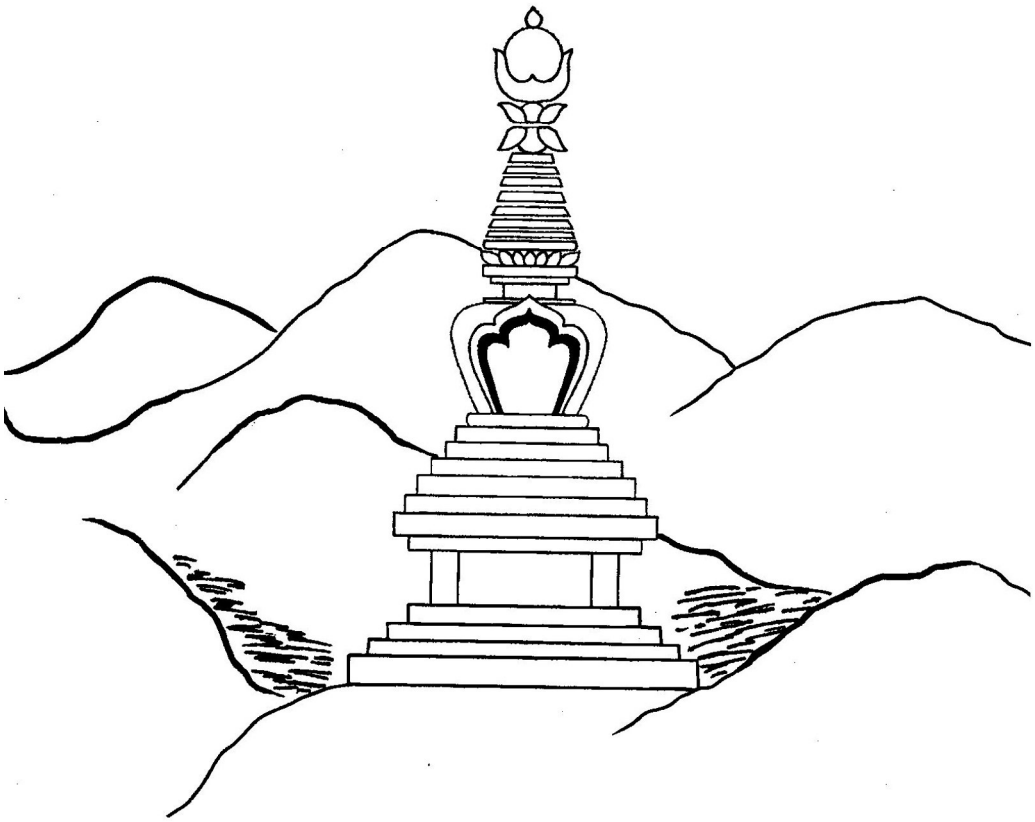
# Bulletin of Tibetology



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*Special Issue*

2014

NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY
GANGTOK, SIKKIM

The Bulletin of Tibetology seeks to serve the specialist as well as the general reader with an interest in the field of study. The motif portraying the Stupa on the mountains suggests the dimensions of the field.

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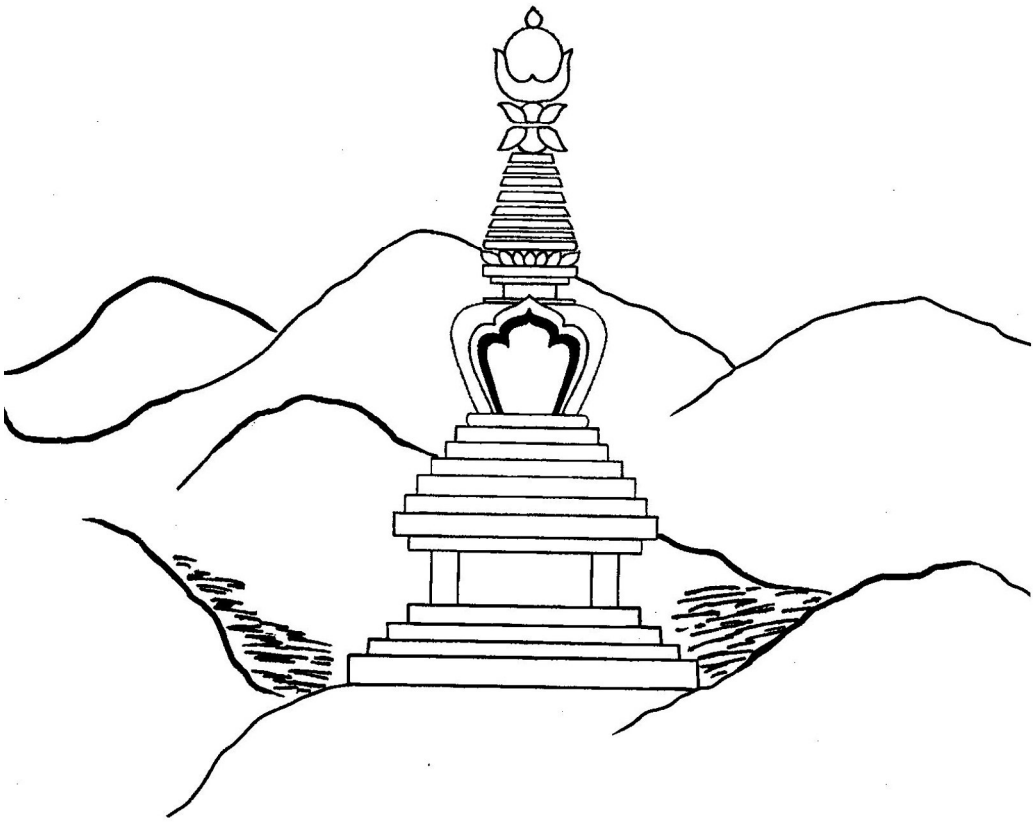

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BULLETIN OF TIBETOLOGY

Volume 50 Number 1 & 2 2014

**SERIES 2**

# THE DRAGON AND THE HIDDEN LAND: SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL STUDIES ON SIKKIM AND BHUTAN

BHUTAN-SIKKIM PANEL HELD AT THE 13TH SEMINAR OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TIBETAN STUDIES, ULAAN BATAAR, MONGOLIA, 2013

CONTENTS

# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

# EXPLORING THE BHUTAN-SIKKIM HIMALAYAS: ON RESEARCH, INTERACTIONS, AND ORIGIN MYTHS

JENNY BENTLEY
*Namgyal Institute of Tibetology/University of Zürich*

After a first special issue on the Bhutan-Sikkim interface (Mullard 2010), we yet again revisit the crossroads of these two neighbouring states nestled in the southern slopes of the mighty Eastern Himalayas. With their vulnerable positions between China and India, Bhutan and Sikkim have negotiated similar obstacles in the past, but also developed differently. Their shared history is complex, at times hostile and conflict-laden, at others more peaceful. Both states were involved in violent conflicts not only with each other, but also with the neighbouring states of Tibet, Nepal, and later colonial India. There were also more constructive exchanges and interactions between the two states and their neighbours Nepal and Tibet – such as trade, religious ties, and feudal (marriage) alliances. The arrival of the British in the region, the colonial encounters, and the development of modern nation-states then carved out new international borders. Incidents in recent history radically redefined the power structures in and around these two states. While Bhutan remained independent, the mighty neighbour to the north, Tibet, was annexed by China in 1959 and Sikkim became a state of India in 1975. In 1962, the Sino-Indian war militarised large stretches of the mountains (Gellner 2013). Within this turmoil, Bhutan and Sikkim increasingly developed stable and fruitful relations in the twentieth century.

The relations between the states as well as between the states and their citizens reflect one aspect of the lives of these southern Himalayan people. The populations in the Eastern Himalayan region formed and still continue to form different relations to the respective states or proto-states that influenced their livelihood, self-perception, and also their actual place of residence – especially during times of war, political suppression, or economic change. At the same time, these populations stayed somewhat aloof of state-power – sometimes specifically by moving away from the localised areas of control or

avoiding public forms of cultural objectification.[1] It needs to be added that until the nineteenth century large tracts of the Bhutan-Sikkim interface lacked "definite demarcation of state authority" (Mullard 2013: 202). As an example, central control of the Sikkimese state was weak and confined to certain locations. Specific regions, presently situated on the borders between India, Sikkim (as an Indian state), Bhutan, and the Autonomous Region of Tibet (China) – such as the Chumbi Valley or modern Kalimpong (previously the Lepcha chieftain of Dámsáng) – experienced leaders with shifting or multiple allegiances and accompanying conflicts.

The quality of state control has strengthened in the past two centuries. The state, the political histories of the place, the power structures, and the inherent modalities of recognition and inequality impact the every-day lives of the people, their self-perception, and their understanding of the national 'other'. With militarisation and amplified territorial control, state borders have increasingly become separating agents, giving birth to cross- or trans-border interactions and exchanges that previously did not exist or had different bearing, as for example among the Lepcha community of the Eastern Himalayan region (Bentley 2015). However, using the state as the core analytical unit cannot exclusively explain the region's complexity. Beyond their relations to the larger political entities, the populations in the Bhutan-Sikkim Himalayas share religious, cultural, social, economic, and political formations that show in oral traditions, origin myths, clan stories, ritual practices, and so forth. Increasingly, research has focused on the movement of people, trans-border interactions and circular exchanges over national borders, ethnic and religious fluidity, questions of citizenships and recognition – all define the people beyond the nation state, but also anchor them to the respective multiple states. Academic discussions to understand the Eastern Himalayas as an analytical unit have reopened, especially over Scott's re-introduction of Zomia (see Scott 2009, Shneiderman 2010) and current theoretical discussions on borderlands (Gellner 2013).

This publication compiles papers presented during the Bhutan-Sikkim panel held at the 13th IATS seminar in Ulaan Bataar in 2013.[2] The aim of the panel was to continue the discussion on an all-inclusive

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1 I give an example of the former in my doctoral thesis (Bentley 2015). Shneiderman skilfully elaborates on the later with regard to the Thangmi (Shneiderman 2015).

2 This issue is dated 2014 as the intention was to publish it shortly after the 2013 seminar. However, we encountered delays and the text now includes references and information up to the year 2016.

approach to research in Bhutan and Sikkim, or maybe even the larger Himalayan region itself. Colleagues working in Bhutan and Sikkim, namely Françoise Pommaret, John Ardussi, Alex McKay, Anna Balikci Denjongpa, and others, initiated the discussion at the 2008 Namgyal Institute of Tibetology conference 'Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture.' Based on these ideas, a first Bhutan-Sikkim panel was held at the 12th seminar of the IATS held in Vancouver in 2010, organised, chaired, and edited by Saul Mullard (Mullard 2010). The main aim was to strengthen the multi-disciplinary collaboration and exchange between scholars working in their respective regions, as well as build up a comparative repertoire of research in the Bhutan-Sikkim interface. Thus, the crossroads turn out to be multi-layered contact zones. They comprise of the interaction among the researchers in the region as well as the researched people of this specific region – the past and the present.

What I have – building on the previous publication by Mullard (2010) – called the Bhutan-Sikkim interface geographically lies in the southern Eastern Himalayas and is historically, politically, economically, religiously, socially, and culturally linked with the neighbouring countries of Nepal, China, and India – possibly as afar as Burma and beyond – as well as the people living in the respective states. A collaborative study of the people in this interface, their connections and relationships among each other and between their respective states is an ambitious but necessary task. It means bringing together people from various disciplines as well as theoretical backgrounds. It means not only connecting people engaged in Sikkimese Studies, Bhutanese Studies, Tibetan Studies, Nepal Studies, South Asian Studies, but also anthropologists, tibetologists, indologists, linguists, political scientists, and so forth. It includes understanding and translating several languages for oral-based as well as textual research and discussing the findings in a larger comparative forum. Consequently, the diversities in the region call for an open and continued discourse between scholars of various disciplines and regions to get closer to an understanding of the current issues from various angles.

With regard to the people, the state, and the Himalayan region – crucial analytical units to research on the crossroads – and their respective interactions and power structures, several approaches simultaneously exist. As introduced before, they capture different yet just as important aspects of the region's complex social, cultural, religious, economic, and political fabric. Subsequently, the panel and

this publication include contributions with alternative perspectives and points of analysis – without trying to agree on an all-encompassing analytical unit. The chapters presented in this volume cover different geographical places in the Bhutan-Sikkim Himalayas, cultural traditions, and time periods. Their authors have also used different methods to approach their topics of interest. What weave them together are the rich ethnographic details and the narratives of interaction in this region – as well as the interest to share knowledge. The compilation gives space for multiple voices and alternatives, at times contrasting views on the region. The panel is not an attempt to offer a new analytical framework, but an attempt to facilitate an exchange of regional and academic knowledge. Each contribution in its own way gives insight into important aspects of the communities living in the Eastern Himalayas and thereby adds to understanding the cultural, social, economic, and political issues that shape contemporary Himalayan societies.

In the past, ethnographies of specific people have dominated anthropological research in the Himalayas. The detailed investigations of these various religious, cultural, mythological, and economic traits have then enabled comparisons over different groups. [3] These approaches give rich insight into local specifics of a rich Himalayan heritage. Françoise Pommaret's article follows this tradition. It is a preliminary account of the community of Ngangla Trong, a village in the Lower Kheng region located at Bhutan's remote southern borders to the plains of Assam. Thanks to its remoteness, unique cultural, mythological, and social specifics still remain vibrant today. Besides sharing data from a region previously undocumented by scholars – which in itself is extremely valuable and opens up interesting fields for mythological and cultural comparison – in her preliminary work she unravels the economic, historical, and mythological ties that bind this region to a larger Himalayan space and identity. Investigations on language, history, and myth unravel complex migration patterns of different groups of people presently residing in the region. While until date, for the Brela – considered the first human inhabitants – no origin myth is known, oral tradition links the other classes (*rigs gsum*) to royal lineages of Tibet. The myths place the ancestral roots of the

[3] A brilliant example of a recent comparative work is Michael Oppitz's *Morphologie der Schamanentrommel* (Oppitz 2013). It comprises of two volumes covering 1240 pages of word and images on the shamanic drum, including analysis myth, ritual, and practice of communities across the Himalayas from Western Nepal all the way to Sichuan.

Lhamenpa in the Yarlung region of Central Tibet by connecting them to Ura in Bumthang in the north. The Bjarpa and the ruling family, the Koche, are designated as descendants of the Tibetan prince in exile, gTsang ma, who migrated from Eastern Bhutan. Local myths and Bhutanese historiography link the region, today considered remote and secluded due to the lack of infrastructure such as roads, to the far-off Yarlung dynasty and to Tibetan nobility, leaving open questions of migration and subjugation as well as mythological construction. Pommaret then underlines the order in three classes distinguished by different migration in the myths with a detailed ethnographic analysis of the unique local social structure and ritual practice evolving around the village temple. Even when bearing in mind potential reconstructions of oral histories and myths, the mere fact that the mythologies of the people reconnect to such distant Tibetan places while at the same time bearing witness to unique local cultural, religious, social, economic, and political formations is an excellent example for the complexity of history, culture, and self-understanding in the Himalayan region.

The various Himalayan localities have diverse, but also astonishingly similar cultural and religious formations. They hold the tangible and intangible knowledge of the people residing in the valleys and plateaus of the highest mountain massif in the world. Some of them have been documented vigorously, while others have until today not been documented in details. This documentation has perhaps become more important than ever before. The reasons are various and cannot be named exhaustively. At this point, I would like to mention two. For one, in the present political environment ethnic groups in the Himalayas are engaged in the politics of recognition. Here, documentation of cultural, religious, and social formations as well as any form of oral or written history is crucial for being heard and – especially in the Indian case – receiving specific forms of affirmative action. Second, knowledge is slowly getting lost, especially the details and local variations are forgotten as the younger generation leaves the villages and the elders tell their stories less; or they are consciously blurred and unified in ethno-political projects. Consequently, Himalayan scholars are involved in and also research on documentation, preservation, and renewed forms of cultural transmission.

The second article by Felicity Shaw is a brilliant and detailed outline of heritage preservation and dissemination at the National Library & Archives of Bhutan. The latter collects and conserves the

written sources, but also has an active traditional printing unit – meaning it also reproduces the cultural and religious knowledge of Bhutan as well as Himalayan Buddhism. The author describes the history and implementation of the carving project – initiated by Lam Pemala (Pema Tshewang, 1922-2009), the library's second director. She meticulously describes the material process involved in the traditional technique as well as the history of the chosen document – Khenpo Ngaga's Commentary on the restricted Dzogchen text *Yeshe Lama* – and the initiator himself.

Remaining in Bhutan, in the next article Brian C. Shaw highlights the Bhutanese version of the original Tibetan concept of *kidu*, variously translated as welfare, self-help, or assistant, and its use in the recent political history of Bhutan. Not only do people move and interlace the Himalayan Massif, but so do concepts and social, religious, and cultural formations. In respective areas, local variations and understandings become dominant. In contrast to the *kidu* system in and around Tibet that provides welfare to members of a group, in Bhutan *kidu* was connected to land and land allocation that was the privilege of the monarch. The monarch can grant land and with it also other means of securing livelihood and belonging – as for example citizenship. The recent developments of the concept of *kidu*, with regard to land reforms from the 1960s onwards, are outlined. Brian C. Shaw points out a close link between the moral authority of the king to provide welfare and the economic requirements of the people, ergo his subjects. The struggles between the king and the ministers over land rights are summarised, while the concept of *kidu* evolves with the establishment of Druk Gyalpo Relief Fund in 2012 for "urgent and unforeseen humanitarian relief" and the 5th king's Kidu Foundation. The latter foundation is a modern extension of the concept of *kidu*, running parallel to the political policies and struggles. Lastly, the *kidu* is a Bhutanese "social contract" binding the people to the monarch and underpinning the developments of Bhutan towards democracy and self-defined forms of modernity. His article shows how a social formation – brought into Bhutan from the Tibetan plateau – can be appropriated by the state, become entangled in a power struggle over political influence and ownership of land, and lastly again be redefined through modern institutions – to enable the endurance of the kingdom.

The next paper takes us to the heart of the Bhutan-Sikkim interface. John Bray discusses the success and the failure of a British Tibet Mission. The title of his article *Stumbling on the Threshold* captures the approach and experiences of the many missions and a widespread way

of seeing this interface region at the time. The Darjeeling and Kalimpong Hills – formerly a part of Sikkim and Bhutan respectively – lay in the borderlands between Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet, and Nepal and, in contrast to the just mentioned states, fully experienced the impact of British colonialism as the British expanded their rule into Darjeeling in 1835 and the Kalimpong regions in 1865. For missionaries and colonial agents alike, the Darjeeling hills and to a certain extent also Sikkim became the base from which they attempted to enter but also understand the hidden lands beyond their scope – ergo mainly Tibet, but also Bhutan and Nepal. Here, they learnt Tibetan language, met Tibetan traders, and got acquainted with Tibetan culture. Darjeeling stood in for Tibet – a phenomenon common also for other regions in the Himalayas. The threshold-lands were never the primary aim of the missions, the people there seemingly missioned by default. Still, the impact of Christian missionaries on the local population reverberates until today. Prominently, they brought schools into the hills; Darjeeling is still renowned for its private schools for the well-to-do. And, Christian faith is widespread among the locals today, especially among the indigenous Lepcha since several generations. Relying on contemporary written sources, John Bray describes the rise, collapse, and the long-term consequences of the Tibetan Pioneer Mission founded by Annie R. Taylor in 1894. She was the first Protestant missionary to ever travel into Central Tibet in 1892-3, after spending around a year and a half in the Darjeeling Hills (in Ghoom) and Sikkim (probably in the Lachen or Lachung Valleys, in Tumlong or Phodang) preparing for her trip. The Mission commenced just after China recognised the British protectorate over Sikkim and allowed the establishment of a trade mart on Tibetan territory, in Yatung beyond the Jelep La. As the missionaries arrived in Darjeeling to prepare and study Tibetan, however, the border to Sikkim and Tibet still remained closed, the British officials not allowing the missionaries to cross in this politically delicate environment. Nevertheless, in September of the same year, they moved on to Gnatong, the last military outpost of the British army in Sikkim before the Tibetan border. After a short time, all but one of Taylor's recruits (who shortly after died) left this hostile environment and returned to British India, especially since there was little missionary work to be done in the camp and the Tibetan traders passing through on their way to Kalimpong could just as well be reached there. They regrouped in Kalimpong under the leadership of Polhill-Turner and eventually left India for Tibet's eastern border, while Taylor moved on to Yatung where she set up a shop – as only

traders were allowed to stay there – and continued her missionary work until she left the region for good in 1907 after the Younghusband expedition. Until then, she carried the self-proclaimed title of the "only Englishwoman in Tibet" proudly but became bitter – and lastly died in a psychiatric hospital in London – over the lack of support of the British colonial government for the Christian mission.

While the Christian missionaries were pushing towards the Tibetan plateau, the historical travels of Buddhist missionaries and religious refugees weave a net of communication and exchange throughout the Himalayan region. Marlene Erschbamer investigates the establishment of the less known 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school of Tibetan Buddhism in the Bhutan-Sikkim Himalayas between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century. In Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan there are important sites related to this school. An example is the monastery Dranggye Gonpa ('Brang rgyas kha) in Paro, built in the fourteenth century, where the founder of the school, rGyal mtshan dpal bzang po, passed away. Erschbamer follows the footprints of the accomplished 'Ba' ra ba master dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (1601-1687), who established the first monastery of that tradition in Sikkim. After entering Sikkim, the previously opened sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs, he first met the first king of Sikkim, Puntsok Namgyal (1604-70) and then went on to establish a monastery in Damsang, close to present-day Kalimpong. dKon mchog rgyal mtshan did not remain there, but kept travelling between Sikkim and Tibet, until his last journey brought him to North Sikkim, to present-day Chungthang. There, according to his biography, he tamed demons and erected a monastery. Her work is ground breaking, as so far it was believed that only followers of the rNying ma tradition were active in Sikkim shortly after the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty and the opening of the land to Buddhism. Prominently, two 'Ba' ra ba monasteries were established in the Chumbi Valley between 1687 and 1746. Strategically located on one of the main pathways between Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan, these monasteries became important centres for pilgrims travelling from the Tibetan plateau into Bhutan or Sikkim. At the time of construction, the land the monasteries were built on belonged to Sikkim, but then was annexed by the Chinese Amban in 1792. The Sikkimese, however, still maintained close relations to the Chumbi Valley and the monasteries. So much so, that besides the Chumbi Valley, the Sikkimese regions of Rinak, Lamten, and Lingtam financed one of the monasteries, bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery (then renamed in to dGa' ldan tshe [m]chog gling by the twelfth Dalai Lama), and consequently could also

send their sons there. The monastery developed into the main seat of dKon mchog rgyal mtshan's incarnation, the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku. When the seventh bKa' brgyud sPrul sku was forced to flee from his monastery in Tibet in 1959, he found a new home in Gangtok and established a monastery in Chandmari.

The current author's contribution investigates how the political relations between Bhutan and Sikkim influenced the ritual and economic obligations of the Lepcha of North Sikkim. I show how the war of succession – that involved armed forces from Bhutan under instigation of the deceased king's sister to attack Sikkimese territory – forged the relations of the Lepcha leaders in Dzongu, the present-day Lepcha reserve, with the Namgyal dynasty. According to the myth, the king requested the villages in Dzongu to send soldiers. Because they didn't have any, a designated Lepcha religious specialist prayed to their mountain deity, who gave them three animals. Each symbolised a disease that killed the enemy soldiers on the battlefield and secured the victory for the Namgyal dynasty. However, the diseases continued to kill the king's own men. Only after the religious specialist performed a ritual did the killing stop. Since then, a complex ritual exchange and taxation system was established between the Namgyal dynasty and the Dzongu Lepcha. It marked – at least in collective memory – the beginning of the political integration of the Lepcha under the auspices of the Sikkimese kings. Dzongu then became the private estate of the kings' respective queens. Interestingly, the myths do not emphasis the political subjugation of the Lepcha, but highlight the religious powers of the indigenous people of the place. They bear witness to the special connection of the people, the Lepcha religious specialist, his clan, and lastly of the Lepcha people to the main protective deity of Sikkim, Ne Kóngchen panó, the supernatural being residing in Mount Khangchendzonga. It is this connection that gives them religious power over the territory and lastly the Sikkimese king – an authority that the king accepted according to the Lepcha myth. Albeit a current reflexion of the past, the myths and rituals suggest that the kings at least feared the powers of the untamed mountain deity and his people enough to regularly finance the rituals and encourage their performances.

The last paper by the linguist Timotheus A. Bodt expands the scope of the Bhutan-Sikkim panel – geographically and disciplinary. He discusses the settlement of the Gongri Valley in Western Arunachal Pradesh, on the eastern border of Bhutan, referred to as Monyul. With an approach combining linguistic analysis, local origin myths and oral history, social and economic structure, the author draws a complex

situation of linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and religious plurality. The origin stories indicate that, save an unknown substrate, Kho-Bwa speakers – represented by several languages – appear to have first inhabited the Gongri Valley. The Kho-Bwa speakers are linguistically and geographically divided into the Eastern Kho-Bwa, including Puroik and Bugun, and the Western branch, including Sartang (Butpa), Sherdukpen, Khispi (Lishpa), and Duhumbi (Chugpa). All of these have complex relations with each other as well as with the groups that subsequently entered the valley. Later migrants such as the Tshangla speakers from Eastern Bhutan, the East Bodish speakers, and the Central Bodish speakers from the Tibetan plateau brought different languages, cultures, and religious practices leading to the complex present ethnolinguistic situation. The mutual linguistic, religious, social, economic, and political influences are manifold. The various groups intermixed, co-habited, and in some places also replaced the former inhabitants such as in Dirang proper or Sangthi Valley. At present, except for the Sherdukpen in the Tenga river valley, contemporary Western Kho-Bwa speakers are a numerical minority in the Gongri Valley. By analysing linguistic evidence alongside several origin myths and social and religious practices, Bodt gives a multiple-viewed angle on migration and power structures. The detailed research outlines complex and shifting relations between language groups, clan lineages, and class relations; it shows how people change languages, lineages, and religious affinities over the course of time, how religious propitiations and social structures itself change, and how different collective identities come into being. In a historio-linguistic perspective, self-understanding with regard to ancestry, territory, and lastly ethnicity is ever evolving and shifting. Thus, the article gives justice to the multifarious history and current ethnolinguistic situation of the region – a complexity that is common in most of the Himalayan Massif and that is at present rapidly disappearing. As such, in its complexity and multi-disciplinary approach, this article stands as an outlook and an outreach to more future interactions and detailed ethnographic research projects.

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# TRACING YARLUNG IN SOUTH-CENTRAL BHUTAN?

# MYTHS, MIGRATIONS, AND SOCIETY: THE COMMUNITY OF NGANGLA TRONG IN LOWER KHENG

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## INTRODUCTION

The region of Lower Kheng (Zhemgang district)[1] is considered one of Bhutan's most remote areas. Until 2016, it was only accessible from Zhemgang by several days of strenuous walking through steep Himalayan jungles or from India via the Manas National Park, encompassing parts of south-central Bhutan and the politically troubled region of North Assam. Situated at the low altitude of 1,190m, the area of Ngangla Trong is the last Bhutanese mountain outpost in Lower Kheng before the plains of Assam. These steep slopes and ridges are home to a cluster of villages sharing a common identity, myths, and social structure that have not been studied until now. These specificities may have remained unique and survived till date because of this region's lack of regular communications with the outside world. In early March 2012 a ten-day ethnographic field trip was made possible by a grant from the Helvetas/EU's project 'Preserving and Leveraging Bhutan's Cultural Diversity' to the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS), Royal University of Bhutan. A motorable road, much awaited by the people of the area, was under construction and consequently the need was felt to document the cultural specificities of the area before immense changes occurred. A fieldwork paper was published in 2015 by Helvetas in Bhutan.[2]

This article intends – through the analysis of language, history, and myths – to place the community of Ngangla Trong within a broader research agenda that seeks to trace patterns of migrations in Bhutan.

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1 Because of the different languages (Tibetan, Dzongkha, Khyengkha) involved in this study, I will spell the names and terms as they are spelt in Latin alphabet in contemporary Bhutan. Whenever possible, I will use or add the classical Tibetan term in Wylie.

2 Pommaret (2015).

Situated in south-central Bhutan, Ngangla Trong has a unique location, being at the nexus between Central and Eastern Bhutan. Using the case study of Ngangla Trong, a first exploration of the links to the region of Bumthang to the north and to Eastern Bhutan is proposed. The investigations hint that the ancestry of the people of Ngangla Trong could be traced to a common root, which would be the region of Yarlung in Central Tibet, at least if we rely on Bhutanese historiography and the myths of the region.

## THE DATA AND CONTEXT

As this region is still unknown in the field of Himalayan Studies, I will first summarise the ethnographic data collected with my ILCS colleagues during the field trip of March 2012 in order to underline the broader discussion on patterns of migrations in Bhutan.[3]

### *People and languages*

The community of Ngangla Trong proper, in the south of Zhemgang district, has seventy mostly scattered households and is composed of Khengpas and a few Sharchopas from the neighbouring sub-district (*rgad 'og*) of Bjoka (written Byog kang in classical text) who married into Ngangla Trong.

The language spoken in Ngangla Trong is Khengkha but most people also speak a dialect of Tshangla (Sharchopkha), spoken in Bjoka. Khengkha belongs to the large Bumthangkha family (East Bodish); Bumthangkha and Khengkha are mutually intelligible. Khengkha therefore belongs to the East Bodish branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family, while Tshangla belongs to the Bodish branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, albeit its exact classification is still debated among linguists. Khengkha and Tshangla are mutually unintelligible. Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, is taught in the schools, along with English.

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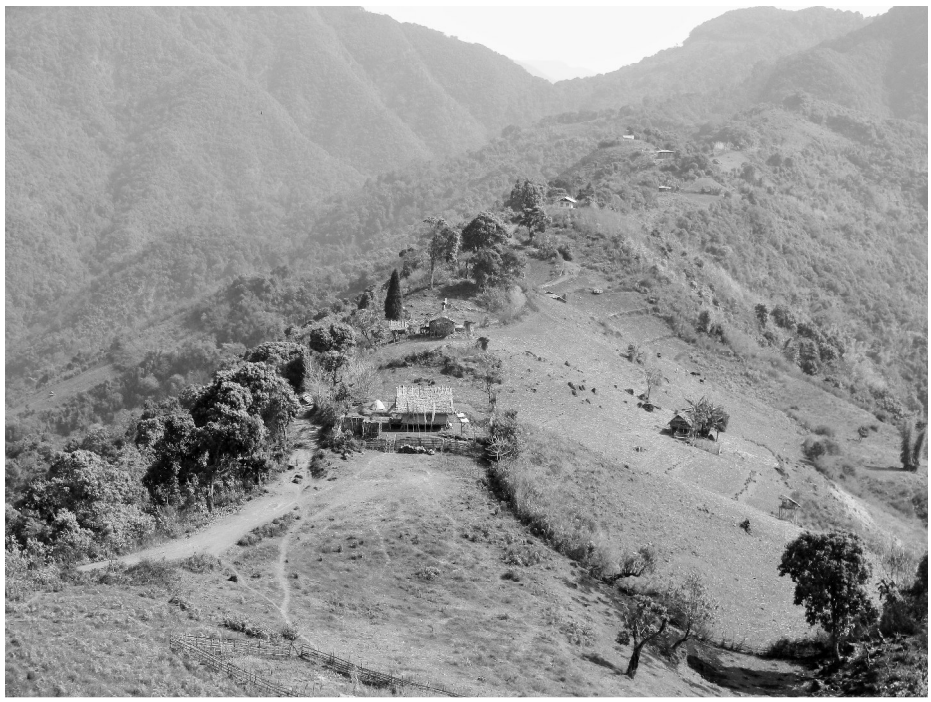
[3] The full field report is available in the book edited by Karma Phuntsho and published by Helvetas in 2015 under the LCD/EU project. My colleagues from ILCS were Kinzang Dorji, Yannick Jooris, and Sonam Nyenda. A film and over 500 documentation photos are available. I am most grateful to Sonam Nyenda for his translations from Khengkha.



Ngangla Trong ridge

*Geography, landscape, and environment*

Ngangla Trong is located at 26'56' latitude, 91'0' longitude, and an altitude of 1,190m.

It is perched on a ridge that dominates the whole landscape to the north and to the south, towards the Indian plains. It is a spectacular location with an aerial view. Except for the ridge where the main settlement is located, the whole landscape is made up of very steep slopes covered by thick tropical forest.

The settlement consists of scattered bamboo houses surrounded by fields. It is spread out along the ridge with clusters of two to three houses on the slopes near the ridge. Except for the top of the ridge, there is no flat area; a few slopes near the top of the ridge are used for farming. The temple is built on the highest point of the ridge, surrounded by five houses, including the stone house of the *koche* (lord).

A traditional house in the vicinity of Ngangla Trong

The climate of Ngangla Trong is pleasant and dry in the winter, from October to March, but the area is subject to very strong winds from north and south. In the rainy season, which starts as early as April and lasts till September, the weather is terribly wet and life is difficult, with rodents, snakes, and leeches everywhere. The swollen rivers are then impossible to cross.

Forest products, including bamboo and rattan, are truly still part of the way of life and 'food bank'. The forest gives the people of Lower Kheng a unique material culture and knowledge. This part of Bhutan is an important point of comparison for the biodiversity of Asia. Keiji Nishioka recognised this specific biodiversity as early as the 1970s and wrote of the 'shiny leaved forest culture complex'.[4]

As in many other places in Lower Kheng, the people of Ngangla Trong depend on subsistence farming – mostly done using slash and burn (Dz. *tshe ri*) – and forest products, with oranges (*citrus*) as a cash crop, for their livelihood. Maize, buckwheat, foxtail millet (*Seteria italica*), and fingermillet (*Eleusine coracana*) are the main crops. Wheat and potatoes are grown in very small quantity. Formerly, millet and maize were used as staple food but nowadays people prefer rice, which they bring from India. Today maize and millet are used mostly

4 Nakao & Nishioka (1984), p. 108.

for brewing local beer *bangchang*, while buckwheat is kept for making the distilled alcohol *ara* (Dz.; Kh. *a rag*), a common drink.

People rely heavily on forest products such as 'wild potatoes', yams (*Dioscorea* spp), and taro (*Colocasis escalenta*). Khatkala Metog (*Adhatoda vasica*), a white flower from a bush blooming in March and April, is used to a great extent as a vegetable, as are orchids (*Cymbidium hookeranum*), banana shoots, cabbage of wild pandanus, and rattan buds (*Calamus* spp.) as well as different kinds of bamboo shoots, stinging nettles, mushrooms, and ferns. By comparison, vegetables from the garden are few: chilli, cabbage, radish, and pumkin. All of the vegetables are eaten fresh or dried and stored. Amaranth *(Amaranthus hypohondriacus)* is cultivated between the maize and millet and the grains from the red spikes are used, especially with chilli paste. Ginger is widely available and used. The leaves of the *Perilla frucetescen*s, a kind of mint or basil, are eaten as a vegetable while its matured grains are widely used in salads, mixed with garlic, cheese, and chillis or pounded to give an oily texture and added to tea.

Oil was produced from different kinds of nut trees, especially from *Lindera* (spp. *Lauracae*) and *Madhuca* (spp. *Sapotaceae*) but today it has been replaced by refined oil from India. Similarly, now tea is imported from India. Tea made from tree leaves or bark (*shing ja*) was available traditionally, mostly from *sorbus cuspidate* (Himalayan whitebeam). Tea is drunk with butter or with milk. However, people prefer *banchang* to tea.

Pigs are raised for personal consumption and not for commercial use. Many people keep hens for eggs. Only a few of them have cattle and one family has a mithun (Kh. *bamen*; *bos indicum*) which is crossed with local cows. It is prized for the qualities of its offsprings. Dairy products are difficult to get and cattle are never slaughtered for meat. Due to religious prohibition people are reluctant to talk about their past as hunters, but they did hunt with bows and arrows and set pointed-bamboo traps in the forest. Hunting supplemented their diet and protected their crops against wild boar, deer, bear, and squirrels. There is not much threat to the lifestock; only old isolated tigers attack the cattle.

Traditional trade was carried out on a small scale and was based on barter. Ngangla Trong traded with Assam (India), but the thick jungles of the Manas region in the south and the lack of surplus commodities may have hampered this marginal trade. The items traded were bamboo and forest products against salt, rice, and spices. Today, oranges (*citrus*) are the main source of cash income in most of Ngangla Trong

and are traded in Assam, rice being the largest import item. As for trade within Bhutan, it appeared to have been limited. Their main bartering partner seems to have been the village of Bjoka, a two-hour walk to the east.

A handful of women weave simple cotton cloth for dresses and belts on backstrap looms. Additionally, the relatively rare 'card weaving' for belts is still practised. Weaving of simple utilitarian baskets of bamboo and cane is done but rarely for commercial purposes.

The lifestyle of the area of south-central Bhutan shown in this short survey with its low altitude, steep slopes, dense tropical jungle, and bamboo culture could not be farther from Central Tibet, and yet the field and historical research presented below allows us now to echo what Ardussi so rightly concluded from his textual research about the scions of the Tibetan prince gTsang ma (b.800) in Eastern Bhutan: "So remote were they [branches of nobility found on dramatic ridge-top settlements] from the main centres of Tibetan culture that these princes go almost entirely unnoticed in Tibetan studies of the lineage fragments from the former Yarlung dynasty."[5]

*History and myths*

As is often the case in Bhutan, written texts do not document the history of remote areas. We have to rely on oral history and myths as well as data from other regions to try and understand the history of a particular place while being mindful of the danger of reconstruction.[6]

The Kheng region in Central Bhutan stretches from the south of Bumthang to the Assamese border and forms the Zhemgang district (*dzong khag*). It was divided into three main regions – Upper Kheng (sPyi 'khor), Middle Kheng (Nang 'khor), and Lower Kheng (Tama chog or Matpala) – which were ruled by petty lords with different titles: *dung* (*gDung*), *koche* (*sKu mched*), and *ponpo* (*dPon po*). Due to its remoteness from the district headquarters in Zhemgang, Lower Kheng is now a specific administrative entity (*dung khag*) with its headquarters in Pangbang and comprises Bjoka, Ngangla, Goshing, and Pangkhar sub-districts.

The daunting topography with steep slopes and deep gorges covered with jungle has certainly contributed to the isolation and fragmentation of Kheng, leading to the rise of petty lords ruling over

5 Ardussi (2007 b), p. 15.

6 This is magistrally demonstrated by Mullard (2011) with regard to the oral history on state formation in Sikkim.

small territories. Kheng did not come under any kind of centralisation until the mid-seventeenth century, at the time of the conquest of Central and Eastern Bhutan by the *'Brug pa* forces led by the 3rd *sde srid* Mi 'gyur brtan pa (1613-1681). However, even after the unification of Bhutan and the later establishment of the monarchy, Kheng retained a lot of autonomy, although Upper Kheng was more under the control of the kings due to its close socio-economic links with Bumthang.

In Lower Kheng the most important traditional rulers were the Bjoka *koche* and the Ngangla *koche*, as well as the Pangkhar, Tama, Gomphu, and Goshing local leaders (*gDung)*; of these the Bjoka *koche* seems to have had the most power.[7] *Koche* is a title given to a hereditary ruler in parts of Lower Kheng and also in the Dungsam (gDung bsam) area of Eastern Bhutan. I will come back to this title and its possible etymology later.

We cannot study the history of Ngangla Trong without mentioning the Tshangla-speaking village of Bjoka which is only two-hour walk away as their histories appear to be intertwined. However, due to lack of time, the study does not extend to fully include Bjoka, but only explores its relations with Ngangla Trong.

### *The origin of the Ngangla Trong people and the koche according to local myths*

Although Ngangla Trong is mentioned, to our knowledge, only once[8] in available written historical records, there is an oral tradition on the myths and origin of the people inhabiting the region. According to this, the people are divided into several classes: the Brela, the Lhamenpa, the Bjarpa, and the Koche.

### *Myth of origin of the Brela and the Lhamenpa*

One of our respondents recounted the myth as follows: Brela were the first humans to reside at Ngangla Trong. But the king of demons, called Rangwang Gyelpo, hunted the place and never allowed the humans to stay in peace. Sometimes he turned into a vulture and ate people. Other times he turned into an enormous snake and swallowed people. So people had a hard time living there. Descendants of the gods, Khewa Dorji and Chagi Tempa, came with their sister Chingi Thagpa, from a

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7 Lham Dorji (2005), pp. 31-59.
8 Aris (1986), p. 39.

place called Urbayling in Bumthang to save them. The Brela handed out grain to them, hence their name, Bre, meaning 'measure'.

