

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

ANNA BALIKCI-DENJONGPA  
*Research Coordinator*  
*Namgyal Institute of Tibetology*

## THIS ISSUE

Following His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama's suggestion, this issue is the second of two focusing on the lives and legacies of those Tibetan lamas who came to Sikkim. Also included are articles exploring historical ties of other nature between Sikkim and Tibet.

The first article, *The garden of liberation: a brief account of the manner in which, in the celestial realm of Sikkim, the sNang Sog Gong lineage spread and the 5th Dalai Lama left his mark on the rNying ma teachings* (in Tibetan) is by Khenpo L Tshering, Principal of Gangtok's Nyingma college. The article explores the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's critical views regarding the contributions of three sixteenth and seventeenth century Nyingma lamas—Nangtse Tertön Zhigpo Lingpa, Sogdogpa Kyedup Lodro Gyaltsen and Gongra Lochen Zhanphan Dorje—who made contributions to the establishment of Buddhism in Sikkim and whose ritual texts are still in use in Sikkim today. These views are explored in the context of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's exchanges with his guru Changdak Pema Thinley. This article is a summary of a forthcoming book by the same author.

The following three articles, *Short biographies of three Tibetan lamas and their activities in Sikkim*, by Tsultsem Gyatso Acharya, present the lives and activities of three Tibetan lamas who made contributions to Buddhism in Sikkim: the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and his predecessors, Sakya Trichen (Sa skya gong ma sGrol ma pho brang) and the *rimed* master Jamyang Kyentse Chokyi Lodro ('Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse Chos kyi blo gros).

The fifth article, *Tibetan masters and the formation of the sacred site of Tashiding* by Mélanie Vandenhelsken and Hissey Wongchuk, in a first section, explores the early emergence of Tashiding as the meeting place between Tibet and Sikkim followed by a description of the site's sacred geography and contributions of its founding lamas. Interestingly, this history is reflected in the monastery's current ritual calendar where both the Chang ter (Byang gter) tradition introduced by

Rigzin Goddem (Rig 'dzin rgod ldem) and the Mindrolling Dzogchen (sMing grol gling rDzogs chen) tradition introduced by Lhatsun Chenpo (lHa btsun chen po) are represented and peacefully coexist. In a second section, the author presents the lives and contributions of three Tibetan masters who left their mark on the monastery in later years, Jamyang Chokyi Lodroe (bLa ma 'Jam dbyangs chos kyi blo gros, 1893-1959), Chaktag Rinpoche (lCags thag rin po che, end of nineteenth century-1957) and Chorten monastery's Khandro Pema Dechen (mKha' 'gro Padma bde chen, 1923-2006).

The sixth article (in French) *Women in the diplomatic game: Preliminary notes on the matrimonial link of the Sikkim royal family with tibet (13<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries)* by Alice Travers explores the nature and evolution of the matrimonial alliances between the Namgyal dynasty of Sikkim and their ancestors, and the aristocratic families of Tibet. Starting with Kye Bumsa's (Gyad 'bum bsags) 13<sup>th</sup> century marriage with the daughter of the hierarch of Sakya and concluding with Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal's first marriage in 1950 to Sangay Dekila, daughter of the Samdrup Phodang family, the author lists some twenty such matrimonial alliances over the centuries which greatly influenced the development of Sikkim's relations with both Tibet and British India. The analysis of these relations reveals a gradual rise in the social status of the brides' Tibetan families and a shift from southern and western religious families to central Tibetan lay families a few decades after the establishment of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's Lhasa government in 1642. This shift towards alliances with higher Lhasa families occurs at a crucial moment in the context of political relations between Sikkim, Tibet and British India. As an example, the author explains how Yeshe Dolma, wife of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal, played an important diplomatic role at the turn of the twentieth century. After Sikkim was officially recognised as a protectorate of British India in 1890, and following the Younghusband expedition of 1904, the social status of the Tibetan brides rose even further, suggesting that their presence was necessary in order to counteract British influence in Sikkimese affairs and reaffirm Sikkim's traditional identity in the face of a very powerful British overlord. Similarly, Sikkimese princesses progressively married into the highest central Tibetan families. From the Tibetan viewpoint, sending brides of the highest nobility to Sikkim was a way of ensuring good relations with Sikkim and consequently with powerful British India. As for the British, tolerating these alliances provided a line of communication with the Tibetan elite and thus an additional avenue for diplomatic relations. The article concludes with

an analysis of the key role played by the Taring family, an offshoot of the Namgyals, within these diplomatic relations.

This issue is completed by the obituaries of Khandro Rinpoche Pema Dechen (1923-2006), better known in Gangtok as Chorten monastery Khandrola and Eleanor Hopkinson (1905-2007), wife of the last British Political Officer in residence in Sikkim.

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