

Eberhard Berg

The Sherpa *Dumji* Masked Dance Festival

An ethnographic description of the 'great liturgical performance' as
celebrated annually according to the tradition of the Lamaserwa clan
in the village temple of Gonpa Zhung, Solu



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Lumbini International Research Institute
P.O. Box 39
Bhairahawa, Dist. Rupandehi
NEPAL
e-mail: liri@mos.com.np

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Painted scroll depicting Lumo Karmo

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Two monks on the temple roof each blowing an oboe as the second instrument to signal the beginning of the sacred masked dances held on the third day
Two monks on the temple roof each blowing a telescopic long-horn to signal the beginning of the ‘long life’ empowerment ceremony held on the fourth day
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A Black Hat in the temple storeroom

Black Hat dancer

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After having created the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya and covered it the tantric 'master of the ceremony' and his assistant take a tea-break

The ritual daggers called *phur bu* representing the entourage of Vajrakīlaya, the tutelary deity, to be used in its cult

The register of the *Dumji* patrons

A Brief Chronology of Sherpa History and of Sherpa Buddhism

- 1480 – 1500 The ancestors of the Sherpas leave Khams and settle in south-central Tibet
- 1533 The ancestors of the Sherpas cross the Nangpa La and enter Khumbu
- 16th century The Sherpas' settlement of the northern Khumbu region
- 17th century The Sherpas' settlement of the southern Solu region
- 1610 Founding of Dorje Trak in Central Tibet, the main monastery of the tradition of the 'Northern Treasures' of revealed literature, by Rigzin Ngagi Wangpo (1580–1636)
- 1656 Founding of Mindröling in Central Tibet, the main monastery of the 'Southern Treasures' of revealed literature, by Rigzin Terdag Lingpa (1647–1714) who also created the grand public festivals known as *sgrub chen* or 'great liturgical performance', which the *Dumji* festival as held among the Sherpas conforms to
- 1667 Founding of the first Sherpa temple at Pangboche by lama Zangwa Dorje
- Middle of 18th century Founding of oldest temple of Solu in Gonpa Zhung; later destroyed by fire
- 1772 Peaceful acquisition of Solu-Khumbu by the Gorkha state established 1769
- Before 1850 A group of Sherpa village priests traveled to the region of Mangyul to study with the famous teacher Thrakar Taso Tulku Mipham Chöki Wangchuk (1775–1837). He transmitted both the ritual cycles of the 'Northern Treasures' and the teaching tradition of Mindröling including its tradition of grand public festivals and of the spectacular sacred masked dances to the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. Thus Sherpa Buddhism adopted its modern form
- Around 1850 The destroyed temple of Gonpa Zhung was rebuilt and the *Dumji* festival was introduced by Dorje Jigdral as a 'great liturgical performance'
- 1902 Founding of Dzarongphu monastery in the Dingri area by Dzatul Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (1864–1940) who inspired the construction of celibate monasteries and the introduction of the *Mani Rimdu* among the Sherpas
- 1916 Founding of Tengboche, the Sherpas' first celibate monastery, in Khumbu mainly on the initiative of Lama Gulu (1850–1934)

- 1923 Founding of Chiwong, the largest celibate monastery in Solu established by Sangye Lama (1857–1940)
- 1925 Founding of Deboche monastery, the first Sherpa nunnery, near Tengboche
- 1953 First ascent of Chomolungma or Mt. Everest by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Edmund Hillary
- 1955 After the coronation of King Mahendra in 1955 Nepal slowly opened up its borders to foreign visitors; this made the emergence of the trekking and mountaineering business in Nepal possible of which almost fifty percent has been controlled by the Sherpas until the Maoist insurgency has shattered it almost completely since the year 2001
- Ca. 1980 Emergence of the Sherpa community in the environs of Kathmandu such as in the areas around the stupas of Bodnath and Swayambunath
- Since 1990 Emergence of diasporic communities in Japan and the West, predominantly in New York, California, and Oregon

Introduction

The anthropology of the Sherpas, the *Dumji* festival as held in a local community, and the project

Every year, the Sherpas of the Lamaserwa clan flock together in Gonpa Zhung, Solu. Here they gather at the village temple to celebrate the *Dumji*, which is their main annual festival. In particular, the Lamaserwa people come to see the public part of the solemn performance and its culmination, the spectacular masked dances, to generate merit, receive the blessing of 'long life', and indulge in a range of mundane entertainments.

In the local tradition of the Lamaserwa clan the *Dumji*'s goal is achieved by the performance of an elaborately orchestrated sequence of ritual practices that are basically of wrathful character. The wrathful characters aim first at subjugating and destroying the enemies of the Buddhist doctrine, and then at expelling both the malignant forces that, having accumulated over the course of the preceding year, molest the community and the 'five different kinds of poisons' or evil spirits which reside within the individual self. All these ritual activities are effected by the village lama who, in the process of tantric meditation, invokes and visualizes the tutelary deity associated with the *Dumji* festival, and who himself subsequently becomes this powerful deity. Thus, the *Dumji* celebration ensures with the deliberate destruction of the evil the renewal of the positive forces, which the well-being of the celebrating community is dependant upon.

Chr. von Fürer-Haimendorf (1909–1995), the pioneer of the anthropology of the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, provides the first short description of the *Dumji* festival as it was performed in the twin-villages of Khumjung/Khunde in the northern Khumbu. According to him this colourful festive event "...involves nearly every member of the village community and serves as an annual expression of the unity of all those who share one temple. (...) The Dumje is a true village festival in the sense that the preparation of food and drink for its celebration is not left to individual initiative, but is a responsibility of the village community as a whole, discharges through a number of appointed representatives, known as Dumje

lawa.” To this brief characterization, however, the author adds: “The significance of the Dumje is far from clear.”¹

It is hoped that after four decades of research in various disciplines the present anthropological enquiry can contribute to revealing the significance of what today is considered as a major Tibetan Buddhist ceremony that is based on a complex ritual cycle. The present research draws upon the theoretical perspectives and the findings of several disciplines, most notably from both the field of Tibetan studies and from social or cultural anthropology in the realm of Himalayan studies. If pieced together the findings of the pioneers of the research on the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu have provided a general and almost comprehensive picture, which this investigation, with its particular focus, builds on.

The basic framework of Sherpa religion and culture, economy and society is known due to the meticulous ethnographic work of Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf who was the first researcher among the Sherpas of Nepal. It is significant, however, that for the writing of his early ethnographic account of the Sherpas of Khumbu (1964) he made no use of any Tibetan-language documents. Twenty years later he added another monograph to this work that was the first enquiry to analyze and describe the profound changes which have occurred due to the Sherpas’ ongoing encounter with modernity that has been taking place since the early Sixties especially in the Khumbu region (1984/1989).

In his seminal, but still too little known book ‘Geschichte und Sozialordnung der Sherpa’ (1968) M. Oppitz provides the historical reconstruction of the migration of the ancestors of the Sherpas from the eastern Tibetan province of Khams and their final settlement in present-day Nepal. In his investigation he makes use of some written clan documents that were found in the Sherpa area. According to these documents the Sherpas originated from four proto-clans who had left from Khams at the end of the 15th century. Around the year 1533 the ancestors of the Sherpas have traversed the Nangpa La and settled in the region of Solu-Khumbu that had practically not been inhabited at that time. Thanks to these written documents the author was able to reconstruct the route of their migration and the diverse stops on the way, their settlement first of Khumbu, then of Solu, the history of the ‘proto-clans’ and their subsequent division into sub-clans. Moreover, this work contains valuable insights concerning, among other things, the distribution of the clans and the marriage customs.

An important and unusual contribution to the knowledge of the Sherpas of Nepal is initiated by A.W. Macdonald (1971). This work focuses on the emergence and development of Buddhism in the Sherpa area (*chos byung*). It was accomplished through the collaboration

¹ Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964:185).

between the Western scholar and the Sherpa monk and scholar khenpo Sangye Tenzin (1924–1990), the lama of gSer logs monastery in Solu. Originally, it was A.W. Macdonald's idea to write a history of Buddhism in the Sherpa area 'from the insider's point of view' in Tibetan language together with the learned Sherpa monk. It took him quite an effort to arouse in the latter the kind of 'scientific curiosity' regarding his own people, which is typical of the modern ethnographic endeavor. Conforming to Tibetan tradition Macdonald requested to write down the results of their cooperation (1969–1971) in the classical forms of Tibetan literature.

It is important that this book was meant to be a manual to be used not only by Western Tibetologists but also for the education of young Sherpas regarding the history of their Tibetan Buddhist ethnic group within the realm of the Hindu nation-state. Interestingly, this joint project realized what the young anthropologists and social scientists who had been active in the student movement at the end of the Sixties had demanded at the same time in lengthy debates: to produce something useful for the so-called 'subjects' of their research. Ironically, it also anticipated what the wave of post-modernism and the 'writing culture'–sdebate were to ask for in the course of the Eighties: to create monographs in which the insider is given the opportunity to write a comprehensive ethnography of her or his own society according to their own point of view.

In her first work on the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu S.B. Ortner gives a detailed ethnographic description of the performance of several rituals (1978). It is a study of Tibetan Buddhist religion as practiced among the Sherpas of Solu that is seen through the then influential theoretical lens of symbolic anthropology but also takes into account their economy and social organization. Ortner highlights the Sherpas' strongly instrumental relationship with their deities that is effected through offering rituals and provides a path-breaking interpretation of hospitality behavior. According to her the Sherpas make offerings to their deities in much the same way humans are controlled by offering hospitality to them as guests. In her second monograph (1989) Ortner provides an overview of the recent religious, cultural, and social history of the Sherpas. Characteristic of this contribution is the strong emphasis on the politico-economic, which she has moulded according to her own version of a theoretical approach that is clearly inspired by then dominant 'theory of practice' of P. Bourdieu.

While embarking on a focused investigation the findings will at the same time be related to the broader developments in the Tibetan world as far as the realms of religion, culture, and history is concerned. Of great importance is the work of René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz on *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (1956) and his explorations of Tibetan sacred dances (1976) and Stephen Beyer's researches on *The Cult of Tārā* (1973).

The investigation greatly benefited primarily from the insights gained in three different realms. Firstly, it was stimulated by the more recent work of Alexander W. Macdonald, Anne-Marie Blondeau, Samten G. Karmay, and Charles Ramble on Tibetan and Himalayan ritual. Secondly, the findings of Franz-Karl Ehrhard regarding certain eminent masters who were key figures in the spread of important ritual cycles of the 'Old Translation School' in the Tibetan-Nepalese borderlands in general, and to the Sherpa area in particular, were of crucial help to trace the origin of the *Dumji* festival as *sgrub chen* or 'great liturgical performance' and thus the emergence of Sherpa Buddhism in its present-day form.

Thirdly, in his meticulous and comprehensive description based on an impressive wealth of observed detail the late R.J. Kohn (1948–2000) demonstrates the great complexity of the three-week long *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival. Moreover, the author discusses Buddhist tantric ritual as one great art form (2001:XXI, XXV, 113). Thus, Kohn calls to mind what had already been emphasized by S. Beyer as follows: "... a scholar from our secular society, (...), may too easily ignore the fact that Buddhism is basically a performing art." (1988: XII).²

The *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival entails numerous works and activities of art made for and performed with on occasion of ritual events. The major works and activities in this context are the following: the carefully crafted maṇḍala, the moulded sculptures of barley dough and coloured butter ornaments called *gtor ma*, the creation of colourful 'thread-crosses' (*nam mkha'*), the complex altar arrangements, the chanting of the liturgical text, the instrumental music considered as a separate offering (*mchod rol*), and the sacred masked dances with a great variety of masks and fine costumes made of brocade and silk.

In fact, all these creations of ritual art each endowed with its distinct profound symbolism combine to form the public enactment of the two different kinds of 'great liturgical performance' that are held annually among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. The *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival is enacted by celibate monks in only three monasteries. In contradistinction, the *Dumji* masked dance celebration is performed in nine Sherpa village temples by tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*) who are hereditary married householder priests. It is the major annual festival of the local community. Each local community where it is held the *Dumji* festival is performed according to a distinct tradition of its own. In reconstructing the history of the grand *Dumji* ceremony, as performed according to the particular local tradition of the Lamaserwa clan, some light will be shed upon the origin of this major ritual

² S. Beyer reminds us that "...in many ways it is only the language of dramatic criticism which is finally applicable to the description of Tibetan ritual." (1988:171). Unfortunately, the exploration of this issue is beyond the scope of this inquiry.

celebration among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu and the different locally distinct ways of its enactment at the same time.

Unlike the famous *Mani Rimdu*, which has attracted the interest of countless trekkers, many photographers, some film directors, and quite a few researchers and has already been the subject of several books, the *Dumji* festival has remained largely ignored. In fact, until recently it has been the topic of only one article by R.A. Paul (1979). Unfortunately, however, the spectacular ceremony was superficially described and more or less misunderstood.

The introduction of the *Dumji* festival among the Sherpas as performed on a grand scale marks the emergence of Sherpa Buddhism in its present-day form. Its history and religious significance, the distinct combination of several rituals that form the grand composition of this festival, the elaborate ritual cycle including its structure on which, depending on the different local traditions, a varying number of days of public performance is based, the tasks the ritual performance has to fulfill for the benefit of the celebrating community, to mention some key aspects, will be major subjects of this investigation.

The focus of the present enquiry is directed at the performance of the *Dumji* celebration according to the specific local tradition of the Lamasewa clan in Gonpa Zhung, which will be reconstructed. It is hoped that it will provide detailed answers to these significant questions. Moreover, information on the relationship between the local corps of religious specialists and the lay community and their respective roles will be given. Since it is an investigation of village religion the secular activities that are going on at the same time will also be examined. Representing the social and economic circumstances in which the liturgical ceremony is embedded these lay activities constitute an integral part of the overall celebration, which cannot be ignored and have to be taken into due consideration. This insight will serve to illuminate the close interplay of religious practices and secular activities in this context.

The investigation aims at a thorough descriptive analysis of the ritual performance of the *Dumji* celebration. A comprehensive synopsis of the events according to the day-to-day chronology will be given. It is hoped that enough information will be supplied so that the colourful festival unfolds its complexity as an organic whole. While attempting in this in-depth-study to provide an elucidation of the *Dumji* festival it is hoped that the detailed ethnographic description of the main annual Sherpa village festival will at the same time mirror the complexity of Sherpa religion, culture, society, and history in general. Throughout the investigation references to other Tibetan local cultures in the Himalayas and to their ritual performances will be given.

Due to the issue of strict secrecy as far as high tantric Buddhist practices are concerned this ethnographic account of the public part of the performance of the *Dumji* celebration in Gonpa Zhung is observed from a non-initiate and necessarily remains restricted to its 'outer'

(*phyi*) level of meaning. It is due to this same reason that the translation of the basic liturgical text that prescribes in detail and guides the ritual procedures cannot be given.

The investigation as a whole may serve as a reference work accessible to the scholarly world. I hope to provide at the same time a useful introduction to Tibetan Buddhist ritual performance as practiced not in a monastic context but in Sherpa village life for students and those who are more broadly interested in Tibetan Buddhism and its spectacular public performances. Moreover, it is hoped that the presented findings will contribute to stimulate further research.

The findings show that the *Dumji* festival represents a living tradition which has been a vital force among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu until the troubled times of the present day. At the same time, the work demonstrates the presence of both the *Byang gter* tradition of Dorje Drak and that of the *Lho gter* tradition of Mindröling, and of the teaching lineage of Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk in the Solu area. Finally, it provides evidence of the role of a member of the Nyang family in Gonpa Zhung who exerted great influence in the history of Sherpa Buddhism.

The official time-span of this research was from April 2002 until March 2004. Since it took me some time to reach an appropriate understanding of the public celebration and to discern the very complex structural order that is veiled behind both the wealth of detail and the seeming chaos characteristic of the ritual performance I devoted a period of almost three years to its completion. I spent a total of seven months on ethnographic fieldwork.

Chapter One

The Sherpas of north-eastern Nepal, their ancestors' migration from Khams to Solu-Khumbu, and the origin and final settlement of the Lamaserwa clan in the area of Gonpa Zhung in Solu

The Sherpas are one of the Tibetan highland communities in Nepal at the periphery of the Tibetan cultural world. They are a small, ethnically Tibetan people who live primarily in Solu-Khumbu, a relatively remote area situated in the north-eastern part of the 'Hindu Kingdom of Nepal'.¹ Solu-Khumbu is a region of high elevation in the south of the Himalayan watershed adjacent to the Dingri (Ding ri) area in Southern Tibet that is situated in the environs to the west and south of Mt. Everest.

The region of Solu-Khumbu spans basically two ecological zones. The southern Solu refers to a distinct area of lower elevation whereas the northern Khumbu represents an area of higher elevation. The Solu region ranges from above 2,000 meters upwards where the cultivable land in the lower parts is fertile but scarce. There were once plenty of forests here, however, the majority of these forests has been cut since the beginning of the trekking and mountaineering business in Nepal following the first ascent of Mt. Everest in 1953. Khumbu, the second ecological zone, is situated above 3,000 meters. It also includes vast areas above the height of 4,000 meters that represent the high Himalayan grazing grounds that support large bovine herds (yak and yak-hybrids).

Wherever possible in Solu-Khumbu, the Sherpas like several other high-altitude populations in northern Nepal have been engaged in a highland economy that is based upon the three characteristic pillars of agriculture (wheat and potatoes), animal husbandry (yaks, cross-breeds, and cows), and long-distance trade (salt, animals, etc.). It is this particular combination of three different realms of subsistence that allows people to make a living in a high-altitude area with scarce resources.² Since the middle of the 20th century the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu

¹ Other major traditional settlement areas of the Sherpas are the less-known environs of Mt. Everest on its northeastern side and the high valley of Rolwaling on its western side.

² For an early short description of the Sherpas' economy in the Khumbu region refer to Chr. von Fürer-Haimendorf (1964:1-17) and for his later account on the profound change of Sherpa society (1984:1-25).

have been successfully engaged in the trekking and mountaineering boom. After the first ascent of Mt. Everest in 1953 Nepal slowly opened its doors to Western visitors. As a direct result of this new state policy important new possibilities of non-traditional employment and the quick earning of comparatively large sums in cash have opened up. These opportunities have not been restricted to the upper ranks but are available to all strata of Sherpa society.

Organized in patrilineal clans that control clan-exogamous marriage, the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu live in nuclear family households in small villages, scattered hamlets, and isolated homesteads. A characteristic feature of Sherpa settlements in ethnically mixed regions is the fact that they are always situated on high ridges overlooking a wide area displaying the houses of all other ethnic and caste groups. Property in the form of herds, houses and land is privately owned by nuclear families. According to the latest official census in the year 2001 about ten thousand Sherpas still live in the region of Solu-Khumbu. The official figures of the decidedly Hindu nation-state, however, have always been unreliable when Buddhist and ethnic groups are concerned. Moreover, an increasing number of Sherpas of all generations, especially young people and young families, have been leaving Solu-Khumbu for more than a decade to make Kathmandu and several places in the West and in the East the new center of their living. This ongoing and still increasing depopulation of high-altitude Solu-Khumbu, as well as many other highland areas in Nepal, due primarily to the Maoist insurgency, has been ignored by the government authorities who have withdrawn and given up control in most of these remote regions.

The Sherpas practice Mahāyāna Buddhism. Among them the tradition of the Nyingma (rNying ma) or 'Old Translation School' of Tibetan Buddhism has been firmly maintained. This tradition as is performed in both communal celebrations in the village temple and in domestic rituals has been practiced by hereditary tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*) who are members of lineages of married householder priests.

Since the time of their settlement in the region of Solu-Khumbu the territory of the Sherpas existed in what W. van Spengen has recently defined as "...a border area in which the effective control of the central state is limited."³ Initially, this area was a frontier zone where no strong political control from outside was existent. According to A.W. Macdonald these first settlers were initially subject to Tibetan authority.⁴ The Khumbu area was one of the

For more recent comprehensive accounts on the particular conditions of the high-altitude economy in Khumbu see B. Brower (1991) and S.F. Stevens (1993). On the economy of the lower region of Solu refer to K. March (1977:83–97) and to W. Limberg (1982). – An excellent comprehensive description of traditional Sherpa village life in Solu has been provided by H.R. Downs (1980).

³ W. van Spengen (2000:49).

⁴ A.W. Macdonald (1987d:69).

'thirteen passages' (*rong khag bcu sum*) between Tibet and Nepal which were used for many centuries for the purposes of long-distance trade, pilgrimage, etc.⁵ Only later in the period between 1772 and 1774 was the region of Solu-Khumbu incorporated into the domains of the young Gorkha state of Nepal, through the deliberate expansion of state power.⁶ Today, Solu-Khumbu is a district of Nepal's Sagarmatha zone with its capital in Salleri, Solu. In the ethnic and caste mosaic that is characteristic of Nepal the Sherpas have retained a distinct identity and their name *Shar pa* indicating the 'People from the East'.

According to their own written tradition the ancestors of the Sherpas left from Salmo Gang (*Zal mo sgang*), a region in the eastern province of Khams, in the period between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. M. Oppitz mentions that it had been the widely spread and long standing fear of the Mongols which had been the reason why they had left Salmo Gang around 1500 for the area of Tinkyé (*gSting ge*) in Central Tibet.⁷ The Sherpa ancestors had to leave again in 1533 because of a Muslim invasion of Tibet from Kashgar under Mirza Haidar Dughlāt, which managed to advance almost to Lhasa in Central Tibet.⁸ After a long journey the ancestors of the Sherpas finally crossed with the Nangpa La the Himalayan watershed and entered Khumbu around 1533.⁹ Subsequently, they took possession of this area in the second half of that century and later of Solu over the course of the 17th century.¹⁰ The original meaning of the toponym 'Khumbu' was 'Khams bu', i.e. 'sons [and their sons – E.B.] of Khams'. Later, a linguistic shift from *a* to *u* occurred in Sherpa language due to which the term Khumbu was created.¹¹ The southern region of is

⁵ These 'thirteen passages' between Tibet and Nepal have been listed by C. Jest (1975:35).

⁶ The administration of the Gorkhali kings of Nepal had a firm interest in controlling the trans-Himalayan trade route that ran through the Sherpa area and in keeping a stable political border with neighboring Tibet but Solu-Khumbu was too remote to exert direct control. – For the Gorkha conquest of Solu-Khumbu and the activities and results of long-term state interference among the Sherpas refer to S.B. Ortner's work (1989:90–123).

⁷ M. Oppitz (1968: 75).

⁸ For this Muslim invasion refer to L. Petech (1997:245).

⁹ M. Oppitz (1968: 78). Due to this long-standing and very real fear of Mongol invasions several waves of Tibetan peoples settled in the Tibetan-Nepalese borderlands such as Mangyul, Helambu, the Nepal valley, Mustang, Dolpo, Kutang, Nubri, to name but a few.

¹⁰ In the appendix to his seminal investigation M. Oppitz (1968) has provided an excellent map of the long migration of the ancestors of the Sherpas; another map in the appendix shows the distribution of the Sherpa clans in the region of Solu-Khumbu.

¹¹ This has been mentioned by the renowned Sherpa monk and scholar mKhan po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin in his book "History of the Sherpas" (*shar pa'i chos byung*) (1971, fol.64). Moreover, he notes a second version according to which the language of the Rai and Limbu has coined the toponym 'Khumbu' for the respective area (ibid.).

often described as *shod lung*, i.e. ‘lower valley’, of Khumbu. The usual toponym for Solu, however, is ‘Gorge of the Mountain Ridges’ ([g]shong[s] rong).¹²

According to A.W. Macdonald Buddhism among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu “...was imposed locally by what one might term highly individualistic frontier lamas filled with a crusading spirit...”¹³ The process of appropriation of their new cis-Himalayan territory was done by means of certain ritual practices which reenacted Padmasambhava’s successful ritual taming and subjugation of the local spirits in Tibet which were hostile to the new belief system. A.W. Macdonald writes, “Exactly as in the proto-exploits of Padmasambhava, the Sherpa founding lamas vanquished the local spirits and transformed their dwellings into strongholds of the Buddhist order. The very countryside became Buddhist, its geography re-named when sanctified by their victories.”¹⁴ A.W. Macdonald has called the ‘great ideological drama [that – E.B.] was played out in the local landscape’ a process of ‘Buddha-isation’ which is typical of the Buddhist conversion of formerly non-Buddhist peoples and areas.¹⁵ Accordingly the Sherpas’ settlement in the northern region of Khumbu was possible only after their religious and political leader, the charismatic lama Zangwa Dorje (gSang ba rdo rje), endowed with great miraculous powers, had tamed the diverse local spirit powers, bound them by oath and transformed them into local Buddhist protective deities.¹⁶ It was this important ancestor who, among others, founded the first Sherpa village temple in Pangboche (sPang po che) where he also instituted the *Dumji* festival. Since then, this site remained the Sherpas’ main place of learning within their own territory of Solu-Khumbu until the beginning of the construction of monasteries (1916) in this region.

The main disciples of lama Zangwa Dorje were lama Phakdze (bla ma ‘Phags rtse) and lama Tsünchung Tashi (bla ma btsun chung bkra shis).¹⁷ After their studies with Zangwa

¹² I obtained this information from various learned informants; this meaning of the toponym has been confirmed by F.-K. Ehrhard in private communication.

¹³ A.W. Macdonald (1987d:69).

¹⁴ A.W. Macdonald (1987c:57).

¹⁵ A.W. Macdonald (1990:203). S.G. Karmay shares this conviction: “The subjugation of the spiritual inhabitants of the country is an extremely important part of the process in the Buddhist conversion of the people who believed in their existence. It was mainly for the need to create a sacred environment in accordance with Buddhist ideals of the universe.” (1998j:446). – The best-known example in Tibetan Buddhist historiography is the miracle contest between Tibet’s great yogin Mi la ras pa and the Bon priest Naro Bhun Chon on Mt. Ti se, cf. G.C.C. Chang (1999:215–224).

¹⁶ For the activities and accomplishments of gSang ba rdo rje refer to A.W. Macdonald (1987d:69) and Ngawang Tenzin Zangbu (1988:12–14). In fact, gSang ba rdo rje was the ‘first great Buddhist figure in Khumbu’, cf. A.W. Macdonald (1987c:57). His fifth incarnation was rDza sprul Ngag dbang bstan ’dzin nor bu, (1866–1940), the abbot of Dzarongphu monastery, cf. Ngawang Tenzin Zangbu (1988:14).

¹⁷ Refer to mKhan po Sangs rgyas bstan ’dzin’s book “History of the Sherpas” (*shar pa’i chos byung*) (1971, fol.29).

Dorje both went south to present-day Solu. They stayed at a place which lama Phakdze called Lumiteng (*klu mo'i steng*). Among others, they invoked the Nāgā goddess Lumo Karmo (*Klu mo dkar mo*), and performed an offering of purification to this divinity (*klu bsang mchod*). After deciding that this site was the appropriate place for the Nāgā goddess they requested her to be their Dharma protectress (*chos srung*), and she gave her consent.¹⁸

At lama Phakdze's dwelling place Lumiteng a boy child is born to him; unfortunately his mother remains unmentioned in this written source. The child was named Serwa Yeshe Gyalzen (*gSer pa Ye shes rGyal mtshan*). The child is identical with Dorje Zangbu (*rDo rje bzang po*) who is revered among his descendants as the founding father of the Nyang family (*rigs*) of the Serwa (*gser ba*) lineage (*ru*).¹⁹ According to both their written and oral traditions lama Phakdze and his son Serwa Yeshe Gyalzen, alias Dorje Zangbo, are well remembered as the first ancestors of the Nyang family of the Lamaserwa clan to have settled down in present-day Solu.

After his father had expired lama Dorje Zangbu continued the migration with the members of his clan. They finally settled down in a sheltered and fertile part of the upper Junbesi valley after their lama had performed some significant miracles.²⁰ Among others, Dorje Zangbu is the founder of the family temple Dongrub Chöling (*Don grub chos gling*), known as the first 'monastery' of what is called Gonpa Zhung (*dGon pa gZhung*, Nep. Junbesi, i.e. 'moon valley'). This first religious monument in Gompa Zhung is also the first village temple in the whole Solu area.²¹

Originally the Sherpas of the Lamaserwa clan had lived in Serta in Khams. In their written history they claim direct descent from the 'treasure discoverer' Ngadag Myang Nyangrel Nyima Özer (*mNga' bdag Myang Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer*, 1136–1204). This famous figure is regarded as one of the main masters in the early history of the Old Translation School of Tibetan Buddhism.²² In fact, there is only one Tibetan-language document known – the

¹⁸ See the "History of the Sherpas" (*shar pa'i chos byung*) (1971, fol.30).

¹⁹ Refer to the "History of the Sherpas" (*shar pa'i chos byung*) (1971, fol.33).

²⁰ However, some of the early Sherpa bla mas have also engaged in prestige fights which involved the display and contest of their magical powers due to fraternal conflicts and rivalry between the bla mas. A good example of the latter is the complex prestige fight between bla ma *rDo rje bzang po* and bla ma *Dgon pa*, cf. A.W. Macdonald (1987d:70–73).

²¹ Refer to the "History of the Sherpas" (*shar pa'i chos byung*) (1971, fol.45).

²² Refer to the clan document II of the Minyagpa – one of the four Sherpa proto-clans – as translated in M. Oppitz (1968:57–58, see p. 57). – On Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, the first of the 'five kingly treasure finders' and the reincarnation of king Khri srong lde btsan, see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:755–759); E. Dargyay (1979: 97–103). J. Gyatso calls Nyang ral 'one of the principal architects' (1996:162, fn. 9) of the 'full-blown Treasure tradition' (p. 151).

“Book of the Bones” (*rus yig*) – which is the written source of the history of the Nyang clan and its settlement in the area of present-day Solu. As such it is a local historiography. Moreover, this clan document is an important source for the reconstruction of the long migration of their ancestors from Khams, which eventually led to their settlement in present-day Nepal. Only there their descendants subsequently became the ethnic group that is now known as the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. This clan document was located in a family temple at Metokpake (Me tog dpag yas), which is the home of the person who had copied it. The small hamlet is situated on a ridge that is about a two hour walk southeast of the district capital of Salleri. M. Oppitz published the original text with an introduction.²³ He has included a translation of the *rus yig* in his book ‘Society and Social Order of the Sherpas’.²⁴

M. Oppitz emphasizes that the text must have been written by several authors at the early time of the Sherpas’ settlement of Solu-Khumbu between 1500 and 1530 CE.²⁵ According to the colophon the original author was lCags dpon Sangs rgyas dPal ’byor (Chak Pön Sangye Paljor), a prominent ancestor of the Chakpa (*lcags pa*, ‘the iron ones’), and is also one of the four proto-clans of the Sherpas. The document was copied and enlarged by a certain Karma Gzung.²⁶ According to this clan document Chak Pon Sangye Paljor was the second son of Minyak Donka Ringmo and his wife Kalden Wangmo in Do Kham Salmo Gang. His elder brother Chak Palchen Dorje (lCags dPal chen rDo rje) married a daughter of Serwa Yeshi Gyeldzen (gSer ba ye shes rgyal mtshan).²⁷ Only then in this important clan document does the ‘gold lineage’ (gSer rus) of the Nyang clan (Nyang rigs) enter the historical stage. Serwa (*gser ba*) is commonly known as the name of the last of the four proto-clans; later, after their settlement in Solu, this clan became known as Lamaserwa, or just as Lama. All the descendants call themselves Serwa (*Ser ba*), i.e. ‘people from Ser’ in Khams, who settled in a wide area in the valley of the Junbesi river and in the upper Solu valley. In fact, they are members of the Lamaserwa patrilineage (*rus*) of the Nyang clan (*rigs*), an important line of hereditary householder lamas (*sngags pa*) in Tibet.²⁸

²³ M. Oppitz (1982:285–295).

²⁴ M. Oppitz (1968:32–49 and 73–100).

²⁵ M. Oppitz (1968:32, fn. 2).

²⁶ M. Oppitz (1982:285). – A.W. Macdonald, however, raises doubts concerning the seriousness of this person whom he describes as a ‘sarcastic, practical joker’ and who created ‘a splendid modern example of a gter-ma...’ (1987c:58).

²⁷ M. Oppitz (1968:36).

²⁸ G. Childs (1997:23–25) has reconstructed the origin of the Sherpa Serwa lineage which descends from a certain Nyang ser Ral chen who is the elder son of Nyi ma ’od zer (p. 23); Childs notes, however, that it is by no means certain that the Sherpa Serwa are actual descendants of Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (p. 25). Moreover, Childs traces the history of the influential ancient Nyang clan.

Chapter Two

The history of Sherpa Buddhism from the time of early settlement until the emergence of its present-day form and the origin of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung

Solid information concerning the religious practices of the Sherpas prior to their settlement in Solu-Khumbu is scant. The following will provide a tentative reconstruction of the written tradition of Sherpa Buddhism from the time before their ancestors' immigration until the emergence of the evolved form that we are familiar with today. This undertaking also refers to the wider framework of certain religious and political developments in Tibetan history. It is based upon two Tibetan-language documents. One text is the afore-mentioned 'Book of the Bones' (*rus yig*), the source of historical knowledge of the Lamaserwa clan of Gonpa Zhung which was published by M. Oppitz.¹ The other text is a Tibetan religious history of the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, which is titled 'History of the Sherpas' (*Shar pa 'i chos byung*). This important document was written by Khenpo Sangye Tenzin (mKhan po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin, 1924–1990), the famous and highly respected Sherpa monk, scholar, and first abbot of Serlo Gonpa (gSer logs dGon pa). Serlo Gonpa was founded in 1959, and is situated close to Gonpa Zhung in Solu.²

According to the SCB (folios 48–50), in the early time of Sherpa settlement in the region of Solu-Khumbu there was no *bKa' ma* tradition, i.e. the 'uninterrupted lineages of the words of the Buddha', but only the *gter ma* or 'treasure tradition' which constitutes the 'interrupted line as represented by spiritual treasures' of Padmasambhava and other great masters. In fact, only certain ritual cycles belonging to the early phase of the treasure tradition of the 'Old Translation School' were known, and this reached the climax of its literary creativity

¹ In the following the *rus yig* will be referred to as RY as it is in Oppitz' book.

² The first part of this book consists of the author's *rnam thar* or religious biography (pp. 1–15); the second part is the *Shar pa 'i chos byung* (pp. 15–125). A.W. Macdonald who had collaborated with mKhan po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin has provided a partial biography of the author (1987e:87–99) and an account of their cooperation (1987c:54–66). – In the following the *Shar pa 'i chos byung* will be referred to as SCB. My copy of this work is a photocopied version simply entitled 'Sharpa-Book'; it contains three folios on the first page and four folios on each of all subsequent pages.

and doctrinal influence with the highly revered ‘all knowing’ Longchen Rabjampa (Klong chen rab ’byams pa, 1308–1364) and Rigzin Gödemcen (Rig ’dzin rGod ldem can, 1337–1408), the founder of the ‘Northern Treasures’ tradition’.³

Tracing back the origin of this rudimentary textual tradition Sangye Tenzin has identified one figure as the key disseminator to the ancestors of the Sherpas. It is the treasure-discoverer Rigzin Ratna Lingpa (Rig ’dzin Ratna gling pa, 1403–79), who is famous, among others, as a collector and editor of the tantras of the Nyingma School (*rNying ma rgyud ’bum*).⁴ The main text of his in use among the Sherpas at that time was the *Rat gling thugs sgrub* or short: *thugs sgrub* (SCB, fol. 27). Chak Pön Sangye Paljor, who was mentioned above as an ancestor of the Sherpas in Khams, had been Ratna Lingpa’s disciple (*ibid.*).⁵ Their close guru-disciple relationship is reflected in the fact that Chak Pön had already been given his name from the treasure-discoverer (RY, p. 34).

Under the spiritual guidance of Ratna Lingpa himself the Sherpa ancestor Chak Pön studied the eminent master’s teachings of the Nyingmapa treasure-cycles, and later he transmitted this textual tradition to his own disciples. According to the SCB (fol. 27) Chak Pön transmitted Ratna Lingpa’s *thugs sgrub*-text to the Sherpa area via Sangwa Dorje (gSang ba rdo rje), the famous ancestor who had led the first families of the Sherpa ancestors to the high valley of Khumbu.⁶ As his own teaching activity is concerned, it is documented that Chak Pön gave his father Don ka Ring mo instructions on rDzogs pa chen mo, the doctrine of the ‘Great Perfection’, the third of the Three Inner Tantras of the Nyingma School on occasion of the latter’s visit at Chak Pön’s new home in Central Tibet (RY, p. 39). Chak Pön’s other disciples were his own son Dudjom Dorje (bDud ’joms Dorje), and a grandson who was the lineage disciple of the treasure-finder Guru Chöki Wangchuk (Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1212–1270) with the name Ngagchang Gyagarwa Chenpo (sNgags ’chang rgya dkar chen po, cf. SCB, fol. 27; RY, p. 41). It seems that apart from Sangwa Dorje those two

³ For the life and achievements of kLong chen rab ’byams pa see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:575–595); for Rig ’dzin rGod ldem phru can and the ‘Northern Treasures’ tradition within the ‘Old Translation School’ see Ch. II, 5b below.

⁴ For his life and achievements see the hagiographies contained in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:793–95) and E. Dargyay (1979:144–47).

⁵ As to the person of Lchags dbon see the partial view provided by S.B. Ortner based on oral tradition (1989:31).

⁶ The Sherpa settlement of Solu-Khumbu developed in various waves over the centuries. Whereas the area of Khumbu represents a melting pot that received new population influx from different areas in Tibet, the Sherpas of the southern area of Solu retained more of their traditional heritage from Khams (for this subject refer to M. Oppitz (1968:73–104). It was only in their new territory in present-day Nepal, among the diverse small social units, that the collective identity of what we know today as the ethnic group of the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, emerged. This view is also shared by M. Oppitz (private communication).

figures were instrumental in the diffusion of these treasure teachings from Tibet among the Sherpas in the Solu-Khumbu region. In their religious ceremonies these texts were used as liturgy.

We may be justified in concluding that Chak Pön's recorded encounter with Thangtong Gyelpo (Thang stong rgyal po, 1385–1464 or 1361–1485), the revered Nyingma siddha, treasure-discoverer, and engineer,⁷ offered him the opportunity to receive spiritual guidance and instructions from this master on certain ritual and meditation cycles as well (SCB, p. 27; RY, p. 40). Unfortunately, however, the two Sherpa documents do not supply any explicit information in this respect.⁸ It is an established fact, however, that up to 1959 when the Chinese closed the Tibetan borders, causing the almost total collapse of the old trans-Himalayan cultural exchange, Sherpas used to travel from their region in the cultural periphery to Tibet for both business and pilgrimage to sacred places and monastic centers of learning of the Nyingma School in order to receive a proper religious education. Thus they continuously kept their links to certain important teachers as well as with the ongoing religious, cultural, and literary developments in Central Tibet and Khams.⁹ Unfortunately the available historical record of this early phase of Sherpa Buddhism does not enable us to render a clear and comprehensive overview of the Sherpas' domestic and communal ritual and meditation practice. It is safe to say, however, that Sherpa Buddhist religious practice in the early time of their settlement in Solu-Khumbu time had remained on a relatively simple level.¹⁰

⁷ On his life and spiritual accomplishments see the hagiography contained in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:802–4) and in E. Dargyay (1979:153–156). Thang stong rgyal po's life-span seems still to be contested. Whereas in G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:434) are given the following two alternatives: 1385–1464 or 1381–1481, according to E. Dargyay (1979:153) this master lived from 1385 until 1510. Thang stong rgyal po is also regarded as the legendary founder of the Tibetan traditional theatre called A che lHamo.

⁸ The importance of both Ratna gling pa and Thang stong rgyal po in this respect is mentioned by Ehrhard (1993, p. 80, n. 4) in the context of contradictions concerning the migratory history of the Sherpas. There Ehrhard holds the view that these contradictions 'might perhaps' be resolved were one to devote more attention to the terma teachings of Ratna gling pa and Thang stong rgyalpo or to the generation of disciples who brought these teachings to Solu-Khumbu.

⁹ mKhan po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin (1924–1990), the author of the SCB, has been one of the last Sherpas to receive his full religious education at some Nyingma centers of learning in Khams where he stayed from the age of 21 until 33. Moreover he also visited the great monastic centers of the dGe lugs pa; cf. His religious autobiography as contained in the SCB, pp. 1–13.

¹⁰ This opinion has been raised by both my clerical Sherpa informants and also by Trulzhig Rinpoche ('Khrul zhi Rin po che Ngag dbang chos kyi blo gros, b. 1924), the leading hierarch of the Nyingma School and lama of the monastery of Thubten Chöling (Thub bstan chos gling), which represents the tradition of Dzarongphu (Dza rong phu) monastery in exile in the Ding ri area on the northern side of the Everest range. This important monastery is situated in Solu about an hour's walk north of Gonpa Zhung.

It wasn't until the first half of the nineteenth century that the historical record offers a clearer view of Sherpa Buddhist religious practice. At this time Sherpa Buddhism became enriched through the adoption of some of the features that have given shape to its modern form.¹¹ That significant transformation was initiated by a number of charismatic Sherpa village priests who traveled to the region of Mangyul in southwest Tibet to study with the famous teacher Thrakar Taso Tulku Mipham Chöki Wangchuk (Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Mi pham Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1775–1837).

This great master was born in Kyirong (*sKyid grong*) in southwest Tibet just north of the Nepalese borderlands. Chöki Wangchuk was recognized as the reincarnation (*sprul sku*) of Thrakar Densapa Yeshe Chödrak (Brag dkar gDan sa pa Ye shes chos grags, 1705–1772),¹² who had been associated with the hermitage of the 'great sacred site White Rock Horse Tooth' (*gnas chen brag dkar rta so*). This place is situated near Kyirong. One reason for its fame is that Jetsun Milarepa (1040–1123), the most famous of all Tibetan ascetics and the most important disciple of Marpa (1012–97), father of the Kagyü lineage, spent twelve years of spiritual practice at this retreat site. Due to his spiritual retreat there it has become an important sacred site in the cult of Tibet's great yogin. Later, Tsang Myön Heruka (gTsang smyon Heruka, 1452–1507) had spent three years in meditation in the caves of Mangyul Gungthang.¹³ It was also the place where the *Collected Songs of Mi la ras pa*, authored by Tsang Myön Heruka, the great 'Madman of Gtsang', and the famous yogin of the Rechung Kagyüpa (Ras chung Bka' brgyud pa), a subsect of the Kagyü school. He is also the author of several hagiographical works, and many other works composed by the latter's disciples were subsequently printed.¹⁴ In the sixteenth century the monastery of Brag dkar rta so had been built on that site by Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyal (lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal, 1473–1557), the best known disciple of Tsang Myön Heruka.¹⁵

Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk was a disciple of his grand-uncle Rigzin Tinley Dujom (Rig 'dzin 'phrin las bdud 'joms, 1726–1789).¹⁶ He is known to have reprinted many

¹¹ Cf. M. Kapstein (1983:42) and F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:81), remarking on this important step in the development of Sherpa Buddhism towards its present-day form.

¹² Cf. F.-K. Ehrhard (1997:255, n. 6). There is also announced that a study of the writings of Chos kyi dbang phyug is being prepared.

¹³ Cf. E.G. Smith (2001:65).

¹⁴ Cf. the introduction by K.R. Schaeffer to the edition of E.G. Smith's anthology (2001:5). On the life of Gtsang smyon Heruka see Smith (2001:59–79). – On the University of California expedition to Kutang and Nubri in 1973 M. Aris has paid a visit to that site. He describes it as "...belonging to the Bar-'brug tradition (...). Not only was this monastery an important centre of the cult of Mi.la Ras.pa, but some scholars believe it to have been the place where the first edition of his writing was prepared." (1975:80).

¹⁵ Cf. F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:93, n. 32).

¹⁶ For the activities of this master see M. Boord (1993:10) and ch. II, 5b below.

Nyingma texts and composed a number of texts himself.¹⁷ In close cooperation with his brother, the translator Lo chen Dharmaśrī (1656–1717), Chöki Wangchuk practiced the teaching tradition of Mindröling (sMin grol gling) in Ü (dBus) where he had also studied. Mindröling monastery was founded in the year 1656 by Rigzin Terdag Lingpa (Rig 'dzin gTer bdag Gling pa, 1646–1714).¹⁸ Moreover, having been committed to an all-encompassing approach to the Nyingma school Chöki Wangchuk also practiced the ritual cycles of the 'Northern Treasures'. This treasure tradition of ritual and meditation cycles, as represented by Padma Tinley (Padma 'Phrin las, 1641–1717), the fourth reincarnation of its founder Rigzin Gödemcen, has its monastic center at Dorje Trak (rDo rje Brag) in Central Tibet not far from Mindröling on the opposite side of the Tsangpo river, which is the other major monastic institution of the 'Old Translation School' (founded in 1610).

Chöki Wangchuk transmitted both of these major traditions within the Nyingma school, among others, to the Sherpa village lamas who had traveled to him shortly before the middle of the 19th century. Thus, Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk played an important role as teacher who was instrumental for the spread of certain *gter ma* teachings of the Nyingma school throughout the borderlands, which Tibetan peoples had begun to settle into since the 14th century. These borderlands include Mangyul, Helambu, and the Nepal valley, Dolpo, Mustang, Gungthang, Purang, and also among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu.¹⁹ Hence, for an adequate understanding of the cultural history of this region in northeastern Nepal in the environs of Mt. Everest, and for the Nyang family of the Lamaserwa clan in Solu in particular, the activities of this important Nyingma master in the first half of the 19th century is of crucial significance. Up until the present day Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk has been held in high esteem among the village lamas of the Sherpas throughout the region of Solu-Khumbu.

¹⁷ Cf. F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:93, n. 31 and 32). – In his *Bibliography of Tibetan-Language historical works* D. Martin lists only a history of the Mdo bo che lineage which transmitted the teachings of the little-known *gter ston* Bstan gnyis gling pa to which the author Chos kyi dbang phyug himself belonged (1997:152–3, no. 362).

¹⁸ For the teaching tradition of sMin grol gling refer to R.J. Kohn (2001:XXX, 3–4.10.15–16,35,49–52; 1997:368).

¹⁹ For this subject refer to the findings of F.-K. Ehrhard. Ehrhard has done considerable research both on Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug and some other masters who were active as propagators of the teachings of the rNying ma pa as well as of the bKa' rgyud pa school in the Tibet-Nepal borderlands, and on the main sites of their diffusion (1993, 1996, 1997). – For the present context it is of significance that Ehrhard identified apart from Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug the masters Kah thog Rig 'dzin Tshed dbang nor bu (1698–1755) and Karma 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789) as the "...central figures in the codification and transmission of rNying-ma-pa teachings in the 18th and 19th centuries from South Tibet to Nepal." (1993:81).

Kyirong is the main town of the region of Mangyul. It is situated in Latö (La stod) and constitutes an area of southern and southwestern Tsang to which the upper valley of the Trisuli River on the Nepalese border belongs. The Mangyul region has a mythologically charged history, and is of particular importance in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. When on his way to Tibet in order to introduce the new faith in the Land of Snows Guru Padmasambhava, the Indian sage and tantric master, is said to have crossed the Gungthang pass in the Mangyul region to enter Tibet and to subdue the evil spirits.²⁰ There he met the envoys of king Tri Songdetsen (Khri srong lde brtsan, reigned from 755/756–797).²¹ After accomplishing his task Padmasambhava left the Land of Snows via the same pass.²² In his life story composed by Yeshe Tsogyal (Ye shes mTsho rgyal²³, Padmasambhava’s close Tibetan disciple and consort, this significant episode is described in the following words: “With his miraculous powers, Master Padma journeyed through the sky and remained for three months on the plateau of Sky Plain in Mang-yul.”

The Mangyul region was once part of the former kingdom of Mangyul Gungthang (also known as mNga’ ris smad, the eastern-most part of mNga’ ris).²⁴ After the assassination of Tibet’s last emperor Lang Darma (Glang dar ma, who reigned only from 838 until 842 C.E) in the year 842 C.E. two factions of the nobility rivaled for his succession, as he had left no legitimate heirs.²⁵ The ensuing power-struggles had disastrous consequences as they resulted in the collapse of the Tibetan kingdom. Descendants of the royal family migrated westward to establish new kingdoms. The elder grandson of the older of Lang Darma’s two sons, Tashi Tsegpa Tsal (bKra shis brTsegs-pa-dpal), with the name Ode (Od lde) migrated to Mangyul Gungthang and established a kingdom. Due to their marital alliances with the Sakya school and their Mongol protectors Mangyul Gungthang was powerful from the second half of the thirteenth century on. In the late fourteenth century the kings of Gungthang aligned themselves with the Nyingma school.

²⁰ See G.C. Toussaint, G.C. (trans.) *Le Dict de Padma. Padma thang yig* (1933: 244–248, song no. 60).

²¹ As to this event refer to A. Ferrari (1958:91,154, n. 548). See also G. Tucci 1949 (Vol.II:545) and T. Wylie (1962:65).

²² Cf. G.C. Toussaint (1933:472, 474).

²³ Yeshe Tsogyal (1993:60).

²⁴ On the division of the territory of mNga’ ris skor gsum into the three myriarchies Guge, Purang and Mangyul see L. Petech (1990:52–3).

²⁵ In a recent contribution L. Petech has emphasized that the problem of the chronology of Glang dar ma is not yet finally solved (1994:649).

The kingdom of Mangyul Gung-thang lasted till 1619/20 when the rulers of Gtsang in Central Tibet eradicated it.²⁶ In 1641 the former Gungthang was taken over by the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Mongol allies. To understand the importance of this kingdom it is vital to realize the fact that the Gungthang rulers represent the senior-most line of descent from the medieval Tibetan emperors.²⁷

According to F.-K. Ehrhard there are many reasons that seem to have constituted the status of Mangyul Gungthang with its district town Kyirong as a 'spiritual centre'²⁸ from where significant religious trends emanated and were disseminated. These reasons include: the former presence of Padmasambhava and Milarepa, the great spiritual authority of the Gungthang kings owing to their descent from the medieval Tibetan emperors, their activities as patrons of diverse treasure-discoverers, the activities of certain treasure-discoverers who had been active in the region, the presence of famous lamas. According to oral tradition this region was considered by the Sherpas as 'great sacred center' (*gnas chen*). Sherpas used to undertake a pilgrimage to Mang yul, visiting the above mentioned holy sites including the so-called 'Phags pa lha khang in Kyirong to make offerings and to offer prayers to the image of Ārya Va ti bzang po or sKyid grong Jo bo, the famous Avalokiteśvara statue that had miraculously arisen.²⁹

Shortly before the middle of the 19th century Sherpa pilgrims met the great teacher Thrakar Taso Tulku Mipham Chöki Wangchuk. From that time until the end of his life in the year 1837 Sherpas used to travel to Thrakar Taso to receive various explanations, instructions, and empowerments from Chöki Wangchuk including the scriptures of his own teaching tradition. Unfortunately the exact duration of their stay in the company of their teacher remains unmentioned in the SCB.

The treasure-cycles of Rigzin Jatsön Nyingpo (Rig-'dzin 'Ja'-tshon snying-po, 1585–1656) and of Rigzin Terdag Lingpa have been very important for the Sherpas of Solu-

²⁶ L. Petech gives a short outline of the changing circumstances of the history of the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang: bKra shis brTsegs pa dpal "...had to retire to La-stod in western gTsang. His three sons, the "Three sMad-kyi-lde" partitioned the inheritance among themselves, thus further weakening the power of their family. Their numerous descendants followed the same pernicious custom, giving origin to dozens of small principalities. Eventually they sank to the level of petty local chiefs or even of landowners. The most important of these statelets was Mang-yul Gung-thang..." (1997:231). – A history of the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang still remains to be written. A rough overview over the changing fortunes of Mang-yul Gung-thang can be obtained from the bits and pieces provided by Jackson (1976 and 1978), Petech (1997, p. 231, pp. 241–3, p. 246), and Childs (2001 pp. 9–13).

²⁷ Cf. G. Childs (2001:9).

²⁸ F.-K. Ehrhard (1996:69, n. 24).

²⁹ Cf. Wylie (1962, p. 64).

Khumbu.³⁰ Khenpo Sangye Tenzin has introduced Thrakar Taso Tulku Mipham Chöki Wangchuk as the main lama who was instrumental for the transmission of the key ritual texts of Sherpa Buddhism, which have been in use in the Sherpa area of Solu-Khumbu from that time up until the present (SCB, fols. 50–54).

Among the Sherpas of Khumbu Chatang Chöying Rangdrol (Bya btang chos dbyings rang grol), who had received the transmission of the main Nyingma lineages from Chöki Wangchuk, was the main figure responsible for their transmission in the Khumbu area.³¹ Among the Sherpas of Solu who traveled in the 18th/19th centuries to Mangyul Gungthang to receive the transmission of these teachings Nyangrig Dorje Jigdral (Nyang rigs rDo rje 'Jigs bral) was the most influential figure.³² These two Sherpa village lamas are important figures in the history of Sherpa Buddhism who were responsible for the spread of the teaching tradition of Mindröling as transmitted by Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk in the region of Solu-Khumbu.

According to the SCB it was Dorje Jigdral who brought the full *gter ma* tradition to Solu (fol. 48), founded the village temple bKra shis mthong smon popularly known as gZhung dgon pa (fol.56),³³ and introduced the *tshe chu* celebration according to the *byang gter* tradition held every month in honour of Padmasambhava (fol. 56). Moreover, it was this charismatic village lama who established the *Dumji* as the annual festival of the Lamaserwa clan in Gonpa Zhung (fol.56) on the basis of the liturgical text *byang gter phur pa spu gri* in the middle of the 19th century. Among the Lamaserwa Sherpas there had been no regular *Dumji* celebration for about six generations following their settlement in Solu in the middle of the 17th century. Since the initiative of Dorje Jigdral, the *Dumji* festival has been celebrated here in the fixed time-span of 'seven days of work' to be performed in the last week of the

³⁰ On the spread of the treasure-cycles by these two *gter ston* among the Sherpas of Solu refer to F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:81–96).

³¹ Cf. SCB (fol. 59). According to personal information obtained from the sTeng po che bla ma Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin bzang po (April 4th 1994) Chos dbyings rang grol was the head of Thang smad dgon pa in the Khumbu region.

³² On this eminent member of the Nyang family (Nyang rigs) see SCB (fols. 48, 54, 56, 59). On fols. 52–54 the author gives an enumeration of all members of the Lamaserwa clan centered in Gonpa Zhung who had studied in Brag dkar rta so with sprul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug. For the names of the members of the Nyang family associated with Brag dkar rta so sprul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug see also F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:81,87, fn. 18 and 19).

³³ It is difficult to determine the exact dating of the village temple's foundation. The signboard above the temple door indicates the year 1636 which seems to refer to the activities of bla ma rDo rje bzang po who actually had only founded a place for the practice of spiritual retreat; S.B. Ortner gives the two dates 1695/1720 (1989:62); F.-K. Ehrhard dates the temple's foundation to the middle or the second half of the 18th century (1993:87, fn. 18). According to my informants, however, the temple may have been founded in the middle of the 19th century.

last month of the Kalachakra year (fol.56). It has to be noted, however, that the author of the 'History of the Sherpas' does not name the festival as it is known today but refers to it solely as *sgrub mchod*. This is the one type of ritual of a grand public celebration called *sgrub chen*, which has been rendered by G. Tucci as 'great liturgical performance'.³⁴ This clearly demonstrates the presence of both the teaching tradition of Mindröling and the tradition of the 'Northern Treasures' in the Solu area.

Dorje Jigdral is a member of the Lamaserwa clan and, in particular, of the Nyang family in Gonpa Zhung (Tib. dGon pa gZhung, Nep. Junbesi). According to the SCB there are fourteen generations from Nyangral Nyima Özer down to Dorje Zangbu, and from him to Dorje Jigdral there are six generation (fols.166–168). Dorje Jigdral transmitted the received teachings to his own disciples, and as such he is an important figure in the history of Sherpa Buddhism. It is significant that these teachings have been passed on within the Nyang family in one uninterrupted family line of village lamas from Dorje Jigdral down to the present village lama of Gonpa Zhung, lama Tenzing (bla ma bstan 'dzin, b.1939).

³⁴ G. Tucci (1988:150).

Chapter Three

The *Dumji* festival as held among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, Nepal

1. History of the *Dumji* festival as had been practiced on a humble and irregular scale

Unlike its famous monastic counterpart, the *Mani Rimdu* masked dance celebration, the *Dumji* masked dance festival performed among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu does not seem to have a specific time and place of origin. The origin of the *Dumji* festival remains obscure since it is not mentioned in their few written sources. According to Sherpa oral tradition the *Dumji* festival, as a distinct phenomenon celebrated on a very humble and irregular scale, had already migrated to the region of Solu-Khumbu with the ancestors of the Sherpas. Their long migration from the eastern Tibetan province of Khams took place at the end of the sixteenth century and in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹ Hence, the *Dumji* ceremony has been performed in communal celebrations since the very beginning of their settlement in Solu-Khumbu.

As mentioned earlier it was the married householder lama Sangwa Dorje (bla ma gSang ba rdo rje), the mythical ancestor of the Sherpas in Solu-Khumbu, who introduced the performance of the *Dumji* ceremony in Pangboche (sPang po che), the Sherpas' first village temple in the Khumbu region. However, at that time and in the following two centuries the *Dumji* was performed irregularly, sometimes several times a year and at other times not at all. It never extended over the duration of one day. The date of its performance had not been fixed either and, most importantly, it was conducted in the local temple by a married householder priest (*sngags pa*) and one of a few assistants on a very simple scale as far as the specific rituals and the length of time involved are concerned.

Performed on a regular and grand scale, however, the *Dumji* festival is less than two hundred years old. The particular rituals, however, on which the grand *Dumji* is based, are

¹ This is the result of many conversations with my clerical informants, which were held in the course of the last four years (2001–2004).

far older. The main ritual cycle of the major annual celebration, varying from one local tradition to the other, is contained in a certain spiritual 'hidden treasure' (*gter ma*). These 'treasure' texts have been discovered in different centuries by two 'treasure-discoverers' (*gter ston*) containing certain teachings of Guru Padmasambhava. According to my informants the ritual cycles, which are the basis of the *Dumji* festival among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, have been unearthed, revealed, and transmitted by Rigzin Gödemcen (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem phru can, 1357–1408) in the fourteenth century and the 'great treasure-finder' Rigzin Ratna Lingpa (Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, 1403–1479) in the fifteenth century. It is the teaching of one particular spiritual 'treasure'-cycle for the worship of a certain *yi dam* or tutelary deity or a combination of several 'treasure'-cycles forming the basic liturgy for the ritual performance of the celebration, which is constitutive of a particular local tradition of the *Dumji* festival.

The *Dumji* festival's basic functions have been basically the same since its obscure beginning in the remote past. These functions include: the worship of Guru Padmasambhava in diverse emanations and of the local protector deities who are all duly invited, venerated and invoked to offer their benevolence and powerful help for the dispelling of a broad range of evil spirit powers hostile to both the Buddhist doctrine as well as the local community and the individual person for the well-being and harmony of the local community. However, before it was lacking the specific features of the *Dumji* festival as it has been performed since the middle of the nineteenth century until the present day. Since then the *Dumji*'s main characteristics are the elaborated ritual cycle and the large number of performing ritual experts who have to ritually chant the elaborated liturgy, upon which the cult of the central tutelary deity is based, and the enactment of the spectacular tantric masked dances. Moreover, the ritual ceremony necessitates the considerable time-span of at least fourteen days that extends from the beginning of the meditation of the tantric village lama on the tutelary deity until the last day of its solemn performance in a grand public celebration that is held in the courtyard of the local temple.

2. Meaning and general structure of the *Dumji* festival

The *Dumji* festival focuses on offerings of gifts and requests to the protective deities and on offerings and exhortations to the demons; it closes with a 'long life' blessing ceremony (*tshe dbang*). In other words *Dumji* represents a ritual ceremony performed to propitiate the deities by prayer (*gsol 'debs*) and to worship them by meditation and offerings in order to secure their benevolence, protection and help in fulfilling the festival's goal. This consists in exorcising the evil forces from the local community that have accumulated over the course

of the preceding year. To accomplish all this, the elaborate religious celebration, which is based on a complex set of several different ritual categories, extends over a period of four to eight days depending on the particular local tradition.²

The main ritual types include the purification of the ritual space (*bsang*), the calling or invocation of both the transcendental and local deities³ (*spyan drang*), the offering of place (*bzhugs pa*), the offering (*mchod pa*) consisting of seven substances,⁴ praise (*bstod pa*), request (*'phrin las bcol ba*), and recitation of mantra (*bzlas pa*) in the course of meditation. In this context music, chanted *mantra*, i.e. the sound-form which represents and is the deity, *sādhana*, i.e. the ritual prescription for the visualization and proper worship of the central deity including a description of the deity's form and attributes, dance movements with masks and costumes, ritual objects, especially the ritual dagger called *phur bu*, and *mudrā*, i.e. symbolic hand gestures, come together and create a carefully prepared and well organized performance of gods and goddesses dancing on the local ground of the celebrating community.

According to my clerical informants the medium of tantric dance is regarded as the necessary guarantee for the power and efficacy of certain important ritual activities such as are performed in the *Dumji* celebration. However, it is always added that the sacred dances are the less important part of a greater ritual ceremony – be it the *Mani Rimdu* or the *Dumji* masked dance festival among the Sherpas. Hence, particularly in the case of highly accomplished tantric masters, the power and efficacy of the performance of a ritual cycle may also be achieved solely through the practice of meditation on and visualization of the central deity and its entourage.⁵ Musical instruments such as bells, cymbals, long horns, oboes, big drums and small hand drums are used for the invocation and veneration of the

² In Sagar-Bhakanje in southwestern Solu the *Dumji* festival is performed over the course of four days [own observation] while in the twin-villages of Khumjung/Khunde in Khumbu it extends over a period of eight days; for the latter refer to Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964:186).

³ Transcendental deities such as Vajrakīlaya, the tutelary deity of the *Dumji* in Gonpa Zhung, and the deities of the sacred dances can both lead to enlightenment and offer any kind of help in both this world and the world beyond. Local deities can offer help and protection in this world only.