These two brothers fought with the demon Rangwang Gyelpo, while the sister Chingi Thagpa prepared three meals per day and wove two dresses each day. As the two brother's clothes were torn off each day fighting with Rangwang Gyelpo, Chingi Thagpa would wake up early in the morning to weave and finish stitching in the evening. When Chagi Tempa subdued the vulture in the sky and returned, he did not see Khewa Dorji anywhere. When he called for his brother, Khewa Dorji replied from the snake's belly. Chagi Tempa told him to use his animal fangs. Suddenly, Khewa Dorji remembered the fangs he had and he tore the snake's belly and got out. It had been nine days and nine nights of fighting by this time. Chingi Thagpa said to her two brothers, "It's done now, we got the land and food. I am so tired of this game. Tomorrow as the sun goes behind the hills, your sister won't be there for you." The next day when the two brothers arrived home, they saw the meal prepared by their sister, but the fire she had made was dying down. This frightened the two brothers and they went to look for her. When they reached the lake Lachen Ama Ringlamed, they saw their sister Chingi Thagpa disappearing into the lake, half of her body changed into a snake and the other half still human.

The two brothers left Ngangla Trong and went to a place southwards known today as Panbang. Chagi Tempa died while fighting a tiger. When the tiger jumped at him, part of his flesh was ripped off and each time Chagi Tempa got on the tiger he broke one of the tiger's ribs. At the end of the fight, Chagi Tempa died lying on one side and the tiger on the other side.[9] Khewa Dorji disappeared into a rock while building a stone bridge over one of the rivers.

The Lhamenpa are believed to be the descendants of these divine figures who disappeared, hence the etymology Lha literally means god and Menpa means without.

This myth might suggest that the people who came to settle in Ngangla from the north, mainly from Bumthang, were the Lhamenpa. Because Chagi Tempa, Khewa Dorji, and Chingi Thagpa came from Bumthang and 'disappeared' in the end, the original people, the Brela, who lived in Ngangla Trong believed these siblings were their gods which they had lost. Who were the Brela? It is impossible for us to

[9] Lham Dorji notes the importance of toponyms derived from the word *stag* (tiger) around the locality of Tagma. This relates to a female tigress who was killing people and animals until it was tamed, (2005), p. 39.

know as till date no historical account or even an oral origin myth could be recorded.

*Myth of origin of the Bjarpa and the Koche*

It had been a long time since the people did not have any leaders to look up to and to maintain decorum in the community. So people decided amongst themselves to find a leader who was of a higher clan. A group of people went to search for a leader in the east, towards Mongar. The group decided to steal a boy because they knew that nobody in the villages would be willing to give a son to them. When they reached the east, they found one young boy playing on the branch of a tree and another sitting under the same tree. So the search party abducted the boy under the tree, covering his head and bringing him back to their village. When the boy grew up, the people made him their leader as a Koche. After a few years the boy's relatives learned that he had been made the *koche* in that community and they followed him to become *koche*, as well. When his relatives arrived there, people did not accept them as *koche*, but let them stay there if they wished. So the descendants of these people are called Bjarpa. These Bjarpa people came to rely on the Koche as the literal meaning of Bjarpa is 'relying' or 'attached'.

To summarise: The Brela are described as the first "humans of the soil" (Dz. *Sa gzhi rten pa*). The Lhamenpa are thought to descend from the two brothers from Bumthang. The third class, the Bjarpa, is related by blood and ancestry to the *koche*. The Brela were the first humans to reside at Ngangla Trong. They were threatened by a demon and two brothers, descendants of gods, came with their sister from a place called Urbayling in Bumthang to save them. Their descendants are the Lhamenpa. However, the brothers disappeared, leaving them without a ruler; hence we have the probable origin of their name Lhamenpa 'people without gods/rulers'. So the Brela went east to steal a child whom they made their ruler. His descendants are the *koche* ruling family. Then members of the stolen child's family in the east wanted to become *koche* too but as this was not possible, they were allowed to settle with high status and became the Bjarpa, which means 'attached/dependent' (to the *koche*).

This is, in a nutshell, the origin of the three classes (*rigs gsum*),[10] plus the rulers, that make up the people of Ngangla Trong: the *koche*, the Bjarpa, the Lhamenpa, and the Brela. People say that only Ngangla Trong has this *rigs gsum* system in Kheng. Nearby Bjoka appears to have a similar system but with different names. Unfortunately, I had no time to investigate in Bjoka.

As usual, myths are fragmented and not always logical, but we can deduct from these stories that the population of Ngangla Trong had at least two origins – one from the north, in Bumthang, perhaps Ura (Urbayling), and one from the east. Nowadays the villagers believe that the *koche* lineage stems from the Thinangbi *koche* in Dungsam (gDung bsam). This part of Dungsam is in today's Mongar district.

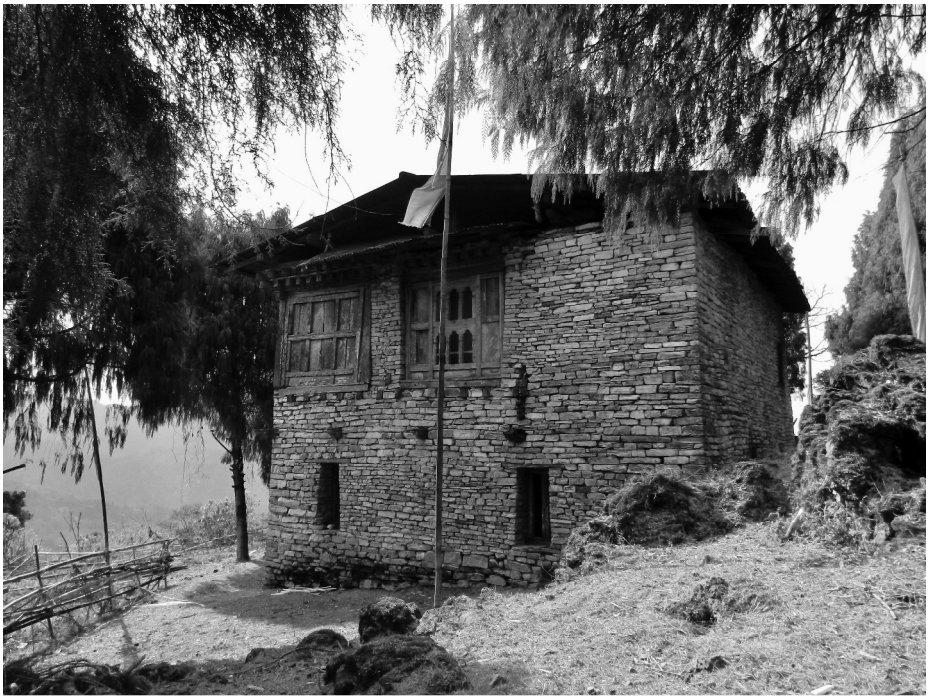
The *koche* family confirms its Eastern Bhutan origin and attributes its ancestry to Prince (*Lha sras*) gTsang ma, the brother of the Tibetan King Ral pa can, who is said to have come to Bhutan in the ninth century and to be at the origin of most of the nobilities of Eastern Bhutan, including the Dungsam region.

*Social structure and alliances pattern*

At a high point towards the top of Ngangla Trong ridge, the temple dominates the village – one big stone house, three large bamboo houses on stilts with banana leaf roofs, and a new white cement house. There is a smaller house just below the temple, where the temple caretaker lives. The stone house belongs to the *koche* of the village.

The three large houses are closely linked to the social set-up and history of Ngangla Trong. As already explained, Ngangla Trong has three social classes (*rigs gsum*): the Brela, the Bjarpa, and the Lhamenpa. Each has a minimum of forty-five households, which are spread all over the ridges and jungles of the sub-district, up to Goshing to the north-west (which was made a separate sub-district in 1997). Beyond these three classes, which already constitute a distinct feature of Ngangla Trong, the system of property ownership and community also appears to be unique. The three houses and adjoining fields near the Ngangla Trong temple do not belong to a private owner but are 'class houses', one for each class, which has ownership over them. However, the word 'class' (*rigs*) may have to be moderated by further research.

[10] We use the term 'class', not being comfortable yet in this context with the term 'clan' although they have clan features such as a common ancestry. However, we feel our research is too preliminary to ascertain these are clans.



The stone house of the Khoche

Every three years a household from each class is nominated to stay in the respective ‘class house’ near the temple. That household takes care of the respective house and fields for three years. After the term the tenant goes back to his/her own house and land, and another ‘class tenant’ of the same class takes over. These community houses have two kitchens so that two families can stay in the house and cook separately. This relates to the fact that the rotation system is extended beyond the three-year term and a fixed transition period exists. The class house is not only inhabited by the family serving the three-year term but also, for one and a half years, by the family who served the term before; this family helps the new tenant with the transition of responsibilities. In other words, a newly chosen tenant family first shares the house with the ‘old’ tenant for one and a half years, then the old tenant leaves and the ‘new’ tenant family lives in the house on its own for three years and then for another one and a half years it shares the house with the next newly chosen tenant family. This means that each family nominated to be the class house tenant actually lives in the house for a total of six years. A three-year tenure ends on the 30th day of the 12th Bhutanese

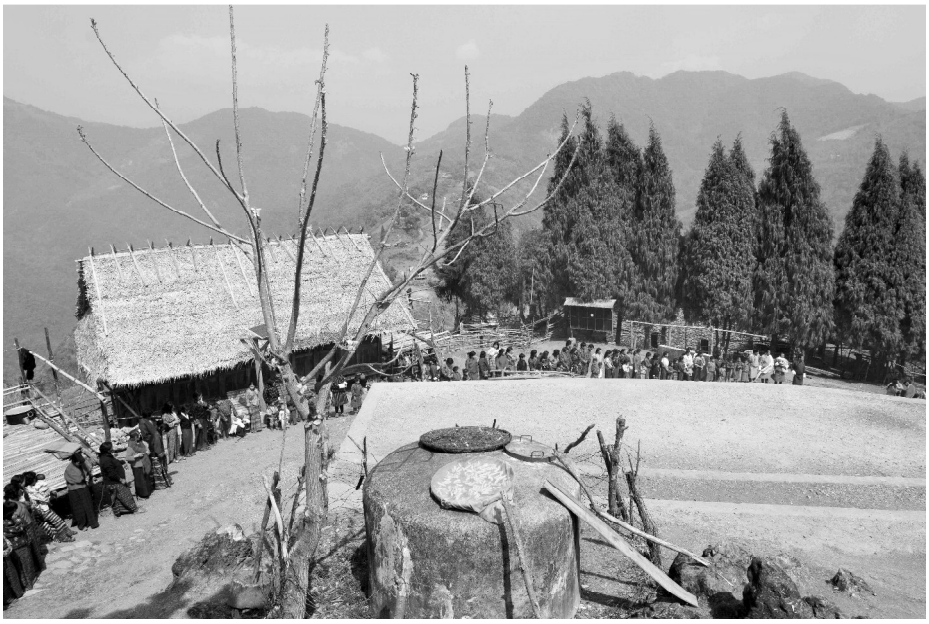
month. The new tenants' arrival is celebrated with a feast and a pig killed by the people of their class. All the class tenants are responsible for initiating activities taking place in the temple. They must also take care of renovating and replacing the roof of the house and contribute financially or in kind to the yearly festival of *mchod pa la*. The people of their own class construct and renovate the three class houses.[11]

Lhamenpa and Brela houses around the temple

This is a unique and sophisticated social system. It allows every family of a class a chance to occupy this house and land, even if temporarily, and it must have been a prestige marker to live near the *koche*. This custom of staying three years in the community class house and shouldering the attendant responsibilities binds the society together and reinforces the existing class system. It thereby buttresses the social stability of the region. However, it is a rigid system which entails huge problems and responsibilities. When the class tenant family returns to its own area they can find their house destroyed and the fields taken

[11] Recently, the MP (Member of Parliament), who was the Minister of Labour until 2013, newly constructed the Bjarpa house through CDG (Constitutional Development Grant), with modern facilities, so that it won't have to be renovated so often. There is a similar plan for the other two houses, too.

over by the jungle. Often an elderly person is left in the house to take care of it but then the food rations have to be provided.



Ngangla Trong community waiting for the Gantey Trulku near the temple

The system of class houses in proximity of the *koche* is certainly legitimised by the myths and history relating the different origins of the people of Ngangla Trong. The class system, at least in Ngangla Trong, is very much alive, and people are routinely referred to by their class name. Although a socio-historical class consciousness in general terms was strong all over Bhutan, Ngangla Trong appears to have refined it and kept it in a unique way, which is, to this day, translated into the settlement and socio-economic landscape of the community.

The rest of the villagers of the three classes who are not serving at the class houses are called *pampa* (Khyenkha; it could be *Phan pa* 'those who benefit/are of help'?) and have to work and assist the 'class households' and the *koche*. They are paid in meals and *banchang*. Again, these people are referred to according to their class. So they are the Bjarpa *pampa*, the Lhamenpa *pampa*, and the Brela *pampa* as well as the Koche *pampa*.

Information from the genealogical chart of the Ngangla Trong *koche* that we drew, based on four generations, shows that the preferred mode of alliances of the *koche*, just as most of Central and Eastern

Bhutanese nobility,[12] was with a cross-cousin from the Bjoka *koche* lineage. Bjoka appears to have been the 'wife givers' to Ngangla Trong, but further research in the genealogy is needed to confirm this. In Ngangla Trong, as in Bjoka, the mode of residence is patrilocal and the sons inherite property. It might have been a way for the Bjoka *koche* to give away non-essential members of the lineage while keeping the Ngangla *koche* pleased by this alliance with a powerful neighbour of the same origin. The two *koche* families are intimately linked through this practice. The Ngangla *koche* built their house at the beginning of the twentieth century on the model of Bjoka and according to the genealogical chart, the two Koche families have been intermarrying at least since the early twentieth century. We can assume that this practice goes back much beyond that date. In the same way, the alliances also extended to the Kuthir/Kuthar *gDung* – in the Bardo area, north of Bjoka and Ngangla Trong – who are considered as having the same rank as the Bjoka *koche*.

Across the classes, residence is also patrilocal and inheritance is patrilineal. This is a strong constrast to Upper and Middle Kheng where marriage was matrilocal and inheritance through the female line.[13]

The classes had a pattern of alliances amongst themselves but this is fast disappearing due to migrations outside the area. The Koche did not marry Bjarpa, because they were considered to be relatives and the Bjarpa did not marry the Lhamenpa for the same reason. However the Brela could marry the Bjarpa and the Lhamenpa. Therefore, besides the *koche* families, the alliance system as described to us in Ngangla Trong reflects strongly the mythical and historical origin of the classes, and perhaps an old clan system. The Brela, who are said to have been the first inhabitants and whose origin is unknown, were not considered of the same blood and therefore could marry both Bjarpa and Lhamenpa. This is consistent with a clan pattern as clans are usually exogamic but there are still questions that need further field research. In particular, one may wonder why the Lhamenpa and the Bjarpa could not intermarry as they seem to have come from two different migrations, and why the *koche* practised the endogamic cross-cousin marriage

[12] In Bhutan there is a distinction between *spun cha* (translated as brothers and sisters but which include in fact the 'parallel cousins') whom it is forbidden to marry, and the 'cross cousins' which are often the preferred mode of alliance. In the west of Bhutan, the term relatives (*nyewa*) refers to any type of cousins and marriage of cousins is prohibited.

[13] See Dorji Penjore (2009) for detailed description of marriage practice in Wamling, Upper Kheng.

common in Eastern Bhutan and amongst the religious lords (*chos rje*) of Bumthang.[14] Nowadays the young generation that is studying and living outside the village, do not want to continue the practice of cross-cousin marriage, which they consider obsolete. However, the patrilocal residence and inheritance pattern may subsist longer.

Polygyny is practised but generally the wives are sisters or cousins as is the custom in Central and Eastern Bhutan. Polyandry does not seem to have been practised and this is again in line with Central and Eastern Bhutan.

The groom's parents bear the cost of the matrimonial arrangement which is done in five stages, can last for several years, and sometimes start when a child is born. Dorji, Rigden, and Pelgen have already described this custom in details.[15] The groom's parents have to fatten pigs, stock grain for alcohol preparation, and send their son to the house of the prospective bride's family to work for up to three years before the actual ceremony.[16] We can infer that this gives time to the bride's family and the girl to evaluate the working ability and the character of the prospective husband, as well as 'pay themselves' for the loss of their daughter in terms of the work force.

After this trial period the ceremony takes place and the bride leaves for the groom's house. One year later, the bride's family hosts a feast and gives the girl her share of the family wealth in the form of jewellery, pots, or a cow. Each stage involves feasting, drinking, and codified and metaphorical songs in the form of praises and riddles, but also involves strict responsibilities and commitments from both parties. As well, it involves the exchange of gifts which are closely evaluated. Marriage is a socio-economic alliance. Although the groom's family requires and appoints a matchmaker, it can be assumed that, given the small pool of potential candidates, the unions are more or less predictable and help to cement this agrarian society. Separations seem to be relatively rare in that area of Lower Kheng, no doubt due to the strong socio-family links, the economic consequences that a separation could have for both families, as well as the three-year ordeal the groom has to go through. A song illustrates this concern:

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[14] Pommaret (2016).

[15] Lham Dorji (2003), pp. 1-23, and Tenzin Rigden, & Ugyen Pelgen (1999), pp. 70-72.

[16] Balikci (2008), pp.267-68, gives a description of marriage customs among the Lhop/Bhutia/Denjongpa of Tingchim (Sikkim) and points out the similarities with the Kheng customs in her footnote p.268 n.27.

We engaged you for three years,
Now take the hands of our daughter (*bomey* (Kh.)),
Be loving and kind to her,
Do not change your preferences,
Do not look for other flowers;
Let us not hear about quarrels,
Let us not hear about divorce.[17]

Temple and houses

*Religious, spiritual, and cultural life*

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to give a full report on the religious set-up of Ngangla Trong.[18] I will simply concentrate on elements that are important in relation to the present topic.

People in Ngangla Trong, as in the rest of Lower Kheng, follow the *Pad gling* (Padma gling pa 1450-1515) tradition of the *rNying ma pa* religious school, which has its roots in Bumthang. Ngangla Trong had a strong religious affiliation with the gSum 'phrang religious lords (*chos*

[17] Lham Dorji (2003), p. 18.
[18] The full field report will be available in the book published by Helvetas under the LCD/EU project.

*rje*) of Ura in Bumthang. The gSum 'phrang lama, himself a descendent of Padma gling pa, until recently came every other winter from Ura to Lower Kheng via the villages along the Chamkhar river. He would perform rituals and give teachings. Villagers would host him and offer him forest products and bamboo weaving. Khengkha and Bumthangkha languages being close, there was no communication problem. This religious link reinforces the historical/mythical connection of the Ngangla Trong community to Bumthang.

As in most communities of Central and Eastern Bhutan, there are no monks in Ngangla Trong and ordinary rituals are performed by married lay practitioners (*sgom chen*) and, at the time of death, by the specialist called the *Mi shi* lama. The *sgom chen* are married lay villagers who till the land but also conduct rituals in the villagers' houses. This adds to their income - in kind or in cash - while providing spiritual and emotional support to the community households. There are about ten *sgom chen* in Ngangla Trong and one of them is the astrologer (*rtsis pa*) who decides the auspicious date to start any new endeavour. The *Mi shi* lama is the head of the lay practitioners and the highest religious authority in the village. This is a socio-religious title common in Central and Eastern Bhutan which is given to a lay practitioner who has mastered the common Buddhist rituals. He is requested by the villagers to take this role and conduct the Buddhist rituals for the village in absence of a member of the clergy. He fills the role of funerary priest, hence his title, and is usually from the Bjarpa class.

Since 2008, the 9th Gantey Tulku (*sGang steng sprul sku* b.1955) who is one of the holders of the Padma gling pa lineage and the reincarnation of Padma gling pa's grandson, has been active in Pangbang, Ngangla Trong, and Bjoka. He has visited the area several times and contributed to the restoration of the temple in Bjoka which he consecrated and took over in March 2012.

The Ngangla Trong temple, the construction date of which is unknown, is a one storey stone structure with an assembly hall and an inner shrine. A lay practitioner (*sgom chen*) from one of the three classes on a rotational basis looks after it. This caretaker (*dkor gnyer*) is married and when he goes away to perform rituals, his wife replaces him at the temple. They live just below the temple.

Besides all the local deities that live in the landscape such as the *gzhi bdag*, *gnas bdag*, (*klu*), *gnyan*, and *yul lha*, each class has its own protective deity, which, like in other parts of Bhutan, is a *btsan*. These deities are: Talatsen (sTag (?) la btsan) for the *koche* and Bjarpa, which reinforces the belief that the *koche* were originally from the same class

as the Bjarpa, Donglatsen (Dong la btsan) for the Lhamenpa, and Rinlatsen (Rin la btsan) for the Brela.

Two local practitioners are particularly important in the daily life of the villagers – the *bon po* and the *dpa' bo*. They are specialists of local deities and rituals that belong to the non-Buddhist complex but they themselves are Buddhist in the typical Central and Eastern Bhutanese custom of practising *Bon* and *Chos* (Buddhism) together, which is also found in many Himalayan areas. *Bon* is seen as dealing with immediate problems of daily life such as harvest, cattle, weather, health and prosperity, while *chos* deals with karmic retribution and after life.[19]

The *bon po* is appointed by the community, which looks at the capacity of a person and his willingness to take on this function. However, the *bon po* is usually from the Lhamenpa class. The *bon po* plays an important role during the *mchod pa la* festival and has a dedicated place of worship - the *bla brang*, a bamboo and leaves altar in the open air on the Ngangla Trong ridge. He performs rituals to bring fortune (*g.yang*) and keep the people, the land, and the cattle healthy and prosperous. He learns the rituals by rote, has no text, and calls his practice *Bon chos*. When he performs, he wears a white headband like a turban and a white scarf. He has no musical instrument.

The present *dpa' bo*, who is a spirit medium, is in his mid-eighties and can barely walk.[20] For the *mchod pa la* festival, people have to carry him from his house to the temple, a twenty-minute walk up the hill. He belongs to the Brela class. He became possessed for the first time when he was twenty-two when he ran to the forest, climbed trees, and acted like a madman. After he had spent a few days in the forest, the villagers brought him back and presented, for his recognition, objects of the previous *dpa' bo*, as well as other things. He chose the right ones and was declared *dpa' bo*. He says there has been no other *dpa' bo* in his family. He gets possessed by three deities, the most frequent being the local deity Saling Norbu, then Ama Jomo, and lastly Gesar. For each of these deities, when he is possessed, he speaks a different language and has a different costume.

His role is the same as the *dpa' bo* in the other areas of Bhutan and Sikkim.[21] Several deities can possess him, a characteristic also found in the *gter bdag* of the Lhuntse region.[22]

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19 Pommaret (2009).
20 He died in 2013.
21 Balikci (2008).
22 Pommaret (1998).

*dpa' bo*

The major festivals of the year are: *Ser gtam*, *Dus mchod*, *brGyad pa tshes bcu*, and *mChod pa la*. All the festivals, except the *brGyad pa tshes bcu* in honour of Guru Rinpoche, appear to be a syncretism of Bon and Buddhism.

As a caution, I would like to quote the words of the anthropologist Robert Weller here:

> In looking for exegesis of rituals, it is easy to gravitate toward a few especially articulate informants. Often… this is the only way to get coherent explanations of religion. However, this procedure can lead us to ignore the great mass of people who have no ready explanations. It is unsafe to assume that the few people who have given more thought to their rituals are expressing ideas common to everyone. The very fact that many people have no easily verbalized explanations is in itself significant. (1987: 64) [23]

The people as well as the *koche* sponsor all the festivals. The latter is involved in all the rituals and sponsors the *dbu mdzad* (ritual master). Each of the three classes sponsors a ritual specialist and it might also be an indication of their different origins: the Bjarpa sponsors the *mi shi* lama, the Brela sponsors the *dpa' bo* and the Lhamenpa the *bon po*. Additionally, they all share the sponsorship of the local *sgom chen* (lay

[23] Weller (1987).

practitioners). When the lama, the *bon po*, and the *dpa' bo* sit together, the *bon po* is placed next to the lama and then the *dpa' b*o. Thus again the order of rank also reflects the social structure of the society.

Lay practitioners perform all the rituals in the temple. Outside the temple *bon po* and *dpa' bo* make offerings according to their own traditions for all these rituals. For religious activities the class households serving the three-year tenure along with the *koche* must provide all the necessary items and food for the offerings. They must also take care of the people from their own class who come for the rituals.

Here, the example of the *mChod pa la (mchod pa lha/ bla/ zla* ?)[24] is given. The ritual is celebrated from the evening of the 14th day of the 10th Bhutanese month to the morning of the 17th day.[25] It is the most important festival of the year when all the people of Ngangla Trong and their relatives from other villages assemble at the end of the orange season. The three 'class tenants' and the *koche* play an important role, which reinforces the social structure, promotes harmony, and gives them prestige. However, the burden of their economic contribution is heavy, as they have to provide for everything over the four-day period. Below I provide a summary of the events.

On the evening of the 14th day, the three 'class tenants' and the *koche* gather in the temple to make a pledge (*bka' dam*) enounced by the *mi shi* lama. They pledge to have the festival run smoothly and that no fighting should take place. They appoint two *gar pa* (dancers/helpers) for each class who dance during the festival. After a ritual of *bgegs gtor*, meant to dispel evil influences, these *gar pa* perform three dances in the temple.

For the whole festival the *mi shi* lama is hosted by the Bjarpa 'class house', the *bon po* by the Lhamenpa and the *dpa' bo* by the Brela; i.e., each practitioner is hosted by the class to which he belongs.

The festival is characterised by a complex 'visiting process' which starts that evening. The *dpa' bo* from the Brela class goes to meet the *bon po* in the Lhamenpa 'class house', and together they go to the Bjarpa and *koche* houses before retiring in their respective 'class houses' for the night, after much drinking in each house.

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[24] We know that in the Bumthang group of languages, the *zla* is often pronounced 'la' and not 'da'.

[25] This festival is video-documented by Dr. Kunzang Dorji and Kinley Penjor but the final product is not yet available. Our shortcomings or mistakes can be corrected by their documentary.

On the 15th day, around 3 a.m., in the temple the *mi shi* lama and the *sgom chen* start the ritual based on the Norjam (*Nor bu rgya mtsh*o) text of Padma gling pa. Then at 7.30 a.m. the *koche* perform the offering of the *mar chang*.[26] At least one representative of each household of the region falling under the classes of Ngangla should be present. Two men, playing the role of the 'old man' *rgad po* and 'old woman' *rgad mo*, arrive and start telling a story. The *rgad po* carries a phallus in his hand while the *rgad mo* waves her ceremonial scarf (*ras chu*). These two characters are found in many festivals of Central Bhutan. They depict the origin of human beings and their journey from heaven to earth. They represent the 'ancestors'. It is believed that they use crude and foul language so that people who listen are embarrassed in front of their relatives and neighbours and this action gets them cleansed from all defilement.[27]

The *mChod pa la* won nation-wide recognition in December 2011 when Dasho Karma Ura included the Ngangla Trong *rgad po* and *rgad mo* in the newly established Dochula Festival and wrote that "they bring prosperity, longevity and happiness to the audience".[28]

Then everybody comes out of the temple; a *gser skyems* is offered and a dance of wrathful deities is performed. With a cymbal player preceding them, the *rgad po* and *rgad mo,* the *dpa' bo*, the *bon po*, and the *mi shi* lama, accompanied by the lay practitioners, go to the *koche*'s house and then to the 'class houses' of the Bjarpa, the Lhamenpa, and the Brela in succession before returning to the temple. In each house they receive money offerings (called here *snyan dar*) and ample drinks. The 'official role' of the *rgad po* and *rgad mo* is now over.

The *bon po* goes to his altar, the *bla brang*, a five-minute walk to the east along the ridge. He is joined by the *dpa' bo* and his helpers, the

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[26] *Mar chang* 'butter and alcohol' is a ceremonial offering which precedes any important function in Bhutan. It is a libation and prayer to propitiate the deities and, in particular, Mahakala.

[27] Lham Dorji (2005), p. 36, writes an interesting account of the Gadpo: "Gadpo families were equally influential but were believed to have no noble ancestry. They were ennobled based on their intelligence (saila), strength (khego) and wealth (junor). Gadpos were known for their courage and skills during warfare. Because of such qualities, people unanimously recognized them as their leader […].
Gadpopa is referred to as a performer during a local festival called Chodpa in Goshing. He performs dances and prays for the longevity, wisdom and prosperity though exhaustive use of mockery and obscene language. He traces his origin to the abode of Lha Jajin (Lord Indra). As revealed by his ritual recitation, he makes his psychic journey from the heaven through Ura to the present place. This is clear from the verses about his encounter with Ura Nad mo (female host of Ura)."

[28] *Tashi Delek* magazine Jan-Feb. 2012, pp. 12-13.

*lha'i bu mo* – 'divine girls', in fact young boys who wear girls' dresses. The *dpa' bo* exhorts them to remain united and performs a dance called 'the good dance of prophecy' *Lung bstan phab bzang.*

The *bon po* is the host at the *bla brang* and receives the *rgad po* and *rgad mo*, as well as the *mi shi* lama and the *sgom chen,* who arrive from the temple. He offers them drinks and then performs divination (*shala,* perhaps from *Phyva* 'divination'?) for each of them using a banana leaf folded with a stick. The way the banana leaf falls on the ground indicates the individual's outlook for the year.

In the meantime, the *gar pa* representing the three classes go to the *koche*'s house where they perform a *mar chang* and three dances; then they join the others at the *bla brang.*

In the evening, the *sgom chen* return to the temple singing and get blessed with holy water by the *mi shi* lama, then they make the round of the houses, visiting the 'class houses' of the Lhamenpa, the Brela, the Bjarpa, and finally the *koche*'s house where the auspicious song and dance *bkra shis* is performed.

The *dpa' bo*, his helpers – the *lha'i bu mo* and the *bon po* – go to the temple where a dance is performed according to a song sung by the *bon po*. This is the end of the role of the *bon po* in the festival.

On the morning of the 16th day the *sgom chen* perform a dance which enacts the journey of Padma gling pa to Kheng and then visit the three houses as well as the *koche'*s house where they are given offerings that represent the products of Kheng: maize, cotton textiles, *spos dkar* (resin of the Sal tree *(Shorea robusta*)), as well as agar wood (dark resinous heartwood that forms in *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* trees, also called aloewood). This part of the festival is a symbol and rememberance of the conversion of Kheng to Buddhism by Padma gling pa and its acceptance by the society.

When the visit to the houses is finished, they go back to the temple and the *dpa' bo* and his *lha'i bum* perform a dance depicting the animals of the forest.

Donations from civil servants and people working in the private sector outside the village are collected and divided amongst the performers.

At the end of the day everybody assembles in the temple. The *rgad po* and *rgad mo* come back to the temple in the late evening and their return marks the formal end of the festival. They congratulate the participants for the smooth arrangements and good atmosphere of the festival.

The formal send off of the *dpa' bo, bon po, mi shi* lama, and *sgom chen* takes place on the morning of the 17th day.

Besides the ritualised importance of the visits to the 'class houses' and the repartition of the practitioners according to their classes, it seems that one of the features of this festival is the fact that the mythic and historical figures of the community get a 'slot', starting with the ancestors, the *rgad po* and *rgad mo*, followed by the *bon po* and the *dpa' bo* and lastly Padma gling pa. The scenario of the festival crescendoes to the appearance of the Buddhist figure who presumably introduced Buddhism in this part of Bhutan.

The composite religious nature of the *mchod pa la* is quite clear from the sequences of events as well as the emphasis on unity and harmony at the community level. The festival, once more, demonstrates the interaction between myths and rituals, ritual's cohesive social function, and its role as a community memory.

If we look beyond Ngangla, this research could be tentatively linked to the religious pattern that has been defined as *Srid pa'i lha Bon* in a recent article[29] by Toni Huber. Huber attempts to demonstrate, based on his studies in Eastern Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, that there was a common Eastern Himalayan space centred around speakers of East Bodish languages and what he calls the *Srid pa'i lha Bon* religious phenomena. "They fully participate in Trans-Himalayan cultural patterns of narrative, symbolism and social practice as well as systematically reflecting ecological realities of the same region".[30]

*In search of history*

The whole social set-up, legitimised by the myths, comes out clearly in the annual religious festival of Ngangla Trong, the *mchod pa la,*[31] as well as in the system of 'class houses'. Each class – the *koche*, the Bjarpa, the Lhamenpa, and the Brela – has specific responsibilities during the festival and is associated with a religious performer. Each class also occupies the common 'class house' according to a pattern that has not yet been documented in other parts of Bhutan.

To this day, the social set-up in *rigs gsum* (three classes) seems to be specific to Ngangla and Bjoka. It might be the remains of the clan

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29 Huber (2013), pp. 263-94.

30 Ibid. p. 288. Furthermore, he calls for a reassessment of *'Bon'* in the light of the new material from the southern Himalayas. In this, Huber concurs with my own work '*Bon* in Bhutan. What's in the name?' (Pommaret 2014)

31 A 20 minutes documentary film on the *mchod pa la* was made in 2015 by Kunzang Dorji and Kinley Tshering within the framework of the Helvetas/EU LCD project.

(*rus/gdung*) system which was prevalent in Central and Eastern Bhutan before the *'Brug pa* conquest of the mid-seventeenth century as related in the *rGyal rigs.* The *rGyal rigs* was authored by the monk Ngag dbang[32] and translated by Michael Aris who dated the text of 1728 while John Ardussi argued in favour of 1668.[33] This text states that

> the Ura *gdung* having also gained power over Khen rigs rnam gsum [present-day Zhemgang district] and gZhong sgar Mol ba lung [today the west of Mongar district], gDung Grags pa dbang phyug came annually to collect taxes and in private he lived with *dpon mo* ('chieftainess') bKra shis dbang mo of whom the son Nyi ma rnam rgyal came forth. His descendants gradually spread and all the *gdung* families who are in Khen rigs rnam gsum [i.e. those of] sTung la sbi, Go zhing, Pang mkhar, Ka lam ti and Nya mkhar and also the so called *rJe* [families] of Yong lam who are in gZhong sgar Mol ba lung are of his lineage.[34]

This text seems to support the oral tradition and the myth that the Lhamenpa, one of the upper classes of Ngangla which came under the same territorial administration as Goshing (Go zhing) until 1997, migrated from Ura in Bumthang.

They would therefore also be the descendants of the Tibetan child that the people of Ura went to kidnap from Yarlung in Central Tibet after their chief gDung Grags pa dbang phyug died without son, having ordered them to go to Central Tibet to get a leader. *gDung* Grags pa dbang phyug himself, according to the myth presented in the *rGyal rigs,*[35] was the grandson of Lha mgon dpal chen, the first Ura *gdung,* who was the divine son of a lady from Ura and of the great central Tibetan pre-Buddhist deity 'O lde gung rgyal, who is believed to have said "The divine son Gu se lang ling having grasped the divine *rmu* cord, will descend to U ra". Gu se lang ling stayed in the womb of the Ura lady till his birth as Lha mgon dpal chen.

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[32] Ardussi (1977), unpubl. PhD: "However, in the form we now have it, the Bhutanese story of Tsangma was not written down until 1668, eight hundred years after the events in question and a mere decade or so after these chiefs were conquered by the 'Brug pa ecclesiastic authorities from western Bhutan. In their reduced political circumstances, the defeated eastern chieftains were saddened that their former subjects had lost interest in distinctions of nobility and class and in memorizing the oral history of their clans and families. So they pooled their knowledge into a private genealogical memoir called the *Rgyal rigs,* written by a monk known only as Ngawang of the Byar clan."

[33] Aris (2009) pp. 5 and Ardussi (2007 a), pp. 1-11.

[34] Aris (2009) pp.50-51.

[35] Aris (2009), pp. 47-50.

Dorji recalls the importance of a non-Buddhist religion in Kheng and the invocation to the *Bon* figure Tenpa Shenrab in many local rituals. Dorji cautions that linking one's ancestry with the gods of the sky such as 'Ode-Gongyal, Tonpa Shenrab and Ama Gung khai gyalmo' was necessary to claim any legitimacy as a ruler because of the importance of a non-Buddhist religion in Kheng and the invocation of the aforementioned gods from the sky in many rituals.[36] While keeping this potential incentive for constructing divine ancestry in mind, the linguistic evidence that Khengka, a branch of of Bumthangkha, is spoken in the area also strengthens our hypothesis that part of the people of Ngangla came from Bumthang along the Chamkhar river at a date yet to be determined.[37]

We could then propose that people of Ngangla Trong, which is right at the edge of the Himalayas where they adjoin the Indian plains, have kept a myth that links them first to Bumthang Ura and further to Central Tibet.[38] The river valleys offer an easy connection all the way to Yarlung. As an example, in a sketch Huber[39] shows how the dissimenation of specific *srid pa'i lha bon* rituals and priests as well as the link with the lHo brag region[40] follow the rivers from Yarlung in the north going south all the way to Kheng, adding evidence to our work. Furthermore, the distance between the region of Yarlung in Central Tibet and Bumthang is barely 300 kms, with only two high

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[36] Lham Dorji (2005), p. 37.

[37] This route was still taken until the 1990s by petty-traders and the religious lords (*chos rje*) of gSum 'phrang in Ura when they came down to Ngangla every other winter to perform rituals and collect alms in kind as Ngangla Trong fell under their religious purview.[37]

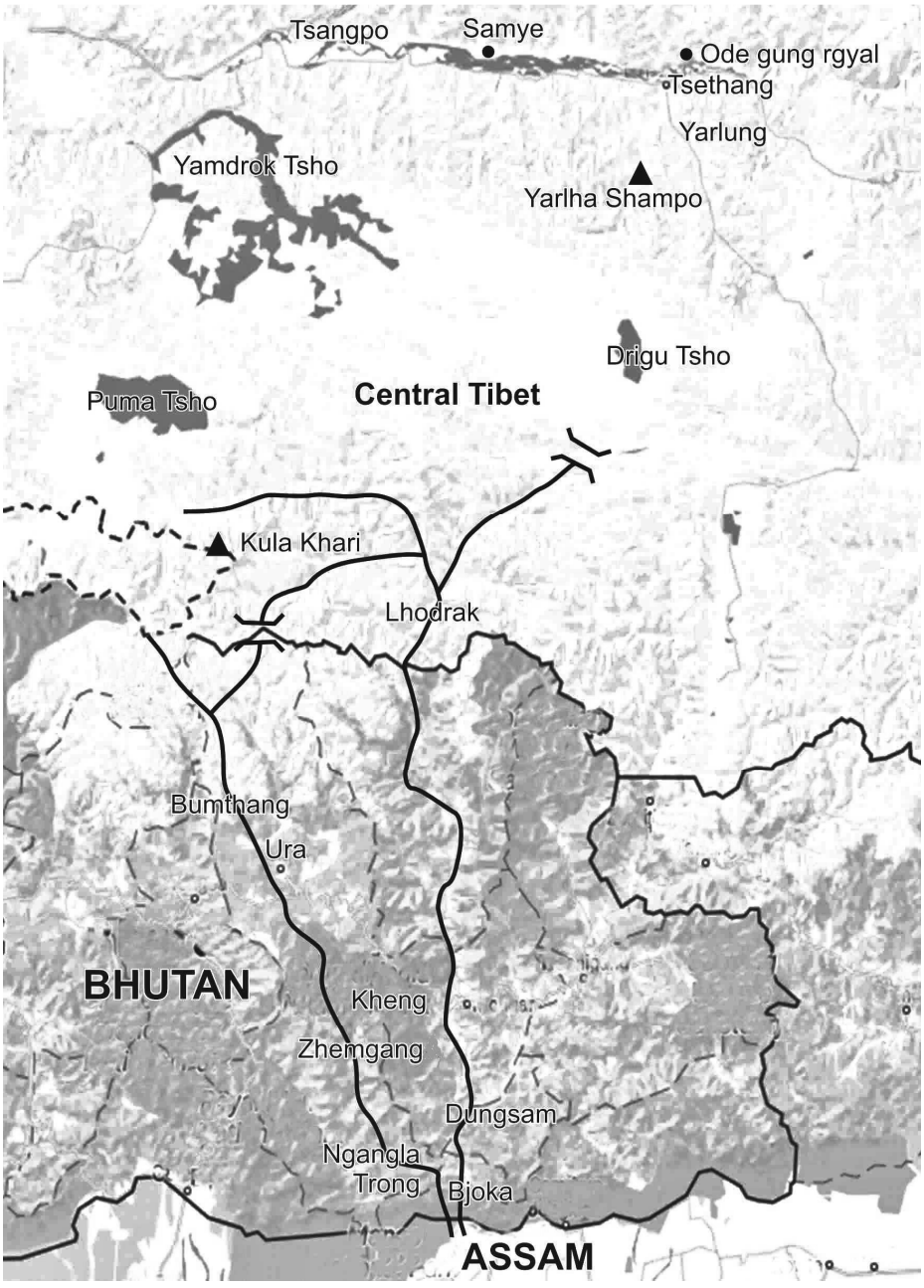
We also know that people of upper Kheng travelled to Lower Kheng-that is around Ngang a-Bumthang and Tibet: "In olden days, people travelled to the Lower Kheng (*mad*) to buy cotton, three or four months before *kharpu.* Until the middle of nineteenth century, the Lower Kheng cultivated cotton, and the people of the Outer Kheng contributed cotton tax to reciprocate gifts of rock-salt from the court in Wangdichholing, Bumthang. The people also travelled as far as Tibet to buy and barter rock salt for farm produce. They bought cotton with *baytam* or *sertam* coins or bartered with Tibetan rock salt, which was in turn exchanged for rice or chillies in Bumthang". Dorji Penjore (2000), p. 52.

