
narrativisation of early Bon doctrinal entities in a late source is especially intriguing in the light of our discussion on the surprising centrality of a sMra/rMa/sMa name and a sKyi realm in early narratives relevant to Bon. Karmay (1998/1992, pp. 222 & 224) furthermore identifies a village that today (still?) is called Mi yul skyi(d) mthing, on the eastern bank of the lower end of the Nyang chu (where it flows into the rTsang po River), located south, below rKong po Bon ri, where Nyangpo, rKong po and Dvags po meet.\textsuperscript{21} We should of course be careful and take the possibility of sacred landscaping, of naming places of worship and pilgrimage after mythic events, into account and we therefore should not take the antiquity of the association, let alone of the referred events, for granted. One would have to look into the history of the place name.

The highest local peak, called rKong po Bon ri, in Karmay’s (1992: 223) analysis may be the original lHa ri gyang do/tho/to, which is connected to founding myths of the Yar lung dynasty. It is the place where gNya khri btsan po descended to earth, to rule the black-headed people (mgo nag mi) of Tibet.\textsuperscript{22} It is also connected to the Gri gum btsan po myth.\textsuperscript{23} As is also well known, Gri gum btsan po was the first Tibetan Emperor to die and leave mortal remains behind. He forms the mythic origin of funerary rites at royal tombs: indeed, in view of narratives from Dunhuang funerary liturgies, not at all an insignificant connection! It is fascinating to observe that (Myi yul) sSkyi mthing, which appears to be at the nexus of origin of bon and gshen stories, like a proto-heartland of Bon, in its narrative matrix, at the same time appears connected to the mythic axis mundi of the sPu rgyal Bod Yar lung dynasty. When the centre of Bon in later, self-consciously Bon identity narratives gradually moved to ‘Ol mo lung ring, and later again to Zhang zhung and Ta zig, curiously, rKong po instead becomes the presumed native land of the bon po demon par excellence: Khyab pa lag ring. Note that Lha ri gyang do is also mentioned in sTon pa gshen rab’s itinerary from rKong po, shortly before he founds Khyung lung mngul mkhar at or not far from Shul dkar rTsang bya g-Yung drung kha.\textsuperscript{24}

I should like to follow Karmay’s (1992: 215f) brief suggestion that today’s Mi yul skyi(d) mthing and the surrounding area may be connected with the early codification of precisely those gto-related type of rites that our ritualistic, non-Buddhist Dunhuang documents engage. The late Bon ri dkar chag maintains that gto rites were once classified at Mi yul skyi(d) mthing, on the eastern bank of the lower end of the Nyang chu (where it flows into the rTsang po), immediately west of an area known as Chab dkar, which is the northern bank of the rTsang po, the southern bank of which is called Chab nag. These names are explained by the fact that the water of the Nag chu looks white compared to that of the Tsangpo, which indeed looks much darker, and these colours continue for a while downstream the Tsangpo River, without mixing. The geography of the sSkyi mthing area seems to feed right into a classification of typologically ‘early’ Bon rites, sgo bzhi mdzod lnga: chab dkar, chab nag, phan yul, dpon gsas, and mtho thog.

It may be useful briefly to align our present deliberations on Myi yul skyi thing with the ideas that Karmay and Ramble have forwarded and developed on Mi yul skyi(d) mthing, rKong po Bon ri, lHa ri gyang tho, and rKong po, in their respective 1992 and 1997 publications:

- It is telling indeed that (Myi yul) sSkyi mthing would appear at the heart of narratives on non-Buddhist Dunhuang death rites, while it also sits close to the hub of stories on the mythic point of origin of death rites: stories on Gri gum btsan po’s death and burial.
Karmay even argues that Gri gum btsan po’s tomb, given of course it ever existed in time and space, might be the very tumulus that presently still is visible in Mi yul skyi mthing, at the foot of the (present) lHa ri gyang tho!

Ramble also points out that Mi yul skyid (sic!) mthing now in fact is ... a cemetery!

On the other hand, it may also be significant that those early Tibetan or proto-Tibetan sMra, rMa, and sMa folks from a sKyi mthing realm, appear at the centre of non-Buddhist Dunhuang narratives on death rites that involve gShen rab(s) and ’Dur gshen rma da figures, while, near to their narrative, mythic, or legendary location: (Myi yul) sKyi mthing, in its later rKong po identification at least, also appears the (old) peak lHa ri gyang tho, which in mythic narratives is associated with the descent of gNya’ khri btsan po! This area in various ways appears to be involved in narrativisations of a cradle of Tibetan culture!

Oddly enough, it seems that later visualisations of a heartland of Bon started from the same fount of narrative elements and visualised geographical centre that narratives on the Yar lung emperors also derive from.

(The construction of Zhang zhung royal or imperial lineages, historiographically, is of course a much later development.)

By a bizarre but telling twist of narrative fate, the narratologically original sacred proto-heartland of Bon appears to be located precisely where later Bon traditions locate their worst demon, bDud Khyab pa lag ring: in old rKong po!

One wonders whether there is some logic to this: later Bon narratives, in the light of their pet tropes about western origins, perhaps had no other option than to push away ubiquitous references to that rather ambiguous rKong po area, and perhaps did so by demonising it.

For Bon that quite literally seems to have been what has happened: rKong po became closely associated with the alpha-demon in the house: bDud Khyab pa.

But Buddhists probably also had to deal with their own rKong po demons, in the form of various ambiguous associations of the locality, such as, of course, those many, distinctly non-Buddhist and Lopa connections (see Ramble 1997).

Perhaps early Tibetan and later competing or conflicting Buddhist and Bon claims on origin stories that are located in the rKong po area may have contributed to widely perceived, ambiguous or amorphous negative associations of rKong po.

The presence of Himalayan Lopa culture in areas where early Dunhuang ritualistic texts also approximately locate their narratives on non-Buddhist death ritual may open interesting new avenues for a better diachronic understanding of local references to so-called bonpo ritual specialists in the Himalayas who, occasionally, even are involved in death rites.

Indeed, absolutely fascinating in this regard is Karmay’s observation that the Bon ri’i dkar chag connects the classification of gto rites, such as are often engaged in non-Buddhist Dunhuang death rites, to Mi yul skyi mthing.

Equally fascinating is Karmay’s suggestion that the localities called Chab dkar and Chab nag are not very far from that alleged ‘centre of gto’, Mi yul skyi mthing; and that these names somehow ended up in designations for the presumably oldest doxographical strata of Bon doctrine, which carry names that are difficult to explain otherwise.
Too many things seem to come together in sKyi mthing for all this to be a mere coincidence! There seems to be a tangled hub of origin stories located near rKong po bon ri and sKyi mthing.

**The Kun 'bum on sKyi mthing: Surprising Confirmations of Ancient Narrative Traces**

Fascinating and even more revealing, but relatively late references to a sKyi mthing realm appear in the first text of the *Kun 'bum khra bo bzhus pa'i dbu phyogs* (tentative dating thirteenth century or younger). The reference, already briefly discussed elsewhere (*PIATS* 2006), appears in a context that also refers to 'Ol mo lung ring and features an elaborate description of Khyung lung dngul mkhar and its immediate environment. In this text (p. 43.3f), the centre of Mi yul sKyi mthing is said to be 'Ol mo lung ring, to the north of which are (or is) bShams pa lha rtse (one of sTon pa gShen rab's castles) and Shambhala. Note the striking phonetic similarity of these two names: they may be identical narrative entities (see also emic ideas, as expressed in a gloss in the *Kun 'bum*, on p. 30.5). In the *Kun 'bum*, we find an explicit confirmation of the indications and weak dissenting voices that we have received from older materials, discussed above and elsewhere (*PIATS* 2006). The match is so spectacular that one cannot help but wonder whether this is not the result of efforts by a later author who, perhaps on similar grounds (narrative traditions as were already extant in Dunhuang period sources), tried to make sense of scattered and confusing data, and, apparently, ended up sharing our conjectures to a surprising degree.

However, moving backward in the *Kun 'bum*, we find a passage (p. 33.1ff) that states that g-Yung drung gsal ba'i 'od gling (probably) is Ta zig (or Ta zig may be situated there). 'Ol mo lung ring is said to be the qualitative centre of the heartland (inner centre) of Ta zig (and thus, according to p. 43.3f, logically, also of sKyi mthing). In this passage, Sham po lha rtse and Shambhala—whether they are visualised as identical or different entities—are both identified with or places in 'Ol mo lung ring, rather than being located to its north.

A few pages back again (p. 30.5), Shambhala—here indeed glossed as Sham po lha rtse—is again located to the north of gShen yul 'Ol mo lung ring (see p. 28.3f). Here also appears a reference to six Hos mo islands, in the north-eastern direction (p. 30.6): the Hos mo gling drug.

The same passage (p. 30.5) and a later passage (see p. 59.3f, quoted a little below) in the *Kun 'bum* also mention a Lang ma ling (there identified as Kho ma ru ring) and, successively, a city Lang ling, both located to the south of 'Ol mo lung ring. The later passage (p. 59.3f) in fact locates the place of gShen rab's far ancestors (gshen rab kyi phyi myes kyi yul) on the bank of Lake (mTsho) 'Du le stong ldan hed, at the city of Lang ling. That Lang ling location is already familiar from an earlier text, the *Bla med go phang bsgrub thabs*, one of the *mDo chen po bzhis* (p. 365): the Great King (rGyal chen po) Hos dang ba yid ring there is located in the city Lang ling, (again) to the south of the Country of Ta zig (sTag gzig gi yul) 'Ol mo lung ring, which in turn is located in the heart of the Exalted Country (Yul mchog) 'Dzam bu gling (cf. also the gZer myig story on the wooing of gShen rab's father).

Fascinating in this sMra yul and sKyi mthing context is a reference, also in the *Kun 'bum*, to a sMra yul thag brgyad, where sTon pa gShen rab goes, after extensive training in death ritual, to deliver his funerary services; a clear resonance of Dunhuang narratives on funerary rites. A subsequent passage, locates the Khyung lung castle in Zhang zhung sgo pa'i yul (gate area of Zhang zhung country) in the centre of g-Yung drung Mu le near Lake Ma pang.
The *Kun 'bum* identifies sKyi mthing with Ta zig, puts '01 mo lung ring in its centre, and Sham po lha rtse, Shambhala, Khri smon rgyal bzshed, etc. (usually) to its north and Lang (ma) ling. gShen rab’s ancestral country, to its South. Based on surprisingly many references that the *Kun 'bum* shares with Dunhuang materials, one may surmise that the *Kun 'bum* made use of story traditions that are also reflected in Dunhuang sources. The *Kun 'bum* shows efforts to rearrange apparently disjointed data into more meaningful-looking patterns. This is accomplished first by adding a vector of Bon identity: i.e., by embedding or appropriating the old narrative elements into newly developing Bon hagiography. As was already noted by Ramble (in Huber 1999: 9) and others, this particular text in the *Kun 'bum* collection indeed contains substantial hagiographical details on ‘the early years’ of gShen rab: to wit, from his birth to his fourteenth Tibetan year.

This further is accomplished by neatly rearranging known early geographical entities, which are also reflected in Dunhuang sources, into early '01 mo lung ring-centred Bon ‘geography’—which, as I discussed in *PIATS* 2006, is conspicuously absent from Dunhuang sources. The conjectural date for the *Kun 'bum*, the thirteenth century AD, would match that late narrative configuration. A relatively more recent date is also suggested by the fact that sKyi mthing here is already seen to move westward, beyond the borders of the old rTsang chen heartlands and is conflated with Ti se-type world mountain and rivers geography.

**Some Other Sources on sKyi mthing**

The *rNel dri 'dul ba'i thabs* also contains many references to sKyi realms and important figures from that area. A bon po called Dri/Gri bon ra ljags/lcags (skyi rgyal), apparently a royal scion of the sKyi realm, is the ritual specialist whose services are most often called upon in the ritual narratives of this text. A Lord of sKyi, sKyi rje rMang po is also mentioned (p. 11.8). In all likelihood, sKyi here stands for sKyi ro ljang sngon and not for sKyi mthing (see the discussion on central and eastern Skyi realms below). sKyi ro ljang sngon (p. 21.6) is mentioned in the ritual narrative starting on p. 21: the Lord is sKyi rje btsan pa; his wife, sKyi rje bdag btsun mo; and their son, sKyi ljags phyug sngon. The ritual specialist is the well-known Dri bon ra ljags. On p. 28.8, the Lord of sKyi ro ljang sngon is called sKyi rje rMang po (cf. p. 11.8). In the following narrative a sKyi gshen rgyang ngar is mentioned (p. 29.6).

The *Srid pa spyi mdos* (undated) has a tantalising reference to ‘Yonder Happy Spring Country’, Ya ki [gi] sKyd sos yul, apparently an enjoyable place, the name of which conveys cheerful warmth and which is located in the Ti se area (see *PIATS* 2006). In its descriptive parts, it implies that '01 mo lung ring and Zhang zhung Khyung lung are identical and that both are centred on Ti se. A hint toward a more firm dating of this intriguing text and passage would certainly be helpful for correlating this sKyd sos yul to sKyi mthing, sKyi ro ljang sngon (see below), or sKyd shod more securely.

According to what for the sake of convenience I call the *bsGrags byang*, the name ’Or/'01 mo lung ring refers to a place in lower Tibet (smad), near Central Tibet. It was granted to (retrospective!) ‘bon po-s’ by a contrite Khri Srong (lde btsan), who regretted having persecuted Bon and thus tried to make amends for his mistakes. In the introductory parts on the location of origination of Bon (chags sa/chag pa yul gyi gnas lugs), the *bsGrags byang* also contains a relatively early description of the general location of Zhang zhung and Ta zig (discussed in detail elsewhere).

As late as the fifteenth century, in the *Yangs rtse klong chen gyi 'grel ba nying zer sgron ma*, sTag tsha bla ma rgyal mtshan also mentions an upper region of Mi yul sKyi mthing.
Later-on, in the same commentary, a curious major island called 'Ol mo is mentioned, which lies to the west of 'Ol mo lung ring. Bon po-s apparently got themselves a winner here: the 'Ol mo name, while still conspicuously absent in Dunhuang sources, in later sources quickly seems to multiply.

Central and Eastern sKyi: Migrating Clusters of Narrative Elements

The central south-western location for sKyi mthing, which becomes apparent through tracing the gshen- and bon-related smra and sKyi clusters of names, is at odds with later Bon come-from-the-west narratives, but also with the discussion of references to a sKyi kingdom in Chinese sources by Thomas. Thomas certainly has a point when he presumes that Dunhuang texts with ritualistic narratives show regional affiliation. He reads sKyi (mthing) in IOL734 (Text IV) as sKyi plateau (1957: 4). He takes it to be identical with Hsi chih (Xizhi) area and connects it to the T'ang chang (Tangzhang?) and the later (since about 564 AD) Tang hsiang (Dangxiang) kingdoms of Chinese histories. He thus locates the origin of the text in north-eastern Tibet.

The name that often appears in Dunhuang ritualistic texts, Myi rMa bu mching rgyal, Man, son of rMa, king of rMing, he identifies as a member of the sKyi mthing royal lineage in that area: the Lyen michen (IDyang rMa mching) of Chinese Histories. Based on his sources, he dates IDyang rMa mching, king of sKyi (Tib. Myi rMa bu mching rgyal) a little after 500 AD. Lyen or IDyang in the royal name he again connects to the T'ang-chang people. Michen and rma mching he tentatively associates with the Mi ch'ing, who in the Tang Annals are mentioned as a Tang hsiang tribe (1957: 53f). Following their descriptions, Thomas identifies the T'ang chang or Tang hsiang as 'Tanguts' from Panaksum, Golok. Yet, Rona-Täs, in a review of Thomas' (1957) work, for the sKyi kingdom prefers the sKyi(d) shod region near lHa sa (reference from Stein 1971: 488, n. 26); thus effectively transporting the narrative cluster back to Central Tibet.

In Dunhuang sources there are frequent references to a blue-green (ljang sngon) sKyi (ro) country (in Central Tibet): (Yul) sKyi ro ljang sngon. Note that this name is closely synonymous with the azure green (mthing) sKyi of sKyi mthing. Skyi ro ljang sngon is said to have been ruled by a sKyi rje rMang po, whose name, incidentally, is somewhat reminiscent of that of the famous lord of rKong po: rKong rje rMang po rje (rMang po may well be some kind of title here). See also the many references to the same in the rNel dri 'dul ba'i thabs, notably pp. 21.6 and 28.8. Thomas (1957: 11) therefore concludes that there must be two sKyi kingdoms and takes care to point out that sKyi ro ljang sngon cannot be the same as sKyi mthing and duly connects sKyi ro ljang sngon to the sKyi valley (sKyi lung) of the sKyi river (sKyi chu, nowadays also Kyilchu) near lHa sa (cf. Bacot, 1940-46: 142f).

Thomas (1957: 1) argues that IOL734 (Text IV) can be traced to a historical datum of approx. 500 AD: Lyen michen. Text III (IOL733) records a division of the Dru gu into Eastern and Western Turks, this point to the first half of the seventh century AD (1951: 280). A beginning passage of IOL734 seems akin to IOL733, while its end shows "awareness of apparently still independent districts of the Tibetan territory acquired by the conquests of the father of Srong btsan sgam po, and also of the original Yar lung kingdom". Based on this evidence, Thomas tentatively dates the origin of IOL734 prior to the sixth century AD. I am not sure whether this argument holds water. It seems to be based on many unnecessary assumptions.

In this light it would be very interesting indeed if Myi rMa bu mching rgyal in IOL734 would not yet appear as the generic nomen for contemporary man that meets us for example
in PT1285.1077-1159 and in PT1134/1039. In Dunhuang ritualistic narratives this ‘name’ appears frequently in a stock phrase that concludes the narratives. In PT1285 Myi rMa bu mching rgyal probably refers to any (respectable) patron, who requested the ritual services and for whom the recitation of ritual antecedents is performed (see also Stein 1971, p. 497, n.53.). Perhaps the phrase there even had some mythical overtones of ‘primeval man’. But at the very least it seems to be used as a general epithet for several if not all individuals of some standing. One might thus speculate that we here are witness to a development in use of Myi rMa bu mching rgyal.

In what Thomas presumes to be an old, pre-sixth century AD document, IOL734, Myi rMa bu mching rgyal could be used as a name of a historical person; in PT1134/1039 perhaps as a general title for a royal person; while in PT1285 it might function as a generic nomen for the beneficiary of any ritual or recitation. This is not very likely, however. To my reading the usage of Myi rMa bu mching rgyal in IOL734 is not fundamentally different from that in the other mentioned texts, such as PT1285. In IOL734 too, they conclude ritual recitations. In many occurrences, the IOL734 ritualistic narratives, like those in PT1285, at their conclusion also explicitly refer to a situation in the ‘here and now’ or use a concessive “also” and thus make explicit that the effective rite that has been described there will ‘also’ be beneficial for the person. Myi rMa bu mching rgyal, i.e., for people nowadays.

Even if we would invest faith in Thomas’ circumstantial dating efforts and accept that IOL734 has preserved strands of old narratives, his reading of Myi rMa bu mching rgyal as a historical person still remains questionable. The impression that this and other texts give is that they recycle narrative and ritual elements that have been around for some time. Geographical and temporal references may have become conflated or have migrated, in larger or smaller clusters, away from their original contexts. Indeed, their elements often appear opaque and difficult to relate to historical and geographical data. The realities of time and place that underlie them may have gone through a blender of prolonged oral or written narration. Narratives would first need to be reconstructed from their present narrative locations, based on appreciation of some kind of ‘logic’ of their development (with hindsight, of course). This is to be attempted on an individual basis; first within the limited context of one story or a group of related narratives, later one could attempt to relate the data to other, similar narratives of the same period. Later sources, especially those that sit on the far side of the relevant divide (and now of course mean the turn of the first millennium, the inceptive period of Bon), such as later, self-consciously Bon hagiographical literature and, most likely, also the Kun ’bum, will need to be evaluated with great caution.

We may tentatively conclude that those blue-green sKyi locations in some stories show signs of conflation. The Lord of rTsang, rTsang Ho de’i hos bdag in PT1136 obviously hails from rTsang; that is a no-brainer (see my discussion in RET 15). But the origins of the rest of his name, which he obviously shares with a His de chen po or His po his bdag, who appears in IOL734, like the rMa name, probably is to be located in a north-eastern sKyi area.

Main figures in one of the ritual narratives of PT1285: sMra go1 skyi ma/mthing and Myi rMa bu mching rgyal, who in PT1285 appear firmly located in a Central Tibetan circuit, the other way around, seem to borrow their sMra and rMa names from the rMa chu (river) and rMa rong (valley) area, of that north-eastern sKyi realm, and import those into a Central Tibetan circuit.
CONCLUSIONS

So where are those bon po-s from? From the sources that remain, we may never be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt where the first bon po-s came from. But we can show where their earliest stories came from. Later Bon narratives indeed demonstrably recycle elements from earlier ritualistic story traditions, such as these rma and skyi narremes, which, by chance, were preserved in Dunhuang caches; later narratives do not come out of the blue and certainly are not pure inventions. If we trace the earliest recorded non-Buddhist stories regarding gshen and bon ritual specialists and follow the meanderings of two crucial clusters of names, rma and skyi, a radically different picture of the origins of Bon appears than is apparent from later historical sources: Tracing the rMa cluster and the sKyi cluster, reveals that names of the founder, his area of origin, and of many other seminal figures and places that are relevant to later Bon, find their most direct literary origins in stories related to gshen and bon ritual specialists from south-west Central Tibet, rather than from the far west, as later Bon has it.

Bon as an early phyi dar phenomenon. Elsewhere, I argue that the earliest traceable references to bon and gshen ritual specialists may relate to ritual innovations from those same south-west Central Tibet regions (RET 15). Probably that ritual innovation has to be dated to the end of the first millennium AD. With hindsight, starting at the early second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet (phyi dar), at the turn of the first millennium AD, these early narratives were perceived as antecedents of organised Bon. The old stories and ritual elements, later, in the phyi dar, were rearranged according to entirely new narrative contexts, which all point to the beginning of the second millennium. These contexts, however, are new inventions, which are fully conversant with Buddhist traditions. The origins of Bon as we know it clearly lay in the early phyi dar and clearly also bear narrative and intellectual imprints of that period.

A tangled cluster of origin narratives. sKyi mthing, Bon ri and lHa ri gyang tho appear at the hub of Tibetan origin narratives, both Buddhist and Bon. The fact that narremes from this cluster permeate both strands of traditions, basically suggests that the narratives predate the distinction Buddhism and Bon. sKyi mthing and mythic Tibetan rMa myi may represent the earliest recorded visualisations of a Tibetan heartland and be part of old myths on archetypical Tibetan ‘people’ and their fertile, lush, green habitat, of which only fragments have survived in extant narratives.

Since sKyi and rMa prominently appear in a narrative environment of gshen and bon in early, non-Buddhist Tibetan Dunhuang sources; one may designate them as indicative of a proto-heartland of Bon. Later emerging, phyi dar bon po-s appropriated these narremes for their identity narratives and they indeed identified sKyi mthing as Ta zig, with ‘Ol mo lung ring as its centre. sKyi mthing became associated with old Bon gto rites, but we do not know when that first happened. Myi yul sKyi mthing has survived in present-day Mi yul skyi(d) mthing or has been recreated there. There may be a link to ancient death rites and, through the Lopa associations of the area, there may be possible connections to Himalayan culture.

The problem of the pink elephant. As I keep repeating at each and every occasion (yang dang yang du): one should not argue that there could not possibly have been earlier (western) origins.

My main point here is that, based on historiographical analyses of extant narratives, it is not necessary to make such extra assumptions in order to understand how Bon as we know it arose. However, if we appreciate that the narratives on occidental origins that appear in later
soures all converge at the turn of the first millennium or later, it seems very unlikely that such early (western) origins would predate the invention of their narratives. It would take a truly mindboggling conspiracy to hide the historical and narrative antecedent traces so thoroughly and make it appear as if it all started arising no earlier than the turn of the first millennium AD.

**Notes**

1. This survey is part of the NWO (2005-10) collaborative research program in Leiden, in which we try to understand emerging Bon: ‘The Three Pillars of Bon’: Doctrine, ‘Location’ & Founder—Historiographical Strategies and their Contexts in Bon Historical Literature. In these ongoing investigations into the pillars of Bon identity, we look at the history of construction (or emergence) of the earliest self-consciously Bon identity narratives.


4. See the proceedings of the Bonn IATS in 2006.

5. Recently published by Pasang Wangdu in gTam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gya gn'a dpe bdams bsgrigs, Lhasa 2007.

6. See my ‘Location’ and Emerging Religions volumes.

7. See the rKong po story in the mDo 'das, discussed in my Khyung lung dngul mkhar article in PIATS 2006.


9. See Blezer on gShen rabs myi bo in RET 15.

10. See the ‘Location’ and Emerging Religions volumes.


12. See work by Anne-Marie Blondeau on bsGrags pa bon lugs (bibliography).

13. PT1285.1016, IOL731.97&120, and cf. the gShin rje tshogs zlog, f.1r: smang yul thang brgya’, in an interesting ritualistic manuscript found and kindly shared by Awang Jiacuo, from lha bdag lhe'u-type priests, found in Gansu.

14. On the equivalence of rma and myi, see ‘Location’ and Emerging Religions volumes.


16. For gShen yul 'Ol mo lung ring, see also the Khyung 'bum gong ma dbu lags, f.4v.3. This is another one of those highly interesting ritualistic manuscripts found by Awang Jiacuo in Gansu, with lha bdag lhe'u-type priests.

17. In the ‘Location’ and Emerging Religions volumes, I argue that with the rma cluster we similarly may have discovered a close match for the ‘parents in narrative’ of the later sTon pa gShen rab ‘character’; cf. also RET 15.

18. ‘Ol mo lung ring could be translated thus if we may take Dudjom Rinpoche’s reference to the (fictitious) wooded place called ‘Ol mo tshal seriously. In this forest, gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes receives his name Sangs rgyas from a child of a gandharva (see Martin in Huber 1999, p. 486, n.7, Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991: 1.609).

19. See Stein 1971: 488 and n.26. The passage can be found in the print-identical blockprint in the van Manen collection: 2740/H67A&B, gTsang ma klu 'bum, sDe dge par ma, corresponding to the Nag po section, f.260r, l.3f.: de nas lo gcig lon nas skyi mthul ma [skyi mthug ma] zhes bya ba de chab la khrus la byon pas bud med bzang sbug can cig dang mjal/ gcig la gcig chags byed cing mchis pa las/ de nas rtse zhing mchis pa na/ rgya msho'i mgo'i chab mig de'i nang na klu rgyal ba kun du sreb ma zhes bya ba de bzhus so/ klu de mnol gyis phog nas de gnyis la bu dang sras med do/ skyi mthug lho nub mshams su bzhus pa la/
gangs la 'dzed ste zhal ni mang yul du gyzis/ thugs ni bong la dgongs/ zhabz mon yul du brkyang ngo / de klu srog gcod pa lags so/ <klu srog gcod pas phrin las sad dang ser ba'ang klu rgyal ba bya bas yin no/...>.

20 gsang ba'i gnas mchog thugs sprul bon ri'i dkar chag yid bzhiJon pa'i phreng ba dhu'i phyogs bzhus so, written by g-Yung drung phun tshogs from Khyung po, probably in 1844 (see Ramble 1997: 137ff).


22 See PT1286, ll.30ff., esp. l.132.


24 The passage is discussed at length, based on three different manuscripts in my PLATS 2006 article on Khyung lung dngul mkhar.


26 g-Yung drung tshul khrims suggests a date for the collection, based on a reference in a colophon of only one of the included texts. In YTKC he writes that the Kun 'bum was never hidden as a gter ma but revealed as a dngos grub to gNyag ston gZhon nu 'bum. gNyag ston supposedly was a disciple of Gu ru nNon rtse (b.1136). Thus it might be a 12th-13th c. AD work. But to apply this dating to all texts is circumstantial and uncertain.

27 Kun 'bum khra bo bzhus pa'i dhu phyogs, Vol.167 of the Bon po bKa’ 'gyur (III), perhaps 12th or 13th c. AD, but probably later, see discussion above, p. 42:4. % zhag zhung skad du/ drung mu sad de sho gu bha/ bod skad du/ g-yung drung lha rgyas bla'i kun 'bum/ dpal kun 'bum go 'byed la phyag 'tsalal lo/ // de nas tson pa gshen rab mi bo'i/ rgyung lo gnis bzhes nas gyer sog bzhes bha ba/ var gyi lha sgo lnga brgyu/ phar gyi glud sgo lnga brgya/ mar gyi sri sgo lnga brgya/ tshur gyi g-yang sgo lnga brgya/ skad gcung gong zhes bya ba/ mchod stod bskal gsum tshang pa'i skad gsum/ bzin lug bgrang gsum lha mi'i [43] dre'u gsum/ geir bskrad bskyed gshab dpo'i hda' gsum/ gtang rag bci bzu gnis zhes bya ba/ gsal rten mchod pa bzhii bon bceu/ lha gshen kha 'dzin lung gi bon bceu/ smrang lung rgyas pa gzhung gis bon bcu/ mtha' rgya bsngo ba don gyis bon bceu/ rgyas bsdus gtang bzhag gnis steng bzhii bci rtsa gnis thugs su chud nas? mi yul skyi mthing gis gsnung po/ 'ol mo lung rig gis byang phyogs/ rten la mtschan gsal pa bshams pa la rtsel/ vul la mtschan gsal pa sham bha la'i gnas chen/ gnas pa mtschan gsal pa kli smon rgyal bzhed zhes bya bar/ thug[s] las sprul pa'i rna lo dang / gsung las sprul pa'i g-yu lo dang / ston pa nidd kyi sku dang gsum/ skor ba byed pa'i lha phyag 'tshal/ ringa gling riung zhing dar 'phan dang phyay/ mchod pa 'bul zhing lha gnas 'bod na/ gar gsal btsan po spyan drang[s] pas/ gser gyi glang po che ru sku sprul nas byon/ lo glang lo'i gtan tshig kyang de nas byung/ rten gar mdung gugs pa'i gtan tshig kyang de nas byung / sa bdag glang chen lnga stobs che bai' gtan tshig de nas [44] de nas byung/.

28 See ibidem, p. 33:1 de nas ston pa gshen rab mi bosa bka' tsal pa/ bdag nyid dang por skye bca' bzhes par mchad de/ g-yung drung gsal ba'i od gling zhes kyang bha/ stag gyzis yul gnis snying po yan tan kyi dbus zhes kyang bha/ gshin [gshen/ yul 'ol mo lung ring zhes kyang bha/ sham bha la'i gnas chen zhes kyang bha/ ri bo gang bsang po'i ra bha zhes kyang bha de na/ dbus dkyil g-yung drung dbu brtsogs dpal gi ri bo/ rin chen sna bdun las grub pas/ de'i shar phyogs 'byung ba sa las spurl pa' g-yung drung rigs su grub pa'i zhing khams//.


30 bsGrags pa gling gsags (attributed to mTha' bshi ye shes blo 'gros, 10th-11th c. AD, see Blezer in Ockham, n.49), p. 62:2 spu lde gung rgyal gyi ring la gong du bla ma dang sku gshen re yod / mu khyi btsan po ldon ggas gru ben kha 'bar / sku gshen bco gyin bu phyag dkar / ggas mkhar khyung ma ne chung / de'i sras ding khyi btsan po / ldon ggas 'ol bon spyan cig / sku gshen bco'u smin dkar / ggas 'khar khyung ma ye rtsa / de'i sras dri rum btsan po / ldon ggas fi bon spungs rgyud / sku gshen co' u zhal dkar / bsas mkhar khang ma ru rings/.

31 Phonetically very similar to 'Ol mo gling; cf. now my article in RET 15 on this.

32 Note that two of the three kho(n)g ma palaces mentioned in these passages were mentioned in a few lines earlier: Kho ma nal chen and Kho ma ru ring (p. 30:2). In the sGrags pa gling gsags all three palaces are mentioned: gSas mkhar Khong ma ne chung, gSas mkhar Khong ma yang rtse, and gSas mkhar Khong ma ru rings. The palace Kho(n)g ma ru ne is identified as the Palace of the Gri gsum btsan po.
See the use of the homophonetic word for “pleasure” in grong khyer rgyal ba mnyes pa, in the mDzod phug commentary by Dran pa’i nam mkha’; p. 2.15: sgon zhang zhung gi yul i sho da na/ shi a pa ra ljon pa’i tshal/ grong khyer rgyal ba mnyes pa’i dbus/ mkar khung lung dangul ma ma zhes kyang bya/ ’om po sgo bzhis zhes kyang bya na zhi g/ . In gZer myig chapter 2, pp. 15-25, appears an elaborate narrative on ancestral origins in that area, it is where sTon pa gShen rab’i father, rGyal bon thod dkar, searches his wife, rGyal bzhad ma. Note that rGyal bon thod dkar and NN exotic gshen both feature thod dkar in their name.

See the Bha med go ’phang bsgrub thabs, chapter one: ’Chi bdag zlog byed kyi mdo las Gling bzhi’i le’u, pp. 363-6, esp. p. 365.4. I quote the passage elsewhere; see Blezer in RET 15, at the expedition abroad narratives (the King of Nos), p. 443, no. 60.

Cf. the Lord (Jo bo) rTsang ho de’i hos bdag, who will be discussed in more detail later; see Blezer in RET 15.

Kun ’bum, p. 58.4f: //zhang zhung skad du/ drung mu tha tshan de sho gu bha/ bzhod skad du/ g-yung drung mtha’ ragyas dbang thang gis kun ’bum/ dpal kun ’bum go byed pa phyag ’tshal lo/ de nas ston pas rgyang lo gsum lon pa’i gting la rgyun lo bzhis nas/ shi thabs sum brgya drug bcu la dgongs pa/ ’dur thabs sum brgya drug bcu stu/ bde ldan grub pa’i gshen ’dur lnga bcu bkras shis bsgrangs pa’i bkras ’dur lnga bcu/ rtag shul grong pa’i rgo/ ’dur lnga bcu/ tha ma phal pa’i ’phang ’dur lnga bcu/ gtsang rigs sman gyi lhe’u ’dur lnga bcu/ mi gtsang g-yen can gys gab ’dur lnga [59] bcu dang sum brgya/ de dag kun rdo’chos las yang gar pat bstan pa thar ’dur drug gi dbyings ’dur drug bcu thugs su chud de/ smra yul thang brgyad du mi gsum gshin gvis bdal [brda] spro’d [probably a technical term for communicating between the living and the dead] du byon pas/ ra bsum yan za ring po cig/ kha nas ma rtsogs bka’ nas byung/ lo yos bu lo’i tshig kyang de nas byung/ med pa la yod par btag pa ri bong ra zhes ba’i tshan tshig kyang de nas byung/ de nas rgyang lo gsum rdo’chos nas sku khrus kyi dus yin pas/ ’ol mo lung ring gis lho phyogs/ grong khyer lang ling misho ’du le stong ldan hed gvis ’gram/ gshen rab kyi phyi myes kyi yul du/ ’byang ba bzhis’i gshin po dang gnam sa lha klu mi gsum skis slob bu ’bum phrag dang gshogs na/ myes chen po rgyal po sa la ’khyer bca pas kyang/ khrus dang tshan gnam ram par bsang nas/ / mchod pa chen po’i sprin phul lo/ .

See Ramble (1999) and Blezer PLATS 2006 on Khung lung dngul mkar.


P. 10.1f, 4, 7, 10; 11.2, 12.1, 16.1, 18.6, and 20.10.

Note here too a similarity between the name of the son and the bon po, as is the case with the smra cluster, sMrA bu (gyi) zing ba’i zing skyes (PT1136) and sMrA bon zing ba in PT1285.1041; is it convergence or divergence?

As to its dating, one might hazard the guess that on a relative scale the Srid pa spyi mdos seems to approach the dates for the Kun ’bum from below. Here too, we find, be it with more uncertainty, a memory trace of a similar motif, extolling the power of a bodhisattva story (as featured in the Ti se area. Again, see my Ockham article for a note on its dating (n.49).

See bsGrags byang, pp. 149.1ff. N.B., immediately preceding that passage there are also curious references to elements from the bodhisattva story (as featured in the Bon ma nub pa’i gyan tshigs and other sources).

See ibidem, pp. 152.3f: der rgyal po thugs dges/ bon po la che thab yig tshang phul ba ni stod na yul gsum phul te/ zas kad gser ting/ btsan po gzhung smad- chu dbar gre gna dang gsum mo/ smad nas yul gsum phul ba de/ ’or mo lung ring/ ’phan yul ’brang skyes/ yar po thud dang gsum phul te/ stod nas ’bangs gsum phul te/ so dang dpa’l... ’dpal ’khor btsan gis kyang lha khang brgya rtsa’i dar suds dang yang [153] chos- le la bar bon chos gnis/ chos- byang/ yang chos chub nas bon dar- bar du chos dar nas yang gnyis ka spyad/ mtha’ mar bon nub/’ se ngan se’u gsum phul/ ’yar lung sog kha bzhugs pa’i gnas su phul lo/ lha sa lar gsal ba’i sar phul/... Compare this to the narrative of sNang bzhed lord po’s revenge in the Bon ma nub pa’i tshan tshigs. In the bsGrags byang we seem to be dealing with a similar motif, extolling the power of Bon, but here not concentrated in a culture hero. sNang bzhed lord po probably is an 11th c. AD construct, which, together with other lineage markers, in the gTan tshigs serves to identify the text as ZZNG and to help warrant its inclusion in the first place (see Blezer, Structural Analysis).

Yangs rtse klong chen gyi ’grel ba nyi zer sgron ma (Dolanj 1973), p. 45, 1.7: mi yul skyi ‘thing gi stod.

Ibidem, p. 47.2: stag gzig gis yul dus gsum gis gsang rgyas thams cad ’khrung pa’i gnas/ ’ol mo lung ring gis nub nas dpag tshad brgyad kyis dkyil na/ ’ol mo gling chen zhues bya/ grong khyer ’bum phrag stong yod pas dbus na/ gshen gyi pho brang chen po gsum gsum dbus nas/ rin po che’i gsas mkar sgo dgus’i nang
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The fact that Uigurs are not mentioned, Thomas presumes may be due to a loss of text.

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Thomas refers to a Russian translation by Père Hiacinth Bichurin, I, pp. 109-12, cf. Bushell, p. 528, and to his geographical introduction.


Thomas (1957), pp. 52f; he outlines the borders of sKyi (mthing) on p. 7 (introduction). Cf. Rockhill 1891: 337f.

Thomas refers to a Russian translation by Père Hiacinth Bichurin, I, pp. 109-12, cf. Bushell, p. 528, and to his geographical introduction.

54 Lalou (1958), in her notes on p. 195, based on PT1285, identifies Myi rMa bu mching rgyal as a general epithet that has been used for no less than six different rulers. NB., obviously, not all Dunhuang narratives pertain to the same period.

55 IOL734.164, 228 and 276: *da myi rma bu mching rgyal* ('di) parallel to PT1285: *de ring sang la na myi rma bu mching rgyal* 'di', which occurs in many kinds of orthographical variants on ll.1056, 1077, 1143, 1159, and 1192. In IOL734 Myi rMa bu mching rgyal in any case usually is accompanied by 'di.

56 I.e., yang and kyong, IOL734, 1.179, 184, 199, 3137, 315 and 320.


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FROM NATURALIZATION TO RATIONALIZATION IN WESTERN TAMANG BUDDHIST PRACTICE

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Sociological, historical, and anthropological studies ultimately relate Buddhist worldviews not only to a general human condition but to specific historical developments in social structure in particular places. Nevertheless much of the anthropology of Buddhism has been framed within the problem of the relative consistency between local Buddhist practices and high textual or monastic renditions of Buddhism. A more fulsome anthropology of Buddhism needs to be situated in an anthropology of religion. I focus here on a particular socio-cultural formation of Buddhism, that of the western Tamang of Nepal. This formation stands in sharp contrast to the Buddhist systems that first inspired comparative sociological reflection. Weber, for one, linked the rise of Buddhism with certain urban and mercantile transformations in north India: “Buddhism presents itself as a product of the time of urban development, of urban kingship and city nobles.” (Weber 1958: 204; cf. Pardue 1968). Weber saw Buddhism comparatively as one of several possible responses to ultimate problems of meaning in particular social-economies. Buddhism was more over conceptualised as a universalizing religious system. In a similar vein recent anthropological studies, especially studies of Theravada Buddhism, have focused on the relation of Buddhism to state formation (Tambiah 1976) and more recently on the relations of modern Buddhism to the emergence of urban middle classes (Kapferer 1991). In contrast to these developments, Tamang Buddhism took shape historically in a clan-based, agrarian society enclosed in the state of Nepal, an enclosure reinforced by local practices of cross-cousin marriage. Tamang Buddhism today, however, is undergoing significant reformation as the social circumstances and experiences of the Tamang change.

I describe Buddhism among Tamang as ‘Tamang Buddhism’ because their practices do not relate neatly with the distinctions among Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana despite their clear historical associations with Tibetan Buddhism. As Gellner (2001) concludes in a review of anthropological contributions to the study of Buddhism: “...the anthropology of Buddhism will have attained maturity only when it can focus equally on other questions and only when it can analyse and compare Buddhism in different contexts without immediately becoming embroiled in issues of identity and authenticity” (59) that dominate more ‘scripturalist’ approaches (Grieve 2006). Tamang have inflected Buddhism to accommodate local culture and society and such inflections are characteristic of Buddhism as we encounter it in almost all social and historical contexts. Within this context I want to make two larger points in reference to the comparative engagement with Buddhism in anthropology. First, where scholars have conceptualised Buddhism in association with particular types of societies and the problems of meaning generated in those societies coupled with an otherworldly orientation, I want to make this comparative typology more complex by looking at the transformations of Buddhism as it became linked to a clan-based society practicing subsistence agriculture. Second, as I noted at the outset, any anthropology of Buddhism must be situated within an anthropology of religion, an anthropology of religion which takes as its
central question the origin of sacred, symbolic, or magical power. As a thoroughly human creation Buddhism must be understood within the broader context of human practices that produce and transform what we abstract as ‘society.’

TAMANG BUDDHISM AND LOCAL SOCIO-POLITY

I engage Tamang Buddhism here—especially that practiced among the Western Tamang who reside primarily in the districts of Nuwakot, Rasuwa, and Dhading Districts of Nepal—within the larger framework of the comparative study of Buddhism and within the historical context of the Tamang in greater Nepal. Tamang are one of the largest Tibeto-Burman speaking populations in Nepal and large numbers of Tamang live as well in northern areas of West Bengal in India, especially Darjeeling District and the region around Kalimpong, and in Sikkim. Tamang histories and practices vary considerably across their range of habitation and the ethnography and analysis I offer here relates to the western Tamang. The western Tamang ritual system as it prevailed and is sustained in hill villages of Nepal includes three main domains of practice that formed an integrated system of which Buddhist practice was and is an essential and encompassing component. In addition to Buddhist lamas who preside over key rituals in Tamang villages, sacrificers known as lambu appease local territorial divinities and exorcise an array of evils and shamanic specialists called bombo capture lost shadow souls, raise up life force, and reveal that which is unknown, deploying their unique powers of sight as they cross over into realms of the unseen and the uncanny.

This classic syncretic pattern of Tamang ritual practice is a function, as I have argued extensively elsewhere (Holmberg 1989), a dynamic, on the one hand, between structure and its limits—e.g. the shamanic deconstructs the very structures produced through Buddhist and sacrificial practice—and history where Buddhist practice superseded other forms of ritual practice and where the Tamang were incorporated first into local, indigenous kingdoms or principalities and then into the Hindu state of Nepal (Tamang 2008). In the latter, Tamang entered as a defeated population who, at least in the western regions of their residence, were subjected to a feudal regime of corvée labour. Their identity, from the perspective of agents of the state, was manual labourers. Once fully incorporated into the Nepalese state in these regimes of corvée labour, their practice of subsistence agriculture and their right to usufruct of their lands was contingent on providing labour to various state operations including porterage, butter production, paper production, fruit production, gun powder production, mining, timbering and the like (Holmberg, March, Tamang 1999). Ordinary Tamang villagers were, moreover, required to provide labour to Tamang headmen, to Lamas, and to bombos, making the burden on villagers substantially higher than simply that extracted by the central government. Total annual obligations varied between 70 and 120 days of labour per household or per land allotment depending on the particular type of forced labour. Due to this regime western Tamang were largely confined to village communities and the state authorities did not allow those Tamang held under corvée to migrate to places like Darjeeling or urban areas nor did they permit Tamang from any region to be recruited by the British as mercenaries. In this relatively contained political and economic condition, Tamang produced unique and enclosed forms of social and ritual practice including their particular form of amonastic Buddhism. In fact the monastic forms of Buddhism that developed elsewhere in Nepal were impossible in Tamang areas for the quite simple material reason that the agents of the state extracted all surplus labour and resources out of communities making it
impossible for them to support a renunciatory monastic community (cf. Tamang 2051 v.s. [1993]).

The forms of Buddhism that developed historically in western Tamang regions were simultaneously directly articulated to a social order characterised by dual organization where sets of patrilineal clans governed their relations within principles of restricted exchange formalised in the practice of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage where Tamang preferred to marry their sons to their father's sister's daughters but allowed marriage as well with mother's brothers daughters. As noted above, much of the historical and sociological study of Buddhism has stressed its linkage to the formation of large scale socio-political systems and major historical transformations away from archaic systems either in the context of the rise of Buddhism in North India and the formation of the empire of Asoka or in the context of Thai or Sri Lankan states, and more recently, in the middle class dynamics of Theravadin societies. Tamang Buddhism, on the other hand, was linked to a very highly circumscribed social order, one referred to locally as a 'circle of kin' that was village based and marginal to the formal order of the encompassing state. In this frame, Tamang—categorised in Nepalese legal codes as Bhote or Tibetan—were classified as carrion eating Buddhists due to their practice of consuming the flesh of deceased cows, animals sacralised along with Brahmans in the Hindu state of Nepal (Holmberg 2006). Some of the first orders issued to Tamang, once they were defeated and incorporated into the Nepalese state, banned the slaughter of cows and enjoined Tamang to revere Brahmans.

In their restricted socio-political sphere, Tamang produced themselves at the highest social levels in two ritual contexts presided over by Buddhist Lamas. The first defined the circle of kin and the other instantiated a local political order revolving around the dominance of a class of headmen (Nep. mukhiya; Tamang: pompo) and Buddhist Lamas. In gral or 'the rescue' of the deceased (sometimes called ghewa), Tamang clans reproduced their relations through sets of elaborate exchanges, hospitality and feasting over a three day period. The prominence of death rites in social reproduction is a distinctive feature of Tibeto-Burman hill dwelling populations throughout the Himalayas. Lamas preside over these three-day rites and directed their ritual efforts to severing the relations between the living and the dead, effecting an auspicious rebirth for the deceased through the application of blessings to erase demerit, expelling the grief of mourners, and generating magical power or wang to revitalise the immediate lineage of the deceased and by extension all of those who could trace a trail of kin to the deceased. Villagers participate in ten to fifteen gral during a year. A few decades ago, all these gral were staged during two or three months of the winter dry season, whereas they are now performed within a few weeks of death. In the enactment and embodiment of specific social positions, Tamang reproduce and sustain local society. In these events and others, lamas instantiated themselves as mediating source of magical power or wang. This wang constitutes an 'alienation' (Turner 2002) of the productive powers of villagers to produce themselves and local society (see Holmberg 2000). Tamang chhechu—a ten day festival of ludic, historical, and mythic dance dramas—likewise produced headmen in their positions of power in the village along side that of lamas (Holmberg 2000). In displays of reversal that mocked kings, moneylenders, colonels, and Hindu yogis, Tamang actively deconstructed the authority of the state and concluded with the distribution of wang or magical power. While Tamang mocked central authority they reproduced a local polity focused on locally legitimatized headmen. According to villagers, Tamang headmen 'walked like kings' and were empowered and instantiated through their relations to village lamas.

The ritual thrust of Tamang Buddhism (as well as sacrificial practices) is the production of order in the world. The Tamang metaphorically deploy Buddhist words whether in writing or speech that sustain the world in orderly form. In Tamang myth, sangkve or Buddhas, most notably Guru Rhimborochhe (Tamang pronunciation of Guru Rinpoche), bound the world
into orderly form through oaths (damla). According to local lamaic exegesis, texts are the damla or oaths of ancient Buddhas and as lamas chant these words, they rebind cosmic and social universes into orderly form. Guru Rhimborochhe travelled north through this area (a myth replicated in almost every valley and local of the Buddhist Himalayas) and bound all territorial divinities to his oaths to protect Buddhism. Buddhist ritual re-establishes both the power of the Buddhist word and by extension that of lamas and local headmen.

The particular social and political orders that emerged in the history of the Tamang in Nepal are of course arbitrary in the sense that they were produced and reproduced in human activity; in this sense, the social and political order is not natural or preordained as socio-ritual rhetorics assert. This arbitrarily constituted village order as organised around cross-cousin marriages on the one hand and the relations of headmen to ordinary people on the other became naturalized in Tamang myth where all order emanates from the deployment of the Buddhist word.

**Naturalization in Tamang Creation**

There are several contexts in which Tamang recount the origin of cosmic and social order. Western Tamang refer to these narrations as Thungrap or kerap (origin or birth sequences). These accounts retell the temporal sequence for the creation of the world into the form that Tamang know it. Local song specialists known as shye pompo sang a creation song known as yha hwai in the month of kartik (October-November) on the occasion of acquiring pledges of grain and money for the village production of chhechu, the ten day dance drama mentioned above. Thus a song about the production of the universe is the prelude to the ritual production of a local socio-political order. Lambu (ritual specialists in exorcism) recite other Thungrap of the creation of the universe when they appease the four orphans (mhiga blih), an evil that destroys the creative potential of households and the village community. I cannot elaborate fully on these complex multifaceted myths and their ritual correlates here and I will only highlight one dimension of these recitations that relate to the origin of human prosperity in order to propose that the myth naturalizes an ultimately arbitrary socio-ritual order. The basic development of both recitations of creation are the same and the portions I recite here are from the appeasement and expulsion of the four orphans that Shyalki Lambu (now deceased) performed in 1977 in the village of Mhanegang:

Long ago when there was neither earth or sky,
Water formed and stayed.
In the water lake, fluffy clouds formed.
High in the middle of the sky, they soared.
From the middle of the sky, a whirling wind originated.
After the wind blew hither and yon, rain fell down onto the inner region.

In the region of water, muddy silt congealed.
From the silty mud, arose common grass to which [more] mud adhered.
After there was dirt, small pebbles, small stones,
Then the great boulder emerged.

After the great boulder stayed, moss emerged.
While moss spread every which way,
The parpati flower of common grass grew.
After grass was established,
The pillar of the earth was established.
In a time when there were no trees of any kind,
When Guru Sangkye, Guru Pema, Guru Lopan
Clasped round a mouth oath, a heart-mind oath,
A sapling of the cottonwood tree originated.

In four years this tree grew tall.
While it was growing, the buds of flowers came out.
After the buds of the flower came out,
The three, Guru Sangkye, Guru Pema, Guru Lopan,
Bound an oath to the four branches.

In the eastern direction, four branches emerged, flower buds emerged.
The flower of the bell and the dorje stayed.
Above the flower of the bell and the dorje, a golden water vessel emerged.
Above the golden water vessel, Palten Sangkye emerged.

Palten Sangkye bound a mouth oath and a heart mind oath to the western direction.
Four branches spread out.
From the four branches, leaf sprouts spread and flower buds emerged.
The dorje and bell flower emerged.
A silver water vessel emerged.
Above the silver water vessel Kalten Sankye emerged.

Kalten Sangkye bound a mouth oath and a heart mind oath to the southern direction.
Four branches spread out.
From the four branches, leaf sprouts spread and flower buds emerged.
The dorje and bell flower emerged.
A turquoise water vessel emerged.
Above the turquoise water vessel Shyap Tung Ngawa Namkyal emerged.

Shyap Tung Ngawa Namkyal bound a mouth oath and a heart mind oath to the central direction.
Four branches spread out.
From the four branches, leaf sprouts spread and flower buds emerged.
Above the dorje and bell flower,
An iron water vessel emerged.
Above the iron water vessel, Tsheku Kondo Sangbo emerged.

After Tsheku Kondo Sangbo bound a mouth oath, a heart-mind oath to the inner region,
The inner region [earth] surface became fixed.
Within the earth surface, leaf sprouts, and flower buds emerged.
The dorje and bell flower emerged.
Above the dorje-bell flower, a water, water vessel stayed.
Above the water, water vessel stayed,
Nhangkai Sangkye emerged.

Nhangkai Sangkye bound an earth oath to the earth,
A rock oath to the rock, a water oath to water.
After binding water, oaths to those who move and feel were bound.
The male and female of humankind were oathbound. The females of humankind were oathbound within the mountain lapsang karpo [Manaslu]. They were bound to stay in the lo demo river. The males of humankind were oathbound within the mountain lari [Ganesh Himal], Within the hill of ganherejung. They were bound to stay in the hill sati.

A mouth oath, a heart-mind oath to exchange in marriage, To exchange heart-minds, to exchange mouths within the nine territories was clasped round.

In the year of the mouse, when the oath to exchange in marriage, To exchange heart-minds, to exchange mouths was bound An oath was bound to the four cornerstones [of a house].

When children increased by the hundreds, there were no provisions. In the time when there were no provisions, The three, Guru Sangkye, Guru Pema, Guru Lopan Bound the buckwheat oath of Lawangpa Yajtsen.

In the hand of the universal Lawangpa Yajtsen, A rounded hill of blessing stayed Filled with prosperous grain, with abundant wealth. When wealth stayed... monkeys might steal [it]. In the time of profusion, it was given to men and women.

When it was put in the hand (care) of mother earth, Many roots spread out. In the air, sprouts rose up, flower buds burst forth in profusion. Grains by the thousand emerged. Prosperity of grain, abundance of wealth, the essential resilience of things stayed, Like a rounded hill of blessings.

After the essential resilience of things stayed, After foods of many kinds stayed, Oaths were bound to all animals.

At Ganesh lake, an oath was bound to buffalos. After bunches of branches [fodder] were made for food, The oath ‘to stay’ in the care of men and women was bound. An oath to cows and bulls was bound. At the place of lang rang ruru [Langtang Himal], An oath to stay in the care of Gaujukpa and Lupembar was bound. Everywhere bunches of branches emerged as fodder. [An oath was bound to cows and bulls] to be in the care of humans. The mouth oath that milk stay in mouths of children was bound.