⁴ These seven substances are: 1. drink, 2. purified water including *nyer spyod*, i.e. 'the five kinds of offerings to be made to the gods in worshipping them': 1. flowers, 2. incense, 3. lamps, 4. odors, 5. eatables (S.Ch. Das:488); for the set of seven offerings in the context of the *Mani Rimdu* where it is expanded by an additional eighth offering item, a white *torma*, see also R.J. Kohn (2001:93).

⁵ R.J. Kohn refers to Trulzhig Rinpoche who presides over the *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival in Chiwong (sPyi dbang) monastery in Solu – who emphasizes that the spiritual practice (*sgrub pa*) from the beginning to its end is the fundamental part while the sacred dances are only of secondary importance. Trulzhig Rinpoche even notes that the sacred dances are 'unnecessary': the *Mani Rimdu* he has instituted in the early sixties at Thubten Chöling monastery in Solu has no sacred dances (2001:71).

deities. Their use is said to enrich the ritual performance with power and blessings, and generally ritual music is considered a particular kind of offering.

Usually, the *Dumji* masked dance festival builds on three different acts: a preparatory phase of meditation by all performers within the temple on the *yi dam* or patron deity concerned; the public performance in the village temple's dance courtyard ('*chams rva*) which reaches its climax in the exorcism of evil forces (*gtor zlog*); and the dissolution phase within the temple where the performers' visualizations of the local protective deities involved are dissolved into emptiness.

The *Dumji* festival, just as any other important ritual celebration, generally provides the possibility for the 'two pursuits of life' (Tib. *tshogs gnyis*):⁶ the accumulation of religious merit (Tib. *bsod nams*) toward a favorable rebirth and of mundane wealth. For the representatives of the clergy, however, the main purpose of the performance consists in the symbolic expulsion of the accumulated evils of the past year that harm the Buddha's teachings and all sentient beings.⁷ Moreover, the ritual performance is believed to procure blessings (*byin rlabs*) for all participants, to generate faith in the Buddhist Dharma in both the lay people and the performing religious experts, and to ease the way to enlightenment (*byang chub*). At the same time the officiants use the '*chams* performance as an impressive means of instruction to the lay population by depicting the supremacy of the Buddhist dharma while at the same time entertaining them.⁸

For the people of the local community, however, the *Dumji* festival also serves their very mundane existential needs as it marks the transition to spring time, and thus the beginning of the agricultural cycle.⁹ As such it is a truly seasonal festival that is always celebrated at the same time of the year in spring – beginning or ending either on the full moon or on the new moon.

The local deities that are worshiped over its course can offer help and protection in this-worldly affairs only. They reside in specific locations and grant their help if they have been properly worshiped. To these deities the Sherpas turn to make them grant general well-being and prosperity. The requests directed to the local deities concern health, wealth, in other

⁶ Cf. S.Ch. Das (1989:1033).

⁷ Due to this important function H. Richardson (1993:123) has called these sacred masked dances 'protracted rites of catharsis.'

⁸ This pedagogical aspect is noted by R.A. Stein (1987:126); and in the context of the *Mani Rimdu* by L. Jerstad (1969: 3,74). In personal conversations with many Sherpa lamas the complaint of the lack of knowledge among the laypeople concerning both the history of Tibetan Buddhism and of Sherpa Buddhism is a recurrent theme.

⁹ In the southern region of Solu the *Dumji* festival is held in the months of March or April, whereas in the northern Khumbu region where spring is later it is enacted in April or May.

words the growth of agriculture, cattle and trade business as the three pillars of the Sherpas' economy, protection from natural disasters such as hail, landslides, and earthquakes, and progeny. The *Dumji* festival represents the major cult of the local deities that is performed within the framework of the cult of the central transcendental deity on which the performance of the *Dumji* celebration primarily builds. The local divinities and worship of them is contained in the sacred book that, serving as liturgy, is recited by the practitioners on the first three days of the festival.

The general ritual structure of the *Dumji* celebration among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu is as follows. Regarding the necessary preparatory activities a week or two before the beginning of the festival the village head lama goes into solitary retreat to meditate upon the tutelary deity according to his worship as is prescribed in the liturgical text. At the same time in the village temple some village priests perform a daily reading of the *kangso* part of the liturgical text devoted to the worship of the local protective deities as well as their clan deities.¹⁰ It is these ritual acts that necessarily precede the celebration of the *Dumji* festival.

The ritual activities of the first day are primarily devoted to the worship of the local protective deities. Two juniper burning offering rituals (*bsang*) usually performed in the morning ensure the purification of both the relationship to the gods and of the site.¹¹ After sunset a ritual circumambulation (*skor ba*) of the village temple (Sherpa *gompa*; Tib. *dgon pa*) is performed, and then an offering to the guardian kings of the four quarters (*phyogs skyong rgyal po*) is made by a group of village priests, under the guidance of the tantric village lama. The activities of this day conclude with a Black Hat (*zhva nag*) dance enacted by the tantric village lama, which is re-enacted on the following two days.

On the night of the second day a long dance rehearsal (*'chams sbyong*) without masks is held, while on the third day the *'chams*, the full set of masked dances consisting of a total of eleven dances, is enacted. The public performance in the courtyard begins in the late afternoon and lasts until around nine o'clock at night. The clerics regard this particular act as the most solemn part of the *Dumji* ceremony. It reaches its climax in several kinds of exorcisms of a broad range of evil forces (*gtor zlog* or *bdud zlog*). The rituals of exorcism to be performed depend on the particular local tradition. The rituals are affected by the tantric village lama

¹⁰ S.Ch. Das (1989:121) renders Tib. *bskang gso* as 'to make copious religious services to the tutelary deities, angels, and the guardian spirits of the ten quarters'. S.G. Karmay renders the term as 'atonement ritual' (1988: 238). On the *kangso* celebration as performed in Solu cf. E. Berg (1998:24-5).

¹¹ On the ritual of purification (Tib. *bsang*) cf. S.G. Karmay (1998c) and below. In fact as will be showed later there are two different categories of *bsang* rituals: *klu bsang* as to the worship of the aquatic serpent deity, and the *lha bsang* concerning the worship of the transcendent deities.

who over the course of meditation, first in retreat, then in public, invokes and visualizes the central deity to finally become the powerful deity who drives away the malignant spirits.

Whereas in the first three days the ritual activities are devoted exclusively to warding off the evil spirits harmful to the Buddhist dharma and all sentient beings, starting in the afternoon of the fourth day a 'long life' empowerment ceremony (Sherpa *whong*; Tib. *tshe dbang*) is conducted. All these ritual activities constitute the key elements the grand *Dumji* ritual is composed of. According to both the specific local tradition and the particular circumstances a characteristic of the *Dumji* festival is that more ritual procedures can be added to this key structure. The diverse variations of this general structure notwithstanding, the ritual practices of meditation, offering, and sacred dance with colorful costumes and awe-inspiring masks constitute the key elements of the *Dumji* celebration.

Although some changes may occur in the performance of the *Dumji* festival in a locality, as they always do over the course of the years, it has to be emphasized that these changes do not and cannot affect the basic ritual structure of this important and complex ceremony. S.B. Ortner has observed that in recent years monks have conducted a monastic campaign in the village temples of Khumjung and Thami in the region of Khumbu. This campaign is directed to disparage the married householder lamas in order to effect shifts in the direction of 'higher' monastic ideals. Among others, the monks' 'move to higher Buddhism' aims at 'cleaning up' the *Dumji* festival as 'all public representations of sex' are concerned, and even at a 'take-over' of the *Dumji*.¹²

In opposition to Ortner's statement the following has to be emphasized. According to the few facts she does report the 'cleaning up' concerns solely the appearance of few figures in the context of the sacred masked dances. Their task is simply to give the audience a break through making people laugh in what laypeople take as comical interludes. These interludes have been inserted into the framework of the masked dances but they do not represent a kind of sacred dance, and hence they do not have any ritual meaning and function.

Moreover, the sacred character of the *Dumji* as 'great liturgical performance' (*sgrub chen*) cannot simply be altered in the course of a campaign of some Sherpa monks. According to my clerical informants basic changes concerning a grand ritual cycle such as the *Dumji* can only be initiated by the leading hierarchs of the 'Old School' such as Trulzhig Rinpoche ('Khrul zhig Rin po che Ngag dbang Chos kyi blo gros, b.1924), the abbot of Thubten Chöling (Thub bstan chos gling) monastery in Solu. However, for almost twenty years

¹² S.B. Ortner (1999:171–175). Ortner notes, however, that this monastic campaign does not affect the Solu region. – I have never received information concerning an actual full 'take-over' of a *Dumji* by monks, an act that cannot simply be stated but, indeed, needs some detailed specification.

Trulzhig Rinpoche, in association with other leading hierarchs, has been directly involved in revitalizing and strengthening among the Sherpas both their popular religious practices and their married householder priests (*sngags pa*) through extensive initiations, etc.

3. The *Dumji* festival and the distinct local traditions where it is held

Among the Sherpas, the *Dumji* festival is held annually in the village temple of only nine local communities in Solu-Khumbu. According to lamas and laypeople alike the *Dumji* represents the most important village celebration in the Sherpas' annual cycle of liturgical ceremonies. The celebration of the *Dumji* festival is reflective of both Tibetan Buddhism and its supremacy over autochthonous belief systems, and the way a particular local community constructs, reaffirms and represents its own distinct local tradition by way of the worship of its local protective deities. Its elaborate performance follows a ritual pattern that is rooted in and governed by Tibetan Buddhism. In each locality, however, the ritual performance of the masked dance celebration is staged in public according to a local tradition of its own. As will be shown, it is the general ritual pattern of the Mindröling tradition of 'public festivals' and its sacred dances, an influential sub-school of the Nyingma order, which has been made use of as an overall ritual structure into which the distinct local tradition of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung has been inserted.

Already before their exodus from Khams the Sherpas seem to have been devout followers of the Nyingma school, the 'Adherents of the Old'. This is the order of the original Buddhist tantric tradition whose followers practice those tantras that had been translated during the Royal Dynastic Period (eighth and ninth centuries). The *rNying ma pa* is 'the old' in contrast to the Sarmapa (*Gsar ma pa*) or 'Adherents of the New' which include all of the other Tibetan Buddhist schools. The latter emerged as 'reform movements' when about two centuries later a new set of Sanskrit texts was translated into Tibetan.¹³ M. Kapstein draws attention to the fact that the Nyingmapa share a common history and much doctrine but that this school is also characterized by a considerable degree of heterogeneity. In consequence each regional tradition adheres to rites revealed by one Nyingmapa visionary.¹⁴ This appears to be equally true of the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu.

It was the great treasure-discoverer Ratna Lingpa (1403–79) who had transmitted the Nyingma tradition to the ancestors of the Sherpas. Subsequently, each locality has constructed its own distinct tradition. The core of this local tradition is represented through the ritual performance of the *Dumji* celebration. It has to be noted that among the Sherpas the *Dumji*

¹³ E.G. Smith (2002: 14f.).

¹⁴ This has been emphasized by M. Kapstein (1983:42).

festival, with its colourful masked dances, has not been instituted in the interest of a political or stately power such as it happened with public festivals in Tibet or in Bhutan but solely by the Sherpa people of the nine localities where it is staged.¹⁵ In each case the *Dumji* among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu has been introduced into the local community owing to the initiative of a charismatic village lama of their own. In each locality where it is held, it is performed on the basis of the maṇḍala of a different *yi dam* or tutelary deity. Consequently, for an adequate understanding of the *Dumji* festival in general and the distinct local traditions where it is celebrated among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu the festival's great diversity has to be taken into due account.¹⁶

The *Dumji* festival has been held traditionally in the local communities of the five villages of Pangboche, Kerrok, Thame, Khumjung and Nauche in Khumbu, of Lukla in adjacent Pharak, and of Gompa Zhung, Sagar-Bhakanje, and Goli in the southern region of Solu.¹⁷ Unlike the clear-cut history of the *Mani Rimdu* based on just one liturgical text as it is performed in Solu-Khumbu in the monasteries of Thame, Tengboche, and Chiwong the history of the *Dumji* among the Sherpas is more complex and thus more difficult to trace, since each local community where it is held has constructed a distinct tradition of its own which also includes the basic text or collection of texts used as liturgy as its key element.¹⁸

In most cases a local community among the Sherpas consists of scattered hamlets and isolated homesteads, which are centered around the village temple called *gonpa* (Tib. *dgon pa*). Either composed of just one single clan, such as in the exceptional case of Gompa Zhung, or of several clans, such as in all other eight localities where *Dumji* is celebrated, it

¹⁵ For the political purpose of the establishment of new public festivals in Tibet and Bhutan in which sacred dances figured prominently see A.W. Macdonald (1987b: 10f.). For the sacred dances as performed in Bhutan refer to M. Aris (1976:612f.); F. Pommaret (2002: 175). As to the staging of sacred dances in various public ceremonies of the Lhasa year until 1959 cf. H. Richardson (1993:7ff.)

¹⁶ Unfortunately, this is not the place to go into the respective details. In fact, this endeavor necessitates a voluminous investigation of its own.

¹⁷ *Dumji* traditions have disappeared in some places whereas in others the same or a slightly different tradition has been invented. In at least five instances, the tradition of performing the *Dumji* festival among the Sherpas has become extinct since about three decades ago. On the other hand, in at least four localities the *Dumji* celebration has been instituted in the same time span. Moreover, in 1993 the married lama of Chialsa gompa in Solu has started the sacred masked dances called *Guru Tsengyed* (Tib. *Gu ru mtshan brgyad*, 'the eight different aspects of Padmasambhava'). This tradition, among others also linked with Mindroeling, has been wholly unconnected with Sherpa Buddhism. It was Dilgo Khentse Rinpoche (1910-91) who had advised the Chialsa lama to establish this new tradition of sacred dances at his monastery. Through the help of the former head of the Nyingma school (from 1987 until 1991) the monks of Chialsa monastery received a sound training in the practice of 'chams at Shechen gompa in Bodnath.

¹⁸ Again, unfortunately, space forbids going into the different local traditions in this context. This endeavor would necessitate a detailed and voluminous investigation of it own.

constitutes a community of families linked by one or more kinship groups, which favors concerted action as to the general organization of both secular and religious activities. Daily life revolves around the *gonpa* of the locality. Buddhist precepts and practices govern, at least ideally, the conduct of the Sherpas' spiritual and worldly affairs such as farming, herding, and trading. Property in land, cattle, houses, trading goods, etc. is held by the nuclear family and is inherited in the paternal line.

S.B. Ortner has described the local community as comprising "...relatively self-contained units, each protective of its property and its social boundaries, cautious about giving and about the obligations it may incur by receiving."¹⁹ According to her the key fact about Sherpa social structure is 'its relative atomization' into nuclear family units and estates. "At the same time, however, a Sherpa village is a community, with lively social interaction, a reasonable degree of order and solidarity, and often a certain collective identity. Such communal solidarity and identity is reproduced in many contexts: in the periodic macroevents of village temple rituals, and in the countless microinteractions of day-to-day social life."²⁰

4. The *Dumji* festival as a 'great liturgical performance' (*sgrub chen*) and the tantric practice of deity yoga

The *Dumji* celebration and the *Mani Rimdu* festival as they have been held among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu up until the present day each represent a certain and distinct combination of Tibetan rituals. Firstly, both ceremonies belong to a genus of Tibetan rituals known as *sgrub mchod*. G. Tucci has translated this term as 'propitiations and offerings' whereas S. Beyer simply calls this kind of genre 'rituals of offering'.²¹ According to G. Tucci the goal of the cult act (*mchod pa*) composed of scriptural recitation and liturgical performances is either to pacify or to give pleasure to a deity or to promote the deity's actualization.²²

Moreover, this kind of religious ceremony is embedded in an overall ritual complex based on a liturgical text that is called *sgrub chen*. G. Tucci has rendered this category of ritual

¹⁹ S.B. Ortner (1978:68).

²⁰ S.B. Ortner (1978:61).

²¹ G. Tucci (1988: 115); S. Beyer (1988:66–68). – J.P. Dalton renders the term as *Spoken Teachings "festival"* (2002:237–44). In his unpublished dissertation the fate of the main sūtra text of the Anuyoga tradition – *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* – is reconstructed and described as well as its use in the context of the development and consolidation of the rNying ma school. – I have to thank F.-K. Ehrhard who kindly made this valuable source available to me.

²² G. Tucci (1988: 115). Here the author gives an overview of the characteristic aspects of the *sgrub mchod* rituals (pp. 115–123, 132). For an overview of the structure and for the description of rituals of offering see S. Beyer (1988: 66–68:186–194; 202–204).

ceremony as 'great liturgical performance' whereas S. Beyer has translated it as 'ritual of great evocation'.²³ A central feature of the *sgrub chen* performances are the spectacular sacred masked dances (Tib. '*chams*'). These masked dances are enacted by well-trained monk dancers dressed in colourful costumes made of multi-coloured brocades and silks traditionally manufactured in China and in Benares, India, and masks, often awe-inspiring, made of clay, but mostly of glued cloth, and paints. *sGrub chen* rituals are usually accompanied by *sman grub* activities, i.e. by the manufacture of sacred medical substances (*bdud rtsi chos sman*) such as is practiced in the context of the *Mani Rimdu* but not in that of the *Dumji* festival.

According to Tucci large-scale festal celebrations such as both the *sgrub mchod* and the *sgrub chen* ceremonies can serve a broad range of purposes such as the expulsion of the forces of evil, invoking a better era, or calling up good fortune for the beginning new year. As Tucci observes both *sgrub mchod* and *sgrub chen* celebrations have been a constitutive part of public rituals as staged in monastic communities. In other words, both kinds of ritual celebration have been enacted on one festive occasion before a mixed audience consisting of clerics and non-initiated laypeople.²⁴ That is the reason why in recent Tibetological literature these two different kinds of great religious ceremony are being rendered as 'public festival'. Although the laypeople do not take part directly in the ritual practice of the cult but act merely as spectators, their presence demonstrates the intended 'participation of all in the central impulse of the monastic community', their social distinctions notwithstanding their presence is characteristic of the genre of 'public festivals'.²⁵ Commonly it is the laity who living in a close symbiosis with their monastery act as sponsors of the religious festivals, as will be outlined below, thus contributing the material resources necessary for their solemn performance. As Beyer has pointed out, the relationship between monks giving ritual service and the laity sponsoring them is reciprocal;²⁶ and it is through the ritual performances that this close mutual bond is continued, revitalized or reaffirmed. However, as Tucci recalls, the laypeople bear 'an active joint responsibility' with the acting clerics for the efficacy of the rituals. Among others, they make their contribution to the intended communal process of accumulation of merit (*bsod nams*) by taking part in the ritual circumambulation of the sacred buildings. Hence, these public festivals, Tucci emphasizes, fulfill an eminent social

²³ G. Tucci (1988:150); S. Beyer (1988:531, index). For the characteristics of rituals of evocation refer to G. Tucci (1988:150ff.); S. Beyer (1988: 66–68). G. Dorje and M. Kapstein have rendered the term as 'rite of great attainment' (1991: 373).

²⁴ In this kind of public festival the performed sacred masked dances are called '*chams*' in contrast to the secret sacred monastic dances (*gar 'chams*, Skt. *nartanā*) which are performed solely by and before initiated clerics.

²⁵ G. Tucci (1988:150).

²⁶ S. Beyer (1988:68).

function as they are not only performed for the welfare and salvation of the individual but at the same time for the benefit of the whole celebrating community whose future well-being the ritual ensures. It is in this highly complex way that the enactment of these large-scale festal ceremonies “...integrates the monkhood and the lay world into a social totality.”²⁷

As will be shown in this investigation, in the context of the *sgrub mchod/sgrub chen* celebrations as held in the local Sherpa community the laymen contribute even more to the merit accumulation since they are expected, at certain times, to beat the big drum (*rnga chen*) or blow the long telescopic horns made of copper (*dung chen*). Moreover, the officiants are also aided by certain laymen who had received some religious education at the time of their childhood but had married later, in the making of the barley dough for the sacrificial cakes (*gtor ma*) and the first phases of their moulding. It is significant that all these activities as performed by laymen are indiscriminately regarded as ritual acts through the execution of which the laity actively contributes to both the expected power of the ritual and the collection of merit. All these aspects viewed together serve to illuminate the important fact that the *sgrub mchod/sgrub chen* celebration which among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu is called *Dumji* constitutes an integral part in the social life of the local Sherpa community and in the construction and reaffirmation of a respective local identity. According to my informants there is a significant division of labour involved in the *Dumji* performance: whereas the ritual experts perform the *sgrub chen* or ‘ritual of great evocation’ of the *yi dam* or tutelary deity, the practice of offering (*mchod pa*) is the activity of the sponsors as representatives of the celebrating community – supported, of course, by the religious experts.

One of the major purposes of a *sgrub chen* performance is in the communal purification through the expulsion of ‘evil forces’ (*gtor zlog* or *bdud zlog*) that have accumulated in the preceding year. This ensures the future well-being and protection of both the monastic and lay communities. This procedure is dramatically enacted and thus the victory of Tibetan Buddhism, representing the good, through the deliberate utilization of the superior power of Tantric Buddhist rituals over the malignant forces is clearly demonstrated.²⁸ The *sgrub chen*

²⁷ G. Tucci (1988:150).

²⁸ Rites of expulsion abound in the Tibetan cultural realm. G. Tucci (1988:150–53) mentions the complex exorcism that is performed in the context of the Great Prayer Festival (*smon lam chen mo*), which was instituted in 1409 by Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the great reformer and founder of the Gelugpa (*dGe lugs pa*) school. Tsongkhapa inserted in the series of pre-Buddhist rites of passage on the occasion of the change of the year; for a detailed description of the various rites that the Great Prayer Festival as held in Lhasa comprises refer to H. Richardson’s eye-witness account of the ceremonies of the Lhasa year (1993:11–59). Certainly, the *smon lam gtor rgyag* ceremony (“Ritual casting out the Votive Offering for the Great Prayer”) is the most spectacular event of the New Year celebrations in Lhasa (op. cit., pp. 39ff.). Moreover, the latter half of the twelfth month is devoted to rituals concerned with “casting out the demons of the old year” (*dgu gtor*). According to M.J.

performance is believed to procure blessings and empowerments (*byin rlabs*) for all participants, clerics and laypeople alike. The lamas regard the *sgrub chen* performance as an important occasion for the ‘two accumulations’ (*tshogs gnyis*): the accumulation of merit (*bsod nams*, Skt. *pūṇya*) and of wisdom (*ye shes*, Skt. *jñāna*).²⁹ Moreover, the clerics emphasize that the grand *sgrub chen* performance, including the spectacular sacred dances, makes a theme of the central tenets of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, these grand and colourful public celebrations also serve as an important means for the education and edification of the faithful laity.³⁰

The spiritual practices characteristic of a *sgrub chen* ceremony consist of the contemplation (*sgom pa*) on the deity and her or his mantra and the subsequent visualization (*dmigs pa*) of the deity whose cosmic force is actualized and manipulated by a ritual expert in his or her ritual.³¹ It is through the generation of and identification with the central deity that the divine power can be utilized and directed to the benefit of the celebrating community, which is precisely the goal of the execution of that kind of ritual ceremony. As S. Beyer observes all Tibetan deities are centers of this cosmic power.³² However, as R. Linrothe emphasizes, it is the class of wrathful deities – Hevajra, Heruka, Cakrasaṃvara, Kālachakra, Yamāntaka and, one may add, Vajrakīlaya such as in the case of the *Dumji* festival of the Sherpas of the Lamaserwa clan in Gonpa Zhung – that occupies a central position in rituals of evocation.³³ According to S. Beyer all the patron deities of the Tantras of the Highest Yoga being derived from the same ‘cultic stock’ that produced the Indian Śiva figure belong to that type of Heruka. These Heruka, he notes, are perhaps the most potent and symbolically evocative of all Tibetan deities.³⁴ Vajrakīlaya is one of the eight Herukas practiced by the

Boord (1993:33) the *gtor zlog* rites begin on the twenty-second and continue until the end of the last month accompanied by dances on each of the four final days.

²⁹ Cf. Patrul Rinpoche (1999:438); in G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:107f.) *tshogs gnyis* is rendered as ‘Two provisions’.

³⁰ This aspect has been noted by M. Boord (1993: 198) and R.A. Stein (1987:126). As to the invention of the ‘chams and their performance in public R.A. Stein assumes as a second reason that the mask has the capacity “to facilitate the manifestation of a deity” (ibid.).

³¹ On the contemplative process and its different stages refer to S. Beyer (1988: 69–99); on the three parts of visualization see op. cit., pp. 69–81.

³² S. Beyer (1988:66). Regarding the complex symbolism of the highest protector deities Beyer notes: “It is, ultimately, this cosmic power that is symbolized by the multitudinous arms and weapons and by the sexual embraces of the highest deities; and it is this power that the practitioner forms “from the realm of emptiness by the process of generation.” (ibid.)

³³ R. Linrothe (1999:7) On the central importance of the class of wrathful deities through the long history of Vajrayāna Buddhism see R. Linrothe (1999:3–9); for depictions of the diverse wrathful deities and their iconography refer to Linrothe’s work.

³⁴ S. Beyer (1988:42).

Nyingma School and other traditions, embodying the enlightened activity of all the Buddhas.³⁵

In his pioneering study of the rituals constitutive of the cult of Tārā,³⁶ which also illuminate the structure of Tibetan ritual in general, S. Beyer observes that in the annual monastic cycle of ritual ceremonies both kinds – *sgrub mchod* and *sgrub chen* ceremonies – are usually combined and staged in the course of one and the same great festive celebration. Moreover, Beyer draws attention to the fact that Tibetans make a broad distinction between two types of ritual approach to the utilization of this divine and primordial power that may be achieved in a complex process of Yoga Tantra practice.³⁷ It is this emic differentiation that he employs in his investigation, which shall be quoted here in full length:

“In a ritual of *evocation* through the process of self-generation, the practitioner first applies the Process of Generation to himself: he vividly visualizes himself as the deity and grasps the divine pride or ego; he directs the power of the deity into himself and becomes, in effect, the transformer through which the divine power can pass out of the realm of knowledge and into the world of events. Thus he next generates or evokes the same deity (occasionally, a different deity) in front of him by the same Process of Generation – placing the power in the sky or within an object (a flask of pure water, say, or an amulet of protection) – and finally directs it into a ritual function or magical employment; he consciously manipulates and conducts it into an activity, into a magical device, or even, as in the bestowing of initiations, into another person.”

In contrast, in a ritual of *offering* “...there is no self-generation, no manipulation of her power through the person of the practitioner. There is no contemplation of the mantra in the practitioner’s own heart during self-generation, but rather the effectuation of the mantra in

³⁵ M. Ricard (1994: 677, index).

³⁶ Tārā, an emanation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, is a very popular Tibetan Buddhist deity whose cult spread in the 11th century mainly through the Buddhist scholar Atiśa Dipamkara Shrījñāna (980/90–1055) who had been a teacher at the great monastic university of Vikramaśīla when he was invited to Tibet. There he spent the last twelve years of his life initiating the Kadampa school. His teaching tradition exerted a major influence on Tibetan Buddhism, mainly on the school of Tsongkhapa (1357–1419).

³⁷ On the power of coercion in the Tantras see D. Snellgrove (1987:235–40). As to the broad range of purposes to be achieved through tantric practice the author notes: “All tantras of all classes promise both supramundane successes, such as gaining prosperity, offspring, a particular woman, good harvests or rainfall, overcoming adverse influences such as various kinds of disease-causing evil spirits, curing the effects of poison etc.” (p. 235). In this text Snellgrove provides a comprehensive overview over Tantric Buddhism, its history and its characteristic aspects (pp. 117–303).

the deities heart generated “in front”: the nexus of power which is the deity is given iconographic form by the ritual Process of Generation and vividly visualized before the practitioner, that the goddess may be approached, her power tapped through her mantra, and the “stream of her heart aroused” with offerings, praises, and prayers.”³⁸

To summarize Beyer’s argument, in rituals of offering the contemplative process is restricted to the Generation in Front (*mdun skyed*) which aims at evoking the deity before the practitioner. In opposition to this, in rituals of evocation the practitioner identifies himself with and subsequently becomes the deity in the Process of Self-Generation (*bdag bskyed*).³⁹ It is the latter process that alone grants the practitioner the capacity to control the divine power and to apply it for the benefit of the celebrating community. This is the basic difference of these two distinct approaches, notwithstanding the same preparatory procedures are required for both ritual performances.⁴⁰

As S. Beyer observes both ritual approaches play an important role in the annual cycle of festive events, such as they are staged in the life of the Buddhist monastic community. All the rituals of the afternoon assembly consisting of the prayers to the various protector deities are rituals of offering. In contrast to the former all the rituals performed for the high patron deities are rituals of evocation. In fact, all the great annual ceremonies of the monastic cult are rituals of evocation.⁴¹ Regarding the principal difference between rituals of evocation and rituals of offering S. Beyer points out the following aspects: in rituals of evocation, which are more clearly soteriological or manipulatory in intent, ‘the practitioner *is* the deity’. In clear contrast the rituals of offering are performed, “...for the most part, to thank the deity (as a power beyond the practitioner) for favors received, or to pray for future kindness.”⁴² On the other hand both ritual approaches share the processes of contemplation and visualization of the deity. In fact, the performance of these two processes represents the necessary precondition for all the uses of the ritual ranging from this-worldly to otherworldly purposes, be it to prevent hailstorms or to gain enlightenment.⁴³

³⁸ S. Beyer (1988: 66–67).

³⁹ As to the fundamental change the practitioner undergoes in this context S. Beyer comments that the latter must, “... in any ritual of evocation (that is, whenever he generates himself as the deity), exchange for his own ordinary ego the ego of the deity, which is the subjective correlative of the exchange of ordinary appearances for the special appearance of the deity and his retinue of the mandala.” (1988:76).

⁴⁰ S. Beyer (1988:67).

⁴¹ S. Beyer (1988:68).

⁴² *Ibid.*; hence, these two approaches to the deity “...often symbolize a difference in the practitioner’s psychological distance from the deity’s power.” (*ibid.*)

⁴³ S. Beyer (1988:69): “...the heart and motive power of the ritual are always the contemplation of the deity.

It is of significance in this context that in monastic practice both kinds of rituals are usually combined into one and the same great liturgical performance. According to Beyer there is never a ritual of offering in isolation from the contemplative preparation of self-generation: "...an offering is always the delayed half of an evocation, the first half of which was performed perhaps years before as the prior ritual service of the deity."⁴⁴ According to my informants the Sherpa *Dumji* festival, in which both the rituals of offering and those of evocation are closely interlinked, clearly conforms to Beyer's important observation. Moreover, the success of the performance of the two kinds of rituals requires the presence of monks whose vows are unbroken, who have been initiated into the respective ritual cycles which are staged in the life of the monastic community, and who have gone first through the ritual service of the central guardian deities that is associated with these complex ritual cycles.⁴⁵

There is considerable danger involved in the Yoga Tantra practices as the forces to be unleashed and utilized are too powerful to be played with by a layman, the uninitiated, or monks who have not duly maintained the moral character as is prescribed in the Vinaya, i.e. the first part of the Tripitaka (Skt. Tripitaka, lit. 'three baskets'), which contains the three sections of the canon of Buddhist scriptures. The practices of Highest Yoga Tantra are strictly kept secret and their use is clearly restricted to those who have been duly initiated into the cult of a particular deity and hence have the capacity to do so.⁴⁶ This is one reason why to make sure that the lay people, who in most cases act as sponsors of a religious festival, pay great attention that the performance is carried out with utmost care since otherwise not only the material resources are wasted but also the necessary performance is merely detrimental to them. Beyer refers to the fact that without the adequate contemplative training, which alone ensures "...the ability to manipulate through one's own body the tremendous power..." that is set free in the ritual, these practices are dangerous to both the practitioners as well as to those for whose benefit it is performed. To underline this caveat he recalls the efforts of his lama informants to make him realize that an ordinary nondivine human body simply could not stand the pressure involved.⁴⁷

whether the practitioner is generating himself as the goddess, evoking her before him, or projecting her into a object. *If contemplation is the heart of the ritual, then visualization is its living soul* [emphasis mine –E.B.]."

⁴⁴ S. Beyer (1988:67).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ For the dangers involved in the practice and the use of the four tantras in general and Highest Yoga Tantra in particular, on the main aspects of the long contemplative training and on those persons who have the required predispositions to enter into the Secret Mantra Vehicle refer to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama on the 'Essence of Tantra'. This important text the Dalai Lama wrote as an introduction to the *Great Exposition of Secret Mantra* (1987:13–79) by Tsongkhapa (1357–1419).

⁴⁷ S. Beyer (1988:66). He remembers the response of a lama whom he had told of the tragic and untimely death, in an automobile accident, of R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, the author of the seminal work on the cult of the

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama strongly emphasizes this issue of strict secrecy that surrounds the realm of Highest Yoga Tantra: “The topics of Secret Mantra are not to be displayed like merchandise but practiced secretly. If they are not, instead of helping, there is a danger of harming many people due to generating misunderstanding. (...) If Secret Mantra is practiced openly and used for commercial purposes, the accidents will befall such a practitioner, even taking his life, and conditions unfavourable for generating spiritual experience and realizations in his continuum will be generated. With other books it is not too serious to make an error, but with books of mantra it is very serious to err either in explanation or in translation. Furthermore, if the fault of proclaiming the secret to those who are not ripened is incurred, there is danger that instead of helping, it will harm. There are many stories of people who have begun treatises on Mantra but have been unable to complete their lifespan and others whose progress was delayed through writing a book on mantra.”⁴⁸

As already mentioned above it is in the context of Yoga Tantra that the central deity, including its retinue is formed in the contemplative process, approached in the ritual of his or her cult and his or her power appropriated through the recitation of the deity’s mantra.⁴⁹ Here it seems appropriate to mention just some of the distinctive features of tantric meditation involved.⁵⁰ The type of meditation in which a practitioner visualizes himself as the deity has two stages: the process of creation (Tib. *bskyed rim*; Skt. *utpattikrama*), often translated as the ritual process of generation; and the process of perfection (Tib. *rdzogs rim*; Skt. *niṣpannakrama*) or stage of completion or fulfillment.⁵¹ The process of perfection continues the efforts of the creation process.⁵²

The creation process is commonly divided into three parts: self-creation (*bdag bskyed*), visualizing oneself as the deity; creation in front (*mdun bskyed*), visualizing the deity in space before the practitioner; and creation in the flask (*bum bskyed*), visualizing the deity in

Tibetan demons and protective deities: “My informant just nodded wisely; he was not a bit surprised.” (p. 54).

⁴⁸ Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (1987:15–18).

⁴⁹ S. Beyer describes the mantra as ‘the sonic reverberation of [the deity’s –E.B.] power’ (1988:64).

⁵⁰ Dudjom Rinpoche’s chapter on ‘Resultant Vehicles of Secret Mantra’ (1991:243–379) presents a clear overview over the whole subject of Tantric meditation from the rNying ma perspective. – R.A. Stein gives a basic outline of the different stages of tantric meditation in the context of ritual performance (1987: 119–125); G. Samuel writes on the morality and the practice of meditation or yoga in early Buddhism, a term not much used by the early Buddhists, although it became common in the Tantric period (1993: 374–377). According to Samuel yoga is a convenient term for the large variety of techniques practiced by Buddhists, Hindus, and Jains. Samuel characterizes the techniques of yoga “...as exercises for the training of the mind and body as a totality.” (ibid.)

⁵¹ These two stages of tantric meditation are also summarized under the term Deity Yoga; for this see R.J. Kohn (2001: 31–34). For the process of creation or generation see S. Beyer, op. cit., pp. 100–127, on the process of perfection see pp. 127–143. For these two stages see also R.A. Stein (1987: 113, 121–125).

⁵² According to R.J. Kohn the process of perfection ‘makes the yogic vision of the creation process real’ (2001:31).

a flask of holy water.⁵³ However, in the context of the performance of the *Dumji* festival only the first two parts of the creation process are of importance according to my informants. In their joint contribution on a Bon ritual to a collection of essays on ritual in different cultures A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay describe the key aspects of these two parts: “According to the goal of the ritual and the level of symbolism involved, the officiant will ask the divinity to accomplish the acts for which he has called her: destruction of demons, etc.; or he will identify himself totally with the divinity recreating her within himself, and thus experimenting the ultimate Consciousness [transl. E.B.].”⁵⁴

The last stage of the generation process, the creation in the flask, concerns the empowering of the water that will be used in an initiation ceremony. It is through the visualization of the deity within the flask and the application of the mantra that the water is rendered potent.⁵⁵ Beyer emphasizes that in many rituals whose purpose is aimed at gaining control of the divine power the generation process may be abbreviated ‘even to the point of being instantaneous’.⁵⁶ Whereas in the New Translation Schools the three parts are performed separately in the Old Translation School they can be done all at once.⁵⁷

The deities to be visualized – such as Vajrakīlaya (rDo rje phur pa) in the context of the *Dumji* festival among the Sherpas of Gonpa Zhung – belong to the class known as *yi dam* (Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*). The term *yi dam* has most often been translated as tutelary deity, although recently the term personal deity has been used. R.J. Kohn observes it is said that a *yi dam* is the very form in which a person practicing meditation will attain buddhahood. Whereas

⁵³ R.J. Kohn (2001:31f). For the creation in front (*mdun bskyed*) refer to S. Beyer (1988:67,69,129, 225–261); on the process of self-generation (*bdag bskyed*) see S. Beyer (1988:67, 129–130, 208, 255–261, 330f.).

⁵⁴ A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay (1988:123).

⁵⁵ S. Beyer (1988:253). – In the context of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung it is practiced only for rendering water potent that is used for the complex blessing to be obtained in the framework of the long life empowerment ceremony (*tshe dbang*). Performed on the fourth day of the festival this ceremony is regarded by the laity as an important part of the whole celebration.

⁵⁶ S. Beyer (1988:128).

⁵⁷ This information is part of the explanations R.J. Kohn received from his main informant, Trulzhig Rinpoche ('Khrul zhig Rin po che Ngag dbang Chos kyi blo gros, b.1924), the high dignitary and eminent master of the Old Translation School, abbot of Thubten Choeling (Thub bstan chos gling) monastery in Solu, who presides over the *Mani Rimdu* festival in Chiwong monastery (sPyi dbang dgon pa) in Solu of which Kohn has provided a detailed Tibetological analysis and a comprehensive ethnographic account. – According to Trulzhig Rinpoche there are actually three systems of *bskyed rim* in the Nyingma school: 1. meditating on the deity as the self, in front and in the flask all at once (*bdag mdun gsum gcig char bsgom pa*); 2. meditating on them separately (*bdag mdun bum gsum so sor bsgom pa*); 3. a system where, before the recitation, the creation of the deity passes from oneself into the creation in front like one lamp lighting another (*me rim btab lta bu phye ba'i bsgom pa*) (2001: 32).

other deities of the pantheon are merely worshipped, "... the *yi dam* is the god one strives to become."⁵⁸

The goal of the *sgrub chen* ceremony can be achieved by carefully performing the complex sequence of ritual procedures in the cult of the *yi dam* or central deity as is textually prescribed. Major activities comprise inviting, praying, praising, offering, and invoking the central deity to ensure that in return she or he offers the divine power that is to be utilized by the officiant in the course of the ritual. It is this divine power that is regarded as the *sine qua non* for the fulfillment of the celebrating community's goal. These activities are carried out through chanting the liturgical text and various kinds of offerings to the deity and his or her retinue in the course of a complex maṇḍala (*dkyil 'khor*) ritual. The latter is a symbol of the universe as visualized in the Generation Process that is to be offered to the *yi dam* including the retinue as his or her divine mansion for the duration of the ritual ceremony. Moreover, these practices comprise the acts of inviting, hosting, and, in certain cases such as in the *Dumji* festival as the subject of this investigation, giving a ransom (*glud*) to the demons (*bdud*) to be expelled (*bdud zlog* or *gtor zlog*).

The contemplative visualizations are always accompanied by the recitation of the deity's mantra (*sngags*), i.e. holy syllables or mystic spells,⁵⁹ in association with the performance of certain mudrās (*phyag rgya*), i.e. symbolic hand gestures.⁶⁰ Mantras occupy a crucial place in Tibetan Buddhist ritual.⁶¹ According to S. Beyer the mantra can be an instrument of

⁵⁸ R.J. Kohn (2001: 32). Referring to the origin of the term the author observes that *yi dam* is related to the word for promise or pledge (*dam tshig*). The underlying concept seems to have two different meanings: "...either that the *yi dam* is the deity to which one is pledged or that it is the form in which one promises to become a Buddha, a provisional image of one's potential Buddhahood." (ibid.) – For the depiction of different kinds of *yi dam* refer to G.W. Essen/T.T. Thingo (1989:129–57).

⁵⁹ D. Snellgrove gives a short definition of mantra (1987:122). For different mantras as involved in the cult of Tārā refer to S. Beyer 1988; for the broad range of mantras used in the cult of Vajrakīlaya see M.J. Boord 1993.

⁶⁰ S. Beyer distinguishes between two functional types of mudrās or ritual hand gestures: 1. stereotyped gestures of reverence, threat, welcome, or farewell and 2. the ritual hand gestures that accompany the presentation of offerings (1988: 146). Various forms of mudrās are depicted in Beyer (1988:147, 152, 154, 160f., 168, 178, 179, 218, 220, 224).

⁶¹ The fundamental importance of mantras in Tibetan Buddhist ritual is clearly indicated by the quotation of H.H. Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's afore-mentioned statement on the issue of secrecy in the context of Highest Yoga Tantra practice. It is also mirrored by the renderings as given by different authors which also reveal a certain difference as to its very meaning. Whereas S. Beyer defines mantra as 'the very speech of god' (1988:144) and R. Linrothe translates the term as the 'sound-form which represents and is the deity' (1999:333) M.J. Boord notes that according to Tibetan clerical authorities on tantric practice 'the mantra is god' (1993:4). Dudjom Rinpoche summarizes the distinctive efficacy of mantras pointing out that through the application of the mantras and the tantras 'all the wishes of sentient beings come true' (1991:248). – Owing to the crucial importance of mantras Tibetan Buddhism calls the school of Vajrayāna or 'Diamond Vehicle' also Mantrayāna.

protection just as an effigy can represent an instrument of destruction. His definition is as follows: “In Tibet, the mantra is the audible simulacrum of the divine power, and in coalescence of image and object, it becomes the divine power itself, manifest and crystallized in sonic form.”⁶² It is only through the contemplation of the mantra in the prior ritual service of the *yi dam* or central deity that the practitioner who has the capacity to do so is able to apply the mantra in order to acquire the divine power. As Beyer states in this context two different processes have to be distinguished. In the ritual, the employment of the divine power is the application of the mantra, whereas the effectuation of the mantra is the ritual evocation of the deity.⁶³

Another constitutive element is represented by the sound of instrumental music played by long horns, oboes, drums, cymbals, bells, etc. Apart from these procedures the use of certain ritual objects such as the magic dagger, called *phur bu* (Skt. *kīla*) in the case of the *Dumji* festival, is characteristic in this context. In the altar arrangements meticulously crafted *gtorma*, i.e. sacrificial dough cakes moulded of barley and butter, and decorated with ornaments of plain butter and paints, and as used only in certain rituals thread-crosses in the rainbow colours (*nam mkha'* or ‘sky’) figure prominently. All these aspects are described in much detail in the particular *sādhana* (Tib. *sgrub thabs*, ‘the means of realization’) that is the Tantric liturgy and procedure for practice, which is often simply called the ritual manual.

The *yi dam* practice as described in the basic liturgical text always contains two main parts which reveal the two complimentary goals of *sgrub chen* celebrations. The *stod las* or ‘upper section’ is devoted to realizing Enlightenment (*byang chub*, Skt. *bodhi*). In contrast, the *smad las* or ‘lower section’ prescribes the practices for the destruction of hostile forces creating obstacles thus obstructing the tantric practitioner from the goal of realization. An essential part of a *sgrub chen* consists in the act of ritual ‘killing’ (*bsgral ba*) through which liberation (*sgrol ba*) occurs.⁶⁴ Taking life clearly contradicts the most fundamental Buddhist precept, but it is considered justified since the being’s consciousness is thereby ‘liberated’.⁶⁵

⁶² S. Beyer (1988:243).

⁶³ S. Beyer (1988:243).

⁶⁴ Among the ‘Three Enlightened Families of Pure Deities of Relative Appearance’, the three main families of enlightened deities of originally non-Buddhist descent, the Vajra Family, as represented by the powerful fierce divinities Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara/Vajrasattva, specializes in the fierce rites of coercing, slaying and destroying; for this refer to D. Snellgrove (1987:191, 236–37).

⁶⁵ In G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:358) the practice of *sgrol ba* is defined as follows: “to transfer forcefully and compassionately the consciousness of a sentient being to a higher level of existence, thus benefiting that being and removing obstacles caused by his or her evil karma.” In the work of Dudjom Rinpoche numerous instances of acts of ritual killing as performed by different masters of the Old School are mentioned (1991:601–605, 607–612, 615, 710–716).

The malignant forces to be killed and thus to be liberated are called *dgra bgegs*. C. Cantwell renders the term *bgegs* as ‘obstacles’ or “...distractions arising in meditation, while *dgra* are the ‘hostile forces’ preventing liberation.”⁶⁶ Sometimes the entity to be liberated through ritual ‘killing’ is called Rudra, i.e. Śiva, the old Hindu deity.⁶⁷ As C. Cantwell points out, in the Buddhist tantras Rudra is always equated with the most negative qualities – ignorance, self-grasping, and the three conflicting emotions of desire, hatred, and delusion.⁶⁸ In fact, it is these negative qualities residing in every human being and conceived of as *dgra bgegs*, as demons (*bdud*), or as Rudra that according to Tibetan Buddhist view constitute the obscurations of the practitioner’s mind from which she or he has to be liberated through tantric ritual. In the latter case, an effigy of Rudra as represented by a *liṅga* (Tib. *nya bo*) is sliced up and the different limbs are then placed in different directions.

Another key aspect concerns the performance of the three wrathful activities called *mnan sreg* ‘*phang gsum*, which is usually carried out in the context of a Black Hat (*zhva nag*) dance.⁶⁹ In their execution the forces of evil are buried underground, burnt, and destroyed by a magical weapon (*zor*) thrown against them. All these activities represent culminating parts in the celebration.

Regarding the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism each of the leading six monasteries with their respective network of secondary monasteries, both large and small, has created its own traditions in general, and particularly for both *sgrub chen* celebrations and sacred dance performances.⁷⁰ Normally, the performance of a *sgrub chen* ceremony involves the whole of

⁶⁶ C. Cantwell (1997:109). In this essay C. Cantwell deals with the diverse aspects involved in the practice of ritual ‘killing and liberation’. – The archetype of an ethically justified and necessary act of ritual killing in Tibetan Buddhist mythology is the ritual murder of the allegedly anti-Buddhist emperor Glang Dar ma in the year 842 by the Buddhist monk dPal kyī rdo je. – In his study of the *Mani Rimdu* festival R.J. Kohn cites some explanations that show how Tibetan lamas deal with the tension between this destructive practice and the basic Buddhist precept in their legitimating of the *sgrol balbsgral ba* rites as practiced in that context (2001:81f.).

⁶⁷ Cantwell sees the *sgrol ba* rite focused on Rudra as a ‘Buddhist inversion of Śaiva tantrism’ (1997:108). The history of Rudra as seen from Tibetan Buddhist perspective may be found in Ye shes mtsho rgyal’s biography of Padmasambhava that was hidden as a *gter ma* or treasure text and revealed in the form of a long poem by the thirteenth century visionary O rgyan gling pa (c.1323–60); see the chants V and VI in Toussaint, G.-Ch. (1933:24–42). See also R.M. Davidson (1991), R.A. Stein (1995), and M.T. Kapstein (2000: 163–177).

⁶⁸ C. Cantwell (1997: 108).

⁶⁹ The three wrathful activities are *mnan pa* (‘pressing down’, ‘covering underground’), *sreg pa* (‘burning’), and ‘*phang ba* (‘throwing’, ‘casting a magical weapon’).

⁷⁰ Two examples may suffice to illustrate the wide and powerful monastic networks within the ‘Old Translation School’. M.J. Boord mentions that the mother monastery of Dorje Drag (rDo rje brag), the center of the influential sub-tradition of the ‘Northern Treasures’ (*byang gter*) within the rNying ma School, controlled over fifty monasteries (1993:2); according to M. Ricard ‘some forty other monasteries’ were under the spiritual authority of Shechen (Zhe chen) monastery (2003:21). – For the tradition of the sacred dances of the rNying

the saṅga or assembly of monks of a given monastery. In the case of big mother monasteries the *sgrub chen* celebration comprise several hundred clerics. The actors are well trained in the arts of ritual chanting, music and dance, drawing the maṇḍala (*dkyil 'khor*) in coloured powder, moulding the intricate *torma* (*gtor ma*, Skt. *bali*), sacrificial dough cakes made of barley flour and coloured butter, and the weaving of thread-crosses (*nam mkha'*, 'sky'). Moreover, they have undertaken long meditative retreats focused upon the 'inner, outer, and secret' (Tib. *phyi, nang, gsang*) sādhanas of a particular teaching tradition and the study of the central deity of a ritual performance.⁷¹ In many cases the ritual performance of the *sgrub chen* goes on all day and a good part of the night and extends over a period of several days.⁷² Another distinctive feature of the dramatic masked dance performance of lavishly attired divine beings is much pomp and splendor. Thus, the *sgrub chen* as performed on such a large scale requires resources that only great monasteries can afford.

sGrub chen celebrations such as the performance of the major annual ceremony among the Sherpas of Solukhumbu, staged in the locality of Gonpa Zhung, are also enacted annually in the village temple of local communities throughout Tibet and the Himalaya, albeit on a far smaller scale. However, only the Sherpas use a name of their own calling their main communal religious event *Dumji* festival.⁷³

It is of importance that the Sherpas are adherents of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. According to the latter school's tradition it was the emperor Tri Songdetsen (reigned from 755/756–797) who having invited the Indian sage and Tantric master Guru Padmasambhava to Tibet established the still existing twofold division of the religious community: "...the shaven-headed followers of the sūtras [the monks] and the followers of the way of the mantras, who wore long, braided locks."⁷⁴ Whereas the former class of religious practitioners are the celibate monks, the latter are married tantric specialists. In the context of the *sgrub chen* ceremony as enacted in local Sherpa communities the officiants

ma School refer to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1997:11–32); for the other traditions including organized Bon refer to op. cit., ch. I.

⁷¹ For the extensive training of monks for the performance of the *sgrub chen* festivals see S. Beyer (1988: 24f., 26).

⁷² M. Ricard notes in his recent work on *Monk Dancers of Tibet* (2003:121) that the sacred dances "...go on all day in the monastery and on stage the time is limited to an hour and a half." However, all the sacred dances I have observed in the context of both the *Mani Rimdu* at the monasteries of Tengboche, Thame, and Chiwong as well as the *Dumji* as performed in Sagar-Bhakanje, Goli, and Gonpa Zhung in Solu and in Pangboche in Khumbu extend over at least two to two and a half hours.

⁷³ H. Zimolong, a colleague doing field research among the Gurungs of Kutang (*Ku tang*), informed me (June 29th, 2004) that a festival with similar characteristics is held among the Gurungs of Kutang, which they also refer to as *Dumji*. Unfortunately this festival has never attracted the attention of any researcher.

⁷⁴ Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:520).

are a kind of hereditary householder lamas who are referred to as *ngagpa* (*sngags pa*, ‘master of tantric spells’), or tantric practitioners. The officiants and the audience are related with each other by close family links. In the case of the *Dumji* as staged in Gonpa Zhung the celebrating community consists solely of one clan. Moreover, the officiants are all members of one patrilineage (*ru*) of hereditary tantric householder lamas. It is this kind of lay tantric practitioners who also perform the sacred masked dances of a village *sgrub chen*.

In Sherpa language the two ritual categories *sgrub mchod* and *sgrub chen* are blended with each other. Another term for the *sgrub chen* celebration is *sgrub spyi*, which can be rendered as ‘general liturgical performance’, meaning the unrestricted celebrating community of clerics and laypeople who live in close symbiosis with their monastery. The mix of these three terms results in the Sherpa word *Dumji*, which is the name of the annual Sherpa festival held in the village temple.

Sherpa clerics see the obvious differences between the great liturgical performances as enacted in the setting of the big Nyingma monasteries before a huge audience of clerics and laypeople and those held in the local Sherpa community. When asked about this subject Sherpa lamas call the village *sgrub chen* also *sgrub chung*, i.e. ‘small liturgical performance’. Thus, it is pointed out that, in theory, it is a difference pertaining more or less to the quantitative scale that sets apart the two versions of one and the same kind of great liturgical performance, which, most importantly, represents the practices of Highest Yoga Tantra. Hence, this emic distinction indicates that the villagers do indeed perform the same important festival thus gaining the same merit (*bsod nams*) and the same blessings and empowerments (*byin rlabs*), which are to be obtained in the great monastic *sgrub chen* festivals of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. However, owing to their rather limited resources the villagers of the local community are capable of staging their *sgrub chen* celebration only on a comparatively humble scale regarding the number of officiants including the dancers, their ritual and dance training, the range of sacred dances, the quality of the few costumes and masks, etc. Moreover, the grand *sgrub chen* ceremonies build upon a meticulously created sand maṇḍala with coloured powders whereas the maṇḍala of the Sherpa *Dumji* is made either of a painted scroll and grain or only of grain.⁷⁵

According to my informants the execution of the above mentioned wrathful activities to be performed in the context of the *sgrub chen* performance necessitates a period of *sādhana* practice, i.e. meditation on and visualization of the central deity in retreat, ‘of at least a week, a month, or, as it would be appropriate for such practice, a year’. This is usual within the

⁷⁵ The most detailed treatise on the ritual preparation of a Tibetan sand maṇḍala has been provided by R.J. Kohn in the context of the *Mani Rimdu* festival held at Chiwong monastery in Solu (1997:365–405).

monastic context. All officiants are married householders who have to cope with the burden of securing a family's mundane existence. Since the tantric lama presiding over the communal ceremony most often simply cannot afford the long time to spend in spiritual retreat necessary for the visualization and evocation of the *yi dam*, he usually restricts himself to a much shorter period of preliminary ritual practice in the cult of the central deity. The same holds true for the other officiants, particularly for the masked dancers, who do not have the time to freshen up their practical capacity as the performance of ritual chanting, the playing of the different instruments, and the various dance movements, recitation of mantras and performance of mudrās are concerned. Due to these problems of mainly practical nature the second day of the *Dumji* festival is, among others, devoted to the performance of a general rehearsal of the sacred dances to be enacted in full on the subsequent third day. In its course, the diverse officiants practice their respective roles, however, only a few of the '*chams*' are staged in the characteristic costumes, without masks.

According to my informants these obvious differences regarding the performance of the *Dumji* festival in the context of the local community in comparison to the enactment of the grand monastic *sgrub chen* ceremonies do not constitute a principal lack. In fact, neither do these differences devalue the power achieved nor the merit and blessings obtained from the ritual procedures provided these are carried out with utmost care and the intention of the officiants is pure. It has to be recalled that the laity who sponsors the communal *sgrub chen* carefully observes the performance of the ritual practices as well as the appropriate behavior of their officiants. Usually, criticism from their side is raised in cases when in the course of the ritual performance officiants simply get lost in the liberal consumption of *chang* or beer brewed from barley, corn, rice, or wheat.⁷⁶

Particular fruits of the *sgrub chen* are to be gained through the solemn performance, be it staged by celibate and profoundly trained monks in the grand monastic framework or by married householder lay practitioners in the setting of a local community, who are usually restricted in various ways. This significant aspect has been emphasized not only by different representatives of the Sherpa clergy but, among others, also by Trulzhig Rinpoche, the high dignitary and eminent master of the Old School whom the Sherpas consider as their most important spiritual authority.⁷⁷ This also confirms an important issue that has been raised by A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay. The latter authors have argued strongly against the

⁷⁶ The history of a *Dumji* performance, just like the history of particular monastic establishments, is not a continuous one. In fact, it seems to be characterized by certain periods of 'ups and downs' for which, among the Sherpas, usually the extent of *chang* consumption is held responsible.

⁷⁷ Trulzhig Rinpoche in an interview conducted in his monastery situated just a two hours walk to the north of Gonpa Zhung (April 14th, 1995).

uncontrolled use of the term ‘popular’ rituals amongst Tibetologists and at the same time have drawn attention to the fact that the so-called ‘popular’ rituals are fully integrated in the Buddhist doctrinal and philosophical system.⁷⁸

The great liturgical celebration is staged annually, in certain cases even in shorter periods, on a grand scale by all Buddhist traditions in monastic settings in Tibet and in other parts of the Tibetan culture area such as in Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, and in the regions of Dolpo and Mustang in Nepal. Whereas in Tibet proper these traditions were brought to an abrupt end over the course of the Chinese occupation the tradition of these great cultural performances remains on the margins of Tibetan culture as well as in exile in Nepal, India, and Bhutan.⁷⁹

Without any doubt the history of the *sgrub mchod* and *sgrub chen* celebrations is very old – although the exact dating of their origin and establishment does not seem to be possible. According to my clerical informants it can be safely assumed that what H. Richardson (1905–2000) points out in his vivid eye-witness account of the annual ceremonies and festivals, such as were held in Lhasa before China’s deliberate attempt at the destruction of Tibetan civilization after 1959, is true.⁸⁰

5. The origin of the *Dumji* festival as ‘great liturgical performance’ in the grand public festivals as created and introduced by Terdag Lingpa, Lochen Dharmaśrī, and the Fifth Dalai Lama who established them as rituals of the newly constructed Tibetan state

In the following section there will first be a brief outline of the formation and establishment of Tibetan sovereignty under the Fifth Dalai Lama, which was going to shape the destiny of modern Tibet until the disastrous Chinese invasion in 1959. Then the composition and establishment of new, large-scale public festivals will be highlighted, as they are the deliberate creation of two great masters of the ‘Old School’, Rigzin Terdag Lingpa (Rig ‘dzin Gter bdag gling pa Padma gar dbang ‘Gyur med rdo rje, 1646–1714) and his younger brother, the great translator Lochen Dharmaśrī (Lo chen Dharma śrī Ngag dbang chos ‘phel rgya mtsho, 1654–1717), and the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyamtso (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–1682). The latter introduced these grand public festivals as rituals of the newly created Tibetan state. It is of particular significance that this triad of influential Tibetan Buddhist masters of different adherences was not only mutually closely connected but in time they were also driven by certain shared goals. That second

⁷⁸ A.-M. Blondeau/S.G. Karmay (1988:122).

⁷⁹ Cf. M. Ricard (2003:26).

⁸⁰ (1993:7).

section focuses mainly on the close relationship of the Fifth Dalai Lama with the Nyingma school, its two major monasteries, their heads, and the respective traditions.

A. The formation and establishment of Tibetan sovereignty under the Great Fifth Dalai Lama

In 1637, Gushri Khan (1582–1655), the chief of the Qośot Mongols, had settled in the Kokonor region in Amdo. In 1636, after he had defeated the Mongol tribe of Chogthur, an ally of the king of Tsang, who had settled in that region only few years before, Gushri Khan was the sole leader of the Mongols in the Kokonor region. In 1637 he had met the Fifth Dalai Lama when he was on a secret pilgrimage in Lhasa, and had been deeply impressed by his personality.⁸¹ The Fifth Dalai Lama took him to be the person who was alluded to in a prophecy. He therefore organized a celebration for which he had a throne made for the Mongol Khan. That was placed in front of *Jo bo*, the famous Buddha image in the Jokhang, the temple of the Crowned Buddha known as ‘The Precious Lord’. During the religious ceremony the Fifth Dalai Lama gave Gushri Khan the name *bsTan 'dzin chos rgyal*, ‘Dharmarāja, he who upholds the doctrine’, and a gold statue of the great monk and reformer Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, 1357–1419) for having defended Gelugpa interests in the Kokonor region.⁸² Thus, the ancient Tibetan Buddhist relationship between a lama (*mchod gnas*) as donee and his royal lay donor (*yon bdag*) was established at this time between the two men. It was this relationship that was to have a far-reaching political consequence.

In 1640, Gushri Khan was informed that the Gelugpa in Tsang were suffering persecution from the side of the Tsang ruler and his own sectarian group, the Karmapa, and the Khan resolved to eliminate the opponents of the Gelugpa. In this context the Dalai Lama, after consulting Zur Chöying Rangdrol (Zur chen chos dbyings rang grol, 1604–57/69), performed an elaborated magic rite ‘on behalf of the Mongol force’.⁸³ In 1641, the Mongol forces succeeded in Khams whereupon they headed towards Tsang. Later, the Dalai Lama together with Zur Chöying Rangdröl⁸⁴ performed various magic rites against the Tsang royal forces

⁸¹ For these circumstances refer to D. Snellgrove & H. Richardson (1986:194–95); S.G. Karmay (1988:8).

⁸² S.G. Karmay (1988:8; 1998f.:509).

⁸³ S.G. Karmay (1988:8).