[38] Another trace of this migration can be found in the deity 'O lde gung rgyal, propitiated in the Wamling village of Upper Kheng. See Dorji Penjore (2008) p. 271.

We will address the issue of migrations in a forthcoming book with the tentative title 'Deities, lamas, migrations and power in Bhutan'.

[39] Huber (2013), p. 271.

[40] We already explored the later links of Central Bhutan and Lhodrak in Pommaret (2000).




The Lower Khen district of Zhemgang, Bhutan

passes to cross, one between Yarlung and Lho brag and one on the Bhutan border (see map).[41] Between Bumthang and Ngangla, in the village of Wamling in Upper Kheng, the *Bon po* priest who presides over the festival of Khar phu (*dkar phud*) makes a mental journey from Wamling to Tibet via Bumthang to invite the deity 'O lde gung rgyal.[42]

However, as we have seen earlier, there are different myths of origin for the people of Ngangla Trong and one of them narrates that the lords and the upper class – the *koche* and the Bjarpa – arrived from the East. The story of a child stolen in the East to become the lord echoes the Ura myth where the Uraps went to Central Tibet to get a ruler. The *rGyal rigs* text once more provides a concurring clue: "The descendants of Bjar Ong ma are all the Byarpa families who are at U dza rong, Byog kang, Ngang la, Khom shar, Ne-to-la and Kheng rigs rnam gsum".[43]

The author of the *rGyal rigs* underlines the *koche* family's oral history. He traces the origin of the Bjar lineage through a complex genealogy to the Tibetan Prince (*Lha sra*s) gTsang ma, the eldest son of the Tibetan King Khri lde srong btsan Sad na legs,[44] who is said to have taken refuge in Eastern Bhutan in the ninth century and whose

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[41] However, we cannot for the time being subscribe completely to Huber's hypothesis that "some form of *Srid pa'i lha bon* was very likely the ancestral religion of the Shar Dung populations in southern lHo brag prior to their mid-14th century southward dispersal into the same Himalayan valley systems where the religion exists today" (Huber 2013, p. 264). He bases his assumption on Ardussi (2004), pp. 60-72. Ardussi's article on the *Dung/gDung* uses Tibetan sources and Ardussi argues in favour of a mid-14th century migration to Bhutan by the Shar and lHo *Dung* following a *Sa skya pa* military campaign against them. He also reviews the myths and argues for a construction of the myths at that time. For the time being, we cannot completely follow Ardussi although his historical presentation is convincing. The migrations into Bhutan cannot be linked to this sole 14th century event, especially if he considers the term *gDung/Dung* "as a epithet rather than a formal lineage name". The historian Karma Phuntsho (2013), pp 128-133, takes a similar cautious approach to the *gDung/Dung* issue in Bhutan.

[42] The song goes as such:
'Lha 'O de gong jan
It is not early for last year's time (neither early)
It is not late for this year's time (nor late)
To the three score households (60) of Wamling
Come to eat food of all men
Come to drink the *kemchana* (*churma*) (alcohol) of all women'.

[43] Aris (2009), p. 39.

[44] Aris (2009), p. 29 sqq.

descendants became the lords of dominions in Eastern Bhutan.[45] One lineage of descendants of gTsang ma was called the Bjar and is at the origin of the ruling family of, among others, Ngangla Trong and Bjoka.[46]

The present acknowledged proximity between the *koche* family and the Bjar is thus confirmed by another historical source and it is likely that the person who became the *koche* of Ngangla was from the Bjar lineage, which settled in many places of Eastern Bhutan. Moreover, two elements of these myths – the stolen child and the 'attached people' – are also found in myths of origin of Ura in Central Bhutan and Eastern Bhutan respectively. To put the history of Ngangla Trong in a broader perspective, while the ruler of Ngangla Trong attributes his ancestry to Prince gTsang ma, as does the one of Bjoka, the nearby rulers (*gDung*) of Goshing and Pangkhar are said to be the descendants of Ura *gDung* Grags pa dbang phyug, himself a descendant of the Tibetan stolen child from Yarlung who became the ruler of Ura in Bumthang.[47]

*Koche* is a nobility title specific to south-central Bhutan, to areas close to the Indian plains. According to Dorji,

> the Khoches were the noble families of Lower Kheng who were dominant in areas close to Assam and Bengal […]. There was a

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[45] I will not comment here on gTsang ma as it has already been debated by both Aris and Ardussi (2007 b), pp. 5-25 & unpublished Ph.D. Canberra, ANU (1977): "The last and most famous of Tibet's royal exiles in Bhutan was Lhase Tsangma, eldest of three sons of Emperor Thri Desongtsen Senaleg (reign c. 800-817). Unlike other Tibetan princes whom we have discussed, the historicity of Tsangma is not in question. His account comes from the standard histories and not from treasure literature. According to Tibetan tradition he was a committed Buddhist, in contrast to his younger brother prince Udumtsen Darma whom later historians held responsible for the anti-Buddhist purge at the end of the Yarlung dynasty. The sons' interconnected stories revolve around fraternal conflict over succession to the throne, and controversy about the extent to which Buddhism should serve as the state religion. This theme became grist for the mill of later Tibetan historians who padded the account of Tsangma's exile to the south in order to build their case against anti-Buddhist elements within the ruling circle. Even his name Tsangma may have been adjusted to serve this purpose.
A very different picture of prince Tsangma emerges from the traditions of Eastern Bhutan and Tibetan Mön Yul where he was viewed as a purely secular figure, the royal ancestor of many noble families that once ruled hereditarily from ridge-top 'kingdoms' and isolated valleys."

[46] Lham Dorji (2005), pp. 31-59. Lham Dorji attempted to give a narrative of their history, based mostly on oral accounts, but the absence of reliable written sources has prevented him from reaching any firm conclusion

[47] Aris (1986), pp. 47 - 51.

> significant trade relationship between Khengpas and Indians. During winter seasons the people of hill had to migrate to the plains with their goats and sheep. Khengpas were known for their excellence in warfare and statecraft. …Local tradition holds that Khoches were the direct descendants of Lhasey Tsangma, a grandson of Tibetan king Thrisong Deutsen. Lhasey Tsangma came to Bhutan in the 9th century. This can be substantiated by the fact that the descendants of this prince established Byarpa families in Kheng Joka (Bjo ka) and Ngangla where Koche were based. I would hypothesize that Byarpa families in Joka and Ngangla once ruled the Khen and Koch tribes of the plains. Through this association Byarpa families came to be known as Joka (Bjoka) and Ngangla Khoches.[48]

In Kheng the term *koche* appears to be associated only with Bjoka and Ngang la, while it is also found, at least in Chimung (Phyi mung) and Thinangbi, in Dungsam (gDung bsam).

The erudite former Supreme Court Justice *Lyonpo* Sonam Tobgay, who is from Dungsam (gDung bsam) in present-day Pemagatshel district, said in an interview with *Bhutan Observer* on 19th September 2012 that "the earliest recorded history of the *dzongkhag* (district) dated back to 869 AD as Dungsam in the biography of Lhasey Tsangma, a Tibetan prince in exile, whose youngest son, Pel Thongley, visited the region and started the social class called Khhochey." This remark shows that knowledge of local history and texts such as the *rGyal rigs* is still alive within erudite circles in Bhutan. The *rGyal rigs* indeed talks about Pel Thongley (dPal mthong legs) who came to Dungsam (gDung bsam)[49] and is an ancestor of the Byar pa families of Tsha se, Yu rung, Khang pa Phyi mung, and Zla gor, villages which are today in Dungsam (gDung bsam): "He gained power over the officers and the subjects and also the Indians and his strength and dominions became great".[50]

The title *koche* brings out different issues about which I will only propose tentative readings. The first issue there is the issue of the origin of the title *koche.* If spelt *mKoche,* it means 'one who is needed' in classical Tibetan. However, this term cannot be found anywhere in the *rGyal rigs* which refers to *gDung, rGyal po, Zhal ngo* and *dPon po,* the other titles associated with the ancient nobility. To our quandary, the Bhutanese historian Karma Phuntsho offered "My best guess is that it is a corrupted version of a familiar title used in other parts of the

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48 Lham Dorji 2005, pp. 34-5.
49 *rGyal rigs*, p. 29 and p. 35.
50 *rGyal rigs,* pp. 38-9.

Himalayan world, Kuchen – important personage. This also goes well with Ponchen, a term often juxtaposed with Koche. I am not convinced by the hypothesis that it is Koche - a useful one."[51]

This remark led us to look into the word associated with *sKu* and we found that *sKu mched* in classical Tibetan refer to siblings in an honorific sense but also to "those who are born the sons of kings".[52] As this nobility is considered the descendent of Prince gTsang ma of Tibet, this would make sense and the local pronunciation *koche* is very close to the original Tibetan. The term *koche* could thus tentatively be linked to the origin myth.

Although the lack of textual evidence at this stage prevents us from commenting further on the historical role of the Bhutanese *koche* in Assam, I would be inclined to follow Lham Dorji's hypothesis about the extent of power of the Bjoka and Ngangla *koche* over what the British called the Duars, these very fertile stretches of land at the foot of the Himalayas. The oral tradition reports it and the raids from the Bhutanese in the Assam plains are documented by the British authors.

A Bhutan-British war was fought over them in 1865 after centuries of skirmishes. From the *rGyal rigs* and local oral traditions, at least some Assamese Duars appear to have already been under some kind of control by 'Bhutanese' chieftains from Kheng and Dungsam to the north much before the seventeenth century. These Duars were populated by a well-known Mongoloid group called the Bodos, with whom 'Bhutanese' had trade links but whom they also kidnapped to make them their serfs. Although we do not know much about the Ngangla *koche*, we know that his neighbour and ally the Bjoka *koche* was powerful and seemed to have had some authority over parts of the Assamese plains, such as the areas of Kokabari Rangapani and Gohali, as well as part of Dungsam (gDung bsam) in Eastern Bhutan. The Chimung (Phyi mung) *koche* of Dungsam consider themselves relatives of the Bjoka *koche*. It is said that the Bjoka *koche*'s stone house/castle, which is huge by region standards, was built partially by workers from Assam and Cooch Bihar but no date is given. For the Ngangla *koche*'s house we would venture the early twentieth century, as local tradition in Ngangla says that Choeje Zangmo (Chos rje bzang mo) from Bjoka built the *koche*'s stone house on the Bjoka model. She married the Ngangla *koche* Druk Wangyal ('Brug dbang rgyal). They were the grandparents of the present Ngangla *koche* who is in his seventies.

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[51] Personal communication 19 June 2013.

[52] S.C. Das *Dictionary* (1983), p. 89.

Given that the Bhutanese made raids into the Assam Duars[53] in order to get cattle and serfs, it is plausible that the Bjoka *koche* had serfs and loot from India. The history of Assam, called the kingdom of Kamrup in medieval times, speaks of Bhutanese raids as early as the fourteenth century but further research is needed to confirm this.

The last issue concerns the ancestry of the upper classes of Ngangla. Either from Ura in Bumthang or from Eastern Bhutan, these upper classes claim an ancestry which would have originated from scions of the Tibetan royal family and the Yarlung dynasty called the sPu rgyal dynasty. Interstingly, the name of the sacred mountain of Ura, Pur shel la, 'the crystal place of tholy mortal remains', could be a different pronunciation of sPu rgyal la. The myth of the descent to earth of the first ruler of Ura in Bumthang and the subsequent search for another leader, also echoes the origin myth of the descent to earth of the first King of Tibet and his discovery by people looking for a leader. The story was first mentioned in the Dunhuang manuscript PT 1038 and underwent several variations over the centuries. Nyatri Tsenpo (gNya' khri btsan po), the first Tibetan king, was the fourth son of the *phyva* god Ya lha bdal drug, who was the brother of 'O lde gung rgyal, the father of all the mountain deities. Nyatri Tsenpo came down from the sky on a *dmu* rope to rule the people on earth. This story presents a striking similarity with the myth of the first ruler of Ura, also a descendant of Ode Gungyal ('O lde gung rgyal).[54]

The parallel between the myths of origin is interesting. The people of Ura went to steal a child from Yarlung after their lord, whose ancestors came from heaven, died without offspring. The people of Ngangla went to kidnap a child of royal descent from Eastern Bhutan after their first lords, the divine siblings who came from Ura in Bumthang, disappeared. This would explain the pre-eminence of the *koche* and Bjarpa over the Lhamenpa and the social set-up: Brela, Lhamenpa and Koche/Bjarpa.

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[53] The name Duars, 'Doors', is derived from the several passes that lead from the region into the Indian plains.

[54] Sorensen (1994), pp. 138-40, (2000) p. 59 and p. 61 and Karmay (1998), pp. 296-97.

*Tentative reading of the community of Ngangla Trong*

| **'Classes'** | **Religious practitioners** | **Order of the rank** | **Origin/myth** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Koche Bjarpa | Mi shi lama | Mi shi lama | Eastern Bhutan. Prince gTsang ma's descendents |
| Lhamenpa | Bon po | Bon po | Ura, Bumthang. Yar lung/'O lde gung rgyal ? |
| Brela | dPa' bo | dPa'bo | first settlers |

*Conclusion*

This work is based on three sources which are usually viewed with some suspicion, if not considered 'apocryphal' by textual historians: oral tradition, myths, and historiography. It does not dismiss the possibility of overlapping between the three sources and it also must take into account the legitimacy agenda of prestigious ancestry which is a common template in the Himalayas. However in this case, the three sources allow us to get a glimpse into the history of this remote region of Bhutan.[55]

Here I cannot provide a linear vision of history but rather pick up surviving fragments and try to make sense of them, as well as raise more questions, including the possibility of a meme. Bhutan did not go through the political and cultural turmoil Tibet did and the memory of the past is not totally erased. To quote a proverb taken from the *Sa skya*

[55] Balikci (2008), p. 96, also notes the Yarlung connection concerning a Pawo from Chongpung village in West Sikkim: "Late Chongpung Ajo Pawo used to chant 'our *pho lha* came from Yarlung', which is an indication that their ancestors might have been pushed towards or established on the fringes of Tibet since ancient times, where they escaped the full impact of Tibetan Buddhist thought in later centuries."
Further on, she concludes (p. 374): "The presence of the great *mo lha* from Yarlung, Yum Machen Düsum Sangay, as the central deity of the *pawo*'s most important ritual is an indication that Tingchim villagers may trace their origin to the Yarlung valley of the kings of central Tibet, an ancient origin which could indicate that their establishment in these southern valleys long predates the migration of western Sikkimese clans from Kham Minyak in the thirteenth century."

*legs bshad* and well-known in Bhutan: "If a man does not know his own family lineage, he is like a monkey playing in a boundless jungle".

The monk Ngag dbang already replied to possible criticisms at the end of the *rGyal rigs*:

> Thus although they represent all the numerous clans names (*rus kyi ming*) which accord with the various local dialects prevailing throughout the area of the Eastern Province of lHo Mon, since they cannot be substantiated here, no more than just this has been put into writing. As for the version which most stories make universally renowned, according to which some people, in recounting the various oral traditions, say that the origins [of their ancestors lay in a] descent to the land of humans after grasping the divine *dmu* ladders and the gold and silver *phyva* cords, is this a legend based on the treasure-texts of the *Bon* tradition? Or is it said of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas whose manifested forms, emanated for the sake of beings, were born among the scions of these families and clans (*rigs rus*)?[56]

Perhaps what we today call, for want of a better term, 'social classes' (*rigs*) in Ngangla Trong are surviving vestiges of the clans (*rus*) that we know from textual evidence were prevalent in Eastern Bhutan but disappeared after the *'Brug pa* conquest in the seventeenth century. The strong identification of the people to each class, the alliance patterns, the sense of shared responsibility, the houses and lands at the class level, as well as the religious festival scenario – all of which continue to the present day – would favour this hypothesis, which shall nevertheless remain speculative for the time being.

The downfall of the Kheng nobility was, it seems, caused at the end of the seventeenth century by the ambition of the Nyakhar gDung in Upper Kheng, which angered some of the lords. They called the *'Brug pa* armies of the new state for help. The Nyakhar gDung was defeated leading to Kheng becoming part of the new Bhutanese state and the nobility accepting an overall power. However, as mentioned earlier, most of the lords continue to enjoy a great autonomy, due, no doubt, to the difficult terrain. At the same time, they collected taxes for the Bhutanese central government and acted as intermediaries between the central government and the people. This was confirmed by the people of Ngangla Trong, who said they always paid in-kind taxes and contributed labour to the central government and not to the Koche.

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[56] *rGyal rigs*, pp. 60-1.

However, by being 'middlemen', the Koche still enjoyed prestige and probably found the arrangement to be to their own benefit.[57]

This paper, due to the preliminary stage of this study raises as many questions as it tries to solve, and many points need further clarification and research. However, it is intended to bring notice to a very specific and fascinating society on the threshold of tremendous changes that come with development.

Ngangla Trong is at the nexus of the histories of Eastern and Central Bhutan and the myths only confirm this. It may also be a surviving testimony and at the receiving end of the turbulent events that took place in Yarlung, Central Tibet, in the ninth century with the assassination of the last Tibetan King and the flight of personalities linked to this event into Bhutan. In a material culture centred on bamboo and jungle, in the deep south of Bhutan where the Himalayas meet the Indian plains, myths and local history may conjure up events of the ninth century in Central Tibet.

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# CARVING KHENPO NGAGA'S COMMENTARY ON *YESHE LAMA:* A PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES OF BHUTAN

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*Abstract*

The National Library & Archives of Bhutan (NLAB) does not simply collect and conserve the literary treasures of northern Buddhism. It has an active Printing Unit where metal-block *zung* (Sk. *dharani*) and from time to time other items are printed on hand-operated letter presses. The wood-block carving tradition is still kept up, and the senior carver is now coming to the end of the carving of a set of blocks for the commentary on Jigme Lingpa's *Yeshe Lama* by Khenpo Ngaga (Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, 1879-1941). The project was initiated by the library's second director, Lam Pemala (Pema Tshewang, 1922-2009) who after retirement was appointed abbot of Nyimalung Monastery in Bhutan's spiritual heartland, Bumthang. The carving master for this new edition is a photocopy of a block-print edition on hand-made paper which was briefly loaned to Lam Pemala in 1998 by Nyoshul Khenpo (Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorje, 1931-99) who was then living in Thimphu.

This paper discusses the history and implementation of the carving project, and the provenance of both the manuscript (*umey*) copy (offset printed in Delhi, 1971) initially used as carving master but later found to be an abbreviated version, and the block-print (*uchen*) edition on hand-made paper now being used as carving master (each, however, from the personal library of Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche). It seems that the block-print edition may not be previously known to any, and indeed may even have been printed from the original xylographs carved at Adzom Monastery, Kham in the 1940s.

Drawing on already published accounts of Lam Pemala's early life together with other background information, the final section discusses why Lam Pemala may have wanted to have this particular work carved at the NLAB.

*Introduction*

The National Library of Bhutan was established in 1967 as part of a program to collect and conserve the literary treasures that form a significant part of the country's religious and cultural heritage. Under the library's second director Pema Tshewang (familiarly known as Lopen Pemala), a scholar monk who held office from 1973 to 1993, this brief was extended to include both the collection of old sets of printing blocks (these mainly transferred from monastic collections for better preservation), and also the carving of new printing blocks. A microfilming unit was set up and a fumigation chamber acquired. Over this period the collection was greatly enlarged and many manuscripts microfilmed. After the most important manuscripts in the National Library had been processed, Lopen Pemala arranged for the microfilming of rare and precious manuscripts held in monastic libraries in and around Thimphu and Paro. For some five years from 1987, when the Microfilming Project was at its height, several thousand new printing blocks were carved on the premises. These were prepared from some of the more important texts called in for microfilming. When preparation of a set of blocks had been completed, the National Library would print the work and sell copies to the public through the National Library Bookshop. Under Lopen Pemala's successor, the scope of publishing activities was widened and the range of printing activities was extended.

*A new carving project*

On retirement in 1993, Lopen Pemala became abbot of Nyimalung Gonpa in Bumthang, where he had completed his training for the monkhood some 50 years earlier. Soon after taking up his responsibilities, the newly designated Lam Pemala proposed a fresh carving project for the library — the preparation of a set of printing blocks for Khenpo Ngaga's Commentary on *Yeshe Lama*. Commonly known as 'Wisdom Guru' (but more felicitously translated as 'Supreme Guide for the Realisation of Wisdom') *Yeshe Lama* is a manual on Dzogchen practice contained in the *Longchen Nyingthig* ('Heart Essence of the Great Expanse'), a cycle of teachings revealed to scholar and meditation master, Jigme Lingpa (1729–98) in three visions of Longchenpa (Longchen Rabjampa, 1308-1363) which has become one of the most widespread sets of teachings in the Nyingma tradition. Dzogchen, meaning Great Perfection, refers to both the natural, unblemished state of the mind and a body of teachings and meditation

practices aimed at realizing that condition. *Yeshe Lama*, a condensation of the teachings and practices found in Longchenpa's *Nyingthig Yabshi*, ('the Four-fold Heart Essence') is one of the most widely studied manuals on the practice of Dzogchen. The manual, a summation of the key points for practice found in the 17 tantras which are at the heart of Dzogchen, is a restricted text to be read only by those who have already received instructions from a qualified teacher. Hence, Khenpo Ngaga's Commentary on *Yeshe Lama*, where the manual itself comprises a little over one third of the text, is also a restricted text.

*Workflow for preparation and carving of a new wood-block edition, in summary*

1. *Obtain and prepare the wood:* In Bhutan, printing blocks (*par shing*) are carved from Himalayan birch (*Betula utilis*, local name *takpa shing*). Home Ministry approval is obtained for selection and felling of birch trees at a designated site. The timber is cut into blocks of the required size at a woodcraft centre. A library carver attends to the finishing work.

2. *Make the carving template:* There are two principal script styles: formal (capital/block letters) used for books and manuscripts, and cursive (capital and lowercase letters) used in everyday writing, called *uchen* and *umey* respectively. If the text of the work selected for carving is in *uchen*, then it may be photocopied directly to create a carving master for the project. If the selected work is in *umey*, it first needs to be transcribed in *uchen* and then photocopied. Thereafter, the photocopied pages are checked for scribal errors or sections of text where the lettering is not clear. A special calligraphy pen is used to write corrections (in bottled black ink)[1] on slips of paper which are pasted over the text they are to replace. The copy-edited carving master is then photocopied with magnification adjusted to reproduce the desired page size.

3. *Prepare the block for carving:* The carver spreads a layer of paste across the carving surface and sticks a page of text onto the block, printed side down.[2] He sets the block aside while the paste dries out.

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[1] Up until the mid-1990s calligraphers used an ink consisting of soot. Now that cooking on open fires has largely been phased out, the soot formerly collected (indeed as a tax) from a shelf above the hearth is no longer available.

[2] Formerly the paste was made up by mixing wheat flour with water. Nowadays Fevicol (a polysynthetic resin adhesive manufactured in India) is used instead.

One week later he dampens the page with water and gently peels it off the block, leaving the black letters of text behind on the wood. The carver moistens the block with mustard oil to soften the wood a day before he starts carving.

4. *Carve the block:* Working with a specialised set of tools, the carver first pares down the wood surrounding the area imprinted with the text, so that when block-printing takes place, only the inked letters make contact with the page. He then removes the wood around the letters, leaving behind the raised text. These steps are then repeated for the other side of the block. A completed block with a page of text carved either side is called a folio. When carving of the folio has been completed, the folio number and running title are carved on the left edge of the front face of the block. A carver can prepare three lines of text per day — sometimes more, if the text is spread out: it depends on the calligraphy.

1. Correcting errors on carved blocks, 1994

5. *Proof-read and correct errors:* Sample pages are printed and the text is checked against the photocopy carving master. If an error is found, the section containing the error is excised. A new piece of wood is patched into the space and fixed in position with a wood adhesive.[3] The section is then re-carved, after which a further print is made from the corrected block and the page is proof-read again. Checking and editing can be done folio-by-folio or else after carving of the entire work has been completed.

2. Manual block printing with roller, inked pad and brush, 1995

*History of the project*

Lam Pemala originally brought to the library for use as carving master a copy he had obtained in Dharamsala. This was the 1971, New Delhi edition, printed and bound western style, with text reproduced from a rare manuscript from the library of Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche. One of the most eminent contemporary Tibetan Buddhist masters of his time and a major lineage holder of the *Longchen Nyingthig* Dzogchen tradition,

[3] Fevicol again.

Nyoshul Khenpo had fled Tibet for India in 1959.[4] The book was photocopied then taken into stock. As the text was written in *umey*, a library calligrapher had first to transcribe it into *uchen* to create the carving master. The text was closely written so the transcribing was quite difficult and time-consuming, especially as many words were written in abbreviated form (as is common in *umey*) and needed to be transcribed in full for the *uchen* edition. The customary stylistic repetitions, too, had been abbreviated, and thus also needed to be expanded for the transcription. After the first 90 folios had been carved, Lam Pemala (who was overseeing the project on his visits to Thimphu) recommended they stop work as there were just too many problems with the *umey* text: he felt that with the commissioning of such a major work there should be no chance of mis-comprehension of text and no incompleteness. So the carved blocks were set aside in storage boxes together with the calligrapher's transcription of the 1971 edition text, and the un-carved blocks were set aside safely also, thus keeping open the option of perhaps completing carving from the 1971 edition as a separate project at some later time.

Lam Pemala now sought out a more authoritative edition to use as master for the *Yeshe Lama* project, but finding another edition of the work proved difficult. While stationed at the New Delhi Field Office of the US Library of Congress from 1968 to 1985, Gene Smith had contacted Tibetan scholar-refugees of all sects and groups, identifying rare and important manuscripts and block-prints they had brought with them into exile and arranging to have these edited, copied, and published under the PL 480 program.[5] That Khenpo Ngaga's work did not come to light amongst the thousands of Tibetan texts published under PL 480 serves to underline both its rarity in India and the reluctance of Dzogchen practitioners to bring forth their own copies of

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[4] According to Nyoshul Khen's old friend Khenpo Sonam Tobgyal Rinpoche of Riwoche, Toronto, the manuscript was copied in *umey* by scribe Tenzing Wangyel for Nyoshul Khenpo (email of 30/1/12 from Kelsang, Khenpo Sonam's assistant). Nyoshul Khenpo would have taken the manuscript with him when he went to India. For details of the circumstances of his hazardous journey, see 'Enlightened Vagabond: an Autobiographical Sketch' in *Natural Great Perfection: Dzogchen Teachings and Vajra Songs* by Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche and Lama Surya Das, 2nd ed., Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2009; the sketch can also be found online, excerpted or in full, at various websites including http://www.dzogchen.org/library/bios/khenpo-autobio.htm.

[5] Under PL 480 and its successors, India paid back loans for purchase of surplus US agricultural products in the form of books, which were distributed to Library of Congress and around 30 participating libraries in the US under a special acquisitions program.

this restricted text for publication under the scheme. Only the 1971 edition was available as a printed publication, and those few Dzogchen practitioners who had their own manuscript copies or block-printed editions were unwilling to loan them to Lam Pemala. So the project languished for the next few years ... and then there was a great stroke of luck!

Nyoshul Khenpo had remained in India after fleeing Tibet. Living first as a refugee, he later travelled widely in the country, giving teachings and cycles of empowerment to many people. While in Kalimpong in the early 1970s, he was struck down with an illness from which he took several years to recover. During this period he spent about two years in Thimphu, where he was treated by respected traditional healer, Dr. Ladakh Amji, and on the advice of Lopon Sonam Zangpo married Damcho Zangmo, a Bhutanese lady from Bumthang. Around 1975 Nyoshul Khenpo left with Damcho Zangmo for Switzerland and further medical treatment. From the 1980s Nyoshul Kenpo made many visits abroad for teaching, sometimes accompanied by his wife, but in later years he spent most of his time in Bhutan, where he had many students. Amongst these students was Lam Pemala.

When Lam Pemala received the oral transmission of *Yeshe Lama* from Nyoshul Khenpo at the latter's Thimphu home in 1998, Nyoshul Khenpo used for reference a block-print edition of Khenpo Ngaga's commentary on the work. After repeated requests,[6] Nyoshul Khenpo eventually permitted Lam Pemala to borrow the book for a day so that a photocopy could be made for use as carving master. Senior carver, Yeshi Namgyal who did the photocopying remembers the occasion well: Lam Pemala brought the book to him in the morning, Yeshi Namgyal photocopied it, and Lam Pemala took the book back to Nyoshul Khenpo in the afternoon. The book was in *pecha* format, block-printed on hand-made paper and seemed quite old.

In 1996 a long-term project to upgrade and modernise the library had begun, financed through Danida.[7] The project's principal thrusts were staff training, creation of an online database to the collection, and a countrywide survey to identify and record details of literary treasures held in dzongs, religious complexes, and private homes. Throughout this period more emphasis was placed on the project-designated

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[6] This could have been because Lam Pemala was known to be "notoriously absent-minded" but equally because Nyoshul Khenpo was reluctant to lend the work at all, even though Lam Pemala was receiving the oral transmission from him at the time.

[7] Danida is the term used for Denmark's development cooperation, which is an area of activity under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. National Archives, too, were set up under the project, which concluded in October 2010.

activities, but the carving and calligraphy team was still there, though eventually reduced to two carvers, as posts falling vacant were not filled. Since completion of their last major project, the copy-editing and correcting of freshly carved wood-blocks for the new block-print edition of *Kuenkhyen Ka-bum*, printed on hand-made paper and officially released on May 16, 2000,[8] the carvers had been occupied mainly with checking and repairing of wood-blocks which were already part of the collection. In 2005 they were able once more to take up the *Yeshe Lama* carving project.

3. Carving of the Yeshe Lama Commentary begins, 2005

*Carving of the Yeshe Lama Commentary*

The text of the block-print edition is 272 folios in total, of which the *Yeshe Lama* root text comprises around 80 folios. The project has no personal sponsorship; as with the 1971 edition, the National Library covered the cost of the wood-blocks required for the carving, which

[8] The carving of this new edition of the collected works of Pema Karpo (1527-92), fourth incarnation of Tsangpa Gyare,(founder of the Drukpa lineage) was initiated in the 1970s by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck who financed the project, which took carvers in Bhutan and India many years to complete.

began early in Dorjee Tshering's tenure as library director.[9] Yeshi Namgyal and his colleague Tandin Tshering worked together until 2007 when Tandin Tshering was transferred to the National Library Press. Progress has been much slower since then, as Yeshi Namgyal has many other duties to attend to. In April 2017 he completed folio 244, leaving only 28 more blocks to be carved. The folios now remaining will be processed soon. Carving completion will be celebrated on the occasion of a simple ceremony to be held towards the end of the year, marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the library. It is envisaged that several sets may subsequently be printed for the library collection in the traditional way, on Bhutanese hand-made paper; but, as this is a restricted text, to be read only by those who have already received the oral transmission, it will not be published freely like other texts, but only on demand and according to the number of sets required.

4. Yeshi Namgyal starting to carve a new block, 2011

[9] Once the director had obtained approval, the senior carver and other staff went themselves in their own vehicles to select and fell in the Pelela area, where birch trees grow in abundance.

5. Freshly carved Yeshe Lama wood-blocks, 2014

*Provenance of the NLAB block-print edition:*

Research remains incomplete, but from what has been uncovered so far it is clear that it predates other editions currently appearing in the Library of Congress and Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre (TBRC) online catalogues.[10] The colophon includes benedictory verses and dedication to Tshewang Drolma and concludes with a statement of authorship, which may be translated as follows:

> These verses of good wishes for the colophon of the xylographic edition have been composed by Thubten Nyendrak, retired abbot of Dzogchen of Dokham at the request of Lha Onn Gyalong, minister of Derge. May they be auspicious!

Historian Rémi Chaix has tentatively identified Lha Onn Gyalong as a minister called Lhagyal who was killed near Mesho in 1946/47 during

[10] Namely, the 1971 Delhi edition printed and bound western style; the 199-? Chengdu edition of Khenpo Ngaga's collected works in *pecha* format, where his Commentary on *Yeshe Lama* (vol. 9) comprises the *umey* text pages of the 1971 edition, as is clear from visual comparison of the final pages of each; and a block-print edition received from Adzom Chogar in 2002-03 as part of a shipment of around 40 volumes.

succession troubles in Derge.[11] If this identification is correct, then the order for preparation of a xylographic edition must have been made before then. The actual carving of the blocks and release of the xylographic edition may have taken place later but probably not much after 1950, as by then the political situation in Kham was deteriorating rapidly. It can safely be assumed that the blocks were carved at Adzom Monastery in Tromtar, Palyul (Baiyü) county, a major centre of practice, study, teaching and printing of texts on Dzogchen with a history dating back over 400 years. It seems most likely that the copy Nyoshul Khenpo obtained was printed from the original wood-blocks cut in the 1940s to early 1950s, as the carver said the book already looked quite old when he did the photocopying.

During the lifetime of the 5th abbot/first Adzom Drukpa, Drodul Pawo Dorji (1842-1924) Adzom Chogar was essentially a loosely organised religious encampment (or *chogar*) rather than a formal monastery. It later became one of the larger monasteries in the area, with a monastic college and printing house in addition to the usual prayer halls and residences. Within the lineage, the teachings of Jigme Lingpa and Longchenpa are the main practice. Adzom Gyalse Gyurme Dorje (1895-1969)[12], third son of the first Adzom Drukpa and Adzom's 6th abbot, was responsible for ordering the carving of most of the famous Adzom Drukpa Chogar editions. Gyurme Dorji's teachers included Khenchen Thubten Nyendrak (1883-1959) and Khenpo Ngaga (1879-1941), who had been one of the principal students of his father.[13] Gyurme Dorji's students included Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorje.

During the political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s the monastery was destroyed and many precious xylographs were lost. When reforms and policy changes were introduced in the early 1980s, the 7th abbot/second Adzom Drukpa (1926-2001) instituted repair and restoration work. Some 20 years later, restoration was largely completed. Half of the more than 40,000 wood-blocks had been restored and the printing house, seriously damaged in 1960, once again

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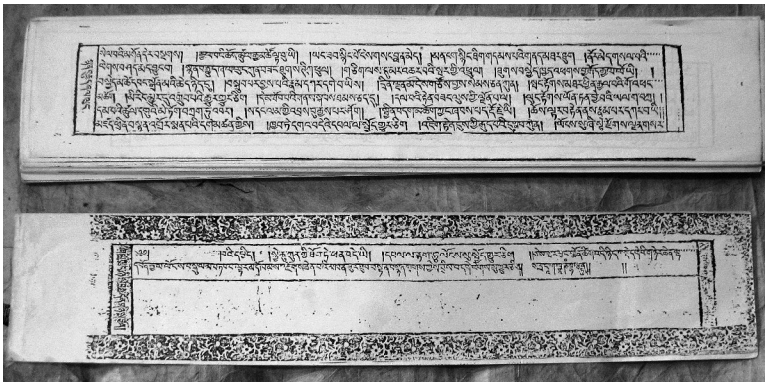
[11] Rémi Chaix is researching the history of the Derge kingdom. A summary of his argument is included as Appendix I to this paper.

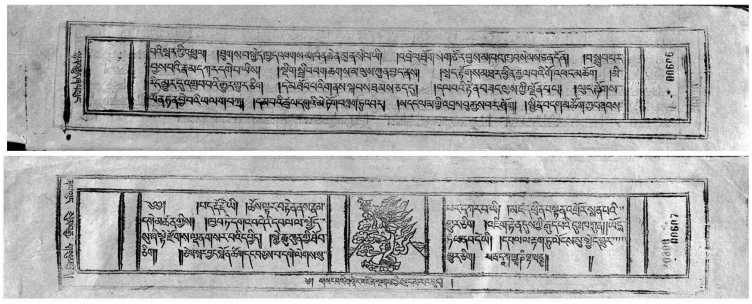
[12] In 1958 Gyurme Dorji was arrested and put in prison where he gave teachings to fellow inmates. He passed away in 1969 with many miraculous signs, leaving a letter predicting the date and place of his future rebirth and the names of his future parents. His trulku was born in Bhutan in 1980.

[13] When Khenpo Ngaga passed away, Gyurme Dorji and Shedrub Tenpe Nyima (immediate incarnation of Khenpo Ngaga's principal teacher, Nyoshul Lungtok Tenpé Nyima and another of Khenpo Ngaga's principal students) led the cremation ceremony.

housed a large collection of printing blocks, including a set of Longchenpa's Seven Treasuries. Some of the printing blocks were newly made. Around 2002-03 TBRC received from Adzom some 40 volumes of works printed from freshly cut wood-blocks. Amongst these was Khenpo Ngaga's *Yeshe Lama* Commentary printed in 303 folios.[14] Examining the final pages of this edition, it is clear that the block-print edition borrowed from Nyoshul Khenpo in 1998 to generate the NLAB carving master differs from and also pre-dates the edition from which Adzom has carved its new set of blocks. More specifically, the authorship statement, which concludes the colophon of the NLAB carving master, does not appear in the new Adzom edition. (See Appendix II for NLAB research officer, Gencop Karchung's comparison of the final pages of the two editions.)



6. Yeshe Lama Commentary: final pages of NLAB carving master, 2010



7. Yeshe Lama Commentary: final pages of new Azom block-print edition, received at TBRC in 2002-03 (Photo: TBRC, 2013)

[14] TBRC senior librarian, Kelsang Lhamo reports that this is their only block-print copy of the work. She says TBRC holds more than 30 different texts from blocks carved at Adzom Chogar 199?-2003 but nothing further has come from Adzom since the shipment of 2002-03 (email correspondence, March 2012-June 2013).

*Where did Nyoshul Khenpo get his copy of the block-print edition?*

After the Dalai Lama's departure in 1959 thousands of Tibetans fled their homeland for India, many carrying books with them. As mentioned, these books formed the focus of Gene Smith's reprinting project, implemented under the PL 480 program. Initially it was believed that because of the destruction in Tibet in the period of the Cultural Revolution, most of what was left of book collections there had been destroyed.

However, as tensions eased in the 1980s, and the area was opened up to tourists, it gradually became known that destruction of monasteries and temples (especially in the remoter areas) had not been as widespread as originally thought and many collections of books had in fact survived in monastic sub-branches, private homes and so forth.[15]

Nyoshul Khenpo visited Tibet twice in his later years. The first visit was with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche in 1990, when Khyentse Rinpoche was invited to re-consecrate the restored Samye Monastery. On that occasion the party visited Samye and Lhasa then toured a number of sacred places and monastic centres in Central Tibet. On the second visit, in 1992, he travelled to Kham with Penor Rinpoche who delivered a Rinchen Terdzö empowerment while they were at Palyul.

The party also travelled around the various monasteries of the area, attracting large crowds everywhere they went.[16] Nyoshul Khenpo had lost touch with all who had remained behind in Tibet, including family members, and on this visit he was reunited with his surviving brothers and sisters for the first time since 1959.