After the heart-mind oath was bound, the oath to goats was bound. Bunches of grass as food were placed in the nine places of Jangtang. An oath was bound to chickens to stay in lang rang ruru in Gyarsa. An oath was bound to the king bird.
After the oath to stay in branches was bound in Sikke Lambu to reveal all kinds of food, The three, Guru Sangkye, Guru Pema, Guru Lopan, Bound a mouth oath, a heart-mind oath.

At the time of binding oaths, The oath of the fire queen was bound. The queen of fire burned everywhere. At the time it was burning everywhere, From the midst of the sky, at the time there was a huge lake, Nhangkai Sangye, while clasping a water vessel, said, "Where will the fire queen go? Where will the fire queen stay?" It stayed within quartz. After it stayed in quartz, bunches of branches stayed.

While branches and trees were growing tall, An oath was bound to the so [life-force]. While trees were growing up, flowers blossomed forth, And the oath of the sons and daughters so-flower was bound At the time when the so flower was bound, when long-life was established, From within India [gyagar], the four mhiga [man like evils/orphans] originated. The four mhiga came for all time to harm.... to harm.

At the times when [people] slept and ate, they emerged. In the times when sores and blisters, withered bodies, and stupors developed, At the time when there was nothing [for the mhiga] Above the door deity gomsi raja, egg, grain, were placed on an iron spike.

This recitation of creation recounts the establishment of productive order in the world. A fully human world with all its productivity in grain and pastoral activities is established through oaths of the sangkye or Buddhas. One of the more intriguing aspects of this account of creation is that the sangkye or Buddhas are intimately tied to a natural process: a primordial tree rises up out of earth that formed in primordial waters that appeared out of nothingness. Buddhas appear above flowers that look like bells and dorjes and then bind the world to oaths and thereby established productive order in the world as Tamang know it. It is this naturalization of the Buddhas and the power attributed to them that I now want to address.

**Naturalization, Power, and Alienation**

Pierre Bourdieu argued that "Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness." (1977: 164). The social order with its hierarchies and its differentiations is ultimately a human creation and even though it does not have to be arranged the way it is, people nevertheless approach the world as though it is, in Bourdieu's terms, "natural and self-evident." (166). This condition or state of consciousness Bourdieu refers to as doxa. I argue here that the production of authoritative knowledge as embedded in myth and ritual works to produce the "taken for granted" (Bourdieu 1977: 164) nature of the historically and socially contingent forms of the western Tamang. It is not so much the narrative flow of the myth above that is critical to understanding the process of naturalization, it is rather the system of categories
themselves that become reinforced in the mythic recitation which takes part in the context of a specific calendrical ritual event. The process of creation in the myth recounted above is followed by the description of the building of the first Gomba in what Tamang call ui same ('Samye of the centre') the place where western Tamang imagine they originated. The Gomba was built by day but collapsed at night and Guru Pema (Padmasambhava) was called to divine the cause which was the four evils or four orphans. Cast out by the ancient ritualists from ui same the four evils moved down through the Himalayas from gomba to gomba eventually reaching Tamang territory where they continue to be cast out in all Tamang houses twice a year assuring productivity and prosperity for householders.

What concerns me here is less the narrative qua narrative of the mythic account retold over and over in Tamang houses. Rather it is the basic underlying, taken for granted aspects of the account. Sangkye are represented as natural with the inherent power to bind the world into orderly form through oaths or words. The narrative tells a tale of creation and destruction and opens the way for repetitive ritual action that further instantiates deep-seated cultural representations or the Tamang mythico-ritual system, representations that do not exist in the abstract but are related directly to a now naturalized Tamang socio-polity. Mythic accounts like the one presented here are part of a knowledge system and the very generation of the sense of the real.

As noted above, Tamang villages were organised hierarchically around the ascendancy of hereditary headmen and Buddhist Lamas where headmen were temporal powers further infused with magical power or wang produced by local lamas. Local social formations as well as political structure was literally made and reinforced in lamaic Buddhist rituals, all of which, to one degree or another, focused ultimately on the production of wang or magical power. All lamaic ritual concludes with the distribution of blessings of which wang is central for Tamang villagers. One of the encompassing ritual functions of lamas is to distribute power which is imagined as emanating ultimately from the sangkye, like those of the myth recited above. The powers of lamas were analogous to the powers of the sangkye of myth. Villagers address lamas as 'sangbe' in all major ritual events. Lamas thus embody during ritual the very power of the sangkye themselves.

I propose then the following anthropological interpretation both of the mythic account and the ritual action of Tamang lamas. The basic situation with which the myth presents us is the instantiation of human productivity from reproduction itself as figured in marriage followed by the productivity of agriculture and animal husbandry all established through the oaths of sangkye who emerged as part of natural process. Essentially human activity becomes represented as part of a natural process. The creation narrative converts productive activities of humans to powers beyond the human to which lamas have a unique mediatory access for it is through their ritual efforts that power is conveyed to headmen as well as other villagers. Production emanates not from the activity of humans but the actions of sangkye possessing powers beyond the human. These powers are as Turner (1977; 2002) and Sangren (1991) have argued constituted in symbolic form the alienated capacity of humans to produce themselves. The myth goes on to naturalize those powers putting them beyond the possibility of transformation and reinforcing local social order. Thus in the Tamang Buddhist complex there existed a close articulation between the mythico-ritual system and the socio-polity ultimately framed not in the otherworldly orientations of monastic Buddhism but local social contingencies.

RATIONALIZATION AND REFORMATION IN TAMANG BUDDHIST PRACTICE

In terms of the comparative study of Buddhisms, the Tamang socio-religious system was not, in Weber’s terms, ‘rationalised’ where people seek a consistency and encompassing logic to
From Naturalization to Rationalization

The system was ‘mythologised’ (Holmberg 1989). Rationalised forms of Buddhist discourse have now established themselves in Tamang communities and substantial tension among lamas has begun to emerge in recent decades and the old mythico-ritual system described above is now transforming in key ways as Tamang experience is deterritorialised in both geographic and social terms. As one elder in the village I know best told me recently, a new kind of Buddhist lama has emerged and these lamas are enforcing a stricter adherence to formal Buddhist practice. Villagers now speak jokingly of two sorts of lamas: sang lamas and chhang lamas (‘incense’ lamas and ‘beer’ lamas). The reformed or sang lamas have all stopped consuming alcohol, meat, and fish and insist on what they call dharmik practice over long standing Tamang customary practice. The reformed lamas now train with masters from outside the region and masters with experience in monasteries in other parts of Nepal. They characterise much traditional Tamang practice as leading to demerit. The chhang lama claim to be ‘ancient lamas’ and are associated with a lineage of lamas who established the first village gomba which sits high on the top of the village. Reforming village lamas associate with particular sects but are largely unaware or how their teachers or practices fit in the scheme of Tibetan monastic history. The ancient lamas call themselves nhakpa doser, a local term form Nyingmapa.

The most visible transformations in western Tamang practice in the areas I know best relate to the performance of gral, the essential Buddhist ritual. During my initial research among Tamang in the mid 1970s, Tamang always performed final mortuary rites in the dry season even if a death had occurred many months before. Some local Buddhist lamas were aware of the Tibetan Buddhist stricture that rebirth occurs within 49 days of death thereby obviating any effect of rituals that occurred after that time but this did not change local practice. No matter the time of death, the final and most important mortuary rites—gral or ghewa—occurred in the months extending from November-December to March-April when people were comparatively free from pressing agricultural labour and space was available in empty fields to gather large crowds of people. The year was structured in a rhythmic oscillation between two halves of the year as tied to the agricultural cycle, a cycle dependent on the monsoon rains that fell from May through September. Buddhism was thus subjected to a local regimen where socio-economic constraint prevailed over formal Buddhist stricture.Tamang now always perform final death rites within the 49 days of death and they no longer raise up the colourful high altars (dasang) around which lamas used to dance and which were distinctive to Western Tamang practice.

Moreover, years ago lamas used to allow the sacrifice of a goat, the head and tail of which were placed under the raised altar, during the performance of gral, a practice known as begging the trail (gyam hrippa) of rebirth. Portions of the meat were distributed to certain categories of kin. Sacrifice stopped decades ago but reformed lamas now want to extend a ban on sacrifice to a ban on the consumption of meat during the feasting of the gral claiming that the demeritous act of killing of animals during the intermediate period between death and rebirth is incompatible with the ends of their ritual practice at the time of death. Reformed lamas extend their personal abstinence from alcohol to local villagers and when they perform gral they do not allow any raksi (alcohol distilled from millet) in the immediate vicinity of the altars of the gral. Such restrictions come up against long established Tamang practice where the offering of raksi to the deceased, especially that by daughters and clan sisters, and consumption of copious amounts of raksi and meat by villagers during the gral was and still is often an elemental aspect of local custom. The ‘ancient’ lamas on the other hand allow villagers to continue their old practices. Gral are generally overseen now by one set of lamas or another and the two rarely practice together.

Along with these developments in ritual practice, reformed lamas are building new gomba. One new gomba, moreover, recently hosted the second ngyunye retreat, a retreat
focused on ascetic practice and merit making, in the region last year and some 58 villagers in
the surrounding region attended (see Ortner 1978: 33-60). In the first performance the year
before, a total of 63 local Tamang participated. Reformed lamas are using ngyunye with its
concentration on lay discipline as a principal context in which to proselytise. The
construction of new gomha among Tamang relate to a triadic set of forces. First, lamas have
taken the initiative in building the new gomha. In one case, five reformed lamas from one
village combined resources and labour to initiate the project. As the project got underway,
young men working as migrant labourers in the Gulf region took up a collection among
themselves and provided forty thousand rupees for a tin roof. They are now raising funds for
statues of the Buddhas. Moreover, a local political leader has contributed some fifty thousand
rupees to the project as part of an effort to gain support in the new democratic regime
emerging in Nepal.

In the face of these developments, villagers find themselves in a dilemma. During a
discussion in the midst of a recent gral, one friend remarked that the lamas have formed into
the equivalent of political parties. He said that the situation had become like the Maoists and
the Nepalese Congress and asked how are villagers supposed to know which is right and
which is wrong? Another friend told me that the villagers are experiencing two kinds of
pressure, one from the Maoists and the other from the reformed lamas. He went on to assert
that if he were to die that very day, he would want the ancient lamas to preside at his death
rites because it was essential to have the daughters and sisters present the ritual flasks of raksi
and beer for a gral to be successful in both religious and social terms. The gral that inspired
these reflections unfolded dramatically in the tension between the two sets of lamas. Men of a
socially and politically prominent lineage in the village were sponsoring the gral for their
mother. They attempted to resolve the conflict among lamas by inviting both sets of lamas—
both of whom could not refuse because of the political prominence of one of the sons—but
each set insisted on moulding different sets of tormo to be placed on separate altars, hanging
different sets of thangka, and deploying different texts. The gral unfolded with the two sets of
lamas sitting side by side taking turns and at times working simultaneously at different ritual
chores. When the concluding dramatic moments of the gral arrived, the reformed lamas
deferred to the ancient lamas on the excuse that one of their members was from the mother’s-
brother’s village of the sponsors and therefore it was inappropriate for him to be involved in
the final sending off of the deceased. During the often extended times that the ancient lamas
were chanting their texts and ritually attending to an effigy of the deceased, the reformed
lamas sat in studied non-participation. Villagers ignoring the strictures of the reformed lamas
brought wooden flask after wooden flask of raksi along with offerings of fine foods to be
placed at the base of the effigy while outside the enclosure of the temporary altars, villagers
feasted and drank.

Parallel to these developments in Buddhist practice and directly related to them is a
dramatically transformed socio-polity in village Nepal. Many Tamang live and work in urban
areas or travel back and forth from village communities and the city with great regularity.
One of the most important political figures in the village and the region now lives almost
fulltime in Kathmandu where he runs a successful construction company and, although in a
position to distribute substantial patronage, visits the village community rarely. For these
Tamang as well as the some 65% of young Tamang men who work outside of Nepal in places
as far flung as the Gulf states and Southeast Asia or beyond, the old localised forms of
Buddhist practice no longer carry socio-political or ontological salience. The old headman
system has disappeared without—at least since the Maoist insurgency—a new one put in
place and social life has become less collective and more atomised. Where communities had
in the past sustained an insular autonomy, they are fully articulated with the centre and local
power centres no longer exist in the way they once did.
Likewise the old subsistence agricultural regime no longer defines the local economy. The majority of young men and many young women work outside the village and outside Nepal. The wives and children of migrants have moved to Kathmandu where they maintain small apartments. For these young migrants old forms of ritual have become obsolete and their interactions with other Buddhist communities in the cities have made them conscious of the apparent heterodox and ‘backward’ aspects of their practices as they are looked down on by other Buddhist communities. The new religious teachings of the reformed lamas have a particular salience to the new world the Tamang are making for themselves. The reformed lamas have introduced a new form of religiosity that makes experience of mobile and modern Tamang more meaningful on the one hand and more consistent with the practices of those whom they meet and interact with in greater Nepal. The powers the reformed lamas provide stress more self fulfilment than collective reconstitution.

In conclusion, Tamang in the villages to the northwest of the Kathmandu valley are in a state of transition that has yet to resolve itself and is full of contradictions. At the same moment that younger members of the community experience new worlds unheard of by their parents to which the more rationalised discourse of the reformed lamas might speak, there is a recognition that their attraction to the rationalised and modern discourse of the reformed lamas is at the expense of some elemental aspect of their identity as Tamang. The young man who told me that he wanted his own gral performed by the ancient lamas is precisely one of those who should be most attracted to reforming lamas as he has been living and working outside of the community and travelling to all corners of Nepal for many years. This man felt that to adopt the practices of the reformed lamas in reference to death was to deny fundamental aspects of what he called Tamang ‘culture.’ Giving up traditional exchanges among affines, ceasing to sing the ancient songs, and suspending the feasting in favour of holding butter lamps and generating inner purity as instructed by the reformed lamas was to alienate himself from his identity produced in the unique configurations and practices of Tamang society not a universalizing Buddhism.

NOTES

1 This paper was drafted while I was conducting field research in village Nepal away from the infrastructure of scholarly endeavour ready at hand including a library. I was unable to return to revising this paper and meeting the deadline of the editors until I found myself again in village Nepal with the same impediments. I apologise to all the scholars and colleagues whose work I should be citing but have not hence the absence of a comprehensive set of references. I want to especially thank Suryaman Tamang my long term research associate for his contributions to this paper which included substantial assistance in transcribing and translating the creation myth that appears in part in this paper.

2 Likewise Buddhism is as much Thai, Sri Lankan, Burmese, Bhutanese, Tibetan, Japanese, Chinese etc. as Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana at the textual/philosophical level. Moreover, with the rise of nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries we can not disjoin Buddhism in many parts of the world with political ideologies both in nations where Buddhism is the dominant religion and in those nations where it is a minority religion. The nationalisms of Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Tibetan diaspora are closely linked symbolically to forms of Buddhism and the institutions of Buddhism. Similarly minority ethnic identities within particular nations can become linked specifically to Buddhism. The ethnic associations of Tamang, Gurung, and now Magar (not to mention Sherpa, Yolmo and others) in Nepal now invoke Buddhism as an essential part of their identity as ‘indigenous’ ethnic groups, distinguishing themselves from dominant Hindus. To these developments, we must of course, now add cosmopolitan and global forms of Buddhism that attract a wide audience including Europeans and North and South Americans. Tibetan forms of Buddhism have had a unique place in these global developments (Abraham Zablucki 2005).

3 Personal communication from Kathryn March and Suryaman Tamang.

4 Christianity has spread widely in some Tamang areas in part because the old mythico-ritual system carried little relevancy in the new experiences of villagers and also supported the old class structure. The reformed
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HISTORICAL AND ETHNIC TRAITS IN THE MES RABS OF RIG 'DZIN RGD LDEM CAN

ROBERTO VITALI

The mes rabs of rig 'dzin rGod ldem can dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337-1408) I study here is found in the major biography of him penned by his disciple Nyi ma bzang po. One peculiarity of this mes rabs, characterised in the canonical style of the rNying ma pa literature by lengthy prophecies about the appearance of this gter ston which are already part of the narrative of his life, are a few lines dedicated to the origin of his family. They say that it belonged to an ethnic group rarely found on the plateau.

The mes rabs in the two available editions of the rnam thar (from Sikkim and Bhutan) makes three main points:

- firstly, that the family of rGod ldem can belonged to the de gvin Hor;
- secondly, that this was the lineage of the Hor Gur ser king according to the sgrung rgyud or 'transmission of the epic lore'; and
- thirdly, that a member of the family, de gvin De wa ra dza, was the maternal uncle of Mun chang Kong co. The royal family of rGod ldem can came to the plateau when De wa ra dza’s relatives followed her to Tibet and they became the favourite of Srong btsan sgam po and the Chinese queen.

PART ONE

Claims of an association with the Ge sar sgrung

The first major question that the few lines on the ancestors of rig 'dzin rGod ldem can engender is to establish what the allusion to the 'transmission of the epic lore' refers to. It is obvious that the brief account of the ancestral family of rig 'dzin rGod ldem can is transferred to a Ge sar milieu. Indeed the Ge sar sgrung is a major source of information about the Hor Gur, an ethnonym that designates the Yu gur, classified in the late Tibetan literature into Gur ser, Gur dkar and Gur nag. In particular the Gur ser were Shara Uighur or 'Yellow Uighur'. Gur ser and Gur nag were arch enemies of Ge sar (Sum pa mkhan po’s reply to a query by dPal ldan ye shes in Damdinsuren, see below n.3).

The next step is to evaluate the notions on the transfer of some Yu gur to Tibet by means of historical evidence external to the biography of rGod ldem can. This is the path followed by a late author such as Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor (1704-1788) who I mention here because he is one of the few Tibetan specialists of the Yu gur. He wrote some pages on Ge sar and the Yu gur in reply to a query by the third Pan chen rin po che dPal ldan ye shes (1738-1780). He identifies the lineage of the Gur ser as that of the Yu gur ruler A nam whose castle was on the bank of the rMa chu. He then talks about the whereabouts of eight communities of the Hor Gur ser at a distance of a seven or eight day journey from the northern shores of mtsho sNgon. Sum pa mkhan po does so in reference to the capture of the
Bha ta Hor sgom grwa by the sPu rgyal dynasty, a well known episode recorded in non-Tun huang sources.

Sum pa mkhan po deals with the same episode in his chos 'byung. He calls Hor Mi nyag the land which was the objective of the campaign launched by Khri srong lde btsan upon the instructions of Guru Padma and under the supreme command of Mu rub btsan po (Guru bkra shis chos 'byung p.502 lines 20-21). This war was waged, as well known, in order to summon Pe har to bSam yas and make him the lord of its treasure.4 The consequent migration of Pe har to bSam yas would symbolise an influx of splinters of Yu gur into Tibet.5

The later sources support their theory that the Yu gur controlled Mi nyag during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan by means of the location of the famous Bha ta Hor sgom grwa in the area of Kan chou (Gan gru), already called Byang ngos in a short Tun huang document published by Thomas in Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan (see below n.9).6 This apparently places the advent of the Yu gur on the border of Tibet to before the end of the reign of Khri srong lde btsan.

However, secular and religious evidence combined together shows that the popular account of a war between Khri srong lde btsan and the Yu gur should be dismissed. As to secular evidence:

• the Yu gur began their inroads into the territory of Kan chou in the first decade of the ninth century (Beckwith 1987: 163). Following the collapse of their empire in Mongolia in 840, one of their groups took over Kan chou from the Tibetans (Haneda 1978: 5).7 In any way this occupation is assessed, it occurred after the reign of Khri srong lde btsan.8

Perhaps just coincidentally, the Yu gur occupation of the Kan chou corridor corresponded with the weakening of the sPu rgyal state after the death of Ral pa can and the ascension of Glang dar ma to the throne. IDe' u Jo sras chos 'byung (p.139 lines 16-17) indeed mentions a Yu gur war in the aftermath of Glang dar ma’s persecution of Buddhism.

Religious evidence corroborates a similar scenario:

• the Tun huang document that records the name Byang ngos for the area of Kan chou is a kind of gdan rabs ante litteram. It contains the lineages of masters from the time of mkhan po Bo dhi sa twa onwards, active at five religious institutions: Ra sa 'Phrul snang, bSam yas and one chos grwa ('religious school') each in mDo Khams, Kam bcu (another (earlier?) name for Kan chou than Gan gru?) and Gog bcu.9

This reference to the Kam bcu chos grwa and its lineage of Tibetan masters is an early and authoritative piece of evidence. It shows that the Tibetans controlled Kan chou during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan in a way stable enough to have a religious school in the same area where the Bha ta Hor sgom grwa was located according to the later sources.10 These texts ignore the existence of the Kam bcu religious school.

Given that the Bha ta Hor sgom grwa did not exist before the first decade of the ninth century and thus after the reign of Khri srong lde btsan, it seems that the late sources have displaced events. They have antedated them to his reign, subverting their actual historical unfolding. It is not clear whether their confusion reached the extent of taking the Kam bcu
chos grwa, founded by the Tibetans as a consequence of their control of the area, for the Bha ta Hor sgom grwa.

The summons of Pe har by the Tibetans was not the outcome of a dispossession of the area at the expense of the Yu gur who, on the contrary, later conquered Kan chou from the Tibetans rather than losing it to them. The almost automatic association of Pe har with the Yu gur by later Tibetan authors and Western scholars should be further investigated.11

The narrative of the ancestors in the mes rabs

The rest of the narrative in the mes rabs does not match the history of the contacts between sPu rgyal Bod and the Yu gur. It has nothing to do with the Ge sar epic either. The mes rabs records the circumstances surrounding the migration of rGod ldem can’s family to Tibet, linked with Kong co who came to Bod yul in 641, the date given in the Introduction to the Tun-huang Annals (lines 10-11, see Tu hong nas thon pa’i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha p.12). These statements place the migration to a time even earlier than the alleged eighth century conquest of the Bha ta Hor sgom grwa when the Yu gur were still living in lands distant from the Tibetan plateau.

Going by the mes rabs, the Turkic influx was limited to a few dignitaries accompanying the Chinese princess. The notion conveyed is that this migration was elitist and not an ethnic inflow. Still it was one more piece in the multicultural mosaic of Srong btsan sgam po’s court. There were Newar and Chinese religious masters; contacts with Kha che through Thon mi Sambhota; the Licchavi court exiled in lHa sa; Kong co’s Turkic nobleman; a Zhang zhung pa wife of the lha sras btsan po; Khotanese monks; Sogdian architects; Tangut strongmen carrying the Jo bo to lHa sa; Sum pa craftsmen, masters of artifacts such as wine vessels in gold. The New T’ang Annals mention a two meter-high wine vessel in gold in the shape of a duck, sent by Srong btsan sgam po to the Chinese emperor (Pelliot 1961: 84).

Kinship between Kong co and De wa ra dza, described as a zhang (‘maternal uncle’) of the Chinese princess, seems to be a reliable detail in the mes rabs. Both T’ang Annals (Pelliot 1961: 3, 82, Beckwith 1987: 22) document that, before 634, unspecified Turks received Chinese princesses in marriage, a customary diplomatic exchange between these two strong powers in Central Asia.

The title de gyin attributed to the ancestor De wa ra dza could be a key to identify rGod ldem can’s ancestors as Yu gur. However this rank was not the exclusive property of the Yu gur. Tegin stands for ‘prince’ in Turkic as Dan Martin (2001: Chapt.3 n.25) has said on the basis of a decoding by Beckwith. The T’u ch’eh or the proto-Yu gur (also known as the T’ieh leh or Kao ch’e to the Chinese) gave this title to the sons and brothers of the ruler (MacKerras 1972: 135 n.60). Later the Yu gur, too, bestowed it to the close relatives of their khagan (ibid.).

In Srong btsan sgam po’s time, other Turks and not the Yu gur were on the borders of the plateau. The definition of the ancestors of rGod ldem can as de gyin Hor may refer to:

- Turks from dominions far away from Tibet and thus Northern Turks, members of the proto-Yu gur;
- or else members of the Western Turks,12 neighbours and allies of the Tibetans at the time.
Given that De wa ra dza was a contemporary of Srong btsan sgam po, the attribution of a Yu gur origin to the family of rGod ldem can is admissible only if it concerns the proto-Yu gur; hence before they formed their state and eventually became the neighbours of the Tibetans on the north-eastern border of the plateau.

A few facts about his origin are elaborated in the words of rGod ldem can found in his sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig le'u drug pa lde mig 'phrul gyi dgu skor sdog go, which he assigns to a prophecy by Guru Padma. In the first place, his words deny the version of the biography that indeed members of De wa ra dza's family migrated to Tibet and indirectly corroborate that it was De wa ra dza who accompanied Kong co to the Tibetan court.

But there are more important points. rGod ldem can does not say that he descended from the Hor Gur ser. He mentions the title de gyin in reference to his ancestor De wa ra dza, said to have been a contemporary of Srong btsan sgam po and Kong co. This is enough proof to confirm a Turkic ethnic affiliation, not necessarily a Yu gur one. How meaningful is rGod lem can's omission of any reference to the Hor Gur ser? The mes rabs of rGod ldem can's biography seems to have been styled by Nyi ma bzang po after the prophecy attributed to Guru Padma, which was actually written by rGod ldem can. Is the association with the Yu gur an anachronistic addition by Nyi ma bzang po?

Its features being as they are, there are no specific grounds to dismiss rGod ldem can's account of his family, despite the historical incredulity in the literature of other schools towards the rNying ma pa authors' attribution of many deeds to Srong btsan sgam po and Kong co. Rejection of the rNying ma pa literature on the imperial period without critical appraisal would be inexcusable given that some of the most brilliant accounts on the lha sras btsan po dynasty and its time are by great rNying ma pa authors, such as Nyang ral (Chos 'byung me tog snyin po sbran rtsi'i bcud), Orgyan gling pa (bKa' thang sde lnga), Sags rgyas gling pa (Bla ma dgongs 'dus) and 'Jigs med gling pa (gTam tshogs). But doubts on specific issues remain.

It is probable that a chronological transfer was operated in the mes rabs, so that events occurring not before the late eighth century or thereafter are assigned to the seventh century. No clues exist in the mes rabs to validate the possibility that the migration, assigned to the time of Srong btsan sgam po, actually happened during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan or after the end of the legitimate lha sras btsan po dynasty. The way rGod ldem can writes about his mes rabs leaves little doubt that the migration indeed occurred in the mid seventh century and that Nyi ma bzang po or his authority opted to embellish it with details belonging to later events.

Vague Ge sar ideas superimposed upon a more ancient layer in the mes rabs are an early hint that connects the knowledge of the Yu gur to the hero of Gling. They are developed considerably in the later literature in a more reliable milieu that associates the Gur ser (and Gur nag, too) with the existence of Ge sar. An interesting point of the accounts dedicated to the Turkic origin of rGod ldem can is that they provide an insight into the relations, although limited and elitist, between Turks and sPu rgyal Bod, missing in the Ge sar epic.
PART TWO

Historical events in the background of the transfer

The transfer of de gyin De wa ra dza to Tibet in the retinue of courtiers accompanying Kong co happened in the background of the well known diplomatic relations established by the Tibetans with the emperor T'ai tsung who sent the princess to Tibet in 641. They were the consequence, as is equally well known, of the military campaign launched by Srong btsan sgam po on the north-eastern flank of the plateau in 634, that ended with the submission of the Sum pa and the rGya, the later being people of Tangut ethnos.

The rGya inhabited the stretch of land subsequently occupied by the Yu gur. Together with the rGya, the people defeated by Srong btsan sgam po on that occasion were the Tangut T'o pa of Turkic stock. The T'o pa inhabited the area of Kan chou like the rGya defeated by Srong btsan sgam po and mingled with them.

rgyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas, written in the fifteenth century like rGod ldem can gyi rnam thar, talks about three Mi nyag:

• rGya Mi nyag in the area of Kan chou;
• Byang Mi nyag or Si hia; and
• Khams Mi nyag Rab sgang.

These three Mi nyag existed in different periods and locations. The same text situates the most ancient Mi nyag, to which the rGya tribes annexed by Srong btsan sgam po belonged, to the east of where sDe dge was later founded. This Mi nyag, confirmed by the Chinese literature (T'ang shu) to be the area held by groups of the rGya during the seventh century (Stein 1951: 225-229, MacKerras 1972: n.112), was in the border area of Khams stod near Sechuan and south of eastern A mdo. rGyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas also talks about a fragment of this Mi nyag held by the rGya in the bends of the Yellow River still inhabited by Chinese, Yu gur and Tibetans during the reign of Glang dar ma (see n.17).

Further developments

The T'ang Annals (Ch. 198 f.2a, and Stein: 1951: 231) enumerate as nine the clans of the rGya who, after their upset by Srong btsan sgam po, remained in the area of Kan chou and submitted to the Tibetans. The remaining fifteen were the clans of the T'o pa who had mingled with these Tangut. In 634, these defeated T'o pa submitted to the Chinese and were transferred to the Ordos region. They set the ethnic basis for the future kingdom of Si hia.

Song che (ch.86, f.9b) is the source enumerating as nine the clans of the Gya, among the twenty-two clans comprising the Tangut of the Kan chou area, who remained in their land. The others were T'o pa who swore loyalty to the Chinese and left for Ordos (Stein 1951: 231-232).

More than 300 years after the split caused by Srong btsan sgam po's conquest of rGya Mi nyag, the T'o pa were instrumental in the creation of the Si hia kingdom. The first ruler of Si hia, Li Ki ts'ien, claimed descent from the T'o pa. In 982 he rebelled against the Chinese. In 1028 the Tangut from the Ordos region were able to take over the ancient Mi nyag kingdom
of Kan chou shared by the T'o pa with the rGya in the seventh century. In 1032 Si hia proclaimed its independence.

rGod ldem can’s ancestors in g.Yas ru

Little is known about the whereabouts of the family of rGod ldem can from the mid seventh century until some time later. The mes rabs in the biography of rGod ldem can offers evidence useful to propose a terminus ante quem that approximates when his ancestors reached their final destination in g.Yas ru and settled at the birth place of the Byang gter master. This was sNa mo lung in the area of Zang zang.

The transfer took place after the twenty-first generation in the lineage (as shown by the presence in Byang stod of a member of its line going by the ominous name of Byang stod dBang phyug rdo rje drag po rtsal), to be counted from 641 when Kong co arrived in Tibet. This calculation by mi rabs leads to a period either not later than the mid eleventh century (on the basis of the Bhutanese edition of the rnam thar) or sometime after the second quarter of the twelfth century (on the basis of the Sikkimese edition). rGod ldem can’s own words are useful to credit the Sikkimese edition and to place his family’s establishment at sNa mo lung sometime after the second quarter of the twelfth century.

The bstan pa phyi dar rulers of g.Yas ru

mKhas pa lDe’u identifies in the three sons of sKyid lde, the youngest of the three Khri bKra shis brtsegs pa dpal’s children, the royalty who held g.Yas ru from the third or fourth quarter of the tenth century until the time of writing his chos ’byung in the late 13th. By then the predecessors of rGod ldem can had already resided in the region for quite some time. The sons of sKyid lde controlled the lands from gTsang rTa nag and ’Jad to the western side of g.Yas ru.

Textual evidence on the migration of groups of Tangut from Byang Mi nyag

La stod Byang

The next local step after the establishment of rGod ldem can’s family in g.Yas ru was the foundation of the nucleus of the La stod Byang principality. It is credited by the sources to people from Byang Mi nyag fleeing Gengis Khan’s destruction of their kingdom in 1227 (dPal ldan chos kyi bzang po, sDe pa g.Yas ru Byan pa’i rgyal rabs f.1b lines 1-3, sPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs p.113 lines 5-8 and Sum pa mkhan po, dPag bsam ljong bzang p.313 lines 10-11).

The name La stod Byang appears officially in the Tibetan records to address g.Yas ru when the dBus gTsang khri skor bcu gsum were introduced in 1268. Adding Byang to La stod obviously served the purpose of distinguishing it from La stod lHo. But it could echo, too, the provenance of the Tangut people who established it, coming from Byang Mi nyag.

With the advent of the people from Si hia there was a change of secular status in g.Yas ru. The descendants of Khri bKra shis brtsegs pa dpal were superseded by the new rulers from Byang Mi nyag. It is with this new power structure that the family of rGod ldem can cohabited but there is no indication whether his ancestors had political responsibilities. The
The Lastod Byang pa rulers benefited from a long spell of alliance with the Sa skyā pa, but their interaction with the overlords of Tibet during the second half of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth is not without inconsistencies. In the long run, the records concerning their origin, too, raise historical perplexities.

Sikkim

The destruction of the Si hia kingdom sent ripples throughout the plateau beyond Lastod Byang alone. There are accounts and inscriptive evidence that attribute descent from Mi nyag to people settled in the southern stretch of the Tibetan plateau. History documents in rather unsettled terms that another migration of Tangut from Mi nyag brought splinters of their people to Sikkim.

Sikkimese histories (for instance, mkhan po Chos dbang's 'Bras mo ljongs kyi chos srid dang rgya rabs lo rgyus p.83 line 7-p.84 line 19) articulate various traditions, which make a major confusion between two Mi nyag that existed in different periods and locations:

- the first talks about one sGer rgyal, the ancestor belonging to the lDong tribe, seemingly the founder of the historically elusive Khams Mi nyag.
- Another refers again to Khams Mi nyag because it mentions:
- Mu rub btsan po moving to mDo Khams;

and one more, related to the legend of Pe har, bSam yas and rGya Mi nyag, which deals with:

- Dharma pā la, belonging to the lineage of king Indra bhu ti the middle, electing residence at the Bha ta Hor sgom grwa (see above n.4).

A rather detailed version of the migration to Sikkim, associating it with Khams Mi nyag as the original land of splinters of Tangut, places it into a Sa skyā pa milieu. It records the well known participation of the Tangut refugee Gyad 'bum bsags in dpon chen Shakya bzang po’s construction of Sa skyā lHa khang chen mo in 1265. This account is again not immune from historical inconsistency. Especially a reference to rGyal rtse founded in the second half of the following century is somewhat disturbing. The Tangut origin of this man is indirectly confirmed by the allusion to his physical strength, a legendary feature attributed in general to the Tangut people. For instance, lHa dga’ and Klu dga’, the Tangut brothers I have mentioned above, who brought the Jo bo to lHa sa, were renowned for the same reason.

After his contribution in Sa skyā, Gyad 'bum bsags moved closer to 'Bras mo ljongs by staying provisionally in 'Bring mtsams, Chum 'bi and Gro mo. He finally settled in Sikkim, and his four sons established one local lineage each.

A Turk in the Tangut land of the south

The cohabitation between Turks and Tangut in La stod Byang was instrumental, some 100 years after the influx from Si hia, in rGod Idem can’s choice of transferring his activity to Sikkim. His biography links it in the wake of the death of his patron, the Gung thang king bKra shis lde, in the year of the snake 1365; and especially after the war waged from dBus
to La stod Byang in the year of the pig 1371 (rGod ldem can gyi rnam thar p.109 line 5) in the aftermath of the fall of the Sa skya pa hegemony in Tibet. These topical reasons urged him to leave his native land and proceed to 'Bras mo ljongs, where he stayed from 1374 to 1384. Besides the mystical undertones provided by prophecies, his decision to go from one pole of Tangut culture in the Tibetan speaking world to another seemingly rested on social conditions in Sikkim, similar to those prevailing in his native land.34

I see in this move the recreation of a piece of century-old history of the plateau and Central Asia, renewed by rGod ldem can that concerns lost kingdoms on the outskirts of the plateau:

• the most ancient—the Mi nyag kingdom of the rGya, crushed by Srong btsan sgam po in 634; and
• the later and better historically documented—Byang Mi nyag or Si hia; while the most enigmatic—Mi nyag Rab sgang in Khams—had an obscure role in these exchanges.

Owing to his family extraction, rGod ldem can was among the few who could recognise these links, again forgotten after his life, which lend to Sikkim a piece of Central Asian interaction beyond the cultural and physical barriers of the Himalayan region.

THE ANCESTRAL LINEAGE OF RIG 'DZIN RGod ldem can

de gyin De wa ra dza

(an unspecified number of missing generations in the family)

Hor 'Jig rten mgon

Byang stod dBang phyug rdo rje drag po rt sal

grub chen Shakya rdo rje

Ye shes rdo rje

bram ze Shakya mgon

slob dpon bDud 'dul

rGod ldem can
NOTES

1 It is reductive to confine an understanding of the role held by rGrod ldem can in Tibetan culture merely to an outline, as I do in the present note, but my focus in this paper is on his ancestors. Future explorations of his towering personality and life activity should not do without several aspects:
   • his almost unparalleled contribution to the theory and practice of rDzogs chen through his numerous gter ma (especially the Kun tu bzang po'i byangchos pa zhang thal and Ka dag rang byung rang shar cycles);
   • his gter ston activity which fostered the establishment of the Byang gter tradition;
   • his opening of a number of shas yul (mChod rten nji ma, sKyid mo lung, Padma'i tshal, mKhan pa lung, Bu le gangs and others);
   • the terms of his yon mchod with three consecutive rulers of Gung thang;
   • the use of the prophetical genre, a classic of the rNying ma pa literature, in reference to him and his activity, which links his life to the sacred and religious history of Tibet at large;
   • the literary and historical significance of the interdependence between his religious achievements and political events set in their background;
   • his association with the Guru Padma byung gnas symbology, as shown by the several rgod ldem (‘vulture/eagle feathers’) grown on his head at different times in his life.

   These are just a few themes. Much more should be taken into consideration.

2 Njy ma bzang po, rGrod ldem can gyi rnam thar (Sikkim ed. p.58 line 3-p.59 line 2) introduces the account of the mes rabs of rGrod ldem can in the form of a prophecy of Guru Padma: “As for his family, this is a royal family like a sa la tree. This is the family of the de gyin Hor. As for it, this is the lineage of the Hor Gur ser king, known to the ancient epic (sgrunings) transmission. A member of this [king’s] clan, de gyin De wa ra dza, who could display the power of the nine dark spoked phur bu, became one of the maternal uncles of Gyim zhang (so spelled) Ong jo. When Ong jo went to Tibet, this lineage member went [with her] to be officiating bla ma and minister (bla mchod bIon). According to rGyal po gsang pa'i gab lung, Srong btsan sgam po, the emanation of ‘Phags pa, and Ong jo, the emanation of sGrol ma, held de gyin De wa ra dza as most beloved. At the end, at the thirty sixth generation devoted to the teachings and belonging to the lineage who acted as commoners [despite being kings], [rGrod ldem can] will be born in this lineage of Compassionate Beings. He will be a king protector of the teachings, [acting as] my successor’.

3 Sum bha (spelled so) mkhan po’s reply to dpal ldan ye shes (Damdinsuren, Istoriccskie korni Geseriadi (Tibetan text) p.184 line 2-p.185 line 4): “On the subject of the Hor dealt with in various chos byung, in order to talk a little about the Yu gur who are contiguous to Tibet, [one should say that] the great line of rulers of these Hor (p.185) who waged a war against Ge sar, whereby they were exterminated, was [the line] of the Ser po Hor Gur ser A nam rgyal po. Not only have I heard that his residence was a great castle, but it is also said in a note that this was on the bank of the Shi ri gwol, this being the name of the river in the land where Cing gi se rgyal po (i.e. Gengis Khan, Jing gir rgyal po) died”.

The appellative Shi ri gwol (or, better, Sha ri gwol) is wrongly taken by Stein (Recherches sur l'épopeé et le barde au Tibet p.172 n.43 and p.313 n.122) to be the collective name of the Yu gur divisions of the Shara Uighur (i.e. the Gur ser) rather than the Yellow River in Turkic language.

Sum bha (so spelled) mkhan po's reply to dpal ldan ye shes (Damdinsuren, Istoriccskie korni Geseriadi, Tibetan text p.186 lines 1-3): “Ge sar later destroyed Ya rtse mkhar belonging to the king of the Yu gur Ho thon who are the Hor Gur ser. This was on the upper left border of sDe dge. Nowadays these communities, the eight divisions of the Shi ra (spelled so) gwol, are on the distant side of mtsno sNgom”. But this combination of the two names does not seem to have been a standard name.

Ibid., (p.186 line 5): “Here (on the upper left border of sDe dge) it seems there are the ruins of the Ban dha Hor sgom grwa, Pe dkar’s residence in antiquity, which was seized [by sPu rgyal Bod]”.

Ibid., (p.188 line 18-p.189 line 1): “It is said that Ge sar stayed for nine years in the land of the Me za and lHan du bdud-s. During that period the bandit troops of the Gur kings of the Gur dkar, Gur ser and Gur nag invaded the land of the Lring pa. (p.189) killed eighty Ge sar’s relatives and thirty brothers of Zhal dkar and Gling”.

Ibid., (p.190 lines 9-16): “Moreover, on the northern border of mtsno sNgom, in the area reached after a journey of seven or eight days, enclosed by Rivers Pâ stong and Shug sha up to the near side of Su gru mkhar of the Chinese are the lands of the encampments of the Hor Gur ser, also known as the eight communities of the Sha ra Yu gur whose customs are similar to those of Hwo (so spelled) thon (i.e. Khotan), and [are inhabited] by a mix of sRgyas, Bod and Hor people”.

HISTORICAL AND ETHNIC TRAITS IN THE Mes RABS OF RGod LDEM CAN 199
Sum-pa mkhan-po, *dpag-bsam ljion-bzang* (p.339 lines 5-15): “Riches were placed in the treasury room Pe har gling, and Pe har was appointed lord of the treasure. Concerning this, some say that, earlier, when slob dpon Padma appointed the five Klu rgyal zur phud to be lords of the treasure, he requested to appoint the klu known as dMu rigs Klu cha rgyal po Hu who resided in Hor yul, and the slob dpon inscribed it for the king on a silk banner which he gave to rNam sras. Before [the sPu rgyal Bod pa] troops went to Hor Mi nyag, there existed the lineages of the Za hor rgyal po Dza who, in succession, included Indra bhu ti, Sha kra mu ti. gTsug lag khang ’dzin, Dharma rå dza and Dharma på la. The latter went from Bhangha la to China and took residence at the *sgom grwa* of the Bha ta Hor in Gan gru (Kan chou). Dharma på la the younger, belonging to the same lineage, came [to Tibet] carrying the self originated turquoise Thub pa, the mask of rhinoceros skin and the crystal lion, three in all. rGyal po Pe dkar was the one who came [to Tibet] following [this] man and [these] treasures flying on a wooden bird”.

Ibid., (p.340 lines 2-7): “Some others say that mkhan [po Bodhi sa twa], slob [dpam Padma ’byung gnas] and rgyal [po Khri strong lde btsan], three in all, sent a messenger. He brought the turquoise Thub pa and the other objects from the Bha ta, which were followed by one among the ‘dre rgyal dkar nag ser (the ‘white, black and yellow ’dre and rgyal [po class of evil spirits’) of the Yu gur. It is said that this (i.e. Pe har) was appointed lord of the treasure. It is true that his name is a corruption of Bi ha ra, Be har and Pe dkar”. Also see Ngag dbang skal ldan rgya mtsho, *Shel dkar chos ’byung* (edited and translated by Pasang Wangdu and H. Diemberger, f.4a lines 1-4; translation on p.25) for the same legend of the war waged against the Bha ta Hor *sgom grwa* and the summoning of Pe har to bSam yas.

As for klu rgyal po Hu, evidence adduced by Demieville (*Le concile de Lhasa Addenda* p.368-369) denies Stoddard’s identification of the Nine Clans of the Hu as the Tangut in Zhang Khri sum rje’s eulogy (see her ‘The Nine Brothers of the White High. Mi nyag and “King” Pe dkar Revisited’ p.4-5). Demieville considers the Nine Clans of the Hu to be Sogdians on Pulleyblank’s authority. See Pulleyblank ‘A Sogdian Colony in Inner Mongolia’ for a convincing identification of the Hu as Iranian people which were settled in Central Asia.

dPyid kyi rgyal mo’i glu dbyangs (p.65 lines 2-10): “Then, the mkhan [po] slob [dpam] and chos [rgyal], three in all, held talks in order to appoint a protector of the *gtsug lag khang*. The troops of the king having raided the meditation school of the Bha ta Hor, it happened that dPe har followed its ‘things’ [and] was appointed the guardian of the [bSam yas] treasure. Others maintain that the mkhan [po] slob [dpam] and chos [rgyal], altogether three, sent an envoy with a message [and] Dharma pä la, [who belonged to] the royal family of Za hor, brought [to Tibet] the turquoise Thub pa and the rhinoceros mask which dPe har followed. Having caused great harm to the people such as madness, since the slob dpon performed the ar [ritual], he escaped to the Bha ta Hor’s land and everything truly returned to normality”. Also see Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Guge Pu.hrang* (n.298-299).

*Nyang ral chos ’byung* (p.343 line 9-p.344 line 4): “Slob dpon [Padma] said the following authoritative words: ‘E ma ho. Times are going from bad to worse. Despite bSam yas [having been built to be the personal temple (thugs dam) of [yourself] the lord, a ’gong po (a “spirit”) has entered the heart of the king. The subjects quarrel among themselves [and] have intermemic struggles. The *gtsug lag khang* are houses of disputes... The empty nihilist views of the bad religion are taught. These are signs of the destruction of the teachings [caused by] these views. At this time rgyal po dPe har, the protector of wealth, is needed to be the protector of the *gtsug lag [khang]* treasure. Go and fetch his “things”. I will then appoint him to be the protector of the treasure””. Also see Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Guge Pu.hrang* (n.300).

In referring to the episode of the fall of the Bha ta Hor *sgom grwa* in the land of the Mi nyag of Kan chou and the consequent summoning of Pe har, shot by rNam thos sras, to bSam yas (ibid., p.287-289), Stein (*Recherches sur l’époque et le barde au Tibet* p.288) cites dpam’ bo gtsug lag ’phreng ba who used *sBa bzhek* as his authority to attribute this military success to the minister Ta ra klu gong. Other sources attribute it to zhang lHa bzang klu dpal (see, inter alia, *Guru bKra shis chos ’byung* p.502 line 7-p.503 line 2 and p.503 lines 7-8). Chronological factors are in favour of lHa bzang klu dpal: Ta ra klu gong was ostracised before the construction of bSam yas which preceded the expedition against the Bha ta Hor. Credit of the conquest of the Bha ta Hor *sgom grwa* to lHa bzang klu dpal is supported by the account of the *gter ma* hidden by him at Bya rog gshongs, a temple in the vicinity of Bo dong E, and rediscovered by gNyal pa Nyi ma shes rab. The fact that he left at this temple the banner associated with rNam thos sras and slob dpon Padma, the symbol and talisman of this military expedition, could be a sign that lHa bzang klu dpal rather than Ta ra klu gong was the general of the campaign.
Zhang lHa bzang klu dpal left part of a statue from Mi nyag and a flag associated with rNam thos sras, who shot Pe har—so that the Tibetans could take this deity to bSam yas—at Bya rgod gshongs, said to have been built by him. They were gter ma-s hidden at this holy place and rediscovered by gNyal pa Nyi ma shes rab.

This would attribute to the late bstan pa phyi dar or soon after its end a resurgence in interest for events linked with the Yu gur migration to Tibet (exemplified by the transfer of Pe har to bSam yas) soon before or around the time when the first member of the rGod Idem can family reached sNa mo lung, its seat in g.Yas ru Byang (see below).

Guru bkra shis chos 'byung (p.502 line 2-p.503 line 12) reads: “gNyal pa Nyi ma shes rab was born in gNyal. He was the disciple of Zangs dkar lo tsa ba ‘Phags pa shes rab. Having learned rNal 'byor gyi rgyud, he was extremely well versed in Yo ga. He established the foundations of the teachings in gNyal stod and smad, and made statues of rNam snang in many lha khang. He turned the wheel of the teachings on Yo ga, such as instructions and debate, and so the cycles of Yo ga became diffused in an extremely expanded way during his lifetime. He was beneficial and gracious to the teachings of Yo ga. His actual residence was gTsang Bo dgon. From the glo 'bur of the lha khang of Bya rgod gshong (spelled so), he ‘invited’ the mask together with the fluttering flag known as lJang yul ma (‘from the land of lJang’) and the meditation cycle of rNam sras mDung dmar can (‘with the red spear’), hidden in antiquity by blon chen lHa bzang klu dpal.

The mask had been made earlier under the sponsorship of rgyal po rNam thos sras himself at the palace of lCang lo can in the north. It was consecrated by Lag na rdo rje, the lord of splendid secrets, [rNam thos sras] spent many years in lCang lo can to benefit sentient beings and, on one occasion, he flew from the sky to a specific province of China. He landed from the sky the way a bya rgod (‘vulture, eagle’) lands and remained there. It is said that this holy place was given the name of Bya rgod gshongs. Having remained in the land of China for many years, he stayed [there] (sic) and benefited the sentient beings of Ma ha Tsi na. Then, during the time of Khri srong lde’u btsan, the king protector of religion, when zhang lHa bzang klu dpal, having brought troops to China, seized China (sic), he took away the sku stod (‘upper part of the image’, this is why it became a mask) to Tibet. Having brought it to his own locality gTsang Bo dgon, he laid the foundations of the holy place in an extensive way. Following the appointment [of rNam sras] to be its protector and the request to stay there, the holy institution became known as Bya rgod gshongs. The sku smad (‘lower part’) is still at present in that province of China. It is well known that one day in the future the upper and lower parts will be joined together and will fly in the sky, and go to lCang lo can. It is indeed regarded as the true rgyal po chen po rNam thos sras (the text writes rNam mang thos sras).

As for the fluttering flag, when lHa sras Mu rub btsan po went to guard the border in the north, slob dpon Rin po che having actually summoned rNam sras rta bdag bgyrgad (rNam sras ‘and the eight horse [riding] lords’) [to Tibet], mTha’i mi gMon brton depicted (bris) the instructions and orders to the king and ministers in the form of the visions [Guru Padma had] on the fluttering flag. rNam sras and his retinue dissolved into it. The prince and his retinue went to g.Yar mo thang of Khams. Zhang lHa bzang klu dpal surveyed the troops at the rGya zam (i.e. the bridge leading to the land of the rGya?). Having counted them, in the east there were 90,000 with faces of falcons; 100,000 horsemen with forelegs of ghouls [and] with legs of Tibet[ans]; (p.503) 120,000 with human bodies and rat tails; 130,000 with human bodies and donkey ears. These uncontrollable troops seized the lands of rGya Hor (i.e. Mi nyag) and Yu gu (spelled so). Being in fear, rgyal po Pe dkar transformed into a bya rgod (‘vulture, eagle’) and fled. A gnos sbyin shot an arrow that hit its wing and [Pe har] fell to the ground. He was caught by rNam ras and his retinue, and brought to bSam yas. The lha sras having seen innumerable heads of the messengers, manifestations of rNam sras, at that time, they were used as models. A painting was made, known as rNam sras lJangs (sic) ‘dra ma (‘the depiction of rNam sras in the mode of lJang’). It is said that, earlier, a fluttering flag of smaller size (’khor nyung) given by the slob dpon was the true lJangs (sic) yul ma (‘the [painting] from the land of lJang’). It is well known that the fluttering flag is presently kept at Chos lung tshogs pa. As to this one (i.e. the flag), it was initially hidden as gter at Bya rgod gshongs, and gNyal pa Nyi ma shes rab rediscovered it together with meditation cycles of gDung dmar can. After a long time, the fluttering flag came into the hands of the Karma pa. It was brought to gzhis ka rNe’u when the rNe’u rdzong pa demanded that shame should be inflicted upon the sGar pa. When there was unrest with the rNe’u [rdzong] pa, Rin spungs Don yod rdo rje having taken it to gTsang, it was offered to Chos lung tshogs pa”.

HISTORICAL AND ETHNIC TRAITS IN THE MES RABS OF RIG ’DZIN RGO'D LDEM CAN
On the circumstances of the foundation of Bya rgod gshongs, Ne’u pandi ta (sNgon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba p.29 line 20-p.30 line 1) says: “Because of the merit of his blind aunt, Tshes spong lHa bzang klu dpal (p.30) built sBo thong (spelled so) Bya rgod gshongs”.

The notion that the Kan chou corridor was already known as Byang ngos during the imperial period is significant because the adoption of this place name is commonly associated with the establishment of the Sa skya pa/Mongol egemony in Tibet.

Stein (’Mi nyag et Si hia’ p.250) says it was conquered either in 860 or 866.

Traces of interaction between Tibetans and Yu gur are preserved in the sources for the period 789-851, marked by sustained military confrontation, but in 822-823 they signed their famous peace treaty.

The mkhas pa mi gsum crossed Yu gur territory, called Hor yul in the related literature, manifestly profiting of the lack of Tibetan control, to escape Glang dar ma’s persecution just before his assassination and thus around 841 842 (IDE ‘u Jo sras chos ‘byung p.154 lines 18-21; mkhas pa IDE ‘u chos ‘byung p.390 line 19-p.391 line 3; Bu ston chos ‘byung p.193 lines 15-21). Ne’u pandi ta says that they fled from Njam shod to Hor yul, the land under the Yu gur (sNgon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba p.32 line 16-p.33 line 1). They were taken from Hor yul to A mdo by a Yu gur dge bshnyen, who he names Shakya shes rab (ibid., lines 20-21).

Ch. 0021 (670, vol.31 f.116b) (Thomas, Tibetan Literary Texts Concerning Turkestan vol. II, Documents: the Sa-cu region p.85-86) from Tun huang opens with the following words: “Bod yul du byung ba’i dge ba’i bshes gnyen gi rgyud kyi rnam”. It continues with a reference to Rgya gar gyi mkhan po Bodhi sa twa, said to have been the establisher of the various monastic lineages of disciples mentioned in this text (ibid., lines 2-3: “Rgya gar gyi mkhan po Bo dhi swa twa (spelled so) las stogs pa’i slob ma ni”). It then adds (lines 17-21): “Kam bcu’i chos gra’i slobz (sic) dpon/ dBas Byang chub rin chen/ ‘An dGe lam/ Lang ’gro dam mtsho/ IJe zhi mal ‘byor sKyor ‘phru ma legs las bsogs pa ni/ Byang ngos su brag yug pa lags so/’; “The masters of the Kam bcu chos gra (’religious school’) were dBas Byang chub rin chen, ‘An dGe lam, Lang ‘gro dam mtsho and IJe zhi mal ‘byor sKyor ‘phru ma legs, the lineage holders in Byang ngos’.