⁸⁴ Various occasions that illustrate the profound influence of this eminent tantric master of the rNying ma school on the Fifth Dalai Lama are mentioned by S.G. Karmay (1988, see index, p. 244). A detailed hagiography of Zur Chöying Rangdröl is given by Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:679–683). Zur Chöying Rangdröl is depicted on p. 680. From him the Fifth Dalai Lama received the transmission of many of the four kinds of tantric rites (p. 682), which included the ‘three traditions of Vajrakīla’ (p. 683).

that were now regarded as the enemy of the doctrine. During these ceremonies the Dalai Lama had various visions.⁸⁵

In 1642, after one year's struggle, the Tsang forces finally had to surrender. Thereupon the Mongol Khan invited the Dalai Lama to pay a visit to the newly conquered Tsang province. At the ceremony of enthronement, the Mongol Khan proclaimed that he offered his conquests of Tibet as a gift to the Dalai Lama and that the Dalai Lama was from now on the sovereign of Tibet. Thus, the Fifth Dalai Lama, who was until then the abbot of a monastery and the leader of one of the four Tibetan Buddhist school, at the age of only twenty-five years, became the temporal head of the country.⁸⁶

His meeting with Gushri Khan resulted in the Fifth Dalai Lama's accession to the sovereignty of Tibet in 1642 and the establishment of the Dalai Lama theocracy. Thus, a new Tibetan sovereign state was created in which the Dalai Lama de facto was the supreme ruler. It is this new sovereign state which was going to shape the destiny of modern Tibet until the Chinese invasion in 1959. The Mongol Khan, however, intended to remain in the background in his function as the titular 'King of Tibet and Protector of the Faith' whose real function was to defend the country and its government.⁸⁷

In establishing his authority he enjoyed the undivided and devoted support of the powerful Mongol leader. Thus, Gushri Khan and the Fifth Dalai Lama continued the old tradition by enacting the roles of royal protector/donor and lama.⁸⁸ S.G. Karmay characterizes the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama as 'one of the more splendid periods of Tibetan history'.⁸⁹ His reign marked the reunification of almost the whole of Tibet under one sovereign leader for the first time since the collapse of royal authority in the ninth century C.E. and the restoration of peace and prosperity in the country which for the last two hundred years had been devastated by sectarian strife and political struggles.⁹⁰ The following pacification and unification of the vast whole of Tibet required a considerable amount of time. Under the government of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Tibet from Ngari and Mount Kailash in the west to Khams in the south-

⁸⁵ S.G. Karmay (1988:9).

⁸⁶ For this historic event and its significance refer to R. Stein (1987:46); Z. Ahmad (1970:137-45); D. Snellgrove & H. Richardson (1986:194-5); H. Richardson (1984:41-42); S.G. Karmay (1988:9; 1998f.:510).

⁸⁷ H. Richardson (1998:389). In this text Richardson traces the origin and the history of the Dalai Lamas. – On the institution of a new government office, that of the sDe srid or 'regent', see S.G. Karmay (1988:9; and 1998f.:511).

⁸⁸ Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:823); D. Snellgrove & H. Richardson (1986:195).

⁸⁹ See S.G. Karmay (1988:12).

⁹⁰ As G.E. Smith has suggested an important factor that made possible the subsequent rise of different religious schools was the absence of a strong central authority and related political rivalries (2001:241-42).

east and to Koko nor in Amdo in the north-east was reunified for the first time since the decline of the Tibetan empire in the ninth century C.E.⁹¹

The Fifth Dalai Lama was the first Tibetan ruler who effectively united in his person the spiritual as well as the temporal power.⁹² The traditional union of the religious, i.e Buddhist, authority and the worldly political power called *chösi nyindre* (*chos srid gnyis 'brel*) is characteristic of the political system of Tibet.⁹³ Lhasa, which had already been the ancient capital of the royal period, was chosen as a suitable location for the new government's seat. And in 1649 the Fifth Dalai Lama transferred his residence from Drepung to the newly built Potala Palace, situated between the monasteries of Drepung and Sera, and the city of Lhasa. It is noteworthy that the Fifth Dalai Lama by way of a range of symbolically charged political decisions sought to demonstrate that with his newly installed state government he deliberately renewed and continued the grandeur Tibet as an imperial power as it had once enjoyed during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (Srong-btsan sgam-po; c. 617–649/50), the first of the 'religious kings', of whom he was a reincarnation.⁹⁴

After Gushri Khan's death in the year 1654 his two sons succeeded him jointly, but later divided the kingdom and devoted themselves to the pursuit of their own interests. Hence the role of the Mongol donor/protector gradually lost its importance, so that all real power in Tibet fell into the hands of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Subsequently, a range of new ceremonies was created according to the same pattern recalling the glorious ancient empire. These new ceremonies were instituted with the deliberate aim of enhancing both the grandeur and stability of the new government of the Tibetan sovereign state and the prestige of the new ruler, the successor of the great Religious Kings as well as that of the Gelug school.⁹⁵

⁹¹ S.G. Karmay (1998f:516).

⁹² D. Snellgrove & H. Richardson (1986:200).

⁹³ Cf. M. Goldstein (1998:5). For this union of politics and religion refer also to G. Dreyfus which he calls *chos srid zung 'brel* (1995:122); G. Dreyfus (ibid., p. 123) also mentions the continuous and unstable interaction with another tendency in the Tibetan cultural universe which he describes as a 'cynical view of power and politics': "Politics is part of the worldly domain (*jig rten*), which is of the nature of suffering and bondage. Participation in the political system is seen as drawback in religious terms."

⁹⁴ Cf. A.-M. Blondeau (1977:20).

⁹⁵ D. Snellgrove & H. Richardson (1986:198); H. Richardson (1993:7).

B. The Fifth Dalai Lama and his close relationship with the Nyingma school, particularly with the 'Northern' and the 'Southern Treasures' tradition and their lineage-holders, and the creation of large-scale public rituals

The political development that led to the settlement of 1642 and that continued to predominate until the Dzungar war of 1717–18⁹⁶ did not only favor a marked upsurge in the influence of the order of the Gelugpa. Thanks to the Fifth Dalai Lama whose strong sympathy for the Nyingmapa tradition was publicly known and who had frequently made use of certain tantric ritual cycles of the 'Old Translation School' these favourable circumstances also benefited the Nyingma school greatly as to both the material as well as the spiritual aspect.⁹⁷ For example, Dorje Drag Mindröling received strong support from the new government of the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁹⁸ It has to be called to mind that among the adherents of the 'Old Translation School' the Fifth Dalai Lama is highly revered as a great revealer of treasure texts which he had transmitted 'mainly' to the holders of the Nyingma tradition, the most eminent among them being the two charismatic masters 'the king of doctrine' Rigzin Terdag Lingpa and Rigzin IV Padma Tinley (Rig 'dzin Padma 'Phrin las (1641–1717)).⁹⁹ Thus the Fifth Dalai Lama has contributed significantly to the development of the Nyingma teachings.

During this period four of the six major Nyingmapa monasteries were founded throughout central and western Tibet, some of them with the support of the Fifth Dalai Lama.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁶ For the circumstances that led to the Dzungar invasion of 1717, on the subsequent short, but brutal terror regime of the Dzungars in Lhasa and Central Tibet under which the rNying ma school suffered severely from systematic persecution and their monastic institutions from being attacked, looted and damaged which was only brought to an end by the Chinese army in 1720 refer to T.W.D. Shakapba (1967:136–39), D. Snellgrove and H. Richardson (1986:217–218); L. Petech (1950:25–61); for the persecution of the rNying ma pa refer to *ibid.*, pp. 44–45. These resulted in the execution of Lo chen Dharmaśrī of sMin-grol-gling, Rig 'dzin Padma 'Phrin las of rDo rje Brag, and others; for this refer to E.G. Smith (2001:18). After the disappearance of the Dzungars both rDo rje Brag and sMin grol gling were restored with the help of Tibet's new leader, Pho lha gnas Bsod gnam Stob rgyas (1689–1747), and their former relationship with the Dalai Lamas was resumed, see E.G. Smith (2001:19). The rest of the 18th century saw what E.G. Smith has described as 'the rNying ma pa spiritual renaissance', and due to his diplomacy Pho lha gnas Bsod gnam Stob rgyas, who had studied with the martyred sMin gling Lo chen Dharmaśrī, managed to restore 'the Tibetan tradition of religious tolerance', cf. *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁹⁷ For these significant connections see E.G. Smith (2001:17). – On the Fifth Dalai Lama's close relationship with the rNying ma school see R.A. Stein (1987:128–9); D. Snellgrove and H. Richardson (1986:196) and Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:682–3 and 821–24). *Op. cit.*, on p. 824 it is written that "...directly and indirectly, the Fifth Dalai Lama was incomparably gracious to the teaching of the Ancient Translation School."

⁹⁸ E.G. Smith (2001:18); P. Yeshe and J. Russell (1991:28,30).

⁹⁹ This has been emphasized by Dudjom Rinpoche, the former head of the rNying ma order (1991: 823).

¹⁰⁰ According to E. G. Smith (2001:17) the six major monasteries are Rdo rje brag (c.1610) and Grwa phyi O

first of these six was Dorje Drag in Upper Tibet, located close to Lhasa on the northern bank of the Tsangpo river. Thub bstan Rdo rje Brag was founded in 1610 by Rigzin III Ngagi Wangpo (Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, 1580–1639).¹⁰¹ Subsequently Dorje Drag Monastery became the principal centre of the *byang gter* or 'Northern Treasures' tradition of revealed literature of the Nyingma school.¹⁰²

This achievement was mainly due to the initiative of Rigzin IV Padma Tinley,¹⁰³ the Fourth Lineage Holder of the 'Northern Treasures' tradition and second head of Dorje Drag Monastery. Thanks to the support of the Fifth Dalai Lama Padma Tinley succeeded in establishing Dorje Drag as both the major monastery transmitting the Northern Treasures tradition and as one of the main institutions of the 'Old Translation School'.¹⁰⁴ M.J. Boord mentions that the Fifth Dalai Lama came to receive the full series of tantric authorizations of the 'Northern Treasure' tradition from an early age.¹⁰⁵ In a recent paper on the origin of certain rituals in the visionary accounts of the Fifth Dalai Lama S.G. Karmay published a list of the personages who were involved in the transmission of the *byang gter* tradition. According to that list it was Rigzin III Ngagi Wangpo who had given the Great Fifth the transmission of the 'Northern Treasures' tradition.¹⁰⁶

rgyan Smin sgrol gling (1656) in Central Tibet; Ru dam rdzogs chen o rgyan bsam gtan chos gling (1685) and Zhe chen (c.1734) in the nomadic area between Khams and Central Tibet; and Kah thog Rdo rje gdan (1656) and dPal yul Rnam rgyal byang chub gling (1665) in Khams. – On the foundation and history of the major monasteries of the 'Old Translation School' see *op. cit.*, pp. 17–20. Refer also to D. Snellgrove and H. Richardson (1986:196) and P. Yeshi & J. Russell (1991:28–32).

¹⁰¹ Rig-'dzin III Ngag gi dbang po was the third incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can cf. M.J. Boord (1993:28). According to Dudjom Rinpoche the latter was invited on occasion of the Fifth Dalai Lama's birth to perform a longevity ritual for him (1991:821). S.G. Karmay notes that the rNying ma order claims it was because of this special connection that the Fifth Dalai Lama later became a rNying ma pa adept (2002:32).

¹⁰² Rdo rje Brag Monastery is mentioned in A. Ferrari (1958:46, 118, fn. 175). A brief description may be found in A. Waddell (1985:277) and in G. Tucci (1987:157). – A photo of Rdo rje Brag is contained in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991, no. 75).

¹⁰³ A short hagiography of Rig 'dzin IV Padma 'Phrin las is given in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:719–20). All the data given above may be found on p. 720. A portrait may be found on p. 719. – As to the close relationship between Rig 'dzin Padma 'Phrin las and the Fifth Dalai Lama see E.G. Smith (2001:19).

¹⁰⁴ M.J. Boord (1993:29).

¹⁰⁵ M.J. Boord (1993:29–30). Some of these tantric authorizations of the *byang gter* tradition were said to have been received directly in mystic visions from the deceased master bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1607) who is the second incarnation of Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408), the founder of the 'Northern Treasures' tradition., *ibid.* 30. – In one of his visions in the year 1652 Guru Padmasambhava himself appeared and gave the Fifth Dalai Lama instructions regarding certain ritual cycles of the *byang gter* tradition, see S.G. Karmay (1988:34).

¹⁰⁶ S.G. Karmay (2002:33).

The close relationship between the abbot of Dorje Drag and the head of the Gelug school and leader of the Tibetan state is mirrored by the fact that Rigzin IV Padma Tinley was enthroned and ordained by the Fifth Dalai Lama.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, he was a personal disciple of the Great Fifth who also inspired him to construct a new Sūtra lineage.¹⁰⁸ However, Padma Tinley devoted much of his time to organizing the ritual texts of the *byang-gter*, which he revised and greatly extended, as has been pointed out by M.J. Boord.¹⁰⁹ The *byang gter* lineage represents a complete system of treasure-teachings, which were first revealed by the visionary Rigzin Gödem trucen (Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru can, (1357–1408)).¹¹⁰

Mindröling (Grwa phyi O rgyan Smin grol gling) in Central Tibet is the main Nyingma monastery of the *lho gter* or 'Southern Treasures' teaching tradition unearthed in Tibet and Bhutan.¹¹¹ Actually this monastery specialized in the *gter ma* teachings of the treasure discoverer Ratna Lingpa (Ratna gling pa, 1403–78).¹¹² It is located not far from the home of the *byang gter* lineage of Dorje Drag across the Tsangpo river on a small tributary.¹¹³

Mindröling Monastery was founded in 1676 by Rigzin Terdag Lingpa and his younger brother, the great translator Lochen Dharmasrī (1654–1717), who was also his closest disciple.¹¹⁴ Rigzin Terdag Lingpa is the speech emanation of Vairocana (bai ro tsa na), the great eighth-century translator. He revealed major *gter ma* or spiritual 'treasures', compiled

¹⁰⁷ See P. Yeshi & J. Russell (1991:30).

¹⁰⁸ For the creation of a new Sūtra lineage and the personal influence of the Fifth Dalai Lama on this project refer to J.P. Dalton (2002:208). – Thanks to F.-K. Ehrhard this valuable PhD Thesis was kindly made available for the present investigation.

¹⁰⁹ M.J. Boord (1993:30).

¹¹⁰ The life and achievements of Rigzin Gödem trucen and the history of the Northern Treasures tradition, its ritual cycles and practices is sketched in Dudjom Rinpoche (19981: 780–83), by E.M. Dargyay (1979:129–132). – The line of incarnations of Rigzin Gödem trucen is sketched by S.G. Karmay (2002:32–3). Whereas recently M.T. Kapstein has recalled that the system of the Northern Treasures 'remains so far unstudied' (2001:209, fn. 66), a detailed overview of the history of the 'Northern Treasures' tradition has already been given by M.J. Boord (1993:21–35). See also J.P. Dalton (2002:165–89).

¹¹¹ E.G. Smith (2001:18). For some data on Smin grol gling Monastery and its history refer to E.G. Smith (2001:18–19), P. Yeshi and J. Russell (1991:28–30), and to D. Snellgrove and H. Richardson (1986:196).

¹¹² E.G. Smith (2001:18); P. Yeshi and J. Russell (1991:29).

¹¹³ Smin grol gling Monastery is briefly mentioned in A. Ferrari (1958:54,132, fn. 318), in A. Waddell (1985:277) and in G. Tucci (1987:192–94). – A photo of Smin grol gling is contained in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991, no. 88).

¹¹⁴ E.G. Smith (2001) presents two different founding dates: on p. 17 the year 1656 and on p. 18 the year 1676. In P. Yeshi and J. Russell (1991:28) the founding date is 1676. – For the life and works of Rig 'dzin Gter bdag gling pa, the founder of the sMin grol ling tradition which spread to Khams and to Western Tibet refer to Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:825–34) and E. M. Dargyay (1979:174–186). A portrait is published in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:826), a painted scroll depicting him with his hand – and footprints in gold is reproduced in op. cit., under no. 89 opp. p. 852. – A short hagiography of Lo chen Dharmasrī is contained in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:728–32). A portrait is given in op. cit., p. 729.

the canonical scriptures of the Nyingma tradition (*rNying ma bka' ma*), inspired Lochen Dharmaśrī to write commentaries on many tantras, and is regarded as one of the most important masters and visionaries in the Nyingma tradition.¹¹⁵

Rigzin Terdag Lingpa and the Fifth Dalai Lama were mutually teacher and close disciples.¹¹⁶ Moreover, he and his brother Lochen Dharmaśrī were personal disciples of Rigzin IV Padma Tinley of Dorje Drag Monastery.¹¹⁷ Lochen Dharmaśrī was fully ordained by the Great Fifth.¹¹⁸ This close interconnectedness of relationships mirrors the free exchange of ideas and instructions without sectarian inhibitions that occurred between the Fifth Dalai Lama, despite his affiliation with the Gelug school, and the leading figures of the two main monastic establishments of the Nying ma order, Rigzin Terdag Lingpa and his brother Lochen Dharmaśrī of Mindröling and Rigzin IV Padma Tinley of Dorje Drag. As will be shown their relationship was not restricted merely to teaching and receiving instructions. Indeed, these eminent religious figures of different religious adherences shared certain political goals and offered practical help to realize them.¹¹⁹ This is less true of Rig 'dzin IV Padma Tinley who, inspired by the Fifth Dalai Lama, sought to construct a new Sūtra lineage that would establish his monastery as the major Nyingma institution.¹²⁰ On at least two occasions Padma Tinley performed several rituals for the Fifth Dalai Lama as is reported in the latter's 'Secret Visions'.¹²¹ However, in the relationship between the Fifth Dalai Lama and Rigzin Terdag Lingpa and his brother Lochen Dharmaśrī their influence upon each other was clearly mutual.

According to the Nyingma tradition, Rigzin Terdag Lingpa and Lochen Dharmaśrī shared with the Fifth Dalai Lama the 'auspicious connection of priest and patron'. Dudjom Rinpoche comments on the actual significance of this political relationship writing: "In these ways, he

¹¹⁵ His detailed hagiography is contained in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:825–34) and in E.M. Dargyay (1979:174–186). Among others, Rigzin Terdag Lingpa restored the 'distant lineage of transmitted precepts' of the Ancient Translation School. The stream of various lineages such as the 'Mindröling lineage of transmitted precepts', the 'Mindröling lineage of Atiyoga' and the 'lineage of the collected tantras' descended through Rigzin Terdag Lingpa. In *sMin grol gling*, the 'distant lineage of transmitted precepts' was transmitted in a continuous succession without decline from Lo chen Dharmaśrī up to bDud 'joms 'Jigs bral Ye shes rDo rje (1904–87), see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:733–35).

¹¹⁶ Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:827, 830).

¹¹⁷ For *Gter bdag gling pa* see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:828), for Lo chen Dharmaśrī see *ibid.*, p. 730.

¹¹⁸ Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:728).

¹¹⁹ Both Dorje Drag and Mindröling monasteries were given charge of performing certain rituals for the Tibetan government, a responsibility both of them hold to this day, see P. Yeshe and J. Russell (1991:28, 30).

¹²⁰ This has been observed by J.P. Dalton (2002:8).

¹²¹ See S.G. Karmay (1988, p. 60 in the year 1671 and p. 66–67 in the year 1673).

planted the roots of continuity for the government of the Ganden Palace.”¹²² The Fifth Dalai Lama took up both the Mindröling tradition and the ‘Northern Treasures’ tradition from Dorje Drag. The latter tradition seemingly was of particular significance since the lineage was held by blood descendants of the great religious kings of Tibet. It was Guru Padmasambhava who declared that if this lineage were not supported and upheld, it would be detrimental for Tibet. Thus it came to be that the Namgye Tratsang, the Dalai Lamas’ personal monastery in the Potala, and the Nechung and Gadong Monasteries of the State Oracles of Tibet would follow the ‘Northern Treasures’ text tradition of Dorje Drag.¹²³

At Mindröling, Rigzin Terdag Lingpa and Lochen Dharmasri devoted the later part of their lives to the project of uniting and consolidating the Nyingma school through the construction of new, large-scale public rituals festivals that were to be performed before an unrestricted audience.¹²⁴ For this end both of them aimed at developing a new Sūtra empowerment since the new public ritual’s primary purpose was no longer to initiate a disciple into the Sūtra’s teachings. Instead, it was meant to serve as a ‘community building event’, as J.P. Dalton has coined it, and thus the emphasis of the ritual celebration shifted from the participants to the observers.¹²⁵ It has to be kept in mind that the creation of this kind of new grand ritual ceremony was also due to the inspiration of the Fifth Dalai Lama.¹²⁶ While Terdag Lingpa and Lochen Dharmasri created and established the new Mindröling ritual as a powerful device to unite the Nyingma school, the Fifth Dalai Lama employed a range of annual festivals and public rituals to bring the nation of Tibet together and build up and consolidate the new state.¹²⁷

Terdag Lingpa and Lochen Dharmasri created elaborately choreographed festivals, which were enacted over a period of several days before large public audiences. Since then Mindröling has enjoyed a special reputation for its colourful sacred dances performed by large numbers of trained monks on an especially grand scale and for its grand public festivals requiring the resources that only a large and wealthy monastery is able to supply. Moreover, J.P. Dalton notes that it is the creation and the performance of the new large-scale public festivals that contributed to Mindröling becoming the most influential monastic center of the

¹²² Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 824).

¹²³ P. Yeshi and J. Russell (1991, p. 31).

¹²⁴ J.P. Dalton (2002:8,9,206,208,221). According to the other means in their strategy to unite the rNying ma order was ‘rigorous historical investigation’.

¹²⁵ J.P. Dalton (2002:224). As to the consequence of this ‘going public’ Dalton comments: “How it was perceived as a public spectacle was now more crucial to its function within the Rnying-ma school.”

¹²⁶ J.P. Dalton (2002:208).

¹²⁷ J.P. Dalton (2002:208).

Nyingma school.¹²⁸ According to R.J. Kohn the ritual dances that figured prominently in many of Terdag Lingpa's new Nyingma festivals seem to have inspired the Fifth Dalai Lama to introduce monastic dances to the Gelug school. In fact, the Fifth Dalai Lama became one of the main exponents of the Mindröling Dance traditions.¹²⁹ Moreover, he wrote his own dance manual (*'chams yig*), which is still regarded as the authoritative text prescribing the performance of sacred dances and explaining the symbolism involved in detail.¹³⁰

In his "Ceremonies of the Lhasa Year" (1993) Hugh Richardson has provided an impressive eye-witness description of all major annual festivals and rituals in Lhasa and its environs. The vivid documentary account builds on his experience of years of personal observation of Lhasa's rich ceremonial life while serving first from 1939 as a member of the British and after 1947 of the Indian diplomatic mission in Lhasa. Hence, Richardson's book meticulously documents pre-modern Lhasa's rich ceremonial life as it used to be before the Communist Chinese took over Tibet in the middle of the 20th century.¹³¹ This event opened up a disastrous chapter of recent Tibetan history as it led to a profound foreign-induced transformation of Tibet's rich cultural tradition – particularly during the Cultural Revolution when countless monasteries, temples and other religious monuments were devastated, monastic communities were persecuted and religious rights were severely restricted. All this was done, as H. Richardson reminds us, in a deliberate attempt to remove the basic framework, in which the faith that is 'the unifying spirit of the Tibetan people', has been embedded.¹³²

Before 1959 the year in Lhasa was characterized by a succession of ceremonies such as religious dances, twenty days of continuous prayer by thousands of monks in the Jokhang, processions, cavalcades of horsemen in ancient armour, etc. Some of these celebrations were great state occasions, some events were of lesser importance, but, as H. Richardson emphasizes, all ceremonies "...were either purposefully religious or reflected an awareness of religion; very few were purely secular."¹³³ Indeed, the great colourful ceremonies were 'essential rites for the well-being of Church and State'.¹³⁴ To produce the intended result these rites had to be performed strictly according to tradition. For the whole governmental

¹²⁸ J.P. Dalton (2002:206).

¹²⁹ R.J. Kohn (2001:49).

¹³⁰ This text was translated by R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1997:85–247).

¹³¹ H. Richardson is the last of a distinguished series of mainly Western foreigners who visited Tibet before the Communist Chinese take-over of Tibet in the years from 1950 until 1959 and who thus were able to experience Tibet as it used to be. Richardson lived in Lhasa for a total of nine years both as a diplomat and a scholar.

¹³² H. Richardson (1993:125).

¹³³ H. Richardson (1993:7).

¹³⁴ H. Richardson (1993:7).

body it was obligatory to be present at these festive occasions; absence without a valid excuse led to severe penalties.

These ceremonies and festivals certainly commanded the attention of the whole population, which was the intention of their creators. Pilgrims from distant places all over Tibet came in large numbers. And it is repeatedly mentioned by H. Richardson that virtually all the city's inhabitants, their social distinctions notwithstanding, showed up to participate in or observe the combination of spectacular religious and secular performances as staged in the context of the New Year and the Great Prayer Festival.

H. Richardson has given some explanation regarding the origins and the particular service of these rituals and ceremonies, and also on the key role that the newly formed Gelugpa theocracy of the late 17th century played in elaborating and re-arranging the major great celebrations, which continued without any significant modifications until the 1950s. Looking back on a total of eight years' experience as a diplomat in Tibet between 1936 and 1950 Richardson observes in the introduction of his vivid account of Lhasa's complex annual ceremonies:

“The origin of most of the ceremonies lies in the remote past but they have been rearranged and elaborated at different times, especially in the seventeenth century during the rule of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama and his equally great regent Sangye Gyatso when they were put into what was very much their latest form with the clear intention of enhancing the grandeur of the new regime imposed by the conquering army of the Oyirad Mongol chieftain Gushri Khan, and the prestige and stability of the position of the Dalai Lama and the Gelukpa, Yellow hat, church.”¹³⁵

Consequently, Richardson sees these great ceremonies as ‘essential rites for the well-being of Church and State’ thus serving an eminent political purpose.¹³⁶

6. The purpose of the creation and establishment of new public festivals as monastic or stately ceremonies for political reasons: inventing traditions, creating unity and identity

A.W. Macdonald aptly describes the spectacular performance of the elaborated new public ceremonies and ritual cycles that had been introduced by the Fifth Dalai Lama as a “...

¹³⁵ H. Richardson (1993:7).

¹³⁶ H. Richardson (1993:7).

public display of the state's monopoly of temporal power and of the lamas' monopoly of spiritual power; they restructure the Tibetan social and religious order."¹³⁷ Regarding the political motivations behind the establishment of new public festivals in the context of his sketch of the introduction of the *smon lam chen mo* or 'Great Prayer Festival' in the year 1409 on the initiative of the great monk Je Tsongkhapa (rJe Tsong kha pa, 1357–1419), G. Tucci observes the following: it is the performance of these grand public ceremonies for the welfare of the whole community, participated in by the clergy as well as the laity, that "... integrates the monkhood and the lay world into a social totality."¹³⁸ Obviously, this must have been the specific purpose associated with these public ceremonies which the holders of either spiritual or both spiritual and political power had in mind so that these great public celebrations were created and established as great public monastic liturgical performances or as great stately ceremonies.

Thus, generally, the establishment and the annual performance of these kinds of great public ceremonies serves to strongly reaffirm, strengthen, and, in certain contexts also, restructure the existing Tibetan socio-political and religious order. At the same time, however, they serve to revitalize or fortify Buddhist norms and values. However, all their particular differences notwithstanding, a major social function can be clearly discerned that all these large-scale public celebrations share: over the course of the ritual performance the diversity of participants constitutive of the assembled congregation is molded into the unity of one celebrating community. This forged unity beyond all differences that separate people in everyday life exists, at least, for the limited duration of the grand festival. Hence, these spectacular public festivals represent a decisive political factor for those who wield power spiritual, temporal, or both.

In the sixties and the seventies the British social anthropologist V. Turner (1920–1983) posed an influential theoretical approach to the study and understanding of ritual. His approach was markedly informed by the Belgian folklorist and culture historian A. van Gennep's (1873–1957) formulation of the processual structure of ritual as elaborated in his magnum opus *Les rites de passage* (1909). In this context Turner's theoretical approach may contribute to reaching a full understanding of what actually is at play when new public festivals and ritual cycles are installed for political aims and their performance is annually repeated.

¹³⁷ A.W. Macdonald (1987b:11).

¹³⁸ G. Tucci (1988:150).

In one of his most famous notions van Gennep suggests that any ritual follows a three-stage sequence from separation via transition to incorporation.¹³⁹ Drawing upon this notion and from his African ethnography on ritual and social process he formulated his key idea of the 'social drama', which he conceived of as a theoretical concept of universal applicability. V. Turner saw man as "...both a structural and an anti-structural entity, who grows through anti-structure and conserves through structure."¹⁴⁰ Moreover, society is defined as an ongoing dialectical process,¹⁴¹ in which the stream of social life in any living bounded human group alternates between two different modalities that he called the 'fixed' as opposed to the 'floating worlds'.¹⁴² The former represents the world of norms and values whereas the latter modality as represented in the performance of ritual constitutes the liminal or threshold phase. Liminality occurs in the middle phase of the *rites de passage* – van Gennep's phase of transition – and gives way to what V. Turner has called 'communitas'. Turner writes of the fixed world of 'structure' as –

“...all that which holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions, is one pole in a charged field, for which the opposite pole is communitas, or anti-structure, the egalitarian 'sentiment for humanity' of which David Hume speaks, representing the desire for a total, unmediated relationship between person and person, a relationship which nevertheless does not submerge one in the other but safeguards their uniqueness in the very act of realizing their commonness. Communitas does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms, though this is necessarily a transient condition if society is to continue to operate in an orderly fashion.”¹⁴³

In other words, V. Turner identified the realm of structure, composed of the norms and values, with those arrangements by which human societies are hierarchically ordered and thus individuals are fundamentally divided from each other in the flow of everyday life. Moving from that state to anti-structure means entering the threshold or liminal phase. Turner argued that within this phase of liminality structure dissolves into 'communitas' by which he meant that for the duration of the liminal phase in a ritual performance status, rank and other

¹³⁹ According to van Gennep each of these three stages is associated with its distinct set of rites: a. 'rites of separation'. b. 'liminal', 'threshold' or 'transition rites', and c. 'rites of incorporation' (1977:11). He observes that beneath a multitude of forms the typical pattern of the rites of passage always recurs (p. 191).

¹⁴⁰ V. Turner (1974:298).

¹⁴¹ V. Turner (1974:251).

¹⁴² V. Turner (1977:VII). V. Turner was initially a member of the renowned Manchester School of Anthropology. Only since the early sixties Turner developed an interest in 'symbolic anthropology', and then, first at the University of Chicago and finally in Virginia, became an early and influential proponent of the current in social and cultural anthropology called 'processual anthropology'.

¹⁴³ V. Turner (1974:274).

divisions of social relations are temporarily suspended. For the limited time of its duration it is here that the 'total, unmediated relationship' between equal persons can be experienced among the congregation on occasion of the performance of a ritual celebration.¹⁴⁴ In consequence, here the diverse participants of a ritual celebration, liberated from the everyday constraints of status and role, can experience a common sentiment of 'one-ness' or 'communitas' that presents 'a living model of brotherhood and sisterhood'.¹⁴⁵ Turner emphasizes that this "... is what revitalistic or revivalistic religious movements, (...) aim to do – to restore the social bond of their communicants to the pristine vigour of that religion in its days of generative crisis and ecstasy."¹⁴⁶ Precisely the construction of this common sentiment of one-ness among the different constituents of a heterogeneous congregation, it has to be underlined, is effected through the performance of the new public festivals and ritual cycles in the Tibetan Buddhist context.

Thus, providing temporary release from the constraints of 'structure', the 'anti-structure' as represented by 'liminality' and 'communitas' is regarded by the social theorist V. Turner as a necessary modality in the life-flow of any given society.¹⁴⁷ Hence, both opposite modalities being in permanent tension with each other are considered as essential to human existence.¹⁴⁸ It should be noted in this context that whereas V. Turner is concerned with the ritual process and its performance and has identified its middle phase as a privileged modality which is identical with the transient condition of 'liminality', ritual according to Clifford Geertz simply fuses the worlds as lived and imagined.¹⁴⁹

It is clearly discernible that the newly installed public celebrations as grand monastic or spectacular stately ceremonies for political reasons serve a variety of purposes. They represent

¹⁴⁴ In the last decennium of his life V. Turner extended his approach to what he called 'cultural performances' as staged not only in the context of spectacular mass events such as the Olympic games or the Carneval in Rio, but also in the realm of Western drama and film and in experimental theatre. In the latter genre he cooperated with director Richard Schechner, refer to V. Turner 1986 and R. Schechner 1988. Indeed, V. Turner, after reworking the study of ritual in terms of performance theory, declares that "...performance seems ...to be a legitimate object of study for postmodern anthropology...", since "...the basic stuff of social life is performance..." (1987:81).

¹⁴⁵ V. Turner (1974:274).

¹⁴⁶ V. Turner (1974:251).

¹⁴⁷ One of the few explicit statements in this respect is: "...anti-structure abolishes all divisiveness, all discriminations, binary, serial, or graduated. This creative moment of rejection of structures, social, philosophical, and theological, what [the Indian social scientist who was his colleague at the University of Chicago A.K.– E.B.] Ramanujan calls 'this fierce rebellion against petrification'..." (1974:288).

¹⁴⁸ V. Turner (1974:274).

¹⁴⁹ C. Geertz (1973a:112) posited: "In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world..."

in a lively and entertaining form the reaffirmation, renewal and strengthening of links between the celebrating congregation and the Buddhist doctrine, the different constituents of the clergy, and between the clergy and the laity. Thus, binding Tibetan Buddhists in a common frame of action these public ceremonies and rituals serve as a decisive factor in the forging of both a unity among the Buddhist schools, among the world of the clergy and the laity, among the diverse people living in the vast Tibetan cultural realm, and thus of a greater Tibetan Buddhist identity. Performed as rituals of the Tibetan state the grand public festivals strengthen and reaffirm Buddhism as the state religion.

Regarding their theoretical classification these public celebrations performed either as monastic or as state rituals belong to the broad category of political rites.¹⁵⁰ As C. Bell suggests it is spectacular public displays that make use of historically charged symbols and organize symbolic action that two decisive aims are achieved. Firstly, the congregation is depicted as an ordered and coherent community based on shared values and goals. Most important, however, is that these stately ceremonial enactments, elaborately choreographed and orchestrated, actually create power and legitimate power relationships.¹⁵¹ A telling example is provided by C. Geertz' inquiry into the expressive nature of the Balinese theatre state and its use and public display of spectacular mass ceremonies, such as Balinese state rituals. A broad range of public celebrations became constitutive of what Geertz has called the 'dramas of the theatre state' while clearly pointing out their distinct purpose: "It was the king's cult that created him..."¹⁵² Hence, the driving aim of higher politics, Geertz concludes, "...was to construct a state by constructing a king."¹⁵³ The same is true of the construction and consolidation of the Tibetan theocratic state through the deliberate efforts of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1642 and the subsequent decennia.

In their attempt to construct a new government in their contemporaneous setting the creators of these stately rituals and its dramaturgy have made deliberate use of the essential elements in the religious symbolic associated with the ancient Tibetan state. They have done this in order to conform to a vision of a culture and civilization the powerful Tibetan empire had embodied and the contemporary degeneration had obscured. The fact that these

¹⁵⁰ C. Bell defines the power and range of political rituals in the following words: "As a particularly loose genre, political rituals can be said to comprise those ceremonial practices that specifically construct, display and promote the power of political institutions (such as king, state, the village elders) or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups." (1997:128).

¹⁵¹ C. Bell (1997:129).

¹⁵² C. Geertz (1980:131).

¹⁵³ C. Geertz (1980:124).

ceremonies of state succeeded in mobilizing vast crowds of people testifies that their rich symbolism at play was, at least to a certain degree, understandable for the audience.

It is in the context of critical phases of major historical transitions that the establishment of new rituals and festivals in Tibet, in the interest of both the religious and the worldly power, takes place.¹⁵⁴ This is precisely the historical framework in which traditions, to borrow a key metaphor from E. Hobsbawm, are deliberately ‘invented’. According to the British historian the term ‘invented traditions’ means “...a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Moreover, “...all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.”¹⁵⁵ And apart from these aspects, of significance in this historical setting, in which traditions are invented, is the fact that the use of history, in the interest of both spiritual and temporal power, constitutes a selective process.¹⁵⁶

In line with C. Geertz’s understanding of the Balinese cockfight as a ‘metasocial commentary’ upon the hierarchically structured Balinese society or ‘as a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves’, these Tibetan Buddhist public festivals can be understood as dramatic enactments through which the congregation enters into a communication with itself about itself.¹⁵⁷ This aspect is most clearly exemplified by the sacred masked dances in colourful costumes, which are a central feature of many of these public ceremonies for stately purposes that evoke certain key themes of the ancient past.

¹⁵⁴ Here it may suffice to refer to another example illustrative of the complexities of imposing and consolidating a new regime. Ta’i Si tu Byang chub rGyal mtshan (1301–1364, cf. T.W.D. Shakapba (1967:72,82) who was first trained as a monk of Sa skya in a long struggle established the religious power of Phag mo gru rulers to the detriment of the former Sa skya hegemony that had lasted about a century (1260–1358). However, he exercised both powers alone, cf. R.A. Stein (1972:19). It was in Byang chub rGyal mtshan’s reign that Tibet gained its independence from the Mongols, and his kingly rule included the whole of the central Tibetan provinces (dBu and gTsang). Although his attempt to create a strong and lasting rule over a unified Tibet failed Byang chub rGyal mtshan’s achievement of having built up a new Tibetan state is important as it built upon the revival of the cherished memories of the ancient empire. According to T.W.D. Shakapba Byang chub rGyal mtshan in several ways adopted the practices of the early kings of Tibet (1967:153). D. Snellgrove and H. Richardson have pointed out that in pursuing his own state-building project Byang chub rGyal mtshan undertook an active policy of removing the traces of Mongol influence – he discarded the Chinese and Mongolian titles and replaced them by the Tibetan title of sDe rid (‘Ruler’) – and of deliberately ‘restoring the glories of the old Tibet of the Religious Kings’ (1986:153). Hence, Byang chub rGyal mtshan demonstrated in many ways the claim that he was actually ‘restoring a real Tibetan kingship’ (1986:153) which according to L. Petech meant ‘a conscious return to the purely Tibetan tradition’ (1990:130,141).

¹⁵⁵ E. Hobsbawm (1994). The first quotation is from p. 1, the second from p. 12.

¹⁵⁶ E. Hobsbawm (1994:13).

¹⁵⁷ C. Geertz (1973b:448).

While the spectacular sacred masked dances reenact certain aspects of the glorious empire the dancers may impersonate either the minor local or the major ‘protective deities of the religious law’ (*chos skyong*, Skt. *dharmapāla*) such as Mahākāla and their retinue, mythical heroes such as Lhalung Palkyi Dorje (Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje) or historical figures such as Hashang (Hva shang). Hence, these sacred dances – the visual component by far more than the main ritual practices – serve as a spectacular and colourful kind of public education of the Buddhist doctrine and its supremacy, its history and spread in the Land of Snows, and the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. Moreover, they give vivid impression of the divine-human interaction and thus celebrate their interconnectedness.

All these aspects mentioned lead me to suggest that the new spectacular large-scale public festivals as monastic or state rituals are in many ways similar to a ritual designed to create unity and identity – and the performance of which is of particular significance in troubled times. For the enactment of these grand public festivals as monastic celebrations or rituals of the Tibetan state all the Tibetan Buddhist people and the Buddhist deities unite to protect the country and her inhabitants against the evils of external aggression and internal war, religious sectarianism, political turmoil and social upheaval. At the same time great efforts for the construction of a new government were made. It was in this context that the new public festivals proved to be a very effective political means since they were in many ways designed to recall the grandeur of the ancient kingdom and its former imperial power which the new holder of spiritual and temporal power had to demonstrate a restoration of as the only way to confer legitimacy to his new regime. What actually is at play in the case of the introduction of new public festivals as ceremonies of the Tibetan state has been summarized by A.W. Macdonald as ‘government through and by the promotion of rituals’.¹⁵⁸

It should be mentioned, however, how the process of the ‘government through and by the promotion of rituals’ actually did work in the particular context of the theocratic Tibetan state. Given the fact that the ‘Festival of the Great Prayer’ constitutes an elaborated series of state-organized rituals which has been inserted by Tsongkhapa into the scheme of the ancient New Year Festival the particular service of the whole festive ensemble is rather obvious. G. Dreyfus has poignantly summarized it when he writes:

“...the Tibetan state reaffirms its *raison d’être*, to support and protect the development of Buddhism, by submitting itself to the monastic authorities. Symbolically, the state is purified and its Buddhist character reaffirmed by the participation of all its members in the ceremonies.

¹⁵⁸ A.W. Macdonald (1987b:12).

(...) This submission is not, however, just symbolic. During the two weeks that the festival lasts, Lhasa is under the rule of the monastic authority of 'Bras-pungs monastery.'¹⁵⁹

What was once started by the great reformer Tsongkhapa in the early 15th century on a comparatively small scale was later in the middle of the 17th century organized and re-arranged by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) on a highly elaborate level. The fine orchestration of a series of religious celebrations and secular festivals which since then make up the New Year festivities once superseded by Buddhism, and the subsequent growth and complexity of this great festival has been described by A.W. Macdonald as follows:

“The Buddha’s mastery over the elements and space is dramatised in the Śravasti celebration, his spiritual power and authority are then emphasized whereas the temporal power of the state is later evoked in a series of so-called secular festivals, established by the Fifth Dalai Lama to commemorate the military help received from Gusri Khan (1582–1655) and the Oyirad Mongols and which enabled him to regain power over the whole of Tibet.”¹⁶⁰

It was the Great Fifth Dalai Lama who created the very form and scale in which the *smon lam chen mo* was staged in Lhasa until 1959.

7. Other central features of the *Dumji* festival as ‘great liturgical performance’ (*sgrub chen*)

A. *Dumji* and *Mani Rimdu* – two traditions of sacred masked dances as performed in public festivals among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu

The tradition of Tibetan sacred dance is old and represents an important genre of both Bon and Tibetan Buddhist Tantric practice. The Tibetan Buddhist *chams* tradition is said to have its prototype in the first recorded *vajra* dance that had been performed by the great Indian sage and tantric master Guru Padmasambhava in the context of the construction of Samye, the famous first Tibetan Buddhist temple complex built in the year 779 on the initiative of King Trisong Detsen (Khri Srong lde’u btsan, 742–797, reigned from 755/56–797). According to Tibetan Buddhist historiography Padmasambhava performed this dance in order to subdue and tame the local spirits hostile to the introduction of the Buddhist dharma, to bind them by oath and transform them into protectors of the Buddhist faith (*chos skyong*), thus creating a purified realm necessary for the construction of the temple.

Another specific sacred dance that is of particular importance in this context is called *zvha nag* after the characteristic black hats, which are used in particular tantric ceremonies.

¹⁵⁹ G. Dreyfus (1995:124).

¹⁶⁰ A.W. Macdonald (1987b:10). – J. Karsten has provided a description of the Yasor and the secular festivals following the *smo lam chen mo* (1983:117–149).

According to Tibetan Buddhist narrative this dance with its distinct costume – the traditional dress of a tantric practitioner – is associated with the Buddhist monk Palkyi Dorje (dPal gyi rdo rje) from Lhalung. Palkyi Dorje is said to have committed an ethically necessary and heroic murder by killing the anti-Buddhist king Lang Darma (gLang dar ma, reigned from 838–842), the last of the Yarlung kings, in the year 842 in public.¹⁶¹ In this act of ritual killing he made use of a bow and an arrow that he had concealed in the long sleeves of his flowing costume while performing this particular dance.¹⁶²

Central features of these sacred dances performed by trained dancers who represent various divinities are the colorful costumes and, in many cases, the wearing of awe-inspiring masks symbolizing the oath bound protectors of the Buddhist doctrine. An important function of the '*chams*' is the physical manifestation of the great protecting divinities who have been invoked and worshiped in the course of the rituals during the preceding days. The ritual dances of the manifested divinities aim at the exorcism of evil for the benefit of the whole community that sponsors the festive event. Moreover, they are a powerful means for the purification of all obscurations and thus help to ease the path leading toward enlightenment (*byang chub*). Since Padmasamhava performed the first *vajra* dance sacred dances are enacted also in the case of a stūpa to be built, a maṇḍala to be created or in the context of important ritual ceremonies. On all those occasions sacred dances are staged in monastic establishments as well as in the temple of the local community; however, both kinds of

¹⁶¹ For this ritual assassination refer to R.A. Stein (1987:37); T.W.D. Shakabpa (1967:52).

¹⁶² This mythical episode is strongly contested by the followers of the Bon tradition. It is of crucial importance especially in later Tibetan Buddhist historiography in which the emperor gLang dar ma is alleged to have persecuted Buddhism, which justified the murderous act. As to its historical 'truth', this Buddhist narrative has been strongly criticized by Tibetologists. Against this version S.G. Karmay argues that the Buddhist clergy "... became too thirsty for political power so that the emperor was obliged to take action against the growing power of the Buddhist establishments, but did not persecute Buddhism as a religion..." (1998g: 532). According to Karmay, in reality no contemporary evidence of any persecution can be produced. Instead, gLang dar ma seems to have dismantled Buddhist monastic institutions, as then they had frequently been involved in state affairs, and thus he had caused the wrath of Buddhists (1988:2). This view has recently been supported by M.T. Kapstein who sees the much debated 'persecution of Buddhism' by gLang dar ma as a mere withdrawal of royal patronage (2001: XVIII, pp. 11–12). He refers to a manuscript from Dunhuang, dating probably to the end of the tenth century that strikingly does not mention gLang dar ma in an enumeration of Tibet's royal patrons of Buddhism, while at the same time it contains no indication of a persecution. – It is an established historical fact, however, that this event in the year 842 had some disastrous consequences, as it led to the collapse of the Central Tibetan royal dynasty and the dissolution of the ancient empire. An ensuing civil war resulted in a protracted period of political division, as Tibet broke up into a number of small principalities competing for hegemony, and thus in the loss of its military power and political unity; for this see Ch. Beckwith (1987: 168ff.). The central authority was restored in 1247 when Sa skya Pandita was invested with the right to rule over the Thirteen Myriarchies of Tibet by Prince Godan, a grandson of Gengis Khan, cf. T.W.D. Shakabpa (1967: 54).

sacred dances are performed in two entirely different settings, and the ritual performances differ accordingly.

Sacred masked dances in a monastic context are performed by the monks of both the Bon religion and of the Nyingma, Kagyü, Sakya and Gelug schools of Tibetan Buddhism in the course of the most important rituals of the liturgical calendar.¹⁶³ Each of the different schools as well as particular major monasteries have developed their own tradition of performing the sacred dances at different times of the year and on special days of the month. Specific manuals called '*chams yig*' written by high dignitaries describe and prescribe minutely the ritual activities to be performed, the masques and the costumes to be used, the dance movements and hand gestures to be practiced, while accompanied by the sacred music of long horns, oboes, drums and cymbals, etc.¹⁶⁴

In his path-breaking investigation R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz has drawn attention to the fact that the tradition of Tibetan sacred dance has given rise to two different categories of dances. *Gar* are dances that are performed by monks in the absence of uninitiated spectators as part of the worship of certain deities. The other kind is called '*chams*'. This term designates the public religious dances with which this present inquiry deals.¹⁶⁵ As M. Schrempf emphasizes '*chams* is commonly understood as a public form of Tibetan ritual dance which is performed for a lay audience by monks dressed in colourful costumes and wearing masks mainly representing the protectors of religion (*chos skyong/bon skyong*), and their assistants.¹⁶⁶ Among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, however, two different kinds of sacred masked dance festivals, *Dumji* and *Mani Rimdu*, are staged annually at different times at different places.

Mani Rimdu centers on the cult of a little-known form of Avalokiteśvara, the patron-deity of Tibet, known as 'Lord of the Dance' (*gar dbang*) and involves the ritual practices of peaceful (*zhi ba*) activities.¹⁶⁷ Depending on each of the nine distinct local traditions where

¹⁶³ The most comprehensive general work on the subject of Tibetan Bon and Buddhist sacred dances is still by R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1997, orig. 1976). On '*chams*' see D. Snellgrove & H. Richardson (1986: 246f.); R.A. Stein (1987:126–9); M. Schrempf (1990 and 1994), R.J. Kohn (2001:55–63); M. Ricard (2003). See also M. Aris (1976) and Fr. Pommaret (2002) on sacred dances in Bhutan; S.G. Karmay (1998h), M. Schrempf (2000 and 2001) on sacred Bon Dances; H. Richardson (1993) on annual ceremonies, processions, sacred dances in Lhasa; M. Schrempf (1997) on the transformation of Tibetan ritual dances in the context of Tibetan diaspora and the 'global performance marketplace'. Other useful treatises on this subject are by N. Hoetzlein (1991), A. Marko (1994), E. Pearlman (2002).

¹⁶⁴ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz has edited and translated the important dance manual for the Vajrakīla '*chams*' (1997:111–245) the major part of which had been written by bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–82), while several other clerics had completed it after his death (p. 85).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1997:5).

¹⁶⁶ Cf. M. Schrempf (1997:91).

¹⁶⁷ *Mani Rimdu* belongs to a type of Tibetan rituals known as *ril sgrub*, which means 'pill practices'. The name

it has been held the *Dumji* festival focuses either on a peaceful or a wrathful emanation of Guru Padmasambhava and thus necessitates peaceful (*zhi ba*) or wrathful (*drag po*) ritual activities. The *Dumji* festival is staged in the temple of the locality for the benefit of the local community and is performed solely by a lay tantric lama (Tib. *sngags pa*), who is the hereditary village head lama, and his assistants; these religious practitioners also perform the sacred dances. All of the ritual participants in the context of the *Dumji* celebration are married householders who in their local community are referred to as lama. In contrast to the most important annual ritual ceremony of the local community the *Mani Rimdu* festival is enacted in a monastic framework before a mixed audience of clerics and laypeople. The acting performers in this large-scale monastic celebration are highly educated celibate monks and well-trained monk dancers.

Both the *Dumji* and the *Mani Rimdu* festivals have their origin in the particular kind of grand public festivals, with their elaborate dances, that have become a hallmark of the Mindröling tradition. The introduction and establishment of the *Dumji* among the Sherpas in the second half of the 19th century and of the *Mani Rimdu* in the early and middle of the 20th century mark two significant chapters in the development that has led to the emergence of Sherpa Buddhism as it prevails at present.¹⁶⁸

It was *Dzatul* Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (rDza sprul Ngag dbang bstan dzin nor bu, 1866–1940), the abbot of Dzarongphu monastery in the Dingri area on the northern side of the Everest range who brought the *Mani Rimdu* traditions to his monastery.¹⁶⁹ He founded Dzarongphu monastery in the year 1902. This industrious lama, a native of Kanga in Kharta, secured the patronage of wealthy Dingri agriculturalists and traders for the construction and the upkeep of the big monastic complex of Dzarongphu which also included five nunneries

Mani Rimdu is a corruption of the Tibetan term *mani* as it is pronounced in Sherpa language, which R.J. Kohn renders as 'the practice of the mani pills'. This category of mani pill-rituals is dedicated to Avalokiteśvara, the spiritual patron-deity of Tibet (2001:4). – The only major works on the Sherpa *Mani Rimdu* are by L. Jerstad (1969) as enacted in Thame Gumpa in the region of Khumbu and the invaluable and meticulous research by late Tibetologist R.J. Kohn (1985 and 2001) on its celebration in Chiwong monastery in Solu. Moreover, the *Mani Rimdu* as it was performed in the monasteries of Thame and Tengboche is described by Chr. von Füller-Haimendorf (1964: 210–224; 1984:100–101).

¹⁶⁸ Refer to M. Kapstein (1983:42) for this important step in the development of Sherpa Buddhism towards its present-day form.

¹⁶⁹ For the history of rDza rong phu monastery and the life, achievements, and the spiritual influence of the charismatic *rDza sprul* Ngag dbang bstan dzin nor bu among the Sherpas who inspired his disciples to found monastic establishments in Solu-Khumbu and who was instrumental in the spread of monasticism in that region see B.N. Aziz (1978:209–211); H. Diemberger (1992:2–5, 3–4 and 3–5; pagination acc. to chapters); Ngawang Tenzin Zangbu, Tengboche Reincarnate Lama, and F. Klatzel (1988:29–31); R.J. Kohn (2001:4, 51–3, 55ff.). – For Ngag dbang bstan dzin nor bu's creation of the *Mani Rimdu* festival refer to R.J. Kohn (2001:4, 51–3). – For the founding of monasteries among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu see S.B. Ortner (1989).

in other parts of the Dingri region. Later Dzarongphu monastery was also subsidized by the Lhasa government for political reasons, since it is located in the Tibetan-Nepalese borderlands.

Dzatul Ngawang Tenzin Norbu was initiated in the *byang gter* or 'Northern Treasures' tradition by the Kuye Lama, a married tantric lama and head of Kuye monastery, located in the Kharta region. Moreover, he had undergone the rigorous religious training at Mindröling in Central Tibet for which this monastery is well known. The charismatic Dzarongphu lama was an important spiritual authority of the people of Dingri and also of the Sherpas in adjacent Solu-Khumbu. He enjoyed the patronage from leading Sherpa families. In the first four decades many Sherpas and even some Newar traders, attracted by the high reputation of the 'Rong phu Sang rgyas', i.e. 'Buddha of Rongphuk', went there to receive religious instruction from him.

Dzarongphu represents the second monastic site from which the teaching tradition of Mindröling reached the region of the Sherpas on the periphery of the Tibetan culture area. It is the influential *Dzatul* Ngawang Tenzin Norbu lama who was instrumental in inspiring the establishment of the monastic tradition among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. This recent innovation occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, reflected by the subsequent construction of monasteries in Solu-Khumbu sponsored by influential 'big men' who had been his disciples and who kept on coming there for courses of instruction.¹⁷⁰

Having edited the *Mani Rimdu* traditions into their present form Ngawang Tenzin Norbu used this particular Mindröling tradition as basis of the liturgy for the creation of the *Mani Rimdu* festival that is celebrated in present-day Solu-Khumbu. Regarding the sacred dances he took the majority of the '*chams*' from a monastery in Tsang province in Central Tibet to which he added some of the dances from the Mindröling tradition.¹⁷¹ According to R.J. Kohn the performance of the *Mani Rimdu* at Dzarongphuk began between 1907 and 1910, and from there it was transmitted to Solu-Khumbu in about 1940.¹⁷² It is enacted in public rituals annually at different times at the only three monasteries in Tengboche (October) and Thame (May) in Khumbu and of Chiwong (November) in Solu.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ According to B.N. Aziz the still existing monasteries of Thame, Tengboche, Chiwong and Trakshingdu were established as 'extensions of Dza-rong' (1978:211). Regarding this profound influence of rDza rong phu monastery and its charismatic abbot on the emerging Sherpa monasticism S.B. Ortner has observed that "... almost all clerics who played a role in founding the first celibate establishments took their vows in Rumbu..." (1989:179). Refer to D.L. Snellgrove (1957:213-223) particularly on its influence on the monks and the monasteries of Chiwong and Thrakshingdu; Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964:134f.; 1984: 86f.).

¹⁷¹ R.J. Kohn (2001:51f.).

¹⁷² R.J. Kohn (2001:52f.); Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964: 211).

¹⁷³ As R.J. Kohn observes, though the liturgical text and the complex of rituals are the same, the ritual

B. Grand public festivals as monastic or state ceremonies and the ancient Tibetan institution of festival patronage

Throughout the Tibetan world the performance of communal celebrations rests on the social institution of festival sponsorship.¹⁷⁴ As will be demonstrated in the following, Sherpa culture also uses the system of patronage for their communal festivals and is molded according to an ancient Tibetan institution. In its most elaborate form the system of festival patronage among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu can be studied in the context of the *Dumji* celebration, as it is the major annual festival of the local community.¹⁷⁵

As has been outlined above the newly established public festivals represent a spectacular demonstration of both the state's temporal and of the Buddha's and lamas' spiritual power.¹⁷⁶ Other major functions of large-scale public ritual ceremonies are the exorcism of evil spirits and the calling up of good fortune for the beginning new year or for ushering in a new and better era. The monks are responsible for the ritual performances, while the laity do not participate directly but are present as spectators who are free to move. Their presence, however, guarantees the exertion of the whole community's positive forces in the realization of the ritual celebration's goal as performed by the monastic community.¹⁷⁷ As to the deeper motivation associated with the introduction of new public festivals it has to be noted that both the laypeople as mere spectators and the clerics as the sole performers are always beneficiaries of these religious ceremonies, since, representing highly positive activities of body, speech and mind, they generate merit (*bsod nams*, Skt. *puṇya*) not only for personal salvation but for the whole community whose future well-being the public ritual seeks to ensure. Hence, by participating in the sacred ceremonies the faithful feel encouraged to actively contribute to their spectacular performance and its efficacy through donations and other services, in other words, to assume, as is customary in the Tibetan cultural world, the role of a donator or *sbyin bdag* (Skt. *dānapati*).¹⁷⁸

D. Seyfort Ruegg has highlighted the ancient Tibetan relationship between a lama officiant/counselor/preceptor (*mchod gnas*) as donee and his royal or princely lay donor (*yon bdag*) in a comprehensive treatise. It has to be recalled that this significant relationship has

performance of the *Mani Rimdu* differs slightly at each monastery (2001:4).

¹⁷⁴ On the particular importance of patronage among the Tibetans in exile for the construction of a Tibetan national identity see P. Chr. Klieger (1992).

¹⁷⁵ For a brief description of festival sponsorship in the context of the *Dumji* festival refer to E. Berg (2003:205–218).

¹⁷⁶ A.W. Macdonald (1987b:10–11); G. Dreyfus (1995:124).

¹⁷⁷ G. Tucci (1988:146–7, 150–1).

¹⁷⁸ Refer to G. Tucci (1988:146–7, 150–1).

its historic origin in the generous royal patronage of Buddhism as performed by the ancient emperor Songtsen Gampo (ca. 617–649/650) and his successors.¹⁷⁹ According to D. Seyfort Ruegg its specific characteristic is that it is ‘not official and institutional but personal and religious.’ Moreover, Seyfort Ruegg hints at the fact that in Buddhist theory and practice the notion of ‘patron’ is problematic, as it implies the subordination of the religious to the temporal order.¹⁸⁰ This is why S. G. Karmay draws attention to the particular feature of this *mchod yon* relationship emphasizing that both parties are considered equal.¹⁸¹

It was this particular preceptor-patron relationship which Tibetan lamas had established with their worldly lay donors to their mutual advantage not only internally with Tibetan rulers but also in their foreign relations with the Mongol overlords.¹⁸² The significance of the important latter relationship has been summarized by M.C. Goldstein as follows: “Tibet’s lama provided religious instruction; performed rites, divination, and astrology; and offered the khan flattering religious titles like ‘protector of religion’ or ‘religious king’. The khan, in turn, protected and advanced the interests of the ‘priest’ (‘lama’).”¹⁸³ It is this relationship between spiritual power and temporal power in Tibet that binds the laity and the clergy into a common frame of interaction. In this relationship, however, the lay donor is usually referred to as *sbyin bdag* (Skt. *dānapati*).¹⁸⁴ As D. Seyfort Ruegg points out only a king or prince is referred to as *yon bdag*, which is an honorific term meaning ‘master of ritual gifts’.¹⁸⁵ Another important term for the ideal Buddhist king – the worldly power that protects the Buddhist doctrine and provides the material support for the lamas as its representatives – is *chos rgyal* (Skt. *Dharmarājā*).

¹⁷⁹ This has been noted by the translators G. Dorje and M.T. Kapstein in their introduction to Book Two *History of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:393–394).

¹⁸⁰ D. Seyfort Ruegg (1995: 7 and 8). The author emphasizes, however, that the search for theoretical models in the Tibetan context “...is no simple matter, for our sources are not as explicit on the subject as we might wish.” Instead, he suggests that neither Phags-pa in his relation with Qublai Khan nor his uncle Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) in his relation with the Chinggisid prince Köden was in a position to elaborate in writing a full theory of the ‘constitutional’ relation between the Officiant/ Preceptor and the Donor King. (p. 152).

¹⁸¹ S.G. Karmay (1998f.:504).

¹⁸² Due to the importance of the preceptor-patron relationship in Tibet T.W.D. Shakapba has titled the fourth chapter of his book respectively as ‘Lamas and Patrons’ (1967:61–72).

¹⁸³ M.C. Goldstein (1997:3).

¹⁸⁴ On the lay and princely donor see D. Seyfort Ruegg (1995:56–59); G. Tucci (1988:10). – S.Ch. Das (1989: 940) has rendered the term *sbyin bdag* as “a patron, (...), a layman manifesting his piety by making presents to the priesthood.”

¹⁸⁵ D. Seyfort Ruegg (1995:150).

Chapter Four

The *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung as performed according to the local tradition of the Lamaserwa clan

1. Recent contributions from the field of Tibetan studies as to analyzing Tibetan rituals

In the main part of this investigation I intend to focus on and assess the relevance of the *Dumji* celebration in the formation of a particular local tradition and in its relation to Tibetan Buddhism.¹ I examine the main issues that have been brought into play in the construction and elaboration of a distinct local tradition, the complex enactment of the *Dumji* festival in the village temple of Gompa Zhung (Nep.: Junbesi). Gompa Zhung is the spiritual center of Sherpa Buddhism in Solu. It has to be noted, however, that this local tradition is exceptional among the Sherpas since it is equivalent only to the particular tradition of the Lamaserwa clan, being the only other kinship group rooted in this locality.

Presently, the Lamaserwa clan with its temple in Gonpa Zhung comprises eighty-four households. These are scattered over its territory that extends on both sides of the Junbesi Khola and on a small part of the eastern side of the upper Solu Khola with Gonpa Zhung as their spiritual center.

Since the last two decennia renewed interest has been devoted to the aspects of rituals as practiced in Tibet and the Himalayas. Significantly, this renewed attention all happened at almost the same time and was initiated by only a few scholars. In the year 1987 an anthology on Himalayan rituals was edited by A.W. Macdonald, who also wrote an important foreword.² Moreover, in the same year A.W. Macdonald published an inspiring article on power and authority in the High Himalaya.³ In the following year the pioneering joint essay by A.-M.

¹ This issue has been explored in an inspiring article by Ch. Ramble (1990).

² *Rituels Himalayens*, ed. A.W. Macdonald. Paris: Société d'Ethnographie; published in the special number of *L'Ethnographie*, LXXXIII, 100/101. – A.W. Macdonald: 'Avant-propos' in *Rituels Himalayens* (1987a: 5–13).

³ A.W. Macdonald: 'Remarks on the manipulation of power and authority in the High Himalaya' in *The Tibet Journal* Vol. XII, No. 1 (1987b:3–16).