Anecdotal evidence points to Nyoshul Khenpo having acquired the book at Palyul on this visit.[17]

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[15] See "Discovery and preservation of ancient Tibetan manuscripts" by Stephen Aldridge at the Kham Foundation website: http://www.khamaid.org/programs/culture/text.htm. The document (read 14/2/12) is undated but makes reference to a May, 1999 field report. The project must have got off the ground initially, as it was described as "still incompletely funded". The Kham Foundation closed in 2010. My attempts to find a current email address for Stephen Aldridge (S. Brinson Aldridge) have so far proved unsuccessful.

[16] In 1982 Penor Rinpoche (1932-99) returned to Palyul for the first time since leaving Tibet in 1959. In the course of four visits (the 1992 visit was his third) he rebuilt and renovated monasteries, gave empowerments, transmissions and teachings to thousands, and ordained monks and nuns.

[17] Nyoshul Khenpo's old friend Khenpo Sonam Tobgyal Rinpoche "believes the wood block originates from Palyul Monastery in Tibet" (email from his assistant, Kelsang 30/1/12).

*Why carve this particular work?*

Pema Tshewang's family gave him a monastic education from a very young age, and when Nyimalung Monastery was founded in 1934, he was entered there as a novitiate. The young Pemala's first teacher at Nyimalung was its founding abbot, Doring Trulku (Jamyang Kuenzang Lungrig Chokyi Nima, 1902–1952) from Kham Dartsedo, recognized as the third mind emanation of Jigme Lingpa.[18] The abbot returned to Tibet in 1940 when Pemala was 15. Doring Trulku had made a great impression on his young student, and when he was 18 Pemala went to Tibet to seek out his teacher and study further with him. He travelled over the Monla Karchung pass (5,300m) to the Lhodrak region of southern Tibet in winter 1944 with two other young monks, all three having absconded from Nyimalung.[19] Pemala traced Doring Trulku to a monastery situated on a remote mountainside above Chakzam Chuwo Ri.[20] He spent six years in Tibet with Doring Trulku, studying, meditating, and travelling with his teacher to many sacred places. In 1950 Pemala returned to Bhutan. Student and teacher did not meet again: Doring Trulku passed away in 1952.

Lopen Pemala had an illustrious career in Bhutan as a scholar monk, first in Education and later as director of the National Library, retiring in 1993. Appointed abbot of Nyimalung on his retirement, Lam Pemala carried out many works there over the years, including the building of a *lhakhang* with three-dimensional mandala as a memorial to commemorate his root lama. Doring Trulku is also commemorated through a representation on the silk appliqué *thongdrel* (consecrated in June 1994) which Lam Pemala acquired for the monastery with support from Japanese sponsors. However, the first thing Lam Pemala did was

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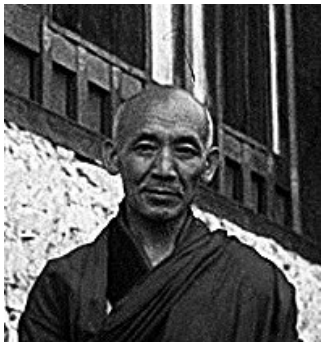
[18] The first and second being Do Khyentse Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje and Jigme Dechen Lingpa, respectively.

[19] This pass is the highest point on the old trade route between Central Bhutan and Lhasa. The route leads through the mountains to the Lhodrak region, an area of great historic importance where the traditions of both the Nyingma and Kagyu schools flourish, acting as a cultural bridge between Tibet and Central and Eastern Bhutan.

[20] 14th century *terton* and master bridge-builder Thangtong Gyalpo's Chakzam Bridge, at the Yarlung Tsangpo River about 65 km from Lhasa, still existed in 1948 though no longer used, the crossing being made by ferry. At the south end of the bridge was Thangtong Gyalpo's main gonpa, Chaksam Chuwo Ri of which no trace now remains. The mountain that towers behind the Tsangpo bridge is known as Chuwo Ri and is magically related to Tibet's prosperity. 108 hermitages were built here. The original hermitage (location uncertain) was founded by King Trisong Detsen. There is a cave residence of Guru Rinpoche on the summit, considered by some sources to be one of the eight principal caves of the Guru.

initiate the *Yeshe Lama* carving project at the National Library. This can be seen as a more personal memorial from Lam Pemala to his mentor who was recognized as third mind emanation of Jigme Lingpa. Looking at this project in the context of Lam Pemala's early years studying with his teacher at Nyimalung and then later in Tibet, it is clear that the carving of Khenpo Ngaga's Commentary on *Yeshe Lama* was initiated as an act of reverence and respect for a beloved guru, as a tangible memorial in the National Library from which block-printed copies could be made as required for those who had already received the oral transmission of this seminal work of the Dzogchen tradition.

In conversation with the author in February 2010, NLAB chief archivist, Kunzang Delek reported as follows: Lam Pemala initiated this carving project. It was his personal wish that the work should be carved, and whenever he was in Thimphu he would come by to see how Yeshi Namgyal's work was progressing, and he would stress that the carving must be completed. It is said that when Lam Pemala was close to death (he expired on February 27, 2009) he whispered 'Yeshi Namgyal' and this is taken as his dying wish that Yeshi Namgyal should complete the carving of Khenpo Ngaga's Commentary on *Yeshe Lama*.



8. Lopen Pemala at Tharpaling, Bumthang in 1985 (Photo: F. Pommaret)

9. Doring Trulku, depicted on a wall painting at Nyimalung, probably executed by Lam Pemala when he was abbot (Photo: Bhutan Cultural Atlas website)

10 a & b. Doring Trulku depicted on Nyimalung *thongdrel*
(Photo: Nyimalung website)

*Appendix I: Concerning the identification of Lha Onn Gyalong*

*Wylie transliteration of colophon authorship statement on carving master: Ces spar byang smon tshig 'di nyid la sde dge'i gnyer chen lha dbon rgyal longs bskul m btab pa ltar mdo khams rdzogs chen pa'i mkhan zur thub bstan snyan grags kyis bris pa dge legs su gyur cig*

*English translation:* These verses of good wishes for the colophon of the xylographic edition have been composed by Thubten Nyendrak, retired abbot of Dzogchen of Dokham at the request of Lha Onn Gyalong, minister of Derge. May they be auspicious!

*Identity of Nyerchen Lha Onn Gyalong:* Reading several modern histories, Rémi Chaix identifies Nyerchen Lha Onn Gyalong as Drebö Lhagyal (d.1946/47). Concerning the translation of *nyerchen* as minister (sDe dge'I gner chen) he writes (email of 7/1/11) that

> In the case of Derge kingdom, the gNyer chen (also called mdun na 'don) were the highest ranking official after the King, they (generally 2 or 4) were chosen among a certain number (depends on the period) of aristocratic families of the kingdom (2 from the northern district of the kingdom and 2 from the southern).

Concerning identification of the minister as Drebö Lhagyal, Rémi Chaix writes (in emails of 8/1/11 and 9/1/11) that

> It is a common use to shorten names taking the first syllable of each part of the name: Lha [Onn] Gyal [Long]. Thus Lha Onn becomes Lha and Gyal Long becomes Gyal, so we have now a minister who may have also been called Lhagyal.
>
> Modern histories mention a minister call Lhagyal who was a member of the Drebö (Bre 'bod) family, which had its estate in 'Dzing khag in the southern region of the kingdom, not far from Kathok and Palyul, but also very close to Adzom Chogar. Members of this family fled to Lhasa in 1909 following General Zhao Erfeng's military conquest of Kham, and Lhagyal returned only in 1930. He was granted by the King Tsewang Dundul (1916-1942, r.1926-42) with the 'go pa title (title of chief, just under Minister) and control over 500 families of Palyul region. The only reason Derge histories mention him is because, by the end of 1946 or beginning of 1947, he was killed near Mesho (rMe shod) by soldiers during succession troubles in Derge. His murder led Jago Tobden, friend of Lhagyal since his time in

> Lhasa, to make a 'coup d'état' against the queen Jamyang Palmo (1913-1988).

He said he didn't find any mention of Lhagyal's promotion to the minister status, but thought that as this period was really troubled, with many political organization changes, it must have taken place between late 1930s and 1947. He also states

> If this becomes the proper identification, it will mean that the realization of the xylographic edition was ordered before 1947 (be careful, the engraving could have been done later).

*Appendix II: Final pages of NLAB carving master compared with final pages of new Adzom block-print edition*

- Different page layout but same text
- NLAB text comprises 272 folios, ending on f. 272A
- Adzom text comprises 304 folios, ending on p. 00607
- In NLAB text, benedictory verses, dedication and authorship statement follow the narrative
- In Adzom text, benedictory verses and dedication follow the narrative but *there is no authorship statement*

*Conclusion:*

The block-print edition borrowed from Nyoshul Khenpo in 1998 to generate the NLAB carving master differs from and pre-dates the edition from which Adzom has carved its new set of blocks.

Many thanks to NLAB research officer, Gencop Karchung for the above text analysis and comparison.

# ASPECTS OF *KIDU* IN BHUTAN[1]

BRIAN C. SHAW
*Hong Kong*

The original Tibetan concept of *kidu* (*skyid sdug*)[2] has been variously considered as welfare, self-help, and assistance. In the context of Bhutan, the concept has closely linked the moral authority of the monarch with the economic needs of the public.

The paper considers both the politicization of *kidu* (the competition for political space and authority by politicians of the First Parliament, against the received authority of the monarchs) and the de-politicization of *kidu* (by the monarchs, notably through land-grant authority reaffirmed in the 2008 Constitution, the establishment of the Kidu Foundation and in other practical ways). *Kidu* rights and the authority of the monarch are reviewed, with especial attention to the future prospects of either diminution or extension of these rights, as the kingdom endeavours to establish 'Democracy with Bhutan Characteristics'. Much of the discussion which follows is inference: the analysis is definitely incomplete. A thorough review of land policy from the Shabdrung's time is long overdue: although time-consuming, such an in-depth and objective analysis of land policy on a national scale would certainly throw much-needed light on a wide range of motivations and behaviours during the past decades and perhaps even centuries.

## *The Tibetan usage*

Various authorities see *kidu* as a form of self-help, usually as cooperative or mutual aid associations which typically administer a

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was published by the Centre for Bhutan Studies (Thimphu), *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 33, Winter 2015.

[2] Variously defined, as e.g. in the Rangjung Yeshe Wiki – Dharma Dictionary: "joy and sorrow, good and bad fortune, ups and downs, happiness and grief / sadness / misery, please [sic] and pain. 2) livelihood, wealth and poverty. 3) membership, society, community. 4) conditions of life; welfare standards; gcig pa – family [RY]", http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php?title=skyid_sdug&oldid=241929. Mathou, Thierry, 'The Politics of Bhutan: change in continuity', *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, vol. 2 no. 2 (Winter 2000), pp. 250-62, refers to *kidu* as a "welfare system" (p. 233 and 236).

fund to assist the economic or spiritual welfare of members.[3] A commentary on Bhutia death practices in Sikkim notes that *kidu* "plays a vital role in performing the social function of that community".[4] Following the analysis by Beatrice Miller,[5] elaborations[6] stress the welfare and communal grouping aspects of *kidu* and related institutions in neighbouring communities (notably Nepal).[7] There is also a news report[8] on a contemporary Tibetan village's "mutual aid institution".

## Kidu *in early Bhutan — speculation*

I broadly speculate that in the seventeenth century, when Shabdrung and his followers travelled to Bhutan and began to establish their communities, they brought with them certain Tibetan concepts relating to local coordination and provision for security. These may or may not have included explicit notions of *kidu*. But as the size of the

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[3] See e.g. *kidu* as 'monastic societies' (Jansen, Berthe 'How to tame a wild monastic elephant: Drepung monastery according to the Great Fifth', p. 123), in Ramble, Charles, Schwieger, Peter, Travers, Alice (eds.), *Tibetans who escaped the historian's net: studies in the social history of Tibetan societies* (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2013), pp. 111-29: but note the author's comment that "Not much appears to be known about the functions of these monastic societies" (ibid., fn. 30). Of course, not all *kidu* were related to monastic activity. (I thank Francois Pommaret for drawing my attention to this reference.)

[4] Mukherjee, Bandana, "Some aspect [sic] of Bhutia culture in Sikkim", *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Seminar Volume, 1995, p. 86. The author adds, but without elaboration: "A tendency of democratisation in formation of Kidu may also be deserved [sic = ?observed] in some cases."

[5] Miller, Beatrice, 'Ganye and kidu: two formalized systems of mutual aid among the Tibetans', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 12 (2) (Summer, 1956), 157-70. The editor of Fisher, James F. (ed.), *Himalayan anthropology* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 1979), suggests that "the *kidu* [as cooperative organization] seems to be a basically urban Tibetan phenomenon" (p. 443).

[6] E.g. Muhlich, Michael, 'Credit relations in Nepal: a preliminary report on the Khatsara and Manange *kidu* systems', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* Vol 24 No.2 (July 1997), pp. 201-15; Toffin, Gerard, *From Kin to Caste: the role of guthis in Newari society and culture* (the Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2005) (Lalitpur: Social Science Baha, 2005).

[7] I have not been able to consult Ronge, Veronika, *Das tibetische Handwekertum vor 1959* (Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1978), cited by Muhlich as giving (at pp. 112-16 and 131-36) "an outline of the organization of kidus that were formerly operating in Tibet, and point[ing] to their possibly higher involvement in political affairs" (Muhlich op.cit., p. 201).

[8] Tenzin Tsondre, 'Kidu: a Tibetan village's mutual aid institution', in e.g. http://www.chinahumanrights.org/CSHRS/Magazine/Text/t20110324_724335.htm, drawing on Chen Bo, *Reproducing Shambala: half a century of village life in Central Tibet* (Chengdu: Social Science Academic Press, 2009)

communities grew, and the need for protection became manifest, taxes were applied to the general population by those with political, religious, and economic power to sustain the granaries that were constructed in the great *dzong*s, to provide both for the daily needs of increasing populations within the *dzong*s in normal times, and for weapons and sustenance to conscript local fighting men in times of war. The detailed article by Karma Ura on the fresh harvest "offering for blessing" of 1679 in Wangdi district[9] gives a clear basis for the subsequent development of a tax system[10] based on initial offerings. "It seems size of offering was dependent on motivation and not land size",[11] with no apparent sense of formal reciprocal official obligation to the tax-payers. *Kidu* as welfare was not yet explicit, but it may already have been implicit since those who give often expect something in return.

Adam Pain and Deki Pema have thrown valuable light on many related aspects:

> The issuing of kashos is linked to a traditional right to seek protection, assistance and relief (kidu) whereby individual households could seek help from both government officials and the King. Indeed the Home Minister was until 1998 known as the Kidu Lyonpo. The seeking of kidu from the King is an established and commonly exercised right and in the matter of land allocation alone, substantial areas of land was given to individual households by the present king between [sic] during his reign (Land Records Office, Ministry of Home Affairs,) *a tradition and exercise of right that can be traced back to the civil rulers (Desi) that predate the establishment of the monarch*y [italics, bcs]. Kidu is also sought for assistance in matters of debt, particularly with formal institutions, and domestic disaster.[12]

The *desis* also extended *kidu* in kind, and the 2nd King was especially concerned that the already "rich and powerful" should not become more so, especially in land holdings.[13]

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[9] Karma Ura, 'Massive rice offering in Wangdiphodrang in Zhabdrung Rinpoche's time', *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 27, 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 3-17.

[10] See the valuable and cogent analysis presented by Pain, Adam, and Deki Pema, 'Continuing customs of negotiation and contestation in Bhutan', *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, vol. 2 no. 2 (Winter 2000), pp. 219-27

[11] Karma Ura, op. cit., p. 9.

[12] Pain, Adam, and Deki Pema, op. cit., extract at p. 212. Their footnote 8 explains: "Right' not as a legal claim but an entitlement claimed on moral grounds of a shared relationship, which can be vertical (as between sovereign and subject, authority and subordinate) or horizontal (kith and kin, same village etc.)".

[13] Anecdotal comments from older citizens in Thimphu to the author during 2010-3.

## Kidu *in Bhutan under the Monarchy*

Before the process of development in Bhutan began in the early 1960s, "land administration and management in Bhutan … was not entrusted to any government agency. In those days, the main source of government revenue was by land taxation. People didn't want to own land as the taxation of land was high."[14]

> The notion of *kidu* is inborn to a Bhutanese – if someone asks for *kidu*, you don't ignore the request or pay no attention: you have to give it very serious consideration.[15]

The third monarch accepted the social utility of *kidu* as part of his forward-thinking reforms (including the freeing of several hundred bonded labourers). When the National Assembly was established in 1953, land issues occupied much of the deliberations. When the Council of Ministers was formally established by the National Assembly at its 28th session in 1968, the Home Minister was styled "Kidu Lyonpo".[16] A Land Act was established in 1971, "but no agencies followed it".[17] By 1976 it was necessary to write a new Land Act. The Land Act 1979 was adopted by the 58th Assembly in 1978,[18] but detailed implementation was not easy as discussions in the National Assembly sessions reflect.

In the period 1984 to 1997, the 4th King issued many *kashos*[19] admonishing officials and Royal Family members for ignoring the spirit and letter of that law, as the following show:

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[14] National Land Commission Secretary Dasho Sangay Khandu, *Bhutan Today*, vol. 6 issue 74 (22 September 2013), p. 1 and 11.

[15] Audience with His Majesty the 4th King, 13 September 1995.

[16] http://www.nab.gov.bt/downloads/6428th%20Session.pdf, Item 2 (p.1).

[17] Sangay Khandu, op. cit.

[18] http://www.nab.gov.bt/downloads/3358th%20Session.pdf

[19] Nishimizu, Mieko, *Portrait of a Leader: through the Looking-glass of His Majesty's Decrees* (Thimphu: The Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2008). The compiler observes (at p. 71): "Among the collection are five decrees about 'land kidu' (royal welfare land grant), addressed mostly to the Home Minister during 1984 to 1991. Compassionate concerns about fair and just distribution of kidu are apparent throughout these decrees. But, what distinguishes these decrees is a palpable sense of frustration – even some anger perhaps – in discovering that land kidu continued to be granted by the Home Minister and others with no authority to do so (a 1980 decree, not included in this collection, established that it is an exclusive authority of the King)."

36. To the Home Minister[20]

With regard to the grant of land kidu, it was decreed that neither you nor any others except me can grant land as kidu, and you have also informed different dzongkhags in the same manner. But you have given away many government lands in contravention of my decree. Therefore, the government should confiscate all the land given either by you or by any royal family member after the date of my decree. You must also conduct a thorough investigation at the time of confiscation to find out if the land is cultivated. If it is the case, then the wages for cultivation and the expenditure for such land should be paid from the national budget. Henceforth, no other person except me can give land as kidu. I will not appreciate anyone granting land in contravention of my decree, and you must once more convey this message to different dzongkhags and departments.

Issued on this 17th Day of the 9th Month of the Wood-Rat Year (10 November 1984).

37. To the Deputy Minister of Finance [21]

Despite my decree dated 29 August 1980 to the Home Minister stating that I alone and no other person can grant land kidu, the Home Minister and some royal family members have granted land in contravention of my decree. It is hereby decreed that you should investigate as to who have given the land without my order, with effect from the above-mentioned date and cancel such lands even if they are registered in someone's name and declare them as government land within December 1985.

Issued on this 15th Day of the 5th Month of the Wood-Ox Year (2 July 1985).

## *New Land Policy*

The document "New approach to the kidu land policy" was published in July 1988[22] and republished in January 1989.[23]

The royal government has for the past 15 years [i.e. from 1973] been distributing land to the landless and poor as and when such requests were received. The primary consideration was […] that the less

[20] Ibid., p. 75.
[21] Ibid., p. 76.
[22] *Kuensel*, vol. 3 no. 29 (23 July 1988), p. 1.
[23] *Kuensel,* vol. 4 no. 1 (21 January 1989), supplement on 67th National Assembly resolutions, p. 6.

> fortunate subjects […] should be provided with a source of material security and opportunity for income generation.

But the policy – "implemented on an adhoc [sic] and highly dispersed basis" [24]– had not achieved these objectives. Almost all productive land in easily accessible areas was already cultivated or privately registered, while the remote areas lacked infrastructure. Rural labour shortages had been intensified by the programmes of the newly created national workforce (needing a minimum of 30,000 workers) and enrolments in schools, monastic bodies, and the armed forces.

Therefore, henceforth there would be "a comprehensive and planned resettlement programme for landless families applying for land" while there would be "opportunities for landless people to join the national workforce". It was "hoped that the new resettlement areas will eventually develop into self-sustaining communities and emerge as future growth points." [25]

But problems of implementation of an equitable land policy remained:

> 41. To the Home Minister[26]
>
> It was decreed that I alone can grant land kidu and the Home Minister too notified about this on 25th day of the 7th month of the Iron Monkey year. Thereafter, a decree was passed to the Home Minister on the 17th day of the 9th month of the Wood-Rat year, supporting and explaining the previous decree. However, it was found after the regularization of land that some lands in some dzongkhags were given in contravention of the above decree. Such lands will be dealt as per the decrees given after 25th day of 7th month of the Iron-Monkey year. Henceforth, except the land for which I have granted kashos, *others given by anyone whether royal family members or any dignitary shall be cancelled and forfeited to the government* [italics, bcs]. The Home Ministry should act according to this order.
>
> Issued on this 22nd Day of the 6th Month of the Iron-Sheep Year (2 August 1991).
>
> 46. To the Finance Minister[27]
>
> The development plans and programmes are meant for the common people and I have been looking into the welfare of various

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Nishimizu, Mieko, op. cit., p. 81.
27 Ibid., pp. 92-93.

> individuals. However, with the increase in the number of people asking for kidu, it has become very difficult for the government, despite the rules being very strict. […]
> A Committee has been established to look after the kidu fund, with the following persons as members:
>
> - Gyalpoi Zimpon,
> - Secretary of Finance, and
> - Auditor General
>
> It is the responsibility of the Committee to check which bank or industry is profitable and invest the fund and stabilize the foundation of the kidu fund. Further, the orders for kidu, which were given to the Ministry of Finance, will now be issued to the Committee. *You should grant the kidu from the interest and study the results after the grant of kidu. You must maintain an account and should be audited as per financial rules. Finally, it is decreed that you must discharge the above functions properly and submit an annual report.* [italics, bcs].
>
> Issued on this 30th Day of the 4th Month of the Fire-Female-Ox Year (15 June 1997)

In 2003, addressing chairmen and deputy chairmen of local administrations, the 4th King re-affirmed the broad boundaries of political authority in the post-1998 administration:

> …while the responsibility of the prime minister and lhengye zhungtsho [cabinet] ministers was to provide good governance to the country, it was His Majesty's responsibility, as the Druk Gyalpo, to safeguard the security and sovereignty of the country and to look after the kidu of the Bhutanese people.[28]

*Kidu* in that context seems to mean an over-arching sense of welfare.

In late 2006, the 4th King abdicated in favour of the Crown prince. Addressing an augmented cabinet meeting on 14th December 2006, he said:

> Bhutan could not hope for a better time for such an important transition. Today, the country enjoyed peace and stability, and its security and sovereignty was ensured. After phenomenal development and progress the country was closer than ever to the goal of economic self reliance. Bhutan's relations with its closest neighbor and friend, India, had reached new heights. International organisations and

[28] *Kuensel*, vol. XVIII no. 19 (17 May 2003), p. 5.

> bilateral development partners were ready to support Bhutan's development efforts and political transformation.[29]

Kidu *Democracy – I*

The new Constitution for parliamentary Bhutan was widely publicized over several drafts before being formally adopted by the Parliament in May 2008.[30] Under Article 2, The Institution of Monarchy, the Druk Gyalpo "may […] Grant citizenship, land kidu and other kidus".[31]

A revision of the 1979 Land Act commanded by the 4th King to take account of the new administrative and legal circumstances, had been deliberated and agreed[32] by the 87th (and last pre-parliamentary) session of the Assembly in June 2007. A Land Commission was also established by the 87th National Assembly, charged with "resolving all errors in the *Thram* [land record] in the *Geogs* [base administrative division] at the earliest".[33] Also, during this session of the National Assembly, the king inaugurated a land programme to further resolve issues; notably, a cadastral re-survey (undertaken during 2008-2011) provided a better basis for a resolution of issues.[34] Henceforward,

> land related *kidu* shall be addressed directly between [the king] and the public without the involvement of other people in order to ensure that such *Kidu* are granted to those deserving cases and not to those who do not deserve…[35]

Perhaps the most important reform initiated by the 5th King was that relating to land *kidu.* On 24th September 2007, the king issued a *kasho*

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[29] *Kuensel*, 16 December 2006, p.1 and 14. Notably, at the same meeting, the Chief Justice, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, "expressed the deep gratitude of the Bhutanese people to His Majesty the King for giving them the identity that they were so proud of. The Bhutanese populace had been poor and down-trodden in the past but now looked into the future with confidence and pride." (p. 14)

[30] See e.g. http://www.nab.gov.bt/assets/templates/images/constitution-of-bhutan-2008.pdf (the formal website of the Constitution, www.constitution.bt, has not been on line for a long time).

[31] Article 2, clause 16(b) of the Constitution. The term *kidu* is defined in Annex to the Constitution as: "Benefits granted by the King or Government of Bhutan".

[32] http://www.nab.gov.bt/Actpsession/61Land-Act-of-Bhutan-2007_English.pdf

[33] http://www.nab.gov.bt/assets/uploads/docs/resolution/2014/87th_session.pdf, p. 97.

[34] Bhutan Broadcasting Service, *Empowering the Future* (video), June 2013 (at https://youtu.be/DjLS5xegW7I ; also see *The Bhutanese*, 5, 48 (09 December 2016), pp 1,8.

[35] http://www.nab.gov.bt/assets/uploads/docs/resolution/2014/87th_session.pdf, at pp 100-101.

stating that "Land issues must be resolved once and for all – if we do not take it upon ourselves to carry out a massive and all – encompassing exercise, then like in the past we will only make small improvements on the existing system but leave the biggest problems unresolved and for future generations to suffer as we do".[36]

Thus by 2008, a Land Commission was in place, along with an updated Land Act, and the cadastral re-survey was in train; these developments (although not perfect) promised a better resolution of land issues and conflicts, and a better institutional basis for resolving land *kidu* issues. Nevertheless, claims of misuse even of land granted as *kidu* were reported.[37]

After the introduction of Parliamentary democracy in 2008, the 5th King moved to further institutionalise the welfare aspects of *kidu*. In March 2010, the then Director of the Royal Office for Media announced[38] that new procedures and regulations had been put in place to professionalise the *kidu* welfare system, to cover the destitute, the impoverished, needy students, and the landless. Two offices of the king's representatives were opened in Bumthang and Mongar, and one in Thimphu itself, to extend the reach and efficiency of dealing with requests for and needs of *kidu.* In the post constitution era, the Director was quoted as saying, "granting *kidu* has become a sacred duty and the king's prerogative".[39]

### *Land Act Amendment Bill, June 2012*[40]

In 2012, after four years in office, the government party proposed a further set of amendments as the Land Act Amendment Bill 2012. Introducing the Bill to the National Assembly, the Agriculture Minister said that "the review was carried out mainly because of the inconveniences caused during the implementation of the Act".[41] He added the Act needs to be reviewed in order to maintain consistency with other related Acts and in keeping with developments taking place.

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[36] See eg. *Empowering the Future* (op cit.); "Land Kidu reforms: Giving a stake", *The Bhutanese*, 5, 48 (09 December 2016), pp. 1, 8.

[37] E.g.: "Kidu land for sale in Tsirang", *Kuensel,* 16 March 2010, p. 1.

[38] "Kidu system reformed", in *Bhutan Observer*, V, 11 (March 19-26, 2010), pp. 1, 19.

[39] Ibid.

[40] www.nab.gov.bt/downloadbill/Eng67.pdf

[41] http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=14823

There was a dramatic and widespread negative response in the media to the Bill.[42] It was the proposals to replace previous National Land Commission members (including secretary-level civil servants and the Gyalpoi Zimpon, answerable especially on land matters directly to the monarch) with ministers of the government of the day,[43] which drew most negative response. The proposed grant of land resettlement powers to the cabinet[44] was seen by many as a grant of land *kidu* powers to politicians. A National Council MP was quoted as saying:

> "This directly contradicts the provision of the Constitution which states that the prerogative to give away land lies only with His Majesty the King. Cabinet can propose to the Druk Gyalpo but cannot give it away. It appears like the Government is trying to get more power by bypassing the prerogative of the Druk Gyalpo. This is unconstitutional."
>
> He said Land is closest to people's heart as it is the main resource. "From what I have heard, the Gyalpoi Zimpon is not included as one of the Commission members. He has to be one of the members as he has to know what is going on in the Commission"[45].

The 5th King quickly issued a *kasho* to the Parliament, which was widely publicised. It did not directly address these misgivings publicly expressed by others, but focused on the separate issue of land-holding ceilings. On this, he said in part

> …as a matter of principle, I, the Druk Gyalpo, must state that in the modern time, in a small nation where land is scarce and the value of urban land continues to rise along with the possibility of ownership of land and wealth being concentrated in the hands of a few, *there is no justification for exempting particular persons, whether royal family members or wealthy individuals, from the land ceiling* [italics, bcs]. Except for institutions of State, no individual should be exempt from the land ceiling and other provisions that apply to the general public of Bhutan.[46]

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[42] e.g.: 'National Council, Political Parties and Local Leaders all against Land Bill 2012', *The Bhutanese*, 21 June 2012 (vol. 1 issue 35), p1, 12: "Most of the above including ordinary citizens are against clauses … that give politicians vast powers over land and the National Land Commission" (sub-head).

[43] Land Act Amendment Bill 2012, Chapter II, clause 5.

[44] Ibid., Chapter VII, article 230.

[45] Ibid., p. 1.

[46] 'Kasho read at the National Council on 18 June', 2012; *Kuensel*, 19 June 2012, p. 1.

The unspoken implication was that more thought should be given to any amendments to the 2007 Land Act, and the amendment bill was withdrawn.[47]

*Druk Gyalpo Relief Fund*

On the eve of the new Parliamentary system, with its grant of legislative power to politicians, the 4th King – in a wide-ranging talk to out-going ministers – had extended warnings about possible profligate spending by politicians:

> [He] recommended the establishment of a Trust Fund for employment related problems. In 1989, the government had decided to create a Future Generation Fund but it had not materialised because of the Ngolop problem in the 1990s. His Majesty suggested that the government should set aside US $ 100 million to create a trust fund for youth employment.
>
> His Majesty reminded the cabinet that it would be useful to create trust funds because the money invested in such funds would be more secure than money kept in the country's hard currency reserves. It was always possible for future governments to use up the hard currency reserves of US $ 513 million, which had been built up with much difficulty over the years.
>
> The money in a Trust Fund, on the other hand, would be utilised only for the purpose for which it was created and, if it was needed for any national emergency, only the parliament would have the authority to sanction its utilisation.[48]

While the first Parliamentary government (2008-2013) did become embroiled in an acute shortage of funds (despite an unprecedented grant of 100 billion Indian rupees announced by the Indian Prime Minister in May 2008)[49], the Druk Gyalpo Relief Fund Act 2012[50] was passed by the Parliament with little disagreement. It gave life to article 14 of section 12 of the Constitution, by mandating an initial grant of Nu 20m. with annual increments of Nu 20m. until the fund reached Nu

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47 Up to the end of April 2017, there has been no re-introduction of an amending bill for this Act. Meanwhile, a very cogent analysis of the 2007 Act has been prepared by Lyonpo Dr Kinzang Wangdi (The Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, Thimphu: *Comprehensive Review of the Land Act of Bhutan, 2007 for Revision,* 2014), available at http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/comprehensive-review-of-the-land-act-of-bhutan-2007-for-revision/.

48 *Kuensel*, 9 September 2006 (vol. XXI no. 70), p. 13.

49 See e.g. *Kuensel*, vol. XXIII no. 39 (21 May 2008), p.1 and 6.

50 http://www.nab.gov.bt/ActParliament/34Drukgyalpo_RFund_Act.pdf

100m., for use by the Druk Gyalpo for "urgent and unforeseen humanitarian relief" for the people of Bhutan without political strings attached.

*Gyalpoizhing Land Case*

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) charged the then Speaker and the Home Minister—both previously *dzongdag*s of Mongar district—and other officials with corruption in allocating land against the express orders of the king. The Mongar district court, the Thimphu High Court, and ultimately the Supreme Court, found against[51] these officials, who were sentenced to terms in jail redeemable by cash payments according to the law.[52]

The case was not without its twists and turns, and not all documentation was made public. For present purposes it is instructive to look at part of the arguments made by the Speaker,[53] the Home Minister, and 13 committee members[54] to the High Court in Thimphu reviewing the district decisions.

The Speaker's *jabmi*[55] said in part that "the ACC has not mandate [sic] to prosecute as it is beyond the purview of the ACC Act",[56] that allotments of plots were made not of his own volition "but under the procedures established in accordance with the Royal command and in keeping with the procedures in force at the time of the allotments over thirteen years ago",[57] and that "ACC has treated similar situation differently by selectively charge sheeting [some office-holders] in the present Government while not charging other dignitaries and individuals who may even have engaged in forgery".[58]

The ACC's lawyer argued principally that 'The *Kaja*' [Royal decree] of 31 March 1987 was specifically issued to regulate allotment of commercial plot and it categorically stated that the government

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[51] The Supreme Court's final decision was announced on 17 July 2013; see *Kuensel*, 18 July 2013 pp. 1 and 2.

[52] Some members of the Royal Family who were implicated had their cases examined by the Privy Council, without public comment.

[53] http://www.judiciary.gov.bt/html/case/Judg/2013/HC/StateVsSpeaker.pdf; see esp. pp. 13-35 for the Appellant's argument, and the ACC rebuttal at pp. 35-54.

[54] http://www.judiciary.gov.bt/html/case/Judg/2013/HC/StateVsLyonpo.pdf

[55] *Jabmi* is defined as "a Bhutanese legal counsel who has been licensed to practice" (*The Civil and Criminal Procedure Code of Bhutan*, Section 216.17, at www.judiciary.gov.bt/html/act/Court%20procedure.pdf).

[56] Ibid., p. 16.

[57] Ibid., p. 17.

[58] Ibid., p. 18.

should promulgate a bye-law and disseminate it and till that was done, all Dzongkhag Municipal Committees or any other person cannot allot any commercial plots".[59] Further they stated that 1991 administration circulars suggested that "preference" should be given only to those persons who own and operate legal shops in the given township.[60] The appellant had "abused his authority" to allot plots.[61]

For present purposes, it is noteworthy that the ACC's concern was to ensure that the word and spirit of the 4th King's *kasho*s should be implemented. Informally, some of the accused felt unfairly dealt with as they had operated under 'the old system'. The subtext of the case was clearly that there must be transparency and accountability.

## Kidu *Democracy – II*

At the end of 2010, Mark V. Tushnet, professor of law at Harvard, was reported by Kuensel as saying

> "You won't know whether the Constitution is an accurate power map, until there's a displacement of monarch's views with that of the government. […] This confrontation will occur here, and it'll test wherein lies the power." [62]
>
> "When democracy is imposed, not in any critical way, particular kinds of problems arise," he said, proffering the contemporary example of a dysfunctional democracy in Iraq. "In Bhutan's context, democracy has to be nurtured because it didn't arise from the organic movement of people". [63]

Tushnet's comments should be seen in the wake of several differences between the National Assembly and the (avowedly a-political) National Council between 2008-2010 and indeed up to the elections and a new government in mid-2013. For present purposes, it is important to underline the growing role of the 5th King in establishing a series of

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59 Ibid., clause 2, p. 35.

60 Ibid., clauses 2-4, p. 35.

61 Ibid.

62 This lays the fireplace for a detailed discussion on the reasons for the growing unpopularity of the leading party elected to power in 2008, and the widespread expression — up to the 2013 elections — in the social media of the view that the party's leader in particular sought to have the power and authority of a king. (Detailed review of these developments lies beyond the present essay.)

63 'Why a constitution matters – because it defines where power resides, says resource person from Harvard', *Kuensel*, 29 December 2010, pp. 1, 2. The report on Prof. Tushnet's seminar contribution was unclear on several key points: his remarks were not based on a prepared paper (personal communication, 30th April 2013).

organisations and institutions that could have a semblance of maintaining a society in case of a breakdown of the democratic experiment, or more positively could be seen as complementing the public policy decisions of the Parliament from 2008.

There had for several years been an understanding by the monarchs that while the democratic experiment had to develop 'its own legs' and learn from mistakes over a period of time, it was not enough to stake all on the success or failure of the parliamentary system of governance. A series of natural disasters in Bhutan affecting thousands of people underlined the contemporary vulnerability of society to unpredictable events, against which at least some preparations could be made.

It is in this sense that the 5th King's 'People's Projects' began, basically a series of investigations of circumstances of people's livelihood that took their authority from outside the formal civil service administration. Natural disasters catalysed the 5th King's decision to establish the Kidu Foundation,[64] followed by the Bhutan Press Foundation, the Desuung Movement,[65] the Royal Institute for

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[64] See http://www.kidufoundation.org/

[65] See www.desuung.org.bt, where it is explained that the first syllable of the word 'De' (bde) originates from the word 'Dekyid' meaning peace or tranquility (with 'De' commonly understood to be the shortened version of Dekyid; the second syllable 'Suung' (Srung) commonly refer[s] to the act of guarding or protecting; thus the phrase 'De-Suung' means 'Guardians of Peace' The organisation (officially launched on 14 February 2011) has established a regular three-week training program for its members (all aged over 25, with roughly one-third female), consisting of basic military training, lectures and practice on health and first-aid and other assistance for times of natural calamities, and lectures and discussions on Bhutan's history and culture. Formal goals are "to impart basic knowledge and skills in various fields such as disaster rescue and relief operations, environment and development, survival skills, leadership and personal development." The Desuung Movement might be seen as a 'proto-militia' in the absence of a formal militia, but the members - known as De-suups (from De-suung-pas) are volunteers from the private and corporate sectors, do not carry arms (although they learn how to use these), and — after successfully completing the initial course — have refresher training as lifelong registered members of the organisation. The rationale and objectives are given on the website:

"Throughout history, the notion of militia in Bhutan was always associated with the protection of the state of the nation's peace and it was never constituted as a force of aggression.

Besides the primary purpose of the militia the program also played an instrumental role in defining the important role of civilians in the protection of our nation's peace and above all, the sovereignty.

[The] De-Suung Program symbolizes the "unity of purpose" in nation building and statecraft.

Governance and Social Studies,[66] the Royal Academy,[67] the Royal Institute of Law,[68] etc.

The Kidu Foundation is not the only enterprise endeavouring to work with NGOs and private individuals to improve the lot of the people in Bhutan. But the Foundation in many ways is the bed-rock for the continuing strengthening of civil society and to buttress the parliamentary political system. The Foundation has significantly expanded its area of interest and the number of projects under its umbrella,[69] in the fields of education, media, the rule of law, culture, and the mentioned People's Projects.

One may see the work of the Foundation as a parallel government, but this would misconstrue the longer intention: there is not a sense of competition with the formal government bureaucracy, but a constant attempt to enhance public policy by non-bureaucratic means. For present purposes, its goals are not just to provide succour in time of disasters, but to extend the political, social, and economic role of *kidu*, as a parallel-track policy safety net pending further maturation of the democratic impulse. The 3rd King stated in mid-1972 that

> A King's sacred duty is in looking after the wellbeing and Kidu of our people. Thus, I have spent these years meeting my people in their homes and villages as I fulfill this duty. I pray that my people will utilize to the fullest the Kidu I strive to bring to them, and ensure that its benefits accrue, not only them but to the future generations.[70]

Looking at the practical extent of *kidu* grants at the start of 2014, the Prime Minister at the opening of the second session of the second Parliament:

> expressed gratitude to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo for granting land Kidu of over 60,000 acres to 63,000 people and 711 acres to 2,000 people comprising 315 households under the resettlement programme besides land Kidu to 196 people who directly approached His Majesty … [and] education support to 3,500 children from humble families under the Gyalpoi Tozay Scheme that enabled these children to study

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At individual level, the [training] programs of the De-Suung will have a significant impact on personal development and [in] cultivating the important values of amity, allegiance and harmony."

66 Inaugurated October 2013. See http://www.rigss.bt/.

67 http://www.academy.bt/

68 http://www.ril.bt/

69 http://www.kidufoundation.org/our-projects/

70 26 July 2012 (original from Kidu Foundation website but no longer given there: see the reportage at *Kuensel*, 28 July 2012, p. 2.