Owing to lack of evidence, the foundation of the Tibetan chos grwa in the area of Kan chou, mentioned in the text in the note above, is not assignable to the reign of any lha sras btsan po (up to Khri srong lde btsan) who ruled Tibet since the time Srong btsan sgam po took away control of the region from the Rgya. Nyung ral chos ‘byung (p.351 line 21–p.352 line 1): “After the takeover of the Bha ta Hor gyi sgom gra, Pe har was summoned to [the land of] the Black Headed people (p.352), many lha ‘dre of bSam yas were appointed as protectors of the gter”.

The adoption of Pe har as the protector of the bSam yas treasure, having occurred soon after the completion of the temple, could have been a simple religious import from the area of Kan chou to dBus, both controlled by Khri srong lde btsan.

Sum pa mkhan po adds that the Gur ser subdivision of the Yu gur was from Khotan (see above n.3). One wonders whether the ancient family members of rGod Idem can, said to have become the zhang of Mun chang Kong co, were Western Turks. But a Western Turk origin for the Yu gur family of rGod Idem can cannot be confirmed on the mere grounds that they would have controlled Khotan in the decades before Kong co was sent to Tibet in marriage to Srong btsan sgam po.

sBas yul ‘Bra mo lngongs kyi lam yig le’u drug pa lde mig ‘phrul gyi dgu skor sdog go (f.8b line 6-f.9a line 1): “A family of Byang chub sems dpa’ who will guide sentient beings to the thought of enlightenment will be earlier associated with my royal lineage (i.e. the lha sras btsan po), but eventually my lineage will go through a process of decadence. During the latter period a protector of sentient beings with the thought of enlightenment will take birth either in an ox or a dragon year. The lineage of de gyun De wa ra dza, the favourite (thab kyi sras sic for thugs kyi sras) of bSrong btsan sgam po, the emanation of ’Phags pa, and Om jo (spelled so), the emanation of sGrol ma, will be a family who behaves like commoners and has faith in the doctrine. At the end of thirty six generations of this progeny [this master with an ox year mark] will be born in this lineage of holders of the thought of enlightenment. He will be a king protector of the teachings (f.9a) [acting as] my successor”.

The version of sBas yul ‘Bra mo ljonangs kyi lam yig le’u drug pa lde mig ‘phrul gyi dgu skor sdog go in mKha’ spyo’d ‘Bra mo ljonangs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs bz lungs has a typing mistake and spells de gyon (p.156 line 13) rather than de gyon.

The reference to the sgrung rgvyud (i.e. the Ge sar epic) made in the mes rabs could link the events narrated in it to an even later layer than the time of Khri srong lde btsan and the conquest of the Bha ta Hor sgom sgrwa, given the dates of the hero of Gling (1000–1087). The attribution to the 11th century has no historical
grounds because the member of the twenty-first generation in rGod ldem can’s family lived around the same period or soon after it (see below n.18).

A literary reference to a Turk interacting in an isolated manner with one ila sras btsan po, like De wa ra dza did, is that of Gru gu Se thod who carried out a crucial mission on behalf of Khri srong lde btsan. The typology of this interaction is more pertinent to the case of rGod ldem can’s ancestor than the episode of the Bha ta Hor sgom grwa. Gru gu Se thod was assigned the task of procuring the renowned Gi ling horses to secure an important military advantage to the ila sras btsan po.

Nyang rai chos ‘byung (p.395 lines 7-18) says: “In order to gain control of the search for horses in Khams and all the mountains ranges which are the source [where to find] the Gi ling horses, lha sras Khri srong lde btsan [appointed] six local masters of horses in the five great countries (yal chen po lngo). Gru gu Se thod and Gru gu Go cha were summoned from the land of the Gru gu; ‘Bro Kho sbyor and ‘Bro bzang La yag were summoned from the land of the ‘Bro; many Cog ro were summoned from the land of the Cog ro; ‘Do khi mDo was summoned from the land of the ‘Do rgod; g.Yu bzher legs khrig was summoned from the three communities in the land of the ‘Bro sNyag. Since they competed in the search of horses, Gru gu Se thod examined their postures. There were five types linked with the five elements. According to the classification by [Gru gu] Se [thod], [the first unidentified type] is linked with the element of earth; the Gi ling [horse] is linked with the element of water; the Gyang shing [horse] is linked with the element of fire; the mDo ba [horse] is linked with the element of wind; and the Gung ron [horse] is linked with the element of the sky, five in all. Likewise, having established their identity on the basis of the [horses’] postures, the king and ministers were happy.”

For a classification of horses in early material by means of the five elements see Blondeau, Materiaux pour l’étude de l’hippologie et de l’hippiatrie tibétaine, which complements Gru gu Se thod’s identification of different breeds of these animals on the basis of their posture using the same metaphor. See, in particular, ibid., (p.157 and p.160) for the Gi ling and mDo/’Do ba horses.

rGyal rabs Bon gyi ‘byung gnas (p.88 lines 2-6): “The Me nyag royal lineage is also called Me nyag rGyal rgod. As for its period, its creation was contemporary with the king of Bod, Glang dar ma. Its kingdom controlled [lands between] China, Bod and Hor, three in all. Some call his ruler rGya rje (the ‘lord of the rGya’ rather than ‘of China’). It is believed that Ge sar, too, had to send gifts [to him]. As for its people, of the three [lands]—Shar Me nyag (‘Mi nyag in the east’, i.e. the Ordos), lHo Me nyag (‘Mi nyag in the south’, i.e. Khams Mi nyag Rab sgang) and Byang Me nyag (‘Mi nyag in the north’, i.e. Kan chou)—it is believed that this one (i.e. the one interacting with Ge sar) was inhabited by the Me nyag pa of Tsong kha in the north”.

My translation is somewhat different from that by Stein (‘Mi-nyag et Si-hia’ p.230 and Recherches sur l’épopeé et le barde au Tibet p.228-229). This classification into three Mi nyag is pertinent, although chronologically weak. Their identification is awkward because, in order to include the most ancient of the three (rGya Mi nyag of Kan chou), the text ends up calling it Byang Mi nyag (‘Mi nyag of the north’), a definition commonly reserved for Si hia which forcibly becomes Shar Mi nyag (‘Mi nyag of the east’).

Nyi ma bzang po, rGod ldem can gvi rnam thar (Bhutan ed. p.9 line 4-p.10 line 1): “In this lineage, after twenty one human years (sic), Hor ‘Jig rten mgon, from the cadet branch [of the family], who had the vision of the Ma mo and held discourses with the people in the realm of Tibet, had the power to reduce the sMan mo to slaves. Successively at sNa mo lung [masters], such as Byang stod dBang phyug rdo rje drag po rtsal, grub chen Shakya rdo rje, Ye shes rdo rje and bram ze Shakya mgon, owing to [their knowledge of] Phur pa mdo lugs, had the vision of rDo rje gzhon nu. (p.10) They [meditated] on rDzogs chen bram ze l’bskor”.

Nyi ma bzang po, rGod ldem can gvi rnam thar (Sikkim ed. p.9 line 4-p.10 line 1): “In this lineage, after twenty one generations, Hor mkhan po ‘Jig rten mgon, from the cadet branch [of the family], who had the vision of the Ma mo and held discourses with the people in the realm of Tibet, had the power to reduce the sMan mo to slaves. Successively at sNa mo lung [masters], such as Byang stod dBang phyug rdo rje drag po rtsal, grub chen Shakya rdo rje, Ye shes rdo rje and bram ze Shakya mgon, owing to [their knowledge of] Phur pa mdo lugs, had the vision of rDo rje gzhon nu and (p.10) meditated on rDzogs chen bram ze l’bskor”.

In the Bhutane edition of rGod ldem can gvi rnam thar there are thirty-six generations between De wa ra dza and rGod ldem can covering the 700 years between 641 and 1337 when the Byang ger master was born. This attributes an average of twenty years to each mi rabs. Twenty one mi rabs into twenty years
makes 420. The family of rGod Idem can would have settled in sNa mo lung at an unspecified time after the mid 11th century, when bstan pa phyi dar was in full swing.

In the Sikkimese edition there are thirty generations between De wa ra dza and rGod Idem can covering the 700 years between 641 and 1337, which would attribute an average of twenty-three years for each mi rabs. Twenty-one mi rabs into twenty-three years makes 483. The family of rGod Idem can would have settled in sNa mo lung at an unspecified time around the beginning of the second quarter of the 12th century, after the conclusion of bstan pa phyi dar.

mKhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung (p.384 lines 11-18): “It is said that sKyid lde, the youngest son of Khri bkra shis brtsegs pa dpal], was given r'Ta nag and 'Jad. Three sons were begotten by both the youngest son sKyid lde and lCgo ro bza' Mang mo. Their lineage controls gTsang [and] g.Yas ru from the land of La stod to 'Jad [and] r'Ta nag. The youngest son went to Byang and ruled a kingdom. There were nine sons plus the father, ten in all. At present [the lineage] has reached btsad po rGyal ba'i 'od”.

Hence both the areas of Zang zang, where the descendants of Turks lived, and 'Jad, where a cult connected with the Tibetan defeat of the Yu gur was practised in relation to the banner deposited there by lHa bZang klu dpal (see above n.5), were under the same secular power.

Deh ther dmar po gsar ma (p.56 line 20-p.57 line 3) attributes the establishment of the La stod Byang khri skor to ti shri Grags pa 'od zer, said to be hailing from g.Yas ru, owing to the grant by Se chen rgyal po in return for the teachings the emperor received.

In reference to rGod Idem can and thus after the establishment of the La stod Byang principality, the biography by Nyi ma bZang po and other rnam thar-s call the area of Zang zang by the sPu rgyal name of Tho yor nag po, known as Byang Tho yor nag po during the Sa skya pa dominance. In my view, the addition of the name Byang indicates that Tho yor nag po, dismembered anciently from Byang thang and incorporated into the stong sde-s of g.Yas ru (see mKhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung p.258 line 11, where it is named ITo yo), had been included into La stod Byang.

The further geographical division into Byang stod and smad echoes the ancient partition of the ru-s and stong sde-s of g.Yas ru into g.Yas ru stod and g.Yas ru smad adopted by the sPu rgyal dynasty (mKhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung p.260 lines 14 and 18 respectively). The stod part was located to the west of the smad part and thus included the area of Zang zang.

Around the time of writing mKhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung, the sovereign of the part of Byang thang of difficult identification, namely Byang stod, was btsad po rGyal ba'i 'od (see above n.20). He must have been a local lord around the time the Tangut settled in contiguous lands or soon thereafter.

On the segment of its chieftains from the establishment of La stod Byang to roughly the time of rGod lde can see the sources dealing with its genealogy, such as, for instance, dPal ldan chos kyi bZang po, sDe pa g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rGyal rabs, dPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs (p.113 lines 5-16) and Sum pa mkhan po, dPag bsam ljong bZang.

sDe pa g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs (f.1b line 5-f.2a line 1) says that the fourth ruler of La stod Byang after the migration from Si hia was a contemporary of the Sa skya pa master, the great rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtsun (1146-1216), which is anachronism.

Given that sDe pa g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs is almost exclusively a complex genealogical tree branching from each member of the genealogy, which is difficult to summarise, I excerpt here, instead, the succinct treatment of the rulers of La stod Byang in dPag bsam ljong bZang for the period under consideration.

The passage (ibid., p.313 lines 10-21) says: “gTsong Byang kha Dar seng and his son, the extraction of Mi nyag rGyal rGod, were associated with the Sa skya pa. The latter's son dKon mchog's son 'Bum lde's son Byang bdag dpon Grags dar received the seal, decree and rank from Se chen and during his time the chos sde of Byang Ngam ring [note: by the order of the mKhas grub] was founded. The latter's son rDo rje mgon po was the Sa skya dpon chen and his son Nam mkha' brtan pa received the titles of gu 'gung, ta dben and gu shri, and the crystal seal from the Mongol emperor. Chos grags dpal bZang, the son of the latter's son, Rin rgyan, received the rank of si tu chang gu. [Chos grags dpal bZang's] son rNam rgyal grags bZang [sponsored] many gatherings of savants [note: on medicine, astrology and linguistics]. He received the rank of si tu and his younger brother, dKon mchog legs pa, obtained the rank of sri'i zi'i tres’.
Hence the lineage is as follows:

\[
gTsang Byang kha Dar seng \\
| his son \\
dKon mchog \\
| 'Bum lde \\
bdag dpon Grags dar \\
rDo rje mgon po
\]

sDe pa g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs (f.1b line 3-f.2a line 2) has a rather different outline of this genealogical segment:

\[
lha btsan Legs pa \\
| Seng ge dar \\
Kun dga' grags \\
rDo rje dpal \\
dKon mchog grags \\
dPal 'bum, Sangs rgyas skyabs & dPal mgon
\]

26 The La stod Byang pa vassals' alliance with the Sa skya pa was in contrast to the political stance of the Tangut who had remained in Byang Mi nyag after the kingdom was destroyed by Jing gir rgyal po. The latter sided with Ariq Boge against Se chen rgyal po, who was favoured by the Sa skya pa, in the struggle for the Mongol throne (Dardess, 'From Mongol Empire to Yuan Dynasty' p.128).

27 Some people of Ding ri claim they came from Mi nyag (oral information by Jo sras bKra shis tshe ring). A literary instance that documents the presence of groups of Mi nyag pa origin in La stod IHo is the abbot of Shel dkar chos sde, namely Nam mkha' od zer (on the monastery’s throne during the late 14th or early 15th century?). She dkar chos 'byung (edited and translated by Pasang Wangdu and H. Diemberger) says that he belonged to the I Dong, the ancient tribe of Mi nyag. This text (f.53 lines 2-3: translation on p.87 which is slightly different from mine I append here) reads: “The rebirth of lo tsa ba bShod pu (spelled so for Shud phu) dPal gyi seng ge, namely chos rje Nam mkha’ od zer, was the son of the brgya dpon of ‘brog Yar ba, hailing from the Mi nyag I Dong”.

The existence of a I Dong line of the local brgya dpon is confirmed by the case of his successor, Nam mkha’ rin chen (ibid., f.53b line 6; translation on p.87): “rJe Nam mkha’ rin chen was born at rGyal phu g.yu nyer to the zhal ngo of the brgya dpon pa who belonged to the I Dong clan”).

As for similar claims in the same southern stretch, Hildegard Diemberger was kind to inform me during the Seminar in Gangtok that mar i' wall inscriptions in sPo rong trace the origin of some local people to Mi nyag. None of these cases is useful to establish beyond doubt whether these people were from Byang Mi nyag or Kham Mi nyag.

28 'Bra mo ljongs rgyal rabs (p.83 lines 9-13): “Some of their (i.e. the Gu ge rulers’) (sic) progeny or else mes po sGer rgyal (the ‘ancestral local lord’, an appellative rather than a proper name), a descendant of the I Dong tribe, the most noble of the mi’u gdung drug, went to Kham and settled, among the mDo Khams sgang drug, at Zal mo sgang. The upper border of Zal mo sgang is named Mi nyag r'i, the lower border is called Tsha mo rong. In short, the many progenies of mes po sGer rgyal settled in the many mountains (ri) of Mi nyag”.

I Ib

33 Primary sources

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29 See ‘Bras mo ljongs rgyal rabs (p.84 lines 3-4) citing a prophecy in rGyalo po bka’ thang: “Mu rub btsan po will migrate to northern Khams”.

30 ‘Bras mo ljongs rgyal rabs (p.84 lines 13-19): “King Dza of Za hor seemingly was Indra bhu ti the middle. His three sons were Shakya pu tri, Gu hya pu tri and Na ga bi ti. It seems that Shakya pu tri was Indra bhu ti the younger. Apart from the account [in rGyal po bka’ thang] about the royal line migrating to Mi nyag, in Sum pa mkhan po’s chos ‘byung it is clearly said that Dharma pa la, the third in succession in the line of Shakya pu tri, went from Bhang la to China and stayed at the Bha ta Hor sgom sgRwa in Nang gru. His successor, Dharma pa la the later, during the time of the mkhan [po] (i.e. Bodhi sa twa), the slob [apun] (i.e. Guru Padma) and the chos [rgyal] (i.e. Khri srong lde btsan), three in all, took those [objects] to bSam yas as its wealth”.

A terminus ante quem for the establishment of Khams Mi nyag could be provided by a brief reference to it in the biography of Mar lung pa Byang chub seng ge (1153-1241), a disciple of Zhang g.Yu brag pa (1112-1193 er 1194). The first part of this rnam thar was completed soon after Mar lung pa’s death, while the second half dates to water dragon 1292.

In a speech directed to a member of a rival clan, Mar lung pa boasts of the lands owned by his family and the Thon mi clan to which it belonged. One passage of this speech (ibid., f.30a lines 2 4) reads (numbers are mine): “The six sons of the Thon [mi] in the centre [of the sky] are [as follows]. [The Thon mi] wear the Bon silk (dar) coat of (1) lJad [and] (2) Dar dings (i.e. the sentence paraphrases the monastery’s name), made beautiful by the decorations of (3) Me gnyag (spelled so) Khams. Inside the turquoise boots of the Sog po the silk of (4) rGya mo softens them. With our urna at (5) Ku thang we stretch our hands up to (6) Kho byug rong”.

The biography (ibid., f.31a line 3) then summarises the six sons of the Thon mi as follows (the list is incomplete): “The Thon [mi] control Lug rwa gangs, Dar dings, lJad and Ros smad Me gnyag Khams. This is g.Yu’o rong po Zhang ri”.

According to these statements, the formation of the political entity named Khams Mi nyag should have taken place sometime before 1241, the year of Mar lung pa’s death.

If the reference to rGyal rtse in the history of rGyap ‘bum bsangs who allegedly went there to barter (see ‘Bras mo ljongs rgyal rabs by chos rgyal mthu stobs rNam rgyal and rgyal me Ye shes sgrol ma p.86 lines 2-3) is reliable, he would not have lived before the second half of the 14th century. He could not have been a contemporary of dpon chen Shakya bzang po.

33 Gung thang gdung rabs (p. 117 ines 4-9): “The year of [bKra shis sde’s] death being wood snake 1365, gter ston rig ‘dzin rGod kyi ldem ‘phru can rediscovered [a text] from the treasure [note: in fire horse 1366, the year after wood snake 1365]. Having extracted Gung thang rgyal rgyud skyob pa mdzod lnga from Zang zang lIa brag, the land adjoining Byang, rig ‘dzin rGod ldem can established a nexus with Phun tshogs lde, but it is said that one cannot [know] exactly what was established”.

He again had yan mchod with mChog grub lde, the next ruler of Gung thang after bKra shis lde and Phun tshogs lde. So he secured a bha ma patron relationship with three consecutive kings of Gung thang.

According to Nyi ma bzang po’s rGod ldem can gyi rnam thar (p.110 lines 2-5), the itinerary that brought him to ‘Bras mo ljongs in the span of four years (1371 1374) led him to bKra shis gling Khayung tsang, where he stayed from late spring to early winter 1372. He then went to Brangs so and ‘Bring mthams Chags mo during the rest of the winter of the same year. In autumn 1373 he arrived at Seng ge long, and reached Sikkim in summer 1374.

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Oral histories seek to give voice to what would otherwise remain voiceless even if not traceless, by reconstituting the life histories of individuals.

Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember

Despite the existence of numerous biographies of Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) who played a pivotal role in the spread of Buddhism in the western Himalaya and western Tibet during the bstan pa phyi dar, we have very limited information about this lo tsa ba or translator considering the fact that he spend his entire life in the Himalayan localities establishing monasteries and stupas along the trade routes or places that were centres of local cults, and also translating several Buddhist Sanskrit works into Tibetan. To present an alternative image of Rin chen bzang po which is generally absent in the known biographies I have used three distinct codes for this study: verbal, visual and visits. The latter two have been partially attempted earlier; however, the first is used here for an extended study of Rin chen bzang po for the first time. Let me briefly explain what these codes imply in the pages that follow.

The verbal code is used here as an additional source for assessing the contribution of Rin chen bzang po to Mahayana Buddhism in the Indo-Tibetan rim lands. It is unimaginable for us to explain why G. Tucci excluded the use of the oral evidence on Rin chen bzang po from his seminal work, Tibetan Folk Songs from Gyantse and Western Tibet. The visual code implies the identification of actual monuments that were built during the life time of Rin chen bzang po, and to make scientific inquiry and systematic study in situ using measuring tape, graph papers and camera. The third code is actually the part and parcel of the second. I have visited all the places and monuments in persona to ascertain the archaeological wealth of the sites associated with Rin chen bzang po in Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti.

The sensitive question of the reliability and authenticity of oral tradition has been widely debated among historians, archaeologists and anthropologists. However, Paul Thompson has elaborated the processes through which oral evidence, like other pieces of evidence, may be subjected to critical scrutiny and such evidence should be regarded as on probation until corroborated by other sources. Oral evidence, Thompson remarks, will become accepted as one among many other historical sources, assumed to be neither more nor less intrinsically trustworthy. It would be an excellent consequence of oral history if it brought more awareness of the fallibility of historical evidence in general, not merely on points of detail, but especially because of the extent to which all are moulded by individual perception and selected through social bias.

After the publication of Jan Vansina’s Oral Tradition (1965) a significant discussion in the 1980s and 1990s has centred on the interpretation of the oral evidence. Vansina has devised an elaborate and meticulous methodology by which oral traditions should be collected and transcribed, their chains of transmission traced and variants compared, and biases and falsifications stripped off to produce primary documents suitable for writing scientific history. After several decades of work in Africa he has placed oral tradition in the
wider context of the problem of historical knowledge. He has formulated some theoretical rules for assessing the value of oral tradition. In his work, Listening to History, Trevor Lummis defended the use of oral evidence, and explained that it is more interactive unlike the documentary evidence, "the ‘source’ can reflect upon the content and offer interpretation as well as facts". Some scholars have gone to the extent of saying that the oral evidence may “often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of events; they always cast new light on unexplored areas of daily life of the non-hegemonic classes". Portelli has further remarked that the “importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather to departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge". He argues that once the credibility and factual verification of oral testimony is checked along with its philological analysis the ‘wrong’ statement could prove psychologically ‘true’ and that “this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts”. We have taken up this argument for discussion in the concluding section as to why the folklorists of Indo-Tibetan interface have changed the birthplace of Rin chen bzang po from Radni (now in Tibet’s Autonomous Regions) to Sumra (in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh).

In an interesting study that tries to establish a meaningful dialogue between archaeology and folklore, Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius Helton have brilliantly summarized the current debate on the interpretation and reliability of oral history. They have admitted that “folklore is not only field where concern with historical accuracy is problematic; archaeology too gives us the past as perceived and interpreted by present people”. The archaeologists have realized that folklore could contribute significantly for archaeological interpretation and offer ‘alternative ideas’ about the past.

Archaeologists, historians and anthropologists seem to have agreed that ‘oral traditions’ are revolved around the common people and essentially represent the ‘plebian consciousness’. A few select literati create the written documentary sources about ‘elites’ who control the means and methods of production. The oral evidence, therefore, democratises the study of history. Carefully recorded and critically interpreted folklores have proved their importance for the study of monuments. How people living in the vicinity of the monument have ascribed meaning to the relics of the past, and gradually oral tradition becomes an inseparable part of the monument. The present study too tries to establish a meaningful interaction between folklore, archaeology and biographical accounts. The analysis of these three sources can help us understand better the role of Rin chen bzang po during the bstan pa phyi dar. The folklore is sung either individually, or by a group of people in a traditional western-Himalayan society. The main protagonist of the folklore analysed in this study is Rin chen bzang po, popularly called as the ‘lotsa rinpoche’. His patrons (the rulers of Gu ge and Purang), so frequently referred to in the biographies, financed his visits to Kashmir and eastern India and also in the construction of many Buddhist monasteries from Khva char and Zher pa in Purang to Hubulangka in Rong chung.

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE:
RIN CHEN BZANG PO AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMNANTS

What follows is a brief discussion on the society and culture of Indo-Tibetan borderlands, a Himalayan tract that witnessed intercultural transmission of ideas, arts, religion and technology during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Folklore about Rin chen bzang po analysed below has been collected from the five villages in the Sutlej basin; however, he travelled extensively in Ladakh, Lahaul-Spiti, Kinnaur and western Tibet (Figure 1). The
Kanaura tribe primarily inhabits Kinnaur region, speaking a Kinnauri dialect. T. Graham Bailey has identified four major dialects of Kinnauri. Oral evidence examined in this paper consists of two Kinnauri dialects: Standard Kinnauri and Theborskad. It received popular approval among the people of Kinnaur thus resulted in its survival over the centuries. Both these dialects are spoken in an area, geographically demarcated, as the Sutlej basin. Out of a total of 77 villages of Kinnaur, 69 are located in this basin. Linguists such as Sten Konow, Gerard, Rahul Sankrityayan and D.D. Sharma opine that Kannauri has borrowed words from three distinct linguistic strata: Sanskrit, Tibetan and Kirata. Perhaps the fourth linguistic strata can be added to this list that is Zhang Zhung. Sten Konow has assigned Kinnauri to the ‘Tibeto-Burman Languages Group’. Translating colloquial terms into English is quite problematic.

Many of these monasteries are located on the trade routes of local, trans-regional and international importance, thus connecting Ngari to Lhasa on the east, Ladakh and central Asia on the north, Punjab plains and northern India on the west and south, respectively. Since our oral evidence is centred on Rin chen bzang po, it is necessary to give a brief profile of this great translator (lo tsa ba chen po).

Born in rta lo (horse year, equivalent to AD 958) at Radni of Kyuwang (now in Tibet), he was ordained by Legs pa bzang po at the age of thirteen, and named as ‘Rin chen bzang po’. He travelled to Kashmir and eastern India for learning Sanskrit and to become acquainted with the tenets of Mahayana Buddhism. He came in close contacts with the leading Sanskritists and Buddhologists, including Shradhakararvarman, Gunamitra, Dharmashanti, Kamalagupta and the mahasiddha Naropa. After spending seven years in Kashmir he travelled to eastern India where he became familiar with the classic works of the translators of the ‘first diffusion of Buddhism’ such as Jinamitra, Jnanashri and Silendrabodhi. After spending ten years in Kashmir and eastern India he returned to Gu ge in AD 985. On his return his patron lHa lde appointed him as the chief-priest and Vajracharya. He accepted the offer of his patron to construct one hundred and eight viharas from Zher pa in Purang to Hobulangka. He became proficient in translation, and several original sutras and tantras were translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit. During a period of about ten-to-twelve years in Gu ge and Purang many Buddhist establishments were founded, including that of Khva char in Purang, Tholing in Gu ge and Nyarma in Ladakh. He was asked by Ye shes ‘od to go back to Kashmir to bring books and artists. He readily agreed to go back and was provided with fifteen intelligent youths as disciples. He spent six years in Kashmir and returned with thirty-two artists in c. AD 1002-3. On his return many new monastic complexes were built, as many as twenty-one are mentioned in his biographies. He also met an East Indian Buddhist master Dipankarashrijana in AD 1042 at Tholing. He was advised by Atisha (Dipankarashrijana) to practice all higher cycles of tantras as ‘imaginative process’ with one thought totally subdued. He became a prolific translator, meditator and attained the highest perfection. He died in AD 1055 at the age of ninety-eight.

Making an assessment about Rin chen bzang po during the bstan pa phyi dar, he was instrumental, along with his patrons, in reforming and reintroducing unadulterated form of Mahayana tantras and the Mahamudra. He was successful to a large extent in eliminating the propagation of dangerous, corrupt, malicious and repugnant practices and rites causing unprecedented harm to both men and animals. Two rulers of western Tibet (Ye shes ‘od and Zhi ba ‘od) had to issue ordinances (bka’ shogs) specifically denouncing such pernicious sacramental ceremonies involving sexual union and mahtation in the career of celibate monks. In an atmosphere of mounting divergences faced in the transmission of Vajrayana
in the mNga’ ris bskor gsum the contribution of Rin chen bzang po would always remain of absorbing interest to the students of Himalayan Buddhism. The Khunu folklorists have immortalized a man of prolific scholarship who provided authentic translation of Mahayana scriptures to validate the authenticity of the Buddhist doctrine. Monasteries and stupas established by him have survived to this day at many places in Kinnuar and Lahaul-Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh. The following monasteries that I have visited personally and carried out archaeological studies in situ are located in Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur include Ta po (Tabo), La ri (Lari), Sho ling or Zho ling (Jholing) in Lahaul-Spiti and Ro dpag or Ro pag (Ropa), Shang rang or Shangs (Thangi), Rig-rtse Tsarang (Tsarang or Chargang), Mon (Kamru), Ka nam or bKa’ nam (Kanam), sPu (Pooh) all in Kinnaur district. Three of these monasteries in Kinnaur are situated on the annual Kinnar-Kailash parikrama performed by the followers of both Buddhism and Brahmanism. The existence of archaeological evidence along the places of this parikrama suggests that the practice of performing the circumambulation around the Kailash in Kinnaur was in existence prior to the tenth century. An interesting miniature mandapika Nagara shrine has been noticed in the Mone lha khang monastic complex (Plate 1). No Brahmanical deity has been enshrined in the temple; however, these types of stone mandapika temples were constructed on a large scale in various parts of Himachal during the seventh and eighth centuries. Also in the Tidong valley at Thangi there is in worship a huge stone Shivalinga in the temple located at the entrance of the village (Plate 2), just 150 meters away from the monastery of Shangs, referred to in the biography of Rin chen bzang po. The establishment of some gisug lag khangs on the circuit of the already existing Kailash parikrama was an innovative idea of Rin chen bzang po and he tried to make the use of the same itinerary for a Buddhist pilgrimage inasmuch the same way as perhaps he witnessed in the Kailash-Mansrowar pilgrimage in Tibet. The establishment of a monastery in an agriculturally potential area such as Thangi and Tsarang (Plates 3 and 4) was essential for the sustenance of the Buddhist community. The survival of the Buddhist community was ensured partly by dakshina collected from the pilgrims and partly by agricultural produce from the local village communities. We believe that the name Shangs originated from the name of the Shangkvi rivulet that flows down into the Tidong river near the village of Thangi.

**POPULAR ORAL TRADITION ABOUT RIN CHEN BZANG PO: AN EVALUATION**

The songs analysed in this paper are sung either individually or by a group of people on certain festive occasions. Undoubtedly, they have been memorized, repeated and handed down from generation to generation, thus avoiding to considerable extent obliteration during the last one thousand years. Nevertheless, maintaining almost ‘stable texts’ over the centuries, there are glimpses of later additions inserted either in the beginning or the end. The length of each song varies considerably: the largest song consisting of 90 stanzas is recorded from Ribba (Plate 5), followed by Ropa (63 stanzas), Kanam (50), Rarang (29), Sunnam 1 (22) and Sunnam 2 (19). The rhythmic and narrative patterns are structured in such a way that they look like ‘continuous narratives’. These songs of varying lengths are comparable to a certain extent with different versions of Rin chen bzang po’s biographies of short, medium and large sizes. It seems very likely that the survival of the oral tradition on Rin chen bzang po might have helped in the creation of biographical accounts subsequently, once a limited number of hand-written copies of these biographies were provided in select number of
monasteries that in turn could have stimulated folklorists to sing his deeds aloud in large congregations on festive occasions.

It is pertinent to discuss here the congruence and divergences noticed in these popular melodies. With the exception of the song at Ribba, all other versions tell us that Rin chen bzang po was born at Sumra but constructed a monastery at Kanam. These two stanzas are added after the singing of rhythmic verses in the beginning of each song. One can infer that these were added in later times. What was the necessity of changing the birthplace of Rin chen bzang po? I shall return to answer that complex question in the concluding section. All folksongs agree that Rin chen bzang po went to Ribba and constructed a monastery there (Plate 6). We gather the impression that Buddhism has already reached Kinnaur for there are glimpses of the existence of stupas at Ribba (see Appendix) and Rarang. This is confirmed by the existence of the Lha khang chen mo monastery at Ribba examined and discussed by us elsewhere.23 That he completed the construction of the monastery during the course of one night might suggest how folklorists have created such rhythmic lines to attract the attention of the audience. The contents of these songs suggest that he faced opposition to the construction of monastery at Ribba, almost repeated in three versions (also indirectly hinted in the Ribba version), a few wicked persons hatched a conspiracy to cut his hands off (the Ropa version has head instead of hands) but he made an excuse to climb up onto the roof of the monastery and flew away to Rarang, across the Sutlej river. He met a housewife of the Baras ancestry (Sunnam song 2 specified wazir’s family). Two songs from Sunnam (the locality is partially mentioned in the biographies of Rin chen bzang po) come to end at this stage, thus they preserve the shorter version of the oral tradition. The concluding stanzas of songs from Ropa and Kanam add that Rin chen bzang po had encounters with Dharmaraja, the latter asking the Rinpoche to accompany him to Raldang. Rin chen bzang po however refused to go and decided to stay back to accomplish his task. The reason behind giving a sudden twist to the narratives might be sought for it decidedly aroused the curiosity and emotional response from the audience. Since each song was composed in specific locations divergences in different versions were likely to emerge. Thus the oral evidence becomes a unique and specific like archaeological evidence but remarkably sharing the commonality of time. Its unique character is maintained because it serves the cultural needs and interests of the specific community in which it is preserved.

Songs from Ropa and Kanam provide important historical information as to how the local community of monks and nuns worked devotedly to accomplish the construction work in most inhospitable conditions of Kinnaur by transporting logs of wood and stones for the construction of the monasteries, and good quality clay for moulding clay sculptures and plastering the walls for murals. Such realistic narrations and minute processes of construction work are missing in the biographies. A folksong from Ropa provides a truer picture about the foundation of monasteries and stupas (Plates 7 and 8). The oral evidence tells us that after constructing a monastery and stupa at Ropa, and three stupas in a vast meadow near the pass he went to Tabo where he is said to have built a monastery and one hundred eight stupas. Could this narration solve the chronological sequence of the construction of Tabo and Ropa monasteries? The construction of the Tabo monastery is well known from an epigraph, attributing it to monkey year, i.e. AD 996.24 A song from Kanam also provides equally important information stating that after building a monastery at Kanam Rin chen bzang po went to Tsarang. He is credited with the construction of one hundred twenty viharas and the same number of stupas and water-springs at Khogu-Gelingo. This possibly refers to the Tholing monastery in Gu ge. Furthermore, we learn that everybody in Kinnaur was surprised
to see the stupendous deeds of Rin chen bzang po and began asking questions: who was this Tibetan boy (‘nyam chang’)? This reference is significant to prove that the two stanzas added in the beginning of the songs have been incorporated in later times, without disturbing the structure of the traditional song. Folklore from Ribba perhaps preserves the earliest oral strata about the activities of Rin chen bzang po. The oral evidence tells us that he made friendship with the local devatas (or sometimes subdued them); similar examples can be encountered in his biographies. Some of the local godlings were made protectors of the newly founded monasteries. One of the Dza la ma ti sisters named bDud ‘brog ma srog mur ma was appointed the protectress of Sum-nam monastery in Kinnaur. The crossing of the rope-bridge on the Sutlej and to pay the crossing-charges and tip are also referred to in the biography, however, the event in the biography occurs somewhere near the mahasangala-bridge on the border areas of Lahaul and Kashmir.\(^{25}\) The chamang who took him in the rope-bridge on the other side of the river was paid one-rupee toll charges and five rupee as tip. The rupee seems to be a later interpolation for cowry-shells referred to in the biography.

CONCLUSION: UNIQUENESS OF THE ORAL EVIDENCE

One may ask the following questions: what ‘unknown aspects of known events’ or ‘unknown events’ are known from these folksongs? What relationship of this oral evidence can be established with the remnants of monasteries and biographical accounts? Monasteries at Ropa, Tsarang, Pooh and Tabo preserve architectural, sculptural (Plates 9 and 10) and epigraphic data from the time of Rin chen bzang po. Monasteries at Tabo, Pooh and Tsarang have in their collections the fragments of original manuscripts translated by Rin chen bzang po from Sanskrit into Tibetan. The names of Rin chen bzang po and his many collaborators can be read in the colophons of these manuscripts. The Kanam monastery is also referred to in the biography but the present structure was rebuilt in 1933. Ribba, according to our survey, carried out in situ, predates the monasteries established by Rin chen bzang po. It is interesting that our study of Ribba that was based on art-historical and epigraphic evidence is supported by a folksong, which indicates the existence of a stupa at the site when Rin chen bzang po came to the village.

The folklore on Rin chen bzang po preserved in Kinnauri traditional society provides invaluable glimpses into the problems faced by the rulers of Gu ge and Purang and the great translator for spreading the Buddhist doctrine in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands where a variety of diverse faiths were well rooted, including Buddhism. An opposition to the introduction of Buddhism in the region is clearly reflected in the folksongs; sometimes Rin chen bzang po is either opposed by the local devatas, or sometimes by the Nagas (both autochthonous cults). Interestingly, there is no mention of any ruling or governing authority, or patron(s), so frequently referred to in the biography, as well as in the epigraphic sources that have survived from Pooh and Tabo respectively. Echoes of Rin chen bzang po’s close interactions with simple lay housewives, lower caste people, chamang, sunara and the village community undeniably present us with an ‘alternative view’ of how closely he was involved with the common people. Such involvement is almost absent in the biographies. The exquisite artistic remains are silent witness to actual socio-economic and cultural environment in which they were created by making the participation of local village community along with the monks and nuns possible. Some information of similar nature can also be noticed from epigraphs written on the walls of the Tabo monastery.
The details of the songs from Ropa, Kanam and Rarang, regarding the cutting of Rinpoche's hands, can be interpreted in different ways: one explanation, as has been associated with Gugga of Bharmaur, that he should not build similar monastery elsewhere. Nonetheless, this explanation is not satisfactory because he was not an artist, like Gugga; Rin chen bzang po helped artists in planning monasteries, performed all ceremonies and consecrated suitable sculptures according to the varied texts of the tantras, especially the Yogatantras. Another explanation could be that the local people were opposed to the introduction of Buddhism thus they wanted to get rid of him (as in the Ropa version someone wanted to cut his head off instead). A third explanation would make Rin chen bzang po a man who possessed miraculous powers, could visualise the coming events and move in a hazardous hilly tracts with considerable speed, and even fly away. We know from his biography that he became perfect in swift-footedness (a janghacarika siddhi) and had travelled three months' journey in only six days. These and similar kinds of miraculous deeds are part of the narrative discourse, partly based on actual events, partly mixed with popular legends and beliefs.

The one last question that needs to be explained is the insertion of change in the birthplace of Rin chen bzang po. Areas of Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur have produced many incarnations of Rin chen bzang po. The eighteenth incarnation, named Blo bzang thub bstan Rin chen bzang po was born at Sumra in Kinnaur in 1923. It seems likely that the areas lying on the west of Shipki pass could not maintain regular interactions with those which now fall in Tibet's Autonomous Regions where Radni, the actual birthplace of Rin chen bzang po, is located. The folklorists thus reinvented the birthplace of the great translator within the territories of Khunu, and there could not have been a better place than the actual birthplace of the eighteenth incarnation of Rin chen bzang po. Thus the entire narratives of his life were made meaningful, fully satisfying the quest of the village community irrespective of the fact whether they follow Buddhism or not. In reinventing his birthplace the folklorists added two stanzas in the beginning of the song without disturbing the rhythmic tone. Since these songs are learned by rote, repeated every year and form part of the public performances they have profoundly linked existing monasteries of the tenth and eleventh centuries with the present. Some of the contents of the folksongs are undeniably present-day representations of monuments, thus bringing the past brought forward into the present. There is no denying the fact that this unique evidence needs to be recorded in other villages of Spiti, Ladakh and western Tibet, this would enable historians and archaeologist to understand the complex socio-cultural environment of the region and the many facets and encounters of Buddhism with the local godlings. How Buddhism provided alternative beliefs and rituals as substitutes for age-old practices, and how popular folk-cults in turn influenced Buddhism, are some of the interesting topics that need to be addressed and satisfactorily explained.

APPENDIX

English translation of the Ribba folksong on Rin chen bzang po

[The two stanzas repeated almost twice are added to every Kinnauri folksong for maintaining the regularity of accents in verses.]

Coming down to Tara Khona, Lotsa Rinpoche rested and saw across (on the other side of the river Sutlej) a picturesque village of Ribba. 'This beautiful village does not possess a gonpa (monastery)', 'I shall get one built here', he said. He came down to a place named Arena and met there a chamang, who operated the ropeway. Rinpoche asked the chamang, 'would you take me in the
ropeway across the (river) or not? The chamang said, ‘why shouldn't I take you across the (river)’? I shall charge one rupee cooliage, and five rupees as tip. After crossing the river by ropeway he reached at Skiba where all the people, including his admirers, came forward with incense (dhupa) in their hands to greet him. Lotsa Rinpoche performed worship (tashi) there. From that place he went up to the Holang stupa22 and sat there. While taking rest, he thought, ‘either I should go from an upper or lower footpath’, but patiently decided to go from an upper footpath. This footpath was above the village of Ribba, a village inhabited by 180 souls. He reached the uppermost rivulet, remained in deep thought for a while, and decided to go up to make a search for shira.24 After reaching the pass of Biling, he found a Banshira. Rinpoche had three devatas as friends: Tarang Thakuras, Kokachang Thakuras and Chango Thakuras; additionally, he had made friends with eighteen devatas. He decided to build a monastery at a spot where the top of the tree would fall down. [The tree-spirit was established in another Kail tree (pinus excelsa).]29 Rinpoche’s friends began to fall down the tree with nine axes and adzes. The top of the tree fell above the village of Ribba, inhabited by 180 souls. There Lotsa Rinpoche built a gonpa in one night. The top of the hen-shaped (wooden ridge-beam or wooden log) did not fit instantly; meanwhile, a demon (rakshasa) appeared in the middle of vast agricultural fields, riding a black horse. He was offered a human (mi) sacrifice. Soon thereafter the wooden ridge-beam got quickly adjusted onto the roof.20 ‘The gonpa has been built, 'now I shall establish another sacred centre', and collect all the Nagas in the copper vessel; so he did. Dhokuchuchang Naga did not agree to Rinpoche’s request.

The 180 residents of Ribba have convened a meeting to know the whereabouts of this Rinpoche, Who was this Rinpoche, completing the gonpa? They invoked the local deity of Ribba (for knowing about the Rinpoche). The devata Kasuraja said, ‘The males of 180 residents of Ribba, you should respect and treat him honourably.’ The residents (of Ribba) paid due regards to Rinpoche. Rinpoche made an excuse that he has forgotten an adze on the roof of (the gonpa). He (went up) and immediately flew away to Tara Khona, on the other side (of the river Sutlej). While Rinpoche consecrated it from Tara Khona (a place near Rarang). Then he went to Rarang, near the spring where he met a housewife of Baras ancestry (khanadana). She recognised the Rinpoche and humbly took him to her house. Rinpoche was taken to an upper storey, housing a personal chos khang (a Buddhist temple). Then the Rinpoche showered boons on her.

NOTES

(All photographs are by Laxman S. Thakur)

3 For a detailed bibliography, see Tonkin (1999).
4 See for example, Thompson (1978), p. 221.
7 Ibid., p. 68.
8 Ibid.
9 See this interesting publication (Gazin-Schwartz Amy and Comalius Heltorf (eds) (1999) that summarizes the entire debate on archaeology and folklore in a series of essays.
10 In an editorial note in ibid., p. 5.
12 Konow (1905), pp. 117-25.
13 Bailey (1909), pp. 661-87; also see his (1910), pp. 659-750; 1911, pt I, pp. 315-64. Also see Joshi (1909).
14 Gerard (1842), pp. 479-551.
16 Sharma (1988).
A brief sketch of Rin chen bzang po presented here is based on a number of Tibetan manuscripts in the collection of the dkYil monastery in Spiti. They are published and edited by rDo rje tshe bryan in Collected Biographical Material about Lo-chen Rin-chen bzang-po and His Subsequent Reembodiments: A Reproduction of a Collection of Manuscripts from the Library of DkYil Monastery in Spiti, Delhi: Laxmi Printing Works, 1977. Subsequently it is referred to as CBM followed by a text numbered by the editor. CBM, No. 5 (86, II. 2-3) says that ‘de yan chod rgya gar dang khache ru lo bcu song skad’ (‘Until now ten years had passed in India and Kashmir’). CBM, No. 5 and 6 also confirm that he had spent ten years in India and Kashmir before he returned to Gu-ge, see CBM, No. 5 (172, line 2) and CBM, No. 6 (255, line 4).

Only CBM, No. 6 says that he remained in Gu-ge and Purang for 12 years before he returned to Kashmir to bring books and artists, see CBM, No. 6 (258, line 2).

A list of monasteries can be found in Thakur (2001), p. 44.

The problems faced in the transmission of Buddhism in the mNgag’ ris bskor gsum have been discussed in Thakur (2006), pp. 18-22.

Rita Negi has recorded in September 2004 these folk songs in Kinnaur for her M. Phil dissertation, submitted to the Department of History, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.

The archaeological remains of the monastery at Ribba are discussed in Thakur (2002), pp. 29-44. There is no justification in ascribing this monastery to four-armed Avalokiteshvara as unconvincingly argued by Klimburg (2006), p. 24; however I have discussed this complex issue elsewhere.

The renovation inscription of Byang chub ‘od very clearly states that the Tabo monastery was constructed in the monkey year by the Bodhissettva Ye shes ’od. a patron of Rin chen bzang po. For its text and translation, see Thakur (2001), text, pp. 252-4; translation, pp. 254-6.

See CBM, No. 3 (86, line 3). The Likir monastery copy of the biography of Rin chen bzang po, which is carefully made copy of CBM, No. 3 also mentions 50 cowry-shells. See Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980), p. 87.

Chamang is a low caste community in Kinnaur district.

Holang is the name of the lowermost part of Ribba village.

The use of shira here conveys two meanings. It can be interpreted in the sense of Banshira—the main tree with a spirit located on the top of the Bililing pass located above Ribba village; however, it can also be translated simply the top of the tree. The subsequent verses of the song make the meaning very clear (kandeyo bililing i banashira bothong).

Before the tree was cut down the spirit of the tree was formally established in another tree.

The practice of sacrificing goats during the kuruda-installation ceremony on the roof of the temples is practiced in many parts of Himachal Pradesh, including Kinnaur district.

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Figure 1. Map of Kinnaur and its adjacent areas showing the location of Buddhist monasteries associated with Rin chen bzang po.
Plate 1. Miniature Nagara shrine constructed in one of the walls of the Mone Lha khang complex, Mone (Kamru), Kinnaur

Plate 2. Stone Shivalinga in the village shrine at Thangi, Kinnaur

Plate 3. Rang rig rtse dgon pa, Tsarang (Charang), Kinnaur
Plate 4. Wooden statue of Shakyamuni in *dharamacakrapravartanamudra*, Tsarang

Plate 5. View of Ribba village situated on the left side on the river Sutlej
Plate 6. Lha khang chen mo of Ribba prior to its destruction in the fire in 2006

Plate 7. The flat roofed monastery at Ropa, Kinnaur
Plate 8. A ruined stupa associated with Rin chen bzang po at Ropa

Plate 9. Wooden Padmapani Avalokiteshvara (height 170 cm), Ropa

Plate 10. Wooden statue of Vajrasattva (height 170 cm), Ropa
This paper explores the role of imperial legacies in the life of the princess Chos kyi sgron ma (1422-1455), as described in her fifteenth century biography. She was born into the royal family of Gung thang, which was considered to have originated from the ancient Tibetan emperors and had established a kingdom between Central and Western Tibet in the thirteenth century. Chos kyi sgron ma lived in a period of political fragmentation in which the revival of imperial legacies played an important role in supporting local rulers’ claims to power and legitimacy, leading to a distinctive revival of Tibetan culture. Her grandfather Khri bsod nams lde was considered prophetically announced by Padmasambhava in texts revealed by Rig ’dzin rGod ldem, her father Khri Lha dbang rgyal mtshan was celebrated as a descendant of the ancient emperors and her brother Khri nam rgyal lde was considered a reincarnation of the Tibetan emperor Khri srong lde btsan. This paper will show that, as a woman, Chos kyi sgron ma was not in the position to fully enact the imperial legacies associated with her lineage. However, these had an important bearing on how she fashioned her religious life and became the founding figure of the bSam sdings rDo rje Phag mo tradition. Chos kyi sgron ma’s biography also provides a valuable insight into how imperial legacies shaped the wider cultural background against which the mythology of the ‘hidden lands’ developed in her kingdom and spread all over Tibet.

IMPERIAL LEGACIES, GUNG THANG AND THE HIDDEN VALLEYS:
RE-ENACTING RELATIONSHIP TO PLACE

Rig ’dzin rGod ldem (1337-1408) spent a significant part of his life in the Gung thang region and was closely linked to the Gung thang royal family. His prophetic texts illustrate the time and conditions for the disclosure of ‘hidden valleys’ and ‘hidden lands’ (sbas yul, sbas lung) in the Himalayan areas, which notably include ‘Bras mo ljongs (in Sikkim),’ and often refer to the kingdom of Gung thang and its royal lineage. These texts reflect intrigues, murders and political conflicts that disrupted the Gung thang kingdom in the years that preceded Chos kyi sgron ma’s birth. These tensions were both contingent and linked to the wider picture of the waning Sa skya pa power and the rise of the Phag mo gru pa, and constituted the background against which his prophecies were announced.

Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s texts often describe dialogues between Padmasambhava and the Tibetan emperor Khri srong lde btsan, or his son Mu tig btsan po, which address a prophetic future of hardship and promote the vision of places hidden in the Himalayan regions as refuges where people could prosper, practice religion and revive the greatness of the imperial ancestors. For example a passage referring to a: “Bodhisattva incarnation killed by the sword/Gung thang in sTod torn by murderous blood” leads into the description of seven ‘hidden lands’. A later passage in the same text seems to refer to the series of regicides that afflicted the Gung thang royal lineage at the end of the fourteenth century:
King! In Mang yul gung thang in sTod, one descendant of the royal lineage killed by the sword will be the beginning of Tibet’s suffering, the killing of two descendants will be the on-set of disaster and three violent deaths will be the end of Tibet’s happiness. Thus [at that time] escape to the ‘hidden lands’ and the southern valleys.4

The guide to sBas yul mKhan pa lung tells that at bSam yas, Padmasabhava spoke to the king who had a dream of Tibet’s future destruction and said: “...When the law in gTsang is disregarded.... it will be time to go. When in Mang yul Gung thang the very lineage of the king is cut by the sword it will be time to go for a change....”5

The idea of ‘hidden valley’ or ‘hidden land’ to be revealed included both the sense of refuge to a remote but ‘known’ place at time of crisis as well as the vision of a rediscovery of places bearing the traces of lost Buddhist civilization, both Indian and Tibetan. Seeking spiritual refuge following the traces of Padmasambhava also promoted the expansion of a Tibetan imperial vision of Buddhist spirituality to include lands and people of the borderlands. These could be tamed in the name of the re-enactment of a relationship to the place that had been first established by the great master or, even earlier, by a Buddhist deity. Prophecy and revelation linked thereby the future and the unknown to a remote but familiar past. This became, after Rig ’dzin rGod Idem, a widespread trope in the narrative of Tibetan expansion in the border areas following the deeds of cultural heroes in search of Padmasambhava’s hidden lands.

In his prophecies Rig ’dzin rGod Idem referred also to members of the Gung thang royal house, calling on them to re-enact the role of their ancestors. In one of his revealed texts he mentions Padmasambhava responding to Mu tig btsan po on the Gung thang la with the following words: “After seventeen generations....on the slopes of the snow-mountains of Mang yul Gung thang later descendants of this very lineage will appear. As real heirs they will protect the Buddhist kingdom. Don’t be sad, Son of the Gods (lha sras), King of Tibet!”6 The king thus prophesized was considered to be Khri bsod nams lde, Chos kyi sgron ma’s grandfather.7

IMPERIAL LEGACIES IN CHOS KYI SGRON MA’S LIFE

Chos kyi sgron ma was born into the Gung thang royal family as the granddaughter of Khri bsod nams lde (1371-1404), the daughter of Khri lha dbang rgyal mtshan (1404-1464) and the sister of Khri mam rgyal lde (1422?-1502).8 Her nephews took over the throne of Gung thang and her grandnephews include the famous spiritual master Lha btsun Rin chen mam rgyal.9 Her own tradition, however, was to flourish far away from her homeland and her prominent family; and this is directly linked to her peripatetic life.

After a brief marriage to the son of the La stod lho ruler, she gave up royal life to become a nun at sPo rong dpal mo chos sding monastery, following one of the greatest masters of her time, Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1376-1451). After his death she became a disciple of Thang stong rgyal po (1361?-1485), the great siddha, artist and constructor of iron-chain bridges. Following his prophetic instructions she travelled to South-eastern Tibet, where she died at Tsa ri, the sanctuary of the deity rDo rje phag mo of whom she was considered an emanation.

Chos kyi sgron ma’s biography was written by a Gung thang scholar who was a fellow disciple of the same spiritual master, Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal, and laid the basis for
the establishment of her reincarnation line. This can be tentatively identified with dpal 'chi
med grub pa, a disciple of Chos kyi sgron ma who followed her in her final journey and
looked after her reincarnation Kun dga' bzang mo. Chos kyi sgron ma's biographer was
deply aware of her ancestry, which is reflected in epithets and anecdotes throughout the text.
For example when she was still a young daughter-in-law at Shel dkar, she is said to have
failed to follow the protocol in dealing with some officials and have been unduly respectful
towards a simple monk. To counter her husband's and in-laws' criticism she reportedly said:

Even though the water carrier has very low rank, he is a monk. My ancestors who were
bodhisattvas (yab mes chos rgyal byang chub sems dpa') behaved with great kindness toward all
living beings and showed great respect to those who were wearing the monastic robes. In the
current bad times, this custom is not practiced anymore. The water carrier is a son of the Buddha
and he should be respected...  

The observation that her lineage was superior in relation to the new nobility of the family she
had married into appears several times and is given great emphasis in inter-personal relations.
For example during a gathering in Gung thang, which took place while she was still a
daughter-in-law of the Lha stod lho rulers, she is said to have been asked to be seated on the
main throne (gong) next to the king.