Blondeau and S.G. Karmay on Tibetan ritual and its basic structure appeared, which was written as a contribution to an anthology on ritual as practiced in various cultures.⁴

In his foreword to the anthology A.W. Macdonald points out some valuable methodological problems concerning the study of Tibetan ritual. For example, an isolated ritual, taken out of its local cultural context, is deprived of its significance. Consequently, in order to understand why a ritual is practiced, one has to situate it in its socio-cultural context, to be precise about the local geography, and to determine the effects of Hindu and/or Buddhist influence in the studied political context.⁵

Since in Tibet, as well as in those territories under Tibetan cultural influence, the offering techniques, similar to the concepts associated with sacrifice, have evolved considerably in the course of history, and any terminology that is applied to the diverse forms of ritual activity needs to be reexamined and made more precise within the particular historical context of its utilization.⁶ Interestingly, A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay raise the same issue since they observe a tendency among Tibetologists to adopt a Buddhological analysis which reduces the extreme diversity of rituals to the doctrinal scheme of the *sādhana*, the liturgical text that prescribes the worship of the tutelary deity, while at the same time ignoring all elements and processes of their assimilation in a particular cultural context.⁷

A.W. Macdonald mentions the difficulties of analyzing rituals as practiced in areas under Tibetan cultural influence such as in the High Himalaya. He draws attention to the fact that the analysis is complicated since meditation techniques constitute an integral component of the ritual practice of all Tibetan religious orders, which the researcher has to take into adequate consideration.⁸ The purpose of rituals consists in the exertion of power over both the people and the spirits.⁹ It is the execution of a combination of bodily, manual, and meditative techniques that gives the manipulator, the lama, being initiated into the cult of the deity whose power is to be utilized through tantric meditation practices, and his assistants the impression to exert a power. It is this power, once invoked and controlled, that is utilized with the deliberate aim to influence the relations between the heaven and its 'inhabitants' (the pantheon), the earth and its occupants and the subterranean world and its 'inhabitants'

⁴ "Le Cerf A La Vaste Ramure. En Guise d'Introduction", in *Essais sur le rituel* Vol. I [= Bibliothèque de L'École des Hautes Études Sciences Religieuses, XCII]. Louvain-Paris: Peeters (1988: 119-146).

⁵ Cf. A.W. Macdonald (1987a:9).

⁶ Cf. A.W. Macdonald (1987a:11).

⁷ Cf. A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay (1988:119-120).

⁸ Cf. A.W. Macdonald (1987a:11).

⁹ Cf. A.W. Macdonald (1987a:12). According to the author the shamanic initiation and the consecration of a political chief seem to be the two poles around which all Himalayan rituals are organized (ibid.).

(the subterranean spirits and the dead) in a ‘contract of the local society’.¹⁰ However, the influence exercised by Tibetan culture on the social re-organization of local cultures whose ancestors had moved from Tibet into the Himalayas to settle there, such as the Sherpas, ‘remains obscure’.¹¹

Moreover, A.M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay argue against the uncontrolled use among Tibetologists of the term “popular” rituals as accomplished for the laity since the so-called “popular” rituals are fully integrated in the Buddhist doctrinal and philosophical system.¹²

The authors note the ‘omnipresence of rituals’ in the life of the laypeople as well as the clerics in Tibet. The rites linked with the social organization are numerous and play a role of primary importance in the life of both the laity and the monastery.¹³ In view of these social facts the authors observe a lack of studies on Tibetan rituals not as viewed from the doctrinal or Buddhist philosophy’s point of view but as observed and studied as lived religion in all its diversity and complexity.¹⁴ Apart from these aspects A.M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay emphasize: “Until the present day there has not been published any study on the historic origins of a rite, its transformations in time, its variants from one tradition to the other – [transl. E.B.]”¹⁵

In his introduction to a special issue of the JASO journal on the ‘Anthropology of Buddhism’ (1990) edited by himself, D.N. Gellner draws attention for the need of a framework that enables people to compare Buddhism in different contexts.¹⁶ Ch. Ramble, however, notes in his contribution to this special issue that, strictly speaking, there is no anthropology of Buddhism, but only the anthropological study of Buddhist societies. Instead, he emphasizes the need for a sound grasp of the textual Buddhist heritage that had already been articulated by David Snellgrove in 1966.¹⁷ It was in this path-breaking paper that D. Snellgrove recalled what can be understood as the *leit-motiv* of this anthropological inquiry:

¹⁰ A.W. Macdonald (1987a:9). The French term the author uses in his text alludes to the influential social theory that was developed by the ‘philosophes’ of the era of European enlightenment. – On the manipulation of powers in the Tantras see D. Snellgrove (1987:235–6) and below.

¹¹ Cf. A.W. Macdonald (1987b:9).

¹² Cf. A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay (1988:121–122).

¹³ Cf. A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay (1988:119).

¹⁴ Cf. A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay (1988:120).

¹⁵ Cf. A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay (1988:122).

¹⁶ D.N. Gellner (1990:109).

¹⁷ Ch. Ramble (1990:185); D. Snellgrove (1966:199–219)

“The thoughts and actions of villagers and monks alike are permeated with religious and philosophical conceptions, and only an adequate knowledge of these will render their behaviour comprehensible. The many religious rites that are performed have a direct bearing on the events of village life, and the only satisfactory way of understanding the meanings of such rites is to understand at least something of the liturgies that are being recited.”¹⁸

S. G. Karmay raises another important issue in the context of this study. The Tibetan scholar recalls that in Tibetan tradition myth is an integral part of ritual: “The ritual cannot function without the myth and is therefore dependent upon it.(...). Knowledge of the preceding myth is therefore indispensable in order to perform the ritual action which is seen as the enactment of the mythical past.”¹⁹

It is these different aspects that have been outlined above that will be the key issues around which the present investigation, which is devoted to the reconstruction of the distinct local tradition of the *Dumji* festival as held in Gonpa Zhung, will be organized.

2. The *Dumji* festival as a grand protective ritual and its distinctive structure

In a recent paper A.-M. Blondeau notes ‘the overabundance of apotropaic rituals in Tibetan religion’.²⁰ The Tibetan world is populated by a vast range of spirits, especially evil ones, and demons with whose harmful activities the people have to cope.²¹ This goal may be achieved by invoking a certain deity whose help is sought in his or her protective ritual. It is through careful execution of the invocation that the subjugation, destruction, or exorcism of the forces of evil may be accomplished. According to S. Beyer the most powerful rituals of subjugation and destruction remain those “... where the power of the deity is directed through the practitioner’s own person and aimed at the object of the ritual either directly through the medium of a magical device. This process requires the practitioner to have acquired the requisite powers of visualization and to have gained the capacity of containing within himself, as a fit vessel, the deity’s power through the performance of the preliminary ritual service of that deity.”²²

¹⁸ D. Snellgrove (1966:207).

¹⁹ S.G. Karmay (1998d:245).

²⁰ A.-M. Blondeau (2000:251).

²¹ The enormous literature devoted to all these spirits and demons has been reviewed by G. Tucci (1949, Vol. II: 717–730) and R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:257–313) who has provided the first comprehensive treatise on the cult and iconography of the Tibetan protective deities.

²² S. Beyer (1988: 302).

As will be demonstrated in the following section the annual *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung – just like all *Dumji* ceremonies among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu – builds upon a certain combination of different protective rites. The great composition of the *Dumji* celebration as a whole represents a grand protective rite that conforms to S. Beyer's characterization. In this kind of festival several different kinds of Tibetan rituals of subjugation, and of exorcism are interwoven that, when solemnly performed, constitute a complex and colourful event. The grand ceremony is performed for the protection and well-being of the community that sponsors it. It is significant that all the rituals the *Dumji* festival is composed of, their differences notwithstanding, are meant to promote the unity and harmony of the celebrating community and the re-affirmation of the existing religious and social order.²³

The characteristic structure of the annual *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung is composed of four different parts. The whole celebration is performed on the basis of the maṇḍala of the tutelary deity Vajrakīlaya. The first two days of spiritual activity and the third day of public festivity are filled with the solemn performance of the elaborate ritual cycle devoted to the cult of Vajrakīlaya. The ritual activities of the first three days constitute the main part of the *Dumji* festival. In a process of visualization and meditation that is usually called 'deity yoga' the ritual master first visualizes the deity and then assumes the deity's ego including its power. It is this power that is to be used for the ritual 'killing and liberation' (*sgrol ba/bsgral ba*) of the 'enemies' of the Buddhist doctrine as embodied by a small dough effigy which the Sherpas call by the Sanskrit term *liṅga* (Tib. *nya bo*).

S. Beyer notes that a Tibetan ritual is built upon a standard pattern, a 'set dramatic form'. Elements may be left out or expanded, which, in fact, is a common feature of each *Dumji* performance, since the procedures actually vary from one year to the other. However, as Beyer emphasizes, the basic structure of the ritual remains the same.²⁴

Representing highest yoga tantra practices as performed in the secluded space of the village temple these ritual procedures have to be kept strictly secret. This is why the ritual master as well as the other officiants are always anxious to avoid being asked even the most marginal question as far as the performance of the cult of Vajrakīlaya is concerned. Due to this strict secrecy that surrounds these tantric practices the majority of the lay people is not aware that the cult of the tutelary deity Vajrakīlaya represents the main part and the overall

²³ This crucial social function that the performance of these rituals fulfills, is noted by many scholars, e.g. S. Beyer (1988:22), G. Tucci (1988:150). – C. Cantwell has highlighted the central role the performance of Buddhist rituals occupies in the preservation of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural heritage in exile and in forging Tibetan identity (1994:95–101).

²⁴ S. Beyer (1988:170).

ritual structure into which the distinct local tradition of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung has been inserted. Hence, as seen from the perspective of the laity the ritual performance of the public part on the third day including the staging of the sacred masked dances (*'chams*) is usually taken to represent the *Dumji* celebration as a whole.

The public part of the *Dumji* festival – its second component – alternates between a peaceful (*zhi ba*) mode held in one year and a wrathful (*khro bo*) mode to be performed in the following year. The peaceful ritual is the 'Ritual of the Four Hundred' called *gyebshi* (*brgya bzhi*). Its ritual performance will be described below. Among the Sherpas the wrathful ritual is called *lokpa* (*zlog pa*), which can be rendered as rite of 'repulsion'.²⁵ For its performance only one big sacrificial dough cake called *torma* (*gtor ma*) is needed.

If the two different modes are compared in conversation the lay people usually hold the *lokpa* rite, being considered as a very efficacious means to fulfill the *Dumji*'s goal, in higher esteem for mainly two reasons. According to their officiants it is very powerful, and its ritual performance, unlike the peaceful *gyebshi* rite, is by far easier and much less costly for the sponsors who pay for and thus make the major annual celebration possible. For four years now, however, the tantric village lama has refused to perform the *lokpa* rite. Due to the progress of the cancer he has been suffering from for almost a decade he simply cannot guarantee the fulfillment of the *Dumji*'s goal by performing the wrathful *lokpa* mode. He has been arguing that this practice is dangerous to anyone even with the proper contemplative training and that though he possesses the ability to manipulate through his own body the tremendous power that has been unleashed in his body has left him unable to deal with this power properly.²⁶

Thirdly, there are those small rites that are appended either to the peaceful or to the wrathful ritual. Their choice is left to the decision of the *Dumji* sponsors who have the opportunity to make special requests to the tutelary deity Vajrakīlaya.²⁷ Basically, there are three rites used in the context of the *Dumji* festival as held in Gonpa Zhung which provide the sponsors with the possibility to actively contribute to maximize the efficacy of their major celebration. Each of the three rites represents a particular kind of exorcism, which is combined with the main exorcism to be performed in association with either the wrathful *lokpa* or the peaceful *gyebshi* ritual. One exorcism rite is called *mi kha* and concerns the

²⁵ Ch. Ramble briefly mentions a *zlog pa* rite that is performed in the context of the annual performance of the mDos rgyab of Klu brag monastery in Nepal's Mustang District (2000:309).

²⁶ S. Beyer has referred to the particular danger inherent in this practice as performed under normal health conditions (1988:54).

²⁷ This opportunity is also mentioned by S. Beyer in the context of his account of the cult of Tārā (1988:194).

exorcism of ‘malicious gossip’ as embodied by a tall crow – or owl-headed black effigy.²⁸ The second rite is called Tonak Gosum (gTo nag mgo gsum) after the huge effigy of a demon with three different heads. In the middle the monster has the head of a red ox, on the left side is the head of a blue pig, and on the right is the head of a yellow tiger. These three different colours symbolize the three basic vices of passion, ignorance, and anger.²⁹ The third rite that can be associated with either the *lokpa* or the *gyebshi* ritual is called *zandre* (*za 'dre*). Its ritual performance will be described below.

Moreover, the characteristic structure of the *Dumji* festival as performed in Gompa Zhung comprises two parts constitutive of the fourth component of its local tradition. Both parts are simply appended, but neither are connected with the main part of the *Dumji* devoted to the cult of Vajrakīlaya nor with the *gyebshi* or *lokpa* rite. A ‘long life’ empowerment ceremony (Sherpa *whong*: Tib. *tshe dbang*), which forms an integral part of all *Dumji* festivals as performed among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, is held on the fourth day. On the fifth day a small ceremony is performed in the village temple, which is characteristic only of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung.

It is one of the distinctive features of the *Dumji* festival, representing the ritual type of the grand Tibetan Buddhist *drubchen* (*sgrub chen*) ceremony, that it comprises several rituals of pre-Buddhist Tibetan origin adapted to Buddhist use.³⁰ As M. Kapstein observes, the religious life of Tibet is characterized by a wide range of ritual practices whose origins are clearly indigenous.³¹ Among them are important rituals of the Tibetan state that have developed over the course of centuries as solemn rites of national significance.³²

On the humble scale of village life ritual ceremonies, such as the offering of the fragrant smoke of burnt juniper (*bsang*), sometimes mixed with other fragrant woods and incense, in association with prayers to the protective gods and spirits of the local landscape, are performed daily in every Tibetan household. This ritual is an integral part of the *Dumji* festival. In the

²⁸ There are many different versions of this rite. M. Kapstein, for example, mentions a version in which the effigy of a ‘gossip girl’ (*mi kha bu mo*) who is not a member of the community is expelled (1997: 528). See also P. Kaplanian on this ritual as practiced in Ladakh (1988:209–217) on the basis of a text found among the Sherpas (p. 212). S.R. Mumford (1989:153–155, 164) mentions the use of the *mi kha* in the course of exorcisms as practiced by Tibetan lamas among the Gurungs of Manang District, Nepal.

²⁹ For a description and its symbolism refer to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:514–516); S.R. Mumford describes its use among the Gurungs of Manang District, Nepal (1989:149–153, 155).

³⁰ Chr. von Fürer-Haimendorf, the pioneer of the anthropology of the Sherpas, was the first to mention ‘pre-Buddhist elements in Sherpa belief and ritual’ in a short paper (1955:49–52).

³¹ M. Kapstein (1997:527). – For a comprehensive overview of the ritual practices as performed in Tibetan folk religion refer to G. Tucci (1988: 163–212), to R.A. Stein (1987:129–157) and to G. Samuel (1993:176–198).

³² A detailed overview of the rituals of the Tibetan state has been provided by H. Richardson (1993).

mundane affairs of life it is a common practice performed on occasion of a wide variety of events. However, the highest offices of the Tibetan government performed the same kind of smoke purification rituals. Significantly, mirroring their continuing importance in contemporary 'globalize' Tibetan society, the performance of smoke purifications in the diverse communities of the Tibetan diaspora has become a policy encouraged by the Tibetan government in exile since 1959 because it preserves a 'quintessentially Tibetan practice'.³³ Over the centuries rituals of these types have been incorporated by Buddhism and have been modified to conform to Buddhist doctrinal norms. Depending on differences of the geographical region and to those that distinguish the four different schools such rituals were adopted for Buddhist use in varying ways and to different degrees.³⁴

According to M. Kapstein a particularly important and broad genre of ritual practice is devoted to the expulsion of various types of evil spirit powers. Throughout Tibet religious specialists, monks or lay priests, associated with village temples, had to be experts in the ritual performance of these exorcist practices devoted to solving the common problems of the village people. In small and isolated communities that are always liable to internal disturbances of various sorts it is of vital importance that cooperative and harmonious relationships are maintained.³⁵ Although the Nyingma order developed great monastic centers in Central Tibet such as Mindröling (sMin grol gling) and Dorje Trak (rDo rje brag) over the course of the eighteenth century the 'Old School' also maintained its strong local presence as represented by lay tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*) who continue to perform a range of ritual services for the well-being of the local community.³⁶

3. The *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung, its basic liturgical text, and the tradition of the *byang gter* or 'Northern Treasures Texts'

Inspired by an influential lama in southwestern Tibet, the tradition of the *Dumji* came around 1850 to Gompa Zhung and to some of the other places where it is held among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. Shortly before the middle of the 19th century a number of

³³ Cf. Nālandā Translation Committee (1997:401). For all these aspects concerning the use of the smoke purification rituals from the top of traditional Tibetan society down to the level of village communities and for its continued and deliberate use in the contemporary Tibetan diaspora community refer to the comments to the 'Smoke Purification Song' that has been translated and introduced by the Nālandā Translation Committee (1997:401–405).

³⁴ M. Kapstein (1997:527).

³⁵ M. Kapstein (1997:527).

³⁶ Cf. D.S. Lopez, Jr. (1997:26). – Fr. Funke (1969, Appendix) has provided a map showing the present settlement of the Sherpas in Solu-Khumbu including the territory of the Lamaserwa clan.

charismatic Sherpa village priests traveled to the region of Mang yul in Tibet to study with the Thrakar Taso Tulku Mipham Chöki Wangchuk (Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Mi pham Chos kyī dBang phyug, 1775–1837).³⁷ This famous master gave them instructions and empowerments to a number of ritual and meditation cycles that have been practiced in the context of communal ceremonies throughout the villages of Solu-Khumbu up to the present day. Having studied as a monk in Mindröling (sMin grol gling), the most famous and influential monastery of the Nyingma school in central Tibet, Chöki Wangchuk practiced the teaching tradition of Mindröling. Moreover, being committed to an encompassing approach to the teachings of the ‘Old Translation’ school, Chöki Wangchuk also transmitted the ritual cycles of the ‘Northern Treasures’ of revealed literature (*byang gter*) of Dorje Drag (rDo rje brag) monastery, which is situated not far from Mindröling in Central Tibet.

One of his disciples among the Sherpa village lamas was the learned Nyangrig Dorje Jigdral (Nyang rigs rDo rje 'Jigs bral) of the Lamaserwa clan in Gompa Zhung. It was Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk who inspired Dorje Jigdral to introduce the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung as ‘great liturgical performance’ (*sgrub chen*). As will be highlighted the *Dumji* festival as performed annually in the village temple of Gonpa Zhung conforms to the important type of ‘great liturgical performance’ (*sgrub chen*) that had been deliberately composed, established, and performed in public on a grand scale in Mindröling by Rigzin Terdag Lingpa (Rig 'dzin Gter bdag gling pa, 1646–1714) and his brother, the translator Lochen Dharmaśrī (Lo chen dharma shri, 1654–1717), in order to unite the warring factions of the ‘Old School’. It is of particular significance that this kind of ‘great liturgical performance’ rose to a phenomenon of national significance when this type of public grand monastic festival was adapted and introduced by the Great Fifth Dalai Lama as a state ritual in his effort to enhance the grandeur of the Tibetan state that had been founded by him in 1642.

The *Dumji* festival as celebrated by the Lamaserwa clan in Gonpa Zhung represents a combination of Dorje Drak rituals of the ‘Northern Treasures’ (*byang gter*) tradition of revealed literature and the tradition of Mindröling *sgrub chen* practices and its sacred masked dances (*'chams*). Moreover, Chöki Wangchuk transmitted the liturgical text to Dorje Jigdral after having given to him the respective explanations and instructions and the initiation for its ritual use. Thus, to modify an expression of F.-K. Ehrhard, the ritual cycle of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung and the teaching tradition of Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk

³⁷ This eminent rNying ma teacher was instrumental in the transmission and spread of the *gter ma* teachings of his school in the Tibetan-Nepalese borderlands. On the achievements and the spiritual career of this master refer to: F.-K. Ehrhard (1993: 93, n. 31 and 32; 1997:255).

and his grand-uncle Tinley Dudjom both migrated from Tibet to Gonpa Zhung through the activities of prominent representatives of a clan.³⁸

Subsequently, Dorje Jigdral transmitted the ritual cycle, the received teachings and the initiation to his own disciples. These teachings have been passed on within the Nyang family of Gompa Zhung in one line of village lamas from Dorje Jigdral down to the present village lama, Lama Tenzing (bla ma bstan 'dzin, b. 1939). According to Lama Tenzing's information he has been presiding over the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung for the last nineteen years after his predecessor died.

The book used as the liturgical text for the performance of the *Dumji* celebration in Gonpa Zhung is called *Byang gter phur pa spu gri* ('Northern Treasures' Razor Tantra). It comprises four different texts. Interestingly, the first and the last text are written by Tinley Dudjom ('Phrin las bdud 'joms, 1726–1789), the grand-uncle and teacher of Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk.³⁹

According to the colophon that indicates neither the place nor the year of the text's writing it was Tinley Dudjom who compiled the basic liturgical text that is being used for the performance of the festival in Gompa Zhung.⁴⁰ Tinley Dudjom had done this on the request of a certain Sangnak Tenzin Dorje (gSang snags bstan 'dzin rdo rje).⁴¹ The second and the third text are devoted to the practice of meditation on the tutelary deity Dorje Phurpa or Vajrakīlaya. These two texts conform to the literary genre called *las byang*. This term has been rendered by F.-K. Ehrhard as 'sequence of ritual acts' and by C. Cantwell as 'main ritual manual'.⁴²

³⁸ F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:81).

³⁹ In an e-mail (13 Oct. 2003) Prof. F.-K. Ehrhard kindly noted that these two texts have been listed by M. Boord (1993: 23) as nos. B 1 and B 2 'unique' to the collection 'Phur pa Texts of the Byang gter Tradition' and that the material does not belong to the Rin chen gter mzod. – M. Boord deals with the role of 'Phrin las bDud joms as an author of Nyingmapa literature (1993:10–12) and indicates that the first text was 'composed as an introduction to the doctrines of Vajrakīla for a group of his disciples about to become initiated into the cult.' (p. 10) It can be assumed that the Sherpa village lamas were part of this group of disciples.

⁴⁰ As to the significant religious role of the important teacher 'Phrin las bDud joms F.-K. Ehrhard has called him along with Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755) and his grand-nephew Brag dkar rta so sprul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug, the 'central figures in the codification and transmission of rNying-ma-pa teachings in the 18th and 19th centuries from South Tibet to Nepal' (1993:81, see also n. 5).

⁴¹ For other important activities of this master see F.-K. Ehrhard (1997:260f. and the fn. 19). From the Nyang clan of Gonpa Zhung the two main disciples of Chos kyi dbang phyug were rDo rje 'Jigs bral and Karma Nges don. It must be assumed that gSang snags bstan 'dzin rdo rje was another name of one of these two figures. For these two and further persons of the Nyang clan who had been disciples Chos kyi dbang phyug and 'Phrin las bDud joms refer to F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:87–93, see esp. fn. 18,19,33).

⁴² F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:84, fn. 10); C. Cantwell (1997:113).

As indicated by its name *Byang gter phur pa spu gri*, the liturgical text had been revealed as a *terma* (Tib. *gter ma*) or spiritual ‘treasure’. *Terma* are religious texts and diverse sacred objects concealed and consecrated by Padmasambhava, his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, Vimalamitra and other great teachers. Later, “...when the time was ripe for disciples to be trained...” they have been discovered and practiced for the benefit of living beings by the reincarnations of those disciples of Padmasambhava who were prophesied as *terton* (Tib. *gter ston*) or treasure-revealers explains Dudjom Rinpoche.⁴³ The *terma* tradition represents the interrupted as opposed to the orderly oral transmission of the continuous (*bka' ma*) *instruction* both of which represent the two important traditions of instruction among the Old School.⁴⁴

The *byang gter* lineage represents a complete system of treasure-teachings revealed within the Nyingma school. According to tradition they have been first revealed by the visionary Ngödrup Gyeltsen (dNos grub rgyal mtshan) also called Rigzin Gödemcen (Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru can, 1357–1408), ‘the One with Vulture’s Feathers’, in the year 1366.⁴⁵ Dudjom Rinpoche describes the particular circumstances of their discovery. It was in the cave of Zangzang Lhadrak that Rigzin Gödemcen discovered a “...great, profound treasure containing five treasure chambers in separate compartments inside a square, blue treasure chest. From the maroon core treasure chamber in the centre he extracted three paper scrolls and three *kīlas* wrapped in maroon silk...”⁴⁶

It was Rigzin Gödemcen – one of the greatest masters of the Nyingma tradition whom J.B. Gyatso has called ‘one of the principal architects’ of the ‘full-blown Treasure tradition’ – who established the tradition of the ‘Northern Treasure Texts’ in Tibet.⁴⁷ After a difficult beginning at another place the lineage of the ‘Northern Treasures’ of ritual and meditational

⁴³ Cf. Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:747). For a comprehensive study of the *gter ma* tradition of the Nyingma school refer to Tulku Thondup Rinpoche (1986), for a thorough discussion of the vast Tibetan *gter ma* literature see J.B. Gyatso (1996:147–169).

⁴⁴ For this subject refer to E.G. Smith (2001:15). The third stream of transmission of the Nyingma tradition is that of the ‘profound pure visions’ (*zab mo dag snang*) in which Padmasambhava in person appears to the treasure-revealer and transmits a treasure to him.

⁴⁵ Cf. Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:780); M. Boord (1993:2). The life and spiritual achievements of Rigzin Godemcen and the history of the Northern Treasure tradition, its ritual cycles and practices is described in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:780–83); see also E. Dargyay (1979:129–132). – The line of reincarnations of Rigzin Godemcen as the lineage-holders of the ‘Northern Treasure’ tradition is sketched by S.G. Karmay (2002:32–3). Whereas recently M.T. Kapstein has written that the system of the Northern Treasures ‘remains so far unstudied’ (2001:209, fn. 66), a detailed overview of the history of the Northern Treasures tradition has already been given by M.J. Boord (1993:21–35). See also J.P. Dalton (2002:165–89).

⁴⁶ Cf. Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:780f.).

⁴⁷ J.B. Gyatso (1996:162f., n. 9; and p. 151).

cycles found its center at Dorje Drag, the second major monastic institution of the ‘Ancient Translation School’ in central Tibet since its foundation in 1610. From then until 1959 the ‘Northern Treasures’ have been a major religious system in Tibet that controlled over fifty monasteries.⁴⁸ Dudjom Rinpoche puts strong emphasis on the eminently political nature of the ‘Northern Treasure’ tradition of revealed literature.⁴⁹ Certain ‘Northern Tradition’ rituals are concerned with the ‘expulsion of armed forces’ (*dmag bzlog*) were used, among others, against invading Mongol armies that, at times, had caused the persecution of this sub-school of the Nyingma order.

According to the *byang gter* chronicles, authoritative texts of ritual cycles and their practices concerning the fierce deity Vajrakīlaya were among the numerous teachings transmitted to Tibetan disciples by the Indian tantric master and sage Padmasambhava in the eighth century.⁵⁰ Vajrakīlaya is one of the major deities whose cult is practiced within the Mahāyoga lineage of the Nyingma tradition, but he is also widely worshiped and his cult practiced among all other Buddhist schools. However, the lineages and tantras of Vajrakīlaya have their origin in the Nyingma tradition.⁵¹

The *terma* texts of the ‘Northern Treasures’ center on the cult of the deity Vajrakīlaya, a wrathful emanation of Padmasambhava.⁵² Hence, the Vajrakīlaya corpus is directly linked to Padmasambhava. Khenpo Namdrol mentions that according to its distinct tradition Padmasambhava received the entire transmission of the Vajrakīlaya tantra directly from Vajrakīlaya himself. Moreover, he received the empowerment and transmission of the tantra from the vajra master Prabāhasti.⁵³

The Sanskrit term Vajrakīlaya is rendered in Tibetan as Dorje Phurpa (rDo rje phurpa), the deity of the *phur bu*, the ritual dagger, which is another name for the fierce aspect of

⁴⁸ M. Boord (1993:2).

⁴⁹ According to him the *byang gter* tradition “...contains, without omission, everything that anyone might require for increasing the teaching, turning back invading armies, terminating infectious disease, the pacification of civil war, exorcism of Gongpo spirits, restoration of governmental authority, and the control of epidemics and plagues. It contains various ways to promote the happiness of Tibet, (...), and also the notices and keys for many sacred places and lands, this single treasure is universally known to resemble a minister who beneficially serves all Tibet and Kham.” (1991: 782).

⁵⁰ Traditional accounts of some of the major Vajrakīlaya lineages are presented by Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:710–716); he lists and briefly describes seven lineages specializing in the cult of Vajrakīlaya (pp. 710–712). M. Kapstein assumes that this enumeration is not exhaustive (2000:266,n. 112).

⁵¹ Cf. E.G. Smith (2001:264); Kh. Namdrol (1999:29).

⁵² For the diverse traditions of the doctrines of Vajrakīlaya see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:710–716).

⁵³ Cf. Kh. Namdrol (1999:24).

Padmasambhava called Dorje Zhonnu (rDo rje gzhon nu).⁵⁴ His mantra is as follows: om vajra kīla kīlaya sarva bighnāna baṃ huṃ phaṭ.⁵⁵ Within the kīla cult in which the deity Vajrakīlaya is worshiped, kīla is a weapon of ritual magic.⁵⁶ It is the most important ritual emblem of the *byang gter* tradition. Its characteristic use in kīla meditation is the ritual act of rolling (*'dril ba*) it between the palms of the tantric master's hands, which S. Beyer describes as a 'means of casting a curse upon an enemy'.⁵⁷ The vajra was originally the thunderbolt of the Indian god Indra. M. Boord points to the fact that since one of the stated aims of the kīla doctrines is to provide a method for the subjugation of 'all enemies and obstructers' the cult of Vajrakīlaya was readily able to assimilate troublesome local gods and demons wherever it spread.⁵⁸

According to tradition, when Guru Padmasambhava was on his way from Nepal to Central Tibet, having been invited by king Trisong Detsen to Tibet, he manifested as Vajrakīlaya to subjugate the pre-Buddhist divinities and spirits of the country and bind them by oath, thus compelling them to act as supporters of the propagation of the Buddhist dharma.⁵⁹ The first instructions he gave to his twenty-five heart-disciples were the teachings of the Vajrayāna or Secret Mantrayāna path on the practice of the cult of Vajrakīlaya to enable them to remove obstacles to their practice of the Buddhist doctrine. Moreover, he gave expansive teachings to many other disciples since he realized they would also experience obstacles in their spiritual practice. Subsequently, three traditions concerning the practice of Vajrakīlaya emerged in the Land of Snows from Padmasambhava's original transmission of the Vajrakīlaya instructions.⁶⁰

Khenpo Namdrol refers to a myth in which Vajrakīlaya owes his origin to the essentially negative figure of Rudra. It was the demon Thar pa nag po (Black Liberation) who in a previous life broke his tantric vows, practiced wrongly and was thus reborn as the demonic

⁵⁴ Dorje Zhonnu is depicted in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:482). Vajrakīlaya is depicted in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:716) and M. Boord (1993:38); actually, there is no iconographic difference between the two deities.

⁵⁵ For his mantra refer to Kh. Namdrol (1998:69).

⁵⁶ On the etymology of the term kīla see M. Boord (1993:2); on the history of the kīla and its Buddhist assimilation see ch. 2, on the iconography of the kīla see ch. 3.

⁵⁷ S. Beyer (1988:44–45); see also M. Boord (1993:8).

⁵⁸ Cf. M. Boord (1993, p. 8); Boord also highlights in detail the history, iconography, and religious chronicles of the kīla and the Northern Treasures kīla, see pp. 39–251. On the cult of Vajrakīlaya in Tibetan Buddhism see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:710–716); Khenpo Namdrol 1999; E.G. Smith (2001: 238–9). Some of the most important Phur pa tantras include the 'Phur pa bcu gnyis', which has been studied in detail by R. Mayer (1996).

⁵⁹ For this crucial chapter of the introduction of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Tibet refer to the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* as translated and edited by A.M. Blondeau (1971:72ff.). See also M. Boord (1993:8) and Kh. Namdrol (1999:24–25).

⁶⁰ Cf. Kh. Namdrol (1999:25).

form of Rudra Thar pa nag po. Rudra had to be tamed since his main activity is to cause obstacles to the propagation of the secret tantric teachings. As such Rudra represents the *dam sri* demons.⁶¹ To subdue this dangerous demon, the Buddhas created an emanation appearing in the guise of Vajrakīlaya who defeated Thar pa nag po, tamed him and converted him back to the rightful practice of the Secret Mantra. Thus, Rudra was completely liberated by Vajrakīlaya. It is since then that Rudra continues to exist as Mahākāla who is one of the most powerful protective deities of the Buddhist doctrine (*chos skyong*) in the Buddhist pantheon.⁶²

The teachings of the ‘Northern Treasures’ have spread throughout the Tibetan Buddhist cultural realm from Ladakh in the west to Nepal and Sikkim in the east where this important sub-tradition of the Nyingma school has flourished to the present day.⁶³

Dorje Drag monastery, the center of the ‘Northern Treasures’ tradition, has been re-established in Shimla, H.P., India, by Taglung Tsetrul Rinpoche (sTag lung rtse sprul rin po che, b. 1927) where it continues to uphold its influential tradition in exile. It maintains its close relation with the private monastery of the Dalai Lama and with the two monasteries of the state oracles of Tibet in Dharamsala, which as initiated by the Fifth Dalai Lama follow the *byang gter* tradition.⁶⁴

In view of the contemporary era Sogyal Rinpoche has emphasized the particular efficacy of the ritual practice of the wrathful deity Vajrakīlaya for destroying the obstacles and hostile forces and ‘for purifying the spiritual pollution so prevalent in this age.’⁶⁵ To demonstrate its importance he mentions that both the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the present Fourteenth Dalai Lama have chosen Vajrakīlaya as their *yi dam* or meditational deity. Today many eminent masters such as Dudjom Rinpoche and Dilgo Khentse Rinpoche are great practitioners and lineage-holders of the transmission of Vajrakīlaya.⁶⁶

4. The officiants of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung: the internal religious organization of the Lamaserwa clan community

It was the great teacher Thrakar Taso Tulku Mipham Chöki Wangchuk (Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Mi pham chos kyi dbang phyug, 1775–1837) who around the middle of the 19th

⁶¹ Cf. Kh. Namdrol (1999:36).

⁶² This legend is narrated by Kh. Namdrol (1999:37–43). Another version of the myth of the origin of Vajrakīlaya is given by M. Boord (1993:7).

⁶³ M. Boord (1993:33, see also fn. 103).

⁶⁴ T. Rigzin and J. Russell (1987:16–21); P. Yeshi, and J. Russel. (1991:31); M. Boord (1993:35).

⁶⁵ Sogyal Rinpoche in his foreword to Kh. Namdrol (1999:7–9, see p. 7)

⁶⁶ Sogyal Rinpoche (1999:8).

century inspired the introduction of the *Dumji* celebration in Gompa Zhung according to the ritual kind of 'great liturgical performance' (*sgrub chen*). The distinct local tradition of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung represents a complex composition of Dorje Drak (rDo rje Brag) rituals of the 'Northern Treasures' tradition and the tradition of both Mindröling (sMin sgrol gling) *sgrub chen* practices and its spectacular sacred dances that had been created and transmitted by Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk.

Moreover, Chöki Wangchuk compiled the basic liturgical text *byang gter phur pa spu gri* that is used for the performance of the festival in Gompa Zhung. It consists of four different treasure-texts unearthed by two different treasure-revealers of the *byang gter* tradition. It was this treasure-text that Chöki Wangchuk transmitted to Nyangrig Dorje Jigdral (Nyang rigs rDo rje 'Jigs bral) of the Nyang family of the Lamaserwa clan in Gompa Zhung. Chöki Wangchuk did this after giving Dorje Jigdral the respective explanations and instructions and after initiating him into the ritual cycle of the worship of Vajrakīlaya, the tutelary deity of the *Dumji* festival as held in Gopma Zhung. Subsequently, Dorje Jigdral passed the received teachings on to his own disciples. It is this ritual cycle and the respective teachings that have been transmitted within the Nyang family of Gompa Zhung in one line of village lamas from Dorje Jigdral down to the present village lama, Lama Tenzing (bla ma bstan 'dzin, b. 1939). According to Lama Tenzing's information he has been presiding over the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung over the last 21 years since 1983, the year when his predecessor had retired. After his marriage, as is customary in view of that important religious function, Lama Tenzing took over the task of the married householder lama who acts as the tantric village lama (*sngags pa*, 'master of tantric spells').

The *Dumji* festival as staged in the temple of a local community is enacted by lay practitioners, i.e. a married householder priesthood, whose members are all closely related through kinship connections. In the everyday life of the local community these married householder priests, just like everyone else, are local landlords, farmers, owners of cattle, etc. According to Dudjom Rinpoche (1904–87), the former head of the 'Old Translation School', it was the Indian sage and accomplished tantric master Padmasambhava, who being revered as the key figure who introduced the Vajrayāna doctrine of Buddhism in Tibet, founded both many colleges to teach it and meditation schools 'for the way of secret mantra'.⁶⁷ And it was the emperor Tri Songdetsen (Khri srong lde btsan, reigned from 755/56 until 797) who having invited Guru Padmasambhava to establish the Buddhist doctrine in the Land of Snows, adopted Buddhism and constructed Samye (bSam yas), Tibet's first Buddhist monastery, around the year 779. Moreover, Tri Songdetsen "...established the twofold

⁶⁷ Vajrayāna or 'diamond vehicle' is the name of the school of Buddhism that is based on written tantric texts. Owing to the use of certain holy syllables called mantra, it is also called Mantrayāna.

division of the religious community, consisting of the shaven-headed followers of the sūtras [the monks], and the followers of the way of the mantras, who wore long braided locks.”⁶⁸ Consequently, these kinds of Tibetan Buddhist religious experts are represented by the married tantric householder lamas. In contradistinction to the celibate monastic monk community the married householder priests participate fully in the mundane affairs of the economy and the social organization of their local or clan community.⁶⁹

The archetype of the Tibetan Buddhist tantric householder lama is Marpa of Lhotrak in Southern Tibet (Lho brag mar pa chos kyi blo gros, 1012–1097), the great Tibetan master and teacher, who is regarded as the father of the Kagyü (bka’ brgyud) school. In his person he combined the different roles of scholar and practitioner as well as of householder and farmer and of husband and father. In their introduction to his famous religious biography (rnam thar) written by Tsang Nyön Heruka (gTsang smyon He ru ka, 1452–1507) the Nālanda Translation Committee has characterized this great saint in the Buddhist tradition of Tibet as follows:

“He ate good food, drank lots of barley beer, and lost his temper with his wife and children. His approach to everything was thoroughly businesslike, practical, and earthy. At home in Lhotrak, Marpa seemingly did not have much time to practice meditation. Certainly, he did not spend most of his time in intensive retreat, as did Milarepa and later disciples. Moreover, he was not even outwardly recognizable as a spiritual person since he did not wear the robe of a monk or yogin. Even his neighbours and relatives had doubts at times about him being a spiritual teacher.”⁷⁰

In their local community the ritual performers are all indiscriminately referred to as ‘lama’ (*bla ma*). The householder lamas form the corps of ritual specialists of the local clan community. They conduct the annual liturgical ceremonies in the village temple as well as the major rites of passage as performed in the households both of which are governed by the Tibetan Buddhist scriptural tradition of the unreformed or ‘Old Translation School’. Thus, the officiants take care of the spiritual well-being not of a Tibetan king or princely lay

⁶⁸ Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:519f.). On Tri Songdetsen and the coming of Padmasambhava to Tibet see op. cit., pp. 512–521. Tri Songdetsen is depicted in op. cit., p. 512.

⁶⁹ These householder priests have to be distinguished from the separate rural ritual communities of married monks called *ser khyim* as has been observed in the Ding ri area in Southern Tibet and described by B.N. Aziz (1978:76–94).

⁷⁰ Cf. Tsang Nyön Heruka (1999:L).

donor such as in the old Tibetan *mchod yon* dyad that has been sketched above but of their own clan community, while the latter in turn provides the resources necessary for the staging of the *Dumji* and the material support for their priests. Apart from that the officiants are in charge of the maintenance of the local temple and of the administration of the temple funds.⁷¹

As a rule, monks neither officiate at nor attend village ceremonies with the exception of funerals.⁷² But, as it happens in the Lamaserwa clan tradition, a monk may officiate at the *Dumji* performance in Gonpa Zhung in his capacity as member of the celebrating clan. In fact, in Gonpa Zhung two monks belong to the body of ritual specialists of the Lamaserwa clan community. One celibate monk is the lama or abbot of Phungmoche (Phug mo che) monastery including its Himalayan Buddhist School. Situated about two hours north of Gonpa Zhung it was founded by the present abbot's grand-uncle, lama Yonten Gyatso (bla ma yon tan rgya mtsho), in the thirties of the last century. The Phungmoche lama acts as the head lama's assistant and is regarded as the second tantric lama of the Lamaserwa clan community. Consequently, it is he who will succeed the present tantric village lama in the near future, due to the latter's progressing cancer.

The other monk, who is the abbot of the small Tombuk (Dong phug) monastery situated at one hour's distance west of Gonpa Zhung, has no particular customary role to fulfill in the *Dumji* context; instead, whenever he is present in Solu he acts as a joker in varying ritual contexts since he is the only fully ordained monk (*dge slong*) of the Lamaserwa clan. His monastery that he himself had founded was consecrated in 1994 by Trulzhig Rinpoche ('Khrul zhig Rin po che Ngag dbang Chos kyi blo gros, b. 1924). Trulzhig Rinpoche, the abbot of the Tibetan monastery of Thubten Chöling (Thub bstan chos gling) just about two hours' distance from Gonpa Zhung, is one of the leading hierarchs of the Nyingma School.

As is customary, the majority of Sherpa men have obtained some instruction in reading, writing, and Tibetan grammar, the fundamentals of Buddhist religion from the Nyingmapa perspective and the performance of the basic ritual practices – including the playing of some of the musical instruments to be used in this context. Their spiritual knowledge is still being

⁷¹ The relation between kinship and the temple as is typical in Tibetan rural communities with a non-monastic householder priesthood and the way that corporate social life is organized between kinship and temple has been highlighted in detail by G.E. Clarke in his unpubl. D. Phil. thesis (1980). For this subject refer also to part IV of Ch. Ramble's unpubl. D. Phil. thesis (1984).

⁷² For the existing and still widening deep cleavage between these two kinds of religious practitioners in Sherpa Buddhism – the celibate lamas, monks, and nuns on the one side and the married householder lamas on the other – which is due to even currently still increasing pressure from the side of the monastic communities among the Sherpas that has been felt since their emergence in the early Twenties of the 20th century, and the effected changes cf. Sh.B. Ortner (1995:359, 377; 1999: 171–75, 262–72).

received either from a celibate lama in a monastery and/or from a learned tantric village lama who is either novice, lay student or ordained monk who may have broken the vows and chosen the secular life of a married householder. Hence, most Sherpa men are able to at least read and perform the ritual chanting of some of the basic religious texts, play some of the musical instruments and officiate in support of the tantric village lama in the context of the performance of both communal and domestic ritual ceremonies. Needless to say that as compared to the long and profound training that the monks and monk dancers in Tibet's great Buddhist monastic centers of all schools receive, the usual level of spiritual training of the local community's lay officiants is low.⁷³ This is also a standard criticism that is being raised by the Sherpa monkhood since the very emergence of Sherpa monasteries at the beginning of the last century. Due to this traditionally fairly high standard of religious education among men – in sharp contradistinction to Sherpa women – the local Sherpa community is almost fully self-sufficient in its religious affairs. It is only for extraordinary purposes, such as the inauguration of important religious monuments (temples or stūpas), through the consecration ceremony (*rab gnas*) or the introduction of new ritual cycles, that the spiritual knowledge and authority of an accomplished high lama is needed.

As far as the *Dumji* festival of the Lamaserwa clan in Gonpa Zhung is concerned the current hereditary tantric village lama presiding over the annual staging of the major annual celebration has received the initiation and empowerment (*dbang*) for the ritual cycle devoted to the worship of Vajrakīlaya, the tutelary deity of the ceremony, in direct transmission from his learned father, lama Druwa (*sgrub pa*), and two other village lamas belonging to the Lamaserwa clan. From his father he has also learned the movements of the different dances, the way of ritual chanting, the mantras or tantric spells that are chanted and the concomitant *mudrās* or ritual hand gestures in a transmission line from teacher to disciple, which is regarded as the only method to impart the tradition from one generation to the other.

It is significant that the village lama's father had not only received the usual transmission necessary for the proper enactment of the *Dumji* ritual cycle within the paternal lineage. Lama Druwa also received the instructions and empowerments directly from the abbot of the newly established Tengboche monastery (1916) stayed repeatedly in the Twenties as the lama's disciple. As has already been mentioned, it was its wealthy founder, Ngawang Norbu Zangbu (Ngag dbang nor bu bzang po, 1848–1934), popularly known as Lama Gulu, who brought the Mindröling traditions, including the sacred masked dances, at the beginning of

⁷³ For the profound training of the monastic officiants in the context of the Kagyü (*bka' brgyud*) school see S. Beyer (1988:24–26); on the complex training program of the monk dancers in Ze chen monastery, the famous rNying ma monastery in Bodnath, Kathmandu see M. Ricard (2003: 46–64).

the 20th century to Solu-Khumbu. He brought them from Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (1867–1940), the charismatic lama of Dzarongphu Gonpa situated in the Dingri area just north of Mt. Everest.

As is customary among Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, the present village lama's father was eager to regenerate his ritual knowledge and power by way of the most direct link. This link is with the particular teaching tradition of which the *Dumji* celebration is a part. At this time this tradition was represented for the first time in person among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu by Ngawang Norbu Zangbu, from whom not only many monks and laypeople, but also many of his contemporaries among the Sherpa village lamas traveled to receive their spiritual education in the first half of the 20th century.⁷⁴ It is from this influential Sherpa lama that a whole generation of Sherpa men including lama Tenzing's father had obtained, among others, the direct explanations, instructions, and empowerments concerning certain ritual cycles of the Mindröling teaching tradition. The *Dumji* celebration in Gonpa Zhung as well as the particular set of sacred masked dances belongs to this tradition. According to my informants it was that particular regeneration of their spiritual knowledge through the transmissions from this eminent Sherpa lama, being the only knowledge-holder of this important Nyingma tradition in Solu-Khumbu in the early 20th century, which has enabled the Sherpa village lamas to correctly perform the same *Dumji* festival. However, each festival is enacted on the basis of a distinct local tradition of its own until the present day.

As is characteristic of the religious training of married householder lamas among the Sherpas Lama Tenzing has practiced extensive meditation (*sgom pa*) on various tutelary deities under the guidance of his father and two other village lamas. This meditation practice he accomplished in a retreat place (*mtshams khang*) that is situated not far above Gonpa Zhung. He completed the retreats prescribed for the teachings of all the ritual cycles current in the Sherpa areas of Solu and Khumbu that he had received from his spiritual masters. Moreover, he received the transmissions of a range of other religious texts from Trulzhig Rinpoche both in direct personal contact as well as together with other Sherpa village lamas and monks over the course of certain summer retreats at Thubten Chöling.

According to his own religious biography (*rnam thar*) it was only once in his lifetime that Lama Tenzing had left his locality to receive additional instructions and empowerments from another learned lama. Significantly, the latter lama belonged to another school of Tibetan Buddhism. It was at the age of twenty-six that he went to Tashi (bKra shis) monastery

⁷⁴ For the life and achievements of Lama Gulu, who built sTeng po che dGon pa, the first monastery among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu, refer to Ngawang Tenzin Norbu and Fr. Klatzel (1988:28–31); S.B. Ortner (1989:130–138).

close to Bigu in the remote Rolwaling valley west of the Khumbu region. There he stayed for half a year to obtain the explanations, instructions, and initiations into some other ritual cycles from the lama who had founded that monastery as a nunnery with only few associated village lamas in the year 1934 where Sherpa and Tamang nuns lived side by side. His teacher was the Bhutanese master Sherab Dorje (Shes rab rdo rje, 1884–1945).⁷⁵ This widely-traveled teacher of the Drukpa Kagyü ('Brug pa bKa' brgyud) school who had come to Nepal with the king of Bhutan's order to renovate the Svayambhū stūpa west of Kathmandu founded a number of temples in some of the Himalayan valleys. Among others, he is remembered to have been active in the Sherpa area of Solu-Khumbu.⁷⁶

The number of officiants varies slightly depending on the different rites that make up the *Dumji* celebration and on how many are available on a particular day. A substitute can always be found quickly among the clan community's corps of officiants. It is the village head lama who presides over the *Dumji* festival. His title Diamond Master (*rdo rje slob dpon*, Skt. *vajrācārya*) is only used by the officiants but not by the laypeople who simply call him by his name. The title indicates that having been initiated into the tantric cult of Vajrakīlaya, the tutelary deity or *yidam* (*yi dam*) of the *Dumji* festival that is based upon one liturgical text, he is the accomplished tantric master who performs the major ritual operations. As is characteristic in the context of village celebrations the tantric master of the ritual ceremony has to give instructions more or less permanently throughout the whole festival regarding the correctness of ritual chanting, the performance of the diverse ritual practices, the crafting of the sacrificial dough cakes (*gtor ma*), the manufacturing of the colourful thread crosses (*nam mkha'*) also rendered as 'space', the recitation of mantras (*sngags*) or tantric spells, and the performance of the associated mudrās or hand gestures. Moreover, in Gonpa Zhung it is also his duty to instruct the masked dancers about the dance steps, bodily movements, and the particular mantras and mudrās involved. Personal instruction, explanation, demonstration, and corrections represent the only way to impart the tradition of sacred dances from the master to his disciples in an unbroken line of transmission from one generation down to the other. The preparation of the liṅga, the effigy used in wrathful rituals symbolizing the evil forces and their negative influences that are to be destroyed (*sgrol ba /*

⁷⁵ Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf has provided a detailed description of this monastery (1976:121–154), which also contains photos of the dgon pa, the community of nuns, and of its founder (for his personal photo see esp. no. 5 after p. 152).

⁷⁶ For a brief overview of the life and achievements of this charismatic Bhutanese master see J.F. Dobremez and C. Jest (1976:120f).

bsgral ba) for the well-being of the community while their mind is 'liberated', is done by the Diamond Master alone.⁷⁷

The second-most important officiant is the Diamond Master's assistant, one of the two afore-mentioned monks who is the abbot of Phungmoche monastery. Among others, his main task consists in handing the Diamond Master the appropriate ritual implements. In Gonpa Zhung it is he who also acts as the Master of Dance (*'chams dpon*) of the *Dumji* festival. Like all of his contemporaries among the Sherpa monks adhering to the Old School he has received his monk name Ngawang Jimba (ngag dbang 'dzin pa) from Trulzhig Rinpoche. Most of his spiritual knowledge and ritual training he obtained from his paternal grand uncle, lama Yonten Gyatso (yon tan rgya mtsho), the founder of his monastery. The Diamond Master and his assistant personify the Buddhist master-disciple relationship and represent the major officiants of the *Dumji* celebration. It is the job of both of them to create the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya on the altar (*gtor cog*) inside the village temple, which has to be kept strictly secret and is thus covered by a cloth throughout the whole celebration. Vajrakīlaya's maṇḍala is usually made in the afternoon of the first day.

Moreover, the corps of officiants comprises two other sub-groups. This distinction is mainly due to the different levels of spiritual training the individual officiants have received. The first sub-group currently comprises ten senior village lamas.⁷⁸ Four of them play the cymbals (*sbug chal*), the leading musical instrument of the ceremony; each one can thus act as what is called *unze* (*dbu mzad*) or Chant Leader in monastic ritual, i.e. the officiant who initiates the prayers and keeps the rhythm going. Each of them has to fulfill a particular supporting function of the ritual chanting that is prescribed in the liturgical text. The other six officiants represent the permanent group of experienced masked dancers. As is usual in case of need, other officiants may always supplement them. Moreover, each of them also plays one or several instruments over the course of the ceremony. It is the senior officiants who perform the main other tasks such as the time-consuming activities of the crafting of the sacrificial dough cakes and the different effigies that are to be given as ransom to the demons (*bdud*) to please them and drive them away from the celebrating community, and of the manufacturing of the colourful thread-crosses (*nam mkha'*) to be used in the course of the *bgrya bzhi* or 'Ritual of the Four Hundred'. Both kinds of ritual objects crafted in different forms are key elements of the *Dumji* celebration. These two major activities in preparation of the festival are carried out on the second day, while the altar arrangements are done on the third day.

⁷⁷ On the role of the Diamond Master as performed in the context of the monastic *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival cf. R.J. Kohn (2001:63f).

⁷⁸ Currently the second monk mentioned above cannot participate since he has gone into retreat in the year 2003 for the customary duration of three years, three months and three days.

Each of the ten senior village lamas owns the liturgical text privately. Moreover, two of them, having undergone some higher tantric ritual training, own a *vajra*, i.e. the adamantine thunderbolt representing wisdom, also called the diamond-wisdom sceptre, a small hand bell (*dril bu*) and a *damaru*, the small two-sided hand-drum made of human cranium. Each of the senior officiants has to bring and use these privately owned ritual paraphernalia over the course of the sacred performance.

Significantly, the corps of senior officiants represents a distinct age group. The youngest of the senior officiants is just above fifty years of age while the three oldest are in their late sixties, just like Lama Tenzing. According to them all of them have been acting as senior officiants for about two decades.⁷⁹ As is customary, each of the officiants is member of a family in which his task has been handed down in the paternal line either from the father or from a father's brother. The highest in rank among the senior officiants is a professional thangka painter. As such he had been working in a museum in Japan for more than three years. Apart from this job he had also been involved in this capacity for some years in the painting of both the newly rebuilt Thengpoche monastery in Khumbu, which had burnt down in 1989 due to a small, but fatal accident caused by the wrong use of a water heater, and of Chiwong monastery in Solu after the completion of its restoration in 1989.

The second senior officiant has been working as a teacher in the monastic school of nearby Serlo (*ser logs*) monastery that was founded by the eminent Sherpa monk and scholar Khenpo Sangye Tenzin (*mKhen po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin*, 1924–1990). It is from this important Sherpa lama that almost all of the senior officiants have obtained their spiritual knowledge and ritual training. Subsequently, their spiritual training is being supplemented in the course of the summer retreats as practiced in meditation caves situated just above Thubten Chöling monastery. Trulzhig Rinpoche initiated the summer retreat in the early Nineties. It has to be emphasized that this highly revered and most important lama for the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu is deeply committed to the preservation and strengthening of the Sherpa Buddhist heritage. In view of his possible passing away within the next few years the already strongly ailing Lama Tenzing gathered the majority of the village lamas in the Solu area in the summer of 1998 at Serlo monastery. In the course of three months' teaching they obtained from him the transmission of all ritual cycles current among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. Today, Lama Tenzing is one of last of his generation of tantric village lamas in Solu who embodies the vast spiritual knowledge of a tantric lama. In his endeavor Lama Tenzing was strongly encouraged and supported by Trulzhig Rinpoche.

⁷⁹ Hence, each of them represents a valuable source of information on both the various performances and the individual performers of the *Dumji* in that time-span.

One of the masked dancers has been working professionally as a carpenter in the context of the construction of religious monuments and private house chapels. Six officiants live as married householders who perform the simpler tasks of a village lama within their own locality. As has become usual in the last two decades among old Sherpas and Tibetans, the tenth of the senior officiants, a very religious man, retired as householder about a decade ago, and has been living in a small, privately owned house in nearby Thubten Chöling monastery. There he devotes the rest of his life to spiritual practice.

The second sub-group representing the minor officiants comprises a varying number of at least fourteen to sixteen actors. Their main task consists in playing the other musical instruments used in the *Dumji* performance. These instruments are the conch shell (*dung dkar*), the short trumpets made of metal (*rgya gling*), the telescopic horns made of copper of about three meters length, all used in pairs, and the big 'offering drum' (*mchod rnga*) that is hung up in a wooden support.⁸⁰ Moreover, they have to help the senior officiants wherever help is needed such as in the context of the crafting of the different sacrificial cakes for which they usually have to do the initial kneading of the dough, in the making of the altar arrangements, etc.

Unlike the group of senior officiants, all of whom have been fulfilling their respective tasks within the performance of the *Dumji* for about two decades, most of the minor officiants change almost every year. Usually, three or four still unmarried men of the Lamaserwa clan who after having received their spiritual education in one or both of the afore-mentioned monasteries now earn their living as teachers at the local Hillary-sponsored high school or as social workers in their locality perform the more important tasks of that sub-group of minor officiants. The others are young monk students ranging between eight and about twenty years of age. Usually they are sent from the abbot of Phungmoche, the main monastery of the Lamaserwa clan, in whose entourage they show up for the *Dumji* performance. In case of any need a smaller group comes from Serlo monastery. It has to be noted that in most cases the latter monk students do not even belong to the Lamaserwa clan but to the neighbouring Thaktho (Grags mtho) clan.

The masks to be used in the course of the sacred dances are made of several layers of glued cloth which are pasted onto a clay mould. This material makes the masks relatively light as compared to those made of wood or clay – both of which, however, are not used among the Sherpas. Their weight is important since the masks are worn over the course of

⁸⁰ All ritual musical instruments have been described in detail including their respective history, making, and symbolism, the particular ritual context in which each one is used, etc., by M. Helffer in her seminal work on the instruments of Tibetan sacred music (1994).

long ritual performances. Moreover, the masks that represent the protective deities, who due to their proper worship have come to dance on the local ground, are about three to four times larger than a human head.⁸¹ Since the only way for the dancer to see is through two small holes at the corner of its mouth the mask must be positioned very precisely on the dancer's head by the one who helps to put it on. The costumes in use are made of multicoloured brocade and silks that are said to have been manufactured in Benares. They are worn over the lay tantric officiants' robes. The *'chams* dancers wear felt boots.

Like all other ritual implements, such as the musical instruments, the masks and costumes belong to the village temple. The one in charge of the temple is the sacristan (*dkon gnyer*) who also performs the daily worship of the deities contained in it. There they are kept in the treasury which is situated on temple's upper floor. Because they are only used on occasion of the locality's main annual festival the masks and costumes are stored away for the rest of the year next to the temple's most secret shrine, which is that of the temple's protective deities (*srung ma*).

As M. Ricard has pointed out recently, all the crafts linked to the manufacturing of the accessories for the performance of rituals and the masked dances have a sacred quality.⁸² All the ritual tools are charged with a complex symbolism. The meanings of the different masks (*'bag*), for instance, can be interpreted at various levels.⁸³ Masks with a peaceful expression symbolize the serenity of wisdom (*shes rab*). The masks with wrathful expression represent the five mental poisons by which mankind is enslaved.⁸⁴ It is the latter that are to be abandoned in Tibetan Buddhism through the spiritual practice – such as in the *Dumji* festival – that aims at renouncing *saṃsāra* (*'khor ba*), i.e. the cyclical existence of sentient beings who suffer through the rounds of rebirth in order to obtain Buddhahood.

⁸¹ Not all masks used in this context are of this considerable size. In particular, all those masks representing strange, funny, or alien characters that are used in the course of the two secular comical interludes and are not regarded as sacred masks just cover the dancer's face. Today, these are mainly made of cheap and simple material such as plastic.

⁸² M. Ricard on sacred craftsmanship as it is cultivated in the monastic setting (2003:57–62).

⁸³ Perhaps the most complex symbolism of all ritual accessories is represented by the black hat that is worn for the sacred dance that is known as the 'golden libation' (*ser skyems*) which being the first dance of the *Dumji* in Gonpa Zhung will be described below. According to M. Ricard (2003:62) the black hat is in itself a symbol of the whole maṇḍala, i.e. a cosmogram of deities, in this context the divine celestial palace in which Vajrakīlaya, the worshiped and propitiated tutelary deity, and his entourage take their abode for the duration of the first three days.

⁸⁴ Op. cit., p. 57. For the 'five poisons' or the 'five conflicting emotions' (*dug lnga*) such as 1. bewilderment, ignorance, or confusion, 2. attachment or desire, 3. aversion including hatred or anger, 4. jealousy, and 5. pride refer to Patrul Rinpoche (1999:414f.).

All the musical instruments made of metal are of Newari making. However, just like the big suspended wooden drum all the masks and the costumes used for the celebration of the *Dumji* masked dance festival have been crafted by religious artisans of the Lamaserwa clan who have received a proper spiritual education and training according to monastic standards, which authorizes them to manufacture these main accessories. In fact, presently in Gompa Zhung all old masks and costumes are of considerable age and none of the religious artisans who created them are still alive. Currently, neither their former homes nor their names are remembered, which clearly indicates that Sherpa Buddhist society has been suffering a loss of its cultural heritage, which has made its influence felt for about three decades.⁸⁵ But none of my lama informants seemed to worry particularly about the fact that today there is not even one young Sherpa artisan to continue with these artful traditions of religious craftsmanship. The usual answer, kept with the pragmatism that is characteristic of the Sherpas, was that in case the community has to celebrate an important festival but lacks officiating lamas, masks, costumes, musical instruments or other ritual paraphernalia any kind of help is granted by the two monasteries in the valley, which have been founded and organized by clerics of the Lamaserwa clan, and also by nearby Serlo Gompa founded and managed by abbots of the Thaktho (*Grags tho*) clan. Moreover, it is added, it has become common practice today among the Sherpas to provide most of their religious items in the shops around the great stūpa (*mchod rten*) at Bodhnath, northeast of Kathmandu, where they are cheaper.