> from pre-primary up to high school. … 75 students who had received scholarship to study abroad [were] back after completion of their studies. Currently 161 students are pursuing their education in eight countries under His Majesty's scholarship programme.
>
> His Majesty also granted citizenship to 8,374 people and medical referral abroad to 95 people including children and old people …[and] granted amnesty to 98 prisoners. The Prime Minister expressed his gratitude to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo for granting Kidu to people from his own personal fund.[71]

Evidently, the role of *kidu* in supplementing the democratic goals of Bhutan is by no means at an end.

## *Concluding Reflections*

*Kidu* in Bhutan has content, and is also a process; therefore grounded but evolving. As welfare, it substantially relates to (and is rooted in title over) land, but it also has come to encompass all that is absent but seen to be desirable in the life of a citizen. The desire for *kidu* has perhaps grown out of proportion: the granting of requests for it certainly has consequences, but – as shown above – the 5th King has institutionalised the grant of *kidu* to substantially reduce the possibility of success of unfair claims.

It seems clear that, whatever the origins and dynamics of the *kidu* system in and around the Tibet region historically and even today, the development of the *kidu* system in Bhutan has been different (as indeed have many aspects of life in Bhutan). In Tibet *kidu* was principally to provide a modality for the welfare and support of members of a group, whether they be monks or artisans from other occupations (e.g. musicians).

In Bhutan, pre-dating the institution of the monarchy system, the central role of *kidu* has been rooted in issues relating to land (and conversely tax): asserting that unallocated land was the property of the State, the de facto sovereign has also asserted his right to determine the allocation of that land. In monarchical times the right to extend land *kidu* also reinforces the authority of the monarch to extend *kidu* in other matters, and indirectly reinforces the dominant political authority of the monarch as one to whom the people can turn for assistance when all hope seems lost – even though government officials, ministers and even

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[71] Resolutions of the 2nd Session of the Second Parliament (from 22 January 2014), published as http://www.nab.gov.bt/assets/uploads/docs/resolution/2014/2nd_session_eng1.pdf, pp. 2-3.

members of the Royal Family themselves have endeavoured to take and assert this power for themselves. After 2008, the monarch is an integral part – albeit at the apex – of the Parliamentary system.[72]

This right of the sovereign has not been directly pre-empted, but on occasion there have clearly been persons who sought to gain or assert for themselves this right (at least partially), in both the pre-parliamentary and parliamentary eras of contemporary Bhutan. The Land Amendment Bill of 2012 most clearly and unambiguously shows the proposed intention of politicians to acquire this right. The 'Gyalpoishing land case' shows its major importance in asserting, clarifying, and 're-setting' the rights of the monarch over land title vis-à-vis the bureaucracy and (more recently) elected politicians.

That politicians have taken up the notion of *kidu* as good things that they might dispense to the people is inevitably in competition and conflict with the rights of the monarch. As elsewhere, politicians have long understood that if they can grant other good things to the people, then their status will be enhanced (and their re-election encouraged). In this continuing process, politicians are not only in competition with the monarch, but they are also building on and encouraging expectations of the people for good things to come to them from higher authority.

While binding people more closely to the monarch in the Bhutanese 'social contract', the *kidu* authority and practice also has the practical effect of keeping open an avenue of review and possible redress for the people, at a time when the political institutions of the country (notably legal and political) are still in the process of growth and maturation.

In a society that might be described as politically adolescent in some contemporary respects, it makes great sense for a benevolent monarch to take initiatives to establish institutions and practices that can operate independently of – but alongside of, and congruent to – the formal state institutions now being constructed or rebuilt under the authority of elected politicians. The achievements of the 5th King in particular in this respect deserve notice, notably (but not solely) the large range of projects folded under the Kidu Foundation.

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[72] During the first Parliament, there were extensive discussions on whether the leading political party – the governing party – should term itself 'the Royal government'. There were definite benefits accruing to a government party from a public linkage to the monarchy – especially when there were disputes over public policy – so the term could be used in a self-serving way. Ultimately, prior usage of the term, the international usage by other monarchies, and the constitutional provisions which included the monarch in the formal Parliament structure, led to acceptance of the status quo.

Institution-building in a modernising society has a principal goal of establishing rules and procedures that seek to minimise or eliminate the arbitrariness of the ignorance or prejudice of those who have authority, i.e. the misuse of power. If we talk of '*kidu* democracy' as a synonym for 'democracy with Bhutanese characteristics', the *kidu* system supports the rights of the common man and woman to a basic livelihood as well as succour in time of dread.

While politicians seek to co-opt the rights and political benefits of *kidu* to their own interests, their efforts seem unlikely to enjoy success unless they are joined as one with the moral authority of the monarch – and the allocation of land title (particularly to individuals or the family unit) will and should remain out of politicians' reach until such time as the review institutions have acquired their own authority.

What of the future? One may envisage a time when politicians are elected by an informed and critical citizenry, and all elected decision-makers (at grass-roots as well as national level) find their decisions closely examined by and helped by a strong network of informed civil interest-group societies. A strong and independent legal system and a fearless anti-corruption body could continue to encourage a deepened and vibrant 'social contract' within the polity, having as a principal focus the continuous implementation of a 'development without discontent'.

Of course, *kidu* democracy is a process (as mentioned), not a goal in itself. Its essence is to be dynamic and informed, with the seeking of welfare for all citizens as a guiding principle. Land will remain the lodestar of the dispossessed, and the rich and powerful will by whatever means continue to amass land banks as an ultimate familial wealth.

It may be that the *kidu* powers of the monarch, so expressly presented in the Constitution, may come to be eroded in practice by some who might assert that that document is 'too narrowly interpreted' or 'viewed in an unbalanced light'.

It might be possible to argue that the tendency towards consensus that had been the norm in public affairs up to 2008 is now in the process of being replaced by a naked individualism, encouraged by the nature of party politics:[73] but individualism was never absent, and it was often the king (or the king's representative in the districts) who

[73] Some argue that corruption has come up much more strongly after 2007 than previously, as the notion that 'public money is nobody's money' has taken stronger root with the moves towards parliamentary-style politics.

could bring moral authority to bear for acceptance of a consensus on controversial issues.

Will the Bhutanese form of *kidu*, focused on the grant of land but in fact and practice encompassing almost everything else as well,[74] in the gift of the king, come to be transformed in due course to a Bhutanese version of 'pork-barrelling'?[75] This seems unlikely in the foreseeable future.

As things stand today, and given the dynamic changes in political and individual relations now under way, the monarch's moral authority must rest to a large extent on the continuing ability to grant – and to be seen to grant – land as well as other *kidu*,[76] independently of the politicians. The grant of citizenship is a form of *kidu* that is managed by the 5th King, through the Office of the *Gyalpoi Zimpon*. It will be important in the mid-term and longer-term to have a well-educated and well-financed legal structure, especially with a view to having the Courts assess fairly any challenges to the Constitution, particularly if any issues arise of interpreting claims to *kidu*.

Thus, the *kidu* system – both in its land aspect, and as more broadly and popularly understood welfare system – has come to underpin the entire march of Bhutan to modernity. If the *kidu* system is lost, then the future well-being of the peoples of Bhutan will be lost also. For the political utility of *kidu* to diminish in the longer term, there seem to be three main prerequisites: a strong legal system, a broad consensus on

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[74] The outgoing ministers of the First Parliament sought from the 5th King – and were granted – *kidu* (or *soelra* according to a statement by the outgoing party) to retain some perks of office, notably including the very expensive Japanese-made 4WD LandCruisers and Prados (*Kuensel*, 30 April 2013). *Soelra* is seen as a gift, often of appreciation.

[75] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pork_barrel

[76] The pseudonymous Bhutanomics website carried an article on 21 June 2013 suggesting that citizenship *kidu* was based on a list managed by the (former) DPT government http://bhutanomics.com/2013/dpt-takes-credit-for-kidu/. However, Article 2 (16)(b) of the Constitution makes it clear that the Monarch has the right to grant citizenship, as well as "land kidu and other kidus". By late May 2016, some 9,000 people had been granted citizenship kidu by the king: individuals seeking citizenship *kidu* submit their appeals to him through the Office of the Gyalpoi Zimpon, which also receives applications through dzongkhag officials in 20 dzongkhags. The king personally grants audience to every recipient of the citizenship *kidu* (*Kuensel*, 24 May 2016, p1).

The domain www.bhutanomics.com (registered in Panama, and hosted from 11 November 2011 on OrangeWebsite.com, a "100% Anonymous domain registration service", based in Rejkjavik, Iceland: (see http://whois.domaintools.com/bhutanomics.com) extended its registration on 11 November 2016 to 11 November 2017. Since January 2015 the site has been active only sporadically.

the country's political priorities, and greater economic equity along with a gross reduction of poverty levels (and for these economic themes, a widespread public attitude of entitlement would need to be transformed to match the economic realities).

There is an additional issue to ponder. With the well-known rural-to-urban migration trend in Bhutan well under way (and at least one recent report[77] suggesting more urban dwellers than rural population by around the mid-2030s), increasing areas of rural land will be left fallow. Fallow land by the border areas especially will gain the attention of neighbours; in due course it might be lost. This is a major security issue, touching the very existence of the state. Indeed, land *kidu* has become a very real security-related complex of issues for the present as well as the not-so-very distant future. How to motivate people to go back to the land, and how to ensure that rural incomes may meet the growing consumer demands of the people, deserves very serious and constant attention.[78] The reforms initiated by the 5th King of Bhutan, building on the experience of his father the 4th King, strengthen the body politic, but do not by themselves fully defeat the scheming self-interest of many on land issues.

[77] See Table 1 given for Bhutan under http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup2014/Country-Profiles/Default.aspx.

[78] The 'Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative' ( www.sji.bt ) which was formally inaugurated on 18-20 December 2010 in Dewathang, appears to be continuing to gain traction. But 'Thimphu is far away'.

# STUMBLING ON THE THRESHOLD:

# ANNIE R. TAYLOR'S TIBETAN PIONEER MISSION, 1893-1907

JOHN BRAY
*Singapore*

In the summer of 1893, the veteran missionary Anne R. Taylor (1855-1922) issued a dramatic appeal for Tibet, presenting the challenge in starkly masculine terms:

> Miss Taylor pleads for a Tibetan Mission, on the lines of the C.I.M. [China Inland Mission]. She asks now for twelve missionaries, six of them medical missionaries, and all, at first, men. Although she, a woman, has penetrated Tibet, she does not think it desirable that women should go at the outset. Few there are of our sisters who could stand the hardships. When God raises the men, as she believes He will, she suggests they ought to go to Darjeeling and Sikkim to learn the language, and attempt entrance from that side. Englishmen, she maintains are greatly respected and admired in Tibet, and once the official barriers are broken down, the way will be easy, for the Tibetans are willing to welcome those who come to teach and relieve suffering.[1]

Figure 1. Annie Taylor in Tibetan dress.[2]

[1] Tibetan Pioneer Mission (1894), p. 6.
[2] Source: Robson (1909), p. 105.

Her call was answered. Within weeks she had gathered a team of thirteen aspiring missionaries, one more than originally envisaged, including a married couple. In February 1894 they set sail from London, planning to spend some months of preparation in Darjeeling, and then to proceed via Sikkim to Tibet.

This paper discusses the rise, collapse and long-term consequences of the Tibetan Pioneer Mission that Taylor founded. It is based on a close reading of contemporary published sources and archival records, notably the papers of one of Taylor's recruits, Henry Martyn Stumbles (1873-1915), which are now held at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge.

The paper's title is an allusion first to Stumbles' surname, and secondly to the title of a near-contemporary publication by the Kalimpong-based missionary J.A. Graham, *On the Threshold of Three Closed Lands* (1st ed. 1897). Graham and other missionaries in the Darjeeling/Kalimpong region saw themselves as an advance guard of the church waiting to move into Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal as soon as these countries' borders were opened. For Taylor, the time had already come to press far beyond the threshold. As will be seen, she and her followers succeeded only in part.

## 1. THE RISE: CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND THE 'GREAT CLOSED LAND'

The emergence of Annie Taylor's Tibetan Pioneer Mission coincided with – and contributed to – a wave of enthusiasm for Tibet in Evangelical circles. This sense of expectation was based first on a sense of divine providence, secondly on the inspiration deriving from Taylor's courageous journey to Central Tibet in 1892-3, and thirdly on an optimistic reading of contemporary political developments.

### *The divine plan*

For more than a century, Central Tibet had officially been closed to Western travellers. In her book *The Great Closed Land. A Plea for Tibet* (1894), the missionary writer Annie Marston lamented that:

> Tibet is a Closed Land, closed not only to the messengers of the Lord, but to the Lord whose message they bear.[3]

[3] Marston (1894), pp. 107-108.

She continued with an allusion to Mark 16:15 where Jesus commands: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature". According to Marston:

> [Tibet] *has to be opened*, for never till this is done, can the parting command of Him whom we call Master and Lord be obeyed. 'All the world' includes Tibet, and 'every creature' includes the Tibetans. Therefore the closed gates must be opened, the surrounding ramparts must be brought down.[4]

For Marston and her contemporaries, the breaching of Tibet's ramparts was expected to come as the result of the advancing Christian missionary movement assisted – through the providence of God – by political pressures from British India.[5]

*Early Protestant missionary engagement with Tibet*

As early as 1816, the London-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) had sent a young German missionary, FCG Schroeter, to study Tibetan near the southern borders of Sikkim.[6] The CMS failed to sustain its efforts in Sikkim after Schroeter's death in 1820. However, in 1856 Moravian missionaries set up a mission station in Kyelang (Lahul), followed by further stations in Poo (Kinnaur) in 1865 and Leh (Ladakh) in 1885. The Moravians regarded their activities in these regions as a preparation for future expansion across the border: an 1891 publication on their work by H.G. Schneider carries the title *Working and Waiting for Tibet*.[7] Their particular contribution to the wider missionary movement included the translation of the New Testament into Tibetan.

Meanwhile, Church of Scotland missionaries established a mission in Darjeeling in the 1870s and soon extended their activities to Kalimpong. They achieved their greatest initial successes in recruiting converts from the local Lepcha and Nepalese populations but, as noted above, nurtured the hope they would in due course be able to expand their operations into neighbouring territories, including Tibet.

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4 Ibid. Italics in the original.

5 For a discussion of missionary views on imperial politics as an instrument of divine providence, see Stanley (1990).

6 On Schroeter, see Bray (2005, 2008, 2011).

7 Hermann G. Schneider, *Working and Waiting for Tibet: a Sketch of the Moravian Mission to the Western Himalayas*, London: Morgan & Scott, 1891.

Despite these long-term aspirations, no Protestant missionary had managed to travel as far as Central Tibet until Annie Taylor's Tibetan expedition in 1892-3.

*Annie Taylor's adventures in China, Sikkim und Tibet*

Annie Taylor was born into a prosperous middle-class family in 1855 and – initially against her father's wishes – had early discovered a missionary vocation. In 1884 she set out for China under the auspices of the CIM, and in 1887 travelled to the 'great Tibetan fair' at Kumbum in Amdo.[8] Soon afterwards, she was forced by illness to leave China to recuperate, and returned briefly to Britain, before setting out a second time not for China but for India.

Taylor initially lived for five months in a 'native hut' near Ghoom,[9] and then spent a year in Sikkim but only the bare outlines of her experiences there are known. An account published in 1893 states that she lived in an unspecified valley in the far north of the country, close to the Tibetan fort of Khambajong across the border.[10] A letter from one of her missionary colleagues adds the further detail that she had lived in the Lachen and Lachung valleys.[11] However, the "chief's wife" tried to poison her by offering her eggs laced with aconite,[12] and the "captain of the guard" in Khambajong came over to order her back to Darjeeling.[13] Thereafter she lived in a room in the monastery at Tumlong according to one account,[14] or a "hut near a Tibetan monastery called Podang" (presumably Phodang) according to another.[15] Even there, her troubles were far from over because local people subjected her to a boycott and she found it hard to obtain sufficient food. As far as we know, she made no Sikkimese converts.

Notwithstanding these setbacks, her stay in Sikkim had two positive outcomes. The first was that she learnt to speak Lhasa Tibetan. Secondly, despite her lack of success among local people, she recruited her best-known convert, Pontso, a 19 year-old boy from Lhasa who had

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8 Carey (1902), pp. 149-162.
9 Ibid. p. 163.
10 'Miss Annie R Taylor. Chinese Missionary and Traveller in Tibet'. Reprint from *The Christian* 17th August 1893 in Tibetan Pioneer Mission (1894:2); reprinted in Taylor (1895), p. 9. See also Carey (1902), p. 163.
11 Report from Miss Bella Ferguson, in Taylor (1895), p. 68.
12 Tibetan Pioneer Mission (1894), p. 2.
13 Carey (1902), p. 163.
14 Ibid.
15 Taylor (1895), p. 9.

hurt his feet and had been directed to Taylor for medical treatment. Pontso remained her faithful servant throughout her subsequent adventures.

In 1891 Taylor returned to China, together with Pontso, and set up a base at Taochow (now known as Lintan) in northern Gansu. In September 1892 she set out for Lhasa, accompanied by Pontso and with a Chinese Muslim called Noga. She got as far as Nagchuka and then, having been barred from onward travel to Lhasa, turned east to the Kham/Sichuan border town of Tachienlu (Dar rtse mdo, now known as Kanding), which she reached in April 1893.

Figure 2. Annie Taylor with Pontso and his wife Sigju.[16]

*The founding of the Tibetan Pioneer Missions*

Taylor's adventures were widely publicised and, as one of her biographers, later wrote:

> Miss Taylor's journey changed the whole face of missionary interest in Tibet. It sent a thrill round the world, and is the true beginning of the new and widespread eagerness for the Christian evangelizing of the land.[17]

[16] Source: Carey (1902), p. 242.
[17] Carey (1902), p. 127.

By 18 July 1893 she was back in London where she approached the London Council of the CIM expressing her "desire to take workers back specially for work in Thibet".[18] However, the Council took the view that "it would not be wise for the Mission to be made responsible for work in Tibet which must necessarily be carried on from India". [19] The issue came up again at a subsequent meeting on 5 September: this time the Council suggested that Taylor might associate herself with the US-based International Missionary Alliance (later the Christian & Missionary Alliance), which had declared an interest in Tibet and had missions in India as well as China.[20]

Not content with this proposal, Taylor eventually decided to set up her own organisation, the Tibetan Pioneer Mission, on the same principles as the CIM. The CIM London Council duly expressed its "full sympathy with her in this new work".[21] William Sharp, who was a member of the CIM Council, took on the additional role of Honorary Treasurer of the new mission.

Both then and later, Taylor argued that Tibet had a special significance in the divine plan:

> The object of the Mission is to evangelize Tibet, and so to remove one of the last barriers to the fulfilment of our Lord's words, 'This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come'.[22]

Evan Mackenzie of Dingwall in Scotland was among the first to respond to her call for recruits, together with his wife Elizabeth and their infant child. By February, Taylor had gathered all the funds that she needed, and assembled a team of 13 missionaries, hailing variously from London, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.[23]

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[18] School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library Archives and Special Collections. China Inland Mission archives (Hereafter CIM archives). Minutes of Council Meeting on 18 July 1893, London Council Minute Book, Vol. 7, pp. 141-142.

[19] Ibid.

[20] SOAS CIM archives, Minutes of Council Meeting, 5th September 1893, London Council Minute Book, Vol.7, p.153.

[21] CIM archives, Minutes of council meeting on 2 October 1893. London Council Minute Book, Vol.7, p.164.

[22] Taylor (1895), p. 75. This is a reference to Matthew 24:14: 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come' (King James Version).

[23] The full list was: Evan Mackenzie, together with his wife and child (Dingwall); Anders Jensen (Denmark); Johan Johansen (Sweden); Theodor Sørensen (Norway); Edward Amundsen (Norway); Henry Martyn Stumbles (Lewisham); Harry Arnott

*British India's political relationship with Sikkim and Tibet*

While all this was going on, the political relationship between British India, Sikkim, and Tibet was going through a difficult and complicated period.

In 1861, the British had established a protectorate over Sikkim, but the Chinese and Tibetan authorities did not fully recognise this. The key unresolved political and diplomatic issues therefore concerned Sikkim's political status, the demarcation of the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet, and the development of trade between India and Tibet. The situation was made more complicated by Britain's recognition of China as the suzerain power in Tibet, as a result of which British diplomats negotiated with Chinese rather than Tibetan officials. This was the period when the Tibetans were reasserting their political initiative. In 1884, Colman Macaulay, the Financial Secretary of the Government of Bengal, led a mission to Sikkim. He subsequently sought formal permission from the Chinese government to enter Tibet. Tibetans actively resisted.

In the summer of 1886 Tibetan forces advanced 13 miles into Sikkim territory (as defined by the British) and built a stockade at Lingtu. The Government of India at first hoped that the Tibetans would withdraw of their own accord but in March 1888, when this did not happen, sent a military expedition to eject them, and built a fort at Gnatong (Nathang) on the road to the Jelep La. Two months later they repulsed a Tibetan counter-attack and then embarked on a series of negotiations.

The eventual outcome of the negotiations was the signing of the 1890 *Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet*, under which China formally recognised the British Government's protectorate over Sikkim, including its "direct and exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of that State". In December 1893 after a further series of negotiations, the two powers signed the *Regulations regarding Trade, Communication, and Pasturage* to be appended to the 1890 Sikkim-Tibet Convention. Article 1 of the regulations provided for the establishment of a trade mart in Yatung within Tibetan territory on the far side of the Jelep La from Sikkim.

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(Dunfermline); James Moyes (Lochgelly, Fife); William Soutter (Peterhead); James Neave (Aberdeen); Thomas G. Orr (Grennock); Tom Craig (London); and George Lawson Shireff (Peterculter).

At the public farewell meeting for the Tibetan Pioneer Mission group in London's Exeter Hall, William Sharp referred to "the remarkable alteration in Thibetan policy effected by the recent Sikkim-Thibet Convention", and noted that British subjects would now be free to reside at Yatung from the following May.[24] For Sharp and his fellow mission supporters, this development served as clear evidence that Tibet's frontiers would soon be open to the Gospel. A few days later, on 23 February 1894, the missionaries set sail from the Royal Albert Dock on the steamship 'Manora', full of optimism.

## 2. ADVANCE, COLLAPSE, AND REGROUPING

This optimism turned out not to be justified. After a hopeful beginning in Darjeeling, the original Tibetan Pioneer Mission fell apart within the space of a few months. The main sources for these developments come from the papers of Henry Martyn Stumbles, who now takes centre stage.

Stumbles was only 20 years old when he volunteered for the mission, and came from Lewisham in south-east London. He may have been named after the early nineteenth century missionary Henry Martyn (1781-1812), and a contemporary report in the CIM magazine *China's Millions* states that he had been "dedicated to the Lord" by his parents.[25] He himself notes that his acceptance for missionary service was "realisation of a long cherished desire".[26] It seems that he had had some medical training, possibly the only member of the mission to have done so, but he clearly was too young to have qualified.

Stumbles' reports on the mission's activities are contained in 13 diary extracts that were published in his local newspaper, the *Kentish Mercury*, under the heading "A Lewisham Man in Furthest India".[27] He sent the first extract in 1895, about a year after the events it describes. The articles are of course addressed to a particular local audience and no doubt edited accordingly.

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[24] Anon (1894), p. 47.

[25] 'The Thibetan Pioneer Mission. Farewell Meeting in Exeter Hall', *China's Millions* 1894, pp. 46-48

[26] Henry Martyn Stumbles Papers (hereafter 'HS'), Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, HS/9/1. 'A Lewisham Man in further India', September 1895 cutting from the *Kentish Mercury*.

[27] HS/9/1-13. The cuttings in Stumbles' papers are numbered, but not dated. However, in some cases it is possible to work out the dates from cross-references in subsequent articles.

*Preparation in Darjeeling*

Stumbles' first article describes the voyage from London via Port Said and Ceylon to Calcutta. During the voyage, the newly recruited missionaries filled their time by studying Tibetan "under Miss Taylor's tutorship".[28] From Calcutta they went on by train to Darjeeling, arriving on 4 April. The plan was to spend an extended period of study in preparation for their further endeavours in Sikkim and Tibet.

Soon after their arrival in Darjeeling, the missionaries received a visit from the Deputy Commissioner, bearing unwelcome news:

> He came to inform us that we should not be allowed to cross the frontier into Sikkim or Tibet… We could not help fearing that something of this kind might be done, considering the jealous way in which Tibet was being looked after by our government, but we hardly expected that it would take this form. Still, perhaps after all it is better to have a brick wall to kick against than a feather bed.[29]

Notwithstanding this setback, the missionaries embarked on the essential task of improving their understanding of Tibetan. However, they faced the immediate difficulty that Tibetans who taught their language to Europeans risked being punished and even executed on their return to Lhasa. This concern did not apply to people who had fled from Tibet to escape punishment, and therefore could not return in any case, and Pontso managed to find a group of volunteers from this source. As Stumbles explains:

> The one that fell to my lot was a (Mr.) Chabres-la, who was once a Lama priest in Lhassa. As far as I remember his story, it appears that some young Lamas had made a raid on a shop in Lhassa in which he 'had had no hand whatever' – but this may be justly queried. Being found out, they were obliged to leave the monastery rather quickly, he leaving with them, arriving eventually in Darjeeling.[30]

Stumbles reports that he was able to put his medical training to good use in offering treatment to the Darjeeling Tibetans. He mentions that he and his colleagues were able to treat some 400 patients as well as – in accordance with their missionary calling – sharing "the glad tidings

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[28] HS/9/1.

[29] HS/9/3

[30] HS/9/3. James Neave evidently had the same teacher. For his account, which largely corroborates Stumbles', see Neave (1933-4). I am grateful to Alex McKay for this reference.

of our Lord's love for them."[31] In most cases he was successful, but – no doubt hoping to touch the hearts of his readers – he also mentions two failures. The first was a girl who had run away from her parents, without letting them know where she was going, and joined a caravan going to Darjeeling, only to catch dysentery en route. The second was a mother of two young children who succumbed to an unspecified illness "after falling into intemperate habits when nearly well". [32]

In the summer months Darjeeling served as the headquarters of the Bengal government, and there was therefore a significant European community of officials as well as business people, missionaries, and their families. Many were sympathetic to the missionary cause. These included Sir Charles Elliott, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal even though, in his official capacity, he had had to discourage Taylor's party from trying to enter Tibet.[33] Stumbles reports an enjoyable social event at Sir Charles's residence:

> One of the events of the season was an 'At Home' given by Lady Elliott, wife of Sir Charles, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, to missionaries at the station. Her invitation was very hearty, and although we went to the 'Shrubbery' [the name of the Elliotts' residence] in somewhat of a 'fear and trembling' we were set at perfect ease at once, and made enjoyably comfortable by our kind hostess. Both Sir Charles and Lady Elliott were most genial, the former taking upon himself the role of a waiter and handing around tea and coffee to his guests.[34]

By contrast, the local police chief was less kindly disposed and took a particularly dim view of the missionaries' attempts to hold public religious meetings:

> An attempt to commence a series of open-air meetings in the higher part of Darjeeling was warmly opposed by the Police Superintendent who, not being in sympathy with such meetings, and, I suppose, in execution of his duty, endeavoured to stop us in the middle of one of them. Seeing, however, that we intended going on he waited till the close, and then made his objections to the leader, finally saying that if we came the following Sabbath he should arrest us. The listeners, however, were not of his opinion and many told him so, begging us at

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[31] HS/9/4.
[32] HS/9/4.
[33] Sharp (1894).
[34] HS/9/3.

> the same time to continue the meetings as they singing of the familiar hymns carried them back to the old country.[35]

The reference to the 'old country' implies that the main participants in the meetings were Europeans rather than locals. It seems that their cries were heard because Stumbles goes on to say that Darjeeling's Deputy Commissioner, after hearing the case, allowed the meetings to continue.

Figure 3. Tibetan Pioneer Mission group portrait in Tibetan dress.[36]

By late September, evidently judging that the British authorities had relaxed or would not apply their earlier prohibition, Annie Taylor decided that the time had come to move across the Sikkim border to Gnatong. Now that the mission was entering a new phase, "it was considered wisest for us to dress like Thibetans and thus gain their sympathy at the outset."[37] Stumbles goes on to note that this approach evoked a mixed response from the local populace:

> A week before leaving Darjeeling we had to don our costumes and, as may be guessed, this caused quite a stir in the place. We lost our prestige all at once, and when met by Europeans they passed us by on the other side, not caring to have anything to do with these Anglo-

[35] HS/9/3.
[36] Source: Robson (1909), p. 83.
[37] HS/9/5.

> Tibetans. The Tibetans themselves though were highly pleased and nearly every one of them in Darjeeling was our sworn friend. For us the garb was not too convenient, it was for ever getting in the way and taking an especial fancy to barbed wire fences, projecting nails etc., and big and unsightly rents were the consequence. After a week of this sort of thing it was time that we moved on, for some of us were rather unpresentable objects.[38]

*Advancing to Gnatong*

Unlike Taylor's earlier journey across Tibet, the transfer of the mission to Gnatong was a major logistical operation. Between them, the missionaries had 16,000lbs of baggage. The standard load of a coolie was about 90-100lbs, so the luggage had to be divided into 140 to 150 packages for as many men.

Stumbles gives a detailed account of the pleasures and travails of the journey to Gnatong. The pleasures included the welcome the missionaries received from J.A. Graham at the Scottish mission in Kalimpong. The travails included the ubiquitous leeches and the steepness of the road on the far side of the Sikkim border. Gnatong – once they reached it – proved far from inviting. In a letter to her supporters, Taylor later noted that Gnatong was 12,350 feet above sea-level, adding briskly that it was "a military outpost for British troops, and as such has the reputation of being one of the healthiest in all India."[39] By contrast, Stumbles' considered assessment was that:

> On the whole Gnatong is one of the most inhospitable places to which I have been, and no one would reside there but those who were really obliged.[40]

He added that it held few attractions as a missionary centre: most of the Tibetan traders who passed through Gnatong went on to Kalimpong, and it would be just as easy to make contact with them there.

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[38] HS/9/5.

[39] Annie Taylor, Gnatong, May 1895. Printed letter included in Tibet Pioneer Mission pamphlet. CIM archives. CIM/JHT, Box 15, letters 1895-1899.

[40] HS9/8.

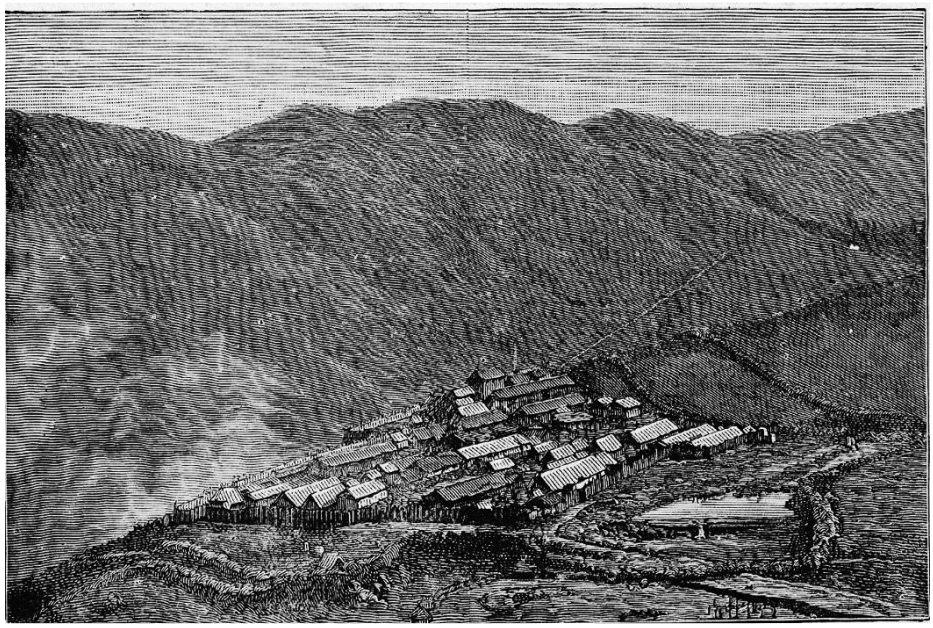

Figure 4. The British fort at Gnatong.[41]

The immediate problem was to find a place to stay. There was no room inside the fort, which was occupied by half a company of the second battalion of the Manchester Regiment. According to Stumbles, "the one small room that Miss Taylor had captured on her arrival was the only one available in the place, and of course this was conceded to the ladies". [42] The men found temporary accommodation first in "a tumbledown wool shed, the property of the Sikkim Political Officer, [43] and then in another shed in the same block. Fortunately, their Danish colleague Anders Jensen was a skilled carpenter, and they managed to build their own hut despite the fact that their tools were limited to "an English hatchet and two native axes".[44] However they suffered from the cold because they only had the clothes of light texture that they had worn in the valleys and, even though they had a blazing log fire, the temperature in the hut rose scarcely above freezing point for several nights running.

[41] Source: *Illustrated London News,* November 1888.
[42] HS/9/8.
[43] HS/9/8.
[44] HS/9/8.

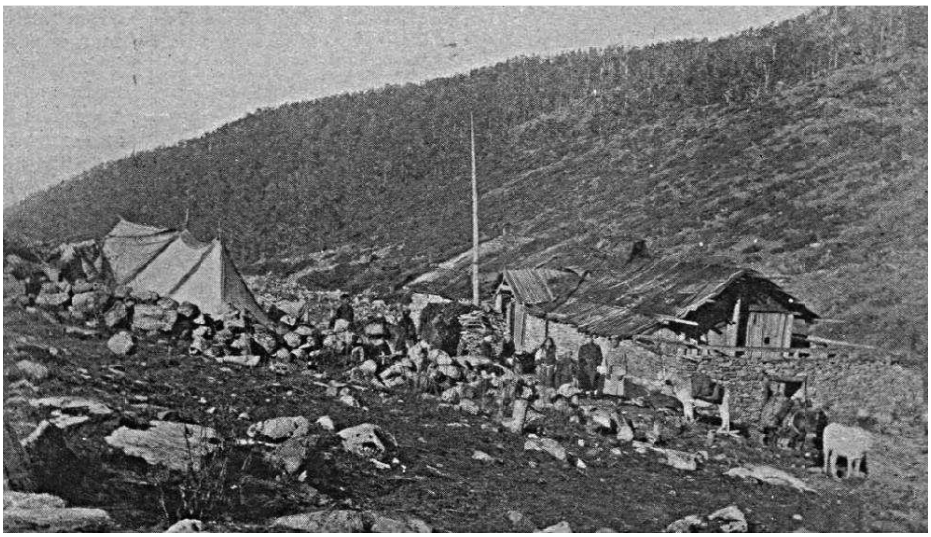

Figure 5. "Lhassa Villa": Annie Taylor's base in Gnatong.[45]

On a more positive note, the missionaries had some "splendid meetings" with the soldiers. As Stumbles recounts:

> The poor fellows had been cut off from the outside world for just two years, and it was only natural that they should be happy at coming into contact with fellow countrymen. On the first Sunday of our stay we invited down to our hut as many as thought they could get in. Some 25 put in an appearance and, as you may guess, we were crowded out. We found them all places though, and had a most enjoyable meeting. Some of the oldest of Sankey's hymns were sung, and as they were well known to all, I suppose similar strains in both volume and kind, had not been heard in Gnatong before.[46]

Nevertheless, conditions remained harsh, and Stumbles continued:

> The high altitude, lack of proper accommodation, manual and mental labour, all ought to have been met by a proportionate amount of nourishment, but owing to some oversight on the part of the management this was lacking. For three weeks we tasted but little animal food as there was simply none to be got… Mrs Mackenzie's health gave us great cause for anxiety, as day by day she appeared to grow weaker, and there was no means of nourishment; but still we

[45] Source: S. Taylor (1904), p.443.
[46] HS/9/8.

> were all kept muscularly strong until our descent a little later, which was a great mercy.[47]

He does not elaborate in any detail, but it is clear that the relationship between Taylor and her recruits became strained to the point that it broke down completely, and all but one of them withdrew from Gnatong. Stumbles stayed long enough to make a short trip to the Jelep pass with an unnamed companion and crossed the boundary so that "one of our anticipations was realised – to be in Tibet".[48] He then followed the majority of his fellow missionaries back down to British India: Jensen was the only one who remained with Taylor in Gnatong. Tragically, he died of typhoid soon afterwards and was buried in the small British cemetery at the fort.[49]

Stumbles' first move was to return to the village of Pedong (also spelt 'Padong'), some 12 miles from Kalimpong on the road to Sikkim. The Mackenzies were already there, and they rented a hut while they awaited further developments in relation to the mission. Stumbles notes that he had plenty of medical work at Pedong since there was no alternative source of medical aid closer than Kalimpong. Evan Mackenzie, who contracted dysentery, was one of his patients.[50]

*Regrouping in Kalimpong*

Meanwhile in London, the Tibetan Pioneer Mission treasurer William Sharp heard of the mission's difficulties and took the initiative to contact Cecil Polhill-Turner (1860-1938) who had previously worked in the Amdo border regions on behalf of the CIM. He[51] was then on leave in England on account of his wife's ill-health.

At Sharp's request, Polhill-Turner wrote to the CIM London Council and sought their permission to visit Darjeeling for a few months.[52] In January 1895, having secured the Council's approval, Polhill-Turner set out for Kalimpong, where the other nine former members of the mission were staying, and then proceeded to Gnatong to confer with Annie Taylor – arriving just in time to preside at

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47 HS/9/8.
48 HS/9/8.
49 Annie Taylor, Gnatong, May 1895. Printed letter included in Tibet Pioneer Mission pamphlet. SOAS CIM archives. CIM/JHT, Box 15, letters 1895-1899.
50 HS/9/12.
51 On Polhill, see Usher (2015).
52 SOAS CIM Archives. Minutes of Council Meeting, 4 December 1894. CIM London Council Minute Book, Vol. 7, p. 263.

Jensen's funeral. As he wrote in the CIM magazine *China's Millions*, he and Taylor decided that her former followers "should proceed independently in carrying on their future work".[53] His own duty was "to remain with the new members, seeking to help them equip themselves for their prospective labours among the Tibetans".

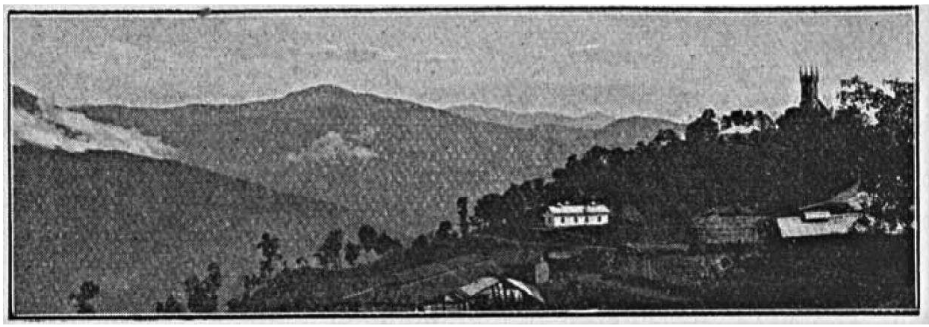

Figure 6. Kalimpong in the late nineteenth century showing the silhouette of the Scottish Mission's Macfarlane Memorial Church. The original caption is "Looking Towards Tibet".[54]

With the help of the Darjeeling Deputy Commissioner, Polhill-Turner was able to rent a house in Kalimpong where he led his new colleagues in a course of language study inspired by the French linguist François Gouin's book on *The Art of Teaching and Studying Languages* (1892):

> Instead of continuing the studies with grammar, dictionary and teacher separately, as hitherto, all collected each day for the classes, during which the exercises were learned off by heart, one by one, first in English and then in Tibetan from the teacher's lips. They were assisted by a young Christian Tibetan studying medicine at the Scottish mission as well as 'very quick young Lama from Lhasa' who, however, died of consumption. Alongside their lessons the missionaries held short services for the Tibetans and 'were thankful to notice real interest among them.' [55]

Stumbles moved from Pedong to join Polhill-Turner's course of study in Kalimpong, noting in May 1895 that he and his colleagues "were kept busy from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m."[56] His papers contain an exercise book dated August 1895, with a series of sentences in Tibetan,

[53] Polhill-Turner (1895), p. 170.
[54] Source: Graham (1905), p. 27.
[55] Ibid.
[56] HS/9/2.

including on subjects such as the initiation of young monks at Tibetan monasteries.[57] This may be a legacy of these language lessons. Stumbles' collection also includes a heavily annotated copy of St John's Gospel in a Tibetan translation published by the Moravians in Berlin, with the English text written by hand below the Tibetan words, and this too may date to the same period.