...she said: "Let Dri med rgyal mo, the daughter-in-law [of the king], be seated on the main
throne. We are equivalent by birth, and according to the custom concerning age I should be seated
on the main throne. However if I were to be seated on the main throne it would be the case of
wrong seating (btsun mo la khyo gral) because she is the daughter-in-law of the king (mnga'
bdag rgyal po), and I am only the daughter-in-law of the rulers of the Lha stod people."

This passage not only reflects the perceived superiority of the Gung thang lineage but also
the fact that she had decided not to allow for any ambiguity concerning potential claims that
she may have raised. In a situation torn by recurring succession disputes and with her brother
considered to be a conflict-prone character, possessed by demons, she would not want to be
perceived as even symbolically trying to take his place, as a potential future dharmaraja of
Gung thang. Her position was clear, she was the daughter-in-law of the neighbouring
kingdom and later she would follow her original choice for a religious life. This would take
her out of any worldly dispute, confirming a statement to this effect attributed to her as soon
as her brother was born.

Despite her personal choice, the profile of her royal lineage is a constant feature in her
life. Most significant is the fact that the dynastic epithet lha sras ('son/offspring of the gods')
is not only used for her father and her brother, but also for her, even though it is sometimes
adjusted to her femininity by adding the adjective mdes ma ('beautiful') as in the following
passage: "...the Great Lord [Bo dong Phyogs las mam rgyal] said, 'Do not call her just the
beautiful Daughter of the Gods (Lha sras mzas ma); she is also the Queen of All Knowledge
(Kun mkhyen dbang mo)." And in the following paragraph responding to someone who had
expressed some doubts he said: "There is no contradiction! The Great Woman is the Phag mo
rDo rje can [i.e., Vārāhī with the vajra], the mother of all Buddhas."

This passage is the first mention of Chos kyi sgron ma as an emanation of rDo rje phag mo, and it might be
significant that the epithet indicating her royal ancestry and that indicating her divine nature
are mentioned close to each other. A comparable combination of epithets appears in a later
passage that reports a letter by Thang stong rgyal po saying:
since the death of Ma cig Lab sgron, there has not been a woman who was dedicated to the benefit of other living beings. Now there is a lady who stems from the royal lineage of the Gods of Clear Light (‘Od gsal lha) who is devoted to spiritual liberation and to the benefit of all living beings. Her outer name is Lady Queen of the Jewel (bDag mo dKon mchog rgyal mo); her inner name is Female Teacher Lamp of the Doctrine (sLob dpon ma Chos kyi sgron ma); her secret name is Vajravarshi (rDo rje phag mo). 

The choice of wording may reflect the practice of highlighting her background of sacred royalty as a way of supporting the emerging claim that she was an emanation of an important tantric deity at a time in which the reincarnation line was not yet established. This would be effective not only for the obvious cumulative effect of the titles attributed to her, but also because it mobilized the well-known concept that the ancient Tibetan emperors were emanations of Buddhist deities.

Chos kyi sgron ma’s deeds also reflected the re-enactment of Buddhist royalty and a vision of Buddhist revival with its ideals of prosperity, high morality and good governance. When she sought to build a new system of water-channels for irrigation in the sPo rong plains, after discovering remains of ancient fields near the dPal khud lake, she reportedly thought:

In ancient times people used to say that in order to establish a great monastery, it was important to build it in an affluent big town to avoid problems with erratic irrigation systems;...the existing surrounding fields would produce large amounts of rice, and numerous learned monks from many places would gather there. In the same way, scholars from Southern and Northern La stod and mNga’ ris should gather here to study and practice...thanks to these good deeds, this land can remain peaceful.

She also behaved according to a model of Buddhist royalty when she took care of the funeral of her master and decided to distribute his relics among all disciples and patrons.

During her final journey towards Tsa ri, in 1454, she visited Lhasa and paid particular respect not only to the gTsug lag khang but also went to the U shang rdo temple “established by her ancestors” on the southern bank of the sKyid chu river. She had gone on this journey after having asked advice from Thang stong rgyal po concerning her situation, and, according to Thang stong rgyal po’s biography, having expressed her wish to leave for a hidden land (sbas lung cig). He had offered her the choice between a long life with few disciples in her homeland or the risk of a shorter life but plenty of disciples if she went on a journey to South-eastern Tibet. Chos kyi sgron ma chose the second and, with a group of disciples, travelled to Tsa ri where she died not long after having arrived there, reportedly leaving behind her skull as a precious relic.

There may be several reasons why Thang stong rgyal po prompted her to take on this adventurous journey, some practical, related to the patronage and the production of iron-chains for his bridges, others religious. Tsa ri is the sanctuary of the rDo rje phag mo deity and is also reckoned among Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s ‘hidden lands’. Thang stong rgyal po received many teachings from two masters of the Byang gter tradition who had been Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s direct disciples and was very much operating in the tradition of opening sacred places and taming the borderlands. According to his biography he thus had been invited by dPal ldan lha mo to explore new regions of Tsa ri:
the time has come for you to open the gate to the sacred place of Tsa gong as prophesied by the Great Teacher of Odđiyāna: “the sacred places for benefiting living beings is Tsa ri Tsa gong”. The time has also come for you to build over these waters of the blue sKyid chu River.27

Tsa ri Tsa gong is where Thang stong rgyal po established his production of iron-chains and where Chos kyi sgron ma died after having supported and coordinated some of his operations. Chos kyi sgron ma, like Rig ‘dzin rgyod Idem, Thang stong rgyal po and many other Tibetan masters, ventured to the little-known, risky borderlands with a whole range of spiritual and practical aims in mind. Chos kyi sgron ma did not survive the challenge for long, but her tradition became established, perhaps also thanks to her sudden, untimely demise during an extraordinary enterprise.

Chos kyi sgron ma’s biography, being incomplete, leaves us with many open questions concerning the final months of her life.28 This gap can be partially filled by referring to parallel sources. Like the biography, these highlight the significance of her royal ancestry and suggest the hypothesis that this may have had a role in the process of the establishment of the reincarnation line.

CHOS SKYI SGRON MA’S REINCARNATION LINE

Thang stong rgyal po’s biography mentions Chos kyi sgron ma several times, often with epithets that refer to her imperial ancestry, and gives an account of the events that happened in the wake of Chos kyi sgron ma’s death:

In order to report the death of the venerable Chos kyi sgron ma, the chief nun bDe legs chos ’dren arrived in front of the great master and asked: “Will there be a reincarnation or not?” [he replied] “Girl! Keep silent! She said that she won’t disappoint us! The new female reincarnation will come soon”...In the earth hare year [i.e.1459] the venerable Kun dga’ bzang mo was born in eastern rKong po. bDe legs Chos ’dren came to see the great master taking along the girl and asked: “Is this the true reincarnation or not?” He spoke the prophetic words: “She is the true one!”[... ] He offered her a mirror that, if wiped, would become clearer and clearer, a hand-cymbal and flour bestowing long life...

When the young girl was taken to Gung thang she reportedly recognised Chos kyi sgron ma’s mother and said:

When my mother escorted me as I was leaving from my country I said: “I will surely come to your pillow before you die. Did you forget this?” Then she told a lot of events from her former life, just as if she had woken up from a sleep, which raised general surprise.29

This highly evocative passage gives an indication of the anxiety of bDe legs chos ’dren, the foremost of Chos kyi sgron ma’s disciples who were taken by surprise by her untimely death and felt a compelling need for a reincarnation. This is the milieu within which the search for Chos kyi sgron ma’s rebirth took place and the memory of her life was preserved through the compilation of her biography. This passage also shows how important memory and re-enactment of relationship were in the process of authenticating the reincarnation. The authoritative opinion of the great siddha was confirmed by the re-establishment of the relationship to the mother of her previous life, essential for the sense of belonging to the
community and the re-enactment of Chos kyi sgron ma’s network of relationships. This linked people, things and places through narratives and ritual practices.

Chos kyi sgron ma’s memory lived on in her relics, her biography and her reincarnation, shared among the community of believers. Among her own followers and in the wider-network of the disciples of her master, the idea that she had been part of a sequence of reincarnations gradually consolidated in the shape of a twin-line, linking female emanations of Vajravarahi and male emanations of Cakrasamvara. sTag lung thang pa Ngag dbang grags pa is likely to have had an influence in this process. He was a disciple of Bo deng Phyogs las mam rgyal and is reckoned among the throne-holders of the sTag lung bka’ brgyud tradition. He recognised his spiritual son dPal chi med dpal bzang as a reincarnation of dPal ’chi med gru pa, disciple and presumed biographer of Chos kyi sgron ma, and of Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110-1170). The sixteenth century Bo deng chos ’byung outlines the twin reincarnation line leading it back to the king of Oddiyāna Indrabhūti and the female mahāsiddha Lakṣmīnkarā. The Indian incarnations were followed by a string of Tibetan ones: Phag mo grub pa rDo rje rgyal po and his consort bSod names ’dren ma; Khams rin chen dpal and his consort bSod nams dpal ’dren; dPal ’chi med grub pa and Chos kyi sgron ma. Rin chen dpal’s consort bSod nams dpal ’dren was considered to be Chos kyi sgron ma’s previous incarnation. bSod nams dpal ’dren was linked to the sTag lung and the ‘Ba’ rong bka’ brgyud traditions and achieved such a fame that later De srid Sangs rgyas rgya mstho included her skull in the stupa built for the Fifth Dalai Lama. However the information available in her biographies seems to indicate that although she was considered an emanation of the rDo rje phag mo, she was not part of an established line of reincarnations leading to her re-embodiment in Chos kyi sgron ma. There is no evident continuity between the people around bSod nams ’dren ma or bSod nams dpal ’dren and those around Chos kyi sgron ma and neither are mentioned in the extant part of Chos kyi sgron ma biographical narrative. bSod nam dpal ’dren biographies provide precious information highlighting the process through which Chos kyi sgron ma’s reincarnation line is likely to have emerged by reckoning illustrious precedents from the bKa’ brgyud tradition, possibly under the personal influence of sTag lung thang pa Ngag dbang grags pa.

The identification of a line of historical referents as previous incarnations was probably an important part of the process through which Chos kyi sgron ma, as generic emanation of the rDo rje Phag mo, became a key figure in the establishment of the reincarnation line. Although none appears in the extant part of the biography, we know from Bo deng phyogs las mam rgyal’s biography that the idea that Chos kyi sgron ma was the re-embodiment of sacred women from the Tibetan and Indian past had already started to circulate in the final years of her life. Here it is stated:

As far as the most accomplished among all, the holder of the secret treasury, is concerned: in earlier times she became dPal mo [Lakṣmīnkarā] the sister of Indrabhūti in the land of U rgyan (Oddiyāna), then the divine princess Mandarava, the consort of the great teacher Padmasambhava. Now in honor of this Great Man [Bo deng Phyogs las mam rgyal], rDo rje Phag mo herself, the chief of all yoginis, incarnated in Chos kyi sgron ma.

Also, when Chos kyi sgron ma is mentioned among the people who took care of Bo deng Phyogs las mam rgyal’s funeral, there is a brief reference to her earlier Tibetan incarnation as tantric consort of Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po:
In addition, there was the one who in earlier times was born in the locality called Phag for the accomplishment of the deeds of Phag mo gru pa, and now is rejoicing in the accomplishment of the deeds of the Omniscient, after having been born at the time of the [Gung thang] King Son of the Gods (tha sras), as the great Vajrayogini A lce sgrol ma Chos kyi sgrom me.36

The author of Bo dong phyogs las mam rgyal’s most famous biography Amoghasiddhi Jig med ‘bang, a member of the Yar ’brog ruling family who had been a disciple of Bo dong phyogs las mam rgyal, certainly had a part in the vision that shaped what happened not only in the wake of his master’s passing but also in that of the sacred princess. He was apparently close to Chos kyi sgrom ma’s reincarnation, Kun dga’ bzang mo, since the great translator Lo chen bSod nams rgya mtsho met her in 1470 as he visited the Yar ’brog palace in sNa dkar rse on one of his journeys.37 At that time Kun dga’ bzang mo was still an eleven years old girl, but her presence at the Yar ’brog court indicates that her sacred identity had already been recognised, confirming thereby the basic information given by Thang stong rgyal po’s biography and the Bo dong chos ‘byung. With the support of the lords of Yar ’brog, Kung dga’ bzang mo later restored the Bsam sdings monastery and it is here that eventually the tradition would become established.

During the final years of Chos kyi sgrom ma’s life, however, the process of establishing the rDo rje phag mo reincarnation as an institution seems to have still been extremely fluid—principally based on her achievements rather than on a protocol of reincarnation recognition. Chos kyi sgrom ma merged the imperial profile that she inherited from her ancestors with that of the tantric deity she embodied through her persona and her deeds. After her demise, her spiritual leadership and the role she had played in the economy of patronage are likely to have rendered the need for a reincarnation particularly compelling for her disciples. From interpreting in hindsight a person as a divine emanation in light of extraordinary deeds, the process thus became that of searching for the traces of a divine identity into a new person that re-enacted past embodiments of the same divine principle.

Patronage, political allegiances and master-disciple relationships could be re-enacted according to modes that had gradually emerged in Tibet since the beginning of the second spread of the doctrine.38 Leonhard Van der Kuyp traces the roots of the Tibetan phenomenon of reincarnation in a combination of factors that brought together the cult of Avalokiteśvara, the idea of rebirth and imperial history. In particular he highlights how according to bKa’ gdam literature Atiśa recognized Brom ston rgyal ba’i ‘byung gnas as Avalokiteśvara and “therefore physically embodied the spirit of intelligent compassion and had done so during a number of reincarnations”.39 His account of rebirths includes extensive references to imperial history and imperial families suggesting a spiritual link between him and Srong btsan sgam po. Atiśa had crossed the Tibetan frontier at Nagarkot (Bal po rdzong) and stayed in Mang yul Gung thang for a while with Nag tsho Lo tsa ba Tshul khrims rgyal ba (1011–c.1068) who subsequently was reincarnated in Chos kyi rGyal po of Khon pu (1069-1144). The area of Mang yul Gung thang had been a fertile place for the emergence of reincarnations and was rich in historical and legendary traces of the Tibetan imperial past. These included the famous Phags pa wa ti temple, which was lavishly supported by the Gung thang royal family40 and was at the centre of a distinctive Avalokiteśvara cult that promoted a grass-roots Buddhism involving the laity41 and was linked to Lakṣmiṇkarā.42

There was also the Byams sprin lha khang, one of the yang ‘dul temples,43 linked to the bKa’ chems ka khol ma and the Mani bka’ ‘bum literature equating Srong btsan sgam po with Avalokiteśvara. Imperial legacies may have also had an impact on the establishment of the
Karma pa reincarnation line. Karma Pakshi (1206-1283) to whom biographical literature attributes imperial ancestry\(^{44}\) is known as having recognized himself as reincarnation of Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110-1193) and emanation of Avalokiteśvara. The following reincarnation Karma Rang 'byung rdo rje was born in Mang yul\(^{45}\) and was recognized by Urgyan pa Rin chen dpal.

Previously established reincarnations and Rig 'dzin rdem’s prophecies calling on the Gung thang kings to re-enact the role of their ancestors provided the background against which Chos kyi sgron ma’s reincarnation line emerged. In addition, it is possible to glean from Chos kyi sgron ma’s and Bo dong Phyogs las mam rgyal’s biographies hints of another, less institutionalised, form of reincarnation linked to kin and reminiscent of forms of reincarnation that can be found in small-scale societies.\(^{46}\) The biography of Bo dong Phyogs las mam rgyal reports the fact that he had been invited to Gung thang in order to free Chos kyi sgron ma’s brother from spirit possession. Three scholars who were brothers from the Bong rdzog community had travelled to central Tibet and as they became affected by demons died during their journey. They were reborn as powerful and ferocious mi ma yin (asuras) and affected Chos kyi sgron ma’s brother who suffered from snying rlung because of them and would go around driven by these spirits. In order to clear him from this evil possession, Bo dong Phyogs las mam rgyal was asked to visit.\(^{47}\) Bong rdzog was the community of origin of Chos kyi sgron ma’s brother’s maternal kin. It is possible to see here an echo of Inner Asian reincarnation practices linked to the idea of the returning of deceased kin and ancestral figures, often according to patterns that contrast with the dominant patrilineal descent system.\(^{48}\) Another, well-known case of kin related reincarnation is mentioned in a passage of the dBa’ brhed which describes the reincarnation of two ordinary deceased children:

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[A monk] said that the son was going to be reborn as a god and the daughter as a son. He placed a pearl half painted with red color in the mouth of the dead girl. One year later, a son was born. Everybody could see that in his teeth he had a pearl that was half red. Forty days after his birth, the boy recognized his aunt and other people. He addressed them just as [the girl] used to before dying.\(^{49}\)

Buddhist and non-Buddhist ideas of reincarnation may have easily blended providing the background against which the institutionalized reincarnation lines emerged in Tibet. Imperial legacies are likely to have had a part in shaping the phenomenon, providing not only a link between royalty and divine emanations but also the sense of sacred lineage.

**IMPERIAL LEGACIES AND REINCARNATION IN HINDSIGHT**

Memory and re-enactment of relationship were certainly important for the establishment of reincarnation lines at their inception. However, the reading of reincarnation ancestry in hindsight was at least as crucial. In the case of genealogies the process of remembering or forgetting the elements that constitute these lines can reflect different perspectives and reflect the particular context of genealogical knowledge interpretation.\(^{50}\) Reincarnation lines present similar features. It is significant that the way of reckoning a reincarnation line, lit: ‘birth line’ (skyé brgyud), is based on the same kind of vocabulary that indicates conventional lineages, ‘bone line’, ‘flesh line’, ‘blood line’, etc. (rus brgyud, gdung brgyud, sha brgyud, khrag brgyud, etc.) based on the transmission of substances. The role of imperial legacies for
Tibetan identity and historiography seems to have provided significant lenses also for the interpretation of reincarnation ‘ancestry’ over the centuries.

Placing Chos kyi sgron ma against the background of famous women who embodied the same principle of female sacredness in history was a constitutive factor in the establishment of the rDo rje phag mo reincarnation line. Thanks to this process her lineage was reckoned as starting from the Tibetan reincarnation of the Indian Mahāsiddha Lakṣmīnākara. This is the origin of the most widespread reckoning system of the reincarnation line, which considers Chos kyi sgron ma as ‘the third’ (starting from the first Tibetan incarnation bSod nams ’dren ma). This by and large maps onto the Phag mo gru pa spiritual lineage (see above) which was at that time not only religiously relevant but also politically significant since the Phag mo gru pa rulers still had considerable power in Tibet. Later variants illuminate the complexity of her reincarnation line and its links to main power holders such as the Karma pa, the Dalai Lamas, etc.

Rig ’dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698-1755), gives a reckoning of the reincarnation line in which the reference to Tibetan imperial heritage was apparently more important than that to the spiritual ancestry of the Phag mo gru pa, whose power had waned significantly much by then. He highlights Chos kyi sgron ma as the founding figure of the bSam sdings reincarnation line and says that her ‘lineage’ (skyed brgyud) is currently known as “the Yar ’brog rje btsun ma”. This might be due to his zeal as a historian, keen to take into account the qualitative difference between the earlier part of the lineage which is more vague (and presumably retrospectively constructed), and the part of the lineage that follows the establishment of the institution with the historically attested recognition of Chos kyi sgron ma’s rebirth, Kun dga’ bzang mo. More likely, he was even keener to highlight the imperial legacy associated with Chos kyi sgron ma and her royal lineage, which he had decided to record and celebrate in his Gung thang rgyal rabs, completed in 1749 in the palace of the King of Mustang whose history is closely connected to Gung thang. Tibetan imperial legacies were apparently important to him more generally as attested by his activity as an “antiquarian” who “had taken the pains to collect and to annotate the text of many important inscriptions of the eighth and ninth centuries” and by the work Lha btsad po gdung rabs, which he dedicated to the Tibetan Empire and the Kingdoms established in Western Tibet by the descendants of the ancient emperors four years before compiling the Gung thang rgyal rabs. Both works reflect his wish to outline historical referents as exemplars for a political rule that followed Buddhist principles and that could inspire the power-holders of his time.

In a private letter to Pho lha nas, at that time the ruler of Tibet, he refers to the widespread longing for ‘hidden lands’ as a sign of their troubled times, using a common trope that contrasts an unsettled present with the glory of an imperial past to be restored by taking refuge in spiritual havens and by re-enacting the ancient models of political and religious morality. Rig ’dzin Tshe dbang nor bu also refers to Chos kyi sgron ma’s brother as mentioned in “a prophecy by Guru Padma according to which he was an emanation of Khri srong lde btsan...”. He thereby not only mentioned a historical precedent for the re-enactment of a powerful exemplar from imperial Tibet, he also implied reincarnation as a form of re-enactment of authority which had by then become a widespread practice.

In contemporary Tibet, highlighting Chos kyi sgron ma’s imperial legacy seems to have been high on the agenda of bSam sdings’ head monk Thub stan mam rgyal and the current bSam sdings rDo rje phag mo who mention her as a founding figure of the bSam sdings rDo rje phag mo lineage. In their article on the bSam sdings rDo rje Phag mo they chose to rely on Rig ’dzin Tshe dbang nor bu’s approach and highlight her as “the first incarnation (sku
phreng dang po) Chos kyi sgron me, from the lineage of the Kings of Tibet (bod kyi btsan po gdung rgyud). They did take into account the lineage mentioning a series of incarnations that preceded Chos kyi sgron ma, however their system of reckoning makes a clear distinction between the earlier ancestry and the institutionalized reincarnation line with Chos kyi sgron ma as the founding figure. By highlighting Chos kyi sgron ma as a descendant of the ancient imperial lineage they harnessed the moral authority of Tibet’s glorious past in the framework of the Chinese multi-ethnic state of the post-Mao era. By celebrating her as a sacred woman they linked her tantric female sacredness to the modernist agenda of female emancipation.

CONCLUSION: RE-ENACTING THE ANCESTORS

Chos kyi sgron ma’s story tells us of an extraordinary woman, embodying both the female sacredness of the Dorje Phagmo and the sacredness of her imperial ancestry. It shows that the individual human experience can be interpreted as the manifestation of a divine being, who is thus able to act in the human world from one generation to the next. Thus Vajravārāhi/Vajrayogini, like Avalokiteśvara, can be a “real force within Tibetan history”. These bodhisattvas can embody not only Buddhist ideals but also imperial legacies in figures such as the bSam sding rDo rje Phag mo and, most prominently, the Dalai Lama. Like relatedness through kin, reincarnation lines link the past generations to the future, through spiritual bonds.

Reincarnations and ‘hidden lands’ can be seen as particular expressions of Tibetan religious culture, as distinctive ways of re-enacting relationships among people and between people and places. Their language of memory and prophecy links the past to the future, often combining political and spiritual claims. They often draw on imperial legacies that are thereby inscribed in the Tibetan landscape and its inhabitants as part of the living tradition. Thus Chos kyi sgron ma, who as a woman was not in the position to become a dharmaraja enacting the imperial legacies associated with her lineage, became a powerful icon of female sacredness and was inscribed in the Tibetan landscape.

On the throne of Yamdrok Lake
Sits the Shabdrung Dorjee Phagmo...

NOTES

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2 According to Rig ’dzin rGod Idem’s guide to Yol mo: “From Gu ge...to mDo kham... there are twenty-one ‘hidden lands’...the three major ones include Tsari in the east, ‘Bras mo gshongs in the south...’ (Yol mo gnas yig, p.8).

3 Tashi Tsering 2008, p.123.

4 Tashi Tsering 2008, p.132. For further references to the royal lineage of Mang yul gung thang cut by the sword see Tashi Tsering 2008, pp.109, 118-119. For a discussion of the link between Rig ’dzin rGod Idem and his ‘hidden valleys’ and the imperial legacy embodied by the Gung thang royal house, see Childs 1999: 126-158.

5 mkhan pa lung gi lam yig, folio 3a, see also Diemberger 1997, p.324.
6 From the bSam pa lhun grub ma, revealed in 1403, which became part of the more famous ritual text gSol 'debs le 'u bdan ma. See Everding 2000: 244ff, 620-623.
7 For a discussion of this identification see Everding 2000: 244ff.
8 1422 is the date given in the Gung thang rgyal rabs. According to Chos kyi sgron ma's biography Khri mam rgyal lde was born when she was some 5 years old. His birthdate would be around 1426.
9 Lha btsun rin chen mam rgyal (1473-1557), founder of the printing-house at Brag dkar rta so and biographer of gTsang smyon He ru ka was the grandson of Khri mam rgyal lde (see Ehrehard 2004, p.360).
10 See Diemberger 2007.
11 Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 22a.
12 This seems to refer to one of the wives of Khri rnam rgyal lde.
13 btsun mo la khyo gral, literally meaning 'the queen taking the male ranking position'.
14 Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 25a.
15 Chos kyi sgron ma's biography (folio 30a-31a) and numerous other sources refer extensively to the disputes between Khri lha dbang rgyal mtshan and Khri rnam rgyal lde (see also Diemberger 2007, p.36; Everding 2002, p.536). The biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal refers to his mediation in one of these conflicts and to the fact that her brother was possessed by demons so that the spiritual master had to be invited to perform an exorcism. (See Biography of Bo don Phyogs las nam rgyal, pp. 310-311).
16 As the news of the birth of her brother from a junior queen had reached Chos kyi sgron ma's mother, she was distressed. On that occasion Chos kyi sgron ma reportedly said: "...in the first part of my life I'll follow your instructions and according to your words, as my mother, I'll lead a secular life. In the later part of my life I'll take the vows and will fulfill my hope regarding my future" (Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 8a).
17 Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 63b, 64a.
18 Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 127a, b.
19 There is no indication that she was recognised as the reincarnation of a historical, human precedent in her biographical narrative. The title of the biography indicating that she was the third incarnation of bSod nams 'dren ma may refer to something that happened at the very end of her life or in the wake of her death. Even though it cannot be excluded that this is mentioned in the final, non-extant, part of the biography, this does not seem to have affected her childhood or the way in which she fashioned her life (see also Diemberger 2007: 239ff).
20 Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 110a, b.
21 Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 85b-86a.
22 Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 137b.
23 Biography of Thang stong rgyal po 282; (see also Stearn 2007, p.378) Chos kyi sgron ma's biography is not as explicit about what triggered her wish to leave. It describes a wide range of factors that led Chos kyi sgron ma to ask Thang stong rgyal po's prophetic advice. Unsurprisingly, Thang stong rgyal po's biography frames her endeavour less ambiguously as fully part of his vision.
25 See note 2.
26 These were Kun spangs don yod rgyal mtshan and Lha gdong pa bsod nams mchog pa: see Stearns 2007, p.24.
27 Biography of Thang stong rgyal po 111-112; see also Stearns 2007, p.201.
28 Chos kyi sgron ma met Vanaratna in 1454 before reaching Lhasa on her final journey. The biography follows her until E yul. What is missing includes the final part of the journey to Tsari, her death in 1455/6 (according to the Bo dong chos 'byung she died aged thirty-four, i.e. 33 according to western conventions) and what happened in the aftermath.
29 Biography of Thang stong rGyal po 308-9; (see also Stearns 2007, pp.406-407.
30 Most important is her skull, which was apparently preserved for a while at the hermitage of sMan mo sgang at Tsa ri Tsa gong where she had died. There is a Cakrasamvara painting commissioned by Chos kyi sgron ma, which includes a brief text referring to her skull as a precious relic which people would visit (dbu thod mjal ba pheb) when on pilgrimage.
31 See also sTag lung chos 'byung p.449.
32 Generally it is believed that the female mahāsiddha Lakṣmīkārā, like her brother King Indrabhūti, lived in the 8th century in Oddiyāṇa; there are however still some uncertainties concerning dating and historicity of one or more figures with this name; English 2002, pp.9-10.
For a detailed discussion of the lineage, see Diemberger 2007.

See Tashi Tsering, forthcoming.

Biography of Bo dong Phyogs las mam rgyal 268.

Biography of Bo dong Phyogs las mam rgyal 391.

Ehrhard 2002, p.79.

van der Kuijip 2005, 16ff.


The support to this ancient temple stretched over several generations. Chos kyi sgron ma's father provided the temple with a new golden roof (Ehrhard 2004, p.83) and Chos kyi sgron ma herself performed offerings there (Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma, folio 49a).


This temple is mentioned in many of the lists of temples pinning down the demoness embodying Tibet's territory (see Sorensen 1994, pp.261, 561-569).

See for example, Richardson 1998, p.339.

Karma Rang 'byung rdo rje was born in Mang yul in a locality called Gangs shur mo.

Obeysekere 2002.

Biography of Bo dong phyogs las mam rgyal 310-311.

Rebecca Empson gives some ethnographic examples and discusses this phenomenon in the Mongolian context (58-82). See also Diemberger (2007: 239ff) for a wider discussion of this issue.

dBa' bzhide folio 5a–b.

Humphrey 1979.

Tashi Tsering (1993, pp.20-53) gives a wide range of lineages in his article on the bSam sdings rdo rje phag mo. On how different version of the lineage are likely to correlate with different political contexts see Diemberger 2007: 239ff.

Gung thang rgyal rabs 125.


See Everding 2000, p.23.


Everding 2000, p.10.

Gung thang rgyal rabs 125.

rDo rje Phag mo bDe chen chos sgron & Thub stan rnam rgyal 1995: 33.


Dhondhup and Tashi Tsering 1979, p.12

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Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma = dPal 'chi med grub pa (?) Ye shes mkha' 'gro bsod nams 'dren gyi sku skyes gsum pa rje btsun ma chos kyi sgron ma'i rnam thar. Incomplete manuscript of 144 folios.


Bo dong chos 'byung = 'Chi med 'od zer dPal de kho na nyid dus pa la bo dong chos 'byung gsal byed sgron me zhes bya ba dPal thams cad mkyen pa 'Chi med 'od zer gvis mdzad pa. Manuscript of 35 folios, kept at Bodong E monastery.
rDo rje phag mo bDe chen chos sgrom dang Grwa Thub bstan rnam rgyal 1995 = “bSam sding rdo rje phag mo’i ‘khrungs rabs dangi sku phreg rim byong gyi mtsad rnam yar ‘brog bsam sding dgon gyi dkar chag bcas rags tsam bkos pa.” Krun go’i bod kyi shes rig. Nr. 2, pp. 31–58, 1995.

Gung thang rgyal rabs = Rig ’dzin Tshe dbang nor bu, Gung thang rgyal rabs, in Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag Inga. Lhasa: Bod ljonrs bod yig dpe mying dpe skrun khang, 1990.

mKhan pa lung gi lam yig =Rig ’dzin rGod ldem sBas yul mKhan pa lung gi lam yig sa spyad bcas pa. Manuscript of 20 folios, private copy from a library in the Arun valley, a microfilmed copy is also available at the Nepal Research Centre.


Tashi Tsering (bKra shis tshe ring). “bSam sding rdo rje phag mo sku phreg rim byong gyi mtsshan dang ’khrungs gshegs kyi lo khams star chags su ’god thabs sngon ’gro’i zhib ’jug mdor bsdu.” In gYu mtsho 1 (1) (20–53), 1993.

Tashi Tsering (bKra shis tshe ring) = mKha’ spyod ’bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs bzhus (Collected Guides of the Sacred Hidden Land of Sikkim), including Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s texts: Ma ongs lung bstan sbas yul gyi them byang bzhus and Lha sras mu tig bstan po la lha’i dbang po brgya byin gyis lung bstan sbas yul bdun gyi sbyi them ma ’ongs lung bstan bzhus so, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, and Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamsala, 2008.

Tashi Tsering (bKra shis tshe ring) = “Ye shes kyi mkha’ ’gro ma bsod nams dpal ’dren gyi ngo sprod mdor bsdu” to be published in g.Yu mtsho in Tibetan and Inner Asia in English, forthcoming.

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Chos kyi sgron ma image on stone with monk in Samding

Chos kyi sgron ma painting in Nyemo

12th Dorje Phagmo in Samding
Ruins of the Gung thang palace (photo: C. Meazza)

Samding monastery (photo: B. Huett)
The Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682) was perhaps the most outstanding person in the political history of Tibet. His influence was prominent in two respects: in respect of space and in respect of time. After a period of political fragmentation he was the one who could achieve control over the greatest part of the Tibetan area again although his power cannot be called absolute. Moreover the change in the political structures of Tibet he was able to bring about was long-standing. Oversimplified in this description is of course to put all these effects down to the person of the Fifth Dalai Lama alone. To a high degree dGe lugs pa politics were organized by the regents, especially bSod nams chos 'phel (period of office 1642-1658) and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1679-1708). But there were more parties and interests involved in the development which finally enabled the rule of the so called dGa’ ldan pho brang government for about three hundred years. Taking the picture from a wider angle one becomes aware that Tibet was just a puzzle in a greater game about power in Central Asia. And taking all the different aspects into consideration one is always asking: who was utilizing whom? And at the end I think there is only one possible answer: The Mongols and the Manchus utilized the figure of the Dalai Lama for their political purposes and vice versa the Dalai Lama and his regent as well utilized the Mongols and the Manchus for the realisation of their own political and religious agenda. This reciprocal relationship of utilization has to be kept in mind as a background when I now approach the topic from the Tibetan angle.

Southeast Tibet before Güśi Qan

Earlier to the East Tibetan campaign of Güśi Qan in 1639 and 1640 the dominant political power in Southern Khams was the Naxi kingdom, to the Tibetans known as the kingdom of 'Jang or lJang(s), with its capital Lijiang (麗江) respectively Sa dam or Sa tham in Tibetan. The chieftain or king belonged to the Mu family. Until the campaign of Güśi Qan he controlled a territory covering not only the area around Lijiang but also the areas north of Lijiang as far as Li thang including as prominent places the district of rGyal thang, in Chinese called Zhongdian (中甸), and Mu li or Mi li, sometimes also spelled sMi li or rMi li. The areas—especially Mu li—were and are not only inhabited by Tibetans but by other ethnic groups as well.

Zhongdian respectively rGyal thang is the name of a region mainly inhabited by Tibetans and situated in the north of present-day Yunnan province. Beginning with the year 1491 until 1559 the genealogical records of the Mu family report again and again of villages in the area of Zhongdian conquered by the king of 'Jang. During that period Zhongdian was incorporated as a district into the dominion of the Naxi kingdom. In the south of modern Zhongdian city is a hill called Daguishan (大龟山) in Chinese, where a fortress, called rDo mkhar rdzong by the Tibetans, was located which the locals trace back to the time of the
ancient Tibetan kingdom. When the Naxi king Mu Tai (木泰, 1455-1502, reigned from 1442) in 1499 conquered Zhongdian he built a village there called Xianggewa (香格瓦). The Tibetans however kept on using the name rDo mkhar rdzong for this administrative centre of the district. The name appears in a couple of documents dated from 1675 until 1747. Today this village makes up the old part of Zhongdian city and has the name Dukezong (独克宗) or Dukenzong (独肯宗) which is the Chinese transcription of rDo mkhar rdzong.

Historiographical Tibetan sources tell us about early contacts with the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa as well as with the dGe lugs pa: the first prominent Karma bKa’ brgyud pa who was invited to ’Jang seems to be the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554). He came there via rGyal thang in 1515, aged eight. The king who is said to have given the child a splendid reception must be identical with Mu Ding (木定, 1477-1526, reigned since the end of the year 1502). It is said that the king promised him not to wage war against Tibet for a period of thirteen years, to present every year five hundred boys as novices for the monasteries (bu khral) and to establish hundred monasteries. After staying for seven days as guest in the royal palace the Eighth Karma pa is said to have travelled to rGyal thang where he founded a monastery.

The first dGe lugs pa hierarch to visit ’Jang apparently was the Second ’Phags pa lha, ’Phags pa sangs rgyas (1507-1566). The king whom he met is called ’Jam dbyangs grags pa and is probably identical with Mu Gao (木高, 1515-1568, reigned from 1553). Believing the report handed down to us up to the visit of ’Phags pa lha the king was hostile towards Tibet and the Tibetan monasteries. It is said that the king justified the warfare by referring to his duty towards the Chinese emperor as his suzerain to protect the border area. The bla ma then is said to have taken the oath from the king not to wage war on Tibet and attack the Buddhist monasteries for a period of twelve years. Although the narration handed down on us hardly amounts to anything more than an account of the miracles performed by ’Phags pa lha, the statement about the original hostility of the king towards the Tibetans matches not only with a similar statement in the biography of the Eighth Karma pa but also with an inscription engraved on a stone drum in 1561. Here we learn that Mu Gao on the order of his father, king Mu Gong (木公, 1494-1553, reigned from 1526), successfully fought the Tibetans who in 1548 and 1549 had invaded several border regions of the kingdom.

Since 1580, under the king Mu Wang (木旺, 1551-1596, reigned from 1579), slowly the dGe lugs pa gained ground in Southern Khams. In 1580 the monastery Thub chen byams gling (or Thub chen byams pa gling) in Li thang was constructed. It was founded by the Third Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho (1543-1588) on the invitation of the Naxi king who also provided the labourers and artisans. Soon a few more dGe lugs pa monasteries were established in the area, most importantly dGa’ ldan dar rgyas gling in lHa steng or lHa khang steng. Mu Wang’s grandson, the ruler Mu Zeng (木增, 1587-1646, reigned from 1597), to Tibetan sources known as Karma Mi pham bsod nams rab brtan, strongly adhered to the bKa’ brgyud pa. At the request of the king the Sixth Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584-1630) lent him a Tshal pa bKa’ ’gyur as the pattern for the production of a bKa’ ’gyur in ’Jang. Then—on the invitation of the king—in 1611 he travelled to ’Jang to check the new printing blocks of the bKa’ ’gyur in person. After the whole work was finished he came for the consecration. Then he composed an account of the project which he completed on 5 or 6 January 1615. The king also founded a new monastery named Tsi shag dgon.
However, although the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa were the strongest among the different Buddhist schools under the king of 'Jang, documents held by the archives in Zhongdian describe the district of rGyal thang as an area where the people previously had a strong faith not only in the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa, but also in the sTag lung bka’ brgyud pa, the rNying ma pa and the Bon po.

GÜSI QAN AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DGE LUGS PA HEGEMONY

In 1640 people in the Southern parts of Kham heard about Güsi Qan’s victory over Be ri Don yod rdo rje, the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa and the Qalq-a-Mongols of Cóyút Qong Tayiji (1581-1637). Encouraged by this news, the dGe lugs pa hierarch of Mu li, the bla ma ‘Jam dbyangs bzang po (1597-1656/1657), asked the Fifth Dalai Lama for support against the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa who previously had not allowed the broad establishment of the dGe lugs teachings in the area under 'Jang. The Dalai Lama commissioned 'Jam dbyangs bzang po to discipline the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa of his home area through peaceful and forceful means. Apparently he then got support through Mongolian troops because the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa in 'Jang accused him thereafter to have called the Mongols from Central Tibet and made preparations to seize him but they were not able to do so.

After the victory of Güsi Qan in Central Tibet in 1642, the dGe lugs pa and their hierarchs together with their Mongolian allies became the dominant secular and religious power in Tibet. Already in 1645 the Dalai Lama started to spread new dGe lugs pa monasteries all over Central and East Tibet weakening the position of other Buddhist schools—especially the bKa’ brgyud ones. Even monasteries like the sTag lung bKa’ brgyud pa monastery of Ri bo che which had been destroyed through the campaigns of Be ri Don yod rdo rje had now to ask for special permission from the Dalai Lama and from Güsi Qan before they were allowed to restore their monastery and revive their traditions. Others—like the 'Brug pa monks from Byams mdun who earlier had close links with Don yod rdo rje—already in 1645 were driven out of their monasteries and their inherited property was delivered to the dGe lugs pa. In this way the dGe lugs pa hierarchs of Brag g.yab and Chab mdo gained their regional political power. Also in other areas of Kham, for example Cha phreng or Phyag phreng, the area directly north of rGyal thang, bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries were destroyed or converted into dGe lugs pa ones.

Most of the new dGe lugs pa monasteries were founded through the conversion especially of Karma bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries and of some ‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud pa ones. Several rebellions organized by bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries—especially known is the uprising in Kong po—were suppressed by Mongolian troops. According to Dung dkar Rin po che the monks received a mark on their hands and were distributed among different dGe lugs pa monasteries. Also other bKa’ brgyud schools than the Karma bKa’ brgyud one were the object of suppression through the new government. sTan ‘dzin ras pa (died 1723), a Sa skya pa from a noble family of the Muktinath valley in present-day Nepal, reports that during the first war of the dGa’ dan pho brang government with Bhutan (1644-1646) those following the Dwags po bKa’ brgyud school had to wear around their neck “a thick piece of woollen thread as a mark of identification” and that they were not allowed to travel freely.

Other schools mentioned in the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama which lost monasteries and property were the Sa skya pa and the Jo nang pa. The new monasteries—no matter whether in Central or in East Tibet—were endowed with land including the local households
and vested with the right of the so-called monk tax. In that way the dGe lugs pa institutions became among the strongest feudal lords in most of the Tibetan territory.

Apparently only one other Buddhist school than the dGe lugs pa made in the beginning something of a profit from regrouping the monastic structure of Tibet. Due to the special interests of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the rNy ing ma pa—well known is for instance the close relationship of the Dalai Lama with the famous rNy ing ma pa scholars of his time gTer bdag gling pa. Dharmā śrī and rDo rje brag sprul sku Padma ‘phring las—this school was the only other one which could gain some new monastic seats.28

THE KINGDOM OF 'JANG AS A REFUGE FOR THE KARMA bKa’ brgyud pa

In Southeast Tibet the king of 'Jang somehow had to deal with the new constellation of power in Tibet. So in 1645 he sent envoys to the Fifth Dalai Lama and opened relations with Güši Qan.29

In 1647 the kingdom of 'Jang was severely devastated through an army of a man called rGya Lu Ts’a who—as it is said—opposed the Chinese emperor.30 This can only refer to the devastation connected with the rebellion of the so-called roving bandits mentioned in the Naxi chronicles for the same year.31 The king of 'Jang apparently lost control over several districts to local rdzong dpons; some Karma bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries were looted.

In this situation the king invited the Tenth Karma pa Chos dbyings rdo rje (1604-1674), perhaps on the one side to offer him a refuge and on the other side to help restoring the shattered Karma bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries. Without mentioning any further details regarding the dates or the political background Si tu Chos kyi ‘byung gnas (1699/70-1774) tells us that the Karma pa had travelled to 'Jang via rGyal thang on the invitation of the king and ministers of Sa tham.32 According to later secondary sources based on an unspecified more detailed biography,33 the Tenth Karma pa had to escape Central Tibet after Güši Qan’s campaigns when he, in 1647, received the invitation to come to 'Jang. The king, called Karma 'Chi med lha dbang in the Tibetan sources, must be Mu Yi (木懿, 1608-1692).34 The Karma pa celebrated the new year festival of the earth-mouse year, starting 24 February 1648, together with the king and his family. From 'Jang Sa tham he went to rGyal thang before roaming further north through the areas of Eastern Tibet. In 165535 or 165636 he returned to 'Jang and stayed in the area for several years. During that time he is said to have ordained about a thousand monks.37 He is further credited with the ordination of the youngest son of the king, called Karma Mi pham bstan pa’i n yi ma, the restoration of all the monasteries which had been destroyed through the ‘Chinese war’, the foundation of thirteen new monasteries,38 the ending of animal sacrifice made by the followers of the Bon religion and the manufacture of a bKa’ ‘gyur with vermillion lettering in Chinese style in 1660.39 Interesting to note is also—among other prominent bKa’ brgyud pa hierarchs (Phag mo zhabs drung, rTse lha sku skye, Zhwa sgom sku skye)—the presence of the young Sixth Si tu chos rgyal Mi pham ‘phrin las rab brtan (1658-1682) during the new year festival of the iron mouse year, starting in February 1660. Between 1660 and 1673 there is a strange silence regarding the exact whereabouts of the Tenth Karma pa. In 1673 he set off for Lhasa where he arrived on 19 April 1673. He went to see the Dalai Lama in the Potala and asked him for the permission to reside in mTshur phu.40

In the same year also the Seventh Zhwa dmar pa Ye shes snying po (1631-1694) returned to Tibet. The Tibetan government preferred to have him in mTshur phu where his activities would be easier to control. According to an account sent to the Kangxi emperor about 1671
the Dalai Lama had planned to let all three, the Karma pa, the Zhwa dmar pa and the Phag mo ba, stay in their own monastery. But due to troubles at the border he was not able to do so. On the order of the Central Tibetan government the Zhwa dmar pa had been kept under the guard of Mu li soldiers three years from 1670 onwards. After the circumstances were reported to the Chinese officials of Yunnan province he was allowed to stay in a monastery in Mu li before finally an official of the Tibetan government arrived to bring him back to Central Tibet.

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF dGe lugs pa RULE IN MU LI**

The weakening of the ruling family of 'Jang and the destruction of Karma bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries through the events of 1647 was a chance for the dGe lugs pa to gain power. Bla ma 'Jam dbyangs bzung po—acting just as if he was the local ruler of Mu li—sent an official order (bka’ shog) from his residence in Tshwa thog (Chinese Yanjing) to the officials of his monastery and of LHa steng and Khe 'long, two places where dGe lugs pa monasteries were located, telling them:

'Jang Sa dam was defeated by the army of rGya Lu Ts’a. The time of those who are blindly attached to the Kar lugs pa is finished. The (people called) Yas pa, A 'phrad rgya bya etc. are plundering the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries of the area and the fortresses of 'Jang. Therefore now for us the time has come to propagate and spread the teachings of us, the dGa’ ldan pa. Because our way of conduct and our language are also of the same type, place (now) all the Kar 'jang who are left under our (rule).'

Already in 1648 bla ma 'Jam dbyangs bzang po along with begging for alms visited the places of the various local people and explained to them that they should pay their taxes from now on to him and not to 'Jang anymore. Now he would function as their religious and secular master, as bla ma and dpon po. Believing the historiographer all the people joyfully and unanimous agreed to pay him the taxes. But of course this was not the whole story. Bla ma 'Jam dbyangs bzang po and his dGe lugs pa party were not without an opposition who tried to keep people from paying their taxes to the bla ma. The conflict even caused a minor war. But finally all the people of Mu li who earlier had been the subjects of 'Jang were subjugated by the local dGe lugs pa hierarch. Nevertheless violent unrest among the people was created again and again.

In the same year the newly set up Tibetan government sent the officials LHa khang pa, Bag dro and others to East Tibet as far as Dar rtse mdo to take a census of the population as a basis for taxation. The records were written down in 56 books. Even during the Simla conference of 1913-14 they were submitted by the Tibetan government as proof of the Tibetan claims to Eastern Khams.

In the early years after the establishment of the dGa’ ldan pho brang government there seems to be one higher regional authority involved who acted in the area of Mu li on behalf of the Central Tibetan government: the Li thang sGo mangs mkhan po, an ecclesiastic sent from Central Tibet to whom people turned in case of a lawsuit but who also had military forces to his disposal. Only as executive functions a governor (rdzong dpon sde pa) was stationed in Dar mdo (at that time called Dajianlu by the Chinese, modern Kangding). He appears for instance at the head of troops to execute a warrant of arrest issued by the Tibetan government.
During the following years the situation in the southern parts of Khams was nevertheless not a stable one. Different parties were fighting each other, apparently also among the dGe lugs pa themselves. When bla ma 'Jam dbyangs bzang po died in 1656 or 57 a mantric initiate (sngags rams pa) from lhA steng (cf. above) called 'Jam dbyangs dPal ldan was charged with having poisoned the bla ma. Later this bla ma was accused of having taken six hundred silver coins entrusted to him by an old merchant and having killed four people who were sent to fetch the money. Perhaps the worst accusation was however that this bla ma later turned away from the dGe lugs pa, again entered the Karma bKa’ brgyud school, propagated their teachings as superior to the dGe lugs pa ones and persuaded the local petty king called mKha’ ‘gro to turn away from the dGe lugs pa and the dGa’ ldan pho braag government.49 This local chief apparently became something of an issue. An account given by the Dalai Lama to the Kangxi emperor about 1671 as well as an imperial letter dated 19 September 1674, describe mKha’ ‘gro as a notorious troublemaker of the border areas. In addition the Dalai Lama accused him of deceitful maneuvers to get his hands on the Zhwa dmar pa and the Phag mo ba. In his letter the emperor praised the Dalai Lama for having sent Dalai Batur to seize mKha’ ‘gro and having thus pacified the border areas. The expulsion of those who do wrong and the unifying of the outer and the inner would be in accord with his own ideas. A statement of the Dalai Lama made to the emperor suggests that rGyal thang might have been a refuge for mKha’ ‘gro. In his account the Dalai Lama writes that he already before had explained the reasons to the emperor why he considered it inappropriate that mKha’ ‘gro would stay in rGyal thang.50

The opponent of the ‘demon’ (dam sri) sngags rams pa 'Jam dbyangs dpal ldan was bla ma bSam gtan bzang po (died 26 January 1678).51 After the death of bla ma 'Jam dbyangs bzang po he occupies the leading position among the dGe lugs pa hierarchs in Mu li. He acted not only as a religious figure but also as a leader of military forces in local warfare. First he was waging war by the side of the above mentioned king mKha’ ‘gro together with the sngags rams pa of lhA steng against the monastery of A ‘phrad which thereupon was converted into a dGe lugs pa monastery. When the king handed the monastery over to bla ma bSam gtan bzang po the sngags rams pa is said to have sowed discord among the dGe lugs pa hierarchs of Mu li as well as poisoned the relationship with the king. The Tibetan government planned to let him kill and sent an edict (bka’ shog) to the governor (rdzong dpon sde pa) of Dar mdo, dBang phyug, ordering the governor to seize him. However, the governor and his soldiers did not find an opportunity.52

Of course it is impossible to check the accusations against sngags ram pa 'Jam dbyangs dpal ldan, but as we shall see further below, the background of the characterisation of the sngags rams pa 'Jam dbyangs dpal ldan as a follower of the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa and as a criminal who “definitely will go to the deepest hell where there is no escape”53 is first of all the rivalry between the sngags rams pa and bla ma bSam gtan bzang po in gaining control over the area of Mu li and its monasteries.

The dGe lugs pa transformed more and more monasteries into their own ones or founded new ones. With such new foundations only the local people were burdened. All levels of the society including the local chieftains were obliged to send one of their sons as the so-called monk tax (grwa khral) into the monastery. The parents had to pay a regular salary (phogs) for their sons as well as to provide their clothes. Everything else that was needed for the monastery had to be provided by the local chieftain.54
The Rgyal Thang Revolt in the Wood Tiger Year 1674

In the seventies of that century the border areas of Khams, especially the southern parts, were embroiled in the revolt of the three feudatory generals who tried to secede their territories from the Qing empire. Among the three the most important one was Wu Sangui (吴三桂, 1612-1678). In 1659 he had conquered Yunnan for the Qing empire. The kingdom of 'Jang was under imperial suzerainty. Although loyal to the court in Beijing the king of 'Jang was not on good terms with Wu Sangui. Finally Wu deprived the king of his power.

At the same time the forces of the Qosud Mongols, the new military power in Khams, were pressing the borders of 'Jang. In 1668 Wu reported to the throne that the Mongols would have occupied Zhongdian, respectively Rgyal thang. According to later Chinese historiographers the reports were false because Wu Sangui had voluntarily given Zhongdian away to have good trade relations with the Tibetans. Believing the Naxi chronicles Wu had in 1668 ceded Zhongdian together with four other large districts belonging to the kingdom of 'Jang to the Tibetans, “for the purpose of reconciling them”. This deal must have cut not only the king of 'Jang but also the Karma bKa' brgyud pa in Rgyal thang to the quick.

Apparently the Tibetan government felt disgraced by Wu's accusations. In a letter sent to the emperor by the Tibetan regent Blo bzang mthu stobs (in office 1668-1675) and dated 29 April 1672 the regent complains:

As long as Wu Sangui did not cause embarrassment there was from this side—except for Dar rtse mdo, Rgyal thang, gSer kha etc. etc.—absolutely nothing like the seizing of possession, the building of fortresses and the stationing of military at new places. In the meantime (we) had no communication (?) with Wu Sangui. At that time the Chinese-Tibetan relationship was good. And after (we) had stationed people who stopped concerns for the arising of discords this king of 'Jang is not saying anymore that (the above mentioned places) would be under 'Jang while (they) belong to Tibet. (We) stay at the border and do not give (them) back ... Whatever in fact the former source (for the king's claims) may be, as long as Wu Sangui did not cause embarrassment, (the places) were either Chinese or Tibetan places. Therefore it is necessary to grant a profound order without paying attention to the different gossip etcetera of the border area.

Ahmad suspects that after the open outbreak of the rebellion in December 1673 Wu Sangui's troops penetrated to Rgyal thang but I have found no evidences for that assumption. On the contrary the Naxi chronicles mention that in 1673 Wu Sangui had even ceded two more territories of the 'Jang kingdom to the Tibetans—obviously to reconcile the Tibetans and their Mongolian allies as an effort to have no enemy in his rear during his revolt against the emperor. And as we shall see later he did not seem unhappy with the result of the campaign against Rgyal thang organized by the Dalai Lama.

For the Fifth Dalai Lama the chances of Wu Sangui's revolt must have been difficult to calculate. In 1674 there were rumours spreading in southeast Tibet based on a 'false letter' from 'Jang Sa dam saying that Wu Sangui would be the Chinese emperor. As the opponent of the king of 'Jang, Wu was the natural ally in the Dalai Lama's fight against the Karma bKa' brgyud pa in Rgyal thang. As pointed out by Ahmad during all the years of Wu's revolt against the emperor, from 1674 until 1678, he had good diplomatic relations with the Dalai Lama. There are even evidences that Dalai Qong Tayiji, the Mongolian ally of the Dalai Lama (see below), was cooperating with Wu Sangui. This later caused the emperor's suspicion towards the Dalai Lama and the regent. He demanded a detailed clarification.
about the reasons for the correspondence and the exchange of presents between the Dalai Lama and Wu Sangui. Although pressurized by the emperor to provide military support the Dalai Lama was skillful enough to avoid a direct military involvement. Still in 1675 the Dalai Lama asked the emperor to be lenient with Wu Sangui.