Usually, it is on the day before the beginning of the *Dumji* festival that all acting senior village priests move from their homesteads to Gonpa Zhung. There the senior officiants spend their usually very short nights together in the secluded sphere of the village temple. For the whole duration of the festival they are not supposed to leave the temple complex, the only exception being for the performance of the juniper burning offering ritual (*bsang*) on the first day at the stūpa containing the relics of Dorje Zangbu (rDo rje bzang po), the mythical culture hero of the Lamaserwa clan who is also said to be the founder of Gonpa Zhung. The latter fumigation offering is directed to the serpent deity (*klu*), the local fertility deity, who for the duration of the cold season dwells in her holy grove that is situated close to Dorje Zangbu's stūpa with whom she is closely associated. The group of minor officiants,

⁸⁵ Significantly, this loss of their cultural heritage has been coupled with the Sherpas' admirable growth of their involvement in Nepal's tourist and trekking business. However, the resulting gains are made individually, while the increasing loss concerns Buddhist religion, culture, and society as will be elaborated in the last chapter of this investigation. – I have dealt with this deplorable loss of their cultural heritage in a recent paper on the disappearance of the art of thanka painting among the Sherpas of the Solu region as exemplified by an outstanding artist who then was highly respected among his contemporaries both Tibetan Buddhists and Western scholars (2002:5–25).

however, who stay in the temple at night as well, joins them on the morning of the first day.

For the performance of the *Dumji* festival all officiants undergo a short initiation and empowerment ceremony (*dbang bskur*) conducted by the tantric village lama that includes a hair-cutting (*skra bcad*).⁸⁶

5. The economics of ritual – *Dumji* festival patronage among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu with a focus on the distinct local tradition of Gonpa Zhung

Over the course of the public performance of the sequence of diverse rituals, including the sacred dances, that make up the *Dumji* festival the religious experts of the celebrating community employ and display their spiritual knowledge and powers over the forces of evil for the well-being of the local community. The community, in turn, sponsors its most important annual festival and takes part as audience. The activities of both are based on beliefs of karma and rebirth and key Buddhist values such as the accumulation of merit (*bsod nams*) through the performance of the *Dumji*, empowerment (*byin brlabs*), prosperity (*rgyu*), and fortune (*rlung rta*).

Being closely connected by paternal kinship relations the officiants contribute to the fulfillment of the clan community's goal through the proper utilization of their ritual knowledge while the lay community, as represented by a fixed annual number of sponsors in rotation, provide the material resources necessary for the staging of the ceremony. The number of sponsors varies according to the different local traditions where the *Dumji* is held. It is of importance that the sponsors do not only act as profane 'givers of money' and organizers of the celebration. Acting as the representatives of their clan community who stages their major annual festive event they also have to assume an important ceremonial role as the hosts and stewards of the local community's protective deities who are invited for the *Dumji* festival, whose cult is performed on that festive occasion, and who are invoked over its course to offer their powerful help, without which the ceremony's goal is not achieved. However, unlike both the diverse Tantric ritual procedures and the performing religious specialists, the secular activities of the lay community in this context have seldom attracted the attention and interest of the scientific community that they actually deserve since it is these practices that constitute the very social and institutional framework of the ritual ceremonies as performed in a village context.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ For the different kinds of empowerment refer to E. Pearlman (2002:55).

⁸⁷ The importance of this issue has also been emphasized recently by Ch. Ramble (2000:289; 314) and M. Schrempf (2000:317).

Hence, in order to convey an adequate understanding of the very complex and spectacular *Dumji* festival I want to situate the subject within the social and economic framework that this celebration is embedded in. Apart from the textually prescribed ritual aspects of the *Dumji* festival, which constitute the main part of this investigation, I also intend to examine more closely the secular circumstances that not only surround but also make the sacred masked dance festival possible. Moreover, I wish to highlight briefly those secular practices that are involved in the performance of the liturgical rite as one of its integral parts.⁸⁸ Principally, the secular activities that are going on in this context are closely associated with the office of the sponsor, which is an important socio-economic institution in Sherpa society. An adequate understanding of both the institution of the sponsor of ritual ceremonies and the secular practices that have to be performed by the former requires a brief outline that shall be given below.⁸⁹

In Sherpa culture practically all communal celebrations are based upon the social institution called *zhindak*⁹⁰ (Tib. *sbyin bdag* – Skt. *dānapati*) that is conceived in terms of the afore-mentioned ancient Tibetan relation between a lama, i.e. officiant/ counselor/ spiritual preceptor, as donee (*mchod gnas*) and his royal or princely lay donor (*yon bdag*). S.Ch. Das renders the term as ‘patron, more especially a dispenser of gifts, a layman manifesting his piety by making presents to the priesthood’.⁹¹ Sponsorship of the annual local celebrations is considered to be one of the main communal duties of each male head of a new nuclear family household once he has become father. As is customary the sponsors are exclusively

⁸⁸ Ch. Ramble observes that these aspects belong to what he calls ‘secular surroundings’ of a ritual ceremony, the ‘secular ritual’ associated with the festival’ or the ‘secular’ activities that are so richly interwoven with the liturgical rite (2000: 303,307, 314).

⁸⁹ In his Ph.D. thesis on the local community of Bonpo householder priests of Lubra (Klu brag) in Western Nepal Ch. Ramble has presented one of the most detailed descriptions of the economics of ritual and festival patronage in the Tibetan cultural realm (1984:283–335). It seems that the system of festival patronage as practiced among the Sherpas of Gompa Zhung is very different and by far less complex if compared to the economic organization of village rituals and the patronage system of the Lubragpas. Their *sbyar-tshogs* (‘combined accumulation’) system of patronage (p. 297, 331) as practiced in two different modes operates through accumulating donations and using them as capital that is invested in trade. – For another recent contribution on festival patronage see the paper on lay sponsors of communal rituals, their secular activities and their involvement in the revival of Bon monasticism in Amdo Shar khog by M. Schrempf 2000.

⁹⁰ On the institution of the *zhindak* in Sherpa society in general cf. S.B. Ortner (1998:23–29; 1999:83–88); on the recent significant and consequential transformation of the relationship between Sherpas and Westerners into *zhindak* bonds refer to V. Adams (1992:541f.; 1996:164–170; 1997:91f.); in 1997 Adams discusses this particular recent *zhindak* relationship as one of the major forces that lead to what she has coined ‘the making of virtual Sherpas’. On the social institution of the sponsor or *chiwa* of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung cf. E. Berg (2003:205–218); in the context of the *Dumji* festival as held in the twin-villages of Khumjung-Khunde in Khumbu where the sponsor is called *lawa* cf. Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964: 185–208; 1984:97f.).

⁹¹ S.Ch. Das (1989:939).

male, whereas women, usually a sister, can act as a sponsor's substitute in the case that he cannot assume his task as *Dumji chiwa* owing to other obligations. This case is clearly on the increase since more and more Sherpas live more or less permanently in Kathmandu or even more far-away places, such as Japan or in the West.

Most of the communal ceremonies on the ritual calendar such as – in chronological order – *losar* (*lo gsar*), the Tibetan New Year festival, *lapsa* (*lha gsol*), the festive gathering not on but below the mountain close to the village in worship of the local mountain deity, *kangso* (*bskang gso*), the ceremony of propitiation of the guardian divinities of the doctrine, or *nyungne* (*smyung gnas*), the fasting rite, have one or several sponsors who serve by rotation for the duration of one of these festivals. All these ceremonies last only one day. In the case of some other festive events such as Buddha's birthday, however, there is no prescribed schedule for sponsoring the ceremony; instead, people get together spontaneously to act as the celebration's sponsors. However, sponsorship in the case of the *Dumji* ceremony, being the Sherpas' most important annual celebration in village ceremonial life extending over a period of four to eight days, is rather different as it involves considerable resources so that many householders have to save money for quite a few years in advance to meet the expenses involved.

Each of the nine local communities where *Dumji* is celebrated among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu has a traditionally fixed set of patron organizers – mostly four or eight – called either *zhindak* or, more specifically, *chiwa* (Tib. *spyi pa*) who are in charge of the full preparation and organization of the festival. S.Ch. Das renders the term *spyi pa* as 'head, chief, leader, superintendent'.⁹² In the context of the *Dumji* the *chiwa* acts predominantly both as host and as steward such as Ch. Ramble has translated it.⁹³ According to Ramble the term 'steward' relates his main role which is regarded as being ceremonial, a role that will be highlighted briefly in the context of the description of the first day's ritual activities.⁹⁴ The office of the *Dumji* patron and steward rotates annually according to the differing schemes of the local traditions among the number of households which constitute the local community.

⁹² S.Ch. Das (1989:806).

⁹³ In the context of the Muktinath Yarlung festival (1987: 228); in the context of the *mdos rgyab* ceremony as performed in Lubra (Klu brag) monastery (2000:303). On the meaning and the office of the *spyi pa* in the context of the festivals of Lubra (1984:274f.) – For a recent contribution on festival patronage see the paper by M. Schrepf (2000:317–357) on the two forms of lay sponsorship of communal rituals and the sponsors' involvement in the revival of Bon monasticism as practiced in Amdo Shar-khog.

⁹⁴ S.Ch. Ramble (2000:303).

It is the temple-committee (Tib. *tshogs pa*) that usually selects the customary set of *chiwas* for the following year's festival. The selection is done on occasion of the official *chang* test, which is held the week before the beginning of the festival. In a book called *tho* which S.Ch. Das translates as 'register, list' all the patrons' names are continuously recorded as proof in potential conflicts over the selection of the *chiwas* for the next *Dumji* festival.⁹⁵ This register is kept in the temple, and the secretary of the temple-committee is the person in charge.

Mostly the individual householder is informed on the last day of the festival when the temple-committee meets and reaches its decision that his turn as patron of the next year's *Dumji* will come. That meeting also offers the opportunity for others to inquire when their turn is likely to come in the future. This knowledge is important, as many householders have to save for quite a long time to be able to cover the considerable expenses involved. In case someone is not able to meet these obligations the order of rotation may be changed for some years. But permanent exemption from the duty to act as a patron in this context is impossible as it implies the loss of full membership in the local community.⁹⁶ However, according to my informants, this has never occurred yet neither among the Lamaserwa people in Gonpa Zhung nor in any of the other eight localities in Solu-Khumbu where the *Dumji* festival is performed.

The lavishness of catering either the whole celebrating community or solely the officiants, depending on the distinct local traditions, may vary depending on the material resources of the individual *chiwa*. But according to both my observations as well as their own statements it is obvious that every Sherpa householder considers it his personal duty in view of the celebrating community to perform the honourable task of the *chiwa* as 'money givers' in the most generous way possible. To give an idea of the enormous costs involved in the last three years (2002–04) the total expenditure of the individual sponsor of the *Dumji* celebration in Gonpa Zhung on food and drink, dough for the sacrificial cakes or *torma* (*gtor ma*), payment of the lamas, etc. amounted to around forty-thousand Nepali Rupees. In all cases the sponsors reported that they had to save for several years to meet the expenses for the enactment of the *Dumji* festival.

Significantly, a *Dumji* sponsor obtains no special status through his activity. Among the Sherpas to act as a sponsor of the *Dumji* implies merit (*bsod nams*) but no heightened prestige

⁹⁵ S.Ch. Das (1989:588).

⁹⁶ The same kind of punishment for not fulfilling his duties in relation to his local community has also been reported by Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf in the context of his description of the customary obligations of the *Dumji* patron in Khumjung-Khunde (1964:187). M. Schrempf notes that in Tibetan communities in general that fulfilling the duty of sponsorship of religious festivals in rotation gives 'the right to group membership' (2000:321).

or improved social status. As mentioned the task of the *chiwa* represents a major civic duty for every Sherpa householder. This is clearly in contrast to the lay-monk relations in Helambu as has been described by G.C. Clarke or among the Bonpo community in present-day Amdo Shar khog in Eastern Tibet by M. Schrempf where the status of the individual villager is directly dependent on his sponsoring activity.⁹⁷ Owing to the rotation principle among the Sherpas all male householders be they rich or poor, high or low, have to perform the same task as sponsors of the *Dumji* festival. Consequently, unlike in the Bonpo community described by M. Schrempf, in this particular ceremonial context the accumulation of ‘symbolic capital’ in P. Bourdieu’s sense and thus status improvement is not to be achieved.⁹⁸

Among others, the patron’s leading role involves the upkeep of the communal order in the religious space of the village temple complex, which is necessary for the undisturbed performance of the festival. Hence he has to assume a role that resembles that of a policeman, a role otherwise non-existent in Sherpa society, whose word has to be followed by the audience unquestioningly without delay.⁹⁹ His main duties in this respect consist in keeping the children – in this context often more or less out of bounds – at bay; avoiding and, if necessary, peacefully settling the outbreak of a verbal or physical conflict among Sherpa adults, which is usually latent and long standing; providing help to all those, mostly people of old age, who are out of self-control as they simply had too much *chang*; and they must constantly keep an eye on the dresses of the dancers so that their masks and costumes fit properly during the long performance of the sacred dances.

In the local tradition of the Lamaserwa clan presently comprising a total of eighty-four households it is a group of four householders who have to act as *chiwa* for the financing and organization of the annual *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung. The four sponsors and stewards

⁹⁷ G.C. Clarke (1989:233); M. Schrempf (2000:318, 320f.,324).

⁹⁸ For his concept of ‘symbolic capital’ see P. Bourdieu (1994:166–178). To be clear about this important issue, the crucial aspects that define Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic capital’ are summarized as follows: “The acquisition of a clientele, even an inherited one, implies considerable *labor* devoted to making and maintaining symbolic *investments*, in the form of political aid against attack, theft, offense, and insult, or economic aid, which can be very costly, especially in times of scarcity. As well as material wealth, *time* must be invested, for the value of symbolic labor without reference to the time devoted to it, *giving* or *squandering time* being one of the most precious of gifts.” As mentioned before, this concept clearly conforms to the sponsorship of colourful grand ritual ceremonies as instituted by Tsongkhapa in the context of the *smon lam chen mo* or Great Prayer Festival and later by the Fifth Dalai Lama which were being performed until 1959 for the well-being of the Tibetan state that had been founded in 1642. It was in this particular framework that sponsorship was one of the major factors for ascending in rank, cf. J. Karsten on the *Ya sor* (1983:117–149).

⁹⁹ This aspect of the *chiwa*’s duties resembles the tasks of the *dob dob*, the Tibetan monk police. In his volume on the ceremonies of the Lhasa year H. Richardson has reproduced a photo of a *dob dob* (1993:23).

and their wives constitute the team that is responsible for the financing and organization of the festival. Those *chiwas* who live at some other distant place move to Gonpa Zhung with their wives, children, and relatives on the day before the beginning of the festival. There, each of them takes one room on the gallery that frames the temple courtyard where they stay for the duration of the festival and where they store their share of the material resources needed for the staging of the ceremony and for the catering of the officiants. Although all four stewards are usually present on all five days a working schedule establishes a division of labour among them marks a time when each of the stewards is fully in charge on one of the first four days. It is their own decision to fix each steward's particular day of office. On the fifth day, however, all the four perform jointly the task of the *chiwa* on equal terms.

The center of their activities is the communal kitchen (*chang mzod*, 'beer repository'),¹⁰⁰ which is situated in a separate small house on the southern side of the courtyard.¹⁰¹ Usually, they are supported by some of their daughters and/or sons. In many cases a sister of one of the stewards also joins the team, whereas their mothers and fathers usually simply enjoy the pleasures of the festival. However, in the seldom case of need, they do have to lend a hand in support to their son and his wife for the festival.

The female part is mainly responsible for the preparation of the food and drink and for all other kitchen work. The stewards' wives have also to brew a quantity of *chang*, the Tibetan beer made of buckwheat, millet, corn or rice, to be consumed over the festival's course by both the officiants, who like alcohol, and the audience, particularly the women and men of the old generation. In the case of the *Dumji* in Gonpa Zhung the beer is usually made of rice or corn. According to both my informants and my own observations it was until a decade ago that the quantity of beer consumed in this context was considerable. This fact is generally regarded as the principal reason for the deplorable decline of the correct staging of the *Dumji* festival and the subsequent loss of the efficacy of the ritual performance that took place over the course of the early Nineties.¹⁰²

In due consequence, the recent decade has seen less beer consumption; none of the performing officiants drinks any more during the whole festival, at least not in public. Among the audience it is mostly the members of the old generation who still stick to the more or less heavy drinking as it used to be. Traditionally beer was rarely available among the Sherpas since it was only brewed for ceremonial occasions. According to lamas and audience alike

¹⁰⁰ This is the rendering of the term by Ch. Ramble (2000:303).

¹⁰¹ Ch. Ramble sees the most salient opposition that pervades the festival in between the two spaces of the temple and the communal kitchen and the people associated with each of them (2000:303).

¹⁰² In those years I personally repeatedly witnessed one or more of the officiants asleep during the ritual performance on the communal stage for long periods due to excessive drinking.

this fundamental change regarding their drinking habits has resulted in the proper performance of their major annual ceremony, and only now has the expected efficacy of the rituals that make up the *Dumji* festival been regained.¹⁰³

The kitchen team is always assisted by a group of three men and at least one woman who do the more laborious parts of food preparation including the making of firewood.¹⁰⁴ These kitchen helpers also support the stewards and their wives throughout the ceremony when serving the officiants with food or butter tea in the temple. The women are also responsible for the brewing of beer, which has to be done at home a couple of days before the onset of the festival.

Much of the secular activities that are interwoven with the performance of the liturgical rite revolve around the catering of either all the people present or of the officiating lamas only. In most local traditions the whole celebrating community is catered with food and drink on occasion of the *Dumji* festival. Actually, this particular mode represents the original duty of the stewards of the *Dumji* in all localities where it is held among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. In the case of the *Dumji* of the Lamaserwa clan of Gonpa Zhung, however, this custom of hosting the whole clan community was reformed about two decades ago due to a considerable increase in the population since the end of the Sixties. This was done in order to keep the costs involved on a still manageable level. Hence, since then the *chiwas* in Gonpa Zhung are responsible for catering to their lamas only. Depending on the duration of their ritual work on each day the officiants are served a warm meal three times a day and at certain times a soup (*thug pa*) is offered. Butter tea is served more or less permanently whereas *chang* is not served at all. It is only on occasion of the *shabru* (*zhabs bro*), the Sherpa round dance that is staged by the audience late at night after the long life blessing ceremony (*tshedrang*), that beer is served to all participants.

As already mentioned above, the office of the *Dumji* patron entails fairly high expenses as well as a range of time consuming duties to be performed before, during and after the festival. But apart from the obvious burden of those expenses and duties there are also definite advantages, privileges and pleasures associated with the patron's job which, from the Sherpas' traditional point of view, far outweigh the burden of costs, labour, time, and obligations involved. According to their own perception the most important fact is: once in

¹⁰³ As D. Snellgrove has observed the efficacy of a ritual ceremony depends primarily upon the mental disposition of those taking part (1957:221). This fact has been continuously underlined by all clerical informants.

¹⁰⁴ These kitchen helpers being the descendants of mixed marriages between Sherpas and Newars do not belong to the Lamaserwa community and are considered people of low status. They live in a remote hamlet and are usually called by the Sherpas on occasion of both communal and family festive events.

their life time, the office of the *chiwa* provides all men as representatives of the households, be they rich or poor, accompanied by their wives and children with the most welcome opportunity to act on the communal stage in the leading role among the assembled members of the clan or clans that make up the local community where the *Dumji* is staged. This takes place in the context of the solemn enactment of their main annual ritual celebration that mirrors the history of the distinct tradition of the local clan community as embedded within the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism whose ritual cycles are performed and whose protective deities are worshiped and invoked to offer their benevolence and help to fulfill the celebrating community's goals.

Moreover, a short separate public ceremony in which the *Dumji* patrons assume their ceremonial role as the community's representatives acting as hosts of the locality's protective deities, whose help is invoked to drive away the malignant spirits, is conducted on the first day just after the initial two juniper burning rituals (*bsang*) that are considered as an offering to the protective deities of the local community. At the end of the second offering ceremony the *chiwas* together with their wives and their mostly young children receive a special blessing (*byin brlabs*). It is due to these highly valued privileges and the special merit that accrues to the *Dumji* patrons and their wives in organizing the *Dumji* festival that the office of the patron and steward has been and still is held in high esteem. This has been the case not only in the past but also in the present in which the Sherpas' cultural heritage is strongly threatened.

Presently the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu are confronted with the forces of 'modernity', the concomitant inevitable secularization of their world view, and with the disastrous consequences of a seemingly never ending guerilla war. Without any doubt the Maoist insurrection, which is neither of their own making nor is it done in the Sherpas' interest, has been severely shattering their living conditions. Among other things, the ongoing fighting between the government forces and the Maoists has been causing an increasing exodus of the population of the high altitude areas all over Nepal to the Kathmandu valley, to neighbouring India, Japan, Hong Kong, and the West. Understandably, both the ritual performance of the *Dumji* festival and the institution of the *chiwa* represent the strongest and hence most important forces that serve to unite Sherpa society as lived primarily in the local community especially at the current time of severe, still increasing crisis.

To summarize, in the course of the *Dumji* festival membership in the local Sherpa community and its unity is celebrated and reaffirmed through the performance of festival patronage.¹⁰⁵ As far as the process of identity building in Sherpa culture is concerned, which

¹⁰⁵ Similar functions have been observed by M. Schrempf in her account of lay sponsorship of communal

is primarily constituted within the local community, the office of the *Dumji* patron, organizer, and steward assumes a key role.¹⁰⁶ According to the norms of Sherpa society it constitutes an important civic duty of the married householder to act as patron or *chiwa* of the *Dumji* festival at least once in his life-time. In Gonpa Zhung people remember that at the time of their grandparents in the first half of the 20th century the task of the *chiwa* had to be performed by one householder at least twice, sometimes even thrice. Nowadays, however, due to the marked increase of the Lamaserwa people since the middle of the last century the householder has to assume the office of the sponsor only once in his life-time.

The close interlocking of religious and secular realms characteristic in this framework is embodied most clearly in the institution of the *yangdzi* (*g.yang rdzas*) offering to the local protective deities. In the context of the *Dumji* festival the *yangdzi* is performed by the four *chiwas* in several different ways. It is over the course of the *yangdzi* offering that the *Dumji* sponsors assume their ceremonial function. This will be described in detail below, in the context of the account of the first day's activities.

rituals and their performance in the Bonpo community of Amdo Shar khog (2000: 318f., 321, 323, 337, 339).

¹⁰⁶ On this important aspect see E. Berg in a forth-coming paper (n.d.:15–17); see also M. Schrempf 2000:321).

Chapter Five

The *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung: a detailed description of the sacred and mundane practices according to the day-to-day chronology

General overview

The *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung extends over a period of five days. In the Tibetan lunar calendar this period comprises the last three days of the waning moon, dark moon, and the first day of the following month. *Dumji* begins on the 27th of the second Tibetan month and ends on the 1st of the third Tibetan month, i.e. Kālacakra New Year.¹ The sequence of time and the main ritual activities is as follows.

The 27th or first day is marked by two kinds of juniper burning offerings (*bsang mchod*) to ensure the cooperation of the higher and the local deities, and a 'fierce' rite to suppress certain kinds of negative spirits (*dam sri*) that create obstacles and obstruct the goal to be achieved through the performance of the *Dumji*. The 28th is devoted to a dance rehearsal ('*chams sbyong*'). The 29th day is the day of the public performance of the sacred masked dances culminating in an expulsion rite (*gtor zlog*) in which the evil forces of the preceding year are expelled. On the 30th, which is dark moon, a 'long life' empowerment ceremony (*tshe dbang*) is held after which a complex blessing (*byin rlabs*) is given to all participants that is highly valued by all Sherpas. The *Dumji* celebration at Gonpa Zhung ends on the first day of the new moon with the performance of the *sku tshab gter nga* ('Five statues of Guru Padmasambhava') pūja after which the second important blessing in the course of the *Dumji* is obtained.

This schedule of the *Dumji* festival has been adhered to since its inception in the middle of the 19th century. Contrary to this basic schedule of time for major ritual procedures, the diverse activities of preparation, such as the making of the sacrificial dough cakes, however, are always subject to certain modifications due to the number of days necessary for their manufacturing. This is mainly dependent upon the particular mode in which the *Dumji* is enacted.

¹ In other words the *Dumji* is celebrated either in the month of March or April.

The laypeople usually only know the public day of sacred dances and the following two days when two highly valued blessings are given. For the officiating lama, however, who presides over the *Dumji* the festival extends over a period of eight up to fourteen and even more days in retreat in the village temple depending on the duration of his practice of solitary meditation on Vajrakīlaya, the *yi dam* or tutelary deity.² The other necessary time-consuming preliminary ritual practice consists of the reading the particular chapter of the liturgical text that is dedicated to the worship and propitiation of the protector deities. This task is usually performed by a group of four to five of the senior village lamas. Their reading in worship of the host of protective deities has to be started about ten to fourteen days before the official beginning of the festival. Due to various reasons, however, this practice was performed by only three lamas in 2002 and 2003, and by only one lama in the year 2004.

Day One: the worship of the local protective deities

The first official day of the *Dumji* festival is the 27th of the second Tibetan month. The beginning of the annual festival is heralded in the early morning by the sound of first conch shells, then long horns, and finally oboes all being played in pairs for about five minutes each. As far as the diverse ritual activities executed on this and the subsequent days are concerned, there are those that are performed on several subsequent days and those that are performed only on a specific day. The *sādhana* practice forms the main thread of the first three days, which from the spiritual perspective are conceived of as forming the significant period of the whole *Dumji* festival. During this period the offerings are performed and the evocation of Vajrakīlaya, the *yi dam*, is achieved through the process of contemplation of the tutelary deity and its visualization, so that his power may be duly utilized for the fulfillment of the festival's purpose.³

The important juniper burning offering ritual (*bsang mchod*) for the purification of the site, intended to please the host of protective deities and ensure their benevolence and powerful help, has to be performed on all five days in the early morning hours. In fact, this

² According to Lama Tenzing's information he has restricted this necessary preliminary practice in the last five years to one or two days only due to other obligations, and mainly to the progress of the cancer he is suffering from since then. As he noted a necessary precondition for the efficacy of the ritual is the pure state of body, speech, and mind of the practitioner, which is, at times, difficult to achieve under those grave health conditions.

³ Just like the basic liturgical text for the *Dumji*, its celebration as a 'great liturgical performance' (*sgrub chen*) according to the sMin grol gling tradition and its sacred masked dances the specific text that prescribes the melody for both the chanting of the liturgical text and the accompanying music which is regarded as a separate offering (*mchod rol*) has also come to Gonpa Zhung from Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Mi pham chos kyi dbang phyug.

ritual marks the very beginning of all ritual procedures that are to be performed on each particular day. However, only on the first day the *bsang mchod* is performed on a grand scale at two different sites, and each offering is directed to a distinct category of the Lamaserwa clan's protective deities.⁴

The ritual activities of the first day are mainly devoted to inviting the host of different groups of local protective deities and to securing their powerful help through offerings and worshipping them. The cult of the local protective deities aims at securing their benevolence and powerful help to protect the performance of the subsequent ritual procedures constitutive of the *Dumji* festival. These are deemed necessary to eliminate potential obstructers and obstacles and thus to ensure the achievement of the annual festival's goal.

The main activities of the initial day are comprised of the performance of the following five ritual ceremonies. Two different kinds of juniper burning offerings are both performed around mid-day. Thereafter, a blessing ceremony of the four sponsors of the festival is held. At dawn the activities start with a ritual circumambulation of the village temple by the officiating lamas. In this context an offering is directed to the 'guardian kings of the four world quarters'. The activities of this day conclude with the performance of a 'wrathful' practice. In its course the tantric village lama, acting in the form of a tantric Black Hat dancer, 'buries' an evil-being underground.

First two different kinds of the same genre of ceremony are performed that usually open up a long Tibetan ritual celebration but are also used in a variety of different contexts. It is the juniper burning offering ritual or *bsang mchod*.⁵ As the clerics observe, this ceremony represents high religious practices that are regarded as belonging to what ritual experts call *cho ga*, 'rules'. According to A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay their religious use necessitates the execution according to a text, and the subsequent performance in three different phases: introduction, the ritual corpus, and conclusion.⁶

The juniper burning offering ritual is executed in two separate performances both of which take their beginning around noon. The *klu bsang mchod* is a juniper burning offering to Lumo Karmo (*klu mo dkar mo*, the 'White Female Serpent Deity') who is one of the most

⁴ A short description of the *bsang* ritual as performed in the context of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung has been provided by F.W. Funke (1969:120f.). However, the author does not seem to be aware that actually he only gave an account of the *klu bsang mchod*, whereas the complimentary *lha bsang mchod* remains unmentioned.

⁵ For the *bsang* ritual in the Tibetan cultural realm as practiced in different contexts refer to R.A. Stein (1987: 135,139,141,177,182,194).

⁶ A.-M. Blondeau and Karmay, S.G. (1988:124f.; A.-M. Blondeau (1990:92). Karmay defines *cho ga* as the 'stereotype habitual or customary ritual' (1998d:289) as opposed to *gto*, 'ritual' that conveys "...a magico-religious system in which the archetype of the cosmo-theogonic myth is re-created each time the rituals are performed."

important of the local protector deities. The second juniper burning offering ritual, *lha bsang mchod*, is directed to the host of local protective deities including the *klu* divinity. Both kinds of juniper burning offering ritual are intended to worship the local protective deities, invoke their protection for the undisturbed staging of the *Dumji* and for their help for the achievement of the festival's distinctive goal.

For an adequate understanding of these ritual procedures and their significance an overview shall be given of the history and related symbolism of the *bsang* ritual in its two different forms, and then of both the category of aquatic divinity and the host of other protective deities to whom the purification ritual is directed and who figure prominently in Sherpa ritual life.

A. The *bsang* ritual

S.G. Karmay has devoted much of his work to the study of Tibetan popular rituals such as they are practiced still today, proving their pre-Buddhist origin and emphasizing their particular force as agents of social and religious organization.⁷ Contrary to the strong inclination of Tibetan Buddhists to endow their rituals with an old Indian origin, since, in their eyes, this has more prestige, his findings serve to demonstrate how the ancient indigenous rituals remain visible beneath contemporary Tibetan Buddhist practice. A good example of this endeavor is his profound contribution on the ritual of fumigation.⁸

Karmay draws attention to the fact that among Tibetan popular rituals the fumigation offering is perhaps the most widely practiced within the whole of the Tibetan cultural realm. It may be performed by any individual, be he monk or layperson, rich or poor, of high or low social standing, and in Central Tibet even by women.⁹ Forming a distinctive part of all types of both religious and lay festivals the fumigation offering is practiced for both worldly purposes such as house building and trade venture and religious functions such as the building of sacred monuments. The *bsang* ritual is even performed in social ceremonies such as the welcoming of an important lay person or a religious dignitary. The *bsang* ritual is performed annually by the entire community, and it occupies a place of primary importance in the annual cult of the local deities, particularly in the mountain cult.¹⁰ Significantly, the mountain

⁷ S.G. Karmay (1998d:290).

⁸ S.G. Karmay (1998c:380–412).

⁹ S.G. Karmay (1998a:380). In his paper, however, Karmay highlights another type of purification ritual as practiced by the adherents of organized Bon. It is called 'the purification of the Ge khod', which can only be performed by qualified ritual experts (p. 381, pp. 389–405).

¹⁰ S.G. Karmay (1998c:388f.,396,405).

cult – to which Karmay has dedicated several papers – not only plays an important role in Tibet’s secular cultural and national identity¹¹ but can also embody the ethnic identity of the people in whose region the cult is performed.¹²

The primary function of the *bsang* rite, Karmay emphasizes, is purification.¹³ Over the centuries, however, the original meaning has undergone considerable changes which is the reason why nowadays even the religious experts themselves often give different explanation of its historic origin and meaning. Western scholars have attempted to associate it with the term *bsang bu*, i.e. ‘food’, while Tibetan Buddhists have assimilated it with incense offerings referred to in Buddhist scriptures thus constructing an Indian origin and legitimating its authority.¹⁴ Contrary to the understanding of both, Karmay traces the *bsang* rite back to a pre-Buddhist origin. Hence, the *bsang* ritual as practiced by Tibetan Buddhists is a Buddhist adaptation of an indigenous ritual. While preserving the indigenous ritual procedure as well as its social and cultural dimensions in both Tibetan Buddhism and later Bon po tradition, this ritual came to be understood as a fragrant offering to the gods (*bsang mchod*, i.e. ‘offering of *bsang*’).¹⁵

Karmay’s closer investigation of certain ancient texts reveals that the term *bsang* derives from the verb *bsang ba*, to ‘purify’ which is etymologically connected with the verb *sangs pa* ‘to illuminate’ or ‘to awaken’. This leads him to conclude that the verb *bsang ba* is closely associated with rituals involving fire and fumigation. However, it does not refer to the sense or taste or smell despite the smoke generated by the burning of aromatic substances of plants such as is done with juniper in this context. It is this last aspect, however, which allows the Buddhists to associate the *bsang* ritual so easily with incense, which belongs to the five types of offerings commonly used in Buddhist rituals.¹⁶

Karmay demonstrates that the concept of ritual purification is closely related to the origin myth of NyaTri Tsenpo (gNya’ khri btsan po), the mythical founder of the Tibetan royal dynasty. According to one version, while descending from heaven the king is accompanied,

¹¹ S.G. Karmay (1998c, 1998e, 1998i, 1998j); 2000.

¹² S.G. Karmay (1998k: 451–462).

¹³ This particular function of the *bsang* ritual has already been noted G. Tucci (1988:201).

¹⁴ S.G. Karmay (1998c:381).

¹⁵ S.G. Karmay (1998c:382).

¹⁶ Ibid.

among others, by three ritual experts.¹⁷ Each of them is assigned a specific task. It is the first ritual specialist who has to perform the *bsang* rituals in order to purify his path on earth.¹⁸

Regarding the very need for ritual purification Karmay explains that these rituals are based on the assumption that the deities and the environment have been 'defiled' (*phog pa*, 'bags pa) as a result of man's impure nature and activity. The deities become estranged and in due consequence withdraw their favors. Man must therefore accomplish a purification rite each time he has committed an impure deed. The purpose of the rite is to purify impurity through fumigation. However, since one may unknowingly commit some unfavourable deed the rite must be performed regularly.¹⁹ Hence, the purification ritual constitutes an elementary part of man's duties toward the local deities and is regarded as a high religious practice.²⁰ Consequently, it is performed every morning in both the household and in monastic establishments. It has to be executed for any kind of important worldly as well as sacred endeavor such as the building of a house or religious monument, the undertaking of a trade venture, the welcoming of a high lama or the performance of a ritual celebration. In other words, the purification rite is deemed necessary for the successful realization of any kind of spiritual or mundane undertaking.

Karmay defines the concept of purification as one of the key elements that constitute the basis of Tibetan culture. According to him two important aspects have to be kept in mind, which are of particular significance for the understanding of the *Dumji* festival and the complex symbolism involved in its performance. Firstly, the notion of purification, as expressed in the popular *bsang* ritual, implies the belief in the local deities connected with the mythical founder of the Tibetan royal dynasty. Secondly, this notion underlying the concept of the *bsang* ritual continues to occupy a prominent role in the social and political cohesion of present-day society.²¹

B. The *klu* divinity and Lumo Karmo: her cult and local history

The *klu* (Skt. *nāga*) are spirits of the water and subterranean regions that are usually depicted as serpents. These aquatic divinities inhabit lakes, streams, and springs. They have

¹⁷ Regarding the legendary narrative of the first Tibetan king's descent from heaven upon earth by means of a rope *rmu thag* or the ladder *rmu skas* as was the normal way of communication between earth and heaven in that mythical time see G. Tucci 1949 (Vol. II:733f.).

¹⁸ It is of significance in the context of this investigation that the third ritual specialist has to perform the 'ransom' ritual for the king's body "...so that the soul of his body does not stray." (1998c:385)

¹⁹ S.G. Karmay (1998c:383).

²⁰ Cf. S.G. Karmay (1998j:433).

²¹ Cf. S.G. Karmay (1998c:405).

been worshiped both in early India and in early Tibet.²² According to the Sherpas' view *klu* spirits are paramount among a great variety of stream, lake, pasture, and mountain spirits. They guard the purity of water and soil, of the individual households, and the hamlets and villages in general. Most houses have a distinct *klu* as protectress of the hearth, which have their abode (*klu khang*) in a shrine made of small stones situated in a quiet corner of the house.

All these different water spirits are closely connected with humans and their mundane existence. The Sherpas turn to them regularly for aid and protection needed for the positive outcome of all their this-worldly endeavors. Provided the aquatic serpent deities are propitiated properly in ritual and prayer, and duly satisfied through various gifts, they secure the general welfare of the people. Otherwise their wrath is provoked which is believed to cause grave retribution on the people and their natural resources through catastrophes such as hail, storm, rain floods, draught, landslide, or earthquake. In due consequence, on many occasions the different *klu* divinities are worshiped in a distinct pūja which is held in both the village temples and in the households. They accept only the three pure white food offerings milk, butter, and cheese and it is only through ritual performance on the part of both the households and the local community that it is possible for the humans to keep them in a good mood as well as at bay.²³ An annual ritual schedule valid in the whole Tibetan cultural realm painstakingly describes the days when the *klu* spirits are to be worshiped.²⁴

Moreover, the *klu* divinities are venerated in an elaborate ritual ceremony performed in worship of all protector deities. All of these divinities require 'many gifts and favors' as the Sherpas see it.²⁵ This ceremony is called *bskang gso*, a term which S.G. Karmay renders as

²² For a detailed overview over the history of the nāgas in Hindu mythology and art see J.Ph. Vogel (1972). The old Indian concept of the snakelike serpent divinities and its association with kingship has already played an important role in early Indian folk Buddhism as has been pointed out by L.W. Bloss (1973). – For the history of the Tibetan cult of the *klu* in early Bon practice and on the contribution it received from Indian Buddhism and its nāga worship refer to G. Tucci 1949 (Vol. II: 732f.). On the concepts associated with the *klu* cult in Tibetan folk culture refer to N. Chopel (1983:26, 30, 44). On the *klu* among the host of Tibetan deities see R.A. Stein (1987:126,132,136,138,142,143,149,163, 172). On p. 141 a Bonpo *bsang* ritual, on pp. 168f. the influential Bonpo *Klu 'bum*, 'Account of the nāga', is mentioned.

²³ For the concept of the *klu* among the Sherpas of Solu see F.W. Funke (1969:27–33; 36–38); S.B. Ortner (1989:137f.) and among the Sherpas of Khumbu refer to Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964: 266–70). – The cult of the *klu* is widespread in the Himalayas. S.R. Mumford has given a detailed account of *klu* worship among the Gurungs of northwest Nepal (1989:93–116). C. Jest mentions a fumigation offering to the local *klu*, which is performed in Dolpo in the course of a ritual circumambulation of the cultivated village land with sacred book and statue (*rten skor*) in the sixth Tibetan month in order to ask her for rain (1975:300f.).

²⁴ Regarding this ritual schedule of *klu* worship see E. Berg (1998:24, fn. 29).

²⁵ In her detailed inquiry into offering rituals to the gods, spirits, and demons among the Sherpas S.B. Ortner gives a detailed account of their ritual practice of 'feeding' them in various other ritual contexts (1978:128–56).

‘atonement ritual’.²⁶ In this context both the *klu* divinities and the mountain deities or *yul lha*, the ‘Lord of the Country’, figure prominently.²⁷ The term *bskang gso* means ‘full to the brim’.²⁸ Within the course of the preceding year the offering bowls containing the gifts to the protective deities become empty. Through performing the *bskang gso* ceremony their offering bowls are again refilled ‘to the brim’. It is structured into three distinct phases: first all protective deities, then all Tibetan protective deities, and finally the local protective deities are worshiped. The *bskang gso* ritual, usually held in spring, aims at worshiping all *srung ma*, i.e. ‘protector deities’, thus reasserting their benevolence and help that the local population has enjoyed in the preceding year.²⁹ In its course special offerings such as barley, wheat, corn, and chang are given to them with the exception of the *klu* divinities who do not like alcohol.

Among the Sherpas Lumo Karmo is regarded as the first in rank of the *klu* divinities, who is the guardian of springs, streams, lakes, and as the protectress of trees. In daily life it is Lumo Karmo who occupies the central role in the numerous rituals of the protective deities and spirits since her power is most intimately related to the problems of mundane life as she takes care of good weather, sends the rain when it is needed, offers protection from hail, drought, landslides, earthquakes, and protects men and cattle from any kind of sickness. Also being the deity of fertility, prosperity, well-being, and of general protection Lumo Karmo is considered one of the most important of the local deities. The clerics and the laypeople alike regard her as a powerful deity that offers protection from any kind of danger.

In Buddhist iconography Lumo Karmo’s white body is depicted half anthropomorphic, half snake-like, in other words the upper part of her body is that of a beautiful woman, whereas the lower half is that of a serpent. She is dressed in white garments and is seated on a crystal throne. In her right hand she holds a vessel of blessed water (*bum pa*) and in her left hand she holds a jewel (*nor bu*). The latter symbolizes wealth and embodies the popular belief that she is tremendously rich. Her divine entourage consists of a host of serpents.

It is important that Lumo Karmo was invited from Tibet before the Sherpas’ settlement in the Solu area by the Lamaserwa ancestor lama Phakdze (bla ma ‘Phags rtse) to take her

²⁶ Cf. S.G. Karmay (1988:238).

²⁷ For the early mountain gods and the cult of the local deity, which is of pre-Buddhist origin refer to G. Tucci 1949 (Vol. II: 727–30).

²⁸ S.Ch. Das (1989:121).

²⁹ For the *bskang gso* rite as held among the Sherpas see S.B. Ortner (1978:12930); R.R. Kunwar (1989:221–23); E. Berg (1998:24f.).

residence there. After having been worshiped appropriately by him in a religious celebration at a mountainous place called Lumiteng (klu mo'i steng), where he had been staying with another lama, it seemed highly suitable to their needs as yak breeders and cultivators but, unfortunately, there was no *klu* deity. Lumo Karmo gave her consent to stay in their new area of residence. Since then she is said to reside in that area during the warm season. It is the glacier lake called Uomi Tsho ('O ma mtsho, Nep. dudh kunda, 'Milk Lake') that is conceived of as her abode during the warm period. She bears also the name Tshomen dung kyongma (mtsho sman dung skyong ma, 'Lake Goddess Protective Conch Shell'), the powerful local protective serpent divinity whose distinctive emblem in the Tibetan tradition is the sacred conch.³⁰

Uomi Tsho is situated just below the sacred mountain of the Solu region. The mountain represents both the seat of and is the regional protector god (*yul lha*, the 'god of the inhabited land')³¹. This powerful divinity is called Tashi Palpoche (*bKra shis dpal po che*) or Shorong Yulha (*Shod rong yul lha*) and Numbur in Nepali. He is depicted as a man wearing an armor and riding a white horse. His hands hold a bow and an arrow, and a quiver and a bow case are attached to his girdle.

Since Lumo Karmo took her dwelling-place in the Solu region, on the initiative of the Lamaserwa ancestor, this sacred locale is now conceived of as having a holy lake as the residence of a female protective goddess in close association with a holy mountain representing the regional male protector deity, and has been for the Sherpas the holy place of pilgrimage in the Solu region. The pilgrimage is held around the full moon of the 7th Tibetan month or the month of Sāun, which is called Janai Purnimā in Nepali, i.e. that day the Hindu men belonging to the upper castes who wear the sacred thread change their threads. In the course of a circumambulation of the lake both of them being the most important local protective deities are given offerings in their worship; their this-worldly requests concerning health, wealth, and progeny are directed mainly to Lumo Karmo who is believed to take special care of the mundane needs of humans.³²

³⁰ As M. Helffer (1994:109) observes, owing to evident links which exist between the conch and the aquatic world the conch has been traditionally associated with the divinities of the subterranean world (Skt. *nāga*, Tib. *klu*).

³¹ This is the rendering of the term as given by R.A. Stein (1987:153).

³² For an account of this regional Sherpa pilgrimage as it is practiced today see (K. Buffetrille 1993) and E. Berg (1998). The latter paper highlights both the place of this pilgrimage in the context of the worship of the local and regional protector deities and the ritual practices involved. – This holy place and its history is described in a guide to the sacred sites of Khumbu and Solu that was composed and written by the Sherpa lama and scholar khempo Sangye Tenzin (khen po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin, d.1990). It was translated and edited by K. Buffetrille (1997:441–59, see pp. 448–52). In her voluminous study of the Tibetan literary genre of edited

However, Lumo Karmo gave her consent only on condition that from then on the Sherpa people would never forget to pay her duly reverence and gratitude for the overall help that she, the *nāgā* goddess, would bestow upon them in the days to come.³³ Lumo Karmo's arrival in Solu thus indicated not only the importance of the concept of the *klu* but also the beginning of Sherpa culture in this region.³⁴ Lumo Karmo is imagined to occupy the first rank among the host of *klu* divinities which are thought to exist in families just like humans. Thus, Lumo Karmo's father is believed to be the god Lha chen, another venerated protector deity residing on a mountain, whereas her mother is said to be also a *klu*. Unfortunately her name seems to be forgotten. The other *klu* in the area are said to be all her younger sisters. Specific offerings to Lumo Karmo are fresh milk from red cows and white goats, incense, rice, *serkem*, i.e. a kind of dried cottage cheese, pure water, butter lamps, and ceremonial scarves. She fears defilement (*grib*), does not like eggs and meat, and abstains from alcohol.

It was Dorje Zangbu (rDo rje bzang po), the son of lama Phakdze, who moved on after the latter had passed away and took residence at a distance of one to two days walk deep below in the fertile valley of the Junbesi river. According to written tradition he founded both the first temple and the village of Zhung (Nep. Junbesi). Moreover, Dorje Zangbu established a special place for Lumo Karmo in a holy grove where she resides in a spring during the cold months.³⁵ It is here that she is worshiped either by the village head lama or by the third senior lama who happens to live nearby according to the afore-mentioned strict annual schedule. Apart from the village lama and the senior lamas of the Lamaserwa clan no humans are allowed to enter her holy grove. Her dwelling place is adorned with pieces of cloth in the five rainbow colours and is situated in close proximity to a small stūpa in the center of the village. This sacred monument contains the relics of Dorje Zangbu. Whereas Dorje Zangbu is regarded as the founding ancestor of the Lamaserwa clan Lumo Karmo is revered as the Protector of the Law (*chos skyong*) of the Zhung temple.³⁶

versions and translations of pilgrimage guide books (*gnas yig*) and related textual genres this holy place is mentioned only briefly (2000: 261–263).

³³ For the narrative of how *klu mo dkar mo* came to the Solu region to become the protective deity for their new settlement area see E. Berg (1998:25–26).

³⁴ A.W. Macdonald has noted that 'according to local tradition' *klu* worship was current in Solu prior to the arrival of Buddhism, and it persisted after its coming (1987c:69).

³⁵ Actually, *klu mo dkar mo* is conceived of as having numerous abodes which are geographically scattered between villages and the summer high pastures in the 'O ma mtsho area. According to Tibetan conception, however, the *klu* divinities have countless abodes in the Tibetan culture area.

³⁶ This has been mentioned by Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin in his afore-mentioned pilgrimage guide in K. Buffetrille (2000:283).

According to oral tradition the *klu bsang mchod*, the communal ritual worship of this important *nāginī* and all her younger sister serpent divinities, has been incorporated into the ritual proceedings of the *Dumji* festival at its very beginning.³⁷ Interestingly, it is the time of the *Dumji* celebration when Lumo Karmo is said to wake up and leave for her summer residence at Uomi Tsho, thus marking with the start of agricultural growth and the herds' departure for the highest pastures at the beginning of spring season. It is said that Lumo Karmo's departure is indicated by a loud roaring sound such as is typical at that 'season of the wind' when the sound of the then increasing wind in the high valleys combines with the, at certain times, enormous natural noise caused by the swelling of rivers and streams caused by the melting snow and ice in the high-altitude regions just nearby.

The *klu bsang mchod* or juniper burning offering to Lumo Karmo in the context of the *Dumji* festival is performed by nine officiants who are guided by one of the senior village lamas. It is held around noon in the open and it takes almost an hour. At that time of the day weather is usually still agreeable. The site of the performance is at the eastern side of the stūpa of Dorje Zangbu facing Lumo Karmo's abode that, until the beginning of spring, is situated in the adjacent holy grove. Over the course of the ritual a small part of a text called *Ri woo bsang mchod* ('Mountain Incense Offering') is read by a senior lama and his assistants. According to my main clerical informant, the lama of nearby Serlo monastery (gSer log dgon pa), this text represents a 'mind treasure' (*gong gter*), which was unearthed by the 'treasure-finder' Lhatsün Namkha Jigme (lha btsun nam mkha 'jigs med, b. 1597–1655).³⁸ Moreover, an offering of seven substances is conducted which are: 1. drink, 2. purified water plus the five kinds of offerings to be made to the deities in worshiping them (*phyi mchod lnga*) consisting of food, water, butter lamp, incense, and flowers.³⁹

It is in this context that the four sponsors of the *Dumji* festival have their first official appearance. This is on the occasion of the performance of a small *yangdzi* (*g.yang rdzas*) offering to Lumo Karmo and her sister serpent deities. As this type of offering is performed on a greater scale in the framework of the second purification ritual it will be described then.

³⁷ According to local oral tradition the *klu bsang mchod* ceremony in honour of Klu mo dkar mo has been part of the *Dumji* celebration since its establishment by rDo rje 'Jigs bral in the Fifties of the 19th century.

³⁸ This text is contained in the list of Tibetan sources in R.J. Kohn (2001:354). – For the spiritual biography and achievements of this 17th century master, who, among others, had been instrumental in the restoration of bSam yas monastery refer to Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:818–20). It has to be noted that a short text describing how to make offerings to klu mo dkar mo, which is edited and translated by K. Buffetrille (2000: 289–91), is neither used in the *Dumji* framework nor by the participants of the pilgrimage to Uomi Tsho. She tentatively attributes the text to Mipham Rinpoche ('Jam mgon 'Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal, 1846–1912), one of the greatest rNying ma scholars. – For the treasure category of *gong gter* refer to T. Thondup Rinpoche (1986:61).

³⁹ Cf. S.G. Karmay (1988:239).

Since the site of the *klu bsang mchod* is situated just beside the main trail leading through the village some adults occasionally stop for a short while to observe the ceremony. As is usual on the first two days, mostly children make up the audience watching the officiants' activities while waiting for some sweets to be distributed by the sponsors in the course of the offerings. Thus, Lumo Karmo and all her sister serpent deities are worshiped and invoked to offer their powerful help for the realization of the *Dumji*'s goal.

C. The *lha bsang mchod* – the juniper burning offering to the broad range of protective deities

The *lha bsang mchod* as performed in the context of the *Dumji* festival is intended to worship and invoke a host of Tibetan Buddhist protector deities in order to secure their benevolence and powerful support.⁴⁰ Included in this framework are also the local protective divinities, among whom the host of serpent divinities as represented by Lumo Karmo and the afore-mentioned mountain deity Shorong Yulha figure prominently. The full name of this ceremony is *rgyag rngan lha bsang mchod*, i.e. 'food gift juniper burning offering to the deities'. Unlike the term designating the burning offering to the *klu* beings who actually require 'many gifts and favors' as the Sherpas put it which means that all serpent divinities need periodic feeding, the latter term puts clear emphasis on the content of the gift that is offered to the protective deities through the performance of the purification ritual. According to the lamas this kind of ritual ceremony was introduced by Guru Padmasambhava. It is said to have its origin in the context of the building of Samye monastery, after Padmasambhava had subjugated the spirits hostile to this endeavor, bound them by oath and then transformed them into protective deities. Through its performance the Indian tantric master and sage established the model according to which the multitude of protective deities can be pleased in order to ensure their benevolence and help for the achievement of man's goals.

The lamas call the host of protective deities summarily *dgra lha*. They pray and make offerings to them so that they lend their power to overcome all obstacles that may obstruct the practice of meditation on Vajrakīlaya, the *yi dam* or tutelary deity of the *Dumji* festival. According to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who discusses the *lha bsang* offering ceremony and the deities invoked in its course, this important class of the Tibetan pantheon fulfills a significant double function. The *dgra lha* are said to be especially capable of protecting their worshippers against enemies, and they help to increase their property.⁴¹ R.A. Stein translates

⁴⁰ It seems that R.R. Kunwar is the only scholar who has mentioned the performance of the *lha bsang mchod* among the Sherpas (1989:236). The *bsang* rite is mentioned by S.B. Ortner as it is performed in the context of the *smjung gnas* fast (1978:35).

⁴¹ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:318). The author has devoted ch. XVII, pp. 318–40, to the *dgra lha*. The

the term *dgra lha* as the ‘god (who protects against) enemies’ and defines this important kind of deity as ‘warrior god’.⁴²

Moreover, the *dgra lha* are conceived of as existing in two different forms. On the one hand it is the name of one particular personal deity whom each human is supposed to have and resides on the right shoulder; on the other they are believed to exist whole groups of *dgra lha*, mostly called *dgra lha* brotherhoods.⁴³ Both kinds of *dgra lha* are believed to protect the lives of their worshipers, to help them overcome obstacles and defeat enemies, and to aid them in achieving a higher rank or social position. Thus the *dgra lha* clearly serve inner-worldly goals.

Nebesky-Wojkowitz observes that *lha bsang* texts contain long lists of gods and goddesses to be worshiped, most of them being of pre-Buddhist origin. To give an illustrative example he refers to a *lha bsang* text used by the ‘Old School’ in which a great many of the groups of deities are listed. Among them are, for instance, the following: Vajrakīlaya or Dorje Phurpa, the mythical Tibetan king Gesar, Pehar, the deity that possesses the state oracle of Nechung (gNas chung) temple near the famous monastic university of Drepung (‘Bras spungs) just west of Lhasa, indigenous mountain gods and a great number of minor divinities including the *yul lha* or country god. These different examples mirror the great diversity of numina being classed together under the term *dgra lha*.⁴⁴ Gelugpa, Nyingmapa and organized Bon perform each a *lha bsang mchod* of their own. Significantly, this kind of purification rite is connected with the cult of the dharmapāla (*chos skyong/bon skyong*), ‘protector of religion’.⁴⁵

The *lha bsang mchod* ceremony is also held around noon but unlike the juniper burning offering to the *klu* divinities it takes almost two hours. At that time of the day the sky is usually already clouded but it is not yet raining, hailing, or snowing such as is usual from the afternoon onwards. The *lha bsang mchod* is performed by eleven officiants who are guided by the master of the ceremony. The site of the performance is the eastern side of the village temple facing the courtyard with the door in its center. The courtyard is of almost quadrangular shape (12m x 11m). On its northern, eastern, and southern sides it is framed by a gallery on

latter should not be confused with the *pho lha*, the personal deity next in importance to the *dgra lha* (p. 318).

⁴² R.A. Stein (1987:153f.,166). H. Richardson gives the same definition (1993: 27, 87). G. Tucci renders this class as ‘enemy god(s)’ (1988:300).

⁴³ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 318–19). However, without being more specific, the author also mentions the existence of *dgra lha* sisterhoods (p. 338).

⁴⁴ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:322f.). – The more important divinities to be worshiped and invoked in the *lha bsang* ceremony are listed on p. 323.

⁴⁵ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:319).

the first floor while the space below on the ground floor remains empty. It is on the eastern gallery facing the entrance of the temple from where all officiants come to occupy their respective role that the leading families of the Lamaserwa clan take their seat during the 'public' part of the *Dumji* festival on the third and fourth days. On this occasion, however, despite being conducted publicly, there is no audience apart from some children from the village who observe the ongoing ritual procedures with a mixture of curiosity and wonder.

As always their strict seating order clearly reveals the existing hierarchy among the officiants. The tantric village lama and three senior officiants are seated in the small niche on the northern side of the temple entrance, three officiants occupy the space just below the threshold of the temple gate, and four officiants have their seat in the other niche on the southern side of the temple. In the course of the *lha bsang mchod* ceremony the master of the ceremony and the other ten officiants read a part of the voluminous *bskang gso* section dedicated to the worship and invocation of all local protector deities that forms a distinctive chapter of the basic liturgical text of the *Dumji* festival, the *byang gter phur pa spu gri* ['Northern Treasures' Black Razor Tantra']. The protective deities summarily called *dgra lha* are worshiped collectively, but named, invoked and requested individually to be the celebrating community's friend and helper and thus offer his or her powerful support to realize the festival's goal. Interestingly, this part of the liturgical text also contains five passages in which Lumo Karmo is mentioned. In this particular context it is due to her role as the Protector of the Law of the Zhung temple that Lumo Karmo is venerated among the diverse divinities who are worshiped in this particular practice of the cult of the local protective deities which represents a distinctive and elementary component of the *Dumji* festival not only in Gonpa Zhung but all over Solu-Khumbu where it is held.

The worship of the local protective deities of the Lamaserwa clan as practiced in the framework of the *lha bsang mchod* ceremony consists of various ritual activities. The main activities shall be outlined briefly in their chronological order:

1. Taking refuge (*skyabs 'gro*)
2. Arising bodhicitta (*byang chub sems*), i.e. the Thought of Enlightenment, a Buddhist technical term referring to a specific mental state characteristic of the Bodhisattvas
3. Practicing the 'Sevenfold Service' (*yan lag bdun pa*, Skt, *saptāṅga*), a form of prayer comprising seven parts⁴⁶

⁴⁶ These seven parts are: prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, prayer to the teachers that the wheel of the doctrine be turned, prayer that the buddhas and bodhisattvas not pass into nirvāna but remain active in the world, and dedication of merit to ultimate enlightenment in which perfect Buddhahood is attained; for this subject refer to G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:154) and Patrul Rinpoche (1999:432); for a description of the offering of the 'seven branches of activities' see Patrul Rinpoche (1999:317–327).

4. Prayer (*gsol 'debs*) to the *dgra lha*
5. Incense offering (*spos bsang mchod*) to the *dgra lha*
6. Offering of a Golden Libation (*gser skyems*) to the *dgra lha*
7. Offering of seven substances: 1. drink, 2. purified water plus the five kinds of offerings to be made to the deities in worshipping them (*phyi mchod lnga*) consisting of food, water, butter lamp, incense, and flowers.
8. Request to the *dgra lha* for prosperity (*g.yang 'gug*)
9. Invocation of good luck (*bkra shis gsol ba*)

Inserted into the concluding part of the *lha bsang mchod* is the performance of the main blessing ceremony of the four sponsors. It is immediately after the *lha bsang mchod* in worship of the protective deities that the four sponsors of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung assume their full ceremonial function for the first time. Being the representatives of the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community the four sponsors act as the hosts who invite the whole range of their protective deities summarily called *dgra lha* and perform a *yangdzi* (*g.yang rdzas*) offering to them. The *yangdzi* is an offering ceremony from the side of the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community which is performed by the laity under the guidance of their religious experts.

D. *Chiwas* and *yangdzi* – on the ceremonial role of the *chiwa* in the context of the *Dumji* festival

In addition to the diverse profane tasks of the organization and management of the Lamaserwa community's main annual festival the four sponsors and stewards of the *Dumji* in Gonpa Zhung have also to assume an important ceremonial function. The importance of this ceremonial role in the context of the ritual proceedings is underlined by the fact that it pervades the whole festival. On the occasion of an important popular ritual that is performed on several different occasions over the course of the festival, which the Sherpas call *yangdzi* (Tib. *g.yang rdzas*), this ceremonial function is displayed in public. Ch. Ramble has similarly emphasized the ceremonial role of the *chiwa* in the *g.yang rdzas* as performed in the context of a *mdos rgyab* ceremony which is the main annual festival of the Bonpo householder community in Lubra (Klu brag) monastery in Nepal's Mustang district.⁴⁷ The term *g.yang rdzas* has been rendered by Ramble as 'requisites for the propensity to good fortune.'⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ch. Ramble (2000:289–316); for the brief account of the *g.yang rdzas* see pp. 306–314; on the *chiwa*'s ceremonial role see p. 303; regarding his diverse duties in this framework see pp. 303–4; 311–314.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ch. Ramble (2000:305). – Literally, *rdzas* means 'items'; *g.yang* is rendered by S.G. Karmay as 'quintessence of fortune' (1998c:384).

Traditionally, the central feature of the *yangdzi* ceremony among the Sherpas has been the *g.yang rdzas* itself which is a wooden ceremonial flask with brass ornaments, filled with beer, and decorated on its rim with a small butter-ornament. Several forms of *yangdzi* have to be distinguished which are practiced by the Sherpas either as an offering to a deity or a gift to another person. Another characteristic feature of the Sherpa *yangdzi* is the fact that this ceremony is usually performed by laypeople. This is the reason why Ramble has classified the *g.yang rdzas* as practiced by the Lubragpas (Klu brag pa) as a 'secular' ritual which is also true of the Sherpa *yangdzi* as practiced in the course of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung.⁴⁹

All kinds of *yangdzi* that are practiced by the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu are intended to ask either a deity for help and protection or to give the human recipient a favor such as material support for any kind of project – in other words, to oblige the deity through a gift to assume the role of a patron for the giver's personal ends. This is done in a highly formalized manner, and in the latter case the gift-giving is accompanied by the singing of a song in which Guru Padmasambhava and some of the sacred places in Central Tibet associated with him are praised. According to oral tradition it was Padmasambhava who in the context of the building of Samye (bSam yas, c. 779), Tibet's first Buddhist monastery, had taught the Tibetans both the art of beer brewing and the giving of beer as a gift for an offering to the gods to oblige them to offer their help and protection. Thus, it is said, beer became a central item in many forms of offering in Tibet, a custom practiced up to the present day which the Sherpa ancestors have brought to Solu-Khumbu – just like the 'Old Translation School' of Tibetan Buddhism, which they have been adhering to before they left Kham in the first half of the 16th century.⁵⁰

This mythical episode is also mentioned by S.B. Ortner who alone has analyzed in detail the institution of the *yangdzi* ceremony as practiced by the Sherpas. She sees the *yangdzi* as the embodiment of the 'manipulative power of food and feeding' that is played out in the context of different hospitality events.⁵¹ Ortner describes the mythical episode as the Sherpas' myth of origin of themselves as a civilized community which "...embodies the basic

⁴⁹ Cf. Ch. Ramble (2000:303).