Meanwhile, Taylor continued to work on her own from Gnatong. She gave her own assessment of her former colleagues' defection in a letter to Mrs Hudson Taylor (the wife of the founder of the CIM) in January 1895:

> The men did not want a mission on the C.I.M. principles but they wanted one on a big scale like the established Church Missions, & they did not understand trusting God & going forward, and all mission questions were to be left to them to decide they said.
>
> The first night they arrived here they went at me for an hour for bringing them here.
>
> I am not giving up the mission here but asking for sisters. The men found hardships in things which the sisters in China would praise God for.[58]

From mid-1895 onwards, Taylor was able to set up shop – literally – across the Tibetan border, in accordance with the *Regulations regarding Trade, Communication, and Pasturage* appended to the 1890 Sikkim-Tibet Convention which permitted British traders to reside in Yatung. Notwithstanding this partial success, Polhill-Turner noted that there were still major political obstacles to a further advance into Tibet:

> It is not, perhaps, well understood in the homeland that Tibet is as still fast closed as ever from the Indian side. Though Yatong, which consists of a few empty buildings, ostensibly for the use of merchants (two of which are now occupied by Miss Taylor, a garrison of about thirty soldiers and a customs officer) is open to Europeans and lies a few miles beyond the British frontier in Tibet, yet a few yards further on is a barricade built across the valley, beyond which Europeans are forbidden to cross, and the only Tibetans likely to visit Yatong are those who pass through on their way to Kalimpong.[59]

In early 1896, judging that the situation on Tibet's southern borders was unlikely to improve in the short term, Polhill-Turner encouraged

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[57] HS/6/2.

[58] Annie Taylor to Mrs Hudson Taylor, Gnatong. 19 January 1895. SOAS CIM archives. CIM/JHT Box 15/412-419/Letters 1895-1899.

[59] Polhill-Turner (1895), p. 170.

Taylor's former followers to transfer their activities to Tibet's eastern border. In March 1896 CIM founder Hudson Taylor visited Darjeeling together with his wife, and accepted the Tibet Mission's members as Associates of the CIM.[60] Soon afterwards, Polhill-Turner led the bulk of what was now the CIM 'Tibet Band' to Shanghai and on to Tachienlu. The Mackenzies had transferred their allegiance to the Church of Scotland mission and therefore stayed behind in Kalimpong.

## 3. LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

The fortunes of the Tibet Pioneer Mission may not have turned out as the chief protagonists expected when the 'Menora' left the Royal Albert Dock in February 1894, but it nevertheless made a lasting impact on many people's lives.

First, Taylor herself continued her missionary activities from her base in Yatung. She followed up her promise to appeal for 'sisters'. Whereas the original Tibetan Pioneer Mission literature explicitly called for male missionaries, her subsequent appeals were equally explicit in appealing for women:

> The pioneer work in Tibet still has to be done; such work means suffering cold, privation and other hardships. But by the God-sent worker these are met in concert with Him and so are easily borne. I do not think that God wants me to do this work alone; so I ask for women of God, who *knowing* the difficulties and counting the cost, will willingly give their lives to the work of God, by striving for the propagation of the Gospel in dark, cold, inhospitable Tibet…
>
> Although women are physically not so well able to endure hardships, yet by a livelier temperament and the power of making the best of circumstances they can adapt themselves to almost anything. Again, one peculiar advantage of women as pioneers for Tibet is that the Tibetans respect women and do not even in time of war attack them. For this reason the political parties of India and Tibet are not so likely to look with suspicion upon women Missionaries. [61]

It seems that her appeal was heard: Taylor's booklet on *Pioneering in Tibet* (c.1897) includes letters from Bella Ferguson and M. Mary Foster who evidently had joined the mission. She also reports that John T.

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[60] King (1905), pp. 171-172.

[61] Annie Taylor, Gnatong, May 1895. Printed letter included in Tibet Pioneer Mission pamphlet. SOAS CIM archives. CIM/JHT, Box 15, letters 1895-1899.h

Collier, a former lance corporal from the Manchester Regiment, had become a Christian while at Gnatong and had entered missionary training with a view to joining the Tibet Pioneer Mission, although it is not clear whether he actually did so.[62]

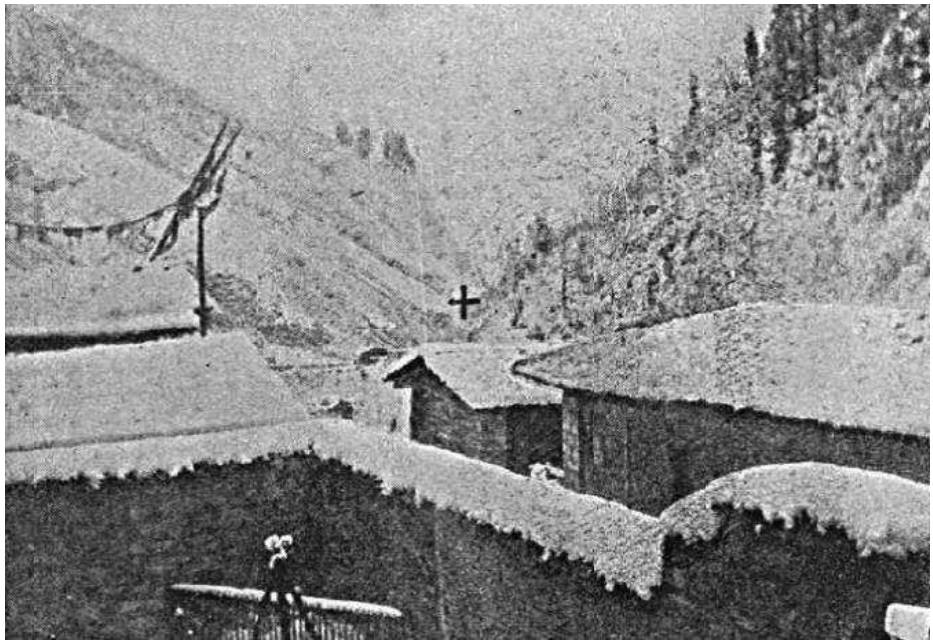

Figure 7. Annie Taylor's House in Yatung (marked with a '+').[63]

In a letter written to former Moravian missionary Gustav Theodor Reichelt in early 1896, Taylor describes the local population in Yatung:

> At present there are about 120 Chinese & Tibetans Army living here & at the gates, amongst whom we can work & then there are the people who come from down the valley for medicine etc. as well as periodical visits from Tibetan chiefs & Chinese officials with their attendants. The Tibetans who live in black tents & look after the [yaks?] are sometimes encamped on the mountains nearby, & then we can visit them. There is also a temple & about twelve houses on the mountain side which we can walk to. The caravans with the wool for Kalimpong come through this way.[64]

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[62] Taylor, Annie R, letter dated 'Gnatong, 1895'. In *Pioneering in Tibet*, pp. 52-53.
[63] Source: S Taylor (1904), p. 529.
[64] Taylor to Reichelt, 25th January 1896, Yatung. Archiv der Evangelische Brüder-Unität (hereafter EBU).

She then summarises her commercial ventures:

> In my little shop I sell drugs & other things. Since it was open in October 18th my sales amounted to Rs 183. This is not much but I am glad to get amongst the Tibetans in their own country. This does not include medicine given in exchange for vegetables eggs milk etc. or that given to those too poor to pay.

In the same letter she describes how she combined Christmas celebrations with Christian preaching:

> Christmas was a busy day in the morning I had a number of Chinese visitors & in the evening forty Tibetans to tea & then about sixty in all to a Christmas tree & magic-lantern show. I told the Gospel as I showed the pictures & at the end we sang 'Jesus loves me' in Tibetan.
>
> It being new to all except two (Puntso my little Tibetan & the Tibetan Secretary to the Chinese customs who comes from Darjeeling) they were all delighted & all got something off the tree, on which I had a number of Tibetan text cards & packets of Toffey [sic] (sweets) made by my-self & little muslin bags of raisins, as well as some [….] cuffs kindly sent by a friend from England. Yesterday being New Year's Day I had another tea & magic lantern show to which we had about fifty guests principally Chinese with their Tibetan wives & children so I told the Gospel in Chinese.[65]

It is doubtful whether the shop was ever commercially viable, but it gave Taylor an official justification for being in Tibet, and no doubt performed a useful service in selling medicines and other goods to people who needed them.

It seems that neither Bella Ferguson nor Mary Foster stayed with her for long. In a letter written in July 1899, she wrote that she was 'alone in the work here' because 'the passes have not been granted to my helpers', presumably by the British authorities in Darjeeling.[66] In her later years, to cite the title of an article published by her sister Susette in 1903, Taylor had an unrivalled claim to her title as "the only Englishwoman in Tibet".[67]

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Taylor to Reichelt, 14 July 1899. Yatung, EBU.
[67] Susette Taylor (1904).

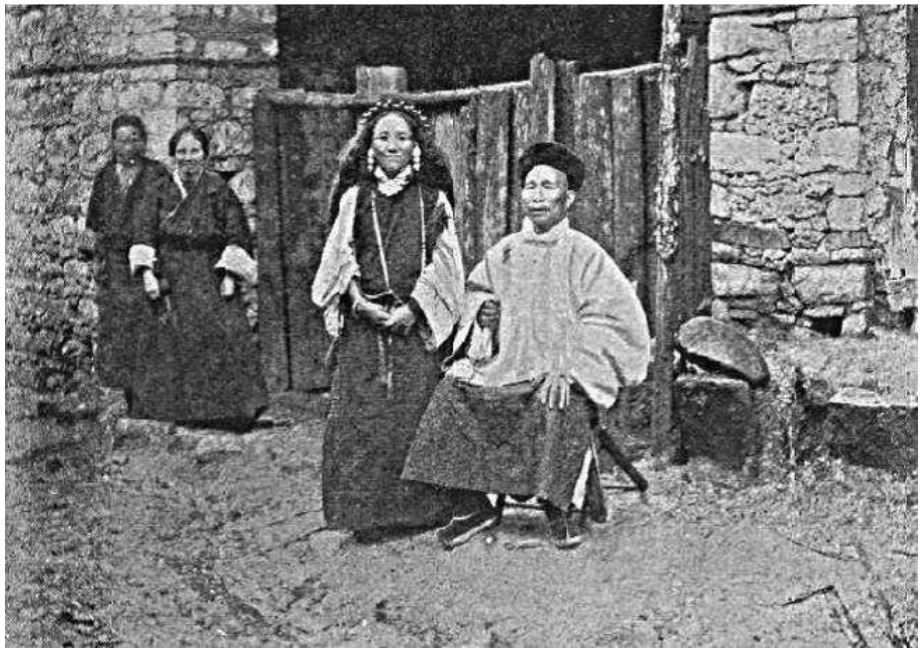

Figure 8. "Sardar Dhukey, a former chief official at Yatung." Annie Taylor is the second figure to the left in the background.[68]

Like many of her missionary colleagues, Taylor initially welcomed the 1903/1904 Younghusband expedition to Tibet. In December 1903, she wrote to *The Christian* in London stating that:

> As a missionary, I welcome the Mission, and look on it as the advent of prosperity to the land of my adoption as well as meaning the increase of British trade and prestige, and the opening of the long "closed land" to the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.[69]

She subsequently volunteered her services to the expedition to Tibet, working as a nurse in the field hospital in Chumbi.[70] However, this proved to be a painful experience because, while she believed that the British were in the right politically, she likewise sympathised with the ordinary Tibetans who were caught up in the conflict, and grieved for the loss of life.

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[68] Source: S. Taylor (1904), p. 529.
[69] 'Miss Annie Taylor in Tibet', *The Christian* 24 January 1904, p. 18.
[70] Robson (1909), p. 112.

Younghusband eventually withdrew from Lhasa without securing access to the country for missionaries, and Taylor's ultimate verdict was that:

> … far from being strengthened, the prestige of Britain has been weakened all along the border between Tibet and India, the only gain in this respect being on the part of China.[71]

As before, she continued to complain that the British authorities failed to assist the missionary cause. More than anything else, there was a "need for prayer for Tibet, especially that the Indian Government may be brought to relax or withdraw their restrictions on missionaries".[72]

Following these events, Taylor briefly stayed on in Yatung but both her health and her morale were under strain, and by 1907 she had left the region for good. As one of her biographers reports:

> Miss Taylor had cherished high hopes that the Expedition would establish friendly relations between England and the wild country to which she had dedicated her life; that Tibet would be opened freely to Europeans and, with them, the missionary would have access to its most sacred places. Completely broken down by the stress of work, anxiety and disappointment, she returned to England where, her friends hoped, a prolonged rest would restore her to health.[73]

On her return to Britain, it seems that she was deemed unable to care for herself and was admitted to Otto House, a psychiatric hospital in London.[74] She died there in 1922.

Meanwhile, other members of the original Tibetan Pioneer Mission continued their work as part of Polhill-Turner's CIM Tibet Mission Band on the Sichuan/Kham borders. William Soutter, one of the oldest and most respected of the Band's members, died near Batang in December 1898.[75] Polhill-Turner withdrew from China on account of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900: he never returned full-time to the mission field but continued to maintain a close association first with the CIM and then with the Pentecostal Missionary Union.[76]

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71 'The Present Position in Tibet', *The Christian*, 20 July 1905, p. 16

72 Ibid.

73 Robson (1909), p. 112.

74 Livne (2011), p. 68. Livne suggests that she may have been suffering from depression (private communication, February 2013).

75 Anon. 1899. 'In Memoriam – William Soutter (Tibet Mission Band). Written by one of his Fellow Members.' *China's Millions* 7, p.70.

76 Van Spengen (2009).

Out of the original group, the Norwegian Theodor Sørensen (1873-1959) appears to have had the longest missionary career: he worked with the CIM at Tachienlu until 1923, and then for a further stint in Beijing from 1925-1938.[77] His fellow-Norwegian Edward Amundsen (1873-1928) returned to Darjeeling for three years from 1900 to 1903 and then moved to Yunnanfu (Kunming) where he worked successively for the British and Foreign Bible Society and Det Norske Misjionsforbund (the Norwegian Mission Federation) until his retirement in 1924.[78] Evan and Elizabeth Mackenzie stayed in Kalimpong in the service of the Church of Scotland mission: Elizabeth died in 1917 (there is a memorial to her in English and Tibetan in the church in Kalimpong); Evan stayed until 1924 when he transferred to another Scottish mission in central India.

Taylor's original vision of setting up a mission within the 'Great Closed Land' was fulfilled to the extent that she herself maintained a Christian outpost at Yatung, just inside the Tibetan border for more than a decade. There is no record of her having made any converts during her time in Tibet, but her courage served as a source of inspiration both to her supporters in Britain and to a select handful of missionaries who continued to work on the Tibetan borders long after she had herself left the field.

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[77] Kvaerne (1973).
[78] Kohler (1985).

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# THE MONASTERY BKA' BRGYUD DGON GSAR IN THE CHUMBI VALLEY:

# THE 'BA' RA BA BKA' BRGYUD PA SCHOOL AND ITS CONNECTION WITH SIKKIM[1]

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## *Introduction*

Gro mo, the present-day Chumbi valley, is nestled between Sikkim and Bhutan in Southern Tibet. On several occasions, this area was important in a political context, for example in 1904, when the British, who lead an expedition to Lha sa, were entering Tibet from Sikkim via the Chumbi valley. Nowadays, it is part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China and thus a border region between China and India. While for China today it might merely serve as a strategic point, for the British it was also of economical relevance. This region had long been an important place for traders, as old caravan routes passed through going from Tibet to Bhutan and Sikkim and from there onwards to West Bengal. The routes were not only frequented by traders but also by accomplished masters and pilgrims. One Buddhist school, whose followers often travelled to or through this valley, was the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school. Important sites related to this school were situated in Tibet as well as in Bhutan and in Sikkim. In order to reach those locations, the members of this school used the ancient caravan routes and thus passed through the Chumbi valley. During the twelfth Tibetan *rab byung*, that is the time between 1687 and 1746, two 'Ba' ra ba monasteries were built in the Chumbi valley. They became an important contact point for pilgrims who travelled from Tibet to Bhutan and Sikkim or vice versa.

[1] I would like to thank Anna Balikci-Denjongpa and Jenny Bentley for organising the Sikkim Bhutan panel. Unfortunately, I could not participate as I was unable to travel during the time of the conference. All the more, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the proceedings. Furthermore, I am indebted to Prof. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, who first arose my interest in the studies of the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school, and to Prof. Petra Maurer. Last but not least thanks are due to Tashi Tsering from the Amnye Machen Institute who brought the articles written by Lobsang Champa to my attention.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the connection of the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school with Sikkim. Up to now, the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa has not received a lot of attention although their teachings and traditions have been upheld since the fourteenth century. First, a short introduction to this school will be given. Second, it will be shown why Sikkim became a pilgrimage site for followers of the 'Ba' ra ba school. Finally, the relationship between Sikkim and the bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery in the Chumbi valley, which once belonged to the Sikkimese kingdom, will be illustrated. This monastery served as former main seat of the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku.[2]

*The 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school*

The bKa' brgyud pa is one of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The expression bKa' brgyud pa refers to the orally transmitted tantric teachings, which are passed from teacher to disciple. The great scholar Pad ma dkar po (1527-1592) pointed out that the term dKar brgyud would be more appropriate, as it means white lineage. Members of this school often wear white robes as a sign of an ascetic life. Nevertheless, it seems that the designation bKa' brgyud gained more acceptance.[3] The term bKa' brgyud pa summarises several lineages going back to Dwags po lha rje, the disciple of Mi la ras pa, who is also known as sGam po pa (1079-1153).[4] The different lineages going back to sGam po pa and to his nephew are divided into the four major (*che bzhi*) and the eight minor branches (*chung brgyad*). The 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa is one of the eight minor branches. It was founded by Gling ras pa Pad ma rdo rje (1128-1288). The 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud can be sub-divided into further branches, the sTod 'brug bKa' brgyud, founded by rGod tshang pa (1189-1258) being one of them. The Yang dgon bKa' brgyud branch, which was established by rGyal ba Yang dgon pa (1213-1258?), is again an

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2 This article is an outcome of my studies on the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa, which I am currently undertaking at the University of Munich as a Ph.D. project.

3 See Karma Phuntsho (2013), p. 138 and Miller (2005), pp. 369-70.

4 The bKa' brgyud pa schools going back to sGam po pa are also called Dwags po bKa' brgyud pa. Additionally, Khyung po rnal 'byor founded the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud pa which, however, is not directly related to those schools of the Dwags po bKa' brgyud pa. For further information regarding the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud pa see Kapstein (1980), pp. 138-44 and Smith (2001), pp. 53-6.

offshoot of the sTod 'brug bKa' brgyud, whereas the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud developed from the Yang dgon bKa' brgyud pa.[5]

'Ba' ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzang po (1310-1391) is regarded as founding father of the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa. He was born in 'Ba' ra brag in the Shangs valley, about 30 km from Shigatse (gZhis ka rtse). This bKa' brgyud offshoot received its name from that place. rGyal mtshan dpal bzang po studied under the most renowned masters of his time, for instance under Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364) and Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1361). Thus he himself became an important master. He also brought the 'Ba' ra ba teachings to Bhutan, to where he undertook several journeys and did not only spread his teachings but also acted as a kind of mediator between local chieftains. As gestures of gratitude, and probably to make him stay in Bhutan, monasteries were built. One of those was the monastery Dranggye Gonpa ('Brang rgyas kha), which was built for him in Paro (sPa gro) during the fourteenth century. After he had passed away in this monastery, it became a main pilgrimage site for his followers.[6]

His successors spread the 'Ba' ra ba teachings in Tibet. Nam mkha' rdo rje (1486-1553), a native of Mang yul Gung thang, studied in the Shangs valley under Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1475-1530), who was regarded as the incarnation of 'Ba' ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzang po. Then he returned to his home region and established the 'Ba' ra ba teachings in south-western Tibet, while Nam mkha' dpal 'byor (sixteenth century), one of his disciples, spread them to Gu ge in Western Tibet.[7] During the seventeenth century, the 'Ba' ra ba teachings reached present-day Sikkim: dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (1601-1687), a native of Grwa in Mang yul Gung thang, established the first monasteries following the 'Ba' ra ba tradition there.

### *The 'Ba' ra ba teachings reach Sikkim*

The accomplished master dKon mchog rgyal mtshan played an important role in the spreading of the 'Ba' ra ba teachings to Sikkim. His root teacher Karma gSal byed (d.1658), the second 'Ba' ra ba sPrul sku,

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5 See Ehrhard (2000), p. 51, Ehrhard (2009), pp. 184-8, and Smith (2001), pp. 44-5. For further reading on the different bKa' brgyud pa branches see among others Smith (2001), pp. 39-46.

6 See Aris (1979), pp. 181-4, Ardussi (2002), pp. 5-16, Ardussi (2011), p. 32, Baruah (2000), pp. 256-8, Ehrhard (2000), p. 52, Ehrhard (2009), p. 189, note 13, and Karma Phuntsho (2013), pp. 130-1 and pp. 182-4.

7 See Ehrhard (2000), pp. 55-66 and Ehrhard (2009), pp. 193-4.

instructed him to travel to the previously opened sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs, that is present-day Sikkim. Following this instruction, dKon mchog rgyal mtshan embarked upon a journey to Sikkim, where he visited the sacred site of Tashiding (bKra shis sding). Then he met the first Buddhist ruler of that country, the previously installed king Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (1604-1670). The king wanted dKon mchog rgyal mtshan to stay at the sacred site of Tashiding but since some monks showed him little respect he refused.[8] Thereupon, the king provided him with some donations and dKon mchog rgyal mtshan went to 'Dam bzang. There he found many donors and was able to build his own monastery in the *mon* style. The monastery comprised a temple and a great assembly hall. A golden statue of Vajradhāra, containing sacred substances from India and Tibet, was placed in the assembly hall.[9]

In the following years, dKon mchog rgyal mtshan travelled back and forth between Tibet and Sikkim. His last journey brought him to northern Sikkim: As he arrived at bTsun mo rin chen thang, that is present-day Chungthang, demons caused mischief and because of that, the villagers suffered, for example due to the lack of water. dKon mchog rgyal mtshan subdued a lake-spirit by giving various blessings. Thereby a new spring appeared and the villagers were again provided with water. Additionally, he saw a stone appearing, which looked like the head of a snake. He identified it as an evil demon and tamed it by erecting a monastery. dKon mchog rgyal mtshan spent his last years in Chungthang. The snake-like stone can still be seen today. It is located near the present-day monastery of Chungthang, which nowadays follows the rNying ma tradition.[10]

dKon mchog rgyal mtshan was the first master to bring the 'Ba' ra ba teachings to Sikkim shortly after the opening of the land to the Buddhist doctrine. His incarnations were also closely related to Sikkim as it will be shown below. So far it was believed that only followers of the rNying ma tradition acted in Sikkim soon after the land was opened to

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8 See *gSer-phreng/a*, Vol. III, 112.5-116.3 and Erschbamer (2011), pp. 39-43.

9 See *gSer-phreng/a*, Vol. III, 116.3-117.4, Erschbamer (2011), p. 44, and Erschbamer (2013). It is not entirely certain where exactly this monastery was built. It is likely that the place 'Dam bzang refers to an area not far from Kalimpong in West Bengal, which is called Dámsáng by local Lepchas; see Ardussi (2011), p. 36 and Mullard (2011b), p. 54.

10 For a complete hagiography of dKon mchog rgyal mtshan see *gSer-phreng/a* and *gSer-phreng/b*. See Erschbamer (2011) for a complete translation of the hagiography. The part dealing with his journeys to Sikkim was edited, see *BJG*, 26-39. For more details regarding dKon mchog rgyal mtshan and about how the 'Ba' ra ba teachings reached Sikkim, see also Erschbamer (2013). For some notes on dKon mchog rgyal mtshan compare Ardussi (2011), p. 36 and Ehrhard (2009) p. 196, note 26.

Buddhism. However, the teachings of the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa also spread in Sikkim at that time. Nevertheless, the 'Ba' ra ba school did not have such a strong presence as the rNying ma pa and the teachings were not as popular as those of the latter.

*bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery - main seat of the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku in the Chumbi valley*

The monastery of bKa' brgyud dgon gsar in the Chumbi valley, 1938[11]

Two new monasteries were erected in Gro mo, the present-day Chumbi valley in Tibet, during the time of the twelfth Tibetan *rab byung*, that is between 1687 and 1746. These were named bKa' brgyud dgon gsar and

[11] From the collection of Bruno Beger, Schaefer Expedition, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok.

mTshams brag dgon. They became important bases for followers of the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud tradition, who were on their way from Tibet to the main pilgrimage sites in Sikkim and Bhutan. Furthermore, bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery developed into the main seat of the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku, the incarnations of the aforementioned master dKon mchog rgyal mtshan. These monasteries stayed in close relationship with Sikkim. In those days, parts of the Chumbi valley belonged to the Sikkimese kingdom, among them also the area where these monasteries were built. In 1792, these parts were annexed by the Chinese Amban. Even so, Sikkimese were still given access to the Chumbi valley during the summer months. They were allowed to herd their cattle and thus Sikkimese taxpayers resided in this area. Additionally, from 1780s to 1888, the summer palace of the Sikkimese royal family was located there.[12]

Entrance to bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery, 1936[13]

[12] See Bajpai (1999), pp. 16-19, Mullard (2011a), p. 40 note 25, and Mullard and Wongchuk (2010), pp. 85-90.

[13] From the collection of Sir Evan Yorke Nepean Baronet held at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok.

The monastery bKa' brgyud dgon gsar in the Chumbi valley is also known as bKa' dgon tshe [m]chog gling or as Gro mo bKa' brgyud. It is nestled on a hill of pines west of the village Shar gsing ma in the district of Gro mo rdzong in south-western Tibet, and still exists to this day.[14] It was built by one Grub dbang mTshams pa mnga' bdag in order to prevent misfortune among the nomads living there during the twelfth Tibetan *rab byung*.

> Furthermore, during the twelfth Tibetan *rab byung* [that is between 1687 and 1746], the nomads of Gro mo were in great danger due to wild animals such as tigers, leopards, and bears. A rich person of that region, called Rin sgang sgom rtsa ba, approached [equipped] with a sling to a meditation cave called Nyi brag khung bu, where [someone] practised. [He] went to meet Grub dbang mTshams pa mnga' bdag, whose retreat helpers were non-humans. [He] spoke about the history of harm caused by the wild animals. Then [he] asked for help. Grub dbang mTshams pa mnga' bdag said: 'If you give me the nomad region called dGun mal, I will be able to send the wild animals such as tigers, leopards etc. to Assam.' In accordance [with that] the nomad region called dGun mal was given to the Bla ma. The Bla ma chased out the wild animals such as tigers and leopards to Assam.[15]

Grub dbang mTshams pa mnga' bdag established bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery at the spot which he was given by the nomads. The monastery comprised an assembly hall with four beams and eight pillars, a temple flanked by two beams, and a building containing the one storey high statue of Vajradhāra made of gold and copper. To the west of the assembly hall one could find a shrine of the protector's deity Ye shes mgon po. Behind that building there was a small house containing the *Rin chen gter mdzod* collection. Furthermore, there were shrine rooms of

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[14] See the map provided at the end of this article indicating the most important places mentioned herewith.

[15] *GLY*, p. 48: *de'ang bod rab byung bcu gnyis pa'i dus 'og tsam du gro mo'i 'brog sder stag gzig dom dred sogs gcan gzan gyi 'jigs pa che bar byung bas / khul de'i phyug bdag rin sgang sgom rtsa ba zhes pas sna thod la dang nye bar nyi brag khung bu zhes pa'i sgrub phug tu bsnyen sgrub mdzad cing mtshams g.yog mi ma yin gyis mdzad pa'i grub dbang mtshams pa mnga' bdag ces zhu ba zhig yod de'i mdun bcar te gcan gzan gyi gnod pa byung tshul dang de las skyob pa'i skyabs 'jug zhus pas / grub dbang mtshams pa mnga' bdag gis khyod kyi 'brog sa dgun mal zhes pa de nga la sprad na ngas stag gzig la sogs gcan gzan rnams a sam du brdzang chog ces gsungs pa bzhin dgun mal zhes pa'i 'brog sa de bla mar phul / bla mas stag gzig la sogs pa'i gcan gzan dug pa can rnams a sam du bskrad /* . See also *GKG/a*, p. 174 and *GKG/b*, p. 84.

gNas chung and bDe ba chen po as well as a temple of rGyal po sku lnga.[16]

Grub dbang mTshams pa mnga' bdag invited his teacher bsTan 'dzin nyi zla (d.1753) to the newly established monastery. This teacher was the incarnation of dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, the master who brought the 'Ba' ra ba teachings to Sikkim.[17] After some time, he established a small monastery in the vicinity of bKa' brgyud dgon gsar.

> At first, [bsTan 'dzin nyi zla] stayed at the present monastery and in the vicinity. [He] was allowed to practise faultlessly the three basic rituals along with one monk and eight followers [in] a dwelling place with four beams. That practise place was named mTshams brag dgon.[18]

bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery, which is the larger one of the two monasteries, became the main seat of the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku, that is the incarnation of dKon mchog rgyal mtshan. This sPrul sku had his own residence within the monastic compound.

> Between the big kitchen and the dharma school is a huge gate. From there, after more than twenty steps in northern direction, one reaches the residence of the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku, which is located on a mountain slope. In this large building, which is completely fascinating, are located some smaller bedrooms, an assembly hall, a treasury room, a room for servants, a kitchen, a storeroom, and horse stables. Bla ma A jo'o mtshams pa rdo rje [twentieth century] resided there and there were always about thirty monk's quarters for meditation.[19]

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[16] See *GLY*, p. 48, *GKG/a*, p. 175, and *GKG/b*, p. 85. The *Rin chen gter mdzod* is an important collection of *gter ma* literature. This collection is part of the five great treasures (*mdzod chen lnga*), which were composed by 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899). For further reading see Schwieger (1990), Schwieger (1995), Schwieger (1999), Schwieger (2009), and Schwieger (2010), pp. 321-35

[17] His incarnation status was confirmed by dKon mchog rgyal mtshan's disciple Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan; see Ehrhard (2009), p. 200, note 32.

[18] *GLY*, p. 48: *thog mar da lta'i dgon de dang nye bar bzhugs te bzhugs gnas ka bzhi dang 'khor brgyad grwa gcig dang bcas gzhi gsum gyi phyag len mi nyams pa gnang / dgon gnas kyi mtshan la mtshams brag dgon zhes zer /* . See also *GKG/a*, p. 175 and *GKG/b*, pp. 84-5. The three basic rituals (*gzhi gsum*) refer to the purification and reconciliation ceremony (*gso sbyong*), the summer or rainy season retreat (*dbyar gnas*) and the ceremony for releasing the summer retreat (*dgag dbye*).

[19] *GKG/b*, p. 85: *chos ra dang thab tshang chen mo'i bar la sgo chen zhig yod pa nas gom pa nyi shu lhag tsam yod pa'i byang ngos ri ldebs su bka' brgyud sprul sku rin po che'i bla brang thog brtsegs can der gzim chung khag dang / tshom chen / phyag mdzod khang / zhabs phyi khang / gsol tab / gnyer tshang / chibs ra sogs cha tshang mdzes sdug ldan yod pa dang / rang byung bla ma a jo'o mtshams pa rdo rje sogs bzhugs yul*

The bKa' brgyud sPrul sku was the only tantric monk. In other words, he did not always reside in the monastery but he had an own family and lived outside the monastic complex in the village most of the time. For ceremonies or gatherings he came to the monastery.[20]

The monastery was financed by taxpayers from the lower Chumbi valley and from eastern regions of Sikkim. Among the Sikkimese regions which paid for the bKa' brgyud dgon gsar, were Rinak (Ri nag), Lamaten (La mag steng), and Lingtam (Li 'dam). The sons of the taxpayers were free to enter the monastery as monks, whereas this privilege was refused to others.[21]

Monks in the courtyard of bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery with the abbot Ajo Rinpoche in white robe, 1936. [22]

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*bsam gtan lugs kyi grwa shag sum cu tsam snga phyir chags yod* / . See also *GKG/a*, pp. 175-6.

20 See *GKG/a*, p. 177 and *GKG/b*, p. 87.

21 See *GKG/a*, p. 177 and *GKG/b*, pp. 86-7. These places are even today linked with the 'Ba' ra ba. A monastery following 'Ba' ra ba tradition is located in Rinak, whereas small village monasteries belonging to the 'Ba' ra ba are situated in Lamaten and Lingtam. As the lower Chumbi valley once belonged to the Sikkimese kingdom and as the summer palace of the Sikkimese royal family was situated there, it is not surprising that the main seat of the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku, which was also located in this area, was financed by Sikkimese taxpayers.

22 From the collection of Sir Evan Yorke Nepean Baronet held at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok.

In the nineteenth century, the twelfth Dalai Lama 'Phrin las rgya mtsho (1856-1875) renamed the two monasteries. mTshams brag dgon pa became dGa' ldan bstan rgyas gling and bKa' brgyud dgon gsar was renamed to dGa' ldan tshe [m]chog gling.[23]

Four different departments (*bla khag*) or transmission lines were established within the monastery during the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They were named Shar ri'i chu bzang Bla ma, Rin sgang btsun sgar Bla ma, Chu 'bi gstang mkhar Bla ma, and Yul gsar steng pa Bla ma. In 1959, they were dissolved and the various members of the departments went abroad.[24]

Due to the political situation, the late bKa' brgyud sPrul sku was also forced to leave Tibet in 1959. Only a few monks stayed behind and the monastic complex slowly fell into decay. After the Cultural Revolution, some parts of the monastic complex were renovated.

> Within a short time, between the years 1983-6, upper and lower parts of nine temples, as well as the assembly hall were renovated. Furthermore, five monk's quarters, a kitchen, and a storage room were newly erected. A reservoir made of cement was erected in a canyon in a distance of about 11,900 meters. Iron pipes for water supply were laid. The significance of offerings and water supply was decided.[25]

Furthermore, some statues were newly erected and additional frescos painted. Some monks following the bKa' brgyud tradition were invited to reside and practise in that monastery. Unfortunately, recent publications do not specify further to which of the many different schools among the bKa' brgyud pa tradition these two monasteries once belonged. It seems that it has been generally forgotten that those monasteries were important sites for the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school or even part of it. More recent documentations concerning the bKa' brgyud dgon gsar cannot clearly allocate the monastery to a specific tradition. According to some texts the monasteries were part of the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud pa, in another text they are given the name 'Bar ba, an abbreviation of 'Ba' ra ba, but that term could not be identified as

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[23] See *GKG/a*, pp. 175-6 and *GKG/b*, p. 85.

[24] See *GKG/a*, p. 176 and *GKG/b*, p. 86.

[25] *GKG/b*, p. 87: 1983-1986 *lo bar dus thung nang du 'du khang sogs steng shod lha khang dgu nyams gso byas shing / grwa shag lnga dang / thab tshang / gnyer tshang bcas gsar du brgyab pa dang / rgyang thag rmid (= smi) khri chig stong drug brgya lhag tsam gyi ri khug tu ar 'dam las grub pa'i chu gsog rdzing bu bskrun cing / lcags sbub kyi chu ka la gsar du 'then te dgon pa'i mchod pa dang 'thung chu'i gnad don thag gcod gnang zhing /* . See also *GKG/a*, p. 178.

sub-school of the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud. Instead, an editor's note suggests that 'Bar ba refers most likely to the 'Ba' rom school. However, even though the most commonly known sources do not make it evident, without any doubt the monasteries and the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku can be connected to the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school. Followers of the 'Ba' ra ba built and maintained them until they were forced to leave Tibet in the late 1950s and the main seats were then re-established in exile.[26]

*Sikkim - new home of the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku*

The late bKa' brgyud sPrul sku 'Jigs med ngag dbang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1939-2007), being the seventh in his line, was born in the Chumbi valley. His incarnation status was recognised by the sixteenth Karma pa Rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje (1924-1981) and Sa skya khri 'dzin Ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang drag (1900-1950). He studied under several masters in Gro mo, sKyid grong, and in rTsib ri.

Due to the difficult times and political changes, the seventh bKa' brgyud sPrul sku had to leave his monastery bKa' brgyud dgon gsar and Tibet in 1959. As the Chumbi valley once belonged to the Sikkimese kingdom, it is not surprising that the monks of the bKa' brgyud dgon gsar in the Chumbi valley always stayed in close connection with Sikkim, where there still were practitioners of their tradition and where some monasteries held the tradition alive. This might also be one reason, why the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku went to Sikkim. In Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, he found his new home. He established a monastery, which was named Tshe [m]chog gling in order to commemorate the abandoned one in the Chumbi valley.[27] This monastery is located in Chandmari, Gangtok. The Sikkimese monasteries of Papyuk (sPa phyug), Tsangyek (rTsa brngas), and Rinak (Ri nag) are affiliated to that monastery.

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[26] See *GLY*, p. 49, *GKG/a*, p. 176, and *GKG/b*, p. 85. The monasteries in the Chumbi valley are mentioned in various hagiographies of different 'Ba' ra ba masters as being an important site. Due to its position it became a significant place for members of the 'Ba' ra ba school who were on their way from Tibet to Bhutan or to Sikkim and vice versa. The 'Ba' rom bKa' brgyud pa school is one of the four major branches (*che bzhi*) of the Dwags po bKa' brgyud pa, whereas the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud pa school is a sub-school of the 'Brug pa, which in turn is one of the eight minor branches (*chung brgyad*). Both, the Shangs pa and the 'Ba' ra ba, have their origin in the Shangs valley, but they are two independent schools.

[27] As mentioned before, Tshe [m]chog gling or dGa' ldan tshe [m]chog gling was another name for bKa' brgyud dgon gsar monastery, which it received from the twelfth Dalai Lama in the nineteenth century.

*Concluding remarks*

Ever since the 'Ba' ra ba teachings reached Sikkim in the seventeenth century, followers of that sub-school of the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa kept close relations with Sikkim. The great master dKon mchog rgyal mtshan was the first to build a 'Ba' ra ba monastery in the country. In the course of time further establishments followed mainly in the eastern region. The incarnation line of dKon mchog rgyal mtshan became known as the bKa' brgyud sPrul sku. The monastery bKa' brgyud dgon gsar in the Chumbi valley, which was established by Grub dbang mTshams pa mnga' bdag during the twelfth Tibetan *rab byung*, that is between 1687 and 1746, became their main seat. In 1959, the late bKa' brgyud sPrul sku was forced to leave Tibet and to go to Sikkim as a result of the difficult political situation.