When the Dalai Lama in 1674 decided to send troops to rGyal thang he did it not “against his own better judgment”. He had not at all in mind to drive Wu Sangui’s forces out of that area as suspected by Ahmad. As has been emphasized above there are no indications that Wu had stationed any troops in rGyal thang. However, the Dalai Lama was already early in the year concerned about unrest in rGyal thang. The campaign initiated by the Fifth Dalai Lama and Dalai Qong Tayiji should suppress a local rebellion of the monks and laymen (ser skya) against the rule of the Mongols and their dGe lugs pa allies in rGyal thang starting in November 1674. The uprising was headed by the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries, first of all the rGya bya dgon pa, and the so called mong kwa or mo kwa. Mong kwa is the Tibetan transcription of the Naxi word mun kwua, in Chinese written as mu gua (木瓜). This was the title of the local military officials placed by the king of ’Jang in the different districts of the kingdom.

To the Dalai Lama this uprising must have been just another link in the chain of Karma bKa’ brgyud pa rebellions following Güši Qan’s victory in East and Central Tibet, all perceived as a threat to the just established dGa’ ldan pho brang government.

The uprising of rGyal thang is mentioned in several sources all relatively close to the events. As historiographical sources we have, apart from the well known biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama, especially the religious history of Mu li covering the years 1580-1735 and composed in 1735 by Ngag dbang mkhyen rab on the base of several older sources. In addition we have quite a few documents from the archives of the rGyal thang district. Several documents issued between 1691 and 1722 assign special importance to the event of the year 1674 in so far as they all unanimously describe the year 1674 as the turning point in the history of rGyal thang because afterwards the political and administrative affairs in rGyal thang were reorganized, typically enough the documents preserved by the local archives start with January 1675.

It looks like the Dalai Lama let the emperor believe that he would attack Wu Sangui. This impression seems at least to be supported by Chinese sources. The biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama is very vague in this regard. Right after his records on receiving the edict of the emperor related to Wu Sangui’s rebellion the Dalai Lama gives his reasons why it would not be advisable to send troops into China and Mongolia (Hor). And then he talks about the decision to dispatch military forces to rGyal thang. Here follows a new translation of the relevant passage in the biography (cf. Ahmad 208f):

How could the forces of Tibet, the country of the nine regions, be able (to enter) into China and Mongolia (Hor)? When the Mongolian Oyirad troops go, it would be difficult that their own forces would unite even when the power of the enemy is great and it would be necessary to take care of the heat and the pox. Therefore it is difficult to promise in respect for the emperor that this would happen. However, concerning all patrons and priests and—superior to those who are great covering the high and low (people) who discussed it—Dalai Qong Tayiji, there came up the plan to go quickly. The supporters for the group of the undisciplined people in the area of rGyal thang are in ’Jlangs (= ’Jang) etcetera. Even if (the area) is hard to access yet for the sake of my own strategy and the collective (welfare), on the 20th day (24 May 1674), (I) bestowed on Prince bKra-shis an empowerment for (lengthening) the life and an authorization for (the practice of) the six armed (Mahākāla), which removes all obstacles, and sent (him) out with presents in the
official position of Öljeitü Batur Tayiji together with bKa’-brgyad nor-bu and Mas-chags-pa as general and military strategist.

That the supporters of the rebellion were located in 'Jang does not say that they were people close to Wu Sangui, but close to king Mu Yi. Under Wu Sangui both, the king and the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa, had lost their power and influence in 'Jang and especially in rGyal thang. Therefore Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las speaks of the king of 'Jang (= 'Jang) as having planned to take revenge by waging a war against the dGa’ ldan pho brang government.

After the Dalai Lama had received the imperial edict in 1674 and discussed it with his advisors and especially the Mongolian leaders, the king Dalai Qan (reigned 1668-1701) sent the emperor a reply explaining to him the impossibility of sending Mongolian troops into hot areas. On 19 November 1679 the emperor refers to this letter in a brief answer to the king. Here he complains about the fact that the king previously did not say one word about military support but only referred to the great heat as reason not to send his troops and informed the emperor that earlier and later people of Wu Sangui had arrived. And in a letter sent to the Dalai Lama probably in 1680 the emperor even accuses the Mongolian troops:

Because all China was oppressed by suffering I acted that way. (I) said “(You) must help sending Mongolian-Tibetan forces from Tibet.” The Mongolian Oyirad forces went but there came (only) harm to the country.

The Mongolian-Tibetan forces sent to rGyal thang in 1674 were under the command of bKra shis Batur Tayiji. The complete success of the campaign was reported in Lhasa on 20 February 1675. To stop the stream of negative action the Dalai Lama refrained from hard punishment like whipping, but he ordered that the twenty most important ringleaders of the revolt should be brought to Central Tibet, while others should be distributed on several districts and estates in upper and lower Khams under the guard of civilian and monastic authorities. The area of rGyal thang itself was—according the documents—offered as a 'monastic estate' (chos gzhis) to the Fifth Dalai Lama. The presence of Mongolian-Tibetan troops in rGyal thang is proved by two small documents of the Zhongdian archives issued by the head of the rGyal thang administration in January 1675.

The new year’s festival at the end of January 1675 was also the celebration of the total victory. The dGe lugs pa militia from Mu li under the command of bla ma bSam gtan bzang po had contributed a great portion to it. Actually also the above mentioned ‘evil’ sngags rams pa 'Jam dbyangs dpal ldan from lHa steng had been ordered to lead forces to the battlefield but he had excused himself on account of illness. So the credit for the brave fighting of the local militia belonged to bSam gtan bzang po alone. Especially his soldiers had taken the mountain fortress to where the forces of the rGya bya monastery had withdrawn. Therefore bKra shis Batur Tayiji offered the bla ma a reward according to his wishes. He asked for five villages, called Wā yang sde Inga, which had been taken away from Mu li previously. Accordingly in the ninth Tibetan month the Dalai Lama issued an edict confirming that Wā yang shall belong to Mu li. Furthermore Wu Sangui praised bla ma bSam gtan bzang po as the great prefect of the border (sa mtshams kyi mi dpon) and sent him fifty silver coins and four rolls of valuable black silk as a sign of gratitude for his messenger services.

At that time the phyag mdzod Nor bu delivered a sealed deed ('ja’ sa tham ka bcas) issued by the Fifth Dalai Lama saying that bla ma bSam gtan bzang po together with his lineage (rgyud) as the legitimate deputy of the deceased bla ma ‘Jam dbyangs bzang po
should seize possession of all the monks and lay people (lha sde mi sde), the mountains and valleys (ri klungs), the grass and water (rtswa chu) owned by the deceased bla ma. By this document bla ma bSam gtan bzang po was also authorized to assume the rule over lHa steng, the place of his rival sngags rams pa 'Jam dbyangs dpal ldan. Therefore he appointed a new representative for lHa steng, a man called Ga ther ji rab 'byams pa 'Jam dbyangs bkra shis. Without having here the space to go more into the historical details I content myself with the comment that later this rab 'byams pa was accused of having bribed successfully the later regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho with gold and silver stolen from the treasury of the monastery in lHa steng so that he would persuade the Dalai Lama to issue a document in favour of the usurper, that he then acted as ruler (mi dbang, dpon) together with a man called dPal ldan bzang po who acted as bla ma and that he tried to prevent the discovery of the reincarnation of bla ma 'Jam dbyangs bzang po.\footnote{87}

\textit{rGyal thang after the suppression of the Revolt}

After the victory of the Mongolian and Tibetan forces the banner of the dGe lugs’ teaching was once and for all firmly established in rGyal thang. The strongest symbol was the construction of the large monastery dGa’ ldan sum rtsen gling on the ruins of a former Karma bKa’ brgyud pa monastery in 1679.\footnote{88} Now the Dalai Lama gave up his neutral attitude towards the Chinese rebels. Wu Sangui had died in 1678. One of his generals, a man called nang blon Cang chung lo yas, tried in vain to escape with his army into Tibetan territory. Under orders from the Central Tibetan government the militia of Mu li fought the rebels and prevented them from entering Tibet in November/ December 1680.\footnote{89} Nevertheless also Wu Shifan (吳世璠), grandson and successor of Wu Sangui, tried to receive military support from the Dalai Lama and the Mongols in exchange for more territories.

However, in a letter dated 11 January 1682 the Dalai Lama obsequiously expresses his gratitude towards the emperor for having suppressed Wu Sangui’s rebellion in the border areas:

\begin{quote}
However, the fruit of the evil deeds accumulated before by the various subjects living in the border areas has ripened. Therefore Wu Sangui and others caused the time of turmoil to arise. Many living beings were tormented by the fighting. We are grateful that (you) have steered the army of the four branches (of the military) to pacify them and so on, that (everything) is covered by the wheel of (your) order.\footnote{91}
\end{quote}

In rGyal thang apparently first and foremost the Qoşud chiefs were the ones who during the first decades had the authority over the use of land and taxes. From the year 1691 onwards there are preserved several documents in the archives of Zhongdian issued from Lhasa by Batur Tayiji. Of course one would like to know more about the relationship between the sde srid, the regent, and Batur Tayiji. Only in one document issued in 1693 both are mentioned together as mchod yon, priest and patron.

The archives in Zhongdian hold not only documents issued in Lhasa, but also documents issued in the Kokonor region, for example a document issued in 1708 by Dayan Qong Tayiji, a Qoşud chief from the Kokonor area who later took part in the imperial campaign against the Dsungsars in Tibet.\footnote{92} By this document he confirms possessory rights for a feudal lord of rGyal thang called Sangs rgyas to whom these rights were already granted by former Qoşud chiefs and prohibits the imposition of new taxes on him.
The long-standing effect of the Fifth Dalai Lama's coup on the politics of religion in East Tibet is illustrated by two documents issued in Lhasa, one from 1773 and one from 1792.  

The first one was issued by De mo Qutuytu Ngag dbang 'jam dpal bde legs rgya mtsho, who functioned as regent during a long period, from 1757 until 1777. The document held by the archives of Zhongdian was issued in favour of the monastery dGa' ldan sum rtsen gling in rGyal thang. It deserves special interest in so far as it contains a detailed narration telling us in perfect harmony with the dGe lugs pa's ideological view of the political affairs rather directly how dGe lugs pa dominance was established in Central and East Tibet and how other schools were blocked from regaining their former position by restricting their financial resources.

The main persons involved are not mentioned according to the chronology of the events but according to their political and social status. So the first one is Shunzhi, the first Manchu on the throne of the Chinese emperor who reigned from 1644 to 1661. It all began—it is said—when he, identified with the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, came together with the great Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, identified with Avalokiteśvara. They both agreed that alone the tradition of Tsong kha pa would be the pure essence of the Buddhist doctrine and that therefore it would be necessary to spread it everywhere. This statement obviously refers to the meeting of the emperor and the Dalai Lama in 1653 which according to the Qing historiography marks the inclusion of Tibet into the empire.

However, we know that the rise of the dGe lugs pa power had already begun in the years 1639 to 1642 with Güshi Qan's victory over the political and religious rivals of the dGe lugs pa. Nevertheless the document mentions him only as the third of the main protagonists responsible for the political achievements of the dGe lugs pa. Güshi Qan, identified as the emanation of the bodhisattva Vajrapāni, took responsibility and stopped the old traditions, the unpure tenet systems of the red hats' lineages, that are the bKa' brgyud pa, for instance the Karma pa, and he took care that they would not be able to rise up again. In this way his role in the political game is described by the document as the one who especially fought against the religious rivals of the yellow hats.  

Corresponding with the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama the document next mentions the founding of the thirteen monasteries. According to the biography all thirteen monasteries were located in dBus and gTsang and included also rNying ma pa monasteries. However, the document speaks about thirteen new dGe lugs pa monasteries for the whole area of dBus, gTsang and Khams.  

If the regent De mo Qutuytu is to be believed the highest authority was without any doubt from the very beginning the emperor of the Qing empire. So he also keeps the role and significance of the Kangxi emperor in mind: After he had ascended the throne (in 1661) he gave the order to the Fifth Dalai Lama to spread the dGe lugs teachings even more. Therefore countless large and small monasteries have been founded—among them also the monastery dGa' ldan sum rtsen gling in rGyal thang with a community of 1200 monks. In this way De mo Qutuytu links the foundation of dGa' ldan sum rtsen gling directly with the highest acknowledged authority of his time, that is the Qing emperor and not the Dalai Lama.  

De mo Qutuytu emphasizes that due to the order of the Qing emperor not only in the Tibetan areas were many dGe lugs pa monasteries founded but also in the interior regions of the empire—especially in the so-called golden kingdom. This is obviously the Tibetan translation of Aisin gurun, the name that Nurhaci (reigned from 1616-1626), the founder of the Manchu state, had given his empire in 1616 by taking up the Jin empire of the twelfth
century. In 1636 the Aisin gurun was renamed by his successor Huang Taiji (reigned 1626-1643) into Qing, the Chinese word for ‘pure’.95

De mo Qutuytu does not forget to mention that also the Seventh Dalai Lama Blo bzang skal bzang rgya mtsho (1708-1757) had protected the monastery dGa’ ldan sum rtsen gling and especially had granted its monks a new bca’ yig, a monastic constitution. And he underlines that also the emperor would not bear a degeneration of this monastery.

To cause the monastery to prosper it would be most important that according to the already earlier existing custom a great number of monks from dGa’ ldan sum rtsen gling would be sent every year to Central Tibet to ‘Bras spungs, Se ra and dGa’ ldan as well as to the lower and upper tantra colleges in Lhasa to deepen their religious studies. De mo Qutuytu admonishes all those who have responsibilities, starting with the head of the district and the abbot, that they should not hinder the monks but support them, for example by issuing official travel permits (lam yig).

It is interesting to note that the De mo Qutuytu speaks of two different motivations for this disposition: one is the prospering of the dGe lugs pa monastery in rGyal thang, the other is the decline of the number of monks in ‘Bras spungs, Se ra and dGa’ ldan as well as to the lower and upper tantra colleges of Lhasa. And as third motivation we might add the strong linking of the dGe lugs pa in the Tibetan periphery with the religious and political centre of Tibet. This linking had also an enormous economic impact.

The rest of the disposition concerns measures to strengthen the financial and religious position of dGa’ ldan sum rtsen gling through blocking the resources for the red hats, that are the different bKa’ brgyud pa branches, especially the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa. The document says that only dGa’ ldan sum rtsen gling is authorized to receive donations or to perform the ritual services for the living and the deceased ones. And all the officials and persons in charge of the district and the estates are admonished to contribute to the prospering of the monastery and to accept this monastery alone as the field for the accumulation of religious merit. Generally it was forbidden for them to rely on the bKa’ brgyud traditions, whose views and tenets are considered as impure. It was further forbidden to establish new bKa’ brgyud pa monasteries and to make new financial resources available to them. At the end of the document those who offended against this disposition were threatened with severe punishment—not only by the guardian gods of religion but also by the law of the emperor himself.

In 1792 the Eighth Dalai Lama 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758-1804) issued another detailed document in which he more or less repeats the narration and arguments of the former one of the De mo Qutuytu. By his document the Eighth Dalai Lama forbade with regard to rGyal thang the restoration of ruined monasteries of the dKar brgyud pa, the so-called white lineage, which probably refers especially to the 'Brug pa bKa’ brgyud pa, further the monasteries of the sTag lung bKa’ brgyud pa and—and in contrast to the original politics of the Fifth Dalai Lama—he adds also the monasteries of the rNying ma pa.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF QING AUTHORITY IN RGYAL THANG

Although the dGe lugs pa hegemony continued to exist, the unrestricted rule of the Mongols and the dGa’ ldan pho brang government in Southeast Tibet was not to last very long. In 1717 the Dsungars occupied Central Tibet. Imperial forces sent the following year from Amdo respectively Qinghai to drive them out again, were beaten by the Dsungars. Thereupon the Kangxi emperor decided to attack the Dsungars with two armies one starting from Amdo
in the North and a second starting from Khams in the East. The Eastern troops should start from Dar rtse mdo respectively Dajianlu and from rGyal thang respectively Zhongdian and should meet in 'Ba' thang. As mentioned above Dar rtse mdo seemed to have been under Tibetan control at least since 1672. On the orders of the Dalai Lama bKra shis Batur Tayiji, the Mongolian commander of the troops sent in 1674 to rGyal thang, had stationed a garrison there. But already before 1691 the troops were withdrawn and the control of Dar rtse mdo was left to the Qing. In 1719 Qing forces occupied Li thang and 'Ba' thang in Khams to secure the supply channels to Central Tibet. In rGyal thang the local chiefs submitted to the prefect of Lijiang in 1720, in the same month when general Uge started from rGyal thang with 3500 soldiers mobilized in Yunnan. The prefect was Mu Xing (木興, 1667-1720, reigned since 1708) who had proved his loyalty to the imperial court. In that way rGyal thang was again controlled by the Naxi kings. However, already his successor Mu Zhong (木鐘, 1687-1725) lost all his power in 1723 when Lijiang became nationalized. The next year rGyal thang came under the jurisdiction of Yunnan and the Qing stationed a garrison there. Also under the new administration monastic affairs were carried on by the Dalai Lama and the regent respectively. While the suppression of the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa through the dGe lugs pa in rGyal thang received the full backing of the Qing, the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa survived among the Naxi in Lijiang with imperial approval. A lasting impression was made by Si tu Chos kyi 'byung gnas through his visit in 1730. At that time he also initiated the foundation of a new monastery. Nevertheless the teachings of the Karma bKa’ brgyud pa were not to play a dominant role among the different cults practised by the Naxi people.

CONCLUSION

The paper presented here is still somehow preliminary because the sources I used have much more to say and deserve a thorough analysis. I hope that later I will have the chance to present a deeper understanding of the events which reshaped the political situation in southeast Tibet during the second half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century. What has hopefully become clear is the outline of the story. On balance I would sum up that the story of spreading the dGe lugs school and establishing the authority of the dGa' ldan pho brang government and their Mongolian allies in East Tibet is first and foremost a story of war and conquest as well as the systematic suppression of other Buddhist schools, especially the bKa’ brgyud ones. They never really managed to recover from the lasting destruction of their base in many parts of East Tibet.

NOTES

1 Regarding a brief outline of the historical events see Karmay 2003.
2 Regarding the name see Rock 1947: 61 note, 191-3.
3 Already during the visit of the Second 'Phags pa lha in the second half of the 16th century the town of Li thang was apparently under the control of 'Jang (cf. below). Sākya lha-dbang 2001: 102f.
4 The little information on Mu li scattered in the literature as well as some maps of Mu li and adjacent areas are gathered in Kessler 1982. For another map of Southern Khams see van Spengen 2002: 26.
5 Rock 1947: 112-118. The Xu Yunnan tôngzhi gao referred to by Rock (1947: 248), states sweepingly that during the Ming and the Qing dynasties Zhongdian belonged to the prefecture of Lijiang.
7 In recent years rGyal thang rdzong respectively Zhongdian county became quite popular through its official renaming into Shangri la in 2001. Cf. Schwieger 2010. The village Dukezong—restored as a tourist
attraction—is also promoted under the name Yuegangcheng (月光城), 'Moonlight City'. Corlin (1978: 75) writes the name of the district capital as rDo-dkar rdzong.

11 Ahmad 1970: 59, 123.
14 According to Si-tu Chos-kyi 'byung-gnas (1972: 297) he died on the 28th of the 9th month (tha-skar) of the horse year (2.11.1630).
15 The story has been extracted from Si-tu Chos-kyi 'byung-gnas (1972: 266-7, 269, 273, 275) and other sources by Shastri 1987: 17-19.
18 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab (1992) calls the Karma bKa' brgyud pa of 'Jang the Kar 'jang.
26 Sais-rGyas rGya-mTSHo 1999: 268-71.
27 Cf. Schwieger 1985: XLVIII-LX.
28 Sais-rGyas rGya-mTSHo 1999: 269-70. In contrast to the hereby attested sympathy of the Fifth Dalai Lama towards the Nyi, Ahmad (1970: 202f, see also 203f) quotes a memorial from the Dalai Lama to the emperor asking him to prohibit the recital of the tantras of Padmasambhava.
29 Ahmad: 59, 123.
30 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 25. In the Chinese translation of the passage, p. 6, the name is given as Lu Zha (卢乍 which would be in the original form of the characters 濟乍), but this is probably only a suggestion for the reading in Chinese.
31 Rock 1947: 133.
33 Richardson 1998: 509-511, Khtesun Sangpo 1977: 216-227, Ldan-ma 'jam-dbyangs tshul-khrims 1992: 183-8. (Be aware that most of the digits presented in brackets in the last source are wrong!). Note that there is at least one more early brief, but complete biography of the Tenth Karma-pa with the title dPal ldan karma pa chen po rje bisun chos dbyangs rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa dad pa'i dga' ston, composed by the Seventh Zhwa dmar pa Ye shes snying po (1631-1694) which I did not have access to.
34 He reigned from 1646 onwards. In 1667 Wu Sangui started to deprive him of his power and burden him with heavy taxation. Finally he put him into jail for seven years. Cf. Rock 1947: 134f.
35 Richardson 1998: 511.
37 The information presented up to here are common in Richardson (ibid.), Khtesun Sangpo (ibid.) and Ldan-ma 'jam-dbyangs tshul-khrims (ibid.). Apart from the statement about the New Year of the iron mouse year the informations on the Tenth Karma pa given below are based on Khtesun Sangpo and Ldan-ma 'jam-dbyangs tshul-khrims alone.
38 Rock (1947: 205) mentions a monastery called 'Og min ramg am gling respectively Jietuolin (解脫林) which shall have been founded by Chos dbang rDo rje. 39 rgyal ba'i bka' 'gyur rin po che mthral dpar rgya lugs su bzhengs / It is not clear to me what is meant by 'Chinese style'.


41 Rdo-rje tsho-brtan 1997: 66: kha rang tsho'i dgon pa zhi sgam tu bde mor sdro' 'jug rtsis yin pa'. There is no precise date given for the account. According to RDo-rje tsho-brtan it was delivered in the tenth year of the Kangxi emperor.

42 Ahmad 1970: 203. Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho 1991: 341-2. Responsible for the troubles at the border area was apparently a local chief called mKha' 'gro. On him see further below. Ahmad speaks of the Red Hat Phag mo ba. Actually these are two different persons, the Zhwa dmar pa and the Phag mo ba.


44 On IHa steng and its monastery see note 11. The monastery in Khe 'ong is called bDe ba can bsod nams dar rgyas gling or only bSod nams dar rgyas gling and was founded by bla ma gNas brtan tshul khrims bzang po in the wood dragon year (1604) (Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 15, 171). In Chinese Khe 'ong is called Kangwu (康武). Cf. Rock 1947: 357 note.

45 The Kar 'jang are the Karma bK'a' brgyud pa of 'Jang.

46 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 25: rgya lu ts'a'i dmag gis 'jang sa dam 'joms shing / kar lugs pa'i rmoon gzhem mkhan nams kyi nim zla rRdzens song bar phyogs de'i kar dgon 'jang rdzong sogs la yas pa dang a 'phrad rgya bya sogs kyiis hab thob byed kyi yod 'duag pas / da cha nga yang dga' ldan pa'i bstan pa dar zhih rgyas par byed pa'i dus la babs pas / rang re spyod lam skad rigs kyang mthun pas kar 'jang shul lugs bkam cang 'og 'jug pa'i bya bar byos shig.


48 Shakabpa 1984: 113. Dung-skra blo-bzang 'phrin-las 2004b: 101. The new Tibetan government summoned most parts of East Tibet under its power and established a new administrative infrastructure. When and how exactly the new administration was set up is not known. According to Kar-glimg don-grub (1992: 17-21) two governor-generals (sde pa) were stationed, one in Li thang and the other in 'Ba' respectively 'Ba' thang. They were sent from Central Tibet. The same held for the leading ecclesiastic officials, the so called dbu 'dzin rtsi drung. The governor-generals controlled the various districts (rdzong) each headed by a so called rdzong 'go or rdzong dpon who was addressed as zhal ngo (cf. also Carrasco 1959: 143). Below the district level were several more levels headed by the mdag dpon, then the 'bed sras (Carrasco 1959: 143, mentions the 'bas sras and calls them village headmen) followed by the gnyer pa. They were all officials of the Central Tibetan government. Coleman (2002: 33) states with respect to 'Ba' thang that only its original sde pa together with his assistant came from Central Tibet and that later the title was assumed by 'Ba' thang's indigenous leaders. Kar-glimg don-grub however states that the sde-pa always were sent from Central Tibet which does not seem very plausible because later the Yongzheng emperor (1723-1735) strengthened the control over Kham by directly granting seals and charters of investitures for instance to 'Ba' thang's sde pa (Coleman 2002: 33f). According to Coleman the first sde pa of 'Ba' thang was sent in 1703. Carrasco (1959: 142) mentions that prior to the Qing conquest the sde pa of 'Ba' thang and his assistant were appointed by IHa bzang Qan. He usurped the power in 1703 (Petch 1972: 9).

49 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 41, 44, 45, 82. According to Shakabpa (1976: 451) mKha' 'gro was a descendant of GuSi Qan.


51 The date of his death (4th day of the first month) reported in Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab (1992: 94) refers to the earth sheep year (ibid., 93) which would be 26 January 1678 (cf. Schuh 1973).

52 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 42, 46f.

53 thar med kyi dmajal ba gting zab por 'gro bar ngas pas / (Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 45).

54 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 41-6, 57-9, 82, 93.


56 Rock 1947: 134f.

officer’s report from 1671 saying that Wu Sangui’s report on the invasion of Western barbarians would be a pure invention: 西番入寇。这纯属无中生有，假报敌情。). To Ahmad (1970: 201), it seems unlikely that Wu’s reports were false but note that Ahmad has been led astray in so far as he apparently does not identify Zhongdian (Wade-Giles: Chung-tien) with rGyal thang. Cf. Ahmad 1970: 211, 213, 223.

58 Rock 1947: 134, 248. Already in 1661 the Dalai Lama showed an interest in the southeastern border area when he successfully requested the emperor for the permission to open a trade market for tea and horses in Beisheng (Ahmad 1970: 200) which is present-day Yongsheng (永善), a place located roughly 100 km southeast of Lijiang (丽江). The border market for the exchange of tea against horses was of economic and military importance for Wu Sangui as well (cf. Haenisch 1913: 15).

59 Already from the grammatical point of view the succession of the syllables bros so rnams is problematic. I suppose either a mistake in the original document or in the transliteration made by the editors. Concluding from the context I would expect *phros, *phros mot or *phros ‘os. Unfortunately I have no possibility to check the reliability of the edited text.

60 Rdo-rje tshe-btSan 1997: 80-81: ‘di phyogs nas ‘u san gus zhabs ‘dren ma zhus phan gyi dar rite mdo dang rgyal thang / gser kha sog s las sa cha gsrar par bdag dang rdzong rgyab (!) pa / dmag bzhag pas mthson snang yang med pa / bar skabs ‘u san gu ‘i bros so (!) rnams / ‘di phyogs ma byung tshe rgya bod lugs bzang la se l byung dogs bkag mi bzhang pa dang / ‘jangs rgyal po ‘di pa bod bdag bzhi la ‘jangs ‘og yin pa‘i bskor lab kyin mi byung (!) ba sa mthshams us bsdod m slog ‘par brten de phyogs su gra ma‘i zhus ‘or byung ba ‘dra/ don snagar gyi khungs gang yin kyang ‘u san gus zhabs ‘dren ma bsgubs phan gyi rgya bod so so ‘i sa cha gang yin las sa mtha ‘i mi‘i kha sog gi (!) rigs la gsan bzhes med pa‘i bka’ mchid zab po tsal dgos .

63 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 92. There the year is given as ‘water horse’ (1642) which—according to the chronology of the text—has to be corrected into ‘wood tiger’ (see also the Chinese translation of the passage, p. 30).

66 Cf. the emperor’s letter to the Dalai Lama probably sent in 1680: Rdo-rje tshe-btSan 1997: 82-3.
67 Cf. Ahmad 1970: 211.
71 This monastery was already visited by the Sixth Zhwa dmar pa Chos dbyings rdo rje in 1611. Cf. Si-tu Chos-kyi ‘byung-gnas 1972: 273, Shastri 1987: 17. Later also the Tenth Karma pa Chos dbyings rdo rje came to this monastery. Cf. Si-tu Chos-kyi ‘byung-gnas 1972: 331. Here the monastery is called Rab brtan gling. Today there are only ruins left (bSod nams rgya mtsho: rGyal thang gi lo rgyus ..., 177 note 2).
74 That are at least the earliest documents published by the local government of Shangri la (Sems-kyi nying-za rdzong 2003). As I have been told in rGyal thang there are no earlier documents preserved.
75 Ahmad 1970: 210, 211, 112.
77 Ahmad (1970: 207, 209) has bKa’-brgyud nor-bu.
78 In Sems-kyi nying-za rdzong (2003: no. 003) both are mentioned as companions of rgyal po Batur Tayiji. Their names are given here as phyag mdzod Nor-bu and Mas chags nas. Phyag mdzod Nor-bu is the same who delivered the deed issued in favour of bla ma bSgam gan bzang po (cf. above).
82 Rdo-rje tshe-btSan (1997: 82): rgya thams cad sdu gsnag gi (!) non ‘dug pa‘i don la nga’i (!) ‘di bzhin byas pa yin / bod nas sog bod gi dmag gton gogs dgos zer byung bar sog po o rod su‘i dmag song kyang yul la gnod pa yong ba dang /. The year of issue is suggested by the editors.
83 bKra shis Batur Tayiji is not the son of the above mentioned Dalai Qong Tayiji (cf. Ahmad 1970: 209) but the tenth son of Güši Qan. His name is also written Das’i Batur or Daši Batur. Cf. Ahmad 1970: 325; Petech 1972: 21; Petech 1966: 281f.

84 Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho 1991: 440. Cf Ahmad 1970: 217, Shakabpa 1984: 120. Shakabpa says that the commander and the officers of the troops had originally “recommended the execution of twenty ringleaders”. However, this is not explicitly said in the biography. See also the differences between Shakabpa’s wording in Shakabpa (1984: 451-2) and Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho 1991.


86 Note that the text has sometimesSKU tsha instead of SKU tshab.

87 Ngag-dbang mkhyen-rab 1992: 47f. The dispute between bla ma bsam gtan bzang po and sngags rams pa’jam dbyangs dpal ldan is also mentioned briefly in the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Cf. Ahmad 1970: 60f.


91 Rdo-rje tshe-btstan (1997: 84): ‘on te sa mihar ’khod pa’i mnga’’bangs ci rigs pas sngon bsags kyi srig pa’i ‘bras bu smin parbrten ’u san gu sogs kyi dus ’khrugs slang ba’i ’gro ba mang po ’thab risod kyi (!) mnar ba la / de dag zhi ba’i ched du yan lag bzhi’i dpung gi kha lo bsgyur ba sogs bka’i ’khor los khyab pa bka’ drin che 

92 In a footnote Petech (1972: 47f) gives a little information about him. His name is written there as Dayan Qungratji. He died in 1718.

93 Sems-kyi nyi-zla rdzong 2003: no. 035, 037. A translation of no. 35 will be published elsewhere.


95 Weiers 2004: 180, 184.


97 He died 8 December 1720. See Rock 1947: 141, 144, 145.

98 Rock 1947: 147.

99 Cf. Wang 1995: 159, 171. Among the documents available to me the last one issued and sealed by a Mongolian chief, from Kokonor area, and addressed to the officials and people of rGyal thang was written in 1717 and dispatched in 1718 (Sems-kyi nyi-zla rdzong 2003: no. 022).


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PUSHING SOUTH:
TIBETAN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES
IN THE FAR EASTERN HIMALAYA, CA. 1900-1950

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INTRODUCTION

During the first half of the twentieth century, and probably long beforehand, Tibetan political and economic interests of various kinds were actively being extended southwards across the watershed of the far eastern Himalaya. This study briefly surveys the scope and nature of such activities to the south of the plateau, throughout the highland frontier region extending from Tawang in the west across to Pemako in the east. In doing so I intend to explore the following thesis: For the period ca. 1900-1950, the Lhasa-based Ganden Phodang state bordered upon the fairly well-defined and carefully maintained northern frontiers of neighbouring states along the Himalaya, including Nepal, British and later independent India, Sikkim and Bhutan. However, the political reality on the ground in the highlands of the far eastern Himalaya was of a predominantly fragmented, stateless region controlled for the most part by a series of small, non-Buddhist, clan-based Tibeto-Burman-speaking communities, the so-called ‘tribes’ of the earlier literature. In contrast to other Tibetan frontier zones, this stateless region thus became perceived and treated by various Tibetan agents as a unique site for expansion, exploitation and adventurism. I aim to demonstrate that their forays to the south were supported by indigenous Tibetan cultural schemes of ethnic superiority as well as armed force.

It is significant that the entire far eastern Himalayan frontier was defined from 1914 onwards by the McMahon Line agreed between the British in India and the Ganden Phodrang. Most studies and commentary about the McMahon Line to date have dealt with the subject in terms of the history of the claims, politics and policies, and diplomatic posturing of the various governments involved. My primary focus in the present study is to offer a different and little known perspective: I investigate what actually happened on the ground along the Line between Tibetan agents and the local peoples they encountered in situ. Finally, the far eastern Himalaya is mainly known to Tibetan Studies through research on various Buddhist activities and holy places along the frontier. My intention herein is to focus in the first instance upon Tibetan economic and political activities, as well as cultural attitudes and social practices in the region. These have been much less well appreciated to date, although compared with Tibetan religion they have certainly had a far greater and more long-term impact upon both sides of the frontier zone.

THE FRONTIER AS PERIPHERY OF CIVILIZATION

Certain aspects of my subject have already been discussed by Alistair Lamb, although some of his points are not borne out by the materials I will present herein. For instance, in his book The China-India Border, Lamb characterized Tibetan interactions with the clan-based highland communities to the south—known generically as ‘Loba’ to Tibetans—as follows,
"The Tibetans, on the whole, tried as did the British to have as little to do with the Lobas as possible. On the contrary, I will demonstrate herein that Tibetans never hesitated to engage these highland populations when they had particular objectives to pursue. Tibetan interactions with the so-called Loba have thus spanned centuries and taken many forms. What Lamb and other writers have also failed to appreciate is that cultural distinctions articulate with social attitudes and practices. Tibetan classifications of ‘Lobaness’ were produced within their own schemes of ‘civilization’, and these were mapped ethnically and geographically upon their immediate neighbours along the far eastern Himalaya. It is this important cultural context that I will now briefly summarize.

Various Tibetan Buddhist schemes based upon concentric and hierarchical representations of the world space are already well-known, including the projection of political and ritual power upon the landscape in the form of mandala, and the use of networks of architectural structures and their subjagatory function. All such schemes share the notion that their centres are ideal realms of pure Buddhist civilization, while their peripheries are the boundaries around which civilizing power and its agents no longer hold a monopoly or cease to function altogether. The quality of being of the denizens of such schemes is indexed to ranked concentric zones, with those beings who inhabit the outer, periphery zone thus being viewed as the most benighted. In accord with these old and widespread Tibetan ways of viewing their own domain and what lay upon and beyond its borders, we find the non-Buddhist, pre-literate highland communities of the far eastern Himalaya consistently represented by Tibetans in highly pejorative terms. The generic Tibetan ethnonym for all such groups, klo pa, means ‘barbarian’, while both these peoples and their region are described as being ‘beyond the pale’ (mtha’ ’khob) and thus requiring ‘suppression’ (non pa) and ‘civilizing’ (’dul ba).

Furthermore, the physical environment of the warm and wet, thickly vegetated, and often precipitous southern flanks of the eastern Himalaya was a completely unfamiliar ecology in the experience of most high plateau dwellers. Nor were Tibetan life-ways and material culture adapted to it in any way. Thus, Tibetans often viewed this environment with awe and trepidation. They habitually associated it with poisonous snakes and various reptiles, tigers, biting insects, and other wildlife which might threaten human life and comfort, or which was, symbolically at least, negatively associated with certain potentially dangerous deities (e.g. snakes and reptiles with the klü deities). Following from this, the ‘Loba’ populations who lived in these places were considered closely associated with this apparently hostile wilderness. This association is in fact very old in Tibet, just as it has been a cliché in reports by my Tibetan informants about the ‘Loba’ during the past two decades. They invariably mention a few specific attributes of extreme difference which have been widely circulated by hearsay, including Loba consumption of insects, snakes, and frogs as food items, that the Loba live ‘naked’ (gser bu, sgren mo), and that like animals they lack any moral system or compassion for other living beings and are thus untrustworthy and violent, will kill without compunction, sacrifice and butcher animals, and so forth. Such representations consistently equate the Loba with the wild, natural world, the opposite of the ‘civilized’ and ‘tame’ in Tibetan Buddhist schemes. The parallels between Tibetan notions of ‘Lopaness’ and earlier European portrayals of indigenous populations (‘savages’, ‘nature folk’, etc.) that were encountered in the New World, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region are of course striking. In both cases, and in the context of specific cosmologies, they often served as a basis for discourses and practices of superiority, exploitation, and domination.
TIBETAN SOCIAL PRACTICES AT THE FRONTIER

Tibetan notions of cultural and ethnic superiority towards their southern neighbours frequently informed specific types of activities and social relations throughout the far eastern Himalayan frontier zone. These contrasted markedly with Tibetan treatment of many other neighbouring populations bordering the Tibetan plateau elsewhere. We can give various examples of what amounted to a social cordon sanitaire that Tibetans imposed throughout the region.

The passage into Ganden Phodrang territory of neighbouring peoples identified as ‘Loba’ was strictly limited and controlled directly at the frontier itself. Mostly, visitors from the south on trading trips who were identified as ‘Loba’ could not freely travel further than one day’s march north across the frontier, and normally not beyond the first Tibetan frontier settlements they reached. They were specifically excluded from over-nighting in Tibetan homes or villages.

Secondly, Tibetans maintained a strict marriage bar with their southern, non-Buddhist neighbours. Tibetan informants from border villages are always adamant that their communities never intermarried with ‘Loba’. While we do know that a very limited number of such marriages occurred, without exception the Tibetan partners involved were from the very lowest social and economic ranking, most often landless persons, runaways, and criminals, with no other marriage options. Among the non-Tibetan border populations to the south who had regular contacts with Tibet, there was in fact a general openness towards mixed marriages with Tibetans. However, these same populations also maintain oral narratives describing the impossibility of intermarriage between Tibetans and non-Tibetans.

Furthermore, far eastern Himalayan highlanders were commonly traded as slaves (khol po, nyo mi) by Tibetans for use as domestic and agricultural labour in Tibetan households and villages. In doing so, Tibetan agents were participating in a wider cultural and economic pattern found in many neighbouring societies throughout the extended eastern Himalayan zone. At issue here is rather the manner in which Tibetans treated these ‘Loba’ slaves from their frontier region. Eye-witness accounts reveal that they were often treated in very negative ways, sometimes akin to domestic animals, or at best as a class of social outcasts.

As the end of the ‘civilized world’, the southern borderland was also a zone where Tibetans who slipped in some way or other ‘beyond the pale’ of their own society were themselves sent by, or took refuge from, their state and its agents. Traitors and convicted criminals were banished there to a network of penal centres located in Tibetan frontier settlements. Persons such as bonded peasants or ‘human lease’ (mi bogs) holders who escaped their estate lords, the heavily indebted, law-breakers, and drifters could all find sanctuary and anonymity at the very margins of the state and in its stateless neighbouring zone.

Following the logic of the frontier as a limit of the state and the Buddhist ‘civilization’ it represented, for some Tibetans it was a zone of relative freedom from the constraining forces of the state and its ideology. The frontier provided an opening for new opportunities and spaces in which certain forms of adventurism, exploitation, and expansion could be freely practiced. While the remainder of this study concerns economic and political examples of such activities, it should not be overlooked that Tibetan religious interests in the region offer parallel examples. Proselytization, millenarian movements, the claims of ‘treasure revealers’, and the ‘opening’ of holy places by lamas were all ongoing processes at points along the frontier. The documented activities around Tsari and Pemako, the two major Tibetan
Buddhist sanctuaries situated along the far eastern Himalayan frontier, testify amply to this. Meanwhile, it must also be acknowledged that such religious and ritual interventions by Tibetans were generally seen as unwelcome intrusions and actively resisted by local non-Tibetan populations in the region.

TIBETAN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

I will now discuss several examples of what I referred to above as Tibetan adventurism, exploitation, and expansion in the far eastern Himalayan frontier zone. My discussion covers Tibetan activities in the territorial zone of clan-based, non-Buddhist highland communities living south of what was to become the McMahon Line, post-1914. This, by definition, excludes the districts of Tawang, Pachakshiri [i.e. modern Mechukha] and Mago, all of which lay south of the Line. According to the wording and implication of the 1914 agreement, these areas all enjoyed some form of exemption from the limitations on activities Tibetans could engage in south of the McMahon Line. The following three case studies are listed according to the names of the upland watersheds of the major river valleys within which they occurred. It was typically these larger trans-Himalayan river valleys south of the McMahon Line that supported significant highland communities, and which also provided the easiest conduits along which Tibetans could push southwards.

i. Upper Subansiri

Dasang Drandul Tsarong (1888–1959), commander-in-chief of the Tibetan army, entrepreneur, and ‘favourite’ of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, first visited the upper reaches of the Subansiri River (i.e. Chayul Chu in Tibet; Nyer Siko or Sinyik to the south) and its main tributary the Tsari Chu (Les Siko locally), between December 1919 and April 1920. The area of the two rivers into which Tsarong ventured for military and commercial reasons had for centuries defined a very significant territory for both Tibetans and neighbouring non-Tibetans. For one, these rivers encompassed the southern slopes of the famous Tibetan holy mountain of Dakpa Shelri at Tsari. The large-scale, 12-yearly circumambulation of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims around the mountain known as the Rongkor Chenmo, had the character of a state ritual for the Ganden Phodrang. Pilgrims in this huge procession crossed the McMahon Line below the frontier village of Migyitiin in Tsari district and followed the Tsari Chu southwards. They then turned back up the Subansiri westwards, crossing the McMahon Line once again to reach the first Tibetan frontier settlements in Chame district. In doing so, they traversed non-Tibetan lands during this entire southern leg of the procession. This was the territory of the Mra clan (Tibetan: Morang Loba) clan, which ran downstream along the Tsari Chu valley and around its junction with the Subansiri at Geling Sinyik, and also of the neighbouring Na (Tibetan: Khalo, Lungtu Lopa) community of Taksing, which extended upstream along the Subansiri heading westwards towards Tibet. Payments in kind were regularly made to both the Mra and Na by the Ganden Phodrang in recognition of the periodic passage of tens of thousands of pilgrims via their territories, and also so that their assistance could be gained in helping the procession proceed smoothly. The Lodzong, a ritualized tribute payment of various Tibetan goods, was made immediately prior to each Rongkor Chenmo. Shares of the Lodzong were given to the Na and Mra, but also to members of other clan-based groups collectively called Tinglo or Tingba by Tibetans. These latter groups lived lower down the Subansiri River and in the upper Kamla River area, and they
regularly threatened to disrupt the pilgrimage unless they received a customary amount of Tibetan goods. 19

A second point of great significance about the valleys of both the upper Subansiri and Tsari Chu is that they provided the only trans-Himalayan trade routes in the wider region which did not require crossing of a high altitude and seasonally snow-covered pass into Tibet. These routes allowed easier access for trade over a longer period of time each year. Accordingly, both the Mra and the Na attempted to maintain tight monopolies over trade passing through their respective valley territories.

While Tibetan relations with the Mra and Na had been cooperative and well-managed since 1945, prior to this they sometimes deteriorated into periods of either low-level or intense conflict. Such conflicts arose at times not only between Mra and Na and their immediate Tibetan neighbours living in the frontier villages, but also directly with Ganden Phodrang officials from outside the region. Relations between Tibetans and Subansiri highlanders had been poor in the run-up to Tsarong’s arrival. He had, in fact, been specifically sent to Tsari by the Dalai Lama with orders to provide a defensive military escort for the 1920 Rongkor Chenmo, in case of attacks upon the event. 14 years prior to the visit, the Na population of the upper Subansiri valley around Lung had been decimated in a series of attacks by Chayul Tibetans and Ganden Phodrang troops. This 1906 war was ostensibly the result of a complex local trade dispute provoked by the Tibetans. The remnant Na then scattered to live as itinerant hunters and gatherers. One group of Na refugees became based somewhat lower down the Subansiri valley at Taksing, south of the McMahon Line, around the latter stages of the Rongkor Chenmo route, while a second Na group remained north of the McMahon Line in Tibet itself. Furthermore, in the years (date uncertain) prior to Tsarong’s visit, Mra Pusing and his clansmen who were warriors from the Tapuk sub-clan of Mra, had a feud with the Migyit'in Tibetans and were executed by them. This set in train a series of retaliatory killings of local Tibetans by Mra in the Tsari Chu over the following decades.

In winter 1919, Tsarong had travelled from Lhasa to Tsari with a force of 125 well-armed troops from the bodyguard battalion. During the preparations for the Rongkor Chenmo, Tsarong departed significantly from the customary practices for protection of the pilgrims. 20 Normally, large groups of pilgrims undertook the procession together in columns called sho, whose composition was determined by the region of the Tibetan world from which pilgrims hailed. The sho set off at fixed intervals, and were each headed by a leader who was assisted by well-armed fellow pilgrims to protect the group from attacks by the Subansiri peoples. A tax of one tangka coin was levied from every pilgrim and shared out between the various sho leaders who were responsible for security. In 1920, Tsarong and his troops took all of this security tax for themselves, considering that they alone with their modern weapons would be sufficient to protect the entire pilgrimage. Apparently for the same reason, Tsarong then withheld most of the Lodzong payment due to be distributed to the large numbers of Subansiri peoples who had come up that year to receive their regular share of Tibetan goods in return for non-molestation of the pilgrims. During the pilgrimage itself, Tsarong had a ‘Loba’ thief flogged and then shot dead by his troops, and this triggered a huge retaliatory raid by other Subansiri peoples who were already dissatisfied with the lack of Lodzong payments. Considerable numbers of pilgrims and their attackers are reported as having been killed or wounded in the ensuing fight, and a large group of Tibetan women were taken as prisoners. The debacle ended with the Subansiri peoples all withdrawing far down into the
heavily forested Subansiri gorges, where Tibetan troops could never safely follow them.21 However, the scene was set for future conflict involving Tsarong.

When the disastrous Rongkor was completed towards the end of March 1920, Tsarong and his troops stayed behind in Chame for over a month with an entirely different purpose. Tsarong organized the planting of experimental tea gardens in the somewhat broader and more open Subansiri valley to the south of the McMahon Line. This area had been cleared of forest by Na, who burnt it periodically for swidden cultivation. Terraces were created at a site named Kepembe between the present-day Na settlements of Taksing and Lengbeng, and tea was planted over an area of several acres. Different reports mention that either "one Jagar (Indian)" or two "Indian Babus and their wives" had accompanied Tsarong to supervise the tea growing operations, which apparently lasted for several years before being abandoned.22 Na oral history relates that some Na who remained in Tibet had assisted Tsarong to establish his tea gardens, while those Na living around Taksing itself were resistant and eventually destroyed many of the tea plants by burning them. This may explain a report by the Chayul Dzongpön recorded in 1936 by Frank Ludlow when he passed through the area. The Dzongpön stated that during the late 1920s Tsarong returned to the area and "blew up a lot of Lobas with Lewis guns.23 After this, he said, there was no further trouble [from the Na]".24 One month later, Ludlow visited Migyitün in Tsari district, and was also told by local informants that "some few years ago, Tibetan troops tied their Loba prisoners to trees, painted a bull’s eye on their chests and used them as targets in an archery contest."25 Such accounts of excessive violence against Subansiri peoples by Tsarong and his men concur with other reports of their conduct elsewhere in Tibet during the 1920s.26

ii. Upper Siyom

The two main highland tributaries of the Siyom River, the westerly Yargyap Chu and the easterly Yomgong River, flow through the Pachakshiri (west) and Monigong (east) valleys respectively. Prior to 1952, Pachakshiri was a private Tibetan estate whose residents paid taxes to the Lhalu family via its agent the Gasha Depa, who was stationed at Molo. The local Tibetan Buddhist population, the Pachakshiriwa [i.e. modern Memba], were linked socially, culturally, and commercially to Tibet by way of the Lho La pass. Monigong was inhabited by the non-Buddhist and only slightly Tibetanized Bokar people who maintained trade relations with the Neyû Tibetans to the north across the Dom La (or Neyû La) pass. Monigong was not Tibetan territory and the Bokar were not Tibetan subjects. However, up until the mid-1950s, for the sake of maintaining trade relations and a positive alliance, the Bokar paid a small, annual tax to a minor local official to the north, the Nekha of Neyû, who was in his turn answerable to the Tsela Dzongpön.27 Neither Pachakshiri nor Monigong had any resident Tibetan officials prior to their incorporation into the Indian state during the 1950s. The Ramo people, who are closely related to the Bokar, inhabited the southern parts of both river valleys. They were similarly non-Buddhist and non-Tibetanized, and completely independent. Prior to the 1950s, Ramo had a lower level of contact with Tibet than their Bokar neighbours. They paid no taxes to Tibetans and their northward trade was mainly mediated via the Bokar and the Pachakshiriwa. The Pailibo people who lived south of the Ramo, and who were almost identical to them, maintained no direct connections with Tibet.

The Bokar and Ramo were independent peoples with their own territories, however small groups from both populations lived either seasonally or permanently to the north in Tibetan territory.28 Such emigration was mainly due to trade, or because they worked for Tibetans as labourers (not slaves), or as a result of taking refuge from disputes in their home areas.
Certain Bokar and Ramo narratives that describe earlier times, relate failed attempts by various Tibetan officials and lamas to impose Tibetan administration in their areas and to convert them to Buddhism. However, most of these sources are difficult or impossible to assess as historical data. The most credible incident concerns the Shoka Depa's attempt to open up new areas for taxation in Ramo and Pailibo territory during the late 1920s.29

Shoka is a small village on the Tsangpo River situated between Lilung and Tseta Dzong. It was a place of no importance, and the Shoka Depa at the time, one Tamdin, would have been a very minor local official. The accounts have it that the Shoka Depa, at the instigation of the Gasha Depa, took a small escort of armed men, crossed the Lho La pass into Pachakshiri, and collected additional Pachakshiri men as guides, porters and bodyguards for an expedition down the Yargyap Chu. The basis of the expedition was a Tibetan document that apparently listed local place names in the territory of the Pangdu (or Padu) people. They had long ago lived in the same area that was colonized by the Ramo south of Pachakshiri and further downstream by the Pailibo around Tato. The Tibetan claim was ostensibly that Pangdu people had once agreed to pay taxes to the Ganden Phodrang. Now, much later, the Shoka Depa was trying to activate this claim. The Tibetan party moved slowly downstream through the Ramo territory, evaluating everything they saw, and asking via their Pachakshiri interpreters about land, population, and so on. The Ramo were secretly apprehensive about their intent. When Tamdin and his party reached Tato, near the junction of the rivers Yargyap and Yomgong, at a flat area up on the hillside called Tamneyenko ('Madder plain'30), they met with and were entertained by leading Pailibo, and offered food and local millet beer. The Ramo had already warned the Pailibo that the Tibetans might be trying to exercise some power over them. While Tamdin and his men had their guard down during the hospitality, Pailibo men overpowered the Tibetan escort. Tamdin was then killed on the spot by the Pailibo warrior Kotin Lipu. Disarmed and stripped of their belongings, the Tibetan bodyguards and their Pachakshiri porters and guides were sent back upstream the way they had come. In the early 1930s, following the reporting of the death of the Shoka Depa back in Tibet, a troop of Tibetan soldiers were dispatched from Molo, via Pachakshiri valley, to try and punish the Pailibo. As soon as they had crossed the pass back into Tibet, the Pailibo mounted a revenge attack upon the settlements of the Tibetans' allies, the Pachakshiriwa.31

This raid was the last known attempt by Tibetans to extend their activities in the upper Siyom beyond customary annual taxation of Pachakshiri and Monigong, which in both cases ended during the 1950s with the establishment of Indian administration. Since the Gasha Depa and Neyü Nekha were then both suddenly deprived of tax revenues, their tactic was to impose new toll payments on Pachakshiriwa and Bokar traders who entered Tibet annually in order to barter.32 We should note that, while Tsarong’s activities in upper Subansiri were within 5 km of the McMahon Line (although at a much greater distance from Tibetan settlements), Tato, the southernmost point reached by the Shoka Depa, is some 45 km below the Line as the crow flies.

### iii. Upper Siang

The Siang or Dihang River forms the main direct flow of the Tsangpo River from Tibet through the Himalayas and into the Brahmaputra River in Assam. Its upper valley along the McMahon Line lies at the southern border of the ill-defined region Tibetans identify as Pemakō. As a result of migrations and shifts in regional power prior to, and during, the early twentieth century, Pemakō and the upper Siang valley became an ethnically and politically complex frontier zone. There were small populations of so-called ‘Memba’ and ‘Khamba’.
whose pilgrim-cum-refugee ancestors began migrating into the region from Bhutan, Monyul, and eastern Tibet during the period around the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century. There were Tibetan-speakers in Pemako who migrated into the area from the neighbouring districts of Chimdro, Powo and Kongpo. Additionally, there were also various peoples whom the Tibetans referred to as ‘Loba’, mostly from northeast Adi groups, including Asing and Tangam (Tibetan: Lokarpo), Shimong (Tibetan: Lonakpo) and Minyong, as well as some Ldu (Tibetan: Tana) from the upper Dibang valley system to the east. Some of these populations intermarried with or culturally influenced one other to various degrees.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Tibetan-speaking rulers of the independent kingdom of Powo were able to extract certain minor taxes from ‘Membas’ and ‘Loba’ settlements along the Siang valley and neighbouring Yang Sang Chu, below the point at which the McMahon Line became drawn. It is important not to overemphasize the extent of Powa influence in the area at the time. During his 1913 visit, F.M. Bailey described the frontier zone between Powa influenced areas and non-Tibetan populations to the south as “undefined and...the frontier villages remained in a perpetual state of war.”

During the late 1920s, the Powo kingdom collapsed following military action against it by the Ganden Phodrang, and the death of the last Powa ruler, the Kanam Depa. Events connected to both the death of the Kanam Depa and the assumption of control over Pemako by a new set of Tibetan agents in the wake of Powa defeat, began to significantly disrupt the region. Importantly, the new Tibetan Dzongpôns who began administering Pemako during the 1930s were demanding increasingly higher levels of taxes in kind and corvee labour from the Pemako Memba and their non-Tibetan neighbours. During 1937-8, parties of these oppressed Membas began appearing in Sadiya as refugees, as well as reports to British Political Officers stationed there of Tibetan tax collection far down the Siang to Riga and Karko, about 60-70 km due south of the McMahon Line. Additionally, a Tibetan document dated 1931 was obtained by the British and confirmed oral reports that the Shimong and Karko areas had obtained assistance from Pemako forces to defend themselves against other Adi groups in the long-running ‘Pangi War’ (1926-36), a conflict which had drawn in many Adi communities along the Siang. The price for this war assistance was possibly the basis for the Tibetan-led collection tours, with armed Pemako Memba and Khamba escorts, coming down as far as Karko virtually every winter season.