⁵⁰ It is significant that unlike all other questions referring to the wide religious field of Tibetan Buddhism which as a rule are answered solely by the clerics – for the deep cleavage between secular and spiritual knowledge refer to J. Draper (1994:100,116, 120f.) – every grown-up lay Sherpa seems to know about and like to talk about this mythical episode that usually serves to legitimate the common pleasure of drinking beer.

⁵¹ S.B. Ortner on the mythical episode (1978:68), which actually is the founding myth of Tibetan Buddhist civilization, as she notes at another place (p. 85); on the *yangdzi* ceremony op. cit., pp. 68f., 73, 86f., 90, on Sherpa hospitality and the 'coercive power of food and feeding' in this context see op. cit., pp. 60–90.

hospitality relationship, with the community as a whole playing the host.”⁵² She understands the basic *yangdzi* performance as a transaction of classical Maussian nature in which a gift is given by the host to his guest thus obliging him to lend his help and fulfill the host’s request.⁵³ In her view, the *yangdzi* ceremony represents a basic coercive mechanism for generating exchange in Sherpa society, “...whether from selfish neighbors, passive gods, or predatory demons.”⁵⁴ Thus, offering rituals take the form of parties or hospitality events for the gods.⁵⁵ Emphasizing the Sherpas’ strongly instrumental relationship with their gods Ortner concludes that ‘in forcing their gods to accept hospitality’ the Sherpas manage to get their religion to work for their benefit.⁵⁶ Hence, the *yangdzi* ceremony as a social institution occupies a key position at the heart of the social functioning of Sherpa society, which is most clearly mirrored by its performance in different forms in the framework of the *Dumji* festival.

Among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu a *yangdzi* offering is performed in many social contexts the most common one being when someone needs support for any kind of profane or spiritual endeavor. Hence, before going on a trade venture or building a house, a sacred monument such as a temple (*lha khang*), monastery (*dgon pa*), stūpa or maṇi wall a *yangdzi* offering is performed to someone the giver seeks to oblige through gift-giving to act as sponsor (*sbyin bdag*) of his project. Whenever the ritual labour of a religious expert such as a tantric householder lama, a celibate lama or monk is needed for the celebration of a household ceremony or in support of the performance of a communal festival a *yangdzi* offering has to be carried out. In all these cases a second *yangdzi* is necessary to thank the sponsor for the help or support received. It is significant that whereas the original *yangdzi* consisted basically in an offering of beer (*chang*) the content of the gift in the context of a *yangdzi* has changed profoundly in recent years. Nowadays, since very few Sherpas – in fact, mainly those of the old generation – drink beer the alcohol has been substituted in the transaction by packets of tea, the number given being dependant on both the particular kind of request and the financial situation of the giver of the *yangdzi*.

Over the course of the *Dumji* festival several kinds of *yangdzi* offerings are performed by the four *chiwas*. In this context, however, formal joking, which is a distinctive aspect of

⁵² Op. cit., p. 90.

⁵³ Op. cit., p. 69.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., p. 90.

⁵⁵ Ortner has devoted the whole book to the study of Sherpa rituals. There she makes the broad distinction between rituals of offering to the gods and rituals of exorcism of demons; on offering rituals refer to ch. 6 (pp. 128–156).

⁵⁶ Op. cit., p. 129.

some kinds of *yangdzi* conducted among the Sherpas, does not take place.⁵⁷ The first kind of *yangdzi* offering held in the context of the *Dumji* is performed on occasion of the official handing over of the *chiwa* office which is held in the context of the ‘*chang* test’ for the *Dumji* to come. It is conducted one or two weeks before the beginning of the festival. Here, the four *chiwas* of the preceding *Dumji* have to make a *yangdzi* offering to the new group of *chiwas*. The latter pass it over to the lamas who each dip their right ring finger into the beer and flick a drop into his mouth. Thereafter the lamas give a blessing to the few participants present who are mainly members of one of the *chiwas*’ extended family.

In the case that the selected *chiwa* is unable to assume his task he has to find a substitute who performs this communal duty in his place. Customarily he asks one of his brothers or sisters. Whoever accepts that task has to be given a *yangdzi* offering as formal expression of showing thanks. Since about the last decennium, there has been an increasing number of Sherpas, who due to some long-term job, mainly in the West or Japan, simply cannot fulfill their duty. Hence, in each of the last five years (1999–2004) there were only one or two ‘original’ *chiwas* out of the four who had been selected by the temple committee on the usual rotation basis; the other two or three *chiwas*, however, acted as substitutes. According to my informants this has been increasingly the case not only in Gonpa Zhung but among all the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu. This trend clearly mirrors the fact that the Sherpas’ encounter with modernity has opened up new income opportunities, mostly abroad, which give rise to a network of diasporic communities. Consequently, mid-generation Sherpas from Solu-Khumbu are facing deplorable depopulation.

The main *yangdzi* offering performed over the course of the *Dumji* festival, which is always connected with the *bsang* offering, is called *g.yang* ‘*gug*, i.e. ‘request for prosperity’, which is directed to the *dgra lha*. It is performed after the *lha bsang mchod* ceremony. The blessing, which the clan community represented by the four stewards receives in return from their protective deities for the due worship of them, is taken as indicative of all the prosperity and wealth that will be sent from the *dgra lha* as the clan requested after their worship.

For the performance of the *g.yang* ‘*gug* ceremony the four sponsors and stewards don the typical Sherpa ceremonial garb, which is worn over their normal daily clothes. Traditionally this is a finely woven Bhutanese piece of cloth of mostly dark red colour, which is often interspersed with different patterns of white, blue, or dark red stripes. Folded once in the middle this cloth is worn as a shawl over the right shoulder. The stewards emerge from the communal kitchen and take their place in a row in front of the master of ceremony and the

⁵⁷ According to Ch. Ramble ritualized joking -- unlike the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung -- takes place at certain occasions in the context of the *mDos rgyab* ceremony of Klu brag monastery (2000:307–311).

three senior officiants. Two of the stewards carry the *g.yang rdzas*, which in this context consists of two offering bowls made of Chinese porcelain. The one containing beer is decorated around the rim with a small stripe of butter ornament (*dkar rgyan*, 'white decoration of purified substance') on three sides. This gift offering is called *g.yang chang* or *g.yang chab* ('prosperity drink substance'). The other offering bowl is filled with barley dough several inches high above the rim. Called *phye mar*, literally 'tsampa butter', this offering means 'food items'. Apart from the barley dough it includes medicinal substances (*sman rdzas*) and both the 'three white foods' (*dkar gsum*) of milk, butter, and curd, and the 'three sweet foods' (*mgar gsum*) of sugar, molasses, and honey.⁵⁸ It is also decorated with three small stripes of butter ornaments around its rim and one on top of the piled-up barley dough.

As he passes along the row of officiants the steward presents the bowl of beer to each of them. Each of them flicks some drops of beer with his right ring finger into his mouth and then lets it move on to the next. Then the second bowl containing the food offering to all *dgra lha* is passed along among the officiants in the same order. Each of the officiants takes a little bit of barley dough and eats half of it while spreading the rest of the dough on his left shoulder. This symbolic gesture is said to express the wish that the Lamaserwa people may always have enough food to live in this life.

The gifts to their protective deities also comprise some pieces of cloth from the stewards' best garments. Besides, theoretically, some symbols of wealth such as turquoise, amber, gold, and any kind of jewel should be included which is usually achieved through the practice of visualization. Interestingly, all these latter items symbolizing wealth are conceived of as objects which members of the Lamaserwa clan may have stolen from other people in a previous life and thus may have committed sins (*sdigs pa*). Hence, these sins may be cleansed through the purification rite which is regarded as a meritorious act of virtue (*dge ba*), and it is on this occasion that the possibly stolen wealth is given back to them. As a rule, the particular merit (*bsod nams*) that accrues from the performance of this class of *lha bsang mchod* that includes the *g.yang 'gug* ceremony is dedicated to the enlightenment of all beings in samsāra ('*khor ba*), the life cycle that includes death and rebirth which is characteristic of worldly existence.

The master of ceremony hands over a ritual sword (*sgrol gri*) to the third steward and a ceremonial arrow (*g.yang sgrub mda' dar* or shortly *g.yang mda'*) to the fourth, both of which, after a short blessing for their ritual use, had been stored until that moment behind the steward's seat. Embodying the active energy or power of their protective deities (*dgra lha*), who are depicted as arm carrying warrior gods, the ritual sword symbolizes the destruction

⁵⁸ Cf. Patrul Rinpoche (1999: 436).

of the enemies of the Buddhist Law and thus the victory over any kind of obstructers and obstacles.⁵⁹ It is the task of the steward holding the ritual sword to direct the community's request to the *dgra lha* that they may offer their power to overcome all obstacles and evil forces while the lamas pray to them that the protective deities may lend their power for the realization of that end.

The ritual arrow is used in ceremonies to ensure luck and prosperity. It is draped with a five-coloured piece of cloth and a white scarf (*g.yang dar*) symbolizing wealth and prosperity. It is made use of in ceremonies conducted to ensure luck and prosperity.⁶⁰ Through this powerful symbol which is, at certain times, brandished with a circular clockwise movement of the right hand, the steward mediates the community's requests to Jambhala, Kubera, and Vaiśravaṇa (rNam thos ras), the Buddhist triad of deities of wealth (*nor lha*) or prosperity (*g.yang lha*), which will also be mentioned later, that they may grant their hosts wealth and prosperity.

The climax of the whole ritual ceremony is represented by the lamas' prayers which end in the following typical outspoken articulation of the celebrating community's request, which does not need any interpretation: "We have offered you all these gifts; please take them, and then fulfill our wishes."⁶¹ Principally, their wishes are to become victor over all obstacles and enemies through the utilization of the power of their protective deities as symbolized by the ritual sword, and to receive all kinds of wealth from the deities of wealth as symbolized by the ceremonial arrow. But actually, the Lamaserwa clan community's wishes as expressed through the requests of both the chiwas and their lamas represent a mix of inner-worldly and transcendental desires that are articulated by the officiants in the following terms: 'tshe dpal bsod nams', i.e. 'long life, wealth, and merit'.

The lamas draw attention to the fact that in the context of this *yangdzi* performance two different ritual activities have to be distinguished. On the one hand it is meant to be an offering (*mchod pa*) to the 'enemy protector deities' (*dgra lha*) of the Lamaserwa clan including the 'country god' (*yul lha*), the earth deity (*sa bdag*), the place god (*gzhi bdag*), and, most important, the fertility deity Klumo Karmo, the aquatic serpent divinity, and the triad of the deities of wealth (*nor lha*). Moreover, it is understood as an offering to all the

⁵⁹ In R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:15) the ceremonial sword is shortly mentioned.

⁶⁰ On the ritual arrow used in ceremonies to ensure luck and prosperity (*g.yang mda'*) see R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 365f.).

⁶¹ A similar outspoken request to the central protective deity is reported from the Khumjung *Dumji* by Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964: 193): "I am offering you the things which you eat, now you must do whatever I demand. (...) Give me whatever I need, I shall remember you, if you do all this for me."

Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and ‘the eight categories of semi-deities’ (*sde brgyad*)⁶² who are all venerated as enlightened or transcendental deities.

The smoke of both the purification offering and the different kinds of incense used in this context that goes up to the heaven’s realm is considered a necessary and important act of ritual offering to the deities, who are pleased by its special smell. However, the smell of the smoke that remains in samsāra (*’khor ba*, the phenomenal experience of the contingent world) is said to be a gift of ‘generosity’ (*sbyin pa*) that is given to the ‘spirits of the lower realms’. In general, the smoke that is produced in the course of the *lha bsang mchod* is seen as a guarantee for the fulfillment of the wishes of all beings in samsāra.

Another *yangdzi* offering that usually has to be performed in the context of the *Dumji* is conducted on the occasion of borrowing the masks of certain protective deities from nearby Serlo (gSer logs) monastery, which the temple of Gonpa Zhung lacks, and also a number of blankets for the officiants.

On the fifth and last day the four *chiwas* have to offer a *yangdzi* consisting of only a bowl of *phye mar* (‘food items’) to the four who will have to act as *chiwas* for the *Dumji* festival in the following year.⁶³ Subsequently, the lamas give a ceremonial scarf (*kha btags*) to both the outgoing and the new *chiwas*. This *yangdzi* ceremony marks the end of all obligations, which form the *chiwas*’ task as hosts and stewards of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung. Formally, however, only shortly before the Tibetan new year (*lo gsar*) their customary obligations come to an end with the change of a certain set of sacrificial dough cakes (*gtor ma*) that, being placed on the altar for the duration of twelve months, are associated with the *Dumji* festival. This act is called *lo gtor spo wa* (‘change of the annual *gtor ma*’).

When interviewed the *chiwas* unanimously describe the performance of the *yangdzi* offering ceremony within the framework of the *Dumji* celebration as a very privileged and honourable occasion for themselves. Here they have to act on behalf of the welfare of their clan as its representatives, who in close association with their religious experts, invite the host of protective deities, welcome and make offerings to them and invoke their powerful help. And it is they who, in close cooperation with their officiants, have to procure through the *yangdzi* performance the wanted prosperity (*rgyu*) and fortune (*rlung rta*) from their protective deities for the assembled Lamaserwa clan community.

⁶² This category of semi-deities may be found in G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:158f.) under the name ‘Eightfold Groups of Spirits’; here the six series of eightfold spirits are enumerated according to Nupcen Sangye Yeshe (gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes, 832–943), the founder of the Lineage of Nub; for the lineage of Nub refer to Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:607–614).

⁶³ Ch. Ramble has given a detailed description of the *g.yang rdzas* offering as performed on occasion of the annual transfer of stewardship in the context of the *mDos rgyab* ceremony of Klu brag monastery (2000: 311–314).

However, it is not only their ceremonial function and the highly valued position of power that they have to exert and enjoy throughout the performance of the *yangdzi* in the center of their local community's public stage. In addition, the task of conducting the *yangdzi* also offers the welcome opportunity, rarely to be experienced in lay peoples' normal daily life, for 'meeting the gods' (*lha mjal*) in a 'personal' encounter. This is the case at the very beginning of the ritual proceedings of the third and most important day. On that day, as will be described later, the four *chiwas* have to perform the welcome ceremony through a *yangdzi* offering to each of the propitiated protective deities who have come to Gonpa Zhung and, after having been duly worshiped, offer their help for the fulfillment of the community's goal.

The diverse *yangdzi* offerings performed in the framework of the *Dumji* festival embody the close link that exists between its high Buddhist rituals and the inserted popular practices, which constitutes the core of the distinct local tradition in Sherpa society. The intimate relationship that exists in Tibetan Buddhism between the spiritual and the secular realm finds its expression in the formula '*chos 'jig rten*' ('Buddhist dharma', 'external world').⁶⁴ It means that without secular practices there is no Buddhist Law and vice versa. According to their lamas this close relationship between the sacred and the mundane is mediated by the office of the *Dumji chiwa* that combines secular tasks and an important ceremonial function. Moreover, in the context of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung as staged solely by the Lamaserwa clan this intimate relationship between both spheres is most clear since both kinds of actors, the religious experts and the sponsors, are closely connected by kinship ties.

E. 'Sealing the borders' of the realm where the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya will be created

After night has fallen three different activities are carried out. All these practices are intended to 'seal the borders' (*tho sdom*) of the realm where the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya will be created and the subsequent ritual procedures constitutive of the *Dumji* festival are to be performed. After the two different initial rituals of juniper burning offering that effect the purification of that realm and ensure the help and cooperation of the local protector deities the latter activities fulfill a twofold task. They aim at both fencing out any kind of obstructers and obstacles and keeping inside the 'perfect capability of accomplishment' (*dngos grub*, Skt. *siddhi*)⁶⁵ which is to be gained in the course of the *Dumji* festival's first three days.

⁶⁴ S.Ch. Das renders '*jig rten*, among others, as 'the external world, the universe' (1989:455).

⁶⁵ Patrul Rinpoche (1999: 403): "The fruit wished for and obtained through the practice of the instructions." This is accomplished in the context of Buddhist Yoga, particularly in the school of the Diamond Vehicle or

First a ritual circumambulation (*skor ba*) of the village temple is performed by the assembly consisting of the tantric master of the ceremony (*rdo rje slob dpon*), his assistant and a small group of five of the senior officiants. In its course an offering is directed to the 'Guardian Kings of the Four World Quarters' (*rgyal chen bzhi*, Skt. Caturmahārājika). Yul 'khor srung (Skt. Dhṛitarāṣṭra) is the Great King of the East, ,Phags skyes po (Skt. Virūdhaka) the Great King of the South, Mig mi bzang (Skt. Virūpākṣa) the Great King of the West, and rNam thos sras (Skt. Vaiśravaṇa) the Great King of the North.⁶⁶ Vaiśravaṇa, the best known of the Four Guardian Kings, is one aspect of the complex figure of the Buddhist god of wealth holding a jewel-spitting mongoose, who is also known as Kubera and Jambhala.⁶⁷ It is through this offering, which accompanies the short recitation of that part of the liturgical text in which the respective Guardian King of the Realm is named, worshiped, and propitiated, that the Protectors of the Four Realms are invited to offer their help and benevolence and protect the *Dumji* performance. Thus the 'demarcation of the exterior limit' (*phyi mtshams bcad pa*) of the sacred realm is achieved.

The solemn circumambulatory procession around the sacred center of the Lamaserwa clan is led by three different pairs of musicians. First come two officiants who each play a *dung chen*, i.e. a telescopic horn of about three meters length, each carried by one minor officiant. They are followed by two officiants who each play a short oboe made of copper (*rgya gling*). All four instruments are adorned with a ceremonial scarf (*kha btags*). Finally come two officiants who play one conch shell (*dung dkar*) each. An acolyte carries a tray with the offerings to be given to the four guardian deities of the cardinal directions. The seven kinds of offerings consist of a 'Gold Libation' (*gser skyems*), a white sacrificial dough cake (*gtor ma*) offering of a small cone of barley dough about ten centimeters high, and the 'five offerings used in certain rituals' (*phyi mchod lnga*) such as food, water, butter-lamp, incense and flowers.⁶⁸ For the short duration of that ceremony, which lasts for a half hour, the three kinds of instruments are played continuously with no interruption. The different

Vajrayāna. Two different kinds of 'accomplishment' to be obtained through the ritual worship of a tutelary deity as laid down in the specific ritual manual have to be distinguished: whereas the laypeople's concern is centered primarily on the 'common accomplishments' which can be simply supernatural powers or long life, the clerics emphasize the 'supreme accomplishment' which is enlightenment (*byang chub*, Skt. *bodhi*).

⁶⁶ Regarding this group of four protector deities of the cardinal directions refer to G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:131); R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:265); R.J. Kohn (2001:93). In the context of the *Mani Rimdu* (*maṇi ril sgrub*) festival held at Chiwong (sPyi dbang) monastery in Solu R.J. Kohn mentions a circumambulation leading around the temple over the course of which offerings are also directed to the Great Kings of the Four Directions (ibid.).

⁶⁷ Regarding this divine triad, the history, and their respective iconographic details see R.de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 68–81); for the history of Vaiśravaṇa refer to D.L. Snellgrove (1987:334).

⁶⁸ For this set of five 'outer' offerings refer to S.G. Karmay (1988:239).

sounds of the deep roaring long horns, the high-pitched oboes, and the deep conch shells combined represent the particular offering of sacred music which always constitutes an integral element of an offering ritual.⁶⁹

When leaving the temple entrance which faces to the east⁷⁰ the assembly has already arrived at the site of the first offering consisting of a 'Golden Libation', one of the small sacrificial dough cakes, and sacred music. These offerings accompany the short recitation of the dimly lit textual part that is directed to Dhṛitarāṣṭra, the Great King of the East. Owing to lack of space the same short ritual procedure is performed in worship of both the Guardian Kings of the South and the North. The circumambulatory path around the village temple is very narrow since it is framed by a steep hillock on the southern and western side and by the structure of an old decaying house on its northern side. Only on its western side is a small niche in the temple wall that contains the statue of the Great King of the West. This small niche serves as an altar where there is space enough for the full set of the afore-mentioned offerings to be placed. It is given to all four protector deities collectively unlike the 'Golden Libation', the small offering *gtor ma*, and the sacred music, which are directed to each of them individually at his respective site. In the subsequent days only a long bamboo stick stuck into the opposite grounds on the southern side, adorned with just one piece of 'wind horse' (*rlung rta*) and yellow cloth, and another one on the western side decorated with a red 'wind horse', are reminiscent of the offerings to the four guardian deities performed over the course of the circumambulation of the village temple on the *Dumji* festival's first day.

After installing the outer boundaries, the assembly has to realize the 'demarcation of the interior limit' (*nang mtshams bcad pa*) of the sacred realm. First, however, they bless the triangular pit in the village temple's dance courtyard ('*chams rva*) in which they will later bury a certain kind of evil spirit, as the culmination of the first day's activities. Normally covered with one of the flagstones that pave the courtyard the pit is only exposed during *Dumji* on the first day, second day, and the day of the masked dances. This pit is not a fixed place but changes every year according to the decision of the 'master of the ceremony'. The blessing is effectuated through the offering of a 'golden libation' to the assembled gods to induce them collectively to lend their help and protection for the subsequent ritual procedures necessary for the fulfillment of the *Dumji*'s goal.

⁶⁹ In Tibetan language the term designating sacred music is *mchod rol*, which means 'offering (of) music'. At the same time sacred music is an elementary component of the above mentioned 'five outer offerings' (*phyi mchod lnga*); for this aspect refer to M. Helffer (1994:301).

⁷⁰ R.J. Kohn (2001:92) notes that beginning in the east like the rising sun is a usual pattern of tantric ritual: it is through the eastern gate that the initiate enters the maṇḍala.

Then the ‘inner border’ of the sacred realm is erected through the performance of two activities. First a ‘Golden Libation’ offering is given to Tandin (rTa mgrin), the Horse-Headed One (Skt. Hayagrīva). The Horse-Headed One, a fierce deity associated with both Padmasambhava and Avalokiteśvara,⁷¹ is the protector of the outer gate of the village temple. Thereupon, the offering of a ‘Golden Libation’ is directed to Dudsī Khyilwa (bDud rtsi ’khyil ba, Skt Amṛtakunḍalin⁷²), who is the protector of the inner gate to the village temple. The ritual practices of sealing the outer and inner borders of the sacred realm where the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya will be created are completed only after each of the guardian kings of the four cardinal directions has been visited and each one duly worshiped and given his offerings.

F. A Black Hat dancer ‘buries’ (*mnan pa*) the *damsi* (*dam sri*) spirits

For the conclusion of the first day’s ritual practices the tantric village lama performs a Black Hat dance at about eight p.m. This ceremony lasts about half an hour. For this performance all officiants gather in the courtyard in one row facing the flagpole in the center. At the head of the row – on its northern side as seen from the temple – stands the ‘master of the ceremony’, who leads the deep-voiced chanting of the respective part of the liturgy, and his assistant. The chanting is accompanied by the soft sound of the cymbals (*sbug chal*) and the big suspended drum (*mchod rnga*).

Characteristic of this dance is the distinct costume of the dancer, the traditional dress of a tantric practitioner (*sngags pa*).⁷³ His robe is of dark brocade with ornate embroidery in the five rainbow colours on the skirt and the wide triangular sleeves. The robe hangs down to the ankles. On his apron made of dark-blue brocade there is a Mahākāla mask surrounded by *vajras* and skulls. He wears a huge wide-brimmed and lacquered black hat (*zhva nag*) that is topped by a flame ornament and a peacock’s feather and holds a *vajra* in his right hand. Characteristic of this important defender of the Buddhist doctrine, the Black Hat dancer does not wear a mask.

⁷¹ For the history and iconography of this important ancient deity see R.J. Kohn (2001: 16–18); Hayagrīva is depicted in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991, pl. 18 after p. 276).

⁷² bDud rtsi ’khyil ba who belongs to the group of the ‘ten wrathful kings’ (*khro bo rgyal bcu*, Skt. daśakrodharāja) is mentioned by M. Boord throughout his book. This deity is also mentioned by Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:548,623). On p. 623 he and Hayagrīva are mentioned in the similar function as the door-keepers of a temple of Zur po che. For the different forms and iconographic details of bDud rtsi ’khyil ba refer to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 320–322).

⁷³ For a description of different Black Hat dances refer to R.de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1997:44–46) in the course of which a liṅga is stabbed; H. Richardson (1993:122f.); E. Pearlman (2002:41).

Over the course of this Black Hat dance the representatives of a special class of evil forces called *damsi* (*dam sri*) are summoned into a small effigy made of barley dough called *linga* which is about twenty-five cm in length. First the *dam sri* have to be called (*dam sri 'gug bshug*). This is done by unfurling a piece of cloth called *yab tar* while reciting a special mantra in association with certain mudrā.⁷⁴ The *yab tar* resembles the kind of cloth that Tibetans use to wrap their sacred books, its colour being the main difference. In line with the ferocity of the particular practice for which it is used, it is a piece of black cotton of about fifty cm square. In Gonpa Zhung the black *yab tar* has a red rim. One corner of the *yab tar* is affixed to the *vajra* the Black Hat dancer holds in his hand.

While the Black Hat dancer intones deep-voiced prayers, in which all officiants join, he flings out the *yab tar* in front of him thus unfurling it and then immediately rolls it up again. This sequence is repeated twice. The *damsi* are exhorted (*bskul pa*) so as to not create obstacles, such as disturbing the spiritual practice in order to make the rituals fail their goals and to confess (*bshags pa*) their ill deeds. Moreover, he tells them that as long as they do not develop the attitude of *bodhicitta* (*byang chub kyi sems*), the 'mind of enlightenment', they will be 'buried' (*mnan pa*) under the ground for many aeons (*bskal pa*). After unfurling the *yab tar* a third time this tantric dance reaches its climax when the *linga* is pushed by the lama's foot into a triangular pit in the courtyard.⁷⁵ This sacrificial pit (*'brub khung*) is regarded as a prison for the *damsi* spirits. It is immediately covered with one of the flagstones that pave the courtyard. Late at night after the end of that day's recitation of the liturgical text the *linga* will be taken out to be used again the following night when this ritual procedure is repeated. And again it is used the third night for the climax of the celebration just after the performance of the sacred masked dances when the *linga*, representing the evil *dam sri* spirits, will be 'killed for liberation' (*sgrol ba/bsgral ba*).

The *dam sri* are a distinct category of evil spirits that form a part of the class of *sri* demons, an important group of early Tibetan deities whose origin and types are described by R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz.⁷⁶ The latter refers to a document in which their respective history is narrated. It was in the castle of the *sri* that consisted of piled up skulls where the first ancestors of the *sri*, the 'sky *sri*' (*gnam sri*) and the 'earth *sri*' (*sa sri*) came forth. Next there originated both the male ancestor of the *dam sri* whose origin was from men who had 'broken their oath', and a class of female spirits who originated from women who had adhered to

⁷⁴ R.J. Kohn (2001:74–75) describes the use of this tantric accessory in the context of a similar ritual as performed on occasion of the *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival which he calls 'Suppressing the Gnomes' (i.e. the *dam sri* – E.B.). In that context, however, the *linga* is 'a floppy, long-limbed cloth doll' (p. 75).

⁷⁵ In Gonpa Zhung the place of the triangular sacrificial pit in the courtyard changes from year to year.

⁷⁶ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:300–303).

'heretic teachings'. Then the father and the mother of the *sri* demons came into existence. Out of the union of these two the 'thirteen eggs of existence' originated. From these eggs several kinds of monstra came forth, one half of their bodies being in the form of an animal, the other half in that of a human. These monstra, embodying the concentrated negativities they inherited from both their fathers and mothers, represent the different types of *sri* demons. Subsequently, each of these different groups of *sri* demons specializes in a particular way of attacking and harming mankind. For example, one kind of *sri* started to devour only male beings, another one began to eat only female beings, while other groups attack mankind in the different phases of human life starting with those *sri* demons who eat infant children.⁷⁷

The class of *dam sri* originated from the monster with a human body and the head of a pig.⁷⁸ Among scholars, however, the particular meaning of this class of malignant spirits does not seem to be too clear. G. Tucci, for example, describes the *dam si* as 'demons of death' who seduce away the life force (*srog*) and breath (*dbugs*) of man so that he falls ill and dies.⁷⁹ In their definition G. Dorje and M. Kapstein⁸⁰ mention that originally nine sibling spirits had violated their commitments, and add that they are said to pose particular danger to infant children thus identifying the *dam sri* with the particular group of *sri* demons called *chung sri*, i.e. demons who eat children.⁸¹ R.J. Kohn renders the class of the malignant spirits called *dam sri* as 'gnomes'.⁸²

According to S.G. Karmay a *dam sri* represents a person who has broken his religious vows by becoming an opponent of the lama from whom he has taken vows.⁸³ In fact, his definition refers back to both the male and female ancestors of the *dam sri*, each of whom had already violated their commitments in different ways. Karmay's conception is fully in line with the information I obtained from the tantric village lama, some of the officiants of the *Dumji* festival, and also from accomplished lamas. According to the explanation given by the clerics, a major task of *sgrub chen* celebration such as the *Dumji* festival, over the course of which the malignant spirit powers are subdued and/or driven away, consists in

⁷⁷ For the many different types of *sri* demons see R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:301–302).

⁷⁸ Cf. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:301).

⁷⁹ G. Tucci (1988:193).

⁸⁰ Cf. 1991, p. 378.

⁸¹ For this class of evil spirit powers see R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:301). M. Helffer, for example, ignores the former aspect of broken vows and renders the *dam sri* simply as 'vampire' (1994: 137).

⁸² Kohn highlights the ritual as performed in the context of the *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival which resembles the one described here and which he calls 'Suppressing the Gnomes' (2001:74, 78–79).

⁸³ S.G. Karmay (1988:239).

fighting those evil beings who have broken their vows and joined heretic groups and have become an 'enemy of the Buddhist doctrine' who are conceived of as *dam sri*.

Now, the main ritual activities of the first day that are performed in public have been accomplished. In the course of the afternoon the maṇḍala (*dkyil 'khor*) of Vajrakīlaya, the *yi dam* or meditational deity of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung, was created by the tantric village lama which serves as support for meditation. A maṇḍala is a symbolic representation of the universe which represents the pure land of the divinity. In Gonpa Zhung it is the divine palace (*gzhal yas khang*) where Vajrakīlaya and his entourage take their residence during the festival.

Over the course of his tantric practice the officiant invites (*spyān 'dren*) Vajrakīlaya and his entourage to enter the maṇḍala and take his divine abode. In order to utilize the power of the *yi dam* deity the officiant first visualizes (*dmig pa*) himself as Vajrakīlaya (*bdag bskyed*) and then assumes the deity's ego (*lha'i nga rgyal 'dzin pa*).⁸⁴ Now being the powerful fierce Vajrakīlaya the officiant is capable to carry out the two wrathful activities that the Black Hat dancer has to perform over the course of the *Dumji* celebration.

In the context of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung the maṇḍala is not made of coloured powders but consists of a thangka of the *yi dam* deity and grains.⁸⁵ It is created on the altar (*gtor cog*) of the village temple and remains covered by a cloth throughout the festival. Since it is a key element of the ongoing secret tantric practice of the cult of Vajrakīlaya as performed in the village temple it has to be kept secret just like all ritual procedures in worship of the tutelary deity.

Day Two: the main tasks in preparation of the *Dumji* celebration

Apart from the ongoing sādhana practice devoted to the cult of the tutelary deity Vajrakīlaya there is only one particular kind of ritual activity which the tantric village lama has to perform on the second day. This concerns the recitation of the text to be used for the 'long life' empowerment ceremony (*tshe dbang*) which is held on the fourth day. The officiants'

⁸⁴ This is the third aspect of the 'process of creation' (*bskyed rim*) as effected in the tantric practice of 'Deity Yoga', cf. R.J. Kohn (2001:32); for the practice of 'Deity Yoga' see op. cit., pp. 31–34.

⁸⁵ Basically there are three different kinds of maṇḍala: those of coloured powders, of a thangka of the *yi dam* deity, and of different kinds of grains. In Gonpa Zhung the latter two kinds are combined. – For a detailed account of the ritual preparation of a Tibetan sand maṇḍala – which is only created in the context of grand monastic festivals – including the sādhana practice, mantra recitation, empowerment, and its final destruction refer to R. Kohn (1997:365–405), (2001:115–119); for the classical work on the subject see G. Tucci (1961); for the linkage of particular maṇḍalas that are projected on differing natural landscapes thus sanctifying either a region or an entire country refer to the anthology edited by A.W. Macdonald (1997); for a recent comprehensive treatise on the subject see M. Brauen (1997).

activities of the second day are mainly devoted to the two main tasks in preparation of the *Dumji* celebration. At night a rehearsal of the sacred masked dances is performed without masks while the main part of the day is needed for the making of the necessary ritual objects, the main group being the diverse sacrificial dough cakes called *torma* (*gtor ma*).

Depending on the number of people available and on the particular combination of rituals to be performed in the course of a certain *Dumji* celebration, the crafting of the various *gtor ma* is already started before or on the first day. The relatively few *gtor ma* needed for the creation of the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya in the afternoon of the first day have to be crafted beforehand. However, the many different *gtor mas* to be used for the maṇḍala of the 'Ritual of the Four Hundred' which is the focus of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung have to be created over the course of the second day.

A *gtor ma* is a ritual cake sculpted of barley dough and decorated with intricate designs of coloured butter ornaments. Historically, the flat Indian offering cake (Skt. *bali*) evolved in Tibetan Buddhism into the refined and meticulously crafted pieces of religious art called *gtor ma*. This ritual object can fulfill different functions. Depending on the particular circumstances a *gtor ma* can symbolize either the central deity and his palace, an offering, or a spiritual weapon to be used for removing obstacles.⁸⁶

In this context many different kinds of *gtor ma* for the numerous divinities and spirit entities that the *Dumji* festival evokes are used. Creating them is a time-consuming affair that keeps most of the officiants, supported continuously by numerous experienced lay people of all age groups, occupied for almost the whole day. Every *sādhana* text contains a section devoted to the making of all *gtor ma* needed for the performance of its ritual cycle.

For the manufacturing of the diverse *gtor ma* many sorts of substances are used. The basic substances of the *gtor ma* (*gtor rdzas*) as used in Gonpa Zhung belong the 'three white foods' (*dkar gsum*) consisting of butter, milk, and yoghurt, and the 'three sweet foods' (*mngar gsum*) which are sugar, molasses, and honey.⁸⁷ If possible the main substances of Tibetan medicine (Skt. *aru*, *baru*, and *kyuru*) are to be used as well. Before their use in ritual two different kinds of blessing (*byin rlabs*) have to be performed for which incense (*spos*) and scented water (*dri chab*) is needed.

⁸⁶ For the different groups of *gtor ma* used in most ceremonies of the Tibetan clergy, their sketches and detailed description refer to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:347–354); references abound throughout this text. For different kinds of *gtor ma* see S. Beyer (1988:174,325,376) and the photos following p. 260; and R.J. Kohn (2001:123–134). Kohn provides a comprehensive list of all *gtor ma* used in the *Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival on p. 122.

⁸⁷ For these two kinds of ritual 'food' see Patrul Rinpoche (1999:436).

The kneaded butter, kept chilled in water, is worked into the various ornaments that adorn the different *gtor ma*. White *gtor ma* are painted with plain melted butter. The other pigments are of chemical dye powder produced in India. To create red *gtor ma* an edible inconspicuous root is used which can be found at certain spots in the area. Among the Sherpas this root is called 'ombulak'. When cooked the result is a thick extract of red colour which is cooked into the butter before it is applied with a piece of cloth.

Depending on the weather conditions this work is done either in the courtyard in the warm sun, that in this season usually prevails at least in the first part of the day, or inside the temple. Joined by numerous onlookers these activities are always performed in a relaxed and joyous atmosphere where there is much joking, laughing, and the telling of old and new stories, including the latest gossip.

The dance rehearsal without masks (*'chams sbyong*) comprising of only three sacred dances starts around sunset so that most of it is performed at night in the dim lamplight. According to my informants the rehearsal is absolutely imperative for the performing lay officiants in a village festival. In the grand festivals performed in a monastic setting this institution does not exist since it is not necessary.

Actually, the correct ritual enactment of a *sgrub chen* or 'grand liturgical performance' such as the *Dumji* festival necessitates an intensive process of learning that involves six different parts: chanting the liturgy and reciting mantras, performing mudrās, creating the maṇḍala, crafting the diverse *gtor ma*, playing the musical instruments and performing the masked dances. Regarding the correct performance of the dancing one has to, to mention a few significant aspects, count the steps in order to coordinate the movements, train for the capacity to memorize the various movements and their distinct expressiveness, and recite the various mantras in combination with the particular mudrās associated with each one of them. In his mind the masked dancer has first to visualize and then to become the deity he represents.

After conducting research in the Drukpa Kagyu ('brug pa bka' brgyud) monastery of Tashijong in H.P., India, S. Beyer summarizes that the monks have to spend a period of at least three years in a formal course to learn the technical details of the grand rituals. Actually, however, even as boy monks they begin learning the basic skills by observing and imitating their elders, long before taking this formal course as an advanced monk.⁸⁸ However, conditions for the lay officiants performing a grand ritual cycle in a village context, are markedly different. Hence, this rehearsal is necessary for the performing officiants since this is the only occasion in the annual cycle for the training of all the skills that are actually

⁸⁸ S. Beyer (1988:24f.).

involved in the staging of the great *Dumji* festival. Moreover, this is also the time for checking and repairing the diverse ritual utensils to be used in its course.

Day Three: the ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ (*brgya bzhi’i cho ga*) and the performance of the sacred masked dances (*‘chams*)

1. The ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ (*brgya bzhi’i cho ga*)

A. The *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung in the context of Tibetan protective rites called *mdos*

The ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ (*brgya bzhi’i cho ga*) which forms the focus of the public part of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung belongs to the category of rites known as *mdos*. In brief, *mdos* rituals have at once the character of both offerings of model universes to the deities and agents of expulsion of the harmful spirits.⁸⁹ The ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ conforms to this particular ritual complex. In the local tradition of the Lamserwa clan it is combined with the ritual cycle of the cult of the tutelary deity Dorje Phurpa (rDo rje phur pa, Skt. Vajrakīla). These two rituals make up this particular *Dumji* celebration.

Mdos rituals have been studied by a number of scholars including S. Beyer, G. Tucci, and more recently, Ch. Ramble.⁹⁰ The most profound research on the history, symbolism and significance of the category of *mdos* rituals has been carried out by A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay.⁹¹

According to A.-M. Blondeau *mdos* rituals are very popular and often practiced in the Tibetan Buddhist world, i.e. in Tibet itself and the Himalayan areas from Ladakh to Bhutan. *Mdos* rituals are performed for a range of purposes either as private exorcisms, when problems occur in family, or as public ceremonies held annually (sometimes only once every twelve years) for the protection of the ruler, if there is one, and of the whole community such as is

⁸⁹ For a short definition of the class of *mdos* rituals see A.-M. Blondeau (2000:251) and Ch. Ramble (2000:301).

⁹⁰ S. Beyer has presented a detailed description of a *mdos* rite as performed in the context of the cult of Tārā (1988:321–359); G. Tucci (1949, Vol. II: 715, 725, 740); (1988: 176f., 181–183). – In his first article on this subject Ch. Ramble describes a ritual of political unity in an old Nepalese Kingdom that belongs to the category of *mdos* rites, and the appropriation of the performance of the *mdos* and other rituals by the monks of three Sa skya monastic centers in Kag, Dzar and Dzong (1992–93: 49–58). – In a recent contribution the author describes an end-of-the-year exorcism involving the *mdos rgyab* ceremony in Lubra (Klu brag), a Bonpo community in Mustang district, Nepal, and gives special attention to the secular activities that surround the liturgical performance (2000: 289–316).

⁹¹ A.-M. Blondeau (1990:91–107); (2000:289–316). S.G. Karmay (1998a:339–379).

the case of the *Dumji* festival.⁹² Common to both all Buddhist orders and organized Bon they share a series of common traits and even the same ritual structure despite many differences that distinguish the *mdos* rites as practiced by the different Tibetan religious schools.⁹³

In her preliminary work on *mdos* rites (1990) A.-M. Blondeau focuses on the origin and meaning of this category of Tibetan rituals in an effort at formulating a definition. First, however, she draws attention to a fundamental misunderstanding among Western Tibetologists.⁹⁴ The *mdos* rituals, well known in Tibetological literature, have since long attracted the attention of Western scholars. These rites are characterized by a more or less elaborated universe or ‘palace’ for the protective deity with whom the religious expert will identify in order to make use of the deity’s power to subjugate, destroy or expel the malignant spirit powers. Around it the offerings are arranged for that deity and the diverse gifts are given to the evil spirits. Interestingly, in most cases they have been confused with one of the colourful elements which they are composed of, but not always: the famous ‘thread crosses’ called *nam mkha*’ by Tibetans which is usually rendered as ‘space’ which Western scholars have invariably described as ‘demon trap’. These remarkable ritual accessories are made of crosses of wood or bamboo, the branches of which are connected with the threads of the rainbow colours. Put on a wooden board the thread-crosses are erected around the ‘palace’ of the tutelary divinity.

An illustrative example of this confusion is contained in the otherwise precise description R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz gives of a thread-cross: “The basic form of a *mdos* is made by two sticks which are bound together to form a cross: the ends of the sticks are then connected with coloured thread so that the object assumes finally a shape similar to a cob-web. Other *mdos* are complicated structures up to eleven feet high, consisting of a number of geometrical objects made of sticks and thread in weeks of patient work.” To this description he adds: “An alternative term for *mdos* is *nam mkha*’.”⁹⁵

Thus, Nebesky-Wojkowitz continues the already existing confusion among contemporary Tibetologists in his seminal work on ‘Oracles and Demons of Tibet’. In the first note in the chapter on ‘Thread-crosses and Thread-cross ceremonies’ the author gives a long

⁹² A.-M. Blondeau (2000:249).

⁹³ A.-M. Blondeau (1990:98); A.-M. Blondeau (2000:267). The author has devoted her main research in the field of *mdos* rites on the Bon tradition. In association with S.G. Karmay she has studied a particular *mdos* rite as practiced by organized Bon (1988:119–155). In a recent paper she discusses the place of the *mdos* in the doctrinal system of the Bon school and highlights the ritual structure of a certain *mdos*, the *mKha` klong gsang mdos*, and the underlying cosmology behind the symbolic construction of the *mdos* (2000:249–287).

⁹⁴ Cf. 1990, p. 91.

⁹⁵ Cf. 1993, p. 369.

bibliography referring to *mdos* rites to which Blondeau added more recent publications. Regarding the definition of the *mdos* rites and their confusion with the *nam mkha* ' or 'space' symbol Blondeau observes that each of the authors – such as Waddell, Lessing, Hoffmann, Stein, Tucci – made deliberate use of the writings of his predecessors, however, without having questioned their findings. She traces the source of this confusion back to the standard dictionaries of H.A. Jaeschke (1881) and especially to the one of S.Ch. Das (1902). Subsequently, each scholar has recopied their initial errors and added his personal note, thus mainly amplifying the already existing confusion. Hence, this highly misleading characterization of the subject matter could persist until the present.⁹⁶

In her view the attention of the Tibetologists has been focused so strongly on the 'thread-crosses' that the problem of the relation between *mdos* rites and *glud* or ransom rites has never been articulated. An exception is G. Tucci who without elaborating on this important question has observed that behind every *mdos* lies implicitly the concept of ransom (*glud*). Consequently, the rite necessitates the construction of a human homologue of the person (*ngar glud* or *ngar mi*) who sponsors the ritual performance that is given to the evil spirits in exchange.⁹⁷ Turning D. Snellgrove's translation of Lopön Tenzin Namdak's explanation of *mdos* on its head, which she regards as incorrect, Blondeau renders the following: "The *mdos* are items (objects, substances) which are pleasing to the gods and demons (*lha 'dre*). One may call the *mdos* 'ransom rituals', but the ransom [*glud* – E.B.] rituals are not referred to as *mdos*."⁹⁸

The difficulty defining a ritual such as those belonging to the *mdos* category is that none of them has the term in its title. Moreover, matters are complicated since neither the indigenous dictionaries and the rituals nor Tibetans she has interviewed provide a satisfying meaning and etymology of the term *mdos*. As these rituals have not yet entered the scope of Tibetan theoretical reflexivity Blondeau focuses on the particular contexts in which the term *mdos* appears in the manuscripts of Dunhuang in order to find a more precise definition. Whereas the origin of the term *mdos* still remains obscure⁹⁹ Karmay has traced the earliest source of the term *glud* in a Dunhuang manuscript.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ See for example S. Beyer (1988, see esp. p. 327,328, 330); S.B. Ortner (1978:179, n. 3); G. Tucci (1988:177); S. R. Mumford (1989:149, 152, see also fn. 14 on p. 152); G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:379); M. Ricard (1994:652); R.J. Kohn (2001:173).

⁹⁷ G. Tucci (1988: 177).

⁹⁸ A.-M. Blondeau (1990:93). D. Snellgrove's translation of Lopön Tenzin Namdak's comment is rendered in the context of the explanation of the term *mdos* in the glossary of his *The Nine Ways of Bon* (1967:300).

⁹⁹ S.G. Karmay (1998a:339); A.-M. Blondeau (2000: 268).

¹⁰⁰ S.G. Karmay (1998a:342ff.).

According to Blondeau the thread-crosses do not seem to fulfill a specific function in *mdos* rituals and they have nothing to do with so-called ‘demon-traps’.¹⁰¹ S.G. Karmay translates *nam mkha* ‘ as ‘sky’ emphasizing that it is often mistakenly described as a ‘trap for demons’ but that this meaning is not found in any Tibetan ritual texts.¹⁰²

Regarding one of the principal differences between the *mdos* and *glud* or ‘ransom ritual’ Blondeau observes: “...the *mdos* is a small-scale replica of the universe, filled with all the sentient beings and everything else (mineral, vegetable, etc.) that it contains; the *mdos* is then mentally transposed into a real universe to serve first as an offering to the deities, then as ransom given to the harmful entities.”¹⁰³

S.G. Karmay has provided the most thorough discussion of the concept of the *glud*.¹⁰⁴ According to Karmay it is the *glud* that forms the basis of other rituals such as the *mdos* which is the reason why the meanings of the two terms tend to be confused. The characteristic feature of the *mdos* is its particular votive construction representing a palace or more often the universe, whereas the *glud* may take various forms.¹⁰⁵ The concept of the *glud* builds on that of an offering to be performed in order to recapture by means of ransom, what has been taken away by invisible evil entities or to avert the wrath of a spirit. Karmay points out that the key notion the concept of the *glud* is based on is that it can be exchanged for something of equal value: “The ritual is therefore based on the notion of ‘exchange’ between the priest and the evil spirits, and on that of equivalence between what the spirits have taken and the ransom given to them for the afflicted person or for the general welfare of the community.”¹⁰⁶ It is the officiant who acts as mediator in this process of exchange and reciprocity between man and spirit.

Hence, the Tibetan concept of the *glud* differs radically from the Biblical notion of ‘the transfer of evil onto another’ as is practiced in the ‘scapegoat’ rite on occasion of the annual Yom Hakipurim festival.¹⁰⁷ Karmay recalls that the notion of the *glud* plays an important role in the myth of the first Tibetan king’s descent from heaven alongside that of the rituals

¹⁰¹ A.-M. Blondeau (1990:98f.).

¹⁰² S.G. Karmay (1998b:329f, n. 75). According to Karmay in Tibetan ritual texts two interpretations of the significance of the thread-cross are so far attested: 1. “It symbolizes the dwelling place of the spirits: (...) as for the *nam mkha* ‘ with the motif of rainbow colour, it is the dwelling place of the gods and demons in this world. (...) 2. It also symbolizes the mind (*sems*), because the *sems* is intangible like the sky, hence *nam mkha* ‘ *sems kyi glud du ‘bul* / “the *nam mkha* ‘ is offered as ransom of the spirit.”

¹⁰³ A.-M. Blondeau (2000:251).

¹⁰⁴ S.G. Karmay (1998a:339–379).

¹⁰⁵ S.G. Karmay (1998a:339).

¹⁰⁶ S.G. Karmay (1998a:340).

¹⁰⁷ S.G. Karmay (1998a:340).

of soul (*bla*) and that of purification (*bsang*), all of which are clearly of pre-Buddhist origin.¹⁰⁸ Karmay emphasizes that ritual beliefs and practices reflect social structure and bind social relations. What is most important, these rituals demonstrate "...the early indigenous system of beliefs that not only have survived or been adapted to the local situation within a predominantly Buddhist culture, but still remain strong as agents of social and religious organization, particularly among the populations of Tibetan culture where the ties of the traditional society have not yet disintegrated."¹⁰⁹ Significantly, the *Dumji* festival uses some of these ancient pre-Buddhist rituals as will be shown in the following.

The function of these rituals is not specific. Blondeau defines the *mdos* rites as 'apotropaic (i.e. protective), polyvalent rites performed to drive out all the obstacles created by hostile supernatural powers.' *Mdos* rites are of several sorts and their performance is beneficial to both the mundane and the spiritual life. As an illustrative example of their utility Blondeau cites the list of purposes written by Terdag Lingpa (gTer bdag gling pa) that the 'Ritual of the Four Hundred' (*brgya bzhi'i cho ga*) fulfills – which belongs to the *mdos* category of rituals. Gter bdag gling pa's list shows that *mdos* rites such as the *brgya bzhi* may be used as a cure for a wide range of purposes such as the subjugation of demons, exorcisms, in cases of illness, epidemics, and natural catastrophes, etc.¹¹⁰ In each case the assumption is that a malignant power being the cause of the calamity must be brought under control and turned back to its own domain.

The 'Ritual of the Four Hundred' is also regarded by the Gelugpa as a *mdos*. The name of the ritual is derived from the four different sets of a hundred gifts, where each gift is given to one of the four demons. They are arranged in four concentric circles around the *glud*. Blondeau notes that it is a ritual that is practiced very often in Tibet. Also among the Gelugpa it is frequently performed at the end of other rituals. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz gives a short description of five different ways of carrying out the *brgya bzhi* ceremony. It is contained not, as one would expect, in the chapter on 'thread-crosses', but in the last chapter devoted to the 'protection against evil'.¹¹¹ The *brgya bzhi* ritual is also practiced on the margins of the Tibetan cultural area. S.B. Ortner and V. Adams describe the performance of the *brgya bzhi* in the context of domestic rituals. M. Brauen mentions the 'Ritual of the Four Hundred' as practiced in the course of a funeral ceremony in Ladakh. S.R. Mumford provides an account of the use of the *brgya bzhi* text for the performance of two different kinds of

¹⁰⁸ S.G. Karmay (1998a:372).

¹⁰⁹ S.G. Karmay (1998d:289–290).

¹¹⁰ A.-M. Blondeau (1990:96).

¹¹¹ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:523–528).

communal exorcism among the Gurungs in the eastern part of Manang District in Nepal.¹¹² In the case of this investigation the *brgya bzhi* ritual is performed in the village temple in the context of an annual communal exorcism (*bdud zlog*) for the well-being of the local community.

In Tibetan Buddhist tradition the ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ is associated with the Indian tradition.¹¹³ The ritual is said to have been created by the Buddha himself.¹¹⁴ There exist two versions of the ritual: the one according to the sūtra, the other according to the tantra which belongs to the *gter ma* tradition. Both versions are very close to each other, their distinguishing feature being their transmission. In the case of the former its transmission runs via Nāgārjuna and Atiśa and many other masters, in a particular variant even via Nub Sangye Yeshe (gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes). The latter version has been unearthed in Bodhgaya and is known as having been transmitted by Padmasambhava.

That version of the *brgya bzhi* text unearthed by Terdag Lingpa is in use in the context of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung. It begins with the history of the lineage of transmission and the account of the mythic origin of the ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ which is meant to inspire belief in its efficacy. Once, Indra, the ancient Indian lord of gods, was afflicted with a severe disease. As he did not know of any remedy to cure it he addressed himself to the Buddha. Knowing that the disease had been caused by the demon Māra in his four different forms the Buddha performed one of his numerous miracles. Māra, the tempter in general, creates obstacles to the spiritual practice for the path leading to enlightenment. Magnifying his right hand he made a replica of Indra’s body in ‘nicer’ form as represented by the palm of his right hand. Thereupon Buddha Śākyamuni summoned the four Māras and made each one take seat on one of his finger-tips. First he gave them a Dharma teaching (*chos bshad*). Then he exhorted them to stop their misdeeds, to leave the afflicted Indra in peace, to take their gifts and the ransom emphasizing that it is much nicer than the original, and to return to their proper realm. Thus Indra was freed from the four demons and cured from the disease.

¹¹² S.B. Ortner (1978: 95–98) whose description differs strongly from this one as to the diverse aspects but space forbids to go into the details; V. Adams describes briefly some of its main aspects but has not even named the *brgya bzhi* rite (1996:134–141); M. Brauen (1982: 322); S.R. Mumford (1989: 149–158).

¹¹³ For a comprehensive discussion of the *brgya bzhi* rite as prescribed by the ritual text written by gTer bdag gling pa see A.-M. Blondeau (1990: 97–99); for a discussion of the *brgya bzhi* rite on the basis of a text attributed to Kumārabuddha who made use of the ‘Heart Sūtra’ refer to D.S. Lopez, Jr. (1996:217–238).

¹¹⁴ This suggests the ancient Indian origin of the ritual practice, a strategy which is not uncommon for Tibetan ritual texts. In line with A.-M. Blondeau and S.G. Karmay as afore-mentioned Lopez sees the *brgya bzhi* rite as a pre-Buddhist rite. It is ‘legitimized’ for use by Buddhist officiants through the addition of a transmission lineage, a tantric format, and the Heart S-tra (1996:237).

It is this mythic origin that is re-enacted in the performance of the *brgya bzhi* rite on occasion of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung.

B. The creation of the maṇḍala associated with the ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’

The *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala is created on a wooden table which is placed in the center of the temple courtyard just in front of the central pole (*phya dar*). First the table has to be cleansed. Next it has to be purified by sprinkling it with scented water (*dri chab*). Only thereafter the complex *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala is arranged by the group of senior officiants. This important work starts in the morning; it takes many hours and always involves some debates as to the proper arrangement of the four groups of items of a hundred each.

The center of the *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala is made up of a big brass plate covered with a white cloth. On this cloth is spread the dough of five kinds of grain to form the clean ground upon which the four concentric rings of gifts to be given to the demons are arranged. The *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala is arranged in the form of the palm of Buddha Śākyamuni’s right hand. On the wrist (*khriḡ ma*), i.e. a slightly elevated seat, is placed a statue of Buddha Śākyamuni; normally it is a brass statue, however, it can also be substituted by a thangka or painted scroll. Except for the head the statue of the Buddha is covered with a ceremonial scarf (*kha btags*). In the center of the Buddha’s palm is placed the *glud* (Sh. lüd) or ‘ransom’. According to the *brgya bzhi* book the palm of the Buddha’s right hand is conceived as consisting of eight petals of a lotus flower which represent the seat of the body of the sick Indra.¹¹⁵ In the case of a sick person to be cured through the performance of a domestic ritual it is the seat of the afflicted for whom this ritual is performed.

In the center of the *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala is placed the main *glud*. This focal object consists of two anthropomorphic effigies made of barley dough, which according to the liturgical text have to be elaborately sculpted and of around eighteen inches height. These two effigies – one male, one female – embody the group of four sponsors and their wives who in an annual rotation system have to care for the material resources necessary for the staging of the *Dumji* festival. It is the sponsors who represent the Lamasewa clan community for whom the annual ritual is executed. As to the two effigies’ appearance, their respective garments and ornaments, and all other components of the ransom the text prescribes that all has to be more beautiful than their model in reality. Moreover, their appearance should include some elements of the personal belongings of each of them and in the space surrounding them

¹¹⁵ In her sketch of what she calls the *brgya bzhi* ‘altar’ S.B. Ortner (1978:97) wrongly used the left hand – which in this cultural realm is generally considered as the ‘impure’ hand. Moreover, in her sketch the palm is made up of only six petals of a lotus flower, a number which bears no symbolic meaning in this context.

should also be placed a few items of their personal liking such as turquoise, amber, gold, and silver, and some pieces of new cloth.

The faces of the two effigies are turned toward the Buddha image. Each effigy is marked by its particular gender symbol. The one representing the male holds an arrow (*mda*) in his right hand while the female has a spindle (*phang*) in her right hand.¹¹⁶ Behind each of them a long stick of wood is stuck; for the male it has to be cut from birch wood (*stag pa*) while the one for the female has to be made of a large kind of alpine willow (*glang ma*). Attached to the stick is a rectangular piece of paper on which are drawn the particular number of crosses that mark the individual age. In popular belief every year every person is confronted with at least one specific kind of obstacle. Hence, one cross also symbolizes the person's main obstacle of a year. On the back side of this paper is written the particular wish of the sponsors, respectively that of their wives which is associated with the performance of the *Dumji* festival and is usually the request to liberate him or her from all obstacles. This ritual object is called *khram shing*.¹¹⁷

The whole arrangement containing the *glud* is wrapped up in a precious ceremonial scarf. At the beginning of the public part of the festival participants put a bank note in front of the two ransom effigies while circling the *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala and cleansing their bodies with a *chang bu*, i.e. a small piece of barley dough. Behind the *glud* is placed a huge, elaborately crafted thread-cross in the five rainbow-colours of sixty cm height. After the whole sequence of sacred performances on the third day which culminates in their expulsion (*zlog*) from the local community, this *glud* is shared by all four demons.

Significantly, unlike the two effigies that constitute the *glud* the four demon effigies must be made of clay. They have clearly androgynous figures and are clad in a yellow, black, red and white garment respectively. Each of them is seated on one of the Buddha's finger-tips facing his image. The thumb bears no meaning in this context. In the *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala they are seated behind the *glud* in one row. Behind each of them a thread-cross of smaller size the center is placed, which is made up of the particular colour he is associated with. In front of each of them a butter-lamp is placed.

¹¹⁶ These two symbols form the title of S.G. Karmay's collection of articles, among others, on myths and rituals that demonstrate the persistence of the early pre-Buddhist indigenous systems of belief as are still practiced in various ritual contexts such as the *Dumji* festival among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu (1998).

¹¹⁷ R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz describes it as 'magic notched stick' (1993:17). S.B. Ortner notes its use but without naming it and holds that it contains horoscope data to identify the sponsor properly (1978:95). S.R. Mumford mentions it in the context of the expelling of the 'three-headed black one' as practiced among the Gurungs (1989:152f.).

The quadrangular space of the maṇḍala, where Buddha Śākyamuni will take his abode for the duration of the ceremony performed after the staging of the sacred dances, is marked on each corner by an arrow (*mda* ') and a mirror (*me long*). In the context of the *Dumji* in Gonpa Zhung the mirrors are often used since they have to fulfill a special task. In case there was too little time or there were too few resources for the preparation of the four hundred items the mirrors are used. Each mirror is taken as a substitute for either twenty-five or even fifty items of all four groups of gifts that are to be given to the demons. Through their use the insufficient number may be expanded into the necessary gift of a hundred objects each. Thus it is ensured that a grand offering can still be accomplished even under difficult circumstances.

On each of the four sides of the maṇḍala a set of seven offering bowls is arranged. They contain the offerings to be given to the Buddha. The seven offerings are water or yoghurt to drink (*dri bzug*), water to clean the feet (*shabs bsil*), a flower to look nice (*me tog*), incense for good smell (*bdug spos*), a butter-lamp 'to see' (*mar me*), scented water as perfume (*dri chab*) and a sacrificial dough cake as food (*zhal zas*).¹¹⁸ Moreover, music (*rol mo*) completes the set of a total of eight offerings that will be directed to the Buddha during the performance of the ceremony.

The four different kinds of gifts to the demons (*bdud*) – a hundred stūpa, a hundred sacrificial dough cakes (*gtor ma*), a hundred butter-lamps (*mar me*), and a hundred *ngar glud* – are arranged in a series of four concentric circles around the *glud* on the eight lotus petals. The thumb bears no meaning in this context. On each of the Buddha's four finger-tips one of the four different kinds of *bdud* of classical Buddhism representing Māra will take his seat.¹¹⁹

The tip of the index finger will be the seat of *phung po 'i bdud*, the Demon of the Aggregates. His colour is yellow and he is associated with the south; he will get the hundred *tsha tsha* or stūpa in miniature form moulded in clay. The Lord of Death, '*chi bdag gi bdud*', will take the tip of the middle finger as his seat. His colour is black and he is associated with the north; he gets the hundred *ngar mi*. One *ngar mi* consists of two small effigies moulded of barley

¹¹⁸ This particular set of offerings is also mentioned by R.J. Kohn (2001: 93) in the context of the Mani Rimdu festival, and, although not all particular offerings are named, by D.S. Lopez, Jr. (1996:222). In fact, it is an extended number of the standard set of the 'five outer offerings' (*phyi mchod lnga*) used in certain rituals such as food, water, butter-lamp, incense and flowers, cf. S.G. Karmay (1988:239).