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*List of abbreviations*

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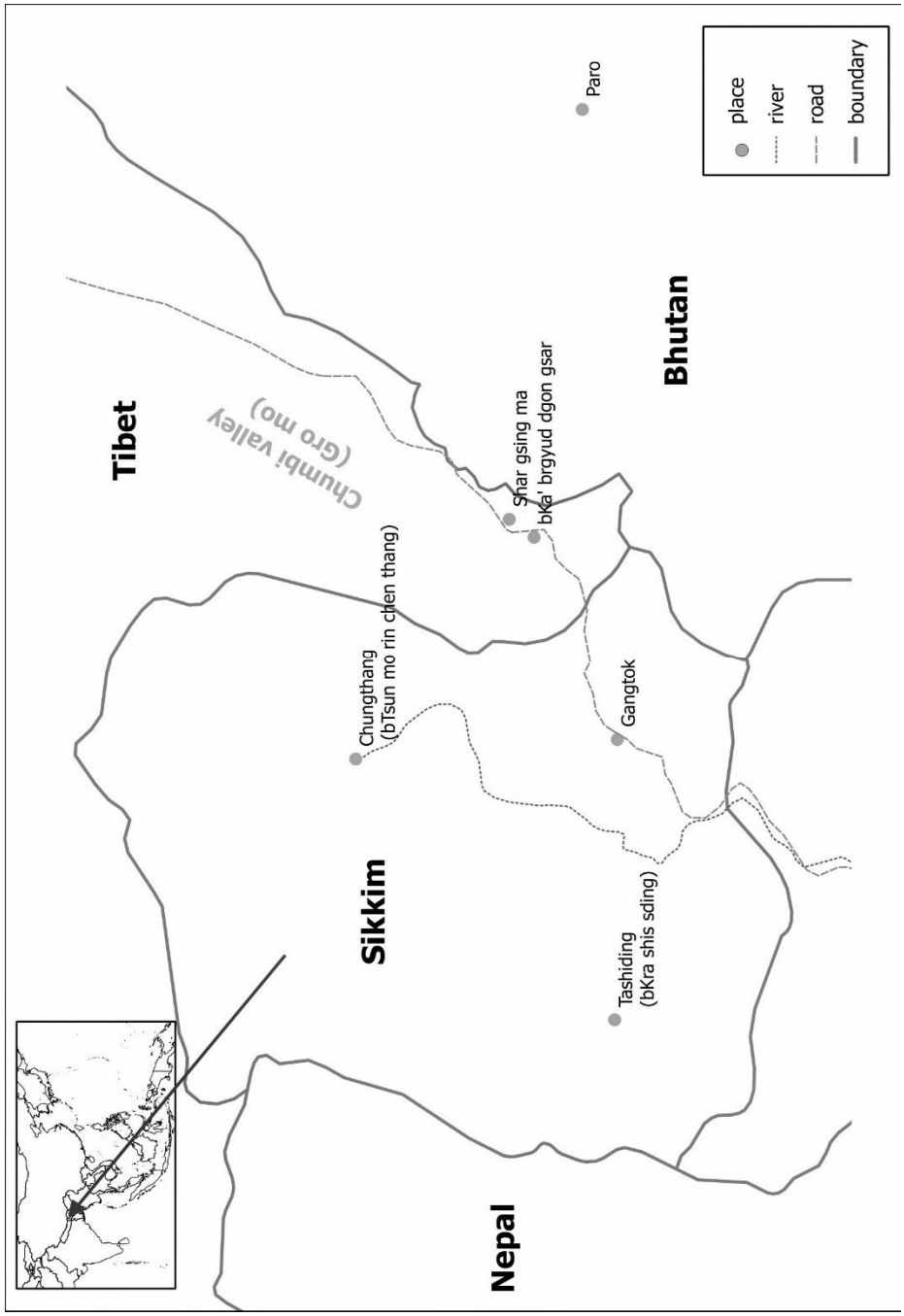
|---|---|
| BJG | *'Bras ljongs nang dgon sde khag gcig gi chags rabs yig cha* |
| GKG/a | *Gro mo bka' brgyud dgon pa'i chags rabs* |
| GKG/b | *Gro mo bka' brgyud dgon dga' ldan tshe chog gling gi lo rgyus* |
| GLY | *Gangs can bod kyi gnas bshad lam yig gsar ma* |
| gSer-phreng/a | *bKa' brgyud gser phreng chen mo* |
| gSer-phreng/b | *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* |




Map of important places mentioned in the paper
(Made with Natural Earth. Free vector and raster map data @ naturalearthdata.com)

# THE KING'S RITUAL AND THE RELIGIOUS POWER OF THE UNTAMED[1]

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The third highest mountain in the world, Mt. Khangchendzonga, towers over the lush green hills and rice terraces of Dzongu, the Lepcha reservation in Sikkim, Northern India. The Lepcha are an ethnic group living in the south-eastern Himalaya in India (Sikkim, West Bengal), Nepal (Ilam), and Bhutan (Samtse). In Lepcha mythology this region is a part of Ne Máyel Lyáng, the ancestral land of the Lepcha. The mighty mountain is the abode of their main mountain deity.[2] The deity has two denominations that also mirror the two-fold relationship the inhabitants have with the supernatural being. Kóngchen is called Kóngchen cú, mountain. The name refers to the actual place of residence and does not distinguish between the supernatural being and the topographic marker.[3] The term *cú* emphasises Kóngchen's role as an ancestral lineage deity. In Lepcha religious tradition and kinship system, every clan is related to a mountain or hillock (*cú*), a lake (*dâ*) and a specifically defined entry-point into the ancestral lands (*lep*). Consequently, each Lepcha clan holds kinship relations with the deity residing in 'their' mountain. The other term Ne Kóngchen pano, the holy king, describes the mountain deity as the lord over a specific territory. In this understanding, the people who have ancestral affiliation with the mountain deity also inherit the socio-political

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1 This paper is based on fieldwork conducted among the Lepcha community of Sikkim and West Bengal since 2006.

2 The mountain is also the abode of the Buddhist deity Dzönga and is worshipped by the Bhutia of Sikkim, see Balikci 2002; Balikci 2008. The syncretic elements of the two religious traditions are common in every-day life in Sikkim. The Lepcha have their own religious tradition, but have been gradually converted to Tibetan Buddhism. The Lepcha communities of the various regions have different histories of conversion into Buddhism. In Dzongu the first monastery, the Tholung monastery, was probably built around the late 17th to early 18th century, but the exposure remained pretty marginal until the early 19th century. Today, both religious traditions exist side-by-side, influence each other, with many apparent syncretistic elements.

3 See Höfer 1999; Ramble 1996 for discussions on the relation between supernatural beings and landscape markers.

powers over the same territory as the respective deity.[4] Consequently, in mountain worship political, ancestral, and religious powers are interrelated. In the following, I use the name Kóngchen for the main protective mountain deity, always implying both the name variations and conceptualisations of the supernatural being.

In this article, I discuss a historic ritual in honour of the main mountain deity that I refer to as Kóngchen ritual. Crucially, I elaborate how this ritual changed with the political subjugation of the Lepcha and how it symbolised the religious powers of the Dzongu Lepcha over the Sikkimese rulers. For this purpose I rely on information from the ritual performances, the origin myths of the respective rituals, clan stories, and local oral histories. My sources are the ritual recitations of current community rituals as well as those recorded by Siiger,[5] myths narrated by religious specialists and elders, as well as interviews conducted in Dzongu between 2006 and 2013.

According to the oral tradition in Dzongu, the ritual is ancient, but it was discontinued after the demise of the Sikkimese kingdom in 1975. I give a brief introduction to the ritual and clarify the role of the Kóngchen *búngthíng*, the religious specialist officiating in the ritual. Then, I discuss the royal patronage that the Sikkimese king, the Chogyal (Tib. *Chos rgyal*) had over this ritual. According to the myth, it occurred as an outcome of a war that I attempt to date. To understand the entire ritual cycle that this royal patronage potentially initiated, I introduce a connection of the said ritual with two annual community rituals still performed in the villages of Dzongu today, Cirim and Sotáp rumfát. I trace ritual and political changes that occurred after the leaders of Dzongu affiliated with the Sikkimese kings and give a potential date when these political allegiances began or intensified. This figure links religious and territorial powers and is central in the further analysis. Concluding, while with the subjugation of the Dzongu Lepcha the political powers of the local leaders altered and ultimately also diminished, the myths and ritual narrate about the religious powers over the Sikkimese rulers. It is a narrative of empowerment.

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[4] See Blondeau 1996: ix, Ramble 1996, Karmay 1996 for comparison with other Himalayan regions.

[5] Siiger 1967; Siiger and Rischel 1967.

*The Kóngchen ritual*

The Kóngchen ritual[6] is performed in one village in Upper Dzongu, in Tingvong. One hamlet of this village is home to the religious specialist designated to organise this ritual. Twice a year the Kóngchen *búngthíng* conducted a ceremony. He calls the first ritual in the year the winter ritual. It was performed in the spring. The second one, the summer ritual,[7] coincided with Pang Lhabsol (Tib. *dpang lha gsol*), the Sikkimese state celebration of the Buddhist manifestation of Mount Khangchendzonga. The Kóngchen *búngthíng* first gave offerings in his house and then along with a delegation walked down to the royal palace to perform a ritual. The delegation received a yak and an ox respectively from the king, returned to Dzongu, and sacrificed the animals at a specific ritual place in Tingvong. Simplified, the ritual requested protection from Ne Kóngchen pano for the royal family and the people of Sikkim. The designated Lepcha religious specialist asked Kóngchen to accept the Chogyal as ruler and protect the people and the land. The ritual is unique to Dzongu and links the region to the Namgyal dynasty that ruled Sikkim from the mid-seventeenth century onwards until 1975.

Interestingly, the origin mythology of the Kóngchen ritual does not give any information on the special royal patronage. Rather, it describes the origin of an ancient Lepcha ritual and narrates of a time just after the creation of Kóngchen cú, when the ancestors and the supernatural beings interacted. In discussion with Siiger, villagers noted that the lineage of Kóngchen *búngthíng* and the ritual were ancient and powerful, and thus drew the interest of the king.[8] Also today, the Tingvong villagers believe their ancestors performed this unique worship of Kóngchen since the time they inhabited these hills of Upper Dzongu.

According to the myth, there was a woman and her six brothers. Once when the sister worked in the field, the brothers went to Kóngchen and became his soldiers. Thereby, they turned into *mung*, malevolent spirits, called the Kóngchen vík (soldier). They visited their

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6 The anthropologist Halfdan Siiger observed one part of the ritual in the late 1940s and describes the ritual in his publication (Siiger 1967; Siiger and Rischel 1967). I will reference him as in parts it is a valuable and detailed description of the ritual, but I also revise some of his assumptions in this article.

7 Kóngchen *búngthíng*, Nung, June 2011.

8 Siiger 1955: 188; Siiger 1967: 195.

sister seldom, so she became lonely and decided to go south. Before leaving, she promised that if she gave birth to human beings, they would perform ceremonies for her brothers, the soldiers of the mighty mountain king. If she had no children, however, she requested her brothers not to be content with ceremonies from other people. She settled in Laven, a village opposite Tingvong, and eventually gave birth to a stammering boy. When a mythological snake came out from beneath Kóngchen and blocked the river so that it flooded the region, the people called upon him to perform a ceremony to Kóngchen – the first Kóngchen ritual. After the ceremony, the snake floated down to Cádúng rázó, an ambivalent deity of the plains, and the river flowed normally again. The son himself had a son who continued the ritual to Kóngchen cú. These were the ancestors of the Kóngchen *búngthíng*.[9]

Through ancestral relations the lineage of the Kóngchen *búngthíng* binds the Lepcha of Tingvong to the Kóngchen soldiers, still prominent in the community rituals of Dzongu today. They are the maternal uncles to the first Kóngchen *búngthíng* and become part of the retinue of the supreme mountain deity. Subsequently, through them the ritual specialist is linked to the highest mountain deity. This relation is raised to higher powers through the Kóngchen *búngthíng*'s clan, the Gârkumtsum clan, because it's *cú*, mountain, is Mount Khangchendzonga. Interestingly, today clan affiliation is inherited through patrilineal descent, thus not from the mother's brothers. These ancestral connections to the supreme mountain deity empower the clan and its religious specialist with religious authority. Presuming that in traditional Lepcha society sacred and mundane worlds were not separated, as outlined previously in the introduction, this clan also had some form of political authority over the territory in present-day Upper Dzongu.

The origin myth of the Kóngchen ritual thus explains how a lineage of powerful religious specialists came into being. It clarifies their unique ancestral relation to the most powerful of the mountain deities and consequently their religious and political leadership over the region. The extent and the quality of the clan's political power remain unclear, since the political organisation of the Lepcha pre-dating the Sikkimese kingdom is obscure. Additionally, oral traditions tend to change over time and are consequently not reliable historical sources.[10] If myth is understood as a contemporary reflexion on the past, a

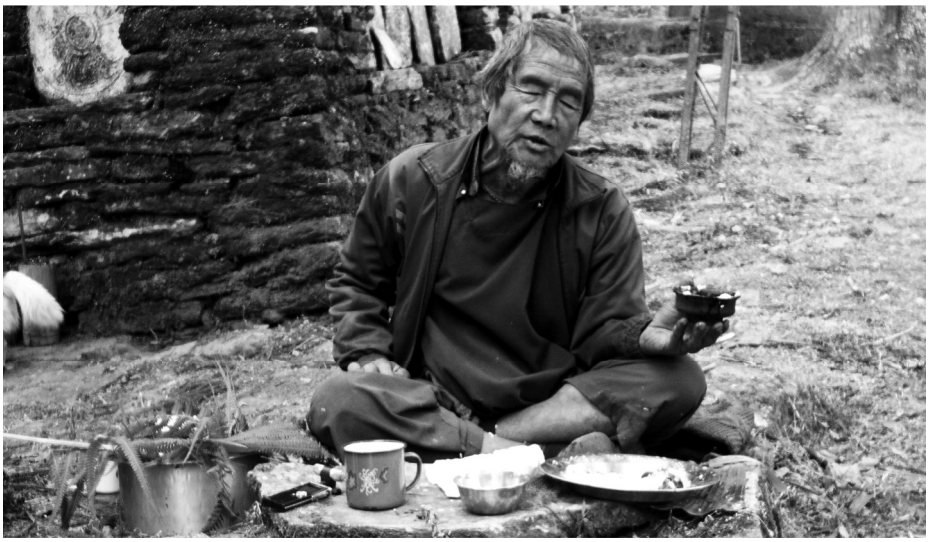
[9] Siiger 1967a: 192-3.

[10] See Goody 2009; Finnegan 2007 on how oral traditions change over time, transmission, interaction with the environment, and impacting events.

relevant conclusion is that – regardless if it is historically accurate or not – the memory of an ancient and exclusively Lepcha ritual that is grounded in ancestral religious powers of the Kóngchen lineage still serves purpose today. I return to this thought later in the article.

*Royal Patronage – A Narrative of War*

So is there a Lepcha oral tradition that explains the patronage of the Sikkimese king over this ritual? To answer this question, I unravel an interrelation between the Kóngchen ritual and two annual community rituals that the Lepcha religious specialists still perform today, Sotáp rumfát and Cirim. This ritual relation has not been documented till date. I first realised a connection when during a performance the *búngthíng* of Lingthem village in Upper Dzongu mentioned that actually the Gârkumtsum clan also should perform this ritual, but does not do it anymore.[11] The last Kóngchen *búngthíng*, who died in 2011, and another senior villager confirmed that the Kóngchen ritual, Cirim, and Sotáp rumfát are in principle the same rituals and belong to an elaborate ritual cycle which was partially funded by the royal lineage of Sikkim.[12]



Netuk, the *búngthíng* of Lingthem village performing Cirim

[11] Lingthem *búngthíng*, 2006.
[12] Kóngchen *búngthíng*, Nung, June 2011; Palden Tshering Lepcha, Lingko, June 2011.

Both Sotáp rumfát and Cirim are preventive community rituals. They are preformed to assure health, prosperity, and social harmony. Main aim is to protect the locality, the people, the crops and animals. Sotáp rumfát is performed to prevent natural disaster like hail, snow, and heavy rains, *sotáp* is 'hail' in Lepcha, rumfát 'offering to deity'. Cirim specifically prevents disease or any form of disturbance, quarrel, or social unrest.[13] It is the mythology on the origin of the Cirim ritual that provides the clues about the royal patronage of the Kóngchen ritual. Interestingly, it is also this ritual that has a name potentially derived from Tibetan or Lhoke (Tib. *spyi rim*, common ritual).[14]

This origin myth refers to a time after the seventeenth century when the Namgyal dynasty was confirming their dominion in the region of present-day Sikkim. It tells us that during war, the Dzongu Lepcha were requested to provide soldiers to help the Chogyal defeat the enemy. The Dzongu Lepcha did not have any soldiers and decided to give offering (*lóp fyet*) to Kóngchen and seek his help. On three consecutive days they found different animals in the offering plate. The first was an ant (*tukfíl*), then an earthworm (*tarekbu*), and the last a snake (*padebu*). The people realised that these were gifts from Kóngchen sent as soldiers. Then, they put each in a bamboo container with a lid and sent them to the Chogyal. When the Chogyal saw the creatures, he scolded the messengers and asked them what it was. He needed people, he said, and refused to accept the creatures. One person managed to convince the Chogyal to take them out on to the battlefield. When they were released from the bamboo vessels, the animals did not need any weaponry, as they were diseases. They brought dysentery (*tabók dók*), fever (*dulót*), and small-pox (*rumdu*). With the help of these diseases, the Sikkimese won the war. When his own people started dying from the diseases, the Chogyal requested the people of Dzongu to stop this. Then, it is said, a *búngthíng* from the Gârkumtsum clan went to the palace to give offerings to Kóngchen and request him to take his soldiers back. After the ritual the diseases stopped spreading.[15]

According to Lepcha mythology Cirim is not a new ritual, but builds on the already existent religious offerings to the mountain deity Kóngchen and the lineage of religious specialists mentioned above. It is the Kóngchen *búngthíng* that goes to stop the soldiers from causing

[13] There is a similar Lepcha word *rím ro* that means "formal religious or sacred ceremony" (Tamsang [1980] 2009: 640).

[14] Balikci 2008: 60.

[15] Linthem *búngthíng*, January 2010.

more devastation. Subsequently, the first Cirim actually is the first royally funded Kóngchen ritual and initiated the ritual relationship of the Dzongu Lepcha, or at least of the Tingvong village, with the Namgyal dynasty. To summarise, the origin myth of Cirim gives us the oral history explaining the royal patronage of the ritual, while the origin myth of the Kóngchen ritual explains an older ritual practice, the origin of the Gârkumtsum clan, and the first ritual worship of Kóngchen pano and his soldiers.

Dorji Tshering, the Payel *búngthíng* performing Cirim in Tingvong village

So how are the community rituals in the village and the Kóngchen ritual connected? When the Kóngchen *búngthíng* journeyed down to the palace, the Kóngchen soldiers – with all their implications as maternal uncles, mountain deities, malicious spirits, and diseases – came down the valley of Dzongu with him. When the mother's brothers took their abodes in the mountains up north, they became a part of a cosmic order that is replicated in the sacred landscape. Up or north correlates with tentatively benevolent and protective deities, while down or south with tentatively malevolent supernatural beings. The geographical extremes symbolise a social, psychological, religious, and economic dichotomy and are painstakingly held apart in ritual

practice.[16] This journey of the evil spirits is considered dangerous, because it disrupts the order. The evil spirits don't only move into the realm of the humans but also potentially make the extremes meet – as malevolent and non-sedentary spirits residing in the tentatively benevolent region.[17] Consequently, other than on those ritual occasions, the Kóngchen *búngthíng* is not allowed to venture around and during the ritual time there is restrictions on the social and economic life of all the other people living in Dzongu.[18] To protect from the diseases and unrest brought by the Kóngchen, each village performs Sotáp rumfát at the time of the winter ritual and then Cirim during the summer ritual.[19] Consequently, the ritual had to be performed when the Kóngchen *búngthíng* went down to Gangtok as well as when he came back. This ritual part is called *parnap*, the rounding off. It is held three days after the actual ritual and corresponds to the time when the Kóngchen *búngthíng* returns from the palace.[20] Today, only the *búngthíng* of

[16] For references to a similar understanding of the sacred landscape among the Rai groups, the Tamang, or the Magar see Allen 1972; Gaenszle 1999; Höfer 1999; Oppitz and Kohl 1992; Oppitz 1999; Ramble 1996b; Gaenszle and Bickel 1999.

[17] Bentley 2015.

[18] Siiger 1967: 193-5; Kóngchen *búngthíng*, Nung, June 2011; Senior villager, Nung, June 2011.

[19] Presently, both Sotáp rumfát and Cirim are performed at the end of winter or the beginning of spring. Sotáp rumfát is conducted first, then Cirim. Cirim is no longer performed in summer but in the ritual recitations, it is still described as a summer ritual. Some informants say that after the Kóngchen *búngthíng* stopped going to the palace twice a year, the rituals in the spring sufficed so the summer Cirim was not performed anymore. The Payel *búngthíng*, who belongs to one of the *tásó* families of Tingvong that organised the Kóngchen ritual, explains that due to the same reasons Cirim was shifted to the spring and performed just after Sotáp rumfát (Payel *búngthíng*, June 2011). In the case of Pentong village, Cirim is performed on the day when the last ritual element of Sotáp rumfát, *parnap*, is done.

[20] I assume that the four day Siiger mentions for the ritual (Siiger 1967: 196) count all days that the Kóngchen *búngthíng* and his entourage take to reach the palace, perform a ceremony, and come back and not merely the return journey as assumed by Wangchuck and Zulca (2007). The entire journey can be done on foot in four days. The time the ritual specialist moves to the palace, taking along with him the Kóngchen soldiers, is considered dangerous. Thus, every village on the way requires ritual protection and the communities perform Sotáp rumfát and Cirim. Due to the dangers of this movement, while the Kóngchen *búngthíng* moves to the palace, the people in Dzongu have strict social and economic restraints in their every-day life (Bentley 2015). Consequently, it seems unlikely that the journey would have been prolonged.

Pentong village still performs this ritual element,[21] while other religious specialists do remember the ritual closure.[22]

In most other regions, the Lepcha villages do not celebrate Sotáp rumfát and Cirim. Exceptions are the areas just outside of the present-day Dzongu borders such as Chungthang, Nampatan, or Gangyop. To protect the village areas from harm such as diseases, the religious specialists perform a ritual called Lyáng rumfát, translated as the land deity worship. It is performed once a year at the end of the winter or beginning of spring. The rituals I recorded do not address the Kóngchen soldiers nor do the religious specialists I interviewed introduce them as important deities. The ritual is dedicated to Kóngchen and the local guardian deities of the respective place.[23] It is possible that the movement of the Kóngchen soldiers and the need for these regular bi-annual rituals began with this incident.

To conclude, the ritual cycle in Dzongu was changed after an incident of war. The affiliation with the Namgyal dynasty and the subsequent royal patronage transformed an older worship of the mountain Kóngchen. It increased the importance of the Kóngchen soldiers in the religious practice in Dzongu and potentially also strengthened the political position of the lineage with a privileged relationship to the respective soldiers and the king.

### *Ritual organisation, tax collection, and political dependence*

When the ritual cycle received royal patronage, it seems the ritual organisation changed drastically. As hypothesised above with regard to the Kóngchen *búngthíng*, political and religious powers conjunct in traditional Lepcha society and were organised along clan structures. However today, clan affiliations play no significant role in the community ritual organisation of Dzongu – with the exception of the religious lineage of the Kóngchen *búngthíng* – or in present social organisation, politics, or administration. This was already the case in the 1930s, as Morris who visited Lingthem village in 1937 noticed.[24] Consequently, the ritual cycle and the origin myth described above indicate that the ritual and political relations with the Chogyal were either forged or at least intensified during a time of war, initiated the

[21] Pentong *búngthíng*, April 2010.
[22] Lingthem *búngthíng*, April 2010; Chegra *búngthíng*, May 2011.
[23] Phur Tshering Lepcha, Namthang, July 2009; Chodok Lepcha, lama and *panchayat*, Namthang, July 2009.
[24] Morris 1938: 64.

disintegration of a clan-based political organisation, and eventually led to a complete political subjugation of the Lepcha of Dzongu.

Samdup Lepcha, the last Kóngchen *búngthíng* who passed away in 2011

Until its discontinuance, a representative from each hamlet of Tingvong organised the Kóngchen ritual, six in total (Tingvong proper and Payel, Namprik, Kussung, Lingko, Sangvo and Nung). The king had in the past selected the respective person and the titles were hereditary in the extended family. One of these selected representatives was the lineage of the Kóngchen *búngthíng*. Each of the representatives carried the administrative office of *tásó*.[25] Still today, the villagers call the religious specialist officiating in the Kóngchen ritual Nung *tásó* after his place of residence and title. The ritual organisers were also the local leaders of the place, responsible for tax collection and local administration. In Tingvong the rank of a *tásó* seemed to be equivalent to that of a *mandal* with regard to power and obligations, but

[25] The Tibetan word for the title is *rTa sa*. According to Mullard and Wongchuck it exists in Limbu villages, some Lepcha village, and in the Sikkimese territories in Morang, presently Nepal (Mullard and Wongchuk 2010: 5).

specifically reserved for these families. The *mandal* was the head of the village during the Sikkimese kingdom; he regulated the affairs in the village and upheld the communication and more importantly the tax collection to the Sikkimese state. Technically, the *mandal* was elected, but factually remained within one extended family.[26] All villages in Dzongu, including Tingvong, were presided by a *mandal*. He had two subordinates, the *gyápân* and, in most villages, the *yúmí*. The *gyápân* used to do the actual tax collection and gathered people for the ritual occasion or communal work. He also helped settle local disputes. The *gyápân* was always a young villager and elected for a three-year term during Sotáp rumfát.[27] The *mandal* chose the *yúmí* as his advisor from the elderly men who had served as *gyápân* beforehand. Due to their knowledge and seniority the villagers held the *yúmí* in high esteem.[28] As Gorer already hypothesises, it is possible that the office of the *yúmí* predated the administration of the Sikkimese kingdom. Till date, the people in Dzongu elect the *gyápân* and some villages appoint a *yúmí*. They remain in charge of organising the community rituals such as Sotáp rumfát and Cirim.

The community rituals of the Lepcha are closely linked to tax collection – both Sotáp rumfát and Cirim as well as the Kóngchen ritual, albeit in different ways. According to the religious specialists in Dzongu today, they perform rituals to pay the dues to the deities. In exchange the deities protect them. The Lepcha word used in the interviews and the ritual recitations is *khe thóp*, *khe* can be translated as 'due' or 'tax', while *thóp* either means 'to pay' or 'to play'. Praying to the deities is an interaction of paying dues. The *gyápân* collects material offerings from every household in the vicinity – it is their due to the supernatural beings for the safeguard. At the same time, praying – or at least the ritual activity revolving around it – is related to paying actual taxes in a worldly sense. The villages fulfilled tax obligations during ritual times. The ritual cycle around the pre-Buddhist mountain

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[26] Siiger 1967: 118 .

[27] See also Gorer 1938: 131; Siiger 1967: 118. Tib. *brGya dpon*. It was one of the lowest ranks in the Sikkimese administration (Mullard and Wongchuk 2010: 5). In the wider Tibetan context it is a military rank. According to Mullard and Wongchuk, the office of the rTa sa ranks under the *gyápân* (Mullard/Wongchuk 2010: 5). This is clearly not so in Tingvong.

[28] In the beginning of the 20th century another administrative post was introduced in Dzongu, the *muktiar*. A *muktiar* supervised the tax collection and reported to the royal palace twice a year (Siiger 1967a: 118; Morris 1938: 65; Gorer 1938: 124). As the *muktiar* is not involved in the ritual process, I will not discuss this office in more detail.

deity Kóngchen was a way of paying taxes to the king of Sikkim. Most prominently, in Dzongu the villagers paid their tax obligation during the time of the state ritual Pang Lhabsol,[29] which is the same time as the second Kóngchen ritual. Religious and political obligations are fulfilled simultaneously.

The six Tingvong *tásó* collected the offerings for the Kóngchen ritual from the villagers. A minor part of the contributions remained in the village for the last ritual ceremony. Together with helpers, the representatives transported the rest to the royal palace. Besides fruits, such as bananas and oranges, and local millet beer (*ci*), they carried precious and priced items that were only found up in the forests of North Sikkim: a medicinal plant from Pentong (*púkzíng*), the kidney of high altitude deer (*saburthíng*) and, during the ritual performed at the end of winter, five live birds caught in the Sakyong area (*tuklyáng fo*) and five live fish caught in the Rukshót waterfall, today commonly known as Lingya falls.[30] The delegation then also received items in return from the royal palace: among others, red, yellow, and white coloured cloth pieces, millet beer, and rice, a black ox during the summer ritual, and most prominently a yak during the winter ritual.[31] The sacrificial animals were then offered at a specific ritual place in Tingvong village – in the name of the Sikkimese king. The Kóngchen *búngthíng* as well as – at least for a certain time period – the entire village Tingvong[32] did not need to pay any additional taxes to the royal palace as the ritual was seen as an appropriate exchange of duty.

The Kóngchen ritual exemplifies the close political relation of Dzongu to the ruling dynasty. The present Lepcha reserve used to be a royal estate of the respective Gyalmo, the queen. The earliest reference to this legal status of Dzongu that I have found so far is an entry the botanist Hooker made in May 1849. He describes the region as the dowry of the Gyalmo.[33] The villagers in Dzongu were subjects directly

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[29] Agya Maila, Lingya, May 2011.

[30] Kóngchen *búngthíng*, Nung, June 2011.

[31] Kóngchen *búngthíng*, Nung, June 2011; Pentong *búngthíng*, May 2011.

[32] The village of Tingvong performed another ritual during Pang Lhabsol at the Tholung monastery, related to the death of the seventh king (see Bentley 2015). The result was that the village did not pay any other taxes to the royal palace, however, they also received less salt and other items in return. In the collective memory of Dzongu, there was an argument about the ritual duty and lack of precious individual return gifts. So the Dzongu *mandal* decided that all villages take turn in offering at Tholung, but all pay taxes to the palace (Palden Tshering Lepcha, former *panchayat*, Lingko, May 2011; Tashi Mandal, Tingvong, June 2006).

[33] Hooker 1854: 15.

to the queen and not to any specific landlord family, even if the queens appointed specific landlords to look after the lands for them. The landlords changed over the course of time, probably due to the relations with the respective queen. As examples, in 1849 the "*subba* of Singtam"[34] supervised the region and in 1937 Rhenock Kazi took over from Mali (Malling) Kazi.[35] The Rhenock Kazi was in charge of the region until 1975 when Sikkim became the 22nd state of India. As the landlord in charge of Dzongu and the private secretary of the king, Rhenock Athing – as the Dzongu Lepcha called him – received the Kóngchen ritual delegation according to the collective memory of the people today.[36]

The war incident mentioned in the Cirim mythology consequently did not only change the ritual obligations in Dzongu, it also marked the beginning of the political integration (or subjugation?) of the Dzongu Lepcha under the rule of the Namyal dynasty. The Kóngchen ritual twice a year reaffirmed this dependency through ritual exchanges and tax obligations.

### *Dating the war*

In the following, I make an attempt to date the war mentioned in the Cirim origin myth by analysing the oral accounts of the myth and crosschecking possibilities with other written, archaeological, and oral sources – again taking into account that oral traditions change over time and cannot be read as contemporary sources but as present reflexions.

The annex of the *History of Sikkim*[37] mentions the affiliation of the Lepcha of Gar Jongu to the Namgyal dynasty during the time when the royal palace was still in Rabdentse. The *History of Sikkim* narrates the clan origin mythology of the Gar Jongu Lepcha; it is astonishingly similar to the origin narrative of the Kóngchen ritual.[38] It seems likely that this passage refers to the Lepcha living in the Dzongu region, potentially even the people under the leadership of the Gârkumtsum clan. The timeframe this reference sets for the allegiance of the Dzongu

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34 Hooker 1854: 15.

35 Gorer 1938: 123.

36 Pentong *búngthíng*, May 2011.

37 The 9th king and the Gyalmo Yeshey Dolma compiled the *History of Sikkim* in 1908, the Tibetan original is called *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. It captures the oral traditions of the time and also needs to be understood in light of a budding nationalist discourse in Sikkim. See Mullard (2011) for an analysis of the construction of conventional Sikkimese history.

38 Namgyal and Dolma 1908: Annex 23-4.

Lepcha with the royal palace is from 1649 to 1788 when the capital shifted to near present-day Kabi in North Sikkim (g.Yul rgyal pho brang) during the Sino-Nepal war. This is a long time span. However, several references lead me to assume that Lepcha leaders in Dzongu had an early association with the Namgyal dynasty, as I elaborate in the following.

The afore mentioned basically complete annihilation of clan affiliation in organising rituals and politics possibly hints at a long history of political and administrative integration of the Dzongu Lepcha during which any clan-based posts were slowly disintegrated. Additionally, oral accounts from the late nineteenth century indicate that the ancestors of Sikkimese noble families immigrated to Dzongu and in some cases married local women.[39] Even if we cannot verify these sources, it hints that Dzongu as a region was not out of the reach of the Namgyal dynasty from the very beginning of its establishment.

The Cirim mythology mentions a war, but the enemy is not clear. Several myth variations I collected describe a fight against the Bhutanese (*promú*).[40] The Lingthem *búngthíng* mentions the Harka or Horka as the adversary.[41] I initially assumed he meant the Gorkha, but the senior religious specialist vehemently disagreed. According to him, the Horka came from somewhere close to Darjeeling. The senior *búngthíng* narrates the oral tradition of a Horka attack on Lingthem village during which they killed many villagers and then became protective spirits.[42] In another narrative the Lepcha of Panang, a hamlet of Lingthem, fight off the Horka soldiers with burning stones. Erected stones demarcate their graveyard.[43] I hypothesise that the term Horka refers to the Kotapa, a branch of the Barfungpa landlord family that had landholdings in present-day Ilam, Darjeeling, and West Sikkim. The oral accounts are most likely transmitted memories of incidents that occurred during the Kotapa rebellion (1828 to 1841), after the Sikkimese Chancellor Bolhö – the Barfungpa landlord of Kabi near Dzongu – was assassinated.[44] The Kotapa allied with the Gorkha army

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39 Risley 1894: 33-4.

40 Songdong *búngthíng*, August 2009; MLAS culture secretary, Passingdang, June 2011; Dawa Lepcha, Gangtok, April 2011.

41 May 2006.

42 Lingthem *búngthíng*, February 2010.

43 Lepcha 2012.

44 See Mullard 2013; Mullard and Wongchuk 2010; Namgyal and Dolma 1908; Risley 1894; Schwerzel, Tuinstra, and Vaidya 2000 and Bentley 2015 for more information on the Kotapa rebellion.

and raided Sikkim as far as Dzongu.[45] Taking the earlier reference to Rabdentse into consideration, however, Kotapa rebellion took place too late to be the war that initiated the Kóngchen ritual because by that time the Sikkimese capital had shifted to Tumlong and Chumbi.

Could it have been a war against the Bhutanese? The term Harka could potentially also refer to the people from Ha: the *Ha pa*, the latter word meaning people in Tibetan or Lhoke. Ha is a district in Bhutan, the valley borders on North Sikkim.[46] Just as with the Horka, there are also oral traditions about a war against the Bhutanese in Dzongu. In Nampatan, a village on the opposite side of the Dzongu valley, a vibrant oral tradition tells about how the villagers bent trees and threw burning stones towards the attacking Bhutanese who had set up camp one a ridge just beyond them. Today, there are still ruins of a fort on the said ridge that the locals call Namgay Thangbu Fort.[47] The *History of Sikkim* refers to the very same fort and dates its construction during the War of Succession (1699-1708).[48] Coming back to the afore mentioned reference to the Rabdentse palace, technically the court was not in Rabdentse during this time, because the king resided in Tibet as Sikkim fell into turmoil over royal succession.[49] However it was before and afterwards. Therefore it corresponds with the reference in the *History of Sikkim* to a leader of the Gar Jongu Lepcha that became subject to the royal palace in Rabdentse.

The oral, textual, and archaeological evidence concur that there was a battle against the Bhutanese in the vicinity of Dzongu. If we assume this war offers the historical context that the Cirim origin myth refers to, then the ritual patronage of the Kóngchen ritual and the political incorporation of the Dzongu Lepcha under the dominion of the Namgyal rulers began in the early eighteenth century.

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45 Namgyal and Dolma 1908: 86.

46 I would like to thank Anna Balikci Denjongpa for drawing my attention to this possibility while commenting on a previous version of this paper. Most households in Tingchim village where she conducted her fieldwork migrated to Sikkim from Ha or Chumbi at different times, some as early as the 17th century (Balikci 2008: 75).

47 The people of Tingchim village, located south of the fort, also have memories of fighting against the Bhutanese in the 18th century (personal correspondence, Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, April 2017).

48 Namgyal and Dolma 1908: 33. See Mullard 2013; Mullard and Wongchuk 2010; Namgyal and Dolma 1908; Risley 1894 for more information on the first War of Succession.

49 Mullard 2011.

*And the religious powers remain*

In the historical narrative of the Himalayas, political subjugation is connected with Buddhist saints subjugating the local deities – described as demons – and incorporating them into the Buddhist pantheon. This process tames them and transforms them into protectors of the *dharma* and the locality. It is not only a religious process, but transforms the people's mind, environment, and society.[50] It is inherently political and enables the rule of the Chogyal, the *dharma* king and divine Buddhist ruler, whose powers over the said territory – in this case Sikkim – are religiously legitimised.

The Cirim origin myth and the Kóngchen ritual, however, are different. They celebrate the religious powers of the subaltern. The Lepcha oral tradition describes the people of Dzongu as crucial players in winning the war for the Sikkimese king. They had no soldiers. Hence, it was not their military or political powers that led to success, but the strength of their main deity and his designated lineage of religious specialists. The myth describes the ancestor of the Kóngchen *búngthíng* as the only person with the power to stop the war and then to control the unleashed diseases that continue to kill the Chogyal's army. The Kóngchen ritual is the bi-annual reminder that the king was indebted to the Dzongu Lepcha and merely held his powers because of them.

According to the said narrative and ritual tradition, the king depended on the powers of the Lepcha *búngthíng*, deities, and lastly religion. The religious specialist requested the pre-Buddhist deities of the land to protect the king and accept his rule. Consequently, the Buddhist deities and the king's religious powers were insignificant at this point in time. On the contrary, with his religious authorities the Kóngchen *búngthíng* was more influential than the Sikkimese king – he had the direct link to the most powerful deity in the territory. In these narrations from Dzongu – most of whose inhabitants were and still are Buddhists – Kóngchen has not been tamed, but is still the rightful owner and king over the territory. The Chogyal – the *dharma* king – merely ruled in these lands because Kóngchen allowed it. Not surprisingly, the propitiation of the Lepcha deity Kóngchen occurs just before its Buddhist manifestation is honoured in the state ritual of Pang Lhabsol. A common narrative in Dzongu is that the last king neglected the Kóngchen ritual and consequently stopped showing respect to the Lepcha and their deities. A less inclusive approach with regard to the

[50] See Karmay 1996; Balikci 2002: 19; Ortner 1978: 99; Samuel 1993: 220.

pre-Buddhist religious practice did become more widespread in Sikkim towards the last Chogyal's rule, as the last Gyalmo's description of the Lepcha ceremony during Pang Lhabsol hints.[51] In the local logic this had dire consequences. The royal lineage did not make sure that the main guardian deity of the place – the actual ruler of the lands – was propitiated properly and request his support for its rule. Thus, he withdrew his protection. The consequences are self-evident, as the Sikkimese kingdom disintegrated and the kings of the Namgyal dynasty lost their powers.[52]

*Concluding thoughts*

Locally, Lepcha people also call the Kóngchen ritual Pano rumfát, the king's ritual.[53] The ambivalence of this term reverberates in the myths and oral histories ranging around this ritual. Who is the 'king' that the ritual belongs to and empowers?

Does the name invoke the Sikkimese Chogyal who honours the ritual with his patronage and in whose name the ritual recitations call for protection? Does it imply the powers of the *dharma* raja? During rituals the villagers paid taxes to the king of Sikkim. The performances thus became regular testimonies of the allegiance to the rule of the Namgyal dynasty. The Cirim myth and the present-day ritual organisation hint at larger political and administrative changes that occurred after the Lepcha leaders of Dzongu became subjects to the king. The local leaders might have remained the same. They presumably had a great deal of autonomy in dealing internal affairs and we can speculate that they even gained leverage through the allegiance with a more powerful loyal lineage. While not much is known about what power structures were there beforehand and how they changed, what becomes evident in the present-day ritual organisation is that the newly introduced administrative posts and their duties completely replaced previous processes and decision-makers. Since then the *tásó* and *gyápân* regulated the ritual performances – a task that must have been structured differently beforehand, potentially along clan membership. This is evidence of a huge political and societal change that was initiated by the expansion of the Namgyal rule. From this point of view, the Kóngchen ritual is the Sikkimese king's ritual, as it

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[51] Cooke 1980: 162.

[52] Dubden Lepcha, Tingvong, October 2008; Palden Tshering Lepcha, former *panchayat*, Lingko, June 2011.

[53] Pentong *búngthíng*, May 2011; Payel *búngthíng*, June 2011; son-in-law of Chegra *búngthíng,* May 2011.

signifies the impact the Chogyal's rule has had on the lives of the people in Dzongu, from taxes to summoning the most powerful religious specialist and leader to the palace.