These developments began to highly alarm the Government of Assam. British administrators now realized that leaving the upper Siang region unvisited and unadministered since 1913 had allowed Tibetan agents to operate unopposed and in their own style far to the south of the McMahon Line. As a response, annual winter tours from Sadiya by Political Officers and accompanying troops were made to the region from 1938 onwards. These tours were meant to inform local communities that they were under British rule and protection, and thus were not obliged to offer any taxes, corvee labour services or food and lodging to Tibetan or Memba collectors. The tours also served to finally provide fine-grained intelligence about developments on the ground to higher levels of government and policy makers. By May 1940, J.P. Mills, then Secretary to the Governor of Assam, was reporting to the Secretary of the Government of India, External Affairs Department, about the exact identities and activities of Tibetan collectors in upper Siang. They discovered that, technically at least, Pemako itself was under the control of a Tibetan official stationed at Chimdro, and he in turn was subordinate to Ganden Phodrang authorities at Chamdo. However,
To the south of Pemako is the Memba country... This area is under the control of the Tsera [i.e. Sera] monastery near Lhasa. A monk, by name Lobsang Tenzing, comes down each cold weather and makes his headquarters in Mito [i.e. Me tog] Dzong... Every other year he goes down to the Abor country as far as Karko and Shimong with an armed escort, nominally to trade. The years he does not himself go down he sends armed Membas [under his agent Pema Jasa]... In March 1939 a Memba, by name Pema Jasa, came down the Siang as far as the Abor village of Bomdo and levied as tribute half of everything the people had in the way of cattle, other livestock, grain and even fish caught, from the 13 Memba villages from Yortong to Kopu on either side of the McMahon Line. If anyone refused to pay his children were taken away as slaves... Pema Jasa sent an envoy to Karko to find out whether, in view of the political Officer's visit in March 1939, the people of Karko were going to refuse to pay their usual tribute. They said the envoy told them that if they did so they would bring down an armed force of several hundred men. Karko in fear paid a mithun on the spot and signified that they would pay tribute as usual.

But the worst local effects of such Tibetan tax collection parties, which often numbered into the hundreds of men, were that they travelled with no food supplies of their own and demanded all their meals from local villagers, sometimes eating away the entire surplus food in a community which later led to seasonal starvation. In order to obtain compliance, they were instructed by Tibetan officials to threaten Siang communities with armed force, for which they carried guns and swords. They also threatened to close off all access to the north for salt trading by Siang peoples, since Tibet was the only source of salt for these and many surrounding highland regions.

British officials were clearly incensed by such reports. Mills himself later publicly remarked that the Tibetans "...send down what they are pleased to call 'tax collectors,' who are really just bandits... it was our business to stop these marauders." Such indignation was not just due to the reports of the great persecutions which local people endured, people whom the British claimed to be their 'subjects'; it was fuelled as well by frustration at their own administrative impotency at the time. Clearly the political value and credibility of expensive annual tours to upper Siang was almost nil, for whenever they departed downstream Tibetan collectors would simply return and continue to act with impunity. From Political Officers and also administrators who had themselves formerly held field positions, there were suggestions and then pressure on the policy-makers for more vigorous measures. These included a more assertive style of dealing directly with Tibetan collectors in upper Siang, and the establishment of permanent posts manned by units of the Assam Rifles, all of which began to be implemented on the ground from 1943 onwards when the Government of India placed J.P. Mills in charge of an earnest, if much belated, British push to try and secure their authority right up to, and along the McMahon Line.

The upper Siang experience had also revealed to British policy-makers during the late 1930s and early 1940s the stark reality of local Tibetan attitudes (or lack of them) and practices in relation to the McMahon Line itself, and the uses Tibetan agents made of the 'administrative vacuum' which had been allowed to develop. Again, J.P. Mill's report to government in May 1940 on upper Siang sums up exactly the message about this that the policy-makers in Shillong, Simla and London were having to digest at the time:

[The Tibetan Government have no clear idea as to the position of the McMahon Line and the International Frontier and leave matters concerning the collection of revenues and tribute to a great extent in the hands of local officials. The local tribes and local officials are probably hardly aware that an international boundary exists at all and regard Tibetan or British territory as extending as far as their respective power extends.]
One cultural point not to be overlooked here is the nature of the local Tibetan administrative system in such frontier zones and the type of conduct it could encourage among Tibetan agents stationed there. Local representatives of the Ganden Phodrang, or of private and monastic estates, were normally given a three-year term of service in an outlaying Dzong, or administrative post. They had a free hand to run affairs locally, provided they regularly delivered the customary tax take to the appointed offices of the Ganden Phodrang, their monastery or estate lord. Yet, obtaining such administrative positions in the first place often required substantial investment in terms of political ‘presents’, expensive participation in large public rituals and ceremonies staged by the state in Lhasa, and so on. As Hugh Richardson once observed of such officials, “…the taxes he collects are the recoupment of his expenditure on securing his post.” Moreover, most officials intended to make a profit from their term of service in what were often considered remote ‘hardship posts’. For such reasons, incoming officials often increased taxes well in excess of the established rates, and new forms of extraction for private profit were implemented. In the eastern Himalayan borderlands, an added attraction for profiteering by Tibetan officials was the range and amount of rare and often highly valuable products that could be obtained through taxation or forced extraction. These included musk pods, bear’s gall, deer’s antlers and other *materia medica*, wild animal pelts (frequently mentioned as part of Tibetan tax collections in upper Siang), as well as honey, chillies, and local cotton cloth, to name but a few.

The autonomy of local Tibetan administrators and private collectors stationed on the frontier, and their need for returns and desire for the potentially huge profits to be made during their postings, was the primary reason for the tenaciousness of their collection tours. These persisted throughout the 1940s and on into the 1950s, in spite of increasing British— and later independent Indian—resistance on the ground towards them. In February 1944, during the winter of 1944-5, and again in April 1945, Sera tax collectors dispatched by the Pemako Depas Chambala and Pema Tenzin were thwarted from completing their tax take, and even had part of it confiscated by British Political Officers. The Tibetan collectors complained to their superiors at Sera monastery in Lhasa, who in turn sent a strongly worded complaint letter to Surkhang Dzasa, Wangchug Tseten (1891?-1952), the Tibetan Foreign Minister at the time. Surkhang Dzasa duly passed this on to Arthur Hopkinson, the British representative, in Lhasa in November 1945. However, in line with the prevailing operational attitude on such matters, the Sera complaint was studiously ignored.

There was another type of local Tibetan response. The Pemako tax collectors set out with even larger parties into the upper Siang to try and more assertively achieve their aims. During February 1946, the new Pemako Depa, Tashi Dondup, went down the Siang valley with three hundred heavily armed men to collect taxes from all the villages on both the right and left banks of the river, a total of 18 Mamba, Khamba, Tangam, Shimong, Bomdo and Karko settlements comprising nearly 2,000 households, and representing an enormous potential tax take. They were however turned back, with considerable difficulty, by a Political Officer and his armed party. During February 1947, two Tibetan officials accompanied by as many as 1,000 armed men again proceeded down the upper Siang in order to attempt their usual tax and provisions collections as far south as the Karko area. They dispatched messages ahead of them threatening reprisals against any village not cooperating. Assam government officials now telegrammed Delhi urgently, emphasizing that “villagers have appealed to Assistant Political Officer that if Deba [the Tibetan official] reaches them starvation this year inevitable.” There were three platoons of Assam Rifles stationed in the upper Siang at the time, and Delhi strongly recommended to the Government of Assam that, in addition to the
use of minimum force as a last resort, the Tibetans might also be repelled by an “air demonstration not (repeat not) involving offensive action over [the Tibetan] party at some effective point.”52 Once again, in 1947, the Tibetan collectors were thwarted,53 although they returned in the years immediately following Indian independence when there was an administrative gap between the withdrawal of Government of Assam staff and installation of new Indian personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

From among various other possible examples we might have examined here, the three case studies presented above reveal several telling points about Tibetan activities along the frontier zone of the far eastern Himalaya during the first half of the twentieth century.

Tibetan agents operating in this particular frontier zone sought to further their goals without hesitation in the use of threats, armed intimidation and violence. They also seemed to have had little or no empathy concerning the hardship and disruption their activities caused (or would potentially cause) for the non-Buddhist and non-Tibetanized highland populations with whom they interacted to the south. This contrasted markedly with the types of relations Tibetans practiced towards neighbours along many other parts of their extensive frontier zones during the same period. Two main factors can explain this difference. The first is that Tibetans acted according to attitudes of strong ethnic and cultural superiority derived from their consistently negative classifications of ‘Loba’ populations. Secondly, given the political condition of statelessness on the ground throughout the highlands of the far eastern Himalayas, Tibetan agents clearly considered that with sufficient forces of men and enough fire-power, they could act with impunity.

Alistair Lamb once asked the important question, “How did the Tibetans see the McMahon Line agreement?” The answer he gave was clear since in it he explicitly restricts the meaning of ‘the Tibetans’ in his question to be the ‘Lhasa Government’ and ‘Tibetan administration’.54 In this brief survey, I have demonstrated that the ‘Tibetan’ agents I have discussed cannot be simply equated with the Ganden Phodrang state, regardless of whether or not they were serving officers of that state. Pre-modern Tibetan administrative systems, whether of the Ganden Phodrang, or those of major monastic institutions or aristocratic houses, permitted, of necessity, considerable latitude to their representatives and operatives in situ. In practice, the geographical McMahon Line appears to have been completely beside the point for all of those Tibetans operating freely along the frontier zone.

I have referred to both economic and political activities in my title and discussion. In part, this is because in the exercise of Tibetan administration along the frontier zone under study, one cannot simply separate taxation—which is a political activity as much as an economic one—from individual economic interests and gains. Beyond this, my point has been to demonstrate that the motivations behind Tibetan ventures in the far eastern Himalaya were very directly concerned with exploitation and profit, rather than just the religious inspirations and the political-cum-diplomatic goals we find emphasized in the existing literature about this region.
<table>
<thead>
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Much of my data and commentary for this section and the next is based upon extensive oral history interviews (1988-2008) with former residents of the southern Tibetan frontier districts of Loro, Chamé, Tsari, Neyii and Kongpo who now live in exile, and interviews (2002-08) conducted with current residents of border zones in northern Arunachal Pradesh, especially Upper Subansiri, Mechukha, Tali, Monigong and Upper Dibang regions. Since 2006, my project *Between Tibetanization and Tribalization: Towards a New Anthropology of Tibeto-Burman-Speaking Highlanders in Arunachal Pradesh* has been funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Bonn.

1 Lamb 1964:127.


3 The mid-sixteenth century *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston* states of the time before the introduction of Buddhism, that “Tibet was filled with those who dwelt like wild animals in the forest and who behaved like Klo and Mon” (*nags na ri dwags lta bur gnas pa yi // klo dang mon ltar spyod pas bod yul gang //*); see Tsering Gyalbo, Hazod and Serensen 2000:55, n. 54.

4 During the 1870s, Nem Singh reported that the Tibetans of Kongpo referred to the non-Tibetan regions to their south literally as ‘Gimuchen’, ‘nakedness’ (*sgren mo can*); Nem Singh and Harman 1915:210-11.

5 On Tsari in the 1940s-50s, see Huber 1999:211-12. On Ramo traders visiting eastern Kongpo in the 1950s, see Dhasmana 1979:169. Bailey 1914:18, 20 describes the situation in various districts along the frontier from Chayul to Kongpo during the early twentieth century, and the Aka-Monpa divide above Dirang (p.77).

6 For a Ramo example, see Dhasmana 1979:28. In Monigong during 2002, I recorded a narrative about a Bokar girl Lomum and a Tibetan girl Nyamum, two brides intended for mixed, arranged marriages who turn to stone when they meet atop the Dom La pass between Monigong and Tibet while en route to the homes of their respective future husbands; see also Haldipur 1957:33. In Limeking during 2005, I recorded a Mra narrative about the warrior Mra Pusing who falls in love with a Tibetan noblewomen, ‘Cissera Taji’, due to which the Tsari Tibetans kill Pusing before any marriage/elope ment can take place.
9 Two persons from upper Subansiri kept as slaves at Sangna Choling in Chayul district during the 1950s were forced to live in animal stalls and eat the same food as pigs. They only escaped this fate when freed by Chinese occupation forces in 1958-59 (interviews in Limeking Circle, Arunachal Pradesh, 2004-05). My informant S.M. Krishnathry, Indian commander at the Gyantse Trade Agency until 1953, observed such slaves in several Tibetan households in Gyantse where they were euphemistically called ‘servants’ (g.yog po), but were ‘obviously the most despised persons in the community, and made to live in small huts behind the houses’ (interview in New Delhi, 2007).

10 The frontier village of Trönši [Trön of the maps] near Chayul was a well-known penal centre where Tibetans charged with treason and serious criminal offences were sent; Ward 1936:388; Ward p.2r. June 24-p.2v. 25 June; Peng Wenbin 2002:68, n. 214; cf. Petech 1950:246. Further penal centres were located at Dirang Dzong in Monyul (see Mills 1950:157), and at Rima in Dzayul.

11 On mi bogs flight from Tibetan estates and lords, see Goldstein 1971 and 1989a, and Childs; In Press.
12 For example, of the border village of Raprang [= Douyu on Chinese maps] in Chamé, it is reported: ‘Douyu is a place to run away to, dodgers credit, flee from famine and lead a vagrant life. There are no families who lived for generations in this place...the present Tibetan residents escaped here from Gongbu [Kong po], Tabu [Dwags po], Rikeze [gZhi ka rtse], Zedang [rTse thang], Lhasa, and so on.’ (Tsering Pema, a 67 year old Tibetan from Douyu, interviewed in 1977); Li Jian Shang, vol.1, 1987:188. On migrants into border settlements at Tsari, see Huber 1999:203, 261, n. 12.

14 See the references in note 13 above. Na oral history relates the killing of a man taken to be a Tibetan lama who went into retreat in a cave near Taksing during the 1930s; Shukla 1965:30; Chabé Chadar, interview, Darporijo 2004. The Bokar have a similar report of a Tibetan lama occupying a local cave near Monigong for meditation, who was killed by the people of Karo village to the south; Tabin Pujen, interview, Monigong 2002.

15 Tawang was both an administrative extension of Tsona Dzong and religious appendage of Drepung monastery before 1914, and continued de facto to be so until the 1950s due to the slow pace of the extension of British and then Indian control over the Monyul Corridor region; see Richardson 1945:62-4, 110-11 and Reid 1942:286-9, 294-300 on its status until the 1940s.

16 Pachakshiri at the headwaters of the Siyom River was a private estate held by the Lhalu family; see Bailey 1913:18, 60; Shing sdong 1988. The Mago pastoral estate east of Tawang was held by the house of Samdrup Phodrang; see Richardson 1945:112.

17 The ‘Exchange of Notes’ document of March 1914 appended to the McMahon Line agreement explicitly protected continued Tibetan rights over private estates south of the Line, such as Pachakshiri and Mago; see Richardson 1984 [1962]:282. The case of monastic revenues for Tawang district, which might have been considered as a religious estate of its parent monastery of Drepung, was therefore ambiguous.

18 On the Mra, see Huber; 2010;
19 On the Tsari Rongkor Chenmo and Lodzong rites, see Huber 1997 and 1999.
20 Normally, the Lhasa official appointed to oversee the Rongkor Chenmo organized security. In 1920 this was Rampase, Namgyal Rinchen (b. 1906) (Bell 1920;6; Petech 1973:158; Who’s Who in Tibet 1949:98), who was then a zhol gyen and thus out-ranked by Tsarong.
21 The account of Rongkor Chenmo here is taken mainly from eye-witness reports by three Sikkimese pilgrims who attended the 1920 event; see Bell 1920. Tsarong’s presence and role at the 1920 Rongkor Chenmo are confirmed by Kennedy 1921, and Tsarong 2000:54-6. Tsarong’s personal interest in the area is confirmed by his possession (and likely commission) of the so-called ‘Tsari map’; see Huber 1992:9.
22 See Sailo 1957:55, who observed the site and collected eye-witness accounts in Feb. 1957. See also Shukla 1965:30.
23 Lewis guns for the Tibetan Army were first imported into Tibet from 1922 onwards; see Richardson 1945:29.
24 Ludlow 1936:62-3, entry of 22 April 1936. Ludlow was a Tibetan speaker himself and also travelled in 1936 with a competent interpreter.
26 For examples, see Goldstein 1989:123-4, n. 68 on summary amputations ordered by Tsarong, and Tsarong 2000:69 on the assassination of an Indian military instructor.
27 See Bailey 1914:18, 58-9 for the early twentieth century. Bokar collectors called Genbo gathered taxes locally and delivered them each November over the Dom La pass to the Néyû Nekha until 1955, when the Government of India stopped the practice. The Genbo Kojen (d.1983), father of my informant Tabin Pujen
(interview, Monigong 2002) and a fluent Tibetan speaker (like many Bokar men of his generation), collected taxes for the last two Neyi Nekhas, Jamyang and Bulu. His collecting area of Sahaji (or Sirji) comprised all families within 13 settlements from Monigong up to the Tibetan border, from which an annual tax per household of half a markey measure (ca. 2 kg) of butter, 1 wild animal hide, 1 bo measure (ca. 12-15 kg, Goldstein 1971a:8, n.10) of dried red chili, and 1 charpo measure (ca. 10 kg) of dried madder vine was taken. Indian writers on frontier populations south of the McMahon Line in Arunachal Pradesh are usually silent on local taxation paid north to Tibet. Thus, the Bokar were only involved in 'trade' and 'barter' with Tibet according to Banerjee 1999: 128-30 and Datta Choudhury 1995:64.

28 By the mid-1950s, there were 15 small Bokar hamlets in the Neyi Phu Chu across the Dom La pass; Haldipur 1957: 'Political' annex following p.52. These people are the 'Lopas' often depicted in recent Chinese publications about Tibet; see Cai Xiansheng 1981:142-7.

29 I base my account on two narratives I recorded in 2002: one in Monigong (informant Tabin Pujen, ca. 65 years) and one in Mechukha (informant Cheda Goba, 80 years old). Dhasmana 1979:28-9 recorded a more problematic version: His portrayal of a local feud involving a series of brothers conforms exactly to the common myths of origin and social division found throughout the northern border region; the suggestion that a single Ramo refugee ('Goni' in the narrative) could instrumentalize a local Tibetan official to mobilize troops on his behalf is not credible. Finally, he estimates 1870 as a possible dating for the events. This is impossible. My informant Tabin Pujen stated his grandfather and father were both alive at the time, and Cheda Goba stated the events occurred not long after he was born. At Tato on 28 November 1956, the Political Officer R.N. Haldipur actually met the elderly Pailibo warrior Kotin Lipu—famous in the area (and the narratives) for killing the Shoka Depa, Tamdin; Haldipur 1957:17.

30 Madder (Rubia cordifolia) is a vine used to obtain a deep red dye, and was a major trade item sent from areas south of the McMahon Line into Tibet for the dying of monks robes.

31 Lambert 1946.

32 Tibetan tax collectors were stopped from making extractions in Pachakshiri, and expelled, when Lambert 1946.

33 Bailey 1914:2-3; Dundas 1913:37-8. Bailey's caution and strong scepticism about Powa claims at the time to taxation and control of what were Ashing, Shimong and Karko areas well downstream on the Siang must be noted; see Bailey 1914:3, top paragraph on page.

34 The Kanam Depa, Wangchen Dundul, crossed the McMahon Line to take refuge with the British in Sadiya for two and a half years before his death from illness in the Abor Hills after escaping from confinement. Lazzano 2005:59, and n. 81, does not refer to British documents on this subject; see Reid 1942:257-8 for extracts of these.

35 During 1931-2, Tibetan and Memba forces fought in a series of conflicts involving Shimong, Komkar and Karko villages, which were also related to the death of the Kanam Depa; Reid 1942:258-9.

36 See Godfrey 1938; and the report by W.H. Calvert of 1937 in Reid 1942:260.

37 Copies of a translation of the document (Letter No. 7(6)-p38, from Basil Gould to Assistant Secretary of the Government of India, External Affairs Department, 27.6.1939) plus official analysis of it (Letter No. 2401-G.S., from the Secretary to the Governor of Assam to the Secretary of the Government of India, External Affairs Department, 7.8.1939) are to be found in file L/P&S/12/4213, India Office Collection, The British Library.

38 Reid 1942:260-64.

39 The same Pema Jasa was recorded as collecting taxes for the Tibetans in the area already in 1936, and still in 1945; James 1945:14.

40 Letter No. 2237-G.S., Shillong, 24.5.1940; see ‘Proceedings’ section in Office to the Advisor of the Governor of Assam. 1944:1-2. Williams 1944:12-17 provides a detailed account of the Sera officials’ administrative organization of Pemakö during the early 1940s, and the identities of the office holders at the time.

41 James 1945:14-15; Godfrey 1946a; Hranga 1999:31, who also cites the shooting of local livestock and confiscation of personal ornaments by Tibetan tax collectors in upper Siang.

42 Mills 1950:156.

43 Mills 1950.

44 This was the expression, often accusatory in tone, that came to be used in later Indian documents; see, for example, Ministry of External Affairs 1956:1, 4.

45 Letter No. 2237-G.S., Shillong, 24.5.1940; see ‘Proceedings’ section in Office to the Advisor of the Governor of Assam. 1944:1.
46 Richardson 1946:1.
48 Hopkinson 1945: see Enclosure 2, Note (interview with Surkhang Dzasa). In his report to government after his stay in Lhasa, Hopkinson 1948 described this document as an “outstandingly truculent letter denouncing our actions in the Assam tribal area (McMahon Area)”, which also “imputed breach of treaty and the like” and “indicated an unfriendly Tibetan attitude”.
49 See Richardson 1946:2, who advised, “It is better that the Tibetans should recognise our strength in the McMahon areas by being driven to protest to us that we should admit their influence in those areas by protesting to them. I think therefore that so far as possible we should avoid formal reference to Tibetan actions in the Tribal area, and should ask that the local officers may continue their patient but firm and unhated treatment of intruding Tibetan officials.” This stance was not just diplomatically astute, it was based upon the repeated experience of British representatives at Lhasa in futile discussions with the Kashag concerning the McMahon Line, and also the recent Tibetan reaction against the 1938 Lightfoot expedition to Tawang, on which see Goldstein 1989:412-19, and Reid 1942:295-300.
50 Godfrey 1946a.
51 Telegraphs 1947: from Shillong to New Delhi, 23.2.1947.
53 Godfrey 1989:419, n. 27.
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FEAR OF INDIAN TEA AND THE FAILURE OF BRITISH INDIA TO BREAK THE CHINESE TEA MONOPOLY IN TIBET

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This chapter shows the importance of tea in the broader context of Chinese interaction with Tibet, and Chinese and Tibetan concerns about international relations with British India. We see that brick tea had an overarching role that extended far beyond the Sichuan merchants in Ya’an, who produced and delivered the tea, and the Tibetan recipients of brick tea in Kangding (Dartsedo).

THE PROBLEM

In China today, certain academic circles persist in the long-held misconception that from the 1850s onwards British India was engaged in the illegal and wicked practice of shipping millions of pounds of Indian tea into Tibet. The overt reason was to earn silver and gold and to secure wool, but the underlying purpose was to seduce the Tibetans and destroy the centuries-old Sichuan tea industry.

A representative example of Chinese views on Indian tea comes from a 2004 publication. The British Empire invaded Tibet in 1888 and forced the Qing court to sign the unequal ‘Sikkim-Tibet Convention’ in 1890 and then renewed it in 1893. As a result, Yadong in Tibet was made an open port where trading activities between the Tibetan, Indian and British merchants were not taxed by one or the other. Hence, tea produced in India and monopolized by the British was dumped in Tibet and the production of and market for the Sichuan brick tea dropped dramatically.

The reference to Yadong near the Tibet-Sikkim border is, as we will see, especially misleading because this was the very place that largely stymied the British.

Intentions and expectations on the part of British India did indeed foresee a huge and welcoming market for Assam and Darjeeling tea inside Tibet, but this never came about. So the hue and cry of the Chinese is really a bogeyman: Indian tea rarely entered Tibet, and never posed a threat to the Sichuan tea industry.

BACKGROUND

Tea probably first came to Tibet at the start of the eighth century, and in the eleventh century Tibetans began receiving and drinking tea in large amounts as a result of the Song-dynasty tea-horse trade. Tea became the indispensable drink of everyday life for reasons of hydration, nutrition, digestion, social interaction, hospitality and religious functions. As a daily necessity, Tibetans traditionally considered it to be one of the four pillars of life: tsampa, meat, butter and tea.

Throughout history Tibetans have always consumed brick tea, always coming from China, and almost always from Sichuan province. Trade in the many varieties of Chinese tea, in addition to the bricks for Tibet, dominated nearly everywhere the beverage was drunk, and up until the 1600s tea was entirely an East and Central Asian affair.
In the 1600s, Britain and other European countries came in contact with Chinese tea and increasingly liked it. The Dutch became hooked by the 1670s, and the English by 1720.\textsuperscript{4}

As consumption grew, so also did the idea that there must be an alternative to buying and importing tea solely from China, and paying so much silver to purchase the commodity.

For the British, one approach to the problem was to sell opium to the Chinese to balance the trade. Another was to grow tea directly themselves.

**TEA IN INDIA**

Before 1823, the tea consumed by Britain came from China and the British looked desperately for a cheaper and nearer source. Thus, there was great joy when a native tea plant turned up in Assam in that year. The first twelve chests of manufactured tea to be made from indigenous Assam leaf were shipped to London in 1838, and this tea was well received.\textsuperscript{5} In 1835 tea was first planted in Darjeeling, but no commercial success came there until the 1850s.\textsuperscript{6}

India’s tea industry grew and matured, and increasingly drew the attention of China; this attention grew to grave concern, especially during the 1870s and 1880s, by which time Britons had come to drink three pounds of tea per head per year.\textsuperscript{7}

Indian tea was steadily breaking the hold of the Chinese tea monopoly. By 1888 Indian tea production had reached 86 million pounds, and for the first time British tea imports from India exceeded those from China.\textsuperscript{8}

**CHINESE FEARS**

Chinese fear of losing its hold on the tea trade was accompanied by alarm as British political and territorial encroachments came close to both Tibet and home.

By the mid-1820s, the British had moved up from Bengal and taken Assam. Then came steady gains into the Darjeeling hills by 1835. China experienced defeat and humiliation in the First Opium War (1839-42), then the Second Opium War (1856-60). In 1865, the British undertook a small war with Bhutan and went on to annex Kalimpong. In 1879, British engineers had managed to open a road to the Jelep La pass on the Sikkim-Tibet border, and in 1881 they completed a narrow-gauge railway to Darjeeling from the plains of Bengal. War and annexation of Sikkim itself came in 1888.\textsuperscript{9}

China was on full alert. If the British could break the Chinese hold on tea to Europe, they could certainly do the same for tea to Tibet. What else could be the reason for all of this activity? Talk of trade relations was received with resistance by the Qing Dynasty, and equally by the Tibetans. A long held belief, still alive today, holds that trade (tongshang) and travel (luyou) merely camouflage the true intentions of foreigners.\textsuperscript{10}

Why was the tea trade to Tibet so important for the Chinese? E. Colborne Baber, a British consul in China in the 1880s, points directly to the political implications.

The exclusive dependence on China for this important product seems to me a political factor not to be underrated, and I believe that, if the monopoly of the tea trade were to be done away with, much of the Chinese influence in Tibet would be gone also.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition, other social, political and economic consequences resulted from the Sichuan tea trade with Tibet.
1. The vast Sichuan tea industry supplied huge revenues. For the Qing Dynasty court, increasing state revenue rather than procuring horses became the main purpose of the border tea trade.12
2. The trade supplied livelihood for hundreds of thousands of people.
3. Close contact with and control of the long border with Sichuan came with the tea trade.
4. This brought influence with Tibetans, local leaders and major monasteries.13
5. Maintenance of the Chinese army in Kham and Tibet depended on tea revenues.14
6. China wanted and needed a number of Tibetan goods and products, such as musk, gold, silver and medicine. These were acquired through the exchange of tea.

Furthermore, tea played a direct role in diplomacy. For example, throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, the Chinese government gave tea as an annual gift: the Dalai Lama received 5000 jin of tea, and the Panchen Lama 2500 jin. This was named shangxu cha, “largesse-for-your-need tea.”15 It was also common practice for the Chinese ambans to help ease their role in Tibet by presenting tea as gifts. Every amban bought hundreds of pounds of tea in Kangding before embarking for Lhasa.16

**British Hopes**

By the 1870s, many British anticipated a real chance for Tibet to become a market for the fledgling Indian tea industry. Tibet was close at hand, tea production grew annually, and such a hope made sense.

The year 1883 saw the publication of a government document that specifically showed practical ways of exporting Indian tea to Tibet. *A Tea Trade with Thibet* (Bengal Secretariat Press) laid out with clarity and detail the state of Sino-Tibetan trade, and made recommendations for the preparation of tea bricks in India for export to Tibet. “We can supply this market without increase of production, and ... without withdrawing a single pound of the tea which can find a sale in the London market.”17

**Chinese Alarm**

From the Chinese point of view, matters had gone far beyond the planning stage and were a direct threat to the tea trade. They believed that the British annexation of Sikkim in 1888 was nothing less than a direct invasion of Tibet, that the conventions of 1890 and 1893 were illegal, and that tea now flowed uninterruptedly into Tibet. Chinese saw tea as the thin edge of the British wedge to gain political and economic control over Central Tibet, to ruin the economy of Sichuan, and to weaken China’s influence in Kham.

Before this, even wilder claims came from Qing Dynasty reports. “When the British person Hastings was the Indian Viceroy, he tried to export the rest of the Indian and Ceylon tea to Kham and Tibet, to weaken the power of the Central government in Tibet.”18 This would have been in the 1700s, but as we have seen, no Indian tea was available until the 1830s at the very earliest, and Ceylon did not export tea until 1873.19
FURTHER CHINESE CLAIMS

Although the following section has the appearance of a chronology, the highlighted presentation of consecutive dates, with relevant text below, in fact helps to clarify the development of events through the decades.

1851-74
“During the Xianfeng [1851-61] and Tongzhi [1862-74] periods, Indian tea began to invade the Tibet border in illegal ways.”

1878
The first Chinese person to reveal the dangers of Indian tea in detail was Huang Maocai. In the 4th year of Guangxu (1878), the governor (dudu) of Sichuan province, Ding Baozhen, contemplated the invasion of Tibet on the excuse that the British, having taken control of Darjeeling and other areas near the Tibetan border, should be taught a lesson. He also needed to defend Sichuan’s tea monopoly. To prepare for action, Ding sent his emissary, Huang Maocai, to gather information and to make a map of northeast India and the border regions. Huang passed through Calcutta in 1879 and returned to Sichuan in 1880. In his book Yin Du Za Ji (Essays on India), he first mentions the crisis of the invasion of Indian tea.

Indian companies planted tea in the Yashan [Assam] area, and they hired Fujian and Guangdong workers, and taught local people so things developed very well... And the British copied the packaging of Sichuan tea in Dajianlu [Tachienlu, Kangding] and they made the tea into packages (bao), and transported it from Darjeeling to Tibet, so they saved lots of transport fees. The cost is also very low. So I am afraid that in the future, Indian tea will be very popular and will threaten our Dajianlu tea. So we must prevent this from happening.

1881
The Chinese feared the organizational strength of the British. In 1881 the Indian Tea Association was founded, with branches in India and London. It had a Scientific Department, Tea Experimental Stations and an outreach program to bring new and better techniques to the tea plantations. These were capabilities that the Sichuan tea industry largely failed to create because of the squabbling and competition between tea producers. The Chinese also claimed the existence of an Anti-China Tea Trade Company.

1886
In the 12th year of Guangxu (1886), the amban in Lhasa, Se Leng E, reported to the emperor that the British had invaded Tibet under various excuses. His concerns about tea were specific:

The Tibetans like tea very much, and the tea depends on Sichuan. The tea has sold very well, and the profit and tax are very high. But I have heard recently that India also produces tea. If they make an agreement with the Tibetan government, ... so we cannot stop the sale [of Indian tea] in Tibet ... the transport fee and the cost of the tea is very low, and this will leave Sichuan tea with no place to sell, and then Indian tea can manipulate the market. So disaster is coming.

The amban further reported:
The British railway can directly arrive to Darjeeling, close to Tibet. So they obviously plotted (xumou) for a long time to do international business with Tibet ... If they use the railway, they can arrive at our hinterland within ten days. If we do not defend our border, there must be a great shock (zhengkong) in Sichuan province.27

(Here, Se Leng E displayed the clear knowledge that Sichuan was at a disadvantage because of the great distances and the slowness of transporting tea.)

1887

In the 13th year of Guangxu (1887), officials and high lamas of the Lhasa monasteries reported to the amban’s office, and he in turn reported to Peking:

All the foreign barbarians (wai fan ren) have their evil intention to do business. Take Calcutta for example, we know how wicked they are, and now in the Darjeeling area, our barbarian people [i.e. Tibetans living in British India] are doing business with these evil people, and this makes us unable to rest easy.28

1892

In the 18th year of Guangxu (1892), Amban Sheng Tai, in a letter to the local Tibetan tax office, tried to forbid Indian tea in Tibet:

Because ... Indian tea is not suitable for the people, it will make lots of problems for the business of the shangshang [main Tibetan tea dealers from monasteries and government] ... And they all know this Indian tea will bring great inconvenience to the business of local people, will do great harm to them. So not just common people, but also the government and merchants do not want this to happen.

These main dealers feared Indian tea because they would lose large profits.29 In Sichuan, Governor Liu Bingzhang worried about jobs:

If Indian tea is sold to Tibet, many people’s livelihood will be lost. ... Tibetans must have tsampa, they must have tea... and hundreds of thousands on both sides will lose their livelihood should the Sichuan tea industry fail.30

1899

In the 25th year of Guangxu (1899), the Dalai Lama is said to have expressed his thoughts on tea through the Mongolian Tenzing Ba Hutuktu, who reported to the emperor:

Tea is the big business of Sichuan businessmen in the hinterland ... and the Tibetan common people really desire it; if we allow Britain to sell Indian tea, ....[Tibetans] must come to covet it for its low price, and we will lose lots of tax. so I demand that you prohibit this.)

1890s

In the late Guangxu period, because of the commercial invasion by Britain, the business in Kangding was heavily affected by Indian tea. Also, the Tibetan trading houses (guozhuang) declined, especially in the 1890s, because Tibetan local products (tu techan pin) were robbed by the British in large amounts. For example, more than half the gold once transported to Kangding has now been lost through this robbery.32
1908

In the 34th year of Guangxu (1908), the Qing government appointed Zhang Yintang to negotiate with British delegates concerning previous trade treaties. He claimed: "In the future, the Buddha-land (futu, i.e. Tibet) will become the market of Britain and India, and the outstanding Chinese merchants will be mere servants in the future."

An assistant of Zhang Yintang, called He Xiangzao, was sent on a mission to determine the extent of British India's tea exploits: "The administrator of the railway station of Darjeeling told me that the Indian tea smuggled through Gartok to Tibet can be 180 men every day [each men equals 60 jin, thus over 1000 pounds daily]." This shows the power of hearsay, and the credulity of the Chinese 'fact-finder' to believe and report on the basis of little or no evidence. (On the actual situation in Gartok, see below.)

Another complaint levied by the Chinese had to do with the alleged tactic of Indian merchants to present tea directly to Tibetans in hopes of winning them over. "In Darjeeling and other areas, once they saw Tibetans planning to go back to Tibet, they presented their Indian tea as gifts."

In 1908, Zhao Erfeng, the Sichuan and Yunnan Border Affairs Minister, put the matter succinctly:

The processed tea sold under license to Front and Rear Tibet has been a major source of income for Sichuan Province. But now the India tea, grown in large quantities, processed in a superior way, shipped in an efficient transportation system, and sold by a gigantic company, has been squeezing out our own tea merchants and seizing their profits. If not resisted, it will gallop eastward, not only causing us the loss of the Tibetan market, but also posing a threat to our tea producing bases.

In the many examples above we have seen the position of the Chinese concerning Indian tea, from the 1850s to 1908. Below follows a listing of British recommendations and attempts to expand the Indian tea industry into Tibet. These efforts in the end proved to be a failure.

BRITISH FAILURE

1869

In 1869, the British official T.T. Cooper, after travelling in Kham, carried on with Bogle's dream, or goal, of British businessmen succeeding in breaking the Sichuan tea monopoly:

Tibet consumes annually 6,000,000 lb of Chinese brick-tea mainly produced in Szechuan province. Could this be replaced by tea of India, and here there would be a market of great value? This idea, that Indian tea could find a ready sale beyond the Himalayas, was an attractive one.

1873

J.W. Edgar's report of 1873 listed the goods imported into Tibet from Bhutan and Darjeeling: broadcloth, rice, sugar, dried fruits, tobacco, stic-laq, indigo, sandalwood, ivory, peacock feathers, rhinoceros horn, and cloth. There is no tea mentioned.

At this time, even the Darjeeling Tibetans did not drink local tea, but rather brick tea from Sichuan. Taste and tradition seem to have determined the choice. That Indian brick tea failed right in its own back yard indicates the difficulties such a trade would face.
1881
The Deputy Commissioner of Bengal, in a monthly report, states: "... trade with Tibet continues to be at a standstill. I have been informed that many traders have returned from Phari in despair." Later reports echo this lack of success.41

1886
In 1886, Tibetan forces controlled the Jelep La and occupied Lingtu, 12 miles inside the Sikkim frontier. They built a fort, blocked the road and stopped all interchange between India and Tibet.42

1880s
Traders heading for Tibet from Sikkim were met at the crest of the Chola Range passes by a Tibetan guard who "displayed a placard inscribed with Tibetan and Chinese characters, and intimidated by simple but significant gestures... 'all who arrive with the intention of entering Tibet: GO BACK.'"43 In addition to being blocked in the north, British officials observed with dismay that traders from the great Lhasa monasteries "easily go to Calcutta, and control the importation of brick tea to Sikkim and Darjeeling."44

1890
The Sikkim Gazetteer presents a gloomy assessment of the trade possibilities. Concerning the 1890 treaty: "Traders would assuredly fall foul of the monopolies reserved for the monks of the great monasteries ..." After the treaty was signed: "The trade of Tibet which the Macaulay Mission was intended to develop may well be left for the present to take its chances. Such scanty data as are available do not appear to warrant a very high estimation of its value."

Sir Francis Younghusband sounded a tone of pessimism about trade in general and Indian tea in particular in his summary of developments after the events of 1903-04.45 The Convention of 1890 proved to be worthless for the British because Tibet never acknowledged it, and China showed itself incapable of controlling the Tibetans or forcing them to abide by the Convention.46 Commenting on Yatung, at the very southern tip of the Chumbi Valley, and its role as a trade centre, he says it was "exceedingly badly chosen."47 Younghusband stated that

... just across the frontier are three millions of tea-drinkers ... We had hoped that the Chinese would meet our wishes in regard to the admission of tea. ... But through their obstinacy, they only allowed Indian tea in at a rate of duty not exceeding that at which Chinese tea is imported into England.

This amounted to 6 pence per pound for the "inferior" Tibet tea. "So this in reality was an ad valorem duty of from 150 to 200 percent, and thus any concession is of 'not the slightest value.'"48

1893
The Tibet Trade Regulations of 1893, following on the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of 1890, "provided for the establishment of a trade centre and a British Trade Agent at Yatung. ... where trade was to be conducted without vexatious restrictions ..." However.

Active obstruction by the Tibetans nullified the work of five years... the Tibetans were
determined to render the treaty abortive and the local Chinese officials were powerless to coerce them. The Chinese were suzerain in name only, while the Tibetans sheltered behind them and played them off against us.49

1894
In 1894, John Claude White, after a visit to Yatung, reported that: “The Chinese had built a wall across the valley about one-third of the valley lower down, and posted sentries on the gate and no one was allowed to come to the ‘Mart’ to buy or sell any goods whatever.” This further confirmed the uselessness of Yatung. The problem was compounded by the role of Phari, 45 km up the Chumbi valley, where the local official charged an automatic duty of 10 percent upon all goods entering.50

1897-1904
In 1897, the trade item reports again fail to mention tea. In that year, British India exported to Tibet silver, indigo, cotton-piece goods, tobacco, wool, iron, brass, provisions, sugar, and husked rice.51 The same situation holds true for the years 1899 and 1904: in these years the ETB confirms that wool was the main import from Tibet, and cotton-piece goods made up the bulk of exports to Tibet. Again, there is no mention of tea at all.52

1904
In 1904, trade continued to fail.

The obstacles to the expansion of trade of Tibet have hitherto been the difficulties and expenses of transport, the trading monopoly enjoyed by the lamas, which accounts for the exclusion of Indian tea, and their hostility to everything promoting the growth of commercial relations with India.53

GARTOK, WEST TIBET

The imperialists always use, at the same time, legal and illegal methods to perform their economic invasion. When the British colonialists were negotiating with the local [Tibetan] government, they were also smuggling Indian tea to Tibet, especially in the Gartok area.54

The fear of Gartok as a site of smuggling seems far-fetched because of its geographic remoteness. Any tea for Tibet would have to travel by way of an immense loop, first west from the tea-growing areas in India, then north into the largely unpopulated expanses of West Tibet, then east to Lhasa. Yet Gartok supplied the conditions to be a good scapegoat for the Sichuanese, because so few people actually knew the situation there. It was a high, remote outpost (4460 m.), referred to as “...small, miserable, windy Gartok ...”55 It became one of British India’s three official trade marts in Tibet as a result of the 1904 treaty concluded after the Younghusband expedition.56

1905
Charles Sherring, a British officer on an inspection trip to Gartok in 1905, noted that the main trade item was wool. Ladakhi traders maintained a monopoly over shawl-wool produced in Tibet, and Tibetans got exclusive rights to trade brick-tea with Ladakh. Indeed, brick tea from Lhasa—coming originally all the way from Sichuan—formed the main trade item, and was the source of tea for Ladakhis and Kashmiris.57
In Gartok, a small smuggling trade performed by a local Tibetan official known as the Daba Zongpen (rdzong dpon) first involved the purchase of cheap Indian tea. The official then labeled it "Chinese," repacked it in the official government skins, after which he sold the product as "the best Tibetan article" to local farmers and others who might not notice the subterfuge.\(^{58}\)

This minor smuggling in these wild, empty spaces was no threat to Lhasa, even less so to Sichuan. Frank O'Connor, a British Political Officer, confirmed that: "Gartok in West Tibet has not the purchasing power—too slight population—and Indian Tea might ... supplant Chinese Tea, but never expect any large development."\(^{59}\)

1906

Sven Hedin, the Swedish explorer, went to Gartok in 1906 and recorded many observations of local people and trade, of the British and Tibetan products at the summer market, but nothing is mentioned of Indian tea.\(^{60}\)

1907

An official British document stated: "...it was already apparent that Gartok was a 'dead end.'"\(^{61}\)

Alex McKay points out: "The Gartok Agency was never of any real importance to the Raj."\(^{62}\) It was maintained simply for prestige, and the remote, wind-swept outpost certainly never handled large quantities of Indian tea.

GYANTSE

At Gyantse, the largest and most important of the three British trade marts in Tibet, Frank O'Connor became the first Trade Agent. A veteran of the Younghusband expedition, O'Connor set to work compiling many detailed reports about the local situation.

1904-1906

In 1906 he wrote that the year 1904 was just a start-up, and very little of any consequence had been happening during the previous two years. He spoke of the good potential for trade, but at the time there was "... a very inadequate return on all our exertions ... until we effectually improve the present line of communication our 'Trade Mart' at Gyantse will remain a dead letter, ..."\(^{63}\)

On tea, he claimed the Tibetans drank millions of pounds per year, and "The whole of this tea is at present imported to Tibet from China, ..."\(^{64}\) With foresight and careful preparation, O'Connor laid out the costs for shipping Indian tea from the rail head at Siliguri in Bengal to Gyantse, and the necessary limits of production costs to equal or beat the prices offered by the Chinese.

... [I]t should be possible not only to undersell the Chinese merchants, but to realise a good profit into the bargain. But because the roads and transport are so bad, there will be no development of the tea trade or any other trade.\(^{65}\)

1906

In 1906, the government in London addressed the tea issue during a House of Commons debate, with questions directed to the Secretary of State for India, John Morley.
Mr. Laidlaw: I beg to ask the Secretary of State for India if there has been any increase of trade between India and Tibet since the late expedition; whether Indian tea is now admitted into Tibet; and, if so, on what conditions.

Mr. Morley: The latest figures received show that for the eleven months ending February last the value of exports to Tibet was £111,054, of imports from Tibet, £118,578. The export of tea to Tibet is subject to the Regulations of 1893, and the provisions of the Lhasa Convention of 1904. The Trade Returns do not show any export of Indian tea to Tibet. ... 66

1915-16
At this time "... an Indian company produced some Tibetan tea ..., but its desultory achievements never amounted to much." 67

1920s
Hugh Richardson, last British envoy to Tibet, affirms that into the 1920s trade of many commodities had been weak, "... nor have there been any strenuous efforts to find in Tibet a market for Indian tea, of which there were formerly great hopes." 68 Nothing could happen so long as the adverse influence of the Resident Chinese Ambans and of the Lamas is unchecked. No matter how short the route, or convenient the road, the hostility of these two parties would be roused to the utmost against any project for a tea-trade. 69

And so it proved through the decades, even after the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and the replacement of the ambans in Lhasa with Republican Chinese representatives. In the end, hopes for a robust Indian tea market in Tibet never came about.

CONCLUSION

One can only ponder the motivations of those who keep alive the idea of a huge importation of Indian tea into Tibet and its subsequent destructive power. Many Chinese still believe that such things actually happened, and "the invasion of Indian tea" remains a useful tool.

With tea as the external focus, abstract complaints of diplomatic and economic injustice take tangible form, and uncomfortable questions about internal failings can be deflected.

1. Indian tea reveals the wickedness of the British and upholds anti-colonial and anti-foreign sentiments. It also shows that illegal economic actions were the inevitable outcome of British expansionist policy.
2. The topic helps ameliorate conflicts between Han and Tibetan, in Kham especially, by blaming economic and social distress on the British.
3. In the face of Indian tea, Tibetans are shown to be upright and loyal. The Tibetan people preferred Sichuan tea to Indian tea, they hated the colonialists and boycotted their products, and thus held firm to national unity. In this vein, compare also the treatment of Tibetan-British relations as depicted in the Memorial Hall of the Anti-British in Gyantse.
4. Invasion of Indian tea helps explain economic decline in Kangding, which was largely due to civil war, fiscal mismanagement and the growing opium trade.
5. Troubles caused by Indian tea deflect criticism from actual disruptions to trade and society caused by communist Red Army actions in Sichuan and Eastern Tibet in the 1930s and 1940s.
The British scheme of sending large volumes of Indian tea to Tibet failed for three main reasons. First, and most importantly, were the manifold Chinese and Tibetan obstructions that confronted the tea trade, especially at the border and customs posts just north of Sikkim. Second, Tibetans did not like the taste or quality of the Indian tea. It was simply unsuitable when compared to the age-old, reliable Sichuan bricks. Tibetans through the centuries had come to depend on the particular taste, quality and efficacy of brick tea from Sichuan. They also knew the different standards of tea and the particular brands, such as Golden Tip, Flying Wheel, Rinchen Dorje and Kham Brick. Sir Charles Bell stated that: "... the taste problem is perhaps insurmountable; ... Maybe it just won't 'take.'"70 Third, the tea planters in India displayed little enthusiasm for making brick tea.71 They found the project strange. In the meantime, sales to England of Assam and Darjeeling tea grew by leaps and bounds, and reconfiguring tea plantations to address the Tibet market never proved practical. The dream of millions of pounds of Indian-made brick tea pouring into Tibet proved totally unrealistic in the end.72

After a close look at British intentions and actions regarding tea through nearly a century, from the 1840s to the 1930s, one ends up with a fine appreciation of the subjunctive voice: should, could, might, ought, would. The British in India did adhere to the goal of exporting Indian tea to Tibet, and they did try, but the expectation and the reality ended up being far apart. As late as 1937, F. Spencer Chapman, a British military officer visiting Lhasa, laments the fact that India cannot supply proper brick tea to the Tibetans, while "every year thousands of loads of tea come over the high passes several months' journey from China."73

NOTES

3. An exception was Japan, which received tea from China and began cultivating it in the 9th or 10th century. See Alan Macfarlane, *Green Gold*, pp. 52-4.
5. Ibid., p. 146. For thorough details on the discovery of Assam tea and its subsequent cultivation, see Alan MacFarlane, *Green Gold*.
12. The amount of tea going to Tibet each year varied, but there was a broad consistency of between 12 and 15 million pounds per year from Kangding. In 1892, a high Chinese official named Liu Bingzhang reported: "After my survey, I know that Sichuan tea is sold in Tibet for 14,000,000 jin" [1 jin is slightly more than 1 lb.]. See Jia Daquan and Chen Yishi, *Sichuan Cha Ye Shi* (History of Sichuan Tea), 1988, p. 229.
13. *Sichuan Cha Ye Shi*, 1988, pp. 272-3. Liu Wenhui, governor of Xikang, was well aware of the use of tea to control the border and influence Tibetans. He wrote: "In olden times, the aim was to control [the minorities], but now the aim is to strengthen the economic relations between Han and Tibetan... so we should supply Tibetan brethren with sufficient daily products to increase the inter-racial trade, and to resist Indian tea, and to protect the domestic market."
In the late Qing, there were 670 Chinese military officers and soldiers spread out between Kangding and Lhasa; they were accredited by the government in Tibet. Payment and salaries every year amounted to 54,000 liang of silver. See Qing Dai Bian Jiang Kaifa Yanjiu, pp. 326-7.


Qing Dai Bian Jiang Kaifa Yanjiu, 1990, p. 316.

A Tea Trade with Thibet, 1883, p. 2. Tea for Britain relied on the smaller, finer upper leaves of the tea plant. Other parts of the same plant, especially the lower large leathery leaves, and twigs and branches, made up the bulk of material for Tibetan brick tea.


Qing Dai Bian Jiang Kaifa Yanjiu, 1990, 11 Yue, pp. 317.


Sichuan Cha Ye Shi, 1988, p. 278.

See http://www.indiatea.org/our_story/ourstory.html

Sichuan Cha Ye Shi, 1988, p. 223. I have been unable to find any further reference to the Anti-China Tea Trade Company.

"Invaded Tibet" refers to the steady push by the British into areas considered partially or completely under Tibet's sphere of influence, such as Darjeeling and Sikkim.

Ying Ren You Li Xizang Pai Kai Dao Zang Fan Zhe (Report on the English Traveling to Tibet and Teaching the Tibetan Barbarians). In Sichuan Cha Ye Shi, p. 228, fn. 1.

Sichuan Cha Ye Shi, 1988, p. 228, fn. 2.

Sichuan Cha Ye Shi, 1988, p. 227, fn. 2.

Ibid., p. 233, fn. 1.

Xu Jun, Chou Bian Yuan Zang: Zhao Erfeng Yu Qing Mo Chuan Bian Jing Ying (Using the Border to Help Tibet: Zhao Erfeng and Managing the Sichuan Border at the End of the Qing Dynasty), 1998, p. 120, fn.5.

Ibid., p. 121.

Ibid., p. 122.


Ibid., p. 227, n. 2. In the 1st yr of Xuantong (1909), another Chinese, named Guo Shicai, was sent to Tibet and India on an inspection mission. Guo, originally a tea merchant, had been the assistant of Amban Yu Gang, and previously travelled to India twice.


Nan Lu Bian Cha Shi Liao (Historical Sources of the South Road Border Tea). 1991, p. 12, fn.3.

The amount at this time was actually closer to 10 million pounds per annum.


See Vibha Arora, Routing the Commodities of Empire through Sikkim (1817-1906), 2008, pp. 9-10. From Tibet to India came tea, salt, wool, blankets, silk piece-goods, mules, sheep, yak tails, musk, ghee, turquoise, coral, gold.

See Report on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan (ETB), 1881. No tea is mentioned in ETB reports of 1890, 1897, 1899 or 1904. “The Tibet trade, such as it is, is confined to Chumbi Valley Inhabitants,” p. 11.

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Gazetteer of Sikkim, 1894, p. x.

Ibid., p. xii.

See Vibha Arora, Routing the Commodities of Empire through Sikkim (1817-1906), 2008, p. 12.

Younghusband's name in Chinese is Rong He Peng. His well-known book India and Tibet has appeared in Chinese under the translated name, A History of How England Invaded Tibet (Yingguo qinlue xizang shi).

See Francis Younghusband, India and Tibet, 1910, p. 50.

Ibid., p. 54.

Ibid., pp. 52-53.


52 See Report on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan (ETB), 1899, p.7. In addition, Richardson points out: "... and by 1898, when the Trade Regulations were due for revision, the frontier was still undemarcated and the Trade Regulations still inoperative." High Peaks, Pure Earth, 1998, p. 532.
55 See Charles Sherring, Western Tibet and the British Border Land, 1906, p. 309.
56 Ibid., p. 310.
59 Ibid., p. 6.
62 Ibid., p. 128.
64 Ibid., p. 6.
65 Ibid., p. 7.
66 Hansard, the Official Report of Proceedings in the House of Commons [HC Deb 31 July 1906 vol. 162 c699]; and [HC Deb 13 March 1913 vol. 50 c387.]
68 Ibid., p. 616.
69 E. Colborne Baber, Travels and Researches in Western China, 1882, p. 198.
70 Charles Bell, Tibet: Past and Present, 1924, p. 18. See also, Sichuan Cha Ye Shi, 1988, pp. 6, 232: "Tibetans aver that the Chinese tea, mixed according to their custom with butter and soda, is more nutritious than the Indian, and it suits their constitutions better." They also thought that Indian tea, because it was produced in a tropical area, had an internal quality that was "hot" (xingre), and the taste was bitter, astringent and dry (se). Also, it made people feel stuffy (men) and uncomfortable. One widespread belief held that because the tea was produced by machines, it retained the taste of industrial oil. Sichuan tea, on the other hand, "is very fresh and smoothie (shuangkou). It can dissolve the fat in food, so although the Indian tea is very cheap, it will have no market." W. W. Rockhill felt that Indian tea was not suitable to the Tibetan taste for reasons of astringency and headiness; see Land of the Lamas, 1891, p. 281, n.2.
71 A sample brick of tea survives at Kew Gardens to bear witness to the ‘Indian Tibet tea’ attempt. Production of such bricks at plantations was largely experimental and eventually fizzled out.
73 F. Spencer Chapman, Lhasa: The Holy City, 1938, p. 52.