¹¹⁹ Patrul Rinpoche gives an overview over the group of four demons (*bdud bzhi*) according to two different systems (1999:393, n. 230). Each of these four demons actually represent a group of its own. In Buddhist texts these are supposed to count seven members each: for their description refer to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:276). According to the Anuyoga system there are five Māras to be renounced, cf. G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:146).

dough, both of which are of about twenty cm height. The one representing the male is in the form of a cone with a triangular base, while the female is in the form of three slim cones that are united at the bottom are adorned with a small round butter ornament on each top. According to my informants they are said to represent the celebrating community but are not seen as ‘secondary effigies’ in association with the *glud*; whereas the former is given as the gift to the Lord of Death, the main effigy is given to all four demons as ransom.¹²⁰ The Demon of the Afflictions, *nyon mongs pa'i bdud*, will take up his seat on the tip of the ring finger. His colour is red and he is associated with the west; the offering to him consists of the hundred butter-lamps (*mar me*). The Demon of the Sons of the Gods, *lha'i bu yi bdud*, will be seated on the tip of the small finger, his colour is white and he is associated with the east. For his offering he will receive the hundred sacrificial dough cakes (*gtor ma*).¹²¹

The main activities of the ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ which is to be performed after the sacred masked dances are as follows. The officiant first invites (*spyān 'dren*) the Buddha to enter the statue. The latter is regarded as the divine palace (*gzhal yas khang*) that is situated in the center of his maṇḍala. He then presents the offering to the Buddha that has been transformed through his meditation in combination with certain mantra and mudrā.¹²²

The officiant first visualizes (*dmigs pa*) himself as the Buddha (*bdag bskyed*) seated in front of both the *glud* or ransom effigies, being the substitutes of the sponsors, and their wives who represent the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community, and the four demons embodying Māra. Then he assumes the deity’s ego (*lha'i nga rgyal 'dzin pa*).¹²³

Having invested himself with the Buddha’s power the officiant now calls (*'gugs bshug*) the malignant spirits to be his guests (*mgron pa*). Having come from their abodes they dissolve into their moulded images of clay. Then the gifts of the ‘Four Hundred’ and the ransom are made to the assembled demons. Thereupon they are asked to participate in an exchange. In return for releasing the sponsors and their wives on whose behalf the ceremony is performed, they will be given the gifts and the ransom. It is through the officiant’s blessing

¹²⁰ In her description A.-M. Blondeau makes this distinction between the ‘main effigy’ and ‘secondary effigies’ all of which are indiscriminately called *ngar mi* or *ngar glud* which she renders as ‘the person, the ransom (who are present) instead of ego’ (1990:98, 106, n. 59). For an explanation of the term *ngar* refer to S.G. Karmay (1998a:341, n. 14).

¹²¹ The distinctive emblems of the four demons are mentioned in D.S. Lopez, Jr. (1996:220).

¹²² In what follows below A.-M. Blondeau (1990:99) discerns the bi-partite structure that is characteristic not only of the ‘Ritual of the Four Hundred’ but of all *mdos* rituals in which the central figure is a *yi dam* or tutelary deity: in the first part the invitation of and offering to the deity, then the visualization of the deity which the officiant subsequently becomes – in the second part the summoning of the demons, giving the gifts to them, and then entering into the exchange with them.

¹²³ This is the third aspect of the ‘process of creation’ (*bskyed rim*) as effected in the above-mentioned tantric practice of ‘Deity Yoga’, cf. R.J. Kohn (2001:32); for the practice of ‘Deity Yoga’ see op. cit., pp. 31–34.

(*byin gyi rlabs pa*) that the *glud* is transformed into something that is described as being far more beautiful and auspicious than its human origins. It is the officiant's particular task to convince the demons that the *glud* is something of greater value and hence is more desirable than the patrons and their wives themselves, of whom it is a replica. In exchange, the demons are exhorted (*bskul pa*) that they refrain from further tormenting the sponsors and each return to their proper domain (*gshags gsol*).

C. The performance of the *za 'dre* rite

In the *Dumji* festival as celebrated in Gonpa Zhung the 'Ritual of the Four Hundred' is never performed alone. Usually, the ritual procedure of expelling the evil spirits is expanded – and thus made more efficacious as the laypeople see it – by the addition of one or two small rituals. The choice of these rituals is dependent upon the sponsors of the festival. In the last four years the *brgya zhi* has always been associated with the *za 'dre* rite.¹²⁴

The title of the liturgical text is *Za 'dre kha bsgyur*, literally 'turning away the mouth of the hungry demon'. Unfortunately, the author is unknown. The text of only five folios in block print belongs to the *sūtra* tradition, which consists of the Buddha's teachings that were transmitted directly. The *za 'dre* is an evil spirit generally embodying the 'five poisons' such as ignorance, desire, hatred, jealousy, and pride, who is taken to be full of the main non-virtues of desire and jealousy. According to my informants 'the eye of jealousy or desire brings bad luck to the object of the desire or jealousy', e.g. a good cow does not give milk any more or a wife gets afflicted with an illness.

Hence, the task of the performance of the *za 'dre* rite is to turn back these permanently hungry spirits which, of course, are conceived of as human beings. The mythic origin of the *za 'dre* is connected with the class of *sri* demons to which the *dam sri* belong – who are first to be subjugated and on the third day ritually 'killed' by the Black Hat dancer by means of the *phur bu*, the three-bladed ritual dagger, as described above.

The effigy of a tiger of ca. thirty cm length is placed on a wooden board that is moulded of clay. The tiger is in a standing position, its tail being unusually long and erect. On a paper stuck into the effigy's heart a mantra is written meaning "Now you go!" Always prone to kill, the tiger represents the 'poison' of desire.

¹²⁴ S.B. Ortner (1978:93, 114–116) mentions twice, but shortly, its use in an exorcism as performed in the context of a funeral ceremony. She identifies it as a *mdos* rite (n. 3, p. 179). – There seems to be still some confusion as to the particular meaning of the *za 'dre* effigy. S.R. Mumford notes the *za 'dre* rite twice (1989:148, 204). On p. 148 he observes that it is performed 'against death demons'. G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:387) call the *za 'dre* a 'vampire demon'; see also n. 904, p. 65.

A triad of small figures made of barley dough is associated with the tiger effigy. The figure of a black man sits on the tiger riding it. The paper with his mantra “Where do I go?” is stuck into his body. In the black man’s back is stuck a thread-cross, its center being black. This black man symbolizes the ‘poison’ of anger or hatred. In front of the tiger is placed a being of human form, but with the head of a bird. It is leading the tiger effigy with a rope. Its mantra “Come to me!” is written on a paper that is stuck into its body. A thread-cross is stuck in its back, which also has a black center. This being also represents the ‘poison’ of desire. Behind the tiger is a being of human form, too, that has the head of a monkey. This figure carrying a stick is driving the tiger. Its mantra “Go away!” is written on a paper which is stuck into its body. His emblem is a thread-cross with a white center. The colour white symbolizes ‘a good heart’, but the monkey-man representing the ‘poison’ of ignorance is also taken to be simply stupid.

Significantly, the *za dre* effigy is placed separately on a low chair which is put on the side and below the table on which the *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala is created, and thus is almost invisible. All participants of the *Dumji* festival draw a lump of barley dough, the left-over of the crafting of the *tormas* placed on the same chair, and by squeezing it in the fist the little elongated pieces of brown dough show the personal imprints of the five finger and the palm joints. Everyone uses these lumps of dough called *chang bu* to cleanse her – or himself of any defilements (*grib*). All parts of the body are touched with it the sole exception of the head which is considered as the seat of the soul (*bla*), so if touched this would result in the loss of the soul.¹²⁵

According to my informants the origin of this practice also refers back to Buddha Śākyamuni. In his time there was a ferocious female demon called Ajima in India. She and her five-hundred demon children used to kidnap and eat children and grown-ups. In need of his powerful protection against her terror the people addressed themselves to the Buddha. In meditation the sage ‘saw’ the abode of the demoness. Once, when Ajima had left the Buddha came to her cave. There he performed a miracle by making the children very small so that he could hide them in his begging-bowl and take them away. After having searched several days for her children in vein Ajima came to see the Buddha to request his help. He made her promise to give up her evil habits for ever since only then her children would be returned to her. To keep her promise he bound her by oath. In order to ensure that from then on she actually refrained from eating human beings the Buddha laid down the rule that each Buddhist

¹²⁵ The *chang bu* is described by R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:364). – The use of the *chang bu* in the context of the *za dre* rite is observed by S.B. Ortner (1978:93, 115) which she calls *pak*. She interprets its symbolism in a somewhat far-fetched psychological way my informants clearly reject, which, however, can be understood as projections that mirror particular obsessions of the observer.

monk should take from every meal a handful of dough for the demoness.¹²⁶ The practice of making the *chang bu* as it is performed in the context of the *za 'dre* rite re-enacts this episode.

Every Sherpa lama, monk, nun, and even many educated Sherpa lay people are familiar with this legend. Moreover, in their everyday life many clerics and also quite a few religious lay people can still be seen today who firmly observe the rule that had once been established by the Buddha. In other words, it is still a very common practice to take a handful of rice or dough of one's meal, to form the *chang bu* in the right hand and then to place it outside at some spot where 'the demoness and her many children' can get hold of it.¹²⁷

Before the beginning of the performance of the sacred dances every participant puts his or her *chang bu* below the tiger effigy on the board. Many sorts of grain such as rice, wheat, and barley, and small pieces of several new as well as diverse used clothes of the sponsors and their wives are placed around the *za 'dre* effigy. At the very end of all the ritual performances of the third day the officiants give the evil spirit powers all the participants' *chang bu*, which are called the *glud rdzas* or 'ransom substance' which will be described in the following part.

2. The performance of the sacred masked dances (*'bag 'chams*) in Gonpa Zhung

A. The setting of the dance performance, the audience and its officiants

The solemn performance of the tantric dances is the spectacular culmination of the public part of a long and complex ritual in worship of Vajrakīlaya and his entourage, lasting almost three days and two nights. This is the best-known part of the *Dumji* festival performed to dispel the evil spirits from the celebrating community, to purge the accumulated sins of the past and to clear the way for the year to come. The officiants have taken turns for the nightly vigil so that over the course of the cult of the tutelary deity the prayer, meditation and ritual are, at least theoretically, never interrupted. To conclude the performance of all ritual practices involved a certain number of the officiants perform the sacred dances in the courtyard of the village temple that is used as dance stage (*'chams rva*). Its size is eleven m in width and twelve m in length. From the early morning hours they engage in prayer and meditation each envisaging himself as the deity whose robe and mask he will wear and whom he will represent with the appropriate state of mind and ritual seriousness.

¹²⁶ This legend is recounted by R. de Nebesky-Wojtkowitz (1993:364f.). It differs in some details from the one given here.

¹²⁷ Interestingly, even hungry dogs and crows seem to respect this gift to the demoness – at least for awhile.

At about three p.m. three pairs of two minor officiants wearing the characteristic red hats of the Nyingma School take up position on the temple roof one after the other. From there the beginning of the performance of the sacred dances is signaled first by the blowing of two conch shells (*dung dkar*), then by the playing of the two telescopic long horns (*dung chen*) and finally by two oboes (*rgya gling*) from the temple roof overlooking the sacred space to be used for the enactment of the tantric dances. This musical performance takes about half an hour.

From their site on the temple roof an impressive overview is provided over almost the whole of the Junbesi Khola valley where Gonpa Zhung is situated and over a smaller part of the subsequent Solu Khola valley in the southeast, and thus over a good part of the Lamaserwa territory. At this time those Sherpas who live in more far-away hamlets and single homesteads can be seen – and also heard – from afar as they move in smaller and larger groups from the north, east and south on the way to their main temple which is the site where the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community gathers for the performance of their major annual festival.

After their arrival at the village temple complex the newcomers enter the courtyard in their ceremonial garb. Men and women alike wear the *chuba*, the warm ankle-length robe that is bound around the waist by a long sash. Over their sleeveless *chuba* women wear a striped woolen apron on their front. The aprons worn on special festive occasions are decorated with brocade patches. Around the neck they wear necklaces of gold plates or precious stones such as coral, turquoise and *dzi* often set in gold or silver. Men wear their *chuba* pulled up to the knee and often withdraw the right arm from the sleeve. Under the *chuba* men wear a shirt with a stiff high collar. Both men and women wear a brocade hat of extraordinary shape with several fur-lined flaps and an inside made of fur. Today, however, most men wear a simple felt hat of Tibetan making that makes them often look more like a figure in a western movie. Today, as is the case anywhere in the Third World, the younger they are Sherpa men prefer to use western-style clothing, and only in case one has to perform a ceremonial task such as that of a *chiwa* the *chuba* is worn over it for the short duration of that function.

The newly arrived approach the center of the courtyard that is marked by a tall flagpole (*phya dar*). At the foot of the flagpole facing the temple entrance and the row of still empty seats of the officiants the altar of the *gyebshi* ceremony has been arranged on a wooden table. As is customary in the context of grand festive occasions, the flagpole holds the tent that covers the dance stage to ensure that masks, costumes, and the altar with the beautifully arranged *gyebshi* maṇḍala cannot incur any damage. Usually during this season, the morning is fair and warm, around midday big clouds build up and it gets colder, while from the late afternoon on pouring rain, hail, and/or snow falls for much of the most important part of this day's activities.

Sight into the temple is barred by the two wings of an old brocade curtain that is hung up at the inner side of the temple door. For the duration of the dance performance the temple is dimly lit by few electrical bulbs and is used as a store-room for the robes, masks, and ritual instruments. Moreover, the temple is used as dressing-room where the masks and costumes are put on with the help of other officiants, and where each dancer performs a short training of the dance steps, hand gestures, etc. A large crowd, mainly of the minor officiants and other members of their generation, has gathered round the stairs leading up to the temple door. The small windows on the first floor of the temple are part of the private room that belongs to the tantric village lama. It is from this comfortable, warm and dry place that his wife, numerous members of his extended family and some guests get to watch the performance of the sacred dances.

While circumambulating the altar everybody takes a piece of the barley dough that is stored on a small wooden tray below the altar. It is the remainder of the kneaded *tsampa* dough that had been prepared on the preceding day for the moulding of the many *gtor ma* that are needed. The piece of dough is rubbed over the body except the head to remove any defilements (*grib*) before it is squeezed through the palm of the left hand, which results in a small object of irregular shape. This object called *chang bu* is put on the tray below the effigy of the *zandre* (*za 'dre*), which later is given as symbolic food to the demons.¹²⁸

After this the newly arrived perform a circumambulation of the temple in a clockwise direction. On their way, 'Om Mani Padme Hum', the mantra of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, is recited without interruption while each time one bead of the rosary (*phreng ba*; Skt. *mālā*) in hand is moved on by the thumb, and turning the prayer-wheels at its south-western corner. Old people, in particular, perform this ritual practice with great seriousness and repeat it at least three times while turning the personal prayer-wheel most of them hold in one hand.

Thereafter, everyone enters the temple to pay homage to their deities. First everybody prostrates before the deities, the main statues being those of Buddha Shākyamuni in the center, Avalokiteśvara or Pawa Cherenzig on his right and Guru Padmasambhava on his left. On the way each person also seeks eye-contact with the other images on either side of the beautifully decorated altar containing the main maṇḍala of the *Dumji* celebration, the covered cosmogram where the tutelary deity Vajrakīlaya and his entourage take their celestial abode for the duration of the festival. At that time the officiants are still in the temple performing the *sādhana* practice in worship of the tutelary deity. The tantric village lama is presented

¹²⁸ The practice of making the small *chang bu* is mentioned by S. Beyer in the context of the cult of Tārā, the popular Tibetan Buddhist deity who is an emanation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. There, it is offered along with the *gtor ma* as a ransom for the person for whom the rite is performed (1988:324).

with a ceremonial scarf made of silk which he returns without interrupting the ongoing ritual practice, putting it around the giver's neck while giving her or him a short blessing by way of touching the crown of the head with the *vajra* he holds in his right hand. Occasionally, he as well as the other officiants are presented each with the gift of some rupee notes in descending order according to the strict hierarchy existing among them.

The dance performance begins in the afternoon and lasts, several long breaks included, until about 9 p.m. Hence, the major tantric activities of the *Dumji* festival are performed at night in a dimly lit courtyard. The first of the major practices consists in the killing of the *liṅga* (Tib. *nya bo*), the effigy of negativities, for the liberation (*sgrol ba/bsgral ba*) of the consciousness by dissolving it in the space of emptiness. This wrathful act is executed at the end of the sacred dances, representing their climax. It is followed by the giving of the ransom (*mdo*) to the demons as substitute of the molested celebrating community in the course of the *gyebshi* ritual, and the subsequent expelling of the malignant forces from the community (*bdud zlog*).

Usually, the *Dumji* audience comprises between three hundred and fifty and four hundred participants. The absolute majority of the spectators belongs to the celebrating Lamaserwa clan. Customarily the leading families and other distinguished persons take their seat on the eastern gallery of the courtyard that faces the temple entrance and the two niches on either side in which the officiants are seated. The rest find places on one of the other two galleries and on the sides of the courtyard. It has to be emphasized that the performance of the masked dances of the *Dumji* festival is attended by the Sherpa public with great concentration and, above all, a deep and respectful devotion. Most of the laypeople cannot understand the complex symbolism of the ritual procedures, the dance movements, costumes, and masks. As is characteristic of a '*chams* performance there is hardly any noise during the procedures.

Significantly, all other spectators keep clearly in the background as is mirrored by their places around the sides of the courtyard and below the galleries. Members of the neighbouring Thaktho (Grags mtho) and of the Salaga (Za la sga) clans most of whom are connected with the Lamaserwa clan by way of marriage relations constitute the second grouping of the audience. Moreover, the numerous members of an extended family that belong to the Kāmi or blacksmith caste enjoy the festive atmosphere. For about one generation this group of Kāmi has been living in a close symbiosis with the land-holding Lamaserwa people of Gonpa Zhung earning their living by way of performing diverse kinds of labour for them that are commonly regarded as menial. Also present are a few Tamang families who live as tenants in the wider vicinity, the group of Hindu teachers of the local high school and of the small village schools in the area that are run by the Nepalese state, and the staff of the local health-post all of whom are Hindus from the southwestern Tarai.

While all other Sherpas are, at least, somewhat familiar with the meaning and purpose of the sacred dances non-Buddhists take it to be a most welcome spectacular festive event that serves to interrupt the normal flow of everyday life in Nepal's ethnic and caste communities where TV, circus or cinema is still non-existent. Occasionally some Tibetans on the way to see 'their lama', i.e. Trulzhig Rinpoche, at Thubten Chöling monastery join the audience of the sacred ceremony. First they approach the village lama being more or less fully engaged in leading the performance to obtain a blessing from him, then they watch the sacred dances with great concentration. They come either from the Dingri (Ding ri) area having crossed the Nangpa La from Tibet, the border established by the Chinese, illegally at night or from the Chialsa (Jya sa) refugee camp in southern Solu. Moreover, usually some trekkers who take a rest in one of the lodges of Gonpa Zhung on their way either up to Everest Base Camp or down to the Kathmandu valley take the chance to join the audience of the spectacular masked dances.

Each of the eleven officiants, all of whom but the retired old man are dressed in maroon robes, take their seat in one of the two niches on each side of the temple entrance or in the space between them that is formed by the stairway. The officiants are seated in one row according to the strict hierarchical order that is characteristic of Sherpa society not only in the context of religious ceremonies but also in any kind of secular hospitality interaction.¹²⁹ On the small table before each of them are placed the opened liturgical book, those ritual accessories which are not in use at the moment, and an empty tea cup that will be filled and refilled again many times throughout the ceremony.

The tantric village lama acting as the 'Vajra Master' (*rdo rje slob dpon*) of the celebration sits on a slightly elevated throne in the niche on the northern side of the temple door, thus heading the row of officiants. The characteristic ritual items of the vajra master are as follows. In his right hand he holds a *dorje* (*rdo rje*, Skt. *vajra*). Often translated as 'diamond thunderbolt' this ritual instrument is the symbol of indestructible wisdom capable of penetrating through everything, of compassion, skillful means, and awareness.¹³⁰ It is the emblem of the Vajrayāna or Mantrayāna school of Tibetan Buddhism. The *vajra* is always associated with the small Buddhist hand bell (*dril bu*, Skt. *ghaṇṭā*), which the vajra master holds in his left hand. This instrument is the symbol of wisdom and emptiness.¹³¹ Just like the small trumpet made of a human thigh-bone (*rkang gling*) the *vajra* and hand bell are the

¹²⁹ Sh.B. Ortner has provided a telling sketch showing the typical seating arrangement in a domestic context (1978:75) and also a photo of men eating in status order at a picnic, op. cit., p. 62.

¹³⁰ Cf. Patrul Rinpoche (1999: 439–440); M. Helffer (1994:193).

¹³¹ For a detailed description of the *dril bu*, its main characteristics, fabrication, textual history, and different categories in its close association with the *rdo rje* refer to M. Helffer (1994:193–214).

key attributes of great accomplished masters, the Protectors of the Doctrine (*chos skyong*) and certain *yidam* or tutelary deities.¹³² Another important instrument used by the vajra master is the *damaru* or two-sided hand drum made of human cranium which is held in the right hand.¹³³ After this instrument is used it is immediately put back into a special bag, which is always kept underneath the vajra master's table. All these ritual instruments are his private property.

In the context of the sacred masked dances the two main *srung ma*, the transcendental Protectors of the Doctrine (*chos skyong srung ma*) that have been chosen and instituted by the ancestor Dorje Jigdral, come after they are been duly worshiped and perform their dance appearance on the stage of the local community. Thus, they do the work they had been asked for by the celebrating community represented by both the officiants and the four *Dumji* patrons and stewards (*chiwas*). The culmination of the public activities of the *Dumji* festival consists of four different acts. First, four Black Hat dancers perform the welcome offering of a Golden Libation (*gser skyems*) to the transcendental as well as the local protector deities. Then follows an appearance of a pair of two figures called *peshangba* whose task is twofold. During the ceremony they have to keep out any obstacles, and at its end they have to clear and protect the way that is followed when the demons are exorcised. It is significant that neither their act nor the subsequent comical interlude of the figures called *tek tek*, meant solely to entertain the spectators and to make them laugh, represent sacred dances. According to the officiating lamas the doings of the *tek tek* are simply an intrusion into the sacred celebration. This interlude is repeated at the end of the four sacred dances that are enacted on occasion of the *Dumji* celebration in Gonpa Zhung.

Out of the five sacred dances only two are of the main *srung ma* while two are performed solely by Black Hat dancers. The two *srung ma* are wrathful (*khro bo*) deities. As always emphasized by the clerics their wrathful activities are carried out solely out of compassion, hence, on a deeper level these are all peaceful (*zhi ba*) activities.¹³⁴ It is typical for all kinds of wrathful deities to be represented by three-eyed masks with a tiara ringed with five skulls.¹³⁵ The fine costumes made of dark brocade and silk with embroidered apron and long sleeves are worn over the officiant's robe.¹³⁶

¹³² Cf. M. Helffer (1994:26).

¹³³ For a description of the different types, their symbolism, iconographic facts, and ritual use of the *damaru* refer to M. Helffer (1994: 233–250).

¹³⁴ This important issue is confirmed by the explanation of the dance master of Zhechen monastery in Bodnath, Kathmandu that is given by M. Ricard (2003:54).

¹³⁵ Cf. R. de Nebesky-Wojtkowitz (1997:25).

¹³⁶ For the different masks and costumes that make up the outfit of a tantric dancer refer to R. de Nebesky-

As M. Ricard has noted the symbols that masked dancers hold are in the form of weapons symbolizing "...the combat of enlightenment against ignorance and the victory of serene clarity over the whirlwind of emotions."¹³⁷ According to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz the majority of the ritual tools which the Protectors of the Doctrine carry, are arms that are used to destroy the enemies of the Buddhist faith, and the priests who break their religious vows and become renegades who are called *dam sri* and whom, as is described above, one Black Hat dancer has already been fighting since the first day of the *Dumji* festival.¹³⁸

According to the explanation of the dance master ('*chams dpon*) of Zhechen monastery in Bodnath, Kathmandu, given to M. Ricard the dancer must have the right motivation, which means to have the wish to help all sentient being to attain enlightenment. He must recite mantras without interruption and must visualize the deity that he not only represents but he also is. He should know the meaning of the dances he is performing and should have a profound experience of meditation. At the end he should dedicate the merit of what he has done, "...so that he himself and all beings in the universe may be liberated from suffering and its causes and attain buddhahood."¹³⁹

The temple orchestra consists mainly of telescopic long horns (*sang dung*), the big suspended drum (*mchod mnga*), bells (*dril bu*), and cymbals (*sbug chal*) which always lead all the other instruments. With the music of the temple orchestra and the steady slow or accelerating rhythm of the cymbals played by the ritual presenter (*dbu mza*) the masked dancers turn in slow or fast pirouettes in deep concentration stretching out their arms and one leg as they turn. The length of each sacred dance is between fifteen and twenty minutes. After a short break the next dance begins.

It is significant that all the sacred dances enacted in Gonpa Zhung today on occasion of the annual *Dumji* festival have been transmitted directly to the officiants from Trulzhig Rinpoche at nearby Thubten Chöling monastery who embodies the tradition of Dzarongphuk monastery. The latter tradition represents an important sub-tradition of the teaching tradition and that of the 'great liturgical festivals' of the famous Mindröling monastery in Central Tibet.

First the sound of a human thigh-bone trumpet (*rkang gling*) and then of the temple orchestra signal the beginning of the performance of the sacred masked dances.

Wojkowitz (1997:70-72).

¹³⁷ M. Ricard (2003:51).

¹³⁸ Cf. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:15).

¹³⁹ The direct quotation is in M. Ricard (2003:54), all other aspects are mentioned in op. cit. between pp. 50-54.

B. Description of the masked dance performance in chronological order

Dance One: The Golden Libation (*gser skyems*) as welcome ceremony in honour of both the Protectors of the Doctrine at Gonpa Zhung and the local protective deities

First the sound of a human thigh-bone trumpet (*rkang gling*) and then of the assembled officiants playing the main instruments of the temple orchestra signals the ceremony at the beginning of the performance of the set of dances. The deep sound of the human thigh-bone trumpet, the deep booming from two telescopic long-horns of about three meters' length made of copper (*dung chen*), the high-pitched piercing sound of two oboes (*rgya gling*), the clashing of cymbals (*sbug chal* or *rol mo*), the thundering blasts of the big suspended drum (*mchod rnga*), and the soft and high sound of the small Buddhist hand drum (*dril bu*) constitute the powerful burst of musical offering that is made to welcome and thank the assembled Protectors of the Doctrine (*chos skyong srung ma*) of the locality, including the local protective deities for having come to the main temple of the Lamaserwa clan.¹⁴⁰

A solemn procession emerges from the temple, lead by four Sherpas dressed in their ceremonial garb. Each of them carries a multi-coloured 'banner of victory' (*rgyal mtshan*) symbolizing the victory of Buddhism and a ceremonial umbrella (*gdugs*).¹⁴¹ They enter the courtyard and as they slowly circumambulate the altar in a clockwise direction, its center containing the *gyebshi* maṇḍala, one after the other takes up position at one of the cardinal points that demarcate the stage for the sacred dances. Before them comes an officiant in slow dance movements holding in his right hand a lot of incense sticks bound together to one big roll. The smell of the incense (*spos*) is meant as an offering to the gathering of their protector deities. Attached to this bundle of incense is a long ceremonial scarf made of silk (*kha btags*), the end of which the officiant holds in his left hand.

After him and before the four Sherpas who each carry a banner of victory and a ceremonial parasol comes the figure of Mi Tshering (Mi tshe ring), the so-called 'white old man'. He carries a walking stick wearing a mask that shows a smiling wrinkled face with a long white beard. He is the only figure who is allowed to speak in the context of 'chams. In his hands he holds a ceremonial scarf and a rosary (*phreng ba*, Skt. *mālā*) and is reciting the mantra

¹⁴⁰ For the history, meaning, and the contexts of the ritual use of the instruments of Tibetan sacred music which is considered as 'musical offering' (*mchod rol*) refer to the seminal work of M. Helffer (1994).

¹⁴¹ According to tradition these two important ritual accessories have their historical origin in the following legendary episode: after Buddha Shākyamuni had gained enlightenment all deities came to worship him, among others, with these two emblems. Both emblems belong to the 'Eight auspicious signs' (*bkra shis rtags brgyad*) corresponding to the different parts of the Buddha's body, cf. Patrul Rinpoche (1999:411). – For a description of the 'banner of victory', an important emblem to be used in the cult of both the Protectors of the Buddhist and of the Bon Doctrine (*chos skyong/bon skyong*) Skt. dharmapāla), refer to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:16).

‘Om Mani Padme Hum’, literally ‘Om, Jewel in the Lotus, Hum’ which is attributed to Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.¹⁴²

After Mi Tshering the Protectors of the Doctrine follow in a queue one after the other in their full array. The four *chiwas* have taken up position on the stairs before the temple entrance performing a *yangdzi* offering to each of them while many others of the Lamaserwa clan throw grains of rice in the air. Each protector deity is offered a ceremonial bowl of *chang* containing a small part of the beer that had been collected from the twenty-four households of Gonpa Zhung on each of the first three days. Each deity dips a blue Himalayan primrose into the *chang* and tosses the drops in the blossom in the air and then moves down unto the courtyard following the queue of assembled divine guests that slowly rounds the courtyard while the music is at full power. Thereafter all participants of the opening procession slowly file back into the temple.

Mi Tshering is the only figure who remains in the courtyard. He takes his seat on a chair by the right side of the altar and gives a short Dharma teaching (*chos bshad*) to the celebrating community. This activity clearly demonstrates that Mi Tshering has some kind of religious function within this setting. At his place he stays throughout the whole masked dance performance until its end. Before every dance he shortly welcomes the respective *chiwas* in this ceremonial context. He is of mankind and has become so old he is taken to represent the ‘long-life person’ with whom the laity identifies.¹⁴³

The first dance usually called *gser skyems* dance is performed by four Black Hat dancers (*zhva nag*). In the course of this first dance an offering of the Golden Libation to the assembled protective deities from Vajrakīlaya, the transcendental deity that is the tutelary deity of the Dumji festival in Gonpa Zhung, at the top down to the Owner of the Locality (*gzhi bdag*) at the bottom is performed. The Golden Libation offering consists of Tibetan beer (*chang*) that is considered as ‘spiritual nectar’ (*bdud rtsi*, Skt. amṛta). Its purpose is to induce the invited

¹⁴² Mi Tshering is a well-known figure in the sacred dances of Mongolia and northeastern Tibet. His Mongolian name is Tsaghan Ebugen, and he is known as the lord of the mountain who rules the earth and the waters. The figure of Mi Tshering has been introduced into the sacred dances performed annually at the Potala by the thirteenth Dalai Lama as a result of a dream he had during his Mongolian exile, cf. E. Pearlman (2002:44–45). – The appearance of Mi Tshering as a buffoon figure is mentioned in the context of the Mani Rimdu masked dance festival in Chiwong by E. Brooks (1992:33). It is dealt with extensively by L. Jerstad in his account of the Mani Rimdu held at Thengboche and Thame in Khumbu (1969:129–135). However, the author identifies him with the Chinese monk and scholar Hwa shang Mahāyāna whose view had been refuted by the Indian master Kamalaśīla in the great debate in Tibet. – In his description of the Tse Gutor (*rTse dGu gtor*) held at the end of the ceremonies of the Lhasa year H. Richardson mentions the appearance of both, first of Hwa shang, then of Mi Tshering (1993:118, 121).

¹⁴³ According to M.T. Kapstein, Mi Tshering is the ‘long-life man’ derived from the Chinese god of longevity Shouxing (2000:50). As such he appears in the context of the *Dumji* festival.

protective deities to offer their powerful help that is needed for the fulfillment of the *Dumji* festivals goal.¹⁴⁴

Two oboe players (*rgya gling*) take up their position next to the temple entrance. Their continuous playing announces the appearance of the masked dancers. Four Black Hat dancers emerge from the temple one by one. Each of them holds a *vajra* in his right hand. In his left hand each of the dancers holds a brass cup to be used for the offering of the libation. One after the other descends the few steps that lead unto the courtyard. For a short while the Black Hat dancers perform the *ser skyems* dance in slow motion as is characteristic and then stop as each of them takes up position in one of the four corners of the courtyard. An attendant passes from the first to the fourth dancer, thus circling the altar in the center in a clockwise direction, first placing a *torma* in the shape of a beach ball in each one's brass cup and then pouring some beer into each cup. The officiants recite the liturgy in deep voice accompanied by the soft, peaceful sound of the pair of cymbals (*sbug chal*) played by the leading of the senior officiants. The sounds of two telescopic long horns (*dung chen*) and of the big suspended drum (*mchod rnga*) join in and the music and dancing resumes. With a powerful sweep of their left arm the dancers toss the combined offering to the assembled deities up in the air. This gesture is accompanied by a burst of musical offerings created by the sounds of clashing cymbals, long trumpets, bells, and the big drum. Following this is a short moment of silence and after that the chanting of the liturgy and the peaceful sound of the pair of cymbals that keep the rhythm of the chanting going is resumed. This whole sequence of activity is performed three times. After the three offerings the four dancers form two pairs and disappear into the temple. Two long horns are blown thus signaling their exit.

This dance lasts about fifteen to twenty minutes and is considered as an offering to all assembled protective deities of the locality. The main local protective deities are the male mountain god and protector of the territory of the Solu region (*gshong rong yul lha*), to all subterranean serpent deities (*klu*), to the Lord of the Soil (*gzhi bdag*), and the Lord of the Earth (*sa bdag*). Above all, however, the *gser skyems* dance is an offering from the lamas, represented by the four Black Hat dancers, to the particular set of transcendental Protectors of the Doctrine (*chos skyong srung ma*, Skt. Dharmapāla) that a particular locality has chosen and introduced.

¹⁴⁴ R.J. Kohn mentions that according to one of his clerical informants the purpose of the *ser skyems* offering is "...to create legions of magic yogic powers." (2001:94). – For brief descriptions of the *ser skyems* offering in different contexts see R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:401, 498), R.J. Kohn in the course of the first of the sacred Mani Rimdu dances (2001:191f.), M. Ricard as it is practiced at Shechen (Zhe chen) monastery in Bodnath, Kathmandu (2003:76); for an authoritative account of the *ser skyems* offering and the dance-steps and bodily movements of the Black-Hat dancers see the '*chams yig* in R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1997: 119ff.).

In Gonpa Zhung it was the charismatic village lama Dorje Jigdral (rDo rje 'Jigs bral) who instituted the *Dumji* festival on the basis of the cult of Vajrakīlaya, as is prescribed in the liturgical text *byang gter phur pa* that was given to him by Thrakar Taso Tulku Chöki Wangchuk (Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug) in the early Fifties of the 19th century. This included the explanations, instructions, and empowerments. Moreover, he was responsible for the building of the present village temple. Most important in this context, however, is that it was he who established the particular trinity of Protectors of the Doctrine in the village temple of Gonpa Zhung that reigns among the Lamaserwa people. Venerated with utmost respect it is only during the *Dumji* festival that their shrine (*srung khang*) situated on the upper floor is accessible for laypeople.

One part of the trinity of Dharma protectors in Gonpa Zhung is Dorje Zhönnu (rDo rje gZhon nu)¹⁴⁵ which is another name of Vajrakīlaya or Dorje Phur pa, one of the fierce emanations of Guru Padmasambhava. The second Dharma protector is Lekden Chenpo (Legs ldan chen po)¹⁴⁶ who is the particular form Mahākāla that is called Palgön Maning (dPal mGon ma ning). The third Protector of the Doctrine is the four-armed Nagpo Chenpo (Nag po chen po) who is also called Mahākāla, i.e. The Great Black.¹⁴⁷ The cult of Mahākāla, very important throughout Tibet, and of the wrathful protective deities constitutes the focus of Tibetan masked dances.

Appearance of the two *peshangbas*

The *peshangbas* are regarded as 'worldly protectors' whose task is said to be the same like that of a 'soldier'.¹⁴⁸ The two actors are dressed in a military-like green uniform each wearing a sun hat. In the right hand each one holds a sword, in the left each one holds a large shield made of leather. Their act is performed in slow motion, step by step, brandishing the sword and the shield. After their performance has come to an end each of them takes his seat at one side of the altar facing the temple-entrance and the whole row of officiants, where they remain throughout the whole performance of the sacred dances.

¹⁴⁵ Dorje Zhönnu or Vajrakīlaya is depicted twice in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:482, 716).

¹⁴⁶ Lekden Chenpo is depicted in Khempo Sangyay Tenzin and Gomchen Oleshey (1975:84, no. 80).

¹⁴⁷ Mahākāla is one of the most popular of the terrific protector deities in Tibetan Buddhism. For more information on this deity see below.

¹⁴⁸ The appearance of similar figures who being called 'Chinese soldiers' (*rgya dmag pa*) have to hack to pieces an effigy after it has been carried outside the village in the course of an end-of-year exorcism in the Bonpo community of Klu brag in Mustang is reported by Ch. Ramble (2000:302).

First appearance of the *tek tek*

This appearance is meant as a comical interlude inserted into the ritual performance to entertain and make people laugh. These so-called ‘comical acts’ which usually end in obscene gestures and sexual allusions seem to endlessly repeat, and are performed with much enthusiasm and considerable noise but with no stage training and only very little creativity by young boys who are dressed up in fantasy costumes. They are called *tek tek*, i.e. ‘small demons’ which is also the name of their act. Laypeople take them to be the ‘*sungmas*’ of small children.

According to the clerics these two parts were introduced into the grand ceremony only in order to catch the attention of the laypeople whose usual capacity of concentration is rather limited over the course of such a long ritual performance and who otherwise would either fall asleep, start conversation or simply leave and get drunk. Sherpas seem to especially enjoy these two parts whereas the clerics most often look bored as they consider them as intrusion into the solemn ritual celebration of the *Dumji* festival.

Dance Two: The sacred dance of the lion-faced goddess *Senge Dongma* (Tib. *Seng ge gdong ma*, Skt. *Simhavaktra*)

According to tradition the lion-faced goddess *Senge Dongma* is one of *Guru Padmasambhava*’s main *dākinīs*, i.e. a female space-farer embodying emptiness, who was one of his spiritual consorts in certain practices. In this context, however, she is the first of the three main transcendental *sungmas* or Protectors of the Doctrine (*chos skyong srung ma*) of the locality to appear in the *Dumji* masked dance celebration.¹⁴⁹

The full name of the sacred dance of the lion-faced goddess is *Seng ge gdong ma yab yum* ‘*chams*. The terms *yab* and *yum* mean the male and the female partners, each of whom is needed in the context of certain tantric practices. Here, these terms indicate that the lion-faced goddess *Senge Dongma* is represented by a male as well as a female character. Popularly considered a husband and wife both figures wear the same costume and mask. In the left hand each dancer holds an empty skull cup (Skt. *kapāla*), which is a ritual tool highly charged with symbolic meaning that is only used in high tantric practice. In the right hand, each dancer holds a chopper (*gri gug*) which is of twenty-five cm length and made of iron. The

¹⁴⁹ The appearance of *Senge Dongma* in the course of the great *glud* ‘*gong* ceremony in Lhasa at the time of the New Year celebrations is mentioned by R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 514). The author describes her as being one of the deities appearing in the entourage of Śri Devi (*dPal ldan lha mo*) in the context of ‘*chams*’ (1997:76). *Senge Dongma* is depicted on a *thangka* in the form of a white *dākinī* appearing in the entourage of *Padmasambhava* in his fierce form as *Dorje Dolö* (*rDo rje gro lod*) in G.W. Essen/T.T. Tingo (1991:107).

chopper will cut all of the harmful evil spirits called *damsi* (*dam sri*) into pieces since they cause a broad range of obstacles for spiritual practice and proper ritual performance so that the *Dumji* ceremony may miss the very goals it aims to fulfill for the benefit of the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community. Over the course of this particular *sungma* dance the ‘bodies’ of all obstructing *damsi* are ‘killed’ symbolically by being placed in the skull-cup and then given as an offering to the assembled protective deities while their ‘mind’ is being ‘liberated’ (*sgrol ba/bsgrol ba*) by dissolving it into the space of emptiness.

Dance Three: The sacred dance of Palgön Maning (*dPal mGon ma ning*)

As already mentioned Palgön Maning is one the diverse forms of Mahākāla, ‘The Great Black’. Mahākāla is one of the most popular of the terrific protector deities in Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁵⁰ According to a myth he was tamed by Avalokiteśvara and he is sometimes even considered to be a fierce manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion.¹⁵¹

This sacred dance is also called Gönpo Maning Yab Yum (*mGon po ma ning yab yum*). As indicated in the name this powerful Protector of the Doctrine is also represented by both a male and a female character who wear the same mask and costume. In the right hand each of the dancers holds a ritual sword (*sgrol gri*) while the left hand holds a ritual accessory in the form of a small radish. It is made of cloth and is of red colour, as is characteristic of all wrathful activities. This ritual object is called *nyingshö* (*snying bshos*). *sNyings* means ‘heart’ and *bshos* is rendered by S.G. Karmay as ‘food for the gods’.¹⁵² While performing this dance each of the actors touches the ‘heart’ with the top of his ritual sword. The symbolic meaning of this gesture refers to the act of the ritual ‘killing’ of the *damsi* out of compassion in order to liberate their consciousness as their ‘hearts’ are stabbed and then given as an offering to the assembled protective deities.

Dance Four: The Ngag Dance (*sngags 'chams*)

This sacred dance is also called the ‘lama-yidam dance’ (*bla ma yi dam 'chams*). It is performed by two Black Hat dancers. The one represents the spiritual teacher, Guru Padmasambhava, while the other embodies the *yidam* or tutelary deity, Vajrakīlaya or Dorje

¹⁵⁰ Mahākāla is depicted in the collection of *Nyingma Icons* explained by Khempo Sangyay Tenzin and painted by Gomchen Oleshey (1975:84, no. 80). For the diverse forms of Mahākāla and their respective iconographic details refer to R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 38–67); for the history and iconography of the various forms of Mahākāla as venerated by all Tibetan Buddhist schools see G.W. Essen/T.T. Thingo 1989:189).

¹⁵¹ Cf. M.M. Rhie / R. Thurman (1991:186, 295) where two different statues of this deity are shown; on pp. 293f. is depicted the ‘Standing White Mahākāla’, on pp. 296f. the ‘Six-Armed Mahākāla’.

¹⁵² S.G. Karmay (1988:241).

Phurpa, the fierce manifestation of Padmasambhava. In the right hand each dancer holds a *vajra* while in the left hand each one holds a small bell (*dril bu*). It is their activities that lead into the subsequent practice of ritual ‘killing and liberation’.

Dance Five: The Lama-Yidam-Khandro Dance (*bla ma yi dam mkha’ ’gro ma ’chams*)

This dance is performed by three dancers. Each of the two Black Hat dancers holds a *vajra* in his right and a small bell in his left hand. The third dancer represents the *ḍākinī* or *khandro* (Tib. *mkha’ ’gro ma*). This dancer wears a white robe and a five-lobed crown on the head and holds a *vajra* in his right and a small bell in his left hand. Out of the group of five *ḍākinīs* (*mkha’ ’gro sde lnga*) that corresponds with the ‘five families’ (*rigs lnga*) the white one is the Buddha *ḍākinī*.¹⁵³ The three figures represent the ‘three roots’ (*rtsa gsum*) which are the lama, root or source of blessings, the *yidam* or meditational deity, source of accomplishments, and the *ḍākinī* or protector, source of activities.¹⁵⁴

A *ḍākinī* (Tib. *mkha’ ’gro ma*), a female space-farer, is a spiritual being who fulfils the enlightened activities and embodies emptiness. Moreover, she is a female tantric deity who protects and serves the Buddhist doctrine and its practitioners. In tantric tradition women often carry the repository of the inner tantras written down in a secret code called *ḍākinī* script. Padmasambhava’s most famous spiritual consort and disciple was Yeshe Tsogyal (Ye shes mtsho rgyal). She helped him to spread the teachings, in particular in recording and concealing spiritual treasures (*gter ma*) to be rediscovered later at times of crisis for the sake of future disciples.¹⁵⁵

Second appearance of the *tek tek*.

C. The climax of the *Dumji* festival: ritual ‘killing and liberation’ (*sgrol ba / bsgral ba*) of the *liṅga* and the expulsion of the demons (*bdud zlog*) from the clan community

The long masked dance performance finally culminates in two different kinds of wrathful (*khro bo*) practices. As is characteristic not only of Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies but also of Western secular performances such as Shakespearean drama or Hitchcock movies, after a long phase of suspense those practices that mark the very climax of the celebration are

¹⁵³ The ‘five families’ are the Buddha, Vajra, Jewel, Lotus and Action families. For this subject refer to Patrul Rinpoche (1999:414); G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:144).

¹⁵⁴ For this subject refer to Patrul Rinpoche (1999:436); G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:120).

¹⁵⁵ For the figure of the *ḍākinī* in the Tibetan context see J.D. Willis (1987:19–37). For the secret life and songs of Yeshe Tsogyal see K. Dowman 1984.

executed at great speed one after the other so that they can easily be missed by spectators who may have given themselves just a short break after having observed about five hours of intense ritual activity. First an act of ritual 'killing and liberation' (*sgrol ba / bsgral ba*) of the *liṅga* is carried out which is followed by the expulsion of the demons (*bdud zlog*) from the community.¹⁵⁶

The second appearance of the *tek tek*, which may extend up to half an hour and often much longer, ends in full chaos amongst the audience, thus transforming the prevailing solemnity typical of the masked dance performances into a carnival atmosphere while the ritual procedures go on.

All officiants have assembled in the courtyard. They form one row facing the altar with the *brgya bzhi* maṇḍala and each one takes his seat on a chair. The different *srung ma* as represented by the masked dancers sit amidst them. On the left side of the altar – as seen from the temple and its deities – the tantric 'Master of the Ceremony' and his assistant are seated. They chant the particular section of the liturgical text containing the *smad las* or 'lower activity' rituals that prescribe the correct execution of the wrathful practices, and all officiants join.

The deep-voiced chanting of the liturgy is accompanied by the steady rhythm given by the soft clashing of the cymbals and the gentle beat of the big suspended drum. Then the tantric 'Master of the Ceremony' gets up and performs the slow pirouettes of the Black Hat dance, gesturing with wide flowing sleeves and holding a *dorje* (*rdo rje*, Skt. *vajra*) or thunderbolt in his right hand. He dances slowly in clockwise direction around the *liṅga* made of the dough of roasted barley flour that was 'buried' by him on each of the two preceding days at night in his prison (*'brub khung*), the triangular hole beneath one of the flagstones of the courtyard. His assistant holds a brass tray with the nine ritual weapons for the destruction of evil.¹⁵⁷ Of these weapons the master makes use one after the other as he performs a series of hand movements over the dough effigy. Due to the ritual procedures on the three preceding days as performed by the tantric village lama and assisted by the senior officiants, all the

¹⁵⁶ The exorcism is practiced in the context of the domestic *gyebshi* celebration and is described by S.B. Ortner (1978:114–120). S.R. Mumford has described the differing exorcism rites among the Gurungs as practiced on the one hand by Tibetan lamas (1989:149–158) and as performed on the other hand by the Paju shaman (pp. 143–149). – A. Waddell has provided a detailed account of the masked dances and their history including an exorcism and an act of ritual 'killing' by means of a *phur bu* as practiced on occasion of the New Year celebrations in Lhasa (1985: 515–539).

¹⁵⁷ These nine ritual weapons are a sword, curved chopper, noose, chain, trident, a pair of skull cups, bell, knife, and a dagger with a *dorje* handle, cf. H. Richardson (1993:123). As this culmination part is always performed very fast in a dimly lit courtyard and is more or less hidden by the back of the *vajra* master. This wrathful activity has to be observed several times to ensure that one has witnessed the whole ritual sequence.

negative forces to be subdued, destroyed, and expelled from the community have now been drawn into the effigy.

For a short moment there is a burst of musical offerings from the temple orchestra. Then there is a short break for silence and from the series of activities from the dancing around the līṅga, until the use of the nine symbolic weapons is repeated twice. Driven by the powerful sound of the orchestra his third dance finally culminates in the act of ritual killing as he bends over the līṅga and thrusts the *phur bu*, the three-bladed ritual dagger, into the heart of the effigy cutting it in pieces.¹⁵⁸ A part of them will be offered (*mchod pa*) to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and the ‘Eightfold Groups of Semi-Deities’ (*sde brgyad*) while the other part will be given as a gift (*sbyin pa*) to the spirits of the heaven’s lower realms.¹⁵⁹

Thus the vajra master has ‘liberated’ the consciousness (*rnam shes*) of the evil forces from their body into the world of wisdom free from thought. According to the clerics, the līṅga in this context actually represents three different kinds of negativities in one.¹⁶⁰ Firstly, they embody the *damsi* (*dam sri*), i.e. those who have broken their vows and have thus become renegades and enemies of the Buddhist doctrine; secondly, the effigy symbolizes Rudra, a fierce form of the great ancient Indian god Śiva, the Buddhist archetype of the evil and terrible god; thirdly, it represents all those obstructers who represent the ‘five poisons’¹⁶¹ such as ignorance, attachment, hatred, jealousy, and pride dwelling within the individual self. Following the ‘stabbing’ of the effigy is a recitation of the last part first of the short *za ‘dre* and then of the *brgya bzhi* text. Over the course of the reading of the *brgya bzhi* text the vajra master, now being Vajrakīlaya, invokes Buddha Shākyamuni and requests his powerful help for the execution of the ransom ritual in the *brgya bzhi* context.

On this occasion the four *Dumji* patrons and stewards who have taken seat by the *brgya bzhi* maṅḍala pray for the liberation of all evil spirits involved. At certain times they throw rice and flower petals on to the maṅḍala. This symbolic act demonstrates their readiness as representatives of their clan community to offer the maṅḍala to the deities. After the *gyebshi* ritual they receive a blessing by means of each of the four ceremonial silk arrows (*mda’ dar*) that are placed on the four corners of the maṅḍala. The symbolic meaning of this blessing is

¹⁵⁸ The stabbing of the līṅga in the *Dumji* context has been mentioned by Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964:192); F.W. Funke (1969:128f.); R.A. Paul (1979:288–290); S.B. Ortner (1999:173).

¹⁵⁹ For an enumeration of the particular semi-deities constituting the ‘eight groups of semi-deities’ cf. G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (1991:158–159).

¹⁶⁰ The fact that the līṅga to be killed actually represents different kinds of malignant forces is also reported by R.J. Kohn in his account of the ritual procedures in the context of the *Mani Rimdu* masked dances where it embodies ‘different things at different points of the ritual.’ (2001:79).

¹⁶¹ Cf. Patrul Rinpoche (1999:414–415).

significant: all material wealth that will be taken away by the demons – which, in fact, has been given to them as a gift – is ‘called back’ (*g.yang ‘gug*).

The two *peshangbas* have now risen from their seats and get into their typical motion brandishing their swords. Several times the rhythm of the music accelerates driven by the loud clashing of the cymbals and the thundering beat of the big drum. The foot-stamping *peshangbas* move towards the courtyard door. And each time their movement comes to a sudden halt due to a short break of silence. Then, as the rhythm of the music reaches its powerful climax with the full sound of the cymbals, the big drum, small hand bells, and the two telescopic long horns their steps change to a sort of hopping in a forward-backward motion.

Meanwhile, two parallel white lines are drawn from the altar, at the center of the courtyard, by means of barley flour that mark the way out of the courtyard that the evil forces to be expelled will now take. This is accompanied by the strong clashing of the cymbals that lead the powerful music of the orchestra. The ransom effigy and the diverse gifts of the *brgya bzhi* rite as well as the *za ‘dre* effigy are collected and a procession is formed. In its course these items are paraded out of the village by the lay audience.¹⁶² The *brgya bzhi* effigy and its associated gifts are taken by young Sherpas who are often related with one of the *Dumji* sponsors and stewards. Significantly, these items are carried out peacefully. However, as a rule the person on whom the burden falls to carry the *za ‘dre* effigy and to cast it away has to be a social outsider, usually a person of low status such as a *kāmi*, or of another ethnic group. On his way the carrier of the *za ‘dre* effigy is accompanied by the piercing whistles and loud shouts of “ha-ha, ho-ho! ha-ha, ho-ho!” by those present to scare the demons away.

Led by the two *peshangbas* brandishing their swords the procession descends the stony trail leading through the village down to the main *stūpa* that marks the limit of the village territory, where the spirits are said to dwell or meet. No torches are used, it is pitch dark. The tray with the ransom effigy and the associated gifts are placed carefully on the ground below the sacred monument. The direction where the ransom effigy is placed is determined after the consultation of the divination book (*rtsis*). Depending on the particular cardinal direction each of the demons is associated with their respective gifts are placed on the ground around the ransom effigy. However, the *zandre* effigy and the collected *changbu*, the small pieces of dough which the members of the celebrating clan community moulded at the beginning of the dance performance, are simply tossed off the cliff.

¹⁶² S.B. Ortner mentions different rites of exorcism including the *brgya bzhi* and the *za ‘dre* or tiger exorcism as practiced among the Sherpas (1978:91ff.,122). S.R. Mumford describes different Tibetan expelling rites (1989:149–158). The account of an exorcism as practiced in Sikkim that includes the *za ‘dre* effigy can be found in A. Waddell (1985:494f.).

The ‘protracted rites of catharsis,’ that Hugh Richardson poignantly analyzes, in the context of a Black Hat dance performed in Lhasa at the end of the year, are over.¹⁶³ In one line the officiants solemnly retire into the temple. After a long day of ritual practice in public they are served with a meal and plenty of butter tea. Only after reading the concluding part of the liturgical text for the worship of Vajrakīlaya does the recitation come to its end.

In the courtyard the members of the audience who have shared this grand moment together slowly disperse, and soon the courtyard which reverberated for many hours with so much colourful dancing activity is empty. The usual calm has returned to the village temple since the last traces of evil have been powerfully driven away from both the community and the self, and well-being and harmony is restored. As it is described above in detail, the celebration’s goal has been achieved in an elaborately orchestrated sequence of different wrathful practices. The practices linked together constitute the distinct structure of the *Dumji* festival. The latter aim first at subjugating and destroying the enemies of the Buddhist doctrine, and then at expelling both the malignant forces that have accumulated over the course of the preceding year that molest the community, and the ‘five different kinds of poisons’ or evil spirits that reside within the individual self.

Ignoring the actors’ distinction between the secular activities of the *tek tek* and the *peshangbas* and the sacred festival, such as the performing officiants perceive it, can lead to seriously misleading conclusions. R.A. Paul, one of the two early outsider observers in Gonpa Zhung, based his description and analysis of the *Dumji* festival mainly on the activities of these lay actors whose task has no spiritual meaning, unlike the sacred performance in which these figures have been inserted solely for the entertainment of the lay people.¹⁶⁴ In other words, the ethnographer having been more or less unfamiliar with tantric Buddhist meditational practices, the complex ritual procedures and the multi-layered symbolism involved took ‘surface phenomena’ such as these secular figures, devoid of any deeper meaning, not only as revealing a good deal of the very significance of a grand liturgical performance such as the *Dumji* festival but also as representing crucial aspects of Sherpa society in general. The same is true of the other early ethnographer, S.B. Ortner, who mentions the *Dumji* only at random and highlights the *brgya bzhi* ritual as practiced in domestic ceremonies in which the *peshangbas* also have their appearance.¹⁶⁵ Subsequently, the two ethnographers presented voluminous monographs each built upon an encompassing theoretical system according to his and her particular predilection.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ H. Richardson (1993:123).

¹⁶⁴ R.A. Paul (1979:274–304).

¹⁶⁵ S.B. Ortner (1978:95–98, 117–125, 130).

¹⁶⁶ R.A. Paul: ‘The Tibetan Symbolic World: A Psychoanalytic Exploration’ (1982); S.B. Ortner: ‘High

Seen through his Freudian lens Paul's conclusion comes as no surprise: "...sex and aggression are at the root of *Dumji*..." and "...the various lay dancers represent precisely those impulses of sex and aggression that Buddhism discourages."¹⁶⁷ However, it is certainly no great surprise either that those repressed impulses may erupt precisely over the course of those non-sense activities of young boys who are simply let loose, lacking any artistic guidance and training. In fact, their doings are not even considered as 'dancing' but merely as an entertainment which is received in an atmosphere of harmless fun, but not of pious devotion.

S.B. Ortner, on the other hand, seeking to relate all phenomena directly to the existing structure of Sherpa society, takes both the demons and the *peshangbas* to be 'social reflections'.¹⁶⁸ Focusing on the figure of the *peshangbas*, Ortner simply dismisses the Sherpas' own explanation that they represent merely 'guards' or 'soldiers' who have a specific task to fulfill in this ritual context since the native's point of view 'does not provide much elucidation'. Instead, she prefers to build on her uninformed outside projections stating that the *peshangbas*' weapons express 'their violent demonic dimension'.¹⁶⁹ According to her view the *peshangbas* are modeled upon the Tibetan scapegoat but at the same time she describes them as 'comic figures' and 'ritual clowns' who are dressed in 'caricatures of poor clothes'.¹⁷⁰ Since Ortner observes that the *peshangbas* in Gonpa Zhung are almost invariably played by middle-status unmarried young males, an observation which fully contradicts my own informants and observations, she assumes that these actors simply represent the values and interests of the people of 'middle status' thus blurring acting on stage and social reality.

Moreover, she ignores that the firm tradition of the Tibetan Buddhist grand liturgical performance does not respond to any kind of secular changes and is thus markedly different from the tradition of Western comedy. Ortner defines the *peshangbas* as 'middle-status people but poorly dressed' who perform a powerful role as agents of their community.¹⁷¹ She reports that the *za 'dre* or tiger exorcism she observes culminates in the chopping up of the effigy by the poorly dressed *peshangbas*. Hence she draws the following conclusion: "...if this is a rite of reversal [which it is not – E.B.] and the *peshangbas* are poorly dressed, then there is a prima facie logic to the suggestion that what they chop up symbolizes the

Religion. A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism' (1989).

¹⁶⁷ R.A. Paul (1979:287).

¹⁶⁸ S.B. Ortner (1978:100).

¹⁶⁹ S.B. Ortner (1978:115, 116).

¹⁷⁰ Op. cit., pp. 115f., 93.

¹⁷¹ Op. cit., p. 121.

rich.”¹⁷² Thus, in an act of crude logic the outsider observer relates the wrongly understood figure of the *peshangbas* embodying the people of middle status who act as a kind of modern revolutionaries to the contemporary social structure of Sherpa society, the emergence of which was to be the subject of her subsequent widely acclaimed work (1989).

Day Four: the ‘long life’ empowerment ceremony (Sherpa *whong*; Tib. *tshe dbang*)

During the first three days the ritual activities were devoted exclusively to the worship of the protective deities in order to secure their benevolence and powerful help needed to subdue, ritually ‘kill’, and expel the vast range of evil spirits from the community that are harmful to the Buddhist dharma and all sentient beings. Late at night before the third day the *Dumji* festival’s specific task has been accomplished. Since the ‘ritual work’ has been done the atmosphere of the last two days of the celebration is considerably more relaxed.

The activities of the subsequent two days are added to the distinct ritual structure of the ‘grand liturgical performance’ to which the *Dumji* conforms. Whereas the ‘long life’ empowerment ceremony (Sherpa *whong*; Tib. *tshe dbang*) which is performed on the fourth day represents a typical feature of the *Dumji* festival as held among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu¹⁷³ the ceremony to be performed on the fifth day represents a particular marker of the distinctiveness of the *Dumji* tradition that is practiced by the Lamaserwa clan in Gonpa Zhung.

The ‘long life’ empowerment ceremony is conducted in the temple courtyard before a large audience. It starts in the late afternoon, lasts for about an hour, and ends with the complex ‘long life blessing’ which is bestowed at its end on all people present. The basic liturgical text of the ‘long life’ empowerment ceremony is called *Yang zab dkon mchog spyi ‘dus* which is rendered as ‘Utterly Profound Gathering of all Precious Jewels’. This text represents a ritual cycle which is used among the Sherpas on diverse occasions, among others, for the manufacture of sacred substances, and primarily in domestic ceremonies. According to my informants the *dKon mchog spyi ‘dus* is a very popular ritual cycle in Solu-Khumbu, but it is not used for the performance of the *Dumji* rituals.¹⁷⁴ The recitation of this text starts on the second day.

¹⁷² Op. cit., p. 122.

¹⁷³ This ceremony is briefly mentioned in Chr. v. Fürer-Haimendorf’s account of the *Dumji* festival as performed in the twin-villages of Khunde/Khumjung (1964:204).

¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, F. Funke who has given an account of the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung (1969:115–138) has stated that here the *dKon mchog spyi ‘dus* is used as the liturgical text. He has provided a translation of this text (op. cit., pp. 256–280). This text cycle has also been mentioned by F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:79).

This important piece of ritual literature is a *terma* (*gter ma*) text from the treasure-finder and great doctrine master 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585–1656) who was born in the far south-eastern province of Kongpo (rKong po). In the year 1620 'Ja' tshon snying po unearthed this ritual cycle among others in Traklung.¹⁷⁵ It was only at the end of the 18th and in the 19th century that his teachings and ritual cycles together with those of gTer bdag glingpa were transmitted from South Tibet to various areas of Highland Nepal from Dolpo in the west to the Sherpa territory in the east. According to F.-K. Ehrhard central figures in the transmission of these *gter ma* teachings were the afore-mentioned Thrakar Taso Tulku Choki Wangchuk (Brag dkar rta so sprul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1775–1835) and his grand-uncle Karma Tinley Dudjom (Karma 'Phrin las bdud 'joms, 1726–1789).¹⁷⁶

It seems that the 'long life' blessing is one of the most important aspects of the *Dumji* festival for the lay audience. At the end of the 'long life' empowerment ceremony the complex 'long life blessing' is bestowed on all people present. Lined up in a queue the people pass by the row of officiants headed by the tantric village lama to receive the blessing. Its major components are: long life pill (*tshe ril*), long life beer (*tshe chang*), long life *torma* (*tshe gtor*), long life water (*tshe chu*) and the blessing by the ritual arrow made of bamboo (*tshe sgrub mda' dar*). This last component is symbolic of longevity, and is brandished with a circular movement of the right hand. The blessing by the sacred book used as liturgy is executed by the presiding tantric village lama, the blessing by the ritual arrow is executed by his assistant. Following this is the distribution of the afore-mentioned components of this blessing from the hands of other officiants.

The typical feature the 'long life' blessing ceremony is the amazingly ordered chaos of a heavily pushing crowd in an almost trance-like state while the uninterrupted blowing of the oboes, supporting this state and signifying the presence of all protective deities, keep the festival's atmosphere at a climax that lasts for more than one and a half hours.

