

EDITORIAL

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Editor

This issue

It is our pleasure at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology to publish this special issue of the Bulletin of Tibetology with the theme: Contributions to Sikkimese History. Its four articles, which I hope will interest local as much as foreign readers, cover various periods and topics:

The first by Franz-Karl Ehrhard relates the late 15th and early 16th century visits and activities of Kaḥ thog pa lamas in the Himalayan valleys of Sikkim and Bhutan. The author suggests that the first representatives of the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa had their residences in both Sikkim and Bhutan, and became influential in these regions at about the same time. It is indeed little known that bSod nams rgyal mtshan, a lama from Eastern Tibet, had opened the "western gate" (nub sgo) of the hidden valley of Sikkim (dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs) in the late 1400s. Better known are the openings of the hidden land, first by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337-1408) and later by lHa btsun chen po nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597-1650). The latter is generally thought of as having permanently opened the hidden valley of Sikkim because his sub-school of the rNying ma pa gained a wide presence in the area and was instrumental in the establishment of Sikkim as a political entity.

The second article by Alex McKay is about the education of Sidkeon Tulku (1879-1914), the 10th Chogyal of Sikkim who ruled for less than a year before dying in mysterious circumstances. Despite his short rule, Sidkeon Tulku is still admired and remembered for thinking ahead of his time and introducing a number of reforms in an attempt to reduce the feudal conditions in the kingdom and improve the level of education. For example, already as crown prince, he concentrated his efforts on the abolition of salutation by prostration before kajis (landlords) and ordinary lamas, the abolition of fraternal polyandry, the education of women and the compulsory education of kajis' sons. His Oxford education undoubtedly influenced him in this direction, and I am certain Sikkimese will enjoy reading about their former king's tour around the world, British education and search for a suitable bride.

The third contribution by Saul Mullard relates the history of the Brag dkar pa family, better known locally as the Yangthang Kajis of West Sikkim, and discusses the nature of their ancestors' 18th century alliances with the Sikkimese Chogyals. Having been deputed from Tibet, Ka rma dar rgyas brag dkar pa had assisted the Sikkimese during the first Bhutanese war of the early 18th century by acting as general of the Sikkimese forces, pushing back the Bhutanese and maintaining the independence of Sikkim while the king had taken refuge in Tibet. He was then rewarded with a very large estate in today's district of West Sikkim. Later in the same century when Sikkim came under a renewal of military pressure from both Bhutan and Nepal, the Brag dkar pa family again demonstrated its support and loyalty to the Chogyal. Using original documents, the author explains how the earlier grant of land served as an emotional bond that helped secure the family's political alliance despite the fortunes or misfortunes of the Sikkimese state and its military campaigns.

The fourth article by Jackie Hiltz brings us to the 20th century when "the last Chogyal, or king of Sikkim, Palden Thondup Namgyal (1923-1981), and others led domestic efforts to create and shape a national identity for the kingdom, namely, an identity embraced by the multi-ethnic people of Sikkim and accepted as the foundation for a collective interest". The author describes the various methods used in this effort and the obstacles that were encountered at the time. Such an effort may today seem a utopian endeavour considering that Sikkim's ethnic communities have not been so much united in recent times. However, the following comments written by the British botanist Joseph Hooker in 1855 suggest that the Chogyal's effort were not baseless and perhaps rooted in the kingdom's recent multi-ethnic memory on which he hoped to build a national identity: "That six or seven different tribes, without any feudal system or coercive head, with different languages and customs, should dwell in close proximity and in peace and unity, within the confined territory of Sikkim, even for a limited period, is an anomaly... the fact remains no less remarkable, that at the period our occupying Dorjiling, friendship and unanimity reigned amongst all the tribes; from the Tibetan at 14,000 feet, to the Mechi of the plains..." (Himalayan Journals, 1855 [1987], pp.131-132).

The Bulletin

This is the third issue of the Bulletin of Tibetology since it was re-launched in 2002, and the second focusing more or less exclusively on Sikkim. The contents of future issues will now be broadened to include the Eastern Himalayas and other subjects of Tibetan Studies. We hope that these two special issues on Sikkim will have sparked some interest in Sikkimese Studies. These were sent out free of charge to a number of people and institutions in order to re-introduce the Bulletin and encourage subscriptions. We would like to thank all those who responded for their much appreciated subscriptions and encourage others, especially university libraries, to do so (please see included subscription form). Past issues (1964-2003) may also be ordered. Their contents can now be found on the Institute's web-site under publications (www.tibetology.com).

In the last issue, vol. 39 (1), we published an article by Martin J Boord entitled *A Pilgrim's guide to the Hidden Land of Sikkim proclaimed as a treasure by Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can*. The following publication should have been listed in the bibliography since the same text, along with a translation and an introduction, can be found on pp. 202-224: Katia Buffetrille, *Pèlerins, lamas et visionnaires: sources orales et écrites sur les pèlerinages tibétains*, Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, Wien 2000. We apologise for the error and will be publishing in the upcoming issue, vol. 40 (1), a follow up by Katia Buffetrille entitled: *Pilgrimage and incest: the case of mChod rten nyi ma*.

For those intending to submit an article for publication, please use the Wylie method in transliterating Tibetan words. The Bulletin's style in rendering the Wylie method is as follow: 1. Names of people and places: first radical letter in capitals, no italics. 2. Titles of texts and teachings: first radical letter in capitals, in italics. 3. Text translations: italics with no capitals. 4. All other words: no italics, no capitals.

News and research

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) would like to encourage and assist Ph.D. level students and senior scholars in carrying out field research in Sikkim. Sikkimese Studies are indeed in their infancy and

we would particularly welcome research in Lepcha ethnography and ethno-botany. Other areas we would encourage are archaeology, ethnology, history, linguistics, art history, medical anthropology and Buddhist studies. For example, the Sikkimese dialect of Tibetan has never been studied, many periods of Sikkimese history have never been addressed and most cultures of Sikkim multi-ethnic society remain largely undocumented.

Saul Mullard, Ph.D. student from Oxford currently affiliated to the Institute, is carrying out research on the formation of the Sikkimese state while training NIT staff in basic research methodology and translation. We hope others will join him in helping us establish Sikkimese Studies and develop the Institute's activities.

Ongoing projects at the Institute include: 1) the monastery project, 2) the Sikkim video archive project, and 3) the historical photographs project. With the first, NIT staff are currently documenting the social history of Sikkim's 60-odd monasteries. In the second, filmmaker Dawa Lepcha is producing a video record of Lepcha social life and ritual over a period of many months under the supervision of visual anthropologist Asen Balikci. Over 60 hours worth of video has already been exposed in the Lepcha reserve of Dzongu in North Sikkim and a first film is currently being edited. In the third project, over 1500 historical photographs of Sikkim dating from the 1890s until the 1970s have been digitised from collections held in Sikkim and abroad. It is hoped that the audio-visual material assembled from both the video and photographic projects will soon be displayed in the Institute's museum.

The museum was recently renovated while maintaining its original style, and its collection catalogued. We would welcome art history students who wish to work on the Institute's collection which was assembled in the early 1960s thanks to the generosity of Tibetans and prominent Sikkimese families including the royalty who entrusted their valuable icons to the Institute for safe-keeping.