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Report on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan (ETB), 1881, 1890, 1897, 1899 and 1904, India Institute Library Archives, Bodleian Library (Oxford).


Since Buddhism’s first centuries, the drama of the Prince Siddhārtha renouncing palace and family life to realize nirvāṇa, then share his teaching with the world, has been the tradition’s central spiritual narrative, inspiring countless disciples from India to Japan. Most communities that converted to the faith transposed the classical Buddha biographies, including his previous life stories (jātakas) into their own artistic expressions and vernacular recensions. It was such locally-composed and domesticated narratives that were the ‘working texts’ that shaped Buddhism in practice across its long Asian diaspora. The Newar Buddhist tradition has contributed many such case studies that shed light on the local histories of this faith in South Asian history. The particular editorial and doctrinal deviations from the canonical sources in communities across Asia also afford insight into the cultural adaptations characteristic of each Buddhist community.

This paper introduces Subarna Tulādhār’s and my translation of Sugata Saurabha (‘The Fragrance of the Buddha’), a life of the great teacher that originated from the Newar community in the mid 1940s. It was written by Chittadhar Hridaya, one of Nepal’s greatest modern poets. Our dual language, facing page translation of Sugata Saurabha was published in the Harvard Oriental Series late in 2007, the first contribution to this series from a source in Newari, or Nepalī Bhāsa. An English-only translation, with much less philological and Nepal-specific discussion, will be published in late 2009 by Oxford University Press. This paper introduces a truly remarkable work, one that faithfully recounts Shakyamuni’s life while also reflecting the modernizing and regional cultural milieu of the author’s South Asia location in Kathmandu, Nepal.

I. THE AUTHOR: CHITTADHAR HRIDAYA

Chittadhar ‘Hridaya’ (1906-1982) was one of twentieth century Nepal’s most famous and accomplished writers. He wrote in the Tibeto-Burman language Nepalī Bhāsa and is regarded as the pre-eminent Newar poet of the twentieth century. Chittadhar devoted his life to writing
in his native language and participating in the vigorous intellectual life that evolved in post-
Rana Kathmandu (1950—). During the last years of Rana rule, Chittadhar was arrested for
publishing a poem regarded as subversive by government; while jailed for this, he wrote his
poetic masterpiece that he entitled Sugata Saurabha, ‘The Sweet Fragrance of the Buddha.’
Most of this epic poem, the early portions written on scrap paper, had to be smuggled out of
prison.

With the coming of greater press freedoms after the fall of the Ranas, Chittadhar became
a leading author and a renowned cultural figure. Besides his poetry, he published several
novels, plays, collections of short stories; he was also a significant scholar in his own right,
authoring articles and books on a variety of historical subjects. Hridaya was also the
president of the Nepāl Bhāsa Parishad, which is still engaged in publishing works written in
the Kathmandu Valley’s indigenous language. It is noteworthy that this group’s revitalization
efforts, begun by Chittadhar, reached as far as the Nepali diaspora communities in Sikkim.

II. SOURCES FOR AND MULTI-VOCALIC READINGS OF SUGATA SAURABHA

A hybrid text in the kāvya tradition

This long work in 19 chapters (spanning 354 printed pages) was published originally in 1948
and reissued after the poet’s death in 1982. The various features of the text itself convey the
richness of intention and poetic ambition in Sugata Saurabha; the genius of Hridaya is
evident in the blending of both traditional and modern-Western influences. The work is an
epic in kāvya style, yet written in Newari albeit with a vast Sanskrit vocabulary. The kāvya
centre of Sugata Saurabha is clear in its other core features: stanzas composed in over 25
classical Sanskrit meters—that he identifies by name in parentheses after each passage!—the
elaborate forms of ornamentation in verse and word choices (alamkāra), the constant reliance
on similes and tropes from the Sanskrit tradition (e.g. ‘lotus-like feet’) and the use of puns
(śles) conveying dual meanings.

As literature, this poem aspires to the classical goals of Sanskrit kāvya poetry, in which
the poet through many traditional conventions seeks to convey a deep feeling for the subject
matter by evoking basic aesthetic ideals or rasas. Given the sophisticated handling of
Sanskrit vocabulary, meter, and usage conventions in Sugata Saurabha, and given that
Chittadhar’s choice of ‘Hṛdaya’ as his own pen-name is so close to the technical Sanskrit
term for the cultured aesthete (sahrdaya), there is no doubt that our poet was well aware of
the Sanskrit tradition’s primary field of aesthetic theory and composed Sugata Saurabha
aware of its ideals and expectations. In Table 1, this goal of drawing upon all the rasas to
write the Buddha’s biography is charted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Indic Aesthetic Ideals in Sugata Saurabha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rasa</strong></td>
<td>Incidents in the Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erotic love (sringāra)</td>
<td>Courtship and Marriage of Siddhārtha-Yashodhārā; Yashodhārā’s recollection of married life; Siddhārtha’s encounter with Gotami; Nanda’s marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SOURCES

AND

SENTIMENTS

IN

SUGATA SURA

BHA

293

heroism (vīra)

Siddhārtha confronts the brahmin ritualists; Shākyas princes in competition for Yashodhara; Shākyas war preparations in the chapter ‘Dispute over Water’

disgust (bibhatsa)

Siddhārtha sees women departing palace;

Incident of Brahmin Marriage Proposal to the Buddha

anger, fury (raudra)

Women angry at men during Gopa’s lament; Queen’s lament over King Bimbisara’s death; Shākyas and Koliyas in chapter ‘Dispute over Water’;

Young Devadatta-Siddhārtha duck dispute;

Buddha reacting to Devadatta’s proposal to lead sangha

mirth (hāsyā)

Moments in contest over Yashodhara, especially seven trees and pig impaled by arrow; a brahmin responds to Siddhārtha’s request for straw; king encounters Aṅgulimālā, now a monk (316); Visakhā encounters the naked ascetics

terror (bhayānaka)

Aṅgulimālā’s reign of terror; Elephant attack of Buddha; Battle preparations in Shākya dispute over water; drought following Queen Māyā’s death

compassion (karuna)

Prince Siddhārtha’s reaction to duck shot by Devadatta; Buddha’s actions and reactions throughout poem; Jivaka’s Physician teacher

wonder (adbhuta)

The gods greeting Prince Siddhārtha as child; Natural events surrounding Prince Siddhārtha’s Great Renunciation; Anathapindika’s first meeting the Buddha; the episode of Nanda’s journey

peace (shanta)

King Suddhodana observes children of kingdom;

parents observe Siddhārtha as young child

paternal fondness (vātsalya)

King Suddhodana’s relations with son in youth, and also after enlightenment

And yet: while varying the number of syllables placed in each line according to Sanskrit rhythmic forms, Chittadhar has throughout Sugata Saurabha followed the western poetic tradition of ending each couplet with rhyming suffixes, a possibility that the vowel endings of Newari and Sanskrit words facilitated. Here, translation cannot do justice, though in the following specimen examples, I do try to replicate in English how the rhymes go in the original:

Surrounded by maids attending, the palanquin’s decor could not be seen.

But the situation was clear: inside must be the queen. (pg. 13)

The stars they saw here and there one after another sparkled phili phili

As the ladies raised their arms to count them, gold bangles jingled chili chili. [35]

Instructed in Ayurvedic medicine and the physiology of the human

He was taught sexology to enlighten him on the ways of man with a woman. [85]

The infantry of powerful, valiant soldiers marched in rows through the streets

Stamping their feet in unison in tune with the battle drums beats. [291]
In spite of his best efforts, not one useless grass did he find anywhere,
As a mystic sees supreme spirit pervading all, he saw medicinal herbs everywhere—[327]

The other clear mark of Western influence in Sugata Saurabha is the use of western punctuation and indentation to mark quotations and the ends of couplets, mixed with more traditional nāgari forms. Chittadhar utilizes commas, colons, dashes in places, single and double quotation marks, and most rarely a semi-colon. Yet for the full stop of a sentence, he retains the traditional danda (‘stick’) ( | ). Chittadhar must have seen advantages in using this English scheme to guide the reading of the verses, but unfortunately the deployment of these punctuation marks is not consistent and adds some confusion for the reader in dozens of lines.

Nepalese and modern Indian sources

Born into a Buddhist family, a polyglot with a facility for languages, and an intellectual with wide-ranging interests and insatiable intellectual curiosity, Chittadhar drew on many sources. Some were from his rich indigenous Newar traditions. Newar Mahāyāna Buddhism in the last century emphasized specific aspects of Shākyamuni’s life, as the four chief moments are often depicted in the art on Newar caityas, frescoes, and paintings; the Buddha’s return to Lumbini is likewise often shown in art and recounted in song. Finally there is a set of popular narratives that have been especially popular in Newar Buddhist culture into the twentieth century; most prominent among these are the Manicuda Jātaka, Simhalasārthabāhu Avodāna, Mahasattva Rāj Kumār Jātaka, Vishvāntara Jātaka, and Syngabheri Jātaka. All but this last work are cited in Sugata Saurabha.

The full panoply of other textual influences on the poet is less certain. A Newari translation from the Sanskrit Lalitavistara Sūtra, published in 1914 by Pandit Nisthananda Vajrācārya, was specifically cited by the poet in our interviews. This was the first book ever printed in Newari and Chittadhar was certainly well aware of it as indicated in the extract from an interview:

I am a Buddhist by birth. So I need not explain why I revere the Lord Buddha. I was quite a young boy when I began to learn the devanāgari alphabet and it so happened this was about the time when the Reverend Nisthananda published his Newari translation of the Lalitavistara that recounts the life of the Buddha. Our Buddhist priests used to come to our house and recite a few pages of it and they left each instalment with us so I could read it. As it was in devanāgari and printed, I had no trouble reading it smoothly. Indeed, as I had just learned the characters, I loved reading it. Children derive a lot of satisfaction from reading books in their own native language. Each time I would quickly work through what the priest had brought and I waited eagerly for the next visit and the next installment. By the end of the year I had made it through the whole book. When I grew older I also learned to read Hindi and started to read books such as the Dhammapada, the life story of the Buddha, and others which had been translated into that language.

The ornate style of the Lalitavistara, a work that also ends with the enlightenment of the Buddha, seems to have been its chief influence, as otherwise Chittadhar consciously avoids magic and divinity in his modernist rendering of Sugata Saurabha.

Other works that the poet encountered as a child studying Sanskrit were the Chānakhya and the Amarakośa, the latter a lexicon and collection of aphorisms that was used to educate
India and Nepal’s intellectual and political elite for centuries. The author’s facility in Hindi also opened avenues of additional textual education, as translations by modern Indian converts gave access to texts that remained only in Nepal’s Sanskrit archives. In Hindi, he read the Dhammapada, the Buddhacarita, and others. Then there were the various early publications of the Theravāda modernist Mahabodhi Society that were also in common circulation among Newar Buddhists, so the texts and perspectives on the Buddha from the Pali Canon mediated by this group clearly informed Chittadhar’s awareness.

A major figure informing the poet’s awareness of Buddhism was the Indian scholar Rahul Sankrityayana (1893-1963). A gifted linguist and independent scholar, Sankrityayana was an adventurer who travelled to Tibet in search of Sanskrit texts, a reformer who sought to revive Buddhism in India and Nepal, a political activist affiliated with the Communist Party of India, and a prolific scholar who published over 150 books. ‘Mr. Rahul’ (as Chittadhar referred to him) had special connections to Nepal through meeting Newar Lhasa traders in Tibet. We do not know how many of the scholar’s books Chittadhar had read, but he did say that later while in prison he had obtained a copy of his massive Hindi translation anthology of the Pali sources on the Buddha’s life and many sermons, entitled Buddhacaryya: Bhagavān Buddhakījīvanī aura Upadesha (1931).

Among this long lineage of Buddha biographies, then, we can place Chittadhar Hridaya’s Sugata Saurabha. He, too, draws upon classical sources, but as mediated by their rendering in two vernacular languages of South Asia, Newari and Hindi. Although all the major Sanskrit sources of the Buddha’s biography have been found in the Nepalese monastic archives, there is no evidence that Chittadhar read from them. Instead, the Newari-language Lalitavistara and, most importantly, Rahul Sankrityayana’s Hindi anthology of texts from the Pali Canon and the Tibetan canon were the chief influence on his own composition. He also followed the modernist influences of other twentieth century Buddhist reformers in the Mahabodhi Society and read translated episodes in their magazine accounts in Hindi translation, all from the Theravāda canon.

**Traditional Buddhist sources**

When presenting the Buddha’s teachings, Chittadhar draws upon a large list of texts whose source can be recognized from the content. These include instructions from the Pali Sigalovāda Sutta on meditation, the ‘Fire Sermon’ in the Mahā Vagga of the Pali Vinaya on the pervasiveness of desire in human life, several famous passages from the Pali Dhammapada that highlight forgiveness and distill the essence of Buddhism. We also see the story of the unfortunate mother Kṛṣṇa Gautami sent to find a mustard seed from families untouched by death, the encounter with the courtesan Amrapali to convey the dangers posed by women for monks, a discussion with the royal counsellor of Magadha on the Vrijji people from the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta to explain his vision of a polity made strong by its morality and communal solidarity.

When noting the explicit use of doctrinal terms, we find the poet covering the major themes that monastic teachers and modern scholars would invoke: the foundational practice of dāna, charity to the needy and the sangha; the Four Noble Truths that connect suffering, desire, and release from mortal bondage; the Eightfold Path, the prescriptive teaching that is explained most extensively of all the doctrinal formula in Sugata Saurabha; the five skandhas that identify one of the definitions of an individual devoid of a permanent soul; Buddhist meditation in its trance and mindfulness division.
Sugata Saurabha is also marked by the poet’s extensive awareness of the formation of the sangha, its practices, and the Buddha’s work as leader of a communal spiritual movement who used a system of rules to order it and insure its continuance after his own death. Chittadhar follows traditional accounts describing the formation of the sangha through his first sermon to the five former companions in Sarnath, the conversion of Yasha and entire ascetic groups; and Chittadhar repeatedly emphasizes the missionary ethos of his new order. The most lengthy treatments are devoted to the early conversion of the fire sacrificing teacher Uruvilva Kashyapa and his brothers (202-3), the admission of Sariputra and Maudgalayana, and the renunciation of home and wife by another famous monk named Kashyapa. The ordination of many Shākya men is likewise conveyed, as the poet notices what many modern Buddhists do not, that the Buddha’s ‘inner circle’ (attendant Ananda, Vinaya authority Upali, doctrinal exponent Udāyi) were mostly the Buddha’s own kinsmen.

Sugata Saurabha follows the practice of showing ordained individuals getting new names upon admission and mentions the two proper canonical monastic practices of begging or accepting home invitations for eating, all before noon. Our poet is also well-versed in the Vinaya, accenting its origins with the arising of disputes and the admission of less than stellar aspirants (pg. 216). Loosely conforming to the case study manner of the canonical work, Chittadhar has situations arise that come to the Buddha’s notice, requires his intervention, then leads to the articulation of a new or modified regulation. This includes the rule requiring the permission of parents for the ordination of their children (pg. 234, 280), a rule ordering monks to specialize in construction and supervise when monasteries are being built for them (262), and injunctions to provide medical help to fellow monks (301-2), limit their possessions (297), and aid their own parents in old age (267). Several passages use classical imagery to emphasize that monks should be worthy and serve everyone as a ‘field of merit’ (269) for the laity, mindful of the karmic benefit to the latter through their making donations (261). Upon close examination, even in sections with extended presentations of doctrinal ideas, we can see that Chittadhar in his discussion of the dharma, sangha, and Buddhist history does so with erudition, insight, and in certain places, extraordinary poetical skill.

Cultural encyclopedia and ethnic nationalism

We have shown that Chittadhar Hridaya was a gifted poet working in the Indic kavya tradition, a writer capable of expressing subtle insights and fully developed appreciation of the Buddha’s life using all the tools of Indic aesthetic traditions and Sanskrit vocabulary. He does this while also drawing strongly upon the possibilities of Nepāl Bhāsā, his native language. His talent also was enriched and informed by his encyclopaedic knowledge of his own cultural milieu, as Newar traditions are drawn upon extensively to provide detail and flavour to this life chronicle.

Chittadhar’s Sugata Saurabha conveys major events in the great teacher’s life, a devotee’s tribute to the founder of his religion. Yet simultaneously through his treatment of characters, the description of natural spaces, and by filling in the place and ethnic details that remain unmentioned or underdeveloped in the canonical accounts, we see him also using the narrative to celebrate his own Newar cultural traditions and also, in places, expressing his own views on different political issues, ethical principles, literary life, gender discrimination, economic policy, and social reform. The impressive display of the author’s erudition also includes the very broad range of this Newar subject matter treated. Table II surveys this truly immense Newar cultural encyclopaedia:
TABLE II
Table of specific details of Newar life in Sugata Saurabha

Clothes and Jewelry:
Protective garland for child (*nakshatra*, 33)
Barley powder makeup of young girls
Child’s shirt (*tabalan*, 73)
Dye for women’s feet (*aia*: 160)

Newar Urban Life:
City gates (44)
Rest houses for travellers
Public water taps and cisterns
Shop selling interrupted by procession
Packed crowds at big events

Foods:
Nepalese raspberries (*ishi*, 63)
Himalayan fruit (*āmali*, 248)
Steamed pastry (*yomari*, 74)

Temples:
Decorative motifs include eight auspicious things (*astamangala*, 47), images of 16 ‘offering goddesses’ (*pujādevi*, 47) and ‘eight mother goddesses’ (*astamatrka*, 52)
Lifelike divine human images (48)
Elephant and lion guardians (49)
Refers to Vishnu temple in Budanilakantha (252)
Festival displays of religious pictures (50)

Home Life:
Women spinning and weaving (46-48)
Baby/toddler childrearing practices (71-74)
Women looking down to street life, men flirting (45-46)
Home entranceway decorations (70)
Homes with bay windows, carved struts (44)
*Agam* shrine with family & tantric deities (69)

Rituals:
Welcomeing to home (*lasakus*, 90)
Child *tika* with lampblack (65)
Ritual meals on auspicious occasions (egg and yogurt *sagan*, 12 incidents)
bowl of rice, with betel nuts, coin, offered to teacher, (Kistli 78)
Throwing rice (263)
Five-part Offering (*pañcopacara puja*, 264)
White cloth rug for image procession (263)
*Pañca Dāna*, festival of great donation, including monastic buildings (264-5)*Nāga* healing rituals (313)
Mantra blowing healing rite (*phu-phu*, 313)

Life Cycle Rituals:
Release from birth pollution (55, 136)
Rice Feeding (67)
Presenting Objects to Predict Child’s Career (67)
*Kête Puja*, departure to study with guru (78)
Death Wailing (58)
Shroud, Death Procession, and Cremation (58-59)
Buddha lights *fa’s pyre* (267)

Marriage Rites:
Betel nuts and gifts sent to finalize proposal (106)
Pastry gifts (*lakha*) sent to fix wedding date (107)
Bride opening *lakha* bowl (107)
Men’s procession to fetch bride at home (108-9)
Bride’s ritual farewell, offering betel (110)
Procession fetches bride in palanquin (110)
Bride’s family priest’s oration (111)
Groom’s priest’s oration, declares ‘victory’ (112-3)
Dowry recounted (114)
Bride’s first entry to new home, holding key (117)
Betel nut greeting to groom’s kin (118)
Bride/groom eat from common plate/cups (118)
Groom applying make-up, hair part *tika* to bride (120)
Pair worships at Ganesh temple (121)
Bride’s kin visit to ‘see her face’ (121)

Festivals Alluded to:
Śvāyāpunhi, spring full moon, Buddha’s birthday (37)
*Mohini* (*Dassain*) (162)
*Sauntī* (*Tihar*) (90, 162)
*Gabalwa dyah* worship (167)
Māgh Sankranti processions (292)
Māgh Pañcamī Sarasvatī worship (78)

Religious Music Ensembles
Farmers’ pole twirling group with band (*Dunjya and dhime bājan*, 41)
*Gumla bājan* (41)
*Dhāpa bājan* (42)
*Painta bājan* (47, 54)
*Pañca bājan* (90)

Misc.
Months of the year (219)
Astrology (219)
Farmer practices (64-6)
Pollution and purity practices (11)
From the panoply of Newar musical scales to the component parts of ornate wooden windows, drawing upon awareness of the details of herbs and practices of ayurvedic medicine, and from the details of myriad ritual offerings to the precise renditions of temple iconography, Sugata Saurabha expresses Hridaya’s encyclopedic command of his own richly elaborate culture. But here is more than mere knowledge: we can in examining the verses throughout see that the poet not only knows but has experienced the cultural performances, looked long and hard at Newar houses, and has closely observed how Newars truly live their urban lifestyle from birth to death, in happiness and mourning. What is even more impressive is how the poet includes the world of other castes (brahmins, farmers) and the lives of traditional women (spinning, weaving, cooking, child-rearing, in romance) in his insider’s perspective. All told, the depth of Chittadhar’s commitment to humanize the Buddha’s life is indicated by how thoroughly he so lovingly embroidered the textures of his own society’s urban life into this story.

A voice of Buddhist modernism

Yet the overview is still not complete, since as we saw through the use of Western punctuation, our poet while revering ancient traditions did not incorporate them uncritically in Sugata Saurabha. Even though Nepal in the first half of the twentieth century was closed to outsiders, the literary and business elite travelled and absorbed the changes underway in British India and beyond. It is beyond the scope of this paper even to overview the complex arrangement of Buddhist traditions in the Kathmandu Valley then. Here again, Sugata Saurabha reflects the breadth and wealth of Buddhist ideas in circulation among Newar Buddhists in the first half of the twentieth century, a contending realm of Newar Mahāyāna incorporating tantric practices, a reformist and missionary Theravādin faction in touch with advocates in Sri Lanka and India, the more subdued presence of Tibetan Buddhism mediated by Newar Lhasa traders, and the intellectual, modernist scholarly presence of Indian scholars such as Rahul Sankrityayan who mediated the Pali and Tibetan canonical sources through Hindi translations.

It was Newar Theravādin converts who in Nepal were cultural middlemen of modern, ‘Protestant Buddhism.’ Many in the Newar community responded positively to this important movement and some Newar Buddhists found their efforts to expose the flaws in traditional Newar Mahāyāna Buddhism convincing. Their criticism of the traditional vajrayāna sangha being ‘corrupt’ resonated even more strongly after 1925 due to a destructive dispute that pitted the affluent and influential Urāy merchants of Kathmandu (Chittadhar’s caste) against one segment of Kathmandu’s Shākya-Vajrācārya sangha. Beyond the fallout from this dispute, many other educated Newar Buddhist laity were no longer captivated with the highly ritualistic practices of their older tradition and they were not drawn to the esoteric tantric practices of their forebears. So when the Mahabodhi Society’s writings arrived on the scene in Kathmandu, reformers found an audience and their Theravādin publications certainly were read by the Newar intelligensia of that era, including Chittadhar.

Chittadhar had serious reservations about some of the Theravādin views. But there is also unmistakeable evidence of their reformist influences in Sugata Saurabha in three key areas: Buddhism is about social reform, with an altruistic tradition as its core, that is intended to reform caste prejudice and uplift the entire society; that religion is compatible with rationality, that is, behind historical legends lies a demythologized empirical truth; and that meditation is at the centre of Buddhist spirituality and is for everyone. So Sugata Saurabha
has no miracles. These Buddhist modernist influences are explicit in passages scattered throughout *Sugata Saurabha*. This commitment to naturalistic explanation is visible in the depiction of the Great Renunciation, where it is lightning, not any divine intervention, that springs Siddhartha from his father’s palace.

The poet’s belief in natural law not only finds him subtracting miracles but also adding an original set of very human stories to the Buddha’s biography. Again filling in parts of the story not found in his canonical accounts—and unique in the history of this tradition to our knowledge—is his description of the time when Siddhartha and Yashodharā were first married. Many small and large vignettes are detailed in their ‘honeymoon’ years before Gautama encountered the ‘Four Passing Sights’ and left the palace. These brief romantic narratives, though perhaps owing something to early Indian cinema, are done sensitively and indirectly, through the lamentation of his wife after his departure when the poet has her reminisce about places and happy events that took place. It is one of the eight scenes illustrated in this work. Through these scenes, Chittadhar develops a strong portrait of Siddhartha as a kind and charming man in love.

*The place of Mahāyāna Buddhism*

A final topic of interest might be the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna elements incorporated into the great poem. From our interviews with Chittadhar, we know that he found some of the criticism of the Newar Buddhist priests to be deserved and that he valued what he learned from the Theravādin reformists and their publications; but it is also clear that he also could see every reason to separate the twentieth century declining Newar elite from the Mahāyāna culture most of them poorly commanded. In other words, Chittadhar still imagined that his native Newar Buddhism was once at the centre of a great cultural tradition, but that the new rulers and intra-Newar discord had seriously weakened it.

There are numerous examples of Chittadhar’s employing what is distinctively Mahāyāna terminology in *Sugata Saurabha*. His treatment of Buddhist doctrine almost always uses Sanskrit, not Pali terms. When referring to the bodhisattva’s natural meditation during a royal ploughing ceremony, he uses the term ‘śunyā’ to describe the boy’s apparent absence; in the chapter-long treatment of the Buddha’s leading his kinsman Nanda through a journey to a Tibet-like land to recognize the worthlessness of attachment to his wife or any beautiful woman, the poet explicitly demonstrates the Mahāyāna virtue of a teacher’s compassion-driven upāya, ‘skilful means.’ Similarly, the poet’s use of the Sanskrit term ‘dāna pāramitā’ in the explanation of the jātaka story of King Vishvantāra could also signal his invoking his Mahāyāna orientation.

The poet also conveys his sense of the Buddha’s employing tantric teaching methods, an influence from his own community’s esoteric traditions, most importantly that based on the Cakrasamvara Tantra. Explaining the Buddha’s unusual action of exposing Nanda to the most beauteous celestial maidens, an experience that ultimately directs him to seek and realize final enlightenment. A similar seeming reference to Vajrayāna tradition follows when the Chittadhar poetically describes Nanda’s moment of sambodhi as ‘attaining the dear prajñā woman,’ juxtaposing this transcendent ‘woman’ with the earthly and celestial women Nanda had earlier wished to possess sexually and for profane pleasure.
In this paper, I introduce an extraordinary poetic biography of the Buddha composed in Newari, *Sugata Saurabha* by Chittadhar Hridaya, the pre-eminent literary figure of twentieth century Nepal. For the Kathmandu reader, then, *Sugata Saurabha* in many places reads like James Joyce's *Ulysses* linguistically and with wide-ranging shorthand references to Hindu, Buddhist, Indic aesthetic traditions all in play. The whole reveals as does no other modern Newar work, to what extent the Indic cultural world is alive for the traditional Newar elite.

A work blending a rich awareness of Indic textual culture, Brahmanical and Buddhist, composed masterfully using a host of rhythmic patterns and end rhymes. A work that—where the classical sources are silent—creatively inserts details of the Buddha's material life and urban culture drawn from the author's own Newar context. Here is an epic that eruditely describes the Shakya sage's life and teachings, inflected through a prism of modernism. Here is a work composed in prison, smuggled out, and with yet another more subtle purpose of defending the integrity of his own cultural traditions, offering a positive vision of Newar life and for Nepal as well. *Sugata Saurabha*, in our view, deserves a place among the great literary accomplishments of Buddhist history and modern world literature.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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THE DREAM OF KANCHEJONGA: 
THE ROERICH FAMILY AND HIMALAYAN STUDIES

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The paper sets itself three main objectives: First, I want to present in one place the basic biographic information about all the members of the Roerich family. Second, I want to give a topical guide to the recent Roerich studies in Russian, a kind of bibliographic help for those wishing to use Russian sources. Third, I want to give a capsule summary of the Roerich family’s Sikkim connections.

The bibliographic part of my work is based on my trips to St. Petersburg in 2004 and to Moscow in 2005. I am certain many interesting items have been published subsequently, but other than going to Russia, it is very difficult to collect the recent bibliographic information on Russian books in Poland.

I. THE ROERICH FAMILY - BASIC BIOGRAPHIC DATA

There are at least three major works on Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947) currently available in English—Decter 1989 and Archer 2005 (the latter unavailable to me in Poland) and Drayer 2005—but they do not say much about the Roerich family history.¹ The name ‘Roerich’ has been variously explained as Old Scandinavian ‘rich in glory’, or else as a derivative of the Russian dynastic name ‘Rurik’ (the dynasty that ruled Russia from 882 until 1598). Both interpretations do not seem to rest on any solid foundations. What is known for sure is that the family had Latvian, and probably German, roots. Nicholas’ father, Konstantin Fyodorovich Roerich, was born in 1837 in Gazenpote, Kurlandia (now Ajzpug, Latvia).² He was the son of Fridrich Johann Roerich (1800-1905, an amazing case of longevity) and Lizeta Konka (date of birth not known, died before 1852). In 1860, Konstantin F. Roerich married Mariya Vasilievna Kalashnikova (1844-1927), daughter of Vasiliy Ivanovich Kalashnikov (1824-ca.1848?) and Tatyana Ivanovna Kalashnikova. Konstantin F. Roerich read law at the Petersburg Technological Institute (though he did not complete the course of studies), then had several government jobs including some years (1859-1867) in the Central Office of Russian Railways, and finally, on 1 December 1867, opened his own notary office. His wife descended from a well-to-do merchant family of the city of Ostrov, Pskov district. He died in Petersburg in 1900.

Not many books on Nicholas Roerich mention the fact that he had an elder sister and two brothers. Lydia Konstantinovna Roerich (born 1867, died after 1931), was the wife of a medical doctor A.D. Ozerov. Not much is known about her. Vladimir K. Roerich (1882-1951) studied at the Physical-Mathematical Faculty, Petersburg University, in 1902-1909, but resigned on his own request without completing his studies. During the Civil War he was on the White side, fighting in Mongolia as the camp commander of Baron Ungern’s Asian Mounted Division. He spent most of his later life in Harbin, where he died. Boris K. Roerich (1888-1945), Nicholas’ youngest brother, was an architect and a well-known painter. In 1926 he met Nicholas (during the latter’s much-discussed visit to the Soviet Union) and helped
him to organize the Central Asian Expedition. The brothers met in Moscow, Novosibirsk, and finally in Mongolia.

Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich, the most famous member of the family, was born in St. Petersburg on 27 September 1874. The basic facts of his studies and life are well-known and need no repetition. However, there are a few points that I think need some space. Much misunderstanding seems to cover the reasons for his leaving Russia. It is well known that he moved to Finland in 1916, the decision motivated by health problems. Decter (1989, pp.109-110), states that Roerich had been seriously ill with pneumonia and the doctors told him to move to a place where the air was healthy. From 1906, Roerich was the Director of an Art School in St. Petersburg, so he kept visiting the city as often as his health allowed; let us not forget that he prepared his last will in 1917, so his health must have been really bad. Only in this context may we discuss his reactions to the two Russian revolutions, on which subject there is much confusion.

No matter what his political preferences might have been, Roerich was obviously interested in the fate of his Art School, of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, not to mention his family. At least two of his friends from the university, Georgi Chicherin (1872-1930) and Anatoli Lunacharsky (1875-1933) held government posts of the highest rank in the Russian, and then Soviet, Governments: Chicherin was the Foreign Affairs Commissar in 1918-1930, while Lunacharsky spent the years 1918-1929 as the Culture Commissar; ‘Commissar’ being equal with ‘Minister of’. The new Russian government seemed to be interested in the preservation of Russia’s historical monuments, which was Roerich’s major interest since at least 1903. It is known (cf. Decter 1989, pp.109-110) that in early 1918 he was offered the post of Culture minister, which he declined solely on ill-health grounds. It is obvious that staying in the healthy climate of Finland was the only way for him to save his life. Therefore, when the USSR-Finland border was closed in May 1918, Nicholas Roerich became a ‘de facto’ exile, but not a political one. Had his health been better, he would have most certainly played a major role in the process of shaping the culture of the new Russia. He was never ‘an enemy of the Soviet Union’, and his alleged pro-Soviet leanings may easily be explained by his love of, and longing for the motherland no matter who ruled it. It was Russia that had abandoned him, not the other way round.

Some of the popular works on Nicholas Roerich call him ‘Professor Roerich’, and it is known he was referred to as a professor during his stay in the US. There is no doubt that he was a professor—at his own Art School in Petersburg—and that he had the right to the title. What needs explaining is that when the US newspapers referred to him as ‘Professor Roerich’, it was almost always in the context of his Central Asian and Indian interests and studies. Nicholas Roerich was an admirer and a lifelong enthusiast of India, Mongolia and Tibet, but he was no academic researcher in Oriental studies. It was not his fault that the way newspapers used his title seemed to suggest that he was a professor in Indology, Tibetology or Buddhist studies.

The fame of Roerich’s paintings has somewhat obscured the study of his writings, which are voluminous and varied. His early writings in archaeology are now available in academic editions, but so far there is no complete, chronologically arranged edition of his complete writings, though reprints of his books abound, as a visit to any bookshop in St. Petersburg or Moscow will demonstrate. This is no place to discuss his writings, but let us remember that Roerich the writer, just like Roerich the painter, wanted to appeal to feelings rather than to the cool reason of his readers. As stated above, he was no scholar in Oriental studies, rather an academically-inclined mystic, with a sharp eye for details, but one who saw only what he
wanted to see. However, there is no doubt that his writings present a vast panorama of one of the most amazing minds of the twentieth century and are a treasury to anyone interested in the reception of Indian and Tibetan cultures in Russia and the West. Now that most of them are available, they deserve all the attention they can get.

Let us now turn to Helena Roerich (1879-1955). Born Elena Ivanovna Shaposhnikova, she came from the same background as her future husband—the rich upper strata of the society. Her father, Ivan Ivanovich Shaposhnikov (1833-1898) was a well-known architect, while her mother, Ekaterina Vasilievna Golenishchev-Kutuzov, was the grand-daughter of the famous Marshall Kutuzov (1745-1813). I know only one book devoted exclusively to her—Klyuchnikov 1991. All the stories about her agree that she wanted to remain in the background, which seems further supported by the fact that when she wrote a work of her own, she would always publish it under a pen-name or anonymously.

As far as I know, there is hardly anything about Helena Roerich in English. Decter (1989) is more an annotated album than a biography, while Drayer (2005), though more informative, is badly edited and lacks sufficient footnotes and references. On the other hand, any book about Nicholas Roerich is also a book about Helena. It seems certain that it was Helena who introduced Nicholas to Theosophy, though university scholars writing about the Roerichs often try to overlook their mystic leanings.4

The publication, in between 2000 and 2002, of some of Helena Roerich’s manuscript works, selections from her private diaries, and an admiring memoir by a close friend, has stirred up violent controversies the dust of which has not settled so far. More about it will be said when this paper comes to the Agni Yoga matters. One thing seems obvious—few great men have expressed their debt of gratitude to their wives so movingly as Nicholas Roerich did in 1941,5 on the occasion of their fortieth wedding anniversary.

Nicholas and Helena got married in 1902. Their first son, Yuri Nikolaevich Roerich (1902-1960) was one of the most famous Oriental scholars of the twentieth century. I have published elsewhere a more detailed account of his life and works, so let me not repeat it here.6 All the works by and about him that postdate my work of 1996 will be listed in the bibliographic section of the present paper.

Svyatoslav (sometimes written Svetoslav) Nikolaevich Roerich, the younger son of Nicholas and Helena, was born in 1904 and died in 1993. He was an architect by education, having studied at Harvard, Columbia and MIT. Unlike his elder brother, he did not participate in the Roerich Central Asian Expedition. He inherited his father’s gifts as a painter, and his fame as a painter has pushed his other accomplishments into a background they do not deserve. Few remember now that he presented his own ballet in Boston in 1922 or that he directed the botanical researches at the Urusvati Institute of Himalayan Research. In 1945 he married Devika Rani, a relative of Rabindranath Tagore, one of the most famous Indian actresses known until today as ‘the First Lady of the Indian screen’. They had no children. Svyatoslav Roerich visited the Soviet Union several times starting in 1960, but nobody accused him of being a spy yet. He lived in Bangalore, Karnataka State, in South India. His paintings are distinctly individual, though they share the aura of majesty and mysticism with his father’s works. His few published works and the works about him will be listed in the bibliographic section of this paper.

Devika Rani was born in 1908 and died in 1994, having outlived her husband by one year.7 With her, alas, the Roerich family came to the end, though some relatives are claimed to exist from time to time.
II. RECENT LANDMARKS OF RUSSIAN ROERICH SCHOLARSHIP - A BIBLIOGRAPHIC GUIDE

1. General

I.S. Anikina & A.P. Sobolev: Pamyatnye mesta sem’i Rerixov v Sankt-Peterburge. Kratkiy putevoditel’, Obrazovanye-Kul’tura, St. Petersburg, 2003. This is a guide to all the places in St. Petersburg connected with the Roerichs, but it also contains brief biographies of all the Roerichs, with much data unavailable anywhere else, with references to sources. A small work of barely 64 pages, but truly indispensable.

2.1. Nicholas Roerich - bibliography of his own works

V.I. Shishkova, M.S. Buxarkova & N.K. Vorob’eva: Nikolay Konstantinovich Rerix, Biobibliograficheskiy ukazatel’ k 125-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya, Mezhdunarodnyi Centr Rerixov, Blagotvorit’el’nyi Fond imeni E.I. Rerix and Master-Bank, Moscow 1999. Contains a detailed biographic sketch, a chronology, and the complete list of Roerich’s writings with details concerning the first and subsequent publications. Concludes with indices in Russian and English. Unfortunately, it does not include even the most famous paintings.

2.2. Nicholas Roerich - catalogue of paintings

No separate work of this kind was available in 2005, but a fairly complete list of Roerich’s paintings is given in Kuz’mina (1978), pp. 259-304.

2.3. Nicholas Roerich - biographies and studies, in chronological order


1978: M.T. Kuz’mina (Ed.) - N.K. Rerix, zhizn’ i tvorchestvo, Izdatel’stvo Izobrazitel’noe Iskusstvo, Moscow. A collection of studies including the most complete catalogue of Roerich’s paintings that I know of.


2002: Z.G. Fosdik – Moi uchitelya, SFERA, Moscow. Subtitled Vstrechi s Rerixami, po stranitsem dnevnika 1922-1934. This book is written by one of the most devoted friends and admirers of the Roerichs, herself a Theosophist. It offers lots of interesting details, but should be read with caution—it is a diary by an admirer who believed every word the Roerichs said, and this understandable enthusiasm is the book’s greatest weakness.

2003: M.L. Dubaev - Rerix - publ. in the series Zhizn’ zamechatel’-nyx ludey by the Molodaya Gvardiya publishers, Moscow. A full biography by the writer of 2001, with an interesting supplement on Helena Roerich and excellent footnotes, but—alas! —no index.
2.4. Richard Rudzitis' works on Nicholas Roerich

Richard Rudzitis (1898-1960), a well-known Latvian poet, was a lifelong friend of the Roerichs and one of the most tireless propagators of the Pax Cultura movement. His few works available to me are listed in the order of publications.

1999: Soznanie Krasoty spasyat, Svet, Novosibirsk. The title reads in English The Understanding of Beauty shall Save. The book is an extremely interesting study of the philosophy of beauty in the works of Nicholas Roerich.

2000: Pis’ma s gor. Perepiska Eleny i Nikolaya Rerixov s Rixardom Rudzitisom, 2 vols., Lotats’, Minsk. This is a complete edition of letters exchanged between Rudzitis and the Roerichs in 1932-1937 (vol.1) and 1938-1940 (vol.2).


2003: Dnevnik 1930-1960, Zvezdy Gor, Minsk. This is Richard Rudzitis’ personal diary.

2.5. Nicholas Roerich's contributions to archaeology and ethnography

Nikolai Rerix: Arxeologia - published as volumes II and III of Peterburgskiy Rerixovskiy Sbornik (bound in one volume), Samara, Agni Publishing House, 1999. This is a one-volume complete edition of Roerich’s archaeological studies—almost 800 pages—richly illustrated and with excellent bibliography.

O.V. Lazarevich, V.I. Molodin & P.P. Labetskiy; N.K.Rerix - arxeolog, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Novosibirsk. A collection of studies in Roerich’s archeological writings.


2.6. Nicholas Roerich and Seminarium Kondakovianum

V.A. Rosov: Seminarium Kondakovianum, xronika reorganizatsii v pis’max 1292-1932 - a supplement to Ariavarta Journal, St. Petersburg, 1999. The volume is an interesting contribution to Roerich studies, discussing his participation in the Seminar, later the Kondakov Institute of Archeology, in Prague. Nikodim Kondakov (1844-1925) was one of Russia’s most famous art historians. The book chronicles the seminar he started in Prague in the 1920s, reorganized as the N.Kondakov Institute of Archeology in 1931.

2.7. Nicholas Roerich in the Russian Newspapers

A.P. Sobolev (ed.): Nikolai Rerix v russkoi periodike 1891-1918, 000 Firma Kosta, St. Petersburg, 2004. The first volume of the collection of pieces about Roerich in the Russian periodicals. Contains the index of names, though not including place names.

2.8. Nicholas Roerich's Religious Art

There are many albums of Roerich’s paintings available at present, and it would serve little purpose to list them all, also because most of them understandably repeat the same items again and again. I have decided to include the following three titles because they focus on
that part of Roerich’s heritage that is still not widely known. This, of course, is a subjective choice that may be questioned.


2.9. Nicholas Roerich and Tibet

This is a highly controversial realm and much of the published data can hardly be scientifically verified. I have listed three works which are both scholarly and on the subject.


A.I. Andreev: *Xram Buddy w Severnoi Stolitse*, second edition much enlarged, Nartang, St. Petersburg 2004. This is a complete history of the Buddhist Temple at St. Petersburg, opened in 1913, in whose construction and layout Roerich was much involved and which was probably his first direct contact with Buddhist monks of Mongolia and Tibet. With good notes and a name index, but no bibliography. The first edition of this exceptionally important work, published in Ulan-Ude in 1992 under a slightly different title, *Buddiyskaya svyatynia Petrograda*, had a detailed summary in English, not repeated in the second edition.

T.M. Grekova: *Tibetskaya medicina v Rossii*, Aton, St. Petersburg 1998. As the title indicates, this is a history of Tibetan medicine in Russia, but it includes an interesting chapter on Nicholas Roerich. The book has excellent reference footnotes but no index.

2.10. Materials for the History of the Roerich Central Asiatic Expedition

N.Dekroa (=N.V. Kordashevskiy): *Tibetskie stranstviya polkovnika Kordashevskog (s ekspeditsiey N.K.Rerixa po Tsentral’noi Azii)*, Aiurveda Press, St. Petersburg 2000. Nikolai Viktorovich Kordashevskiy (1877-1945) was one of the most important members of the Roerich Expedition, being responsible for security matters. This is his own Expedition diary.

Riabinin, K.N. *Razvenchannyi Tibet* (Tibet Dethroned), Amrita—Ural, 1996. This book is quoted by A. Andreev in his 2003 *Soviet Russia and Tibet* (Brill, Leiden, see Bibliography p.409). I have not had access to Riabinin’s book. He was the expedition’s doctor.

Portniagin, P.K. *Sovremennyi Tibet, Ekspeditsionnyi dnevnik 1927-1928*, Aryavarta journal 2, St. Petersburg, 1998: I have not had access to this work, either, and I owe the reference to Andreev op.cit., p.409.
3.1. **Helena Roerich - general**

Sergey Klyuchnikov: *Provozvestnitsa epoxi ognya. Povest'-issledovanie o Elenye Ivanovny Rerix,* Sibirskoe otdelenye izdatel’stva Detskaya literatura (Siberian branch of the Children’s literature Publishers), Novosibirsk 1991. This seems to be the only book-length study of Helena Roerich’s life (at least, until 2004). Contains many interesting plates and a bibliography of Helena Roerich’s works, the only one of its kind that I know of.

3.2. **Helena Roerich’s works published by herself**

As it has already been mentioned, all of Helena Roerich’s works have originally been published anonymously or under pen-names. The three known pen-names used by her are here given in inverted commas.


‘N.Yarovskaya’: *Prepodobnyi Sergiy Radonezhskiy,* Paris 1934.

The first two are easily available in English: *Foundations of Buddhism* and *On Eastern Crossroads,* both now published under the author’s real name. The important study of St.Sergiy of Radonega does not seem to be available in any other language than Russian.

From the bibliographic point of view it is important to remember that one of Helena Roerich’s pen-names—‘Zh.Sent-Iler’, or ‘Josephine Saint-Hillare’—should not be confused with the French scholar Jules Barthelemy Saint-Hilaire (1805-1895), whose book *The Buddha and his Religion* is available in the 1997 reprint by Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi. In many bibliographies he is listed as J. Saint-Hillare.

3.3. **Helena Roerich’s translations from the English**


Elena Petrovna Blavatskaya: *Taynaya doktrina,* 2 vols., Riga 1940. This is her translation of Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine.* I have not had access to it, and I owe this reference to Klyuchnikov 1991.

3.4. **Editions published after Helena Roerich’s death**

E.I. Rerix: *Putyami duxa,* SFERA, Moscow 2002, edited and annotated by D.N.Popov. This is a one-volume edition of the three works listed under 3.2. above, to which is added a previously unpublished collection of legends *Legendy Istiny* and two collections of essays *Put podviga* and *Uchites’ lyubit*, also previously unavailable.

3.5. **Works from Helena Roerich’s manuscript remains**

Elena Rerix: *U poroga novogo mira,* MCR (=Mezhdunarodnyi Centr Rerixov), Moscow 2000, with an excellent index of personal names (but no index of place names). The
volume contains the following works, all previously unavailable: *Sny i vidyenya, Ognennyi opyt, Stranitsy dnevnika E.I. Rerix, Kosmologicheskie zapis* i and a selection of letters *Izbrannye pis'ma.*


The above three volumes contain selections from Helena Roerich’s private diaries kept at Amherst College, US. They throw a lot of light on the origin of the Agni Yoga and the family relations within the Roerich family. The publication of these volumes stirred up a violent controversy which has not quite settled by now. All the three volumes were published by SFERA, Moscow 2002.

3.6. *Helena Roerich’s letters*

When the international organization of the Pax Cultura and the Agni Yoga movements was established, Helena Roerich took upon herself the day-to-day contact with the Roerich groups all over the world and answering their countless questions. Her letters are invaluable from both the philosophic and historical points of view, containing *inter alia* the spiritual history of the international Roerich movements.

Elena Rerix: *Pis’ma,* 2 vols, Riga 1940. For many decades this was the only Russian-language edition of her letters. Some sources indicate that there was the third volume, but I have never seen it, nor have I seen any references to it.


I have been told that vol.7 was published in 2007, but I have not yet seen it. This is a long-awaited, complete edition of Helena Roerich’s letters, with numerous fascinating plates and superb indices of names (but alas, as it is usual with the MCR, no indices of place names).

Let me add that the two-volume collection of *Letters of Helena Roerich* is easily available in English, but it contains no plates and an index that leaves much to be desired.

3.7. *Helena Roerich’s philosophic and pedagogical views*


This is the only work known to me that discusses the question of Helena Roerich’s ideas on pedagogy and philosophy. It closes with a bibliography of 117 items, but has no indices. As both Helena and Nicholas Roerich paid a lot of importance and attention to matters of education and reforms of educational institutions, and the subject seems to be almost forgotten in English, let me quote the one English work that gives a lot of space to Nicholas Roerich’s ideas on these matters:

Garabed Paelian, *Nicholas Roerich,*1974, no publisher given, but at one time available from Aquarian Educational Group, P.O. Box 267, Sedona, Arizona 86336,USA.
4.1. Yuri Nikolaevich Roerich - bibliography

Yuriy Nikolaevich Rerix - biobibliograficheskiy ukazatel', MCR, Moscow 2002. Contains a brief biography, a chronological list of Yu. Roerich’s publications, an index of titles in Russian and English, and an index of names in Russian.

4.2. Yuri N. Roerich - works published since 1996. (See also 4.5. below.)

As I have published elsewhere a detailed study of Yu. N. Roerich’s life and works, see Gdok 1996, I shall now limit myself only to the subsequent publications.

Yu.N. Rerix: Buddizm i kul’turnoe edinstvo Azii, MCR, Moscow 2002. A collection of papers in Tibetan and Buddhist studies. Contains a number of plates, also in color, but no indices.


4.3. Letters


4.4. Memoirs

Richard Rudzitis (see 2.4. above): Vstrechi s Yuriiem Rerixom (Meetings with Yuri Roerich), Lotats’, Minsk 2002. Yet another major contribution by Rudzitis to Roerich studies, with a few plates and an excellent index.


4.5. Yu. N. Roerich’s paintings

Not many students of Yuri Roerich’s scholarly works know that he, too, inherited his father’s gift for painting. The Moscow MCR has issued a collection of several small portfolios of Yuri Roerich’s paintings and drawings, of which the only one available to me is vol.8, 2002. The sixteen reproductions, including four in full color, show that Yuri Roerich’s style of paintings differed greatly from his father’s and his brother’s one.
Yu.N. Rerix: _Po tropam sredinnoy Azii_, Agni Publishing House, Samara (? place not given, date not given). This is a beautifully designed Russian translation of _Trails to Inmost Asia_ (first edition Yale 1931). I have decided to include this title here because of one special reason. The volume is beautifully illustrated in color, and though most of the plates are the paintings by Nicholas Roerich, there is at least one—titled _Son Vostoka_ or _Dream of the East_—that seems definitely not Nicholas’, and since Svyatoslav Roerich did not participate in the expedition, the only candidate for the picture’s authorship is Yuri. The picture can be found in the insert of plates between pages 256 and 257, on page 3 of the insert (the plates are not numbered). 8

5.1. **Svyatoslav Nikolayevich Roerich - general**

There does not seem to exist a biography of his yet, but the following two items may be partial substitutes.

_Vospominaniya o S.N.Rerixe (= Remembering S.N.Roerich)_ - a collective volume, MCR, Moscow 2004. Contains a number of plates but no index.

_Mgnoweniya zhizni vypusk 1 (= Glimpses from Life), 000 [sic] Firma Kosta, St. Petersburg 2004_. The first volume of a series of studies in S.N.Roerich’s life and works. I have not seen or heard of any subsequent volumes of this series.

5.2. **Svyatoslav N. Roerich - letters**

Svyatoslav Nikolayevich Rerix: _Pis’ma_, vol.1 (1912-1952), MCR, Moscow 2004. The first volume of the collected edition of Svyatoslav Roerich’s letters. Numerous fascinating plates, a superb index of names, no index of place names. I have been told that the second volume was published in 2005 or 2006, but I have not seen it yet.

5.3. **Svyatoslav N. Roerich - paintings**


5.4. **Svyatoslav N. Roerich - literary works**


Svetoslav Roerich: _Art and Life_. International Centre of the Roerichs (=MCR), Moscow 2004. A one-volume edition of the four books of reflections upon what the title defines, followed by 124 pages of plates and a small selection of papers on S.N. Roerich’s art.

6. **Devika Rani Roerich (nee Chaudhuri)**

Unfortunately there does not seem to exist any book about Devika Rani, nor have I come across any references to papers about her, though it seems impossible there are not any. I can do no better than to give references to the three pages devoted to her that I found on internet:
My husband Piotr Klafkowski, who had the honour of being invited by Svyatoslav Roerich to Kulu and spent some time with them at the Hall Estate remembers that unlike Svyatoslav, Devika Rani liked to talk about her young days.

7. Additional

D.N. Popov. (Ed.): Derzhava Rerixa, Izobrazitel’noe Iskusstvo (Pictorial Arts Publishers), Moscow 1994. The title could be rendered in English as Roerich’s Kingdom. It is a large (over 400 pages) anthology of essays and studies of Nicholas Roerich’s art and ideas, in chronological order, by both Russian and foreign authors. The book is superbly edited (which seems to be D.N. Popov’s trademark). It contains inter alia the paper by D.N. Popov Literaturnoe naslediye N.K. Rerixa (c katalogom) (that is N.K. Roerich’s literary heritage (with a catalogue), pp.400-430.

Znamiya mira: MCR, Moscow 2005. The volume (Flag of Peace in English) was published to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Roerich Pact. The volume contains the full documentation of the Pact, Roerich’s collection of related essays, and his correspondence on the subject, as well as a number of plates and an excellent index of names. This seems to be the definitive volume on the Roerich Pact so far.

III. The Roerich Family - Sikkim Connection

According to the available chronologies, the Roerichs travelled to Sikkim at least twice; in 1924 and in 1928. Not much of this is reflected in Nicholas Roerich’s ‘Altai-Himalaya’. Granted, the book does contain a chapter titled ‘Sikkim 1924’, but as usual with Roerich’s writings, the chapter is a long string of notes and remarks not always on the subject indicated by the title. Roerich’s chief points of interest were Padma Sambhava, the healing arts and medical plants, and the Sikkimese monasteries. However, the text is dominated by the author’s fondness of the mysterious, the unknown, the only-hinted-at. Roerich sees only what he wants to see—how else could he present Csoma de Koros, whose life is well-known thanks to Th. Duka’s 1885 biography, if not as a mysterious wanderer? Even if Nicholas himself did not know Duka’s biography of Csoma, it is impossible to think that Yuri, the research director of the Roerich Expedition, did not know it. Another example: Roerich writes of the book on Shambhala as if it was a closely-guarded secret. Could he, a graduate of the Karl May German-language college for boys in St. Petersburg, not know that both the Tibetan text and the German translation of that work were published by Albert Gruenwedel in Munich in 1915? And even if he did not know it—which in this context seems plainly impossible, for he devoured any and every reference to Shambhala—is it possible Yuri did not tell him about it?