Late at night, the people gather again in the temple courtyard. There they spend the cold and humid night until the early morning hours merrily drinking, singing and performing the *shyabru* (Tib. *zhabs bro*), the Sherpa round dance. On this occasion the *Dumji* sponsors and their wives offer *chang*, the beer brewed from rice or corn, to all dancers and the wife of the tantric village lama distributes a ceremonial scarf to each one.

Most of the unmarried young women and men, however, disappear sooner or later into one of the four 'discos' which have been put up by some groups of young people in deserted

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:810). For the religious life and the accomplishments of this eminent master of the doctrine see op. cit., pp. 809–812; he is depicted op. cit., p. 810. – According to G. Dorje and M. Kapstein there are many editions of liturgical texts associated with this ritual cycle (1991:286).

¹⁷⁶ F.-K. Ehrhard (1993:77, 79) and (1996:63).

houses for that occasion since about five years ago. Interestingly, for a couple of years more and more members of the middle generation have started to follow them later in the night.

Day Five: the *sku tshab gter nga* ceremony held in the village temple

On the fifth day the *Dumji* celebration concludes with the *kutshab ternga* (*sku tshab gter nga*) ceremony which is held in the village temple. According to the proud statements received from the officiants the *kutshab ternga* *pūjā* represents one the most important markers of the local distinctiveness of their *Dumji* festival. This short celebration is not a ritual practice based on a certain text. Instead, it is a solemn speech by the tantric village lama. It consists of a short history (*lo rgyus*) of the *kutshab ternga* and how the *Dumji* came to Gonpa Zhung and of a Dharma teaching (*chos bshad*).

The *kutshab ternga* are the 'five treasure representations' of Guru Padmasambhava, the Indian tantric master and sage who according to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism had been instrumental in the introduction and establishment of the Buddhist doctrine in Tibet.¹⁷⁷ Padmasambhava is said to have created these five statues himself and to have hidden them, one of them in Tsibri, at the time of his departure from the Land of Snows for the protection and well-being of the Tibetan people. Hence these *kutshab ternga* statues are endowed with a very special power (*byin rlabs*) for the adherents of the Nyingma school, and consequently they bestow tremendous merit on those who receive their blessing.

Of these five sacred statues the Lamaserwa clan owes one. No other village gompa in the whole Sherpa area of Solu-Khumbu owns an extremely sacred and powerful statue of Guru Padmasambhava of comparable religious importance. According to their written tradition its owner Sungden Dorje had given the sacred statue to Dorje Zangbo, the mythical hero of the Lamaserwa clan, while he had been studying for three years in Tibet.¹⁷⁸ The *kutshab ternga* statue in Gompa Zhung represents a lama with a typical hat sitting in meditation posture on a lotus throne. Its size is only about ten centimeters and it is made of clay that is covered with a layer of gold. Kept in a finely crafted silver box that is decorated with jewels it stored in a separate room on the upper floor of the village temple. Only for a short while on the fifth and last day of the *Dumji* festival laypeople have access to it when it is taken out to be displayed in public for the blessing. The village lama blesses the people by touching the crown of the head with this exceptional statue of Guru Padmasambhava

¹⁷⁷ Cf. S.Ch. Das (1989: 90): *sku tshab*: – 'a representative' (i.e. a statue or sacred text representing a deity, in this context: a statue of Guru Rinpoche – E.B.); *gter* – 'treasure', i.e. Buddhist scriptures and sacred objects hidden by Guru Padmasambhava and other tantric masters; – *nga*: five.

¹⁷⁸ This story is recounted by A.W. Macdonald (1987d:71f.).

Over the course of the *kutshab ternga* ceremony, the tantric village lama gives an extensive overview on Tibetan Buddhism, its history and its central tenets starting with the achievements of Guru Padmasamhava in taming the malevolent spirits, binding them by oath and thus building Samye (bSam yas), the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, in the year 779. Its second part focuses on the historic origin of the Sherpas in Kham and on their long migration across the Himalayan divide to Solu-Khumbu. The longest part, of course, is when he elaborates on the history of the Lamaserwa clan and on their famous ancestors. This is followed by a detailed account of when and how the *Dumji* came to Solu-Khumbu and to Gompa Zhung including an explanation of its complex meaning. Of particular importance for the audience seems to be both the purpose – the expulsion of evil forces from the community – and the distinct benefits accruing from the annual correct performance of the *Dumji* for the local community of the Lamaserwa clan as a whole, as well as for the sponsors and their wives and families.

In a concluding statement the lama summarizes his exposition which amounts to a pointed local history of Sherpa religion, culture and society as an integral part of Tibetan Buddhism. In the last two years the end of the village lama's speech, built on traditional conventions, was marked by the express exhortation that in these difficult times of increasing 'chaos' (*grib*) it is and will be of vital importance for the Sherpas to stick firmly to the Buddhist dharma, to be proud of the Sherpas' and, in particular, of the Lamaserwa clan's glorious past and present – to continue the celebration of their religious festivals and to devote all their available resources to the preservation of their cultural heritage. Thus, he has started to make deliberate use of the framework of the major festival to articulate urgent problems of communal interest by alluding to the Sherpas' seriously affected everyday lives and livelihoods in the context of the increasingly dramatic political turmoil due to the Maoist insurgency.

The *kutshab ternga* celebration is one of the most pleasant parts of the whole festival. All those assembled are in high spirits while at the same time fully relaxed, if not just simply tired. All the officiants are present, along with the four sponsors of the *Dumji* celebration, their wives and children. Moreover, all families and individuals from Gompa Zhung proper and from diverse hamlets in the vicinity participate. Even after some days of intensive feasting the latter still can manage to take part in the final ceremony and receive the *kutshab ternga* blessing at its end.

It is significant that in the last two years on this occasion the atmosphere in the village temple has been markedly different. On all the preceding days the ritual celebrations had been performed in a religious space which was shared by many children who, as is the norm on festive events such as this, had been playing and running around noisily in the courtyard

and in the temple; at the same time many of the adults had been engaged in long and loud private conversation and quite a few of the old ones male and female had already been enjoying *chang* for some days. Now, however, most of those present are fully concentrated on their highly respected lama's elaborations. The children are exhorted successfully to remain quiet in order to listen carefully to the lama's words, which they actually do, and all those who tend to fall asleep are kept awake quietly. His speech only articulates what everyone has become conscious of for quite awhile but almost no one dares to speak about because of the presence of some of the Maoists. Hence, the majority of the listeners are left in deep thought for awhile.

After completion of the *kutshab ternga* ceremony in the early afternoon the religious practitioners remain seated to be served with food and drink by the sponsor and his wife on duty. The audience, however, dissolves slowly and people start to leave for their homes in smaller and bigger groups. The usual calm of everyday life returns to the temple courtyard again. Only a group of young men remains. They have to remove the tent and the central pole in the courtyard which are put up only for the performance of the *Dumji* festival. This is done in a collective effort in great joy and loud shouts of "Ha, ha! Ho, ho!" The tent has to be cleaned and dried again in the warm morning sun of the following day. Thereafter it will be stored away in the temple's treasury where it remains until the day before the next *Dumji*. Moreover, they have to adorn the impressively high central pole (*phya dar*) with a new 'wind-horse' (*rlung rta*), in this case a rectangular piece of cotton of about four m length. Its principal feature is a horse in the center with a wishing jewel on its back, an eagle and a dragon in the upper corner and a tiger and a lion in the lower corner.¹⁷⁹

It is this newly erected symbol that signals to all that the *Dumji* festival in Gonpa Zhung has been performed and its task fulfilled: the evil spirit powers have been subdued, ritually 'killed', and expelled, and thus the future well-being, unity, and the existing religious and social order of the Lamaserwa clan has been ensured. The highly concentrated mix of smells of sweet herbal incense, oily butter lamps and of sour *chang* fills the air. Only the merry singing of groups of disappearing Sherpas can be heard from afar, for quite awhile.

¹⁷⁹ For its pre-Buddhist history and its particular symbolism refer to S.G. Karmay (1998e:413-422).

Chapter Six

Local *Dumji* performance, festival patronage, and Sherpa identity

Among the Sherpas the *Dumji* festival, with its colourful masked dances, was not instituted in the interest of a political or stately power such as it happened with public festivals in Tibet or in Bhutan. Instead it was instituted by the Sherpa people of each of the nine localities where it is held.¹ In each case the *Dumji* was introduced thanks to the initiative of a charismatic village lama. The celebration of the *Dumji* festival is the major festive occasion on which the two categories of ‘place’ and ‘territory’ come together and thus have a direct bearing on the emergence of Sherpa identity and its different layers.

The *Dumji* celebration in Gompa Zhung is embedded in the history of the Lamaserwa clan that is rooted in its geographical territory – as symbolized by the heroic deeds of the mythical ancestor, which he had performed at certain places, with the particular set of local protective deities. Hence, the *Dumji* festival is the main annual festive occasion for the worship of both the ancestor and the specific local protective deities. In consequence, the ritual ceremony gives a collective identity to the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community. As such it can be regarded as an elaborate ritual self-enactment of the Lamaserwa clan, which is clearly mirrored by the fact that Sherpas of other origin may take part solely as simple marginal spectators. Thus, over the course of their *Dumji* festival the members of the Lamaserwa clan celebrate the unity and harmony of their clan community as a whole.

Moreover, the *Dumji* festival represents the traditional link between the Lamaserwa community as an integral part of the Sherpa ethnic group in northeastern Nepal, that lives on the margin of the Tibetan cultural realm, and Tibetan Buddhism. The *Dumji* celebration in Gompa Zhung builds upon a set of specific rituals and several matters such as the liturgical text belonging to the *terma* tradition and the *kutshab ternga* statue both of which are at the

¹ For the political purpose of the establishment of new public festivals in Tibet and Bhutan in which sacred dances figured prominently see A.W. Macdonald (1987b:10f.). For the sacred dances as performed in Bhutan refer to M. Aris (1976:612f.) and F. Pommaret (2002:175). As to the staging of sacred dances in various public ceremonies of the Lhasa year until 1959 cf. H. Richardson (1993:7ff.)

heart of Tibetan Buddhism and its history in the Land of Snows. Hence, this is the ritual ceremony in which they celebrate themselves as both Sherpas and as Tibetan Buddhists thus clearly demonstrating their close links with the Tibetan cultural realm.

In fact, the Sherpas are not only proud of being Sherpas, but they consider themselves as both Sherpas and Tibetan Buddhists. Religion is the distinctive idiom – as it is to Tibetans in general – in which the Sherpas present themselves in their dealings with people of Hindu caste or of other ethnic origin, whereas the reference to locality is employed in their interaction with both Sherpas of other regions, Tibetans and also with other Nepali people.²

It is predominantly in the context of the major local religious celebration of the *Dumji* festival in Gompa Zhung that the individual as well as the communal identity of the members of the Lamaserwa clan is moulded and given its particular character. Moreover, the worship of *Shorong Yullha*, the male god of the inhabited land of the Solu region, who is the regional protective deity, as performed over the course of the *Dumji* constitutes the regional identity of the Solu Sherpas as opposed to that of the Khumbu Sherpas who on the occasion of the corresponding ritual events venerate the *Khumbu Yullha*. It is only on this festive occasion that all the people of the Lamaserwa clan unite once a year with both certain high gods and their local protective deities to protect both their people and territory against evil forces and to secure the benevolence and help of the deities. Thus they reaffirm the future well-being of their community.

To underline the crucial importance of the *Dumji* festival as held among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu as it is seen to themselves it may suffice to quote the view of a wealthy Sherpa business man. He has been living with his wife and children permanently in Kathmandu for more than a decade and came to Gonpa Zhung for the *Dumji* in 2002 to fulfill his duty as one of the four annual sponsors of the festival. His view, articulated with the characteristic pride of Sherpa culture and religion, is illustrative of the eminent double function that the *Dumji* celebration fulfills in the local Sherpa community and that the average Sherpa is fully aware of:

“Today, many Sherpas have left their local community in Solu-Khumbu and many others keep following them for a variety of reasons. They live in Kathmandu, but a steadily growing number of Sherpas have established themselves abroad. But nevertheless, we keep our houses and fields, and often a part of the family

² These two markers of Sherpa identity are shared by all other of Nepal’s Tibetan speaking groups. Moreover, Ch. Ramble has pointed out in a comprehensive treatment that the identity of the Bhotiyas, the indigenous Tibetan-speaking people of Nepal, is based on religion and “...very largely on their association with a limited territory.” (1997: 379) – This is true of the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu as well.

remains. We Lamaserwa people try to return, at least, for the annual *Dumji* festival. If one's term has come to assume the role of the *chiwa* on that occasion we do our best to arrange our business schedule accordingly, even if one lives in Europe, Japan, or in the United States. The celebration of the *Dumji* is necessary since only this may guarantee the help and blessings of our deities without which we cannot exist. Moreover, it ensures the well-being and cooperation of our Lamaserwa community here in Gompa Zhung just as it does in the case of all other communities in Solu-Khumbu where the *Dumji* is celebrated. As you have seen, the celebration of our *Dumji* brings us all together. And since it forces us to act as *chiwa* in this context at least once in our life-time we all contribute to be brought together at least on occasion of this annual festive event. Indeed, without the proper annual celebration of *Dumji* the continuity of our Buddhist religion and culture will be broken and as Sherpas we will be lost."³

Accordingly, I suggest that for the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community the *Dumji* festival can be understood as a 'ritual of unity and identity'.⁴ Over the course of the *Dumji* celebration membership in the local Sherpa community is celebrated and reaffirmed through the performance of festival patronage. As far as the process of identity building in Sherpa culture is concerned, which is primarily constituted within the local community, the *Dumji* patron, organizer, and steward assumes a key role. Due to this fact and the special merit that accrues to the *Dumji* patrons and their wives in organizing the *Dumji* festival the office of the patron has been held in high esteem not only in the past but also in the troubled times of the present.

In fact, the ritual enactment of the *Dumji* celebration and the patron's activities throughout offer a telling example of how the distinct tightly-knit social web typical of Sherpa Buddhist society is continuously created and renewed. It is a world in which people are closely interconnected and have ongoing mutual obligations. Since their early childhood Sherpa

³ His elaborate view summarizes the diverse answers to this important question that I obtained in the course of many interviews. A similar view has recently been expressed by Ngawang Karsang Sherpa, a young Sherpa who is studying at an important business school in Pennsylvania. Although he had spent most of his life, except his early years, away from Khumbu he has come back to Khumjung "...since it had become my responsibility to perform the festival." (2003:146–147. see p. 146).

⁴ Fr. Pommaret has analyzed the annual sacred dances in the Paro Valley in Bhutan, a territory which is represented by its local divinity. According to her these sacred dances reveal the identity of the people of the central valley of Paro (2002:175). For other valuable contributions regarding the question of identity building in the context of the worship of the local protector deities see cf. H. Diemberger (1994:144); M. Kind (2002:271, 285f.).

girls and boys are familiar with their major communal festival and its solemn performance, its origin and meaning, the different rituals and the sacred masked dances, the complex procedure of the 'long life' blessing and the religious merit that accrues from the participation in the festival. Moreover, as often as possible they have experienced the range of mundane enjoyments that go with it. At least once they have experienced the whole festival from the privileged perspective of a patron's family when it was either the father's or a close male relative's task to act as patron.

In two long appearances the young boys – but not the young girls – of the local community are even given their own role on stage in the context of the solemn *Dumji* celebration. Although inserted into the sequence of the sacred masked dances those two appearances taken as 'comical' or 'humorous' interludes are not considered as sacred dances.

While still unmarried young adults, girls and boys have helped at least one relative whose turn it was to act as patron or who was married to one of the patrons. Moreover, for them the festival represents a major opportunity for meeting partners of the opposite sex and for merry-making. As married adults they have to save for years to provide the means necessary for the inevitable duty to fulfill the task of the festival's patron when it is the husband's turn. For those Sherpas of the middle and the old generations who are simply off duty the festival provides the favorite time to meet others, engage in long conversations, drink *chang*, sing and dance while performing late at night the *shabru* (*zhabs bro*), the Sherpa round dance, around the pole which is at the center of the courtyard of the village temple. And as grandparents they give explanations to their grandchildren while watching over the correct performance of the sacred dances until in quite a few cases their liberal consumption of *chang* brings their capacity of concentration to an end. Often this leads to an interesting role reversal later at night when the small grandchild has to lead the drunk grandmother or grandfather through the darkness along the trail back home.

Chapter Seven

The present state of Sherpa culture, religion, and society

In the last three decades the Buddhist Sherpas have experienced tremendous economic success due to their advantageous integration into a globalized economy. Thus, the Sherpas have demonstrated their admirable capacity of agency and adaptation to novel conditions that had emerged from outside. However, R. Miller also hints at the other side of this truly remarkable coin noting: "From the standpoint of culture contact and culture change, the specialized Sherpa have been transformed into a peripheral and dependant segment of Western culture."¹ Seen from the peripheral Sherpas' view the monolithic dependence on the tourist, trekking, and mountaineering business within the globalized capitalist market is characterized by unpredictable, not understandable and uncontrollable ups and downs of the seemingly autonomous economic forces. It comes as no surprise that their strong unilateral dependence on the globalized capitalist market has not been felt among the Sherpas as long as the boom of the tourist business in Nepal continued. Due to their deliberate engagement in the flourishing tourist, trekking, and mountaineering industry in the 'Hindu Kingdom of Nepal' the Buddhist Sherpas have been, albeit economically, one of the nation-state's most powerful among the diverse ethnic and caste groups. As is noted by J.F. Fisher in 1988 Sherpa entrepreneurs were in control of almost half of the most important sector of the country's economy.²

Hence, as S.B. Ortner emphasizes the contemporary Sherpas certainly are not victim of 'world capitalist expansion'.³ On the contrary the Sherpas represent a striking example of a local people who according to M. Sahlins managed to integrate successfully the world system in their own 'system of the world'.⁴ In Ortner's words, the Sherpas' great capacity of agency and adaptation demonstrates their 'relative ability to control their own fates'.⁵ If this

¹ R. Miller (1997:22).

² J.F. Fisher (1990:115).

³ S.B. Ortner (1989:100).

⁴ M. Sahlins (1994:384).

⁵ S.B. Ortner (1989:100).

observation is also true of the future existence of Sherpa culture, religion, and society, however, remains an open question due to the increasing uncertainties which have strongly affected their everyday lives and livelihoods since the royal massacre of June 1st, 2001, and the events following September 11th, 2002.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable data of recent origin. It is a fact, however, that the tourist, trekking, and mountaineering industry in Nepal has been suffering an ongoing dramatic loss from which it will only recover if a lasting peace can be established in this war-torn country. According to my current findings that I collected in spring 2004 among different Sherpa trekking agents and in the Sherpa community center in Bodnath the segment of Nepal's tourist market that is currently controlled by Sherpa companies has been more or less the same since the time of J.F. Fisher's above-mentioned enquiry. But as profits have fallen dramatically since the middle of 2001 in the most important sector of Nepal's national economy, the whole tourist industry has been undergoing a profound structural transformation. This process is primarily reflected by the disappearance of many of the small companies that have been occupying a place in the middle range of the tourist business hierarchy. Moreover, many of the small shops, restaurants, lodges, and resorts have had to close down as well. Until the present day the bigger companies, especially those which are run in a joint venture with foreign partners, could make the best of the deplorable situation and thus have clearly the best chances to survive the current predicament.

Under closer scrutiny the encroachment of a novel political-economic order among the Sherpas has not only created considerable gain, but also significant loss. The Sherpas have gained predominantly on an individual level, and their gains concern solely the material aspect. The concomitant significant loss, however, can be witnessed on the level of their cultural and religious traditions as practiced and lived in the local community. Recently M.T. Kapstein has emphasized that religion in contemporary Tibet seems to provide a field in which the issue of identity 'is intensified and brought into full consciousness'.⁶ This observation applies as well to the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu who presently have to face a profound crisis. Three major reasons for this are the increasing predicament of their livelihoods due to the ongoing guerilla war, the loss of their cultural and religious traditions due to the adoption of those individualistic values characteristic of capitalist 'consumer culture', and the current increase of diasporic communities of a good part of primarily the male Sherpas of the middle generation both married and not yet married.

According to their traditional norms, material prosperity in the Tibetan culture area had to be translated into patronage for Buddhist institutions and their representatives. Accordingly,

⁶ M.T. Kapstein (1998:142).

some rich Sherpas at the beginning of the 20th century dedicated a significant portion of their accumulated wealth to the construction of monasteries, the upkeep of monastic communities, and to the sponsorship of someone's religious education. The rise of Buddhist monasticism among the Sherpas was a function of wealth that had been generated by new trade opportunities in India at the turn of the 20th century.⁷ Among the contemporary Sherpas, however, the readiness to accept the duty of a patron for the performance of the monastic festivals or for Buddhist institutions and the lamas, monks and nuns has been severely on the decline for about two decades, despite their increasing affluence made over that period.

S.F. Stevens quotes a recent saying in Khumbu that is illustrative of both the recent trend among the Sherpas and of the current predicament of Sherpa culture: "...whereas once, when a Sherpa became rich, he spent his money on religion (thus accruing merit for his rebirth), he now builds a new house."⁸ It is worth recalling that this fundamental change was realized by Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf. In his last book on the Sherpas entitled *The Sherpas Transformed* (1984) which depicts a rather pessimistic view on the profoundly changing Sherpa society he notes the considerable decrease in the efforts and resources spent on religious enterprises.⁹ This fact is wholly opposed to the Sherpas' 'generosity for religious purposes' that he had observed in his early ethnography.¹⁰ The latter had been written in full admiration of the natural, tough, unpretentious high-altitude mountain-dwellers whose depiction resemble J.-J. Rousseau's image of the 'natural man'.

For more than a decade the drastic decline or, in some cases, the disappearance of the necessary material support for the lamas and the upkeep of the monasteries is a constant complaint that has been raised over the years in our conversations by practically all of the Sherpa clerics.¹¹ In this respect Western and Japanese Buddhists today have almost fully replaced the Sherpas as sponsors. Presently almost all Sherpa monasteries are supported solely by foreigners.¹² Unlike the monastic communities the members of the local village

⁷ For this important chapter of recent Sherpa history refer to the works of S.B. Ortner (1989;1990).

⁸ S.F. Stevens (1993:196).

⁹ Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1989:12).

¹⁰ Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1964:131).

¹¹ In his *Monuments of Northern Nepal* published in 1981 C. Jest published his sobering diagnosis as to the future of the Sherpas' cultural heritage that today has lost none of its validity. According to Jest (1981:100) the Sherpas face a problem "...that has to be resolved, particularly with regard to the religious buildings and their communities. If these people suffer rapid and uncontrolled Westernization, their culture will quickly disappear."

¹² Hence the current processes of revitalization in the realm of Tibetan Buddhism already noted by Chr. von Furer-Haimendorf (1990) as can be witnessed in regard to the 'mushrooming' of monasteries in sacred places such as Bodnath (Helffer 1993). This seems to build on shallow ground as it does not emerge from 'within' their own culture but owes its visible success due to the support from the side of wealthy Western and Eastern

communities are not facing the same problem on occasion of the celebration of their major communal religious festivals. However, Western foreigners have always favored 'High Religion', certain high dignitaries, and elaborate and colourful monastic festivals. Contrary to this attitude Sherpa religious life as lived in local worlds has only seldom attracted more than casual interest from their side. Hence, for the latter realm there has never been and still is almost no support from Western foreigners.

Contemporary Sherpas have to face a dramatically altered way of life. The following letter to a former young American student who taught English for three months at Serlo monastery which I had to translate and write for a ten year old monk student mirrors the contemporary state of Sherpa society as scattered over a vast territory its new center being situated in the United States, especially in New York City.¹³ In this letter young Nuru Sherpa briefly describes, among other things, the current situation of his family: "My family is small. I have only father, mother, and a small sister. My grandpa and my grandma live in Loding, Solu [i.e. the village of the home of his family – E.B.]. My father, my mother, and my sister live in New York. I am the only son, I am a monk."

A corresponding view is seen from a different angle is given by another young Sherpa. Tenzing Gyazu Sherpa, originally from Namche Bazaar in Khumbu, now part of the Sherpa community in Oregon, has depicted the current rapid change in his place of origin from his far away US-perspective as follows:

"Indigenous people are becoming more sophisticated and more westernized; young-generations are gradually starting to dwell in different parts of the world. Numerous giant buildings have been constructed for the trekkers' and mountaineers' accommodation. Many western materials have been brought in, and not only the young generation but also the old people seem enthusiastic about using, learning and experimenting with them. (...) Trying to live between cultures, there have been a tremendous amount of changes in my life."¹⁴

Many Sherpas, especially those of the young generation both female and male, live up to new, i.e. modern, values and ideals due to contact with Westerners, the availability of modern

Buddhist sponsors.

¹³ According to the information I received over the years from the Sherpas living in New York City their local diasporic community numbers about a thousand people; for the performance of communal festivals they have a center of their own which they sometimes even call 'Sherpa gompa'.

¹⁴ Tenzing Gyazu Sherpa (1997:viii). He attended Portland State University in the late Nineties and worked simultaneously for the *Himalayan Research Bulletin* as Barbara Brower's editorial assistant.

education, modern medicine, and to novel role choices etc. Consequently, the modern values and ideals tend to replace those characteristic of traditional Sherpa culture and society. Instead of strengthening the traditional social network such as the old ones have done the modern values and ideals mainly serve to fortify individualistic motivations and tendencies. Hence nowadays, more and more Sherpas do not seem to be willing to devote a part of their resources to religious purposes as their parents and ancestors used to do.

These new conditions have also caused growing disparities within Sherpa society between the Sherpas who are engaged in and profit from the tourist business, and the Sherpas who continue to live in remote Solu-Khumbu, profit less or not at all from it, and keep celebrating the traditional religious festivals in their local community. Those involved in the trekking industry live mostly in urbanized areas in and around Kathmandu, and a still growing number of Sherpas join their urban community. Moreover, due to the ongoing and still increasing political turmoil that has reached Solu-Khumbu in the last four years more and more of those who have remained there currently try to escape from the growing uncertainties in remote high-altitude areas. Hence, currently Solu-Khumbu just like the regions of Helambu, Mustang or Dolpo has to face a massive wave of depopulation whereas the urban community centered around Bodnath in the Kathmandu valley is growing accordingly.

In their new social environment in the Kathmandu valley, far away from home, the Sherpas develop a modern individual life-style within the context of the nuclear family while joining the mainstream of modern Nepal. There they project themselves as modern Westernized Nepalis while they continue to celebrate *Losar*, the Tibetan New Year, and *Buddha Jayanti*, Buddha's Birthday, i.e. all those Buddhist festivals which are not associated with a specific locality and territory such as the *Dumji* festival. A significant feature of this ongoing and consequential metamorphosis is the domestic celebration of the main Hindu festivals such as Tihar and Dasain not as religious festivals but as national holidays. Many women enjoy the wearing of punjabi dresses instead of their traditional warm *chuba*, the long ankle-length robe that is bound around the waist by a long sash. Men, children and most of the teenage girls wear western-style clothing. Most important, however, is the fact that many parents speak to their children in Nepali, and consequently many children and teenagers are no longer capable to speak their native language properly and to communicate with their relatives who keep on living in remote Solu-Khumbu and still speak Sherpa. Moreover, in the last decade quite a few Sherpas, especially of the young generation, have joined diasporic communities in the West, mainly in the United States (the main places being in New York, in California and in Oregon). There many of them settle down on a more or less permanent basis.

Due to these manifold changes many Sherpas increasingly lose contact with their particular local high-altitude community in Solu-Khumbu where they have their 'roots'. In fact, the

center of their lives and livelihoods has shifted from their traditional world to far-away places in other worlds with a dominant culture alien to them, be it Hinduism in Kathmandu or versions of more or less secularized Christianity in the West. It is there that they have, and mostly also want, to make their new living which implies new social engagements and new corresponding financial obligations. Once out of their traditional socio-cultural context and instead within a modern setting there is seemingly no real reward for acting as a patron for the performance of their local festivals in remote high-altitude Solu-Khumbu. Whereas in Solu-Khumbu the weight of this decision is felt far more. Nevertheless, Sherpas tend to withdraw from the social obligations which still bind them to their local Sherpa community. This current trend is testified by the fact that according to my findings the readiness of the Sherpas to act as patron in support of both their religious establishments and their religious practitioners as well as their communal celebrations has been severely on the decline in the last years.

One obvious result of these fundamental changes is outstanding in its weight: The finely knit web of interconnectedness that has characterized the world of traditional village life among the Sherpas currently seems in danger of falling apart. At the same time there seems to be no remedy in sight yet because presently a continuously increasing number of Sherpas try to escape from the constraints of remote high-altitude village life and its chain of ongoing mutual obligations. Traditionally, Sherpa identity was based on an association with a distinct geographical area and articulated through the performance of cults of the local and territorial deities as has been demonstrated in the case of the *Dumji* celebration in Gompa Zhung. Those local cults, however, have at best only a limited relevance outside of their local community. For members of the young generation who have been educated in the Kathmandu valley or abroad and have never or barely lived in the remote territory of their ancestors these cults are difficult to understand and are less likely to be appreciated as the core of their own Sherpa Buddhist identity.

All the various aspects outlined above mirror the fact that the Sherpas currently have to wrestle with the complexity of the great changes that are currently transforming their religion, culture, and society. Their obvious gains notwithstanding certain consequences of the Sherpas' specific encounter with modernity also pose a serious threat to the future of the living Sherpa Buddhist tradition.

Conclusion

To summarize, the ritual performance of the *Dumji* masked dance festival represents a key socio-religious institution which integrates the individual members of the local community into one common frame of action. It establishes an alliance between the local people, certain high gods and the local and territorial divinities – an alliance which has to be purified and reaffirmed annually, thereby renewing the forces of fertility and prosperity. The celebration allows the local community to define itself as an autonomous social unit of Sherpa society as well as an integral part of Tibetan Buddhism. In consequence, the annual grand performance, including the staging of the sacred masked dances, continuously creates and renews their unity thus giving an identity to the celebrating community that is based on its own history and is rooted in its territory. Moreover, the existing religious and social order is reaffirmed and strengthened in this ritual context.

Accordingly, the *Dumji* festival serves an important social function especially today, in the current situation of a more and more felt deep crisis, about the preservation of Sherpa religion, culture, and society. Presently, the Sherpas have to wrestle with at least two kinds of radical changes within the larger political framework of the Hindu nation-state which are due to two entirely different processes. One has been of their own making. It is articulated by the rapid rise from being traditional high-altitude agro-pastoralists and traders to their successful engagement in Nepal's globalized trekking and mountaineering industry.¹

The recent dispersion of a growing number of Sherpas to far-away places such as Kathmandu, London or New York and the concomitant shift in values and ideals is mirrored by the currently increasing withdrawal of those Sherpas who have made a fortune from their customary social obligation to act as donor on behalf of the monasteries and their respective monk or nun communities. It has to be recalled that since their emergence from the beginning of the 20th century onwards monastic establishments and the communities of celibate lamas, monks, and nuns have always been strongly dependent upon lay sponsorship from the side

¹ The tourist, trekking and mountaineering business kept flourishing until 2000/01 when Western media began to report more steadily on the Maoist insurgency, and it reached almost a break-down in 2001 after the events of the 11th of September, without having the chance until the present day to recover from that deplorable state.

of wealthy 'big men'.² Today, however, the monasteries are almost all more or less fully supported either by Western or Japanese individuals and/or organizations.³

In contrast to the currently decreasing patronage of their monastic institutions from the side of the Sherpas themselves, which depends on the individual's free decision, it represents a social obligation towards one's own clan community to act as donor on behalf of the communal religious festivals such as the *Dumji* celebration at least once in a life-time. It is the fulfillment of this obligation that guarantees the maintenance of one's community membership. Nevertheless, also the different village temple committees where the *Dumji* festival is held have to cope with increasing problems which are felt when the traditionally fixed set of patrons for the enactment of the following year's celebration has to be designated.

The main reason for these difficulties consists in the fact that at present more and more Sherpas have their center of life in places far away from their local community in Solu-Khumbu where they have their roots. Due to these new circumstances those Sherpas are often not able to personally fulfill their customary obligations at a fixed date that is not of their own choice. Since it happens more and more often that someone simply cannot meet his obligation to act as patron in this context one resorts to a customary device and sends a representative in his stead. In most cases this representative is a sister or brother. In this way one makes sure that although one cannot participate personally one's community membership is maintained. It seems to be due primarily to this specific personal motivation resulting from the social obligation to fulfill the task of festival patronage once or twice in a life-time in order to maintain one's community membership that the proper celebration of the *Dumji* is guaranteed also in the present world of dramatically increasing crisis. Thus, the preservation of both their particular local tradition and its core element and of Sherpa Buddhist culture and society in general is ensured even during the troubled times of today.⁴

The second process, however, has been invading Sherpa Buddhist society over the last four years from the outside, through the growing violence following the expansion of the Maoist insurgency. Currently, the latter profoundly shatters the order of Sherpa Buddhist

² For this important chapter of recent Sherpa history see S.B. Ortner (1989: 99–149).

³ According to my recent findings presently there are only the two Sherpa village *gompas* each at Rimishung in Pharak and at Goli in Solu that are supported solely by the local Sherpas themselves. In the case of Rimishung the bulk of the material support is being provided by the village lama who for about fifteen years successfully has run a meditation center in Taiwan whereas in Goli, formerly a village of rich traders, the village community itself still takes care of their religious establishments.

⁴ All interviewed Sherpas clearly expressed this deeply felt concern emphasizing that without the celebration of the *Dumji* festival the future of Sherpa society as is lived in the locality as well as of Sherpa Buddhism in general will be in serious danger.

culture and society as lived in the village community and thus confronts the Sherpas with a world of growing uncertainties hitherto unknown to them. At the same time the pursuit of the Hindu state policy as far as the Buddhist high-altitude areas are concerned has always been and still remains one of more or less blatant neglect.⁵

According to my findings there is at the moment a rising awareness among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu concerning the grave problems which currently affect their culture, religion and society. But most probably it will take them some time to find appropriate solutions at a time when they have to cope not only with one but with several kinds of waves of serious change. When asked about this currently growing predicament both Sherpa monastic clerics and village lamas are fully aware of the Sherpas' present difficult circumstances which are understood as a clear indication of the 'degenerate times' as are characteristic of our present era. But regardless of all these difficulties, without exception, all have been expressing a strong optimism regarding the future of Sherpa Buddhist culture and society. Their optimism seems to be justified by the fact that hitherto the Sherpas' rotation system of the patrons of the *Dumji* ceremony has kept working. In fact, until the present day there has not been one reported case of a Sherpa in Solu-Khumbu who had flatly refused to act as patron or who had simply not shown up in his locality for the performance of this communal duty.

Moreover, the village lamas keep referring to the Sherpas' long history of migration which was possible only because of their high capacity of adapting successfully to novel conditions, even in our era when Sherpas in growing numbers migrate to Western countries and to Japan. According to my informants, their past has clearly shown that the annual and correct celebration of the *Dumji* festival has been the appropriate powerful ritual means in Sherpa history, thanks to which all evil had been successfully averted from the local community up to the present day. Indeed, its ritual performance will be of utmost importance especially at times of growing political conflict and economic crisis such as in our present era. Hence, in their view the Sherpas will also be able to master the profoundly changed conditions of today provided they continue to firmly stick to their traditions which are rooted in Tibetan Buddhism.

It is this view that has been expressed to me by both the village lamas of Gonpa Zhung and of four other localities where I was fortunate to have seen the *Dumji* performance. A great number of laypeople whom I had the opportunity to interview articulated more or less the same attitude. Their optimistic view is shared, among others, by the Sherpas' spiritual

⁵ In fact, like so many other local communities in the remote areas of Nepal the Sherpas feel 'sandwiched' between the Maoists who exert their 'rule' primarily at night while the 'Royal army' shows up in the remote areas once or twice a year killing some of the insurgents and beating heavily up those who had been forced by brutal means to 'support' the guerilla.

authority, Trulzhig Rinpoche XI, the highly venerated abbot of Thubten Chöling monastery situated just an hour's walk north of Gonpa Zhung.⁶ The representative of the Dzarongphu tradition and leading dignitary of the Nyingma school has been active in strengthening Sherpa Buddhism for almost two decades. Among other things, this master has been instrumental in recruiting a young generation of Sherpas to be initiated by the old tantric village lama of Gonpa Zhung into the meditative and ritual cycles, such as those of the *Dumji* celebration, which solely a lay tantric lama with his assistants has to perform on behalf of his local community. Initiatives such as this one are of particular urgency since Lama Tenzing, who will pass away in the not too distant future, represents one of the last of the fully trained lay tantric practitioners of his profession in the Solu region.⁷

⁶ In our conversations this eminent master of the 'Old Translation School' also kept referring to the dangers of Mongol invasions of Tibet that lasted for several centuries, and the Chinese take-over of the Land of Snows – both of which did not succeed in eradicating neither Tibetan culture, in general, nor Tibetan Buddhism, in particular.

⁷ Ironically, the current disappearance of the lay tantric practitioners among the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu is due, among other things, to the general moves from the side of the monks 'to disparage the married lamas' and to their specific suggestions "...that monks could do a better job with Dumji..." , as S.B. Ortner put it in her most recent and most probably last work on the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu (1999:174).

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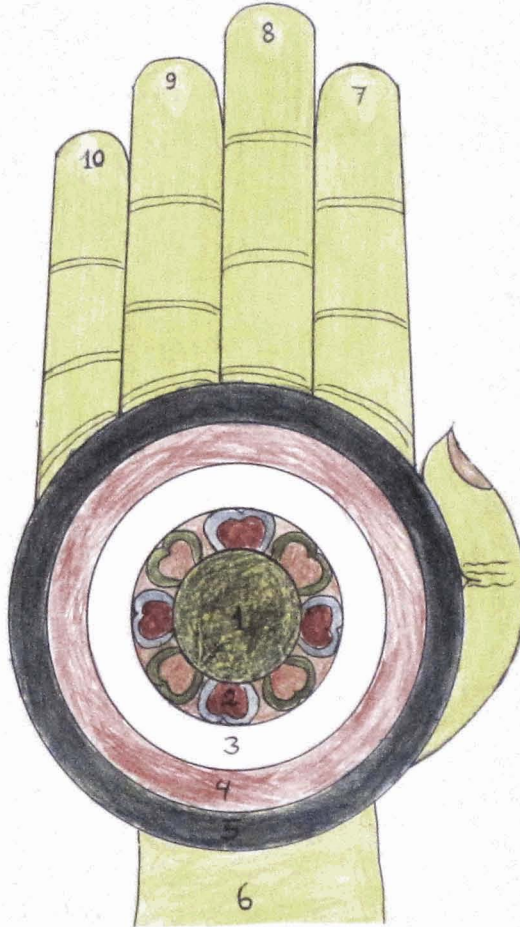
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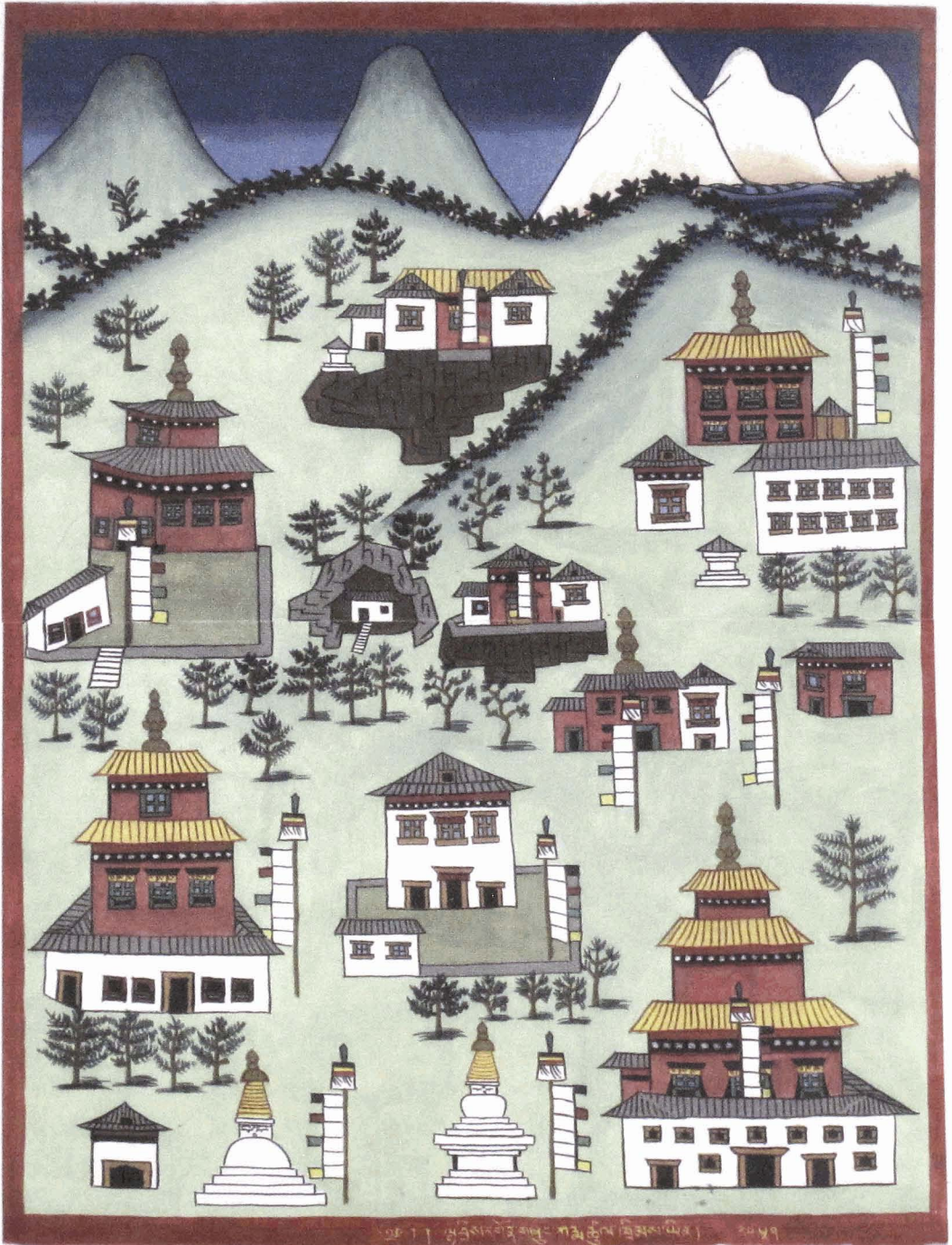
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Appendix



A. The maṇḍala of the *gyebshi* (Tib. *brgya bzhi*) or 'Ritual of the Four Hundred'
 No. 1: the 'ransom' (*glud*) to be offered to the evil spirits; No. 2: yellow colour – a hundred stūpas for the *phung po'i bdud*; No. 3: white colour – a hundred *torma* (Tib. *gtor ma*) for the *lha'i po bdud*; No. 4: red colour – a hundred butter-lamps (Tib. *mar me*) for the *nyon mong pa'i bdud*; No. 5: blue colour – a hundred small 'ransom' effigies (Tib. *ngar glud*) each consisting of a pair of sacrificial dough cakes – one represents the male, the other the female form for the *'chi bdag gi bdud*; No. 6: the statue of Buddha *Śākyamuni* placed on the wrist of the right hand; No. 7: seat of the *phung po'i bdud*; No. 8: seat of the *'chi bdag gi bdud*; No. 9: seat of the *nyon mong pa'i bdud*; No. 10: seat of the *lha'i po bdud*



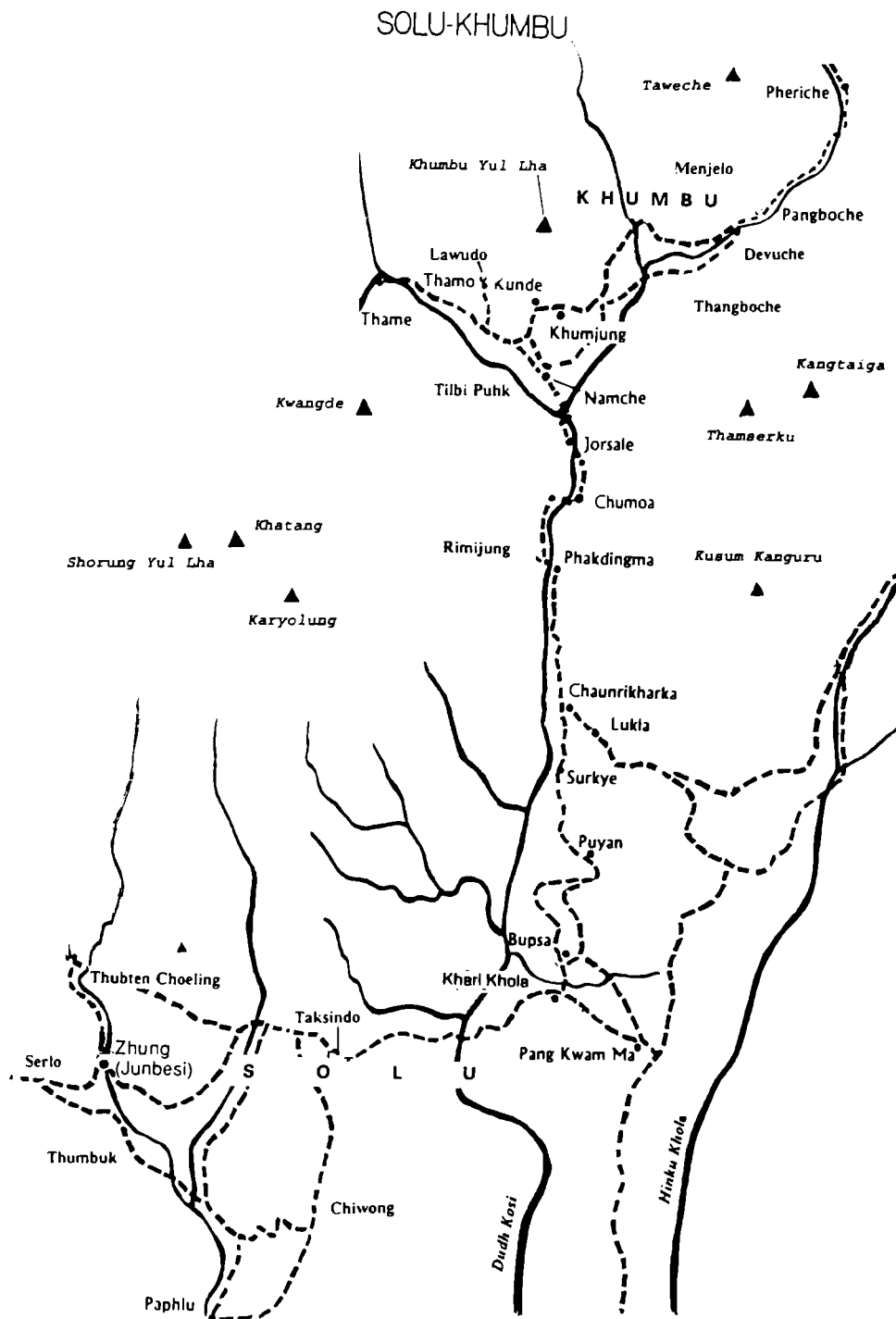
B. Painted scroll showing the sacred landscape of the Lamaserwa clan and the diverse religious monuments, the major one being the village temple of Gonpa Zhung (lower right corner). To the left of it is the stūpa containing the relics of the ancestor Dorje Zangbu



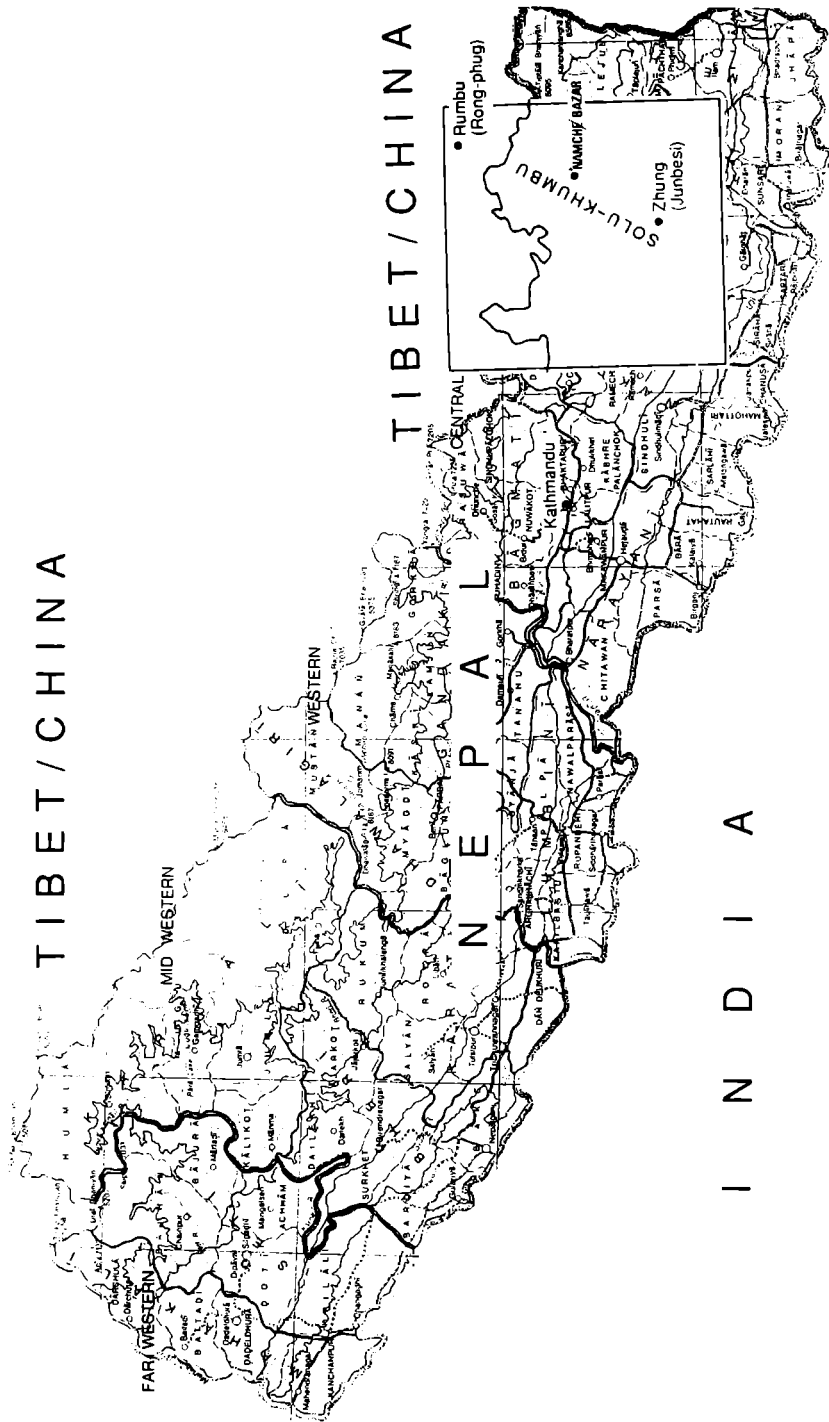
C. Painted scroll depicting Lumo Karmo, the Nāgā goddess, in the spring in her holy grove



D. Painted scroll depicting Shorong Yüllha, the male protector deity of the Solu region

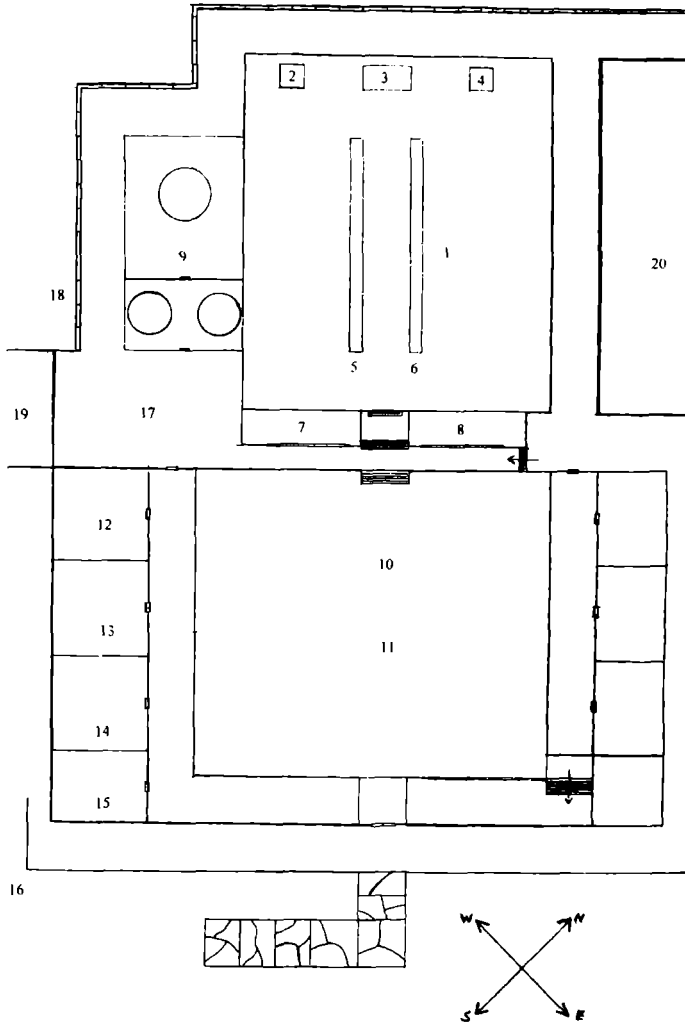


E. Sketch of Solu-Khumbu, the territory of the Sherpas in northeastern Nepal (expanded and modified version of a drawing contained in E. Brooks 1992, p. 14)



F. Map of Nepal and adjacent countries indicating the region of Solu-Khumbu (based on 'Nepal', Survey Dept. HMG, Nepal 1987)

Sketch of the village temple of Gonpa Zhung



G. No. 1: village temple of Gonpa Zhung; No. 2: statue of Pawa Cherenzig (Tib. 'Phags pa sPyan ras gzigs) or Avalokiteśvara; No. 3: statue of Buddha Śākyamuni; No. 4: statue of Padmasambhava; Nos. 5 and 6: the two tables used by the officiants during the performance of ceremonies; Nos. 7 and 8: the two niches where the officiants are seated during public ritual performances; No. 9: the room housing a big and two small maṇi wheels; No. 10: the temple courtyard used for public ritual performances (size: 12m x 11m); No. 11: the central pole in the courtyard; Nos. 12–15: each of the four rooms situated on the gallery surrounding the courtyard on three sides is occupied by the family of one of the four *Dumji* patrons; No. 16: terrace on the slope where the village temple complex is constructed; No. 17: yard to be used for the preparations of communal ceremonies; No. 18: the wall facing the slope of the hillock that protects and stabilizes the



Signboard showing Zhung or Junbesi Gonpa in the center of the local trail network



Partial view of the village temple as seen through a small opening in the tent used during the *Dumji* festival for the protection of the officiants, the masked dancers in particular, and the *gyebshi* altar against hail, rain, snow, and wind



Signboard above the temple door indicating its full name and the date of its foundation



Two monks on the temple roof each blowing a telescopic long-horn as the first music instrument to signal the beginning of the sacred masked dances held on the third day



Two monks on the temple roof each blowing an oboe as the second instrument to signal the beginning of the sacred masked dances held on the third day



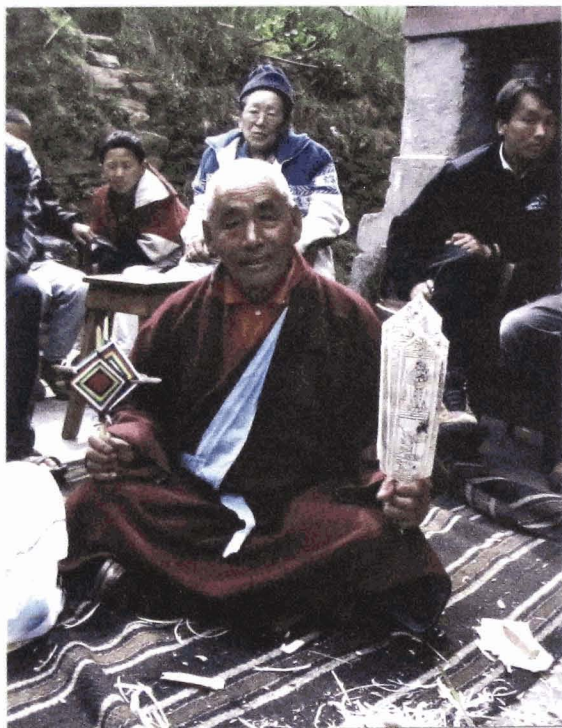
Two monks on the temple roof each blowing a telescopic long-horn to signal the beginning of the 'long life' empowerment ceremony held on the fourth day



The crafting of the *zandre* (Tib. *za 'dre*) effigy to be used in the expulsion ritual on the third day



The crafted *zandre* effigy including the three 'thread-crosses'



A senior officiant holds three small 'thread-crosses' and three printed papers containing astrological data



The two effigies embodying the Sherpa couple that symbolizes the *Dumji* patrons who represent the celebrating Lamaserwa clan community. The two effigies will be given as 'ransom' to the evil spirits who molest the local community



The full maṇḍala of the *gyebshi* (Tib. *brgya bzhi*) or 'Ritual of the Four Hundred' arranged in the center of the temple courtyard

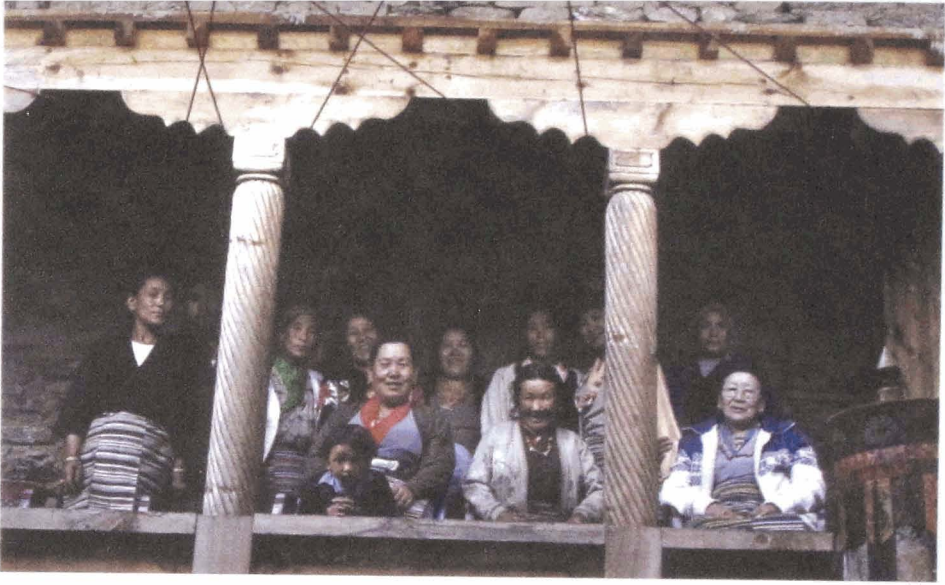


The *Dumji* patrons performing the major *yangdzi* (*g.yang rdzas*) offering to the protective deities.



The leading senior officiants of the *Dumji* celebration presided over by the tantric village lama (on the right)





A group of Sherpanis on the gallery observing the ritual proceedings



Sherpani performing a *yangdzi* offering to welcome the main Black Hat dancer



The main Black Hat dancer in full motion



The tantric 'master of the ceremony' (right) and his assistant chanting the 'wrathful' part of the basic liturgy



A Black Hat in the temple storeroom



Black Hat dancer

The tantric 'master of the ceremony' performing a short Black Hat dance



The dancers embodying the protective deities that figure prominently in the masked dances after their performances take a rest having lifted up their masks



The tantric 'master of the ceremony' giving the blessing of 'long life' to the individual participants





Member of the audience seated on the gallery

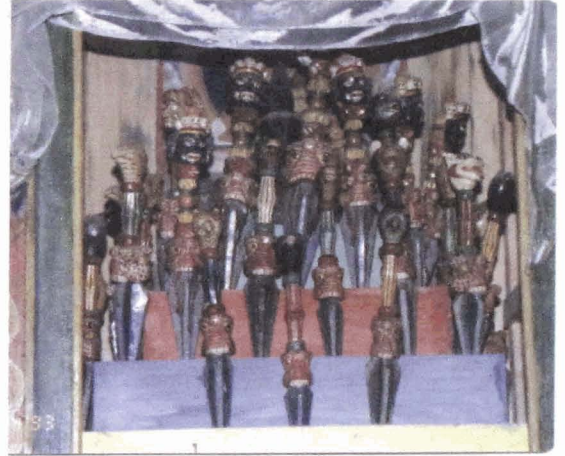




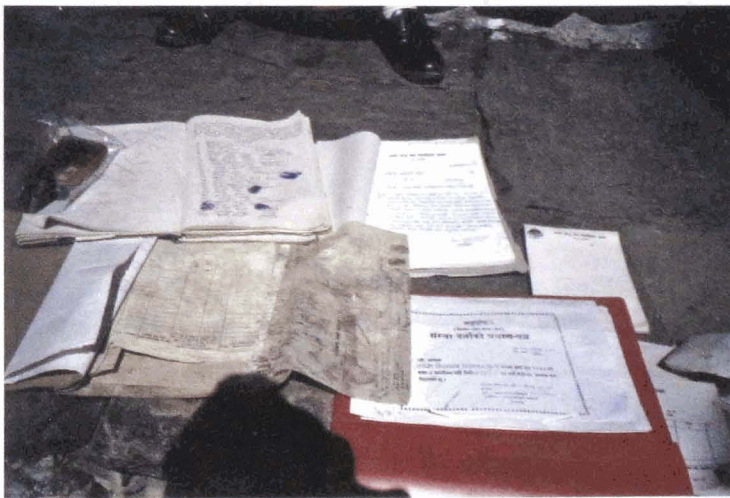
Two laymen each performing the meritorious task of blowing the telescopic long-horn



After having created the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya and covered it the tantric 'master of the ceremony' and his assistant take a tea-break



The ritual daggers called *phur bu* representing the entourage of Vajrakīlaya, the tutelary deity, to be used in its cult



The register of the *Dumji* patrons