A somewhat more realistic and believable image of Sikkim can be found in Nicholas Roerich’s Heart of Asia (1929). Here some interesting details may be found, for example Roerich’s remarks on the Tibetan scholar Lama Lobzang Mingyur Dorje, or ‘General’ Laden-La. It seems rather surprising that all we learn about Sikkim from Yuri Roerich’s Trails to Inmost Asia, the last few pages, is that there are rhododendrons and Finnish missionaries there.
Numerous references to Sikkim in Helena Roerich’s letters are almost without exception connected with the great Buddhist Teachers Padma Sambhava and Atisha.

It is a pity—let me repeat myself—that the MCR editors of the monumental edition of those letters did not think it important to add place-name indices to every volume, which means one has to look for Sikkim references by turning all the thousands of pages.

Sikkim, and Kanchenjonga in particular, are frequent subjects in both Nicholas’ and Svyatoslav’s paintings. It seems more than likely that Yuri, too, must have painted at least some sketches in Sikkim, but this is a guess based on the fact the he, too, did paint, and that his paintings are still almost unknown. Besides numerous Kanchenjongsas by both Nicholas and Svyatoslav, the most important artistic contribution in this respect is the series of paintings titled Sikkim by Nicholas Roerich, painted in 1924. Two lists of titles of these paintings are available, but they do not always match. Z.G. Fosdik (cf. 2.3. above), who saw the paintings with Nicholas Roerich himself in December 1924 as Roerich brought them to New York, gives the following list supplemented with Roerich’s own explanations:11

The ‘Sikkim’ series:

1. **Sanga Chelling.** Lama meditating on a stone that cracks if the life in the monastery is unclean (a legend).
2. **Kangchendzhangka.** Kanchenjonga range.
3. **Tashiding.** Tashiding with a monastery on the top.
4. **Siluety.** Silhouettes of the City of the Future.
5. **Pemayangdze.** The lamas’ quarters near Pemayangdze.
6. **Rinchengong.** The Rinchengong Monastery during monsoon.
7. **Gimalai.** Himalayan foothills.
8. **Stupeni k Gimalayam** (no inverted comas). *Steps to the Himalayas.*
9. **Lao-tszy.** Returning from China to Tibet on the holy bull. A bamboo grove.
10. **Tszonkapa.** Meditating on the Mendang Mountain. Bare rocks, as if direct action of spirit.
11. **Padma Sambhava. Mag.**
12. **Put’/Christ.** The legend of his trip to Tibet at the age of 25-7.
13. **Rozhdenei mystiri (The Birth of Mysteries).** Putting together the early Greek and Eastern forms. Rhythm and unity of ocean waves and heavenly clouds. The birth of a new cult.12
14. **Mater mira (Mother of the World).** Based upon a vision. The cult of the pre-eternal Mother of the World. The fish-symbol of silence. The landscape below—‘approaching Tibet’.

There is no complete catalogue of Roerich’s paintings so far, but the most complete list available in print that I know of is given by V.V. Sokolovskiy in Kuzmina (cf. 2.3. above), pp.259-304. The list of the Sikkim series of paintings, given on p.284, reads as follows (I quote only the titles in Russian and the English translations):

1. **Gimalai.** The Himalayas.
2. **Kapli zhizni.** Drops of Life.
3. **Krasnyi lama.** A Red lama.
4. **Mater iz Turfana.** Mother from Turfan.13
5. **Namze.** Namtse.
According to Sokolovsky, all these paintings are in the US. As we see, not all the titles
match in both lists, a point that invites further research.

There is one interesting point that I have not been able to follow. As I was informed by
Dr Anna Balikci of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, and by several interested Sikkimese
participants during the Conference, His Royal Highness Sir Tashi Namgyal K.C.I.E, the
Eleventh Chogyal of Sikkim (1893-1963), was himself a painter, and his paintings—
according to those who have seen them—are executed in the artistic style reminiscent of
Nicholas Roerich. These paintings are said to be in the Royal Palace which I had no
opportunity of visiting, so I cannot say anything more on this point, but it obviously deserves
attention for showing the influence of Roerich on the arts of the Indian Subcontinent.

IV. VALENTIN M. SIDOROV AND THE ROERICH REVIVAL IN THE USSR

Almost all the recent books on Nicholas Roerich mention the invitations of Svyatoslav
Roerich to Moscow by Khrushchev in late 1950s and by Gorbachev at the beginning of the
perestroika. However, the man who is said to have played the key role in the revival of the
Roerich movement in the USSR remains largely unknown in the West. Valentin
Mitrofanovich Sidorov (1932-1998) was a well-known poet, writer and painter. His book
Sem’ dniyey w Gimalayax (= Seven Days in the Himalayas) was first published in mid-1980s.
An account of his trip to India and his meeting Svyatoslav Roerich, it was a sensation and
marked the beginning of the mass interest in Roerich and his achievements in the USSR and
Russia. The book’s title is an obvious allusion to Heinrich Harrer’s Seven Years in Tibet that
was also published in the USSR at about that same time. As far as I know there is no
biography of his but much interesting data can be found in the five-volume edition of his
collected writings published by the Xudozhestvennaya Literatura publishers in Moscow:

vol. 3: Sem’ dniyey w Gimalayax, 2000. (Contains most of his writings on the Roerichs and
penetrating studies of Nicholas Roerich’s poetry.) Numerous documentary
photographs.
vol. 4: Znaki Xrista (Philosophic writings), 2000.
vol. 5: Priaz uchitelya (contains Sidorov’s writings on Russian-Indian cultural relations and

Valentin Sidorov re-established the Peace Through Culture Movement in the USSR and gave
it an official, academic and international footing. As far as I know, the only biographic note
about him in a Western language is given by Wolfgang Kasack in his well-known Lexikon
V. URUSVATI HIMALAYAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

I am not including any summary of the Urusvati Institute history and achievements, as these have been told many times by others, and there are no Sikkim connections. The three published volumes of the Urusvati Journal were reprinted in India with a (hopefully) detailed\textsuperscript{15} introduction, so we can consider this point as sufficiently known.

VI. THE AGNI YOGA OR THE LIVING ETHICS

The syncretic religious-philosophical system known as Agni Yoga, the Yoga of Fire, or the Living Ethics, which is one of the most enduring parts of the Roerich Heritage, has not fared well with scholars. The official biographies of Nicholas Roerich do mention it, but usually in the disparaging context of ‘the occult’ and Theosophy, or do not mention it at all. However, it seems to me, no serious Roerich researcher can afford not to give it at least some attention. It is not necessary to be a Theosophist to study the Roerich Heritage, but if they believed it and regarded it so highly throughout their lives, I cannot afford not to pay attention to it. Since there are Agni Yoga Societies in many countries, the most important Western one being in New York,\textsuperscript{16} and the text of the Agni Yoga is easily available in a number of languages, I will not go into details.

The Agni Yoga is a series of 14 small volumes published between 1924 and 1938, originally in Russian, but soon translated into English. In today’s terminology we could call it a ‘channeled’ text. This is no place to discuss what is known about the actual ‘channeling’\textsuperscript{17} of it, but the process is generally believed to have begun in the United States in the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{18} It is also generally acknowledged that it was Helena who played the most important role in the actual process of channeling, though exact details are not known.

Agni Yoga is a syncretic system of spiritual self-perfection that seems admirably adjusted to the needs of the modern big-city man. After all, it is not so easy for a Western man to ‘renounce the world and go to a cave hermitage’, the well-known model presented by the Indian classics of Vedic religion, Buddhism or Jainism.

We can distinguish different strains in Agni Yoga: Vedic religion, Buddhism, Jainism, Russian Orthodox Christianity, Islam, some Judaism, references to Akbar the Great and his Din-i-Illahi,\textsuperscript{19} to Wladimir Solovyov’s philosophy,\textsuperscript{20} to Einstein and the theory of relativity, to Jagdish Chandra Bose and his discoveries,\textsuperscript{21} and to a number of then-current academic theories and disputes. All of it is masterfully blended into a coherent, unified whole. No matter what one thinks of it from the academic point of view, this system has proven its validity and practicality, and it has helped countless people all over the world. Even if we take it merely as a ‘placebo effect’, its very appeal to the people of all cultures and all countries merits attention.

Agni Yoga has become the focus of a considerable body of literature for and against it. I shall limit myself to a few words on such literature in Russian. There are several commentaries of various kinds on the Agni Yoga, but many of them share the same weak point—too fiery enthusiasm of the respective authors not necessarily coupled with adequate knowledge.
Of the works by Agni Yoga admirers and followers the following three deserve particular attention:

Aleksandre Klizovskiy: *Osnovy mirovozreniya novoy epoki (Foundations of the New Era's Worldview)*, 3 vols., republished by the Vieda Publishers, Riga 1991, and many others. The author lived 1874-1942. He was one of the earliest members of the Roerich Society of Latvia, set up in Riga in 1927.


A.V. Balabanov: *Agni Ioga - Simfoniya*. I have seen only the third volume of this work, which was published by Izdatel'stvo Belovod’e, Moscow 1999. The complete work in three volumes was published between 1997 and 1999. This is an extremely detailed, scholarly concordance-cum-commentary, and its value, even after a quick perusal, seemed exceptionally high.

It is somewhat ironical that the most detailed study of the Agni Yoga currently available, with full sources and references, is the work of a declared enemy of it:


In the chaotic years following the dissolving of the Soviet Union, enthusiasts of Agni Yoga wanted to introduce it in the new Russia’s schools, and the Tserkov (Russian Orthodox Church) fought a long and sometimes quite violent battle against it. This is no place to discuss it, but a full account can be found in the following source:


In the first volume of this collection of various contributions, pp.280-483 and 485-560, we can find detailed studies (authors not given) titled *Russian Orthodox Church against the Roerichs and Calumnies Supported*. In vol.2 of the same collection we can find a study entitled *V poiskax Pravoslaviya. Sovremenniki*, by Aleksandr Vladimirov, pp.170-420 (*In Search of Orthodox Christianity. Contemporaries*). The tone of both volumes is rather emotional and corresponds well to their title which translates as *We Shall Defend the Name and the Heritage of the Roerichs*.

Let me close this paper with words of hope that it might help others to find their way to the numerous and valuable Roerich studies in Russian.

**Acknowledgements**

The paper was prepared under the research grant titled *Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich (1874-1947) and the Problems of Multiculturalism*, which is also the title of my doctoral dissertation under completion. I wish to thank Drs Alex McKay and Anna Balikci and the Board of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology for inviting me to the Golden Jubilee Conference in Gangtok, my first opportunity to present my ideas at an international forum. As the main language of my researches is Russian, I wish to thank my husband for arranging and translating the lengthy manuscript into English, and for adding some of his original research to it.
Note by the author

The original paper concluded with an appendix by Piotr Klafkowski discussing three Roerich controversies: allegations he was a spy, the ulterior motives behind the Central Asian and Manchurian Expeditions, and the question of Roerich believing himself to be the true reincarnation of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. This part is deleted here for reasons of space and will appear elsewhere, but we invite questions and comments on the three points.

Notes

1. Biographies of Roerich - for example Decter 1989 or Messina 2002 - state that when Nicholas Roerich was a small boy, he was profoundly impressed by one of the pictures hanging on the walls at his father's summer residence in Isvara. The picture was of a huge snowy mountain at sunset. Apparently, it became one of his dreams to see this mountain some day. The dream came true in 1923, when he came to Darjeeling and recognized his children's dream - it was Kanchenjonga, which he painted many times. Nicholas' younger son Svyatoslav has also portrayed the mountain many times. I do not know whether Yuri Roerich, too, has painted Kanchenjonga, as his paintings are becoming known only now, but it does not seem impossible.

2. The information about the Roerich family is taken from Pamyatnye mesta..., see II.1. below. This is one of the very few sources containing information about the entire family, not only about Nicholas.

3. Stasulanke 2005, pp.292-92, and Drayer 2005, p. 200, both quote the same passage from a pamphlet (?) written by Roerich in 1919, titled Violators of Art, which was distributed by the Russian Liberation Committee in London. I have not had access to the full text and therefore cannot comment upon it. The two sources do not include any details about the context of the passage quoted or the contents of the entire text. The passage certainly contains strong words, but it seems obvious that had Roerich openly declared himself an enemy of the new Russia, he would never have been allowed to enter it in 1926.

4. Drayer 2004, pp.8-9. I have no access to Carlson 1993, the only history of Theosophy in Russia that I know of. Much related information can be found in Rosenthal 1997.


7. As far as I know, by 2005 there were no book-length biographies of Svyatoslav Roerich and Devika Rani. Cf. II.5. and II.6. below.

8. There may be another possibility. Andreev 2003; p.299, mentions a painting by Roerich: "One of these portrayed a Mahatma wearing a steel helmet, with his face turned to the East, a face strikingly resembling that of Lenin." However, the picture I refer to does not seem to correspond to Andreev’s description.

9. Lobzang Mingyur Dorje is a well-known name, even though I failed to trace the dates of his birth and death. He collaborated with W.Y. Evans-Wentz (1878-1965). He was also a Tibetan lecturer at the University of Calcutta. His Tibetan Reader in three parts still remains very useful wherever Tibetan is taught, and remains in print - it was reprinted by Calcutta University many times, the latest I know of being in 1969. He is mentioned a few times by Yuri Roerich in his letters (cf. Pis'ma, vol. I pp. 142, 184 and 233, see II.4.3. in this paper). He was one of the Tibetan scholars working at the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute.

10. S.W. Laden La (1876-1936), was a native Sikkimese working in Bengal police force, later on employed by the Tibetan Government to organize the police force in Tibet. He is mentioned a few times by David MacDonald in his Twenty Years in Tibet (repr. Vintage Books, Delhi 1995). His full name was Sirdar Bahadur Laden-la C.B.E. A biography of his came out in Calcutta in 2006: A Man of the Frontier: S.W. Laden La 1876-1936, his Life and Times in Darjeeling and Tibet, by Nicholas and Deki Rhodes. Unfortunately, I have no access to it.


12. This is one of the most enigmatic paintings by Roerich. It can be admired at the International Centre of the Roerichs (MCR) Museum in Moscow. According to further explanations in Fosdick 2002, p.730, the picture includes a group of figures from an ancient Greek relief showing the climactic scene of the Afroditian mysteries. The text does not make it clear whether this explanation is by Roerich himself or by the editors.
I have never seen this painting, the only one by Roerich that I know of referring directly to Turfan.

The Mongolian word 'suburgan' became just as accepted in Russian as its Tibetan equivalent 'chodten' in English.


For full information please consult the Agni Yoga Society, 319 West 107 Street, New York 25, N.Y.

Since the publication of Jon Klimo’s monumental Channeling, investigations on receiving information from paranormal sources, revised and updated edition by North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA 1998, this fascinating body of literature has finally stopped being considered ‘untouchable’ by scholars. A word of thanks to Ms. LesLee Alexander for a copy of Klimo’s book.

This is stated by Drayer 2005, p.61. However, the details concerning the history of the Agni Yoga texts are still not fully known. In my opinion they may be of interest, but not of paramount importance. It is obviously more important what the Agni Yoga does say than when and how it was received.


Wladimir Solovyov 1853-1900, one of the most important - if not the most important - Russian philosopher, best known for his writings on free theosophy (not Helene Blavatsky’s Theosophy!) and the uniting of Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity. His brother Vsevolod Sergeyevich Solovyoff (1849-1903; name as spelt in his book in question) was first an enthusiast of Helene Blavatsky and Theosophy, and later one of her major critics. His book A Modern Priestess of Isis, first published in London, 1895, is now available in an undated Kessinger Reprint.

Jagdish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), Indian scholar, author of amazing studies in botany, organic and inorganic chemistry, and biochemistry and biophysics. He is little known today, probably because he still seems centuries ahead of contemporary science. The only detailed account of his life and works in English that I know of is given by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird. The Secret Life of Plants, Penguin Books, London 1975, pp.81-96, and p.323 which gives the bibliography of Bose’s most important works.

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It was in August 2007 that I was able to realize one of my most cherished dreams—a pilgrimage to Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar. This was a journey I had hoped to make for decades. I had regarded it as being focused on these two spectacular terrains that have been invested with enormous spiritual significance in several traditions—Tibetan, Buddhist, Jain and Hindu. However, I soon discovered something that I had not been prepared for—the human spirit that made the journey possible. This was not simply my own will power (which proved to be an extremely limited resource, as I realized in no time) but the support provided by dozens of people, many of whom I grew to know and respect in spite of barriers of gender, class, community and language. It was this that provoked the present exercise. What are the ways in which we can understand the complex, occasionally conflicting experiences and perceptions of the yatras?

I will attempt to address this question by focusing on four accounts written by Indians—the classic account of Swami Pranavananda, the account written in Bengali by Uma Prasad Mukhopadhyaya, that of Veena Sharma, a liaison officer in the government sponsored yatras that have been a regular feature since the late twentieth century and that of Manosi Lahiri, an amateur geographer and explorer, explicitly in the tradition of famed Swede, Sven Hedin.

These accounts will be explored along two axes—one, the significance assigned by the authors to these journeys—whether as pilgrimages or expeditions or a combination of both, and second, in terms of interactions with the local population. The first experience is perceived as being constituted by the sheer beauty of the physical landscape, refracted, partly, through the presence of those who were considered explicitly or implicitly as companions—men and women regarded as capable of sharing or appreciating the transformative moment. While these relationships were occasionally fraught with tension or conflict, there was also an overwhelming sense of a shared, if exclusive world, that comes through.

On the other hand, relations with the local population were often viewed as far more tenuous, and marked by ambivalences and fears that surface in these accounts. It is possible that the convergences and conflicts in these ideas and relationships may help us understand the multiple significances that the yatras has acquired in recent times.

Both Swami Pranavananda and Mukhopadhyaya ventured into Tibet during the first half of the twentieth century. However, while Mukhopadhyaya was able to make the arduous journey only once, and did not attempt the parikrama of Lake Manasarovar, Swami Pranavananda made several trips—the first in 1928 through Kashmir and Ladakh, the second in 1935 through Gangotri, and twice (1936 and 1938) through the Lipulekh pass, and he spent a full year on the banks of the Manasarovar. He made further trips during the forties, completing in all, 23 parikramas of Mount Kailas, and 25 of the lake. His was a quest for
the spiritual as well as the scientific—time and again we find comparisons and critiques of
Sven Hedin’s assessments. He also provided detailed descriptions of the monasteries, their
rituals and the rich and complex iconography developed within the schools of Tibetan
Buddhism. Besides, myths, both major and minor, were systematically demolished in his
account, sometimes with a dry, terse, statement such as the following: “Lion (senge) is said
to be seen near Kailas only by the sages; so it is only a mythological creation.” And a little
later: “Like the mythological animal lion, there is a mythological bird, red crow, which, if
held in the hand, the person holding it becomes invisible.”

While there are strong undertones of nationalism in Pranavananda’s writings, one also
notices an attempt to be even handed. As an example of the former, we may note that he
suggested that Tibetan culture was derived, to a great extent from India. At the same time,
he dismissed the claims of Hindu pilgrims, who identified the statues in the monastery at
Khojarnath as those of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana, pointing out that these were images, all
male, of various Bodhisattvas.

For various reasons, Mukhopadhyaya kept a diary or a journal, but did not write his
account immediately—the first account which appeared was written in 1977, about 33 years
after he had made the pilgrimage, and was reconstructed from his notes, but also from
memory, as he states that several manuscripts were lost by the time he documented this
particular journey. Like Pranavananda, he was familiar with received wisdom, but distanced
himself from the more dubious claims, recognizing, for instance, that mythological
associations to the contrary, the Ganga did not originate in the region of Mount Kailas.

Not surprisingly, regular women travellers are a more recent phenomenon, although
Pranavananda’s text made provision for them. The author mentions a woman from a royal
family who made the journey in 1931, a group of Gujarati women who undertook the yatra
in 1937, as well as a group of women from Andhra Pradesh in 1945. Sharma undertook her
journey in the late nineties of the last century and Lahiri (who has been part of more than one
expedition) visited Tibet during 2000 and 2002. Their accounts and perspectives are not
quite identical. For Sharma, the quest was intensely spiritual. In her own words:

Our yatra is like a journey through these obstacles, each of which provides an opportunity for
inner evolution. In my mind it comes to be visualized as an ascent through three chakras which
represent stages in development along the spiritual path—the basal (muladhara), the middle
(manipura) and the higher (ajna).

For Lahiri, on the other hand, the journey was more in the nature of a geographical
expedition, a quest for the real source of the Sutlej. In spite of these differences in
perspective, it is interesting to explore the ways in which these women described their
experiences—including connections and conflicts with their companions, and their
understanding of the world beyond the frontiers of the Indian nation, in terms that are
somewhat different from those of their male predecessors. We can, if we wish, attribute this
difference to the span of about half a century that separates them from the men. But it also
worth considering whether gender may not at least partially explain these responses.

Expectedly, all four travellers had acquired prior knowledge about the rich mythologies
associated with the celebrated mountain and the lake. In turn, their writings have contributed
to disseminating ideas derived from Tibetan, Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions, as well as
insights from scientific investigations. However, for the present, we will focus not on these
aspects, but on their descriptions of their experiences, their companions, and the
ethnographic accounts that they provide.
The overwhelming beauty of the landscape was invoked by virtually all of the travellers. In the words of Swami Pranavananda:

The perpetual snow-clad Peak of the Holy Kailas (styled Kang rinpoche in the Tibetan language) of hoary antiquity and celebrity, the spotless design of Nature's art, of most bewitching and overpowering beauty, has a vibration of the supreme order from the spiritual point of view.

It is evident that Manasarovar inspired feelings that were as ecstatic:

She is majestically calm and dignified like a huge bluish-green emerald or a pure turquoise set between the two mighty and equally majestic silvery mountains, the Kailas on the north and the Gurla Mandhata on the south and between the sister-lake Rakshas Tal or Ravana Hrada (Langak Tso of the Tibetans) on the west and some hills on the east.

For Mukhopadhyaya, the vision of the sacred mountain was awe-inspiring:

My first darshan of the peak Kailas from a distance. There it is. The backbone of the earth, Mount Sumeru. I gaze as if spell-bound. I tremble with excitement. The pure, deep, unsullied blue of the Tibetan sky. The dusky mountain range spread to the north. And in the centre, the crowning crest-jewel – the peak kissing the sky. As if a Shiva linga adorned with white sandalwood paste. An unblemished crown of snow. Ablaze with the dazzling rays of the sun, the mountain ascetic in deep contemplation.

And this is what Manosi Lahiri wrote:

I loved visiting Lake Manasarovar. For long, I had known that one day I would reach this mountain lake. It was my destiny since my parents had christened me perfectly. My mind had imagined a placid, watery blue sheet, but not this brilliant paradise. It was the largest sheet of water that temperamentally changed colour in a matter of minutes, reflecting the hues of the sky and tracking the warm and cold currents within it. All the blues and greens of the spectrum that one could imagine streaked it. And because it was so enormous, you could walk along its shores for miles without encountering anyone.

So too, was the impact of an extraordinary skyscape:

The dark sapphire-blue of the Tibetan sky is a blue so enchanting, tranquil and inspiring in itself, that it can lull one into ecstasies.

Sharma, likewise, recorded the awe-inspiring beauty of the mountain and the lake, and the intense humility it evokes in the viewer, as follows:

The mountain stands in pristine clarity, its luminosity making the hardness of the rock appear ethereal. We soak in the vision through brimming eyes. Some walk up closer to the lake, others kneel down and prostrate themselves on the earth. It feels like a sacrilege to lift a camera and point it at this magnificent and sacrosanct entity.

She was also overwhelmed by the celestial play of light and colours:

The all-pervading clear light makes even the atmosphere appear luminous. Varying hues of purple, violet, magenta and other unidentifiable colours bathe the mountain. They diffuse its lines, blurring the boundaries between empty spaces and concrete substance. Nothing seems clearly defined as appearances change with the light. The colours, contours and undulations all form part of a moving chiaroscuro.

And at night:
The moon is now almost three-quarters full and sheds a clear cool light on the Lake. It is a wondrous crystallization of a scene I had created in my mind’s eye and longed to actually see. I slip out when all is quiet. The Lake is a sheet of silver at the base of the mountain and the sky above a silent expanse of stars and moonlight. Never before had I seen a sky so brilliant in the middle of the night. Not a single cloud obstructs the sight. The waters, as if in reciprocation to the heavens above, renounce their ripples and merge in the silence. The mountains stand like phantom spectators. Nothing moves.

Others, such as Mukhopadhyaya described the Himalayas in an equally poetic mode. A rough translation of one such description is as follows:

Silent hills rose in layers, spread in all directions, resembling the matted locks on the head of Shiva, lost in meditation. The nearest mountains were draped in soothing green, the more distant ones were wrapped in clear blue. And towering above them was the bright luster of the snow capped peaks, almost touching the skies.

His evocative description of the silence of the nights is also lyrical:

A dark earth and a dark sky. And in the midst of that blackness, the lamp light of countless stars. Everything is silent, motionless, not even a single pulsation. My hand rests on the earth. What a calm, tender feeling. I almost hear the heartbeat of nature, as it is lulled to slumber.

The authors are also sensitive to the profound spiritual resonances of these sacred spaces. Lahiri for instance, observes:

When I first heard the all-pervasive Tibetan Mani Mantra: Om mani padme hum, I literally imagined a sparkling brilliant crystal in a half-open lotus flower with dark pinkish-mauve petals that was borne on the crest of a flood wave.

It is evident that each of the yatris acknowledged the sublime beauty they encountered, groping for words to express a unique experience. It is when we turn to the more complicated social matrix within which this experience was located, that we find a different kind of complexity emerging.

Some of the yatris, such as Swami Pranavananda, represented their journey in terms of a solitary expedition: this in spite of the fact that he recommended that pilgrims travel in batches. Companions virtually never surface in the account. Interestingly, while he named and acknowledged a host of people who supported his yatras in a variety of ways, the “several Bhotia and Tibetan friends who rendered him valuable service in various ways during his several trips to these sacred places” remain virtually anonymous.

In marked contrast, authors such as Mukhopadhyaya provide us with vivid, if somewhat stereotypical representations of their fellow-travellers. In his account, we find Sudhir, a young man who was at once playful and competent, Swami Anubhabananda, associated with the Ramakrishna Mission, the acknowledged leader, revered for his experience, wisdom, tenacity, stamina and courage, Surendra Maharaj, also from the Ramakrishna Mission, a model of the taciturn mendicant, meticulous in matters of organization, and reminding the vacillating flock about their ultimate goal, and Brahmachariji, a somewhat comic figure with pretensions of being a doctor and a chef, handicapped by a physique that barely withstood the hazardous journey.

Lahiri’s account of her companions, Rock, Anita and Medha, is more complex—they are individuals engaged in personal quests—to overcome private grief, to seek spiritual solace, in
pursuit of peace, subject to emotional upheavals, angry, happy, tranquil, exuberant, tired, arrogant, trusting and sad. They have their idiosyncrasies as well, and consequently emerge as more real figures than those delineated by Mukhopadhyaya.

Veena Sharma, as the leader of a somewhat rebellious and heterogeneous flock of yatris, seven women and 22 men, brought them within her canvas through crisp delineations—there were the inevitable fissures between the rich and the not so well-to-do, women and men from different regions and social backgrounds. Most were in turn arrogant, stubborn, foolhardy, resilient, supportive, combative, aggressive, unpredictable, and kind. In spite of these differences, the explicit goal of the yatra cemented the group together, even if the cracks were apparent. She noticed individual idiosyncrasies with gentle irony—one of her flock was missing as they boarded a bus—busy getting a final shave to arrive with a shiny pate, another was sure that the porters had stolen a sheet from her baggage, only to discover it in her luggage minutes later, others grumbled about those inevitable inadequacies—elusive electricity and food that was never quite like that at home. The yatra also threw up almost predictable surprises—professional trekkers nearly collapsed under the strain, whereas less agile pilgrims made the passage, bolstered by their unflappable faith.

IV

However, there were other people whom the yatris encountered. These included those who were recruited as coolies, guides, cooks, servants, and pony men. These peoples were variously classified as Bhotiyas, Nepalese and Tibetans occasionally regarded as differentiated, but sometimes as belonging to one amorphous group—the ‘other’ of the yatris, people whose social norms were construed as different in a variety of ways.

Pranavananda provided graphic details about their utility. He recommended the use of a kshatriya cook, with an assistant, a Brahmin or kshatriya who would fetch water. Cleaning arrangements were supposed to be best left to the pony men. While Pranavananda took the existence of these hierarchies for granted, and absorbed them within his own preferred arrangements, more idealistic or romantic yatris were surprised to note the existence of social distinctions amongst the porters and pony wallahs, who, instead of cooking and sharing food together, scrupulously maintained caste distinctions.

If caste and class were markers of difference between the yatris and their supporters, so were the tasks the latter were expected to perform. For instance, the functions attributed to the servant by Pranavananda were remarkably diverse:

Usually the servant from Garbyang would look to the bedding, bring water, clean vessels, get hot water ready by the time the pilgrim gets up from his bed, collect fuel, help in pitching the tents, help the cook, and above all would narrate local traditions.

Some of these roles seem to persist with remarkable tenacity. Decades later, Lahiri finds her guide and driver providing impromptu entertainment, performing a Tibetan tap dance.

Equally interesting is the detailed listing of the functions of the mate, the head of the coolies in Pranavananda’s account:

He would tie and untie the bedding, get all the loads tied in order and despatch in time, bring water in staging places, clean vessels, and would hold himself responsible for the coolies. He will not carry a big load but would accompany the pilgrim and carry his tiffin carrier, thermos flask, umbrella, and waterproof coat...
Pranavananda also provided a list of Bhotiya guides and merchants, amongst others, whose services were recommended to the would-be pilgrim. Two of them, Kich and Rukum Singh, figured in Mukhopadhyaya's account as well. Pranavananda's description of these two men is instructive. Kich Khampa, we are told "is a polite, calm, intelligent, enduring, smart, jolly, and very serviceable man and a good cook as well."

Mukhopadhyaya's descriptions of these individuals were more detailed. We are introduced, initially, to Bhan Singh, who knows Bengali, and packs and unpacks with quiet efficiency, and is obviously well-versed in pitching and dismantling tents. He has other skills as well, producing, amongst other things jalebis for the weary travellers, and meticulously ensures that everything is ready when the group plans to start off in the wee hours of dawn. These little miracles recurred time and again: when the pilgrims struggled into camp at the end of a long day, Bhan Singh conjured up hot cups of tea within minutes, and he as well as Rukum Singh (described below) dug channels to drain out water to protect the camp when it was threatened by floods.

Rukum Singh, the guide who accompanied the group to Tibet, is described as wearing a military attire, and armed with a gun. He could handle both major and minor adversities: lighting fires to fumigate irritating insects as well as attacks by brigands. As important, he was well-connected: one of his uncles was both a merchant and a patwari, a powerful man, whose support ensured that the yatris were able to enter Tibet. Another uncle, Prem Singh, proved to be an invaluable guide, tracing a virtually invisible track all the way to the snow-bound Lipu Lekh pass in the dark.

Mukhopadhyaya provided a vivid pen portrait of Kich Khampa, the Tibetan guide: his clothes are somewhat worn out, his visage bears the marks of exposure to the harsh environment of Tibet, he is tall and strong, tanned, virtually beardless, with long hair tied in a knot, enormous ear-rings decorated with coral and greenstones and a simple smile. Besides there are three or four others, described in more general terms.

We also learn that as many as fifteen porters accompanied the five pilgrims from Almora to Garbyang. The porters sling their loads from head bands: they are poorly equipped, but cheerful, with a rhythmic gait that inspires the author when he is exhausted. And they are trustworthy: there is no question of keeping an eye on them. Their dedication in the face of danger moves the author to tears when he realized that they had risked their lives through a particularly treacherous stretch of the path simply in order to ensure that the group did not suffer. In another, more dramatic situation, they came to the rescue of Brahmachariji, carrying him on their backs, up a steep slope, when he was completely exhausted and breathless. The author acknowledged that the relationship was not quite monetary, unlike that of the urban hotel: here "the forest dwelling, impoverished people offer the unsolicited, priceless gift of heartfelt service."

It is not only those who were of immediate use who attracted the pilgrim's attention. One notes, for instance that the construction workers did not escape Mukhopadhyaya's notice. We learn about how one of these men died in an accident. Yet, the others continued to hew out paths from the intractable surface of the rock. The sight is dizzying, and humbling, a testimony to both courage and skill.

Yet, there were cultural differences that surfaced: when the porters were overjoyed at finding a chunk of meat, the yatris insisted that it be transported separately, so that the strong smell did not taint their baggage. The theme of smell was in fact a recurrent one and was thought to emanate from the flocks of animals that were an intrinsic part of the lifestyle of these people, as well as from the strong drink that is supposed to have ensured their
survival in conditions of extreme cold. These innuendos slip into a more ambivalent image—of the porter or the guide who drives a hard bargain, typified, in Mukhopadhyaya’s account, in the representation of the patwari who came to negotiate with the travellers accompanied by a group of drunken men. Anubhavananda, who ultimately clinched the deal, compared them to man-eating tigers, supposedly preying on the unwary yatris. The theme of drunkenness recurs in other contexts as well. En route to the Lipu Lekh pass, even the otherwise reliable Bhan Singh and the other porters drank to warm themselves up, and the yatris perceived them as a liability.

If negotiating with the porters was at times a troubling experience, there were other dilemmas as well. Some of these related to the use of beasts of burden. Mukhopadhyaya’s team initially hired four pony men in addition to the porters. We find him agonizing about whether the animal which has borne his weight will remember him, and whether the horseman will pocket all the money, without sharing anything with the mute creature. Does the horse sense the natural beauty, even as he undergoes the unimaginable hardship of lugging a novice rider up and down countless slopes?

Mukhopadhyaya also dwells on points of conflict or confrontation, centering, for instance, on the occasions when the yatris was expected to dismount from the horse. Brahmachariji was a reluctant trekker, and thought he had the right to use his mount all the time, as he had paid for the services. The tension this produced within the group was ultimately diffused, but not before sparks had flown.

And then, there were the problems about horses (and horsemen) not showing up on time, as also of their equipment not being adequate: saddles, stirrups, reins almost never matched up to the expectations of the yatris. Yet, the horsemen are occasionally credited with heroic feats: when crossing the Lipu Lekh pass through snow bound terrain, they unloaded the horses, carried the burden themselves, and opened up a path for the scared animals by spreading blankets to ensure a safe footfall.

Some of the Tibetan porters were viewed less sympathetically—one of them, referred to as ‘Uncle’ is represented as a clown-like figure, even as we are told about how he continued to search for a son he had lost.

Interestingly, when Mukhopadhyaya’s team bade farewell to the porters who had accompanied them all the way up to Garbyang, he mused:

Just as the beautiful mountain stream, the verdant forest, the grandeur of the snow clad mountain do not inspire them with awe or strike them as extraordinary, and they are surprised when anyone finds them remarkable, so too, they help the yatris naturally and effortlessly through a sense of duty, even when unsolicited, regarding it as a routine, regular task that does not deserve special mention.

It is almost as if the porters have been assimilated to the natural grandeur to which they grant access.

By the end of the millennium, the journey that Sharma and her group undertook was under state supervision, if not surveillance. Many of those who were recruited to ensure the well-being of the yatris were drawn from the local population, but the connection was mediated through local government agencies and para-military forces. Yet, support was not rendered mechanically—considerable thought went into the food that was served to the yatris, their comfort, and receiving them warmly.

Sharma’s experience across the border, with the support provided by the Chinese administration, was somewhat similar. One of her guides, who had adopted the anglicized name of Garry, regarded conducting the yatra as a job that he performed reasonably
efficiently, but with a singular lack of enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{77} In marked contrast, Li, her Chinese guide, proved to be caring beyond the call of duty.\textsuperscript{78} She recognizes that to those across the border, she and her co-yatris seemed like “zombies from another planet.”\textsuperscript{79} At the same time, she observes the Chinese attempt to cater to Indian obsessions – water for ablutions was provided outside each room in beer bottles.\textsuperscript{80}

The streamlining, if not straitjacketing of the yatra did not eliminate all uncertainties, however. Sharma struck up a working relationship with her pony wallah, Man Singh,\textsuperscript{81} who, however, disappeared for some time during the critical trek to Lipu Lekh,\textsuperscript{82} and the contractor in charge of transporting the luggage of the yatris proved recalcitrant in a crisis.\textsuperscript{83} And, inevitably, the horse wallahs on the Tibetan side were amused by the ineptitude of the yatris, much to the annoyance of those who expected far more obsequious behaviour from those whose services had been commissioned.\textsuperscript{84} They also made no concessions to the physiques and temperaments of the yatris—alloting a tiny animal to a large man, and perching a frail old woman on top of a more majestic mount.\textsuperscript{85}

At the same time, some of the new recruits apparently had traits that resonated with those recommended by Pranavananda: Lalit Mohan, Sharma’s guide, “keeps up a continuous chatter about the area, the people and anecdotes about earlier groups of yatris.”\textsuperscript{86} Her armed companion, Sita Ram, who belonged to the local constabulary, is described in almost identical terms: “His memory and capacity for narrating stories replete with homilies is unlimited. During flat or downward stretches, he prattles continuously. During ascents, the heavy task of breathing demands full concentration and he is compelled to give his vocal cords a rest.”\textsuperscript{87} However, Sharma also cherishes his knowledge of the local vegetation.\textsuperscript{88}

By the time Lahiri\textsuperscript{89} made her journey, the principal guide was a Tibetan woman, Pema, a woman who spoke English and was, according to the author, dressed ‘immodestly’ by Tibetan standards,\textsuperscript{90} but obviously competent and in charge of complex situations, including negotiating with officials and surviving in an environment where political tensions were palpable. The horses and horsemen also, were, for the most part, replaced by drivers and a Sherpa, Pradip, a Nepalese who spoke Tibetan fluently, a cook named Devi, and three assistants. While the cultural barriers seem to dissolve in a situation where Hindi film music provides common bonds, there is also learning, sharing, and occasional conflict. Tsering, one of the drivers, is conscious about the environment, and scrupulously disposes of waste.\textsuperscript{91} Another of the drivers is extraordinarily skilled: “He never stopped amazing us by his ability to effortlessly manoeuvre the truck through hairpin bends on the mountains.”\textsuperscript{92} In fact, the guides, porters and horsemen appear in a rather different light in Lahiri’s account. Some of them aspire to learn English and go to America, and are clearly as much a part of the globalized world as the group they are accompanying.\textsuperscript{93} Lahiri also manages to persuade them to take her to the forbidden Rakshas Tal, offering a monetary compensation to overcome their religious scruples.\textsuperscript{94} Elsewhere, she notes drily that the difficulty on staying mounted on the yak “gives the yakpa liberty to shove the human in a most crude manner, like pushing up a sack of potatoes. The unspoilt mountain man is most chivalrous in assisting the female of his species when opportunities like these arise.”\textsuperscript{95} However, in spite of these compromises, for Lahiri and her companions, criminals, disease and heavy loads were a thing of the past.\textsuperscript{96} The major challenge was the High Altitude Syndrome.\textsuperscript{97}
The dependence on the support of specific members of the local population, with all its complications, was accompanied by attempts to understand them in more general terms. Some of these were in the nature of anecdotal, ethnographic observations, others were based on academic investigations, both of which were marked by curiosity, occasional admiration, and considerable unease at this encounter with difference in terms of language, customs, class, caste, religions, and nationalities.

In the case of Pranavananda, we may note an explicit drive to ‘improve’ the local population, in both material and spiritual terms. He states, for instance, that “if the wool produce of Tibet is controlled and improved scientifically, Tibet will become one of the finest and biggest wool-supplying countries of the world-market, like Switzerland.” He also notes with approval the efforts of the Dharma Seva Sangha “for uplifting and socially reforming the Bhotia community.” Such preoccupations are absent in the writings of the other authors, who, while they might have shared the perspectives of Pranavananda, tended not to locate themselves on a pedestal above their fellow mortals.

Apart from providing invaluable recruits on whose support the survival of the travellers often depended, in some instances, the local population brought gifts, local produce, as offerings, touching in terms of both simplicity and generosity. Both Pranavananda and Mukhopadhyaya describe these populations at length—in terms of their economic activities, social and cultural practices, and their differences from the plains people. Mukhopadhyaya, for example, has a discussion on the vibrant commerce that thrives across the frontiers. While Sharma occasionally ventures into ethnographic generalizations, Lahiri tends to eschew these formulations. And even when she does, she is generally far more empathetic to those whose lifestyles are diametrically opposed to her own, trying to bridge the gap between different worlds.

Mukhopadhyaya’s account of the BhoTiyas on the Indian side depicts the men as lazy while the women are hard-working. The latter handle housework as well as agricultural activities and knitting and weaving. They are beautiful, but their natural beauty is weighed down with loads of jewellery. Some of these impressions are corroborated, decades, later, by Sharma, who describes the women as deft weavers, clever salespersons, who maintain houses that are meticulously clean. However, the men and women, and their crafts, do not always live up to the expectations of the yatris. Sharma, for instance, notes wistfully that the carpets on sale are not the old, delicate ones, but have garish modern designs.

These generalized descriptions are provided for the Tibetans as well. One of the most succinct of such accounts can be found in Swami Pranavananda’s work:

People, both men and women in general, are strong, sturdy, and hard-working; they have great power of resistance to cold and hardships; they are primitive, cheerful, pleasure-loving, peaceful, religious-minded, very hospitable, contented, but dirty in habits and customs. Lamas and officers are highly cultured and polite. There is no caste system in Tibet. But the smiths are the only second class, with whom the rest of the society does not inter-marry or inter-dine; so every Tibetan is the embodiment of all qualities, beginning from those of a priest to those of a sweeper.

Elsewhere, he notes the fluidity within the monastic order:

Monks take to all callings in life—Gurus, high-priests, corpse-cutters, officials high and low, traders, shepherds, servants, cooks, coolies, pony-drivers, shoe-makers, cultivators, and what not from the highest to the lowest—from Dalai Lama to an ordinary coolie.
However, he also notes that becoming a lama required years of training. If the absence of social hierarchies was viewed with astonishment, so were what appeared to be blurred gender identities. Mukhopadhyaya was at pains to try and distinguish between the men and the women: they appeared, to him, to dress alike and look alike as well. However, he noted items of clothing, jewellery and activities that seem distinctive. More importantly, there was an acknowledgement of an alternative ordering of sexual relations. Pranavananda, for instance, remarked that women “enjoy full social liberty and equal status with men.” He also noted the prevalence of both monogamy and polyandry, suggesting that the latter was justified as a means of preventing an increase of population in a situation where the “struggle for existence is very hard.” Elsewhere, he remarked: “Nearly one third or one fourth of the population are monks and nuns and the standard of morality is low,” justifying this in terms of early initiation, and blaming the system rather than the individual.

These differences in sexual and marital matters were occasionally romanticized. Mukhopadhyaya, for instance, wistfully documented the relatively free sexual mores amongst the Bhotiyas, implicitly contrasting these with the more regulated practices expected of urbans, ‘civilized’ men and women with whom the author identified.

It is evident that the encounter with a population with distinct cultural mores, with little or no notion of the social hierarchies that were taken for granted by the pilgrims, could on occasion, be unsettling. We also find other sources of discomfort. Sharma, for instance, was occasionally uncomfortable with what she describes as pilgrim-watching. Obviously, those who had come to observe were not quite prepared to be examined. At the same time, she recorded, both visually and aurally, the exotic. On such occasions, the thin line between curiosity and condescension is somewhat blurred. Note, for instance, the following statement: “As I flourish on my recorder to hold their sounds, the play becomes more enthusiastic.”

There were other cultural markers of difference that attracted attention. Thus, Mukhopadhyaya describes a camp of Tibetan merchants:

They were wearing dark red robes, their long locks of matted hair were dirty, they wore enormous ear-rings decorated with green stones, with coral necklaces, boots made of coloured wool, and appeared before us laughing, displaying huge, white, sparkling teeth.

For him, the Tibetan dance forms are remarkable only for their lack of aesthetics and rhythm; the music seems monotonous, like the drone of bees.

Contrast this with Lahiri’s perceptions:

I have a faint recollection of once watching lhamo, a Tibetan folk opera, during my childhood in the 1960s in Calcutta. I cannot recall the story but I remember the impressive masks and many feet-long trumpets. There was colour and romance, war and dance. But today I can mostly remember the music…It was, all in all, the ultimate exotica, that left you yearning to see more.

Lahiri is also sensitive to the rigours of survival in the harsh environment of the plateau, noting that “Tibetan farmers used every bit of cultivable land to grow crops.” And a shepherd who insists on posing for a photograph with his daughters reminds her of her deceased husband and her own girls. Overall, she is remarkably sensitive to the lifestyle of the nomadic shepherds, to their skills and resilience in eking out a livelihood from a demanding environment.
In the case of the early pilgrims, local food habits incited a mixture of awe and disgust. Mukhopadhyaya discovered that one of the Tibetans was eating raw meat. He suggests that this was because of the acute shortage of fuel, and that possibly the meat was roasted in the sun. Once again, we find that attention was drawn to the exotic, and an attempt was made to explain or justify it.

Interestingly, food habits figure in Lahiri’s account as well, but with a certain complexity. One of her companions is horrified when a driver returns with a dried leg of yak. At the same time, the Tibetans were aghast when the Nepalese and Lahiri’s companions were planning a meal of fish hauled out of the sacred streams that descended from Kailas, with the fish managing to escape in the melee.

Other cultural practices evoked horror as well. There was anxiety about dirt, vermin and disease. Mukhopadhyaya for instance refers to fleas, described as pishu, microscopic organisms that apparently infested the bedding. While the urbane yatris shuddered at the prospect of using such equipment, the porters are represented as being thick-skinned enough to endure these near-invisible enemies. Lahiri’s companion Rock, likewise, feels “helpless and angry at being left immobile among a group of very smelly and dirty peasants.” Her own attitude emerges as more pragmatic. Tibetans, she remarks, are not obsessive about bathing, and they often use yak butter as an ointment, which may account for their smell.

Underlying some of the early descriptions was the stereotype of the ignorant or the superstitious Tibetan/Bhotiya, often marked by a degree of ambivalence. So, for instance, in his discussion on the mineral wealth of the region, Pranavananda noted:

The Tibetan Government has now stopped the working of borax at that place (Lake Tseti tso) due to the superstitious belief that the mining deity became enraged [even as he observed]: But some of the white deposits are carried by the people in the surroundings and used for washing hands and clothes.

These notions occasionally extended to ideas of medicine. For instance, Mukhopadhyaya recounts an incident where the porters took recourse to indigenous medical practices, in addition to allopathy. While he notes that the patient was cured, he was reluctant to attribute this to any one of these remedies. Interestingly, several decades later, Lahiri, likewise, voices her scepticism about the remedies for High Altitude Syndrome prescribed by her Tibetan guide, Pema, as well as her faith in the curative powers of the bones of the dead fish found at Manasarovar, even as she concedes that the Tibetans have a rich tradition of medical knowledge. Earlier travellers, such as Pranavananda, had also acknowledged the potency of herbal remedies, such as that of a root, known as thuma, which apparently worked as an aphrodisiac.

If there is a degree of ambivalence about cultural and social practices in these representations, these occasionally shade into perceptions that the local population was potentially violent. Once more, such formulations are most explicit in the earlier accounts. Read for instance, Swami Pranavananda’s instructions:

Moreover, at the time when the Indian pilgrims visit Kailas and the Manas, the shores of the Lake are much frequented by nomad robber-tribes going up and down. Those who want to go round the Holy Lake in summer or rainy season, should do so in parties guarded by armed men and they should take good ponies or yaks to cross the rapid rivers.

He also cautions:

While in Tibet, one should not leave any article outside one’s tent, for the children, who often flock around the pilgrims, pilfer them. One should also be very careful about the Tibetan dogs.
especially when approaching Tibetan shepherd-camps and tents, as they are very ferocious and at times tear men to pieces, if they are not alert.

That these precautions were actually taken is evident from Mukhopadhyaya’s account which mentions that three of the men who were accompanying the team were armed with guns.

However, these are not the only images that the pilgrims conjure up. There is the element of the sheer survival and resilience of the population in the stark landscape that is sometimes grudgingly acknowledged. Sharma, for instance, notes:

The Tibetans have devised their own methods of coping with the harsh environment – they just laugh through every situation. In the days to come we see hundreds of Tibetans using transport like ours, laughing their way over bumps and boulders. They giggle childishly at shortcomings – their own and those of others – and there is no malice in their laughter. Our mental stuff is being kneaded into a pliable dough. Those who can maintain a sense of equilibrium are the ones who will go back enriched.

At another level, the travellers recognize the range of spiritual practices. Swami Pranavananda declared, for example:

There are no doubt several lamas who are learned in their scriptures and well-versed in the external tantrik rites and incantation-performances, which are elaborately conducted for days together. People in general are very superstitious, religious-minded, devotional and mystic in temperament.

He also noted with approval the absence of religious bigotry, and the access that people of all sects could have to monasteries.

Interestingly, even the avowedly aspiritual Lahiri succumbs to the powers of the mystic and the monastic, documenting how traditions of science, technology, art and writing were developed and preserved within monastic institutions, remarking, in one instance:

This was Tibetan Buddhism at work, where spiritualism and concern for mankind are intertwined inextricably. Bodhisattvas were real persons here: men and women in flesh and blood, who had reached enlightenment, but voluntarily delayed Nirvana for the benefit of fellow beings.

In fact, the travellers respond to the almost magnetic attraction of Tibetan Buddhism, manifest in the architecture of the gompa and the person of the lama. As Sharma observes:

“the gompa’s small cells and terraces that open out to the vastness of the lake or the sky provide a place for meditation and intense spiritual practices.” Some of the almost miraculous powers these endow the practitioners with are also demonstrated in an episode where a lama, Loh Sam, traverses the path around the sacred mountain at an incredible speed, all in order to return a torch that Sharma had left behind.

Finally, Lahiri, like her predecessors, recognizes the quiet strength of the ordinary Tibetan pilgrim. She notes: “Tibetans complete the kora of Manasarovar on foot in two days. It takes us four to five.”

Lahiri is also sensitive to the enormous cultural divide in Tibet between the “overpowering Chinese presence and subdued Tibetan Buddhism.” She highlights the complexities of this relationship, pointing out how the Chinese now occasionally turn a blind eye to begging for alms, one of the practices associated with Buddhism. She also accounts for the reluctance of the Tibetans to engage in more than routine conversation to fears of surveillance by the authorities and documents that what is at stake in this conflict is not only a way of life, but natural resources, including gold.
The webs that bind the pilgrims to one another, and to those who support their quest as well as those whom they encounter, deliberately or otherwise are at once delicate and complicated. Access to the sacred is mediated through these relationships—of dependence, hierarchies, difference, and trust. While we, as yatris, tend to visualize the landscape in splendid isolation, it is in fact peopled in complex ways. As we have seen, yatris have tended to both acknowledge and deny the humanity of these populations through a range of strategies—by focusing on differences, both real and imagined, by highlighting the exotic, and by occasionally accepting a shared humanity.

Let me end on a personal note. On one of the few stretches when I was trekking along with my fellow yatris and porters, the latter were merrily singing Hindi film songs. Some of the yatris joined in as well. One of the porters turned to me and said: “Madam, aap bhi gaayiye” (Madam, please join us and sing). Totally out of breath, I replied, “Main sirf sun sakti hoon” (I can only listen). He responded, with a mocking smile, “Yeh to bahut ehsaan hoga aapkaa” (you will be doing us a great favour, indeed). It is only when we can begin to listen without condescension to the voices of those who provide us, the privileged travellers, with a glimpse of the divine, that our access to the sacred will be truly complete.

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Notes

5 Incidentally, Pranavananda refers to Mukhopadhyaya’s journey, and the film that was prepared by the yatris, in his account, Pranavananda, p. 226.
6 Ibid., p. xix.
7 Ibid., pp.213-217.
8 Ibid., p.69
9 Ibid., p.71.
10 Ibid., p.59.
11 Ibid., p.66
12 Mukhopadhyaya, p. 2.
13 Pranavananda, p. 186.
68 Ibid., p.63.
69 Ibid., p.47.
70 Ibid., p.63
71 Ibid., p.92.
72 Ibid., p.136.
73 Ibid., pp 155-156.
74 Ibid., p. 98.
75 Sharma, p.42-43.
76 Ibid., p.50.
77 Ibid., p.95.
78 Ibid., p. 174.
79 Ibid., p.101.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., p.54.
82 Ibid., p.90.
83 Ibid., p.86.
84 Ibid., p.125.
85 Ibid., p.133.
86 Ibid., p.65.
87 Ibid., p.66.
88 Ibid., p.73.
89 Lahiri, p.5.
90 Ibid., p.104.
91 Ibid., p.44.
92 Ibid., p.55.
93 Ibid., p.45.
94 Ibid., p.129.
95 Ibid., p.157.
96 Ibid., p.272.
97 Ibid., p.xxii.
98 Pranavananda, p.71.
99 Ibid., p.99.
100 Mukhopadhyaya, p. 96.
101 Ibid., p.54.
102 Ibid., p. 103.
103 Sharma, p.79.
104 Sharma, p.42.
105 Pranavananda, p.52.
106 Ibid., p. 54.
107 Ibid., p.58.
108 Mukhopadhyaya, p.140.
109 Pranavananda, p. 54.
110 Ibid., p.53.
111 Ibid., p.55.
112 Ibid., p. 57.
113 Mukhopadhyaya, pp. 70-71.
114 Sharma, p.53.
115 Ibid., p.78.
116 Mukhopadhyaya, p.91.
117 Ibid., p.178.
118 Lahiri, p.xiii.
119 Ibid., p.21.
120 Ibid., p.48.
121 Ibid., p.263.
122 Mukhopadhyaya, p. 141
123 Lahiri, p. 51.
124 Ibid., p. 260.
125 Mukhopadhyaya, p. 46.
126 Lahiri, p. 52.
127 Ibid., p. 125.
128 Pranavananda, p. 49.
129 Mukhopadhyaya, p. 119.
130 Lahiri, p. 10.
131 Ibid., p. 114.
132 Ibid., p. 19.
133 Pranavananda, p. 45.
136 Mukhopadhyaya, p. 108.
137 Sharma, p. 98.
138 Pranavananda, p. 25.
139 Ibid., p. 58.
140 Lahiri, p. 32.
141 Pranavananda, p. 130.
142 Sharma, p. 181.
143 Lahiri, p. 111.
144 Ibid., p. 1.
145 Ibid., p. 12.
146 Ibid., p. 25.
147 Ibid., p. 259.

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