This is, however, not the narrative heard in Dzongu. In the Dzongu oral traditions the first Kóngchen ritual and all the ones to follow bear witness to the special connection the Lepcha and their religious specialists have to Kóngchen, the untamed deity residing in Mount Khangchendzonga. Ne Kóngchen panó, the sacred king, is the ultimate ruler over the place. The narratives highlight that with this ritual patronage the divine ruler of Sikkim accepted that the Buddhist *dharma* and its religious practitioners could not control the pre-Buddhist deity Kóngchen. To appease the primary territorial deity of the place remains the privilege of the subaltern population. Through the ancestral ties to the mountain deity the lineage of the Kóngchen *búngthíng* has the legitimacy to perform the main ritual, while the other Lepcha religious specialists address the mountain deity on behalf of their respective village region. This indigenous connection the Lepcha and their religious specialists have to the guardian deity of the place ultimately put them in the unique position to guard the territory against enemies and protect the king – moreover enable to king's rule. It gives them religious authority over the territory and its political rulers. The Kóngchen ritual was the ultimate annual affirmation of the powers of the untamed deity and the Lepcha people of Dzongu.

The narratives of Dzongu are current day reflections on the ritual and its origin and do not narrate the actual historical event that took place. The royal patronage of the Kóngchen, however, allows the conclusion that to a certain extent the royalty in Sikkim respected the local religious beliefs of the Lepcha people when they came within their dominion. The practice and the ritual recitations – recorded when it was still performed – suggest that the kings at least feared the powers of the untamed mountain deity and his people enough to regularly finance the rituals and encourage their performances.

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# NOTES ON THE SETTLEMENT OF THE GONGRI RIVER VALLEY OF WESTERN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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*Abstract*

As research in the area is ongoing, the ethnolinguistic history of western Arunachal Pradesh is slowly being unravelled. The Gongri river valley is home to several ethnolinguistic groups, speaking languages that represent various Tibeto-Burman linguistic subgroups. The Kho-Bwa cluster is represented by several languages, and the speakers appear to form the indigenous population stratum. Later migrants brought divergent languages, cultures, and religious practices with them, resulting in the complex ethnolinguistic situation we find today.

## 1.1. *Introduction*

Due to a lack of written historical documentation, historical-comparative linguistic studies, and reliable genetic and archaeological research, the ethnolinguistic history of the area referred to as Monyul or the Monyul corridor (e.g. Aris 1979) in western Arunachal Pradesh is often presented in a greatly simplified manner. The people belonging to the Monpa Scheduled Tribe are usually portrayed as devout Buddhists, whose origins lie in exiled progeny of the royal dynasties of the Tibetan plateau (e.g. Duarah 1992:5-; Biswal 2006:13; Bodt 2012, among others). This 'down-from-Tibet' myth, often underlined by origin and migration histories of the people themselves and assumed a conventional truth, has earlier been challenged for other populations of the extended eastern Himalayas,[1] such as for example the Mra of Arunachal Pradesh (Huber 2010).

The presence of Neolithic stone adzes found in the Chug valley attests to a long inhabitation of the valley. These adzes are called *atha nambaq pha* 'axes of grandfather moon' and are believed to be thrown down by the male lunar deity to evict a female demon called *brak sinmu*

[1] With 'extended eastern Himalayas' Huber and Blackburn (Introduction to 2012) mean the Himalayan ranges from mid-western Nepal to south-western China, including the Monyul region.

(Tib. brag srin-mo) 'female demon of the cliff' when she is causing hailstorms damaging the crops. These surface findings of Neolithic stone tools from the Chug valley, also reported from elsewhere in the region (Tada et al. 2012), might be indicative of the ancient inhabitation of the Monyul area. Significant in this regard is the fact that whereas some of the tools are made from jadeite, the geographically closest sources of which are northern Burma and south-western Yunnan (Ashraf 1990:4-5, 44; Tada et al. 2012:44, 51, 63), others are made from locally available materials. Recent advances in genetic, linguistic and archaeological research have led to the speculation that the eastern Himalayas might be the ancient homeland of the Tibeto-Burman people, and in recognition of this, van Driem (2011, 2014) proposed the neutral, geographical name Trans-Himalayan for the language family.

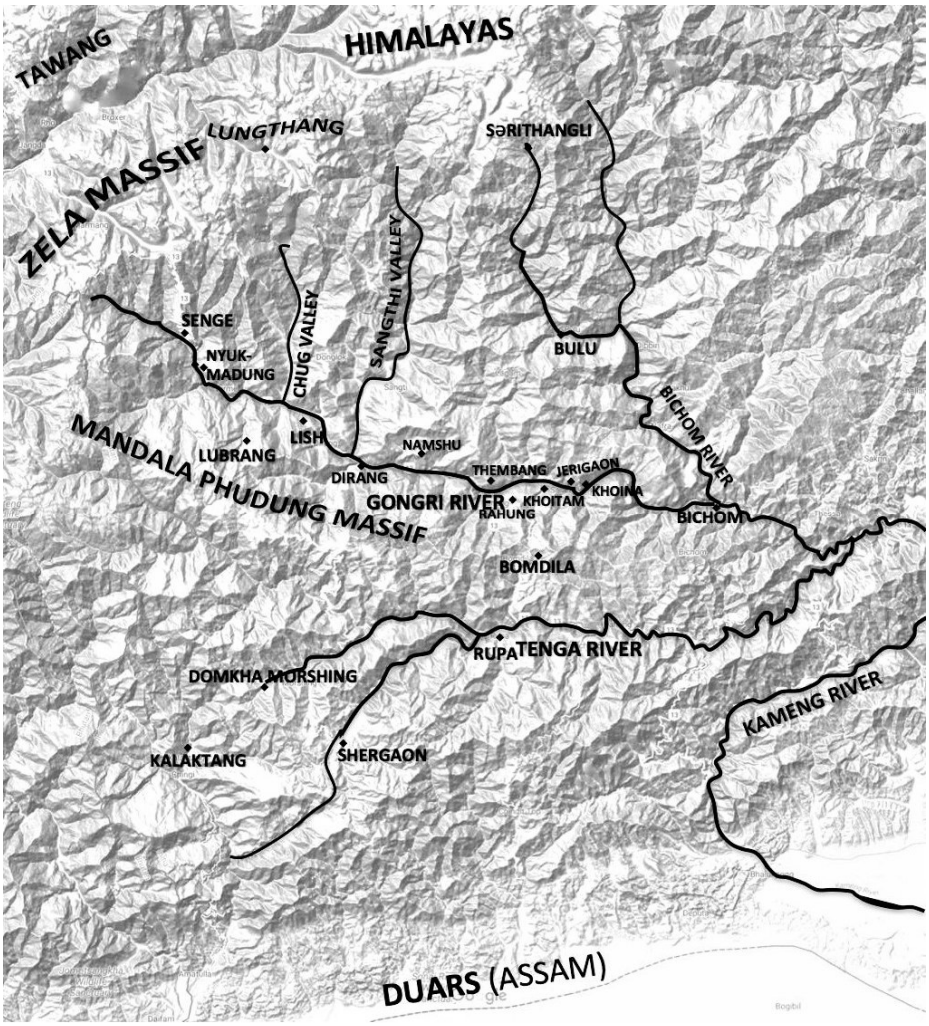
The geographical focus of this article is the Gongri river valley. This valley is located between the Zela pass in the west and the confluence of the Gongri river with the Bichom river in the east (from whence it is known as the Kameng river) and between the ranges south of the valley of Mago-Thingbu in the north and the Mandala-Phudung massif in the south.

Save what may perhaps be an unknown substrate, the oldest population stratum in the area appears to be formed by speakers of languages of what has been called the Kho-Bwa cluster (van Driem 2001:473). Geographically, as well as linguistically, a distinction can be made between an eastern branch of Kho-Bwa, including Puroik[2] and Bugun, and a western branch, which Blench (2005) called the Mey cluster[3] and includes the languages known as Sartang (Butpa), Sherdukpen, Khispi (Lishpa), and Duhumbi (Chugpa). The assumption of the ancient occupation of these speakers in the Gongri valley has been partially challenged by Huber (2015:169), who cites the absence of written historical reference and the local socio-cultural practice as evidence for the Khispi and Duhumbi to be later migrants to the area. The origin and migration stories presented in this article and the forthcoming linguistic evidence, however, show the interrelatedness of the Western Kho-Bwa people, and their progressive east to west spread

[2] The exact classification of 'Puroik', exhibiting considerable and hitherto poorly understood variation, is currently in the process of being described (Ismael Lieberherr p.c., Lieberherr 2015 and Lieberherr, forthcoming).

[3] A name I refrain from using, firstly, because the actual realisation is [me:] in Shergaon and [mø:] in Rupa, not [mej] or [mɛj], secondly, because none of the other related groups, i.e. the Sartang, Lishpa, and Chugpa, identify themselves (or each other) by any name close to 'Mey'. I therefore prefer the geographical and hence more neutral term 'Western Kho-Bwa'.

across the valley and into the Tenga valley to the south. Some linguistic evidence for the coherence of the Kho-Bwa cluster is provided in Lieberherr and Bodt (2017), whereas ongoing linguistic research provides further evidence for the internal subgrouping of the Western Kho-Bwa languages (Bodt, 2017), the higher-level relation between the branches of the Kho-Bwa cluster, and their relation with other Tibeto-Burman languages.




Map of the Gongri river valley in Western Arunachal Pradesh, with the main locations mentioned in this article (background map © Google Maps, 2017, art by Debbie Macartney)

Later arrivals to the area include the Tshangla and the East Bodish speakers. Whereas the Tshangla homeland appears to be the adjacent parts of south-eastern Bhutan, the latter are mainly concentrated in Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and in the northern parts of eastern and central Bhutan where they probably settled after arriving from the Tibetan plateau. Although little is known about the indigenous belief system of the Tshangla, the East Bodish speakers followed what has been referred to as *Sridpai Lha Bon* (Tib. srid-paḥi lha bon, Huber 2013 and forthcoming). To differentiate between *Sridpai Lha Bon*, 'organised' *Yungdrung Bon* (Tib. g.Yuṅ-druṅ Bon), and the various cults of propitiation of territorial deities and spirits of the local environment (Huber 2013:263 footnote 1 and 288), the latter will be referred to as 'local *bon*' in this article. The Tshangla and East Bodish speakers and their belief systems had a profound impact on the ethnolinguistic situation in the area.

In the fourteenth century (Bodt 2012:237, an assumption challenged by Huber 2015:169 footnote 1) the Central Bodish *Brokpa* (Tib. ḥbrog-pa) migrated from their ancestral homeland in southern Tibet, and they also left a religious and linguistic mark on the area. Numerically small and largely linguistically assimilated, the Central Bodish *Chöcangacakha* (Tib. khyod-ca-ña-ca-kha, also *Kurtöpaikha*, Tib. skur-stod-paḥi kha) speakers from eastern Bhutan settled in the Sherdukpen area but were evicted from there and then formed the *Peiki Sarmu* clan in Rahung[4] and the *Pyemlengpa* (a name derived from the Nyingmapa saint *Pemalingpa*, Tib. padma gliṅ-pa) in the Chug valley, where a few people still faintly remember the language.[5]

### 1.2. *Written sources*

The most important historical document available for the Monyul region, including most of eastern Bhutan and western Arunachal Pradesh, is what has been called the *Gyelrik* (Tib. rgyal-rigs), written by *Lama Ngawang* (Tib. bla-ma ṅag-dbaṅ), also known as *Byarpa Bande Wagindra* (Tib. byar-pa bande wa-gindras) and usually dated to 1728 (Aris 1979), though arguments to date it to 1668 also exist (Ardussi 2004, 2006:19 footnote 11 and Bodt 2012:10-11). Two versions of this document are currently available. The first is the Bhutanese version retrieved from Trashigang in eastern Bhutan by late Tenzin Dorji and published in part or in whole by Aris (1986) and in the manuscript by

[4] Personal communication Khatuk Nampo of Rahung, 11 May 2013.
[5] Personal communication Nari, Chochong and Tshering Pema of Chug, 2 May 2012.

rdo-rje and o-rgyan chos-rje (1988). The second is the Dirang edition, of which photographs exist with the author and parts of which have been published in rgyal-sras sprul-sku (2009).

In both versions, *Lhai Wangchuk* (Tib. lhaḥi dbaṅ-phyug), the son of the exiled Tibetan prince *Lhase Tsangma* (Tib. lha-sras gtsaṅ-ma, ninth century CE), is invited by the people of *Lawok Yulsum* (Tib. la-ḥog g.yul-gsum) in Tawang to become their king. From his heirs descend the *Khampa Jowo* (Tib. khams-pa jo-bo) clan of *Lhau*[6] *Khampa* (Tib. lhaḥu khams-pa) and *Shar Derang*[7] (Tib. śar sde-raṅ). The *Bapu* (Tib. ba-spu) of *Shar Domkha*[8] (Tib. śar dom-kha) and *Morshing*[9] claimed descent from the *Byar* (Tib. byar) clan started by the son of Lhase Tsangma's grandson *Gongkargyel* (Tib. goṅ-dkar-rgyal) and his senior wife. Finally, members of the *Wangma* (Tib. waṅ-ma) clan descending from the son of Gongkargyel's youngest wife were invited by the local leader of *Thembang*[10] (Tib. them-spaṅ) to suppress the *Lo Khanak* (Tib. klo kha-nag) 'black-mouthed Lo'[11] and the *Lo Khakar* (Tib. klo kha-dkar) 'white mouthed Lo'.[12]

Additionally, in the Dirang edition of the Gyelrik it is written that the descendants of *Gyelpo Tsori* (Tib. rgyal-po tso-ri), one of the seven sons of *Namkha Sonam*[13] (Tib. nam-mkhaḥ bsod-nams) of the Jowo clan spread along the *Shar Drangmachu*[14] (Tib. śar graṅ-ma-chu) river. The royal dynasty of *Sangthi* (Tib. saṅs-thi) descended from *Bhisura* (Tib. bhi-su-rwa) or *Bhisurapa* (Tib. bhi-su-rwa-pa). The royal dynasty of *Lis* (Tib. slis) was established by *Ami Sarpa* (Tib. a-mi gsar-pa).

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6 Present-day *Lhau* (Tib. lhaḥu) village in Tawang district.

7 Present-day *Dirang* (Tib. ḥdi-raṅ) village in Dirang circle of West Kameng district.

8 The historically important village of *Domkha*, also spelled Tib. sdom-mkhar, in West Kameng district, where later a dzong was built.

9 Present-day Murshing village, located close to Domkha West Kameng district.

10 Thembang village in Dirang circle of West Kameng district.

11 Perhaps these are the Hrusso/Aka and Dhimmai/Miji tribes of Kameng, who both used to tattoo their faces.

12 It is unknown which tribe this is, but perhaps the Puroik and Bugun among whom facial tattoos were not practiced.

13 A 5th generation descendant of Lhase Tsangma's eldest son Lhai Wangchuk.

14 The *Drangmechu* (Tib. sgraṅ-med-chu) is the main river flowing through the Tshangla-inhabited areas of eastern Bhutan. The Shar Drangmachu (Tib. śar sgraṅ-ma (med)-chu) is the main river flowing on the other side of the Indo-Bhutan border. Not only these Tibetan (and Dzongkha) names of the rivers are the same, the Tshangla name, Gongri is the same on both sides as well, and they flow in east-west and west-east direction, respectively, in their upper reaches, unlike most other rivers of the Eastern Himalayas that flow in a north-south direction.

Basically, this is all the presently available written information on the origin of the ruling clans of the area, and neither can this information be independently verified through other authorised sources, nor does this information provide any clue as to the origin of the common people of the area.

### 1.3. *Importance of oral traditions*

In absence of written sources, this article bases itself on oral traditions to show that the present-day ethnolinguistic situation in the Gongri river valley is a manifestation of complex migration streams from various directions at different times, with successive population strata sometimes displacing and replacing, but most often co-inhabiting and ultimately intermixing with older strata. As Hill (2015) rightly pointed out, origin and migration myths should be integrally made available in their original language, so that insightful observations regarding possible shared and inherited themes can be distilled from them. In his words: *"If descriptive linguists hold themselves aloof from the documentation of traditional literature, the future of comparative research on the languages of this* [Tibeto-Burman, added] *family is bleak"*. The observations in origin and migration stories can present additional clues and ideas about the interrelatedness and prehistory of the Tibeto-Burman people, in addition to the genetic, archaeological, and linguistic evidence.

This article presents several origin and migration myths of the people of the Gongri river valley, some in more detail than others, without claiming their historical truth or accuracy. For want of space, the present article can only summarise the stories thus far collected in the area, while the transcribed, translated, and annotated versions in the original languages are slated for a future publication.

### 2.1. *Following the palm trail: the Eastern Kho-Bwa speech communities*

The Puroik are a Scheduled Tribe living in scattered settlements in an extensive area of central Arunachal Pradesh. Puroik origin stories all relate about the arrival of the first Puroik from the east, slowly extending their habitat across East Kameng, then westward into West Kameng until the Zela pass, and eastward into Papum Pare, Kurung Kumey, and Upper Subansiri districts, planting starch palm trees in each place they (temporarily) settled.[15] The ubiquitous sago palm tree *Metroxylon sagu*

[15] Personal communication Ismael Lieberherr and Lieberherr 2017.

is well-known in many areas of Southeast Asia and Oceania for the tapioca starch extracted from its pith (Johnson 1992). The Puroik also extract palm starch from various terminally flowering species of palm (Stonor 1952:959; Deuri 1982; Lieberherr, 2017). Other ethnolinguistic groups, such as the Miji, Hruso (Aka), and the various Adi tribes, similarly follow the practice to various degrees (Stonor 1948; Henderson, 2009; an overview in Bodt 2012:383; and Blench and Post 2014). In the origin story of the Bangru, a tribe related to the Miji, *Ase Ləju*, 'Grandmother Sun' gifted the first two Bangru brothers that descended from her with *ləwoo*, a starch palm.[16] Palm trees from which starch is extracted are called *hing nuk* or *hing nük* by the Sartang and Sherdukpen, *màlù* by the Brokpa of Lubrang, *nungshing* by the Khispi and Duhumbi and the Tshangla of Sangthi valley and *dengshing* by the Tshangla of Kalaktang and eastern Bhutan. Only the Puroik continue to cultivate various species or varieties of starch palms as an integral part of their livelihood strategy. Whether this is a case of a retention of an ancient livelihood strategy, or perhaps a cultural reversion caused by external circumstances is not yet clear (Lieberherr 2017). Although Austroasiatic, rather than Tibeto-Burman affinities of the Puroik have been proposed (e.g. Tada *et al.* 2012:33 and Blench and Post 2011), the linguistic evidence till date does not support this.[17] As for the Puroik religious beliefs, these have been said to mimic the Nishi's 'extremely intense form of animism based largely on the everlasting propitiation of a vast horde of evil spirits by greater or lesser sacrifices' (Stonor 1952:961).

The original inhabitants of the village of Bulu under Nafra circle of West Kameng district are speakers of a Kho-Bwa language partially intelligible to the Puroik varieties of Kazuan (Kojo) and Ruedou (Rojo) in Lada circle of East Kameng, but unintelligible to most of the Puroik varieties further east.[18] At present, only a handful of middle-aged men still speak this language, and the grim projection is that within the next decade the language will become extinct.

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[16] Personal communication Pisa Chanang of Sarli, 16 December 2013.

[17] Personal communication Ismael Lieberherr, Lieberherr 2015 and Lieberherr, forthcoming.

[18] Personal communication Phembu of Bulu, 16-17 October 2013 and Ismael Lieberherr, Lieberherr 2015, 2017 and forthcoming.

## 2.2. *Sangthi valley's secret: the Mundapa*

The Sangthi valley lies to the west of Bulu and is at present inhabited by speakers of the Dirang variety of Tshangla. As will be explained in section 4, the arrival of the Tshangla speakers divided in *Bapu* or ruling *tshan*[19] and *Gila* or subsidiary *tshan* is, however, relatively recent. In fact, until a few decades ago, two additional tribes lived in the Sangthi valley, both presumably speaking languages related to the Kho-Bwa cluster: the Mundapa and the Tukshipa. The first was called *Mundalo* by the Tshangla speakers, and their speakers were called *Mundapa*.[20][21] The Mundapa originated from the area around the confluence of the Gongri and Bichom rivers. This area is till the present inhabited by people called the Mundapa, *Bolo Gidu* or *Khawa* by the Tshangla speakers, but better known as the Bugun Scheduled Tribe.

According to the origin stories told by the descendants of the Mundapa speakers, a Mundapa hunter from the Bichom area who was called *Thespa Rangthong* or *Kyapso Rangthong*, also referred to as the *Bishum Shapa* 'hunter from Bishum' and *Shapa Ata* 'hunter grandfather', shot down eight of the nine suns and eight of the nine[22]

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[19] The term *tshan* or *mi tshan* is exclusively used in the Tshangla-speaking area of Arunachal Pradesh to refer to a patrilineal descent group; *tshan* probably existed in eastern Bhutan as well, but as the seventeenth century Gyelrik already remarked, the *tshan* names and distinctions had since long disappeared there. Although it would be tempting to simply translate the term *tshan* with 'clan', a word used widely within the context of tribal Arunachal Pradesh to refer to patrilineal descent groups, I hesitate to do so: a *tshan* is neither unilineal nor exogamous, as the members of a clan do not exclusively claim descent from a single common ancestor, but can also be based on a single ethnolinguistic and/or geographical origin. Similarly, using the term 'class' seems inappropriate. The etymology is from written Tibetan *mtshan* 'name (honorific)'

[20] The homophony with the name of the Austroasiatic *Munda* speakers of the east-central Indian subcontinent will strike the attentive reader, particularly those who have been suspecting an Austroasiatic affiliation of the Puroik. Till date there is, however, no linguistic or other evidence that would support such as affiliation.

[21] Personal communication Tsorgan Thinlay of Phudung, 7 November 2013; Leki of Bishum, 7 November 2013.

[22] There seems to be a significance of the numeral 'nine' in the stories and languages of the area. King Ling Gesar is also said to be the youngest of nine brothers in the sky, and the Duhumbi 'week' consists of nine days. Perhaps this is also a Vedic influence, the नवग्रह *navagrāha* are the nine astrological/celestial figures, which, if the north/ascending lunar node or eclipse-maker (Tib. sgra-gcan) and the south/descending lunar node or comet (Tib. mjug-rings) are added also occur in Tibetan Buddhist astrology. In addition, there are the Tibetan Buddhist and Bon nine *mewa* (Tib. sme-ba) 'moles' or 'birth signs'.

moons in the sky.[23] Because of the sinfulness associated with this act, he was banished from the area. While he was deciding where to travel to, a flood carried away some *shazhewa* 'takins' (*Budorcas taxicolor*) from the Sangthi valley. The carcasses washed ashore at Bishum, and he found the meat so tasty that he decided to search for more of them. So, he travelled upstream along the Gongri river until he came to the confluence of the Gongri and the Sangthi river. For some time he stayed there, and then he travelled into the Sangthi valley until the place called Khendarong. There, he planted the seeds of cane, and at the foot of the mountain called Shapcang he planted the seeds of the sago palm. He hunted for takin at Torokpa and settled in a place he named after his home village, Bishum. He then married a woman, who had come from an unknown place with her relatives. The woman and her relatives brought with them seeds of rice, broomcorn millet, and foxtail millet which they started cultivating. When after the harvest they started husking the paddy in the mortar, the pounding made all the wild animals flee. Bishum Shapa had no more animals to hunt. In retaliation, he shot one of his wife's relatives, and all of them except his wife fled. The Bishum Shapa and his wife had a few children. In the forest, he met with a solitary, man-eating, thumb-less being called a *gretpu*. After being defeated by this being in a wrestle match, Bishum Shapa took him into his household, feeding him on takin meat. But after the *gretpu* abducted one of Bishum Shapa's children, he had no choice but to kill him. Bishum Shapa's son *Thongza* started the propitiation of the local deity Shapcang which is continued till present on the 18th day of the 10th Tibetan month. During the ritual there are offerings of a head of a takin and a barking deer and meat of other animals killed in a community hunt.

Until several decades ago, the people of Bishum, Phudung, Khenda, and several other hamlets in the northern part of the Sangthi valley were known as the Mundapa. They spoke Mundapalo, which according to informants was closely related to Bugun as spoken in the Bichom and Singchung areas as well as to Puroik as spoken in Bulu. Although all the Mundapa now speak the Dirang variety of Tshangla, there may be a few elderly people who still speak Mundapa, although they refuse to do so

[23] Hill (2015) called the 'shooting of the sun' story a key inherited myth of the Tibeto-Burman people, like the slaying of the dragon myth of Indo-European. To the several examples he mentions, the Mundapa origin story can now be added. Several similar stories exist in the area. The question remains, however, to what extent this story is inherited, and to what extent it might have spread due to contact situations, especially with geographically relatively closely related people such as the Nyishi, Bugun, and Mundapa.

due to the stigma attached to it. The people of the Mundapa villages used to live in houses on wooden stilts with walls and floors made from bamboo mats supported by wooden beams and rafters, and roofs made of sago palm leaves. They survived mainly by forest cultivation of sago palms for starch extraction, and hunting and gathering. The sago palm plantation still exists today and is divided in plots, with each plot having between two and seven palms that are managed by seven households of Bishum village. Wood-and-stone houses have replaced the bamboo houses. The Mundapa and the Puroik of Bulu were traditionally very close. Just like the Mundapa are now culturally and linguistically assimilated to the majority Tshangla-speaking population of Sangthi, the Bulu of Puroik are increasingly being assimilated to the Miji of Mathow and Dibin. There is some evidence that the Miji of Mathow themselves were Puroik speakers once upon a time. Unlike the Miji of Dibin, the people of Bulu and the Miji of Mathow village did not participate in annual raids on the Sanghi valley. This, combined with the generally low status accorded to the people of Mathow village by the Miji of Dibin, provides evidence for the local presumption that the people of the village of Mathow itself were Puroik speakers until the 1940s: they were racially and linguistically distinct from, and themselves subservient to, the people of Dibin.[24]

The Gyelrik recounts how descendants of Lhase Tsangma replaced the lineage of Bhisurapa in the Sangthi valley (Gyelrik 1668: ff27b-28a). The partial homophony between this 'Bhisurapa' and the Mundapa 'Bishum Shapa' is curious, and perhaps alludes to the historical replacement of a Mundapa population by a Tshangla-speaking population.

### 3.1. *The Western Kho-Bwa speech communities*

The information in this section is a synthesis of origin stories from the four Sartang villages of Khoina, Jerigaon, Khoitam, and Rahung. [25] Many of these narrators are *romo* (spirit mediums), who not only act as intermediate between the mortal human world and the spirit world but

[24] Personal communication Tsorgen Thinlay of Phudung, 7 October 2013; Leki of Bishum, 7 October 2013; Ismael Lieberherr.

[25] Koina: personal communication with Geshi Tamu Yamchodu and Tshering Dolma Nethungji, 22 May 2014. Jerigaon: personal communication with Chaphok Nathungji, 23 May 2014 and Dorji Khandu, 11 May 2013. Khoitam: personal communication with late Dargye Chanadok, 4 June 2012 and Kezang Rokpu, 25 May 2014. Rahung: personal communication with Karma Tsering Ngoimu, 29 May 2014 and Khatuk Nampo and Karma Tsering Ngoimu, 11 May 2013.

are also the repositories of oral legends of origin and migration. The stories all detail the origin, migration and eventual settlement of the various clans that now make up the Sartang tribe in these four villages.

The apparent 'homeland' of the Western Kho-Bwa people is said to be a place called *Dəwu Dəsa* which is now known as Lower Jang in Nafra circle. According to some local sources 3,500 years ago, a group of people settled here, led by a person called *Rongrədu*. They had come from a place called *Lici Labõ* or *Lici Ləwa* located to the east, beyond a mountain pass called *Ləphang*. Rongrədu's sons were *Rongra* and *Rongrəcong*. Their clan became known as the *Sunikji* clan. According to local folklore, the Sunikji people were short-tempered in nature, a character trait said to persist in their descendants of the Sunikji clan, and their main deity was *Asu Adok* 'big grandfather'.

While living in Dewu Desa, they were joined by a people who had been living in a *batka* 'hamlet for shifting cultivation' called *Sərithangli* located in the north, just below the snowline of the Himalayas. They descended through the *batka* called *Anini*, *Misəri* and *Bulu*, settling all along the Buchung (Bichom) river. Anini and Misəri are now deserted, but as mentioned before, Bulu still exists. These people called themselves the *Nəthongji* clan and believed themselves to be the descendants of four brothers that were the offsprings of the male deity called *Tang* or *Düngla Shengsheng* and the sun goddess called *Jü*. The Nəthongji people were considered mild-natured and reserved.

These two groups of people were then expelled by a numerically and materially advanced people who invaded from *Janacing*,[26] and they settled in *Khampalingchong Thük* (*thük* means 'village' in Sartang) and *Səribantha*, now called Khoina, and *Dünglõ* on the opposite site of the Gongri river. Their deities, through a middleman called *Chikjã Changkü*, asked the two clans to exchange daughters in intermarriage so their relation would become stronger against the external threat. Both clan leaders had a daughter, but the Nəthongji clan leader, considering himself of higher pedigree, refused to give his daughter as bride to the Sunikji. The deities then challenged both clans to see who was superior. First, they were asked to shoot an arrow into the *Phatham pharu* cliff far away. The clever Nəthongji heated the arrow head and dipped it in beeswax before shooting it at the cliff, and on contact, the arrow stuck to the cliff, whereas the Sunikji's arrow simply bounced off. Then, they competed in a jumping competition, which the Nəthongji won again. As the third test, their leaders were made to eat a lot of food and then drop

[26] Note the similarity with Tibetan *rgya-nag* 'China'.

their excrements in the river. Whoever's excrement would float on water would be the winner. Whereas the Sunikji leader ate all the food, and his excrements sunk as soon as it dropped in the water, the Nəthongji leader hid a wild tuber in the fold of his dress and dropped that in the river while pretending to make toilet. As the tuber floated away, they had also won this competition. The middleman now challenged both groups to make fermented grains to float on water. The Sunikji dropped real fermented grains in the water, and they sank right away. But the Nəthongji mixed ash and lime, put this on top of some big leaves, pretending it was fermented grains. When they placed it on the water, it floated away. Again, the Nəthongji had won: saying they were the ones of higher birth, they refused to give their daughter to the Sunikji in marriage. Finally, the middleman ordered the two groups that if they would not let their leader's daughters marry into each other's clan, they could just as well throw the girls into the river. The Sunikji obeyed the order, and their leader's daughter was carried away by the river. But the smart Nəthongji dressed up a piece of dry wood in their leader's daughter's clothes and threw this in the river instead. Angered at the disobedience to follow his order, the middleman chased away the Nəthongji clan. The Sunikji clan went after them from place to place. Then, the middleman hid the fire of the Nəthongji clan. Without fire, they could not prepare their food, and they could not make a fire to warm themselves and keep the wild animals and bugs away at night. They became desperate and went searching for fire. Seeing a fire burning in the distance, they found out it was the fire of the Sunikji clan. When they asked the Sunikji for fire, the Sunikji responded that they would only share their fire if the Nəthongji would give their leader's daughter in marriage. After much deliberation, the Nəthongji realised they had no choice and agreed to it. Since then, the Nəthongji and Sunikji stayed together, and formed a single ethnic group.

The preceding origin story has some interesting elements. Two ethnic groups being described in the story as being very distinct – the Sunikji consisting of rather 'primitive', wild-mannered hunter-gatherers, the Nəthongji of more 'civilised', mild-mannered shifting cultivators – are forced to cohabit and eventually merge into a single ethnic group under threat of an external force. We can only guess the ethnolinguistic affiliations of these groups, but there is some circumstantial evidence. The Sunikji are thought to be related to the tribal populations to the east, particularly the people known in Khoina as *shtang* 'Puroik' (cf. also Duhumbi *bis-tang*, from *bi-stang* 'tribal people', and Rupa Sherdukpen *stang* 'slave' (Jacquesson 2015: 267)): those who could not cross the mountain pass are said to be the Puroik clans of East Kameng and

beyond. Their linguistic inheritance could explain the shared basic vocabulary between the Puroik, the Bugun, and the Western Kho-Bwa. Even the Puroik of Bulu, the Bugun of the area and the Mundapa could perhaps be related to who became known as the Sunikji clan of the Sartang people in their origin stories.

The Nəthongji, now forming the Nəthongji clan of the Sartang people, on the other hand, are thought to be an ancient population of possibly Pre- or Proto-Bodish origin that survived in shifting cultivation hamlets on the southern slopes of the Himalayas. Not only may they have introduced shifting cultivation of grain and other crops, they also introduced livestock species and elements of material culture unknown to the Sunikji. A part of the Western Kho-Bwa lexicon that has no cognates with Puroik or Bugun but rather with Bodish languages could possibly be attributed to this element. Although it is hard to differentiate between these 'old' borrowings and later nativised loans from Bodish contact languages, shared phonological developments are a major criterion (Bodt, 2017).

The invading people are generally identified as the Miji people now inhabiting Nafra circle. The Sartang people's belief that the Miji pushed their ancestors downstream is partially collaborated by the origin story of the Bangru,[27] a tribe linguistically related to the Miji and living in Kurung Kumey district. One of the two brothers descending from *Ase Ləju* stayed in the same place and became the ancestor of the Bangru, the other brother moved southwest in search of *takin* and became the ancestor of the Miji and the Hruso Aka of East and West Kameng (Bodt and Lieberherr 2015).

In addition to these two 'human' groups, a mythical forefather called *Rinchendu* or *Rincinnadu* came from the sky. From him descend three Sartang clans, namely the *Rincindu* clan of Jerigaon, the *Rincinnadu* clan of Khoitam and the *Yamnoji* or *Yamchodu* clan of Khoina.

The descendants of the Nəthongji, Sunikji and Rincinnadu/Yamnoji spread progressively through the Gongri river valley, establishing villages now inhabited by the people known as the Sartang tribe, Jerigaon, Khoitam and Rahung. They also moved further west and probably established the villages of Namshu (Namtshaw), Dirang (Durma), Yewang (Shiling), Lish (Khis), and Chug (Duhum) as well as Rupa in the Tenga valley.

The Western Kho-Bwa speakers started living in clustered villages in strategic locations as protection against the Miji. Their houses were

[27] Personal communication Pisa Chanang of Sarli, 16 December 2013.

made of wood-and-bamboo and built on wooden or stone stilts, roofed with bamboo. Bodt (2017) uses comparative lexical evidence and reconstructed roots to show that the original Western Kho-Bwa homeland is most probably located exactly here in the dry, subtropical inner river valleys with broadleaf forests on the hills. The primary livelihood of the Western Kho-Bwa speakers became shifting cultivation of millets and buckwheat, combined with transhumance herding of cattle and sheep, both of which continue to play an important role in the Western Kho-Bwa livelihood and the Sartang rituals.

### 3.2. *Survival against all odds: the Sartang*

Inhabiting the villages of Jerigaon, Khoina, Khoitam, and Rahung and associated hamlets live a remarkably resilient people generally neglected by researchers (exceptions are Dondrup 2004 and Bodt 2014). Hitherto included in the Monpa tribe, they have applied for official recognition as Sartang Scheduled Tribe. The considerable dialect diversity observed between the various Sartang villages can largely be explained by the divergent origin histories of the speakers, but also by the main contact languages – Miji in the east and Tshangla in the west. The Sartang have previously been referred to as 'Rahungpa' or 'But Monpa'. These names, however, refer only to the people of Rahung village and Jerigaon village, respectively. Until 1984, Jerigaon village was known as But village and the people were known as *Butpa*. The negative associations with Hindi *bhūt* 'ghost' led to the official name change to Jerigaon, i.e. *jiring-gaon* from Sartang *jiring* 'human being' and Hindi गाँव *gā̃v* 'village'. The information in this section is a synthesis of the origin and migration stories told by the same informants as in the previous section.

In Khoina and Jerigaon, the original three clans, Sunikji, Nəthongji, and Rinchennadu/Yamnoji slowly split in various sub-clans. There are at present 10 clans in Khoina, and most of these clans occur in doublets between which intermarriage is not possible. These clans of Khoina are *Gashidu* and *Ciyadu*, Nəthongji and *Bangmidu*, *Mendadu* and *Matandu*, Yamnoji and *Məsüdu*, and Sunekji and *Napudu*. In Jerigaon, we find the Nəthongji and Sunikji clans, and in addition the Rincindu clan, the *Rəphingji* clan who later came from Rahung and the *Rokpu* (cf. Tib. rogs-pa 'helper, friend') clan descending from people who later came from Tibet. In Khoitam we find the Sunikji, Nəthongji, Rincinnadu and Yamnoji/Yamchodu clans, and in addition the Rokpu and *Dunglen* clans who later came from Tibet, the Rəphingji clan from Rahung, and the *Chanadok* (perhaps *chan-adok* 'big *tshan'*) clan.

The most divergent clan make-up is found in Rahung village, which is probably because this village is located on the old trade route between Tibet and Assam. At present, in Rahung we find the *Ciringdu*, *Pabom Sarmu* and *Kasi Sarmu*, and *Sambön Ngoimu* clans, the *Nampo* and *Thadung* clans, and the *Peiki Sarmu* clan. The Nampo and Thadung clans came as *romo* and *chopji dop* religious practitioners respectively from Khoina village. The Peiki Sarmu clan descends from the mid-twentieth century Chöcangaca-speaking migrants from Shergaon. The former four clans claim descent from an ancestor called *Ata Mlamjung* who was said to have come from *Kharsowaikhar* in Tibet: the Sarmu and Ngoimu clans can also be found among the Brokpa of Nyukmadung and Senge and in the Sangthi valley.

After giving up their trust in Asu Gyaptang and his entourage (see section 3.3), the people of Jerigaon and Khoina decided to look for a new ruler in Tibet. Looking for a guide, they first went to Sangthi, but did not find a suitable person. The people in Chug were too busy with threshing the rice harvest. In Lish, they met an old man called *Lispu Atha Codur* ('the slandering old man of Lis') who guided them till the top of the Zela pass, where his walking stick broke and from where he returned. At Zela top they met some Brokpa herders, whom they told that as the wild boars were damaging their crops, they needed a hunter to help them. The Brokpas told them they would find a suitable person among five brothers in *Lanajabi* in Tibet. They should keep a goat leg and a sheep leg on a rock, and whoever of the five brothers would take the sheep leg would be the hunter that could help them. They requested that brother to come with them for a couple of months and reduce the wild boar population in their village, to which he agreed. But when arriving at Zela pass, they told him their real purpose, namely that they wanted to keep him as their king. He fell to the earth lamenting not having said farewell to his parents. The tears from his eyes formed the Tawang river, and the mucus from his nose formed the Gongri river. The Zela massif in between these two watersheds is a representation of his nose bridge. He then prayed that whenever a pine tree be cut at the Zela pass, one of his descendants would die. He was then taken down and the people built a fortified castle for him called *Dəkhri*. From there he and his descendants ruled, and they became the ruling *Dirkhi Bapu* clan of Thembang village. This clan is still known as the *bapü* to the Sartang people, the fortress was later moved from Dəkhri to Thembang village itself.

The latter story is also mentioned in the Gyelrik (1668: ff26a-b), where *Palladar* (Tib. dPal-la-dar), a descendant of Lhase Tsangma belonging to the Wangma clan, is invited by the *tsorgan* (Tib. gtso-rgan)

'village chief' *Agye* (Tib. A-rgyal) of the village of Thembang to suppress the Lo Khanak and the Lo Khakar. Despite this and the later control by the *Ganden Phodrang* (Tib. dgaḥ-ldan pho-braṅ) administration from Tibet through its fortress in Dirang, local and British (Reid 1942: 285, 288 and Kennedy 1914) sources attest that in the twentieth century the extent of the Miji depredation on the Sartang was such that their society was on the verge of collapse.

### 3.3. *The Sherdukpen*

Like the other Kho-Bwa speakers, the Sherdukpen are the descendants of a mixture of different ethno-linguistic groups and migration streams in the long course of their history. As with the other groups, it is difficult to retrace these origin and migration histories due to a lack of written sources, but some general remarks can be made. The Sherdukpen consider the Sartang people as the descendants of their porters and servants, an assertion vehemently denied by the Sartang themselves. The Sherdukpen created a distinct identity at a relatively early moment in history mainly because of their mostly cordial relations with successively the Boḍo, Ahom, Assamese, and British of the plains of the Brahmaputra (Bodt 2014). High participation in mainstream society including high educational levels, socio-economic status, and visibility has resulted in a relatively high number of publications on the Sherdukpen (from Sharma 1988 [1960] till Dolffus and Jacquesson 2013).

The original village of the Sherdukpen is most commonly simply called *Thük* 'village' and refers to the town now known as Rupa. On basis of their clan names, the original inhabitants of Rupa can be divided into two groups: one directly related to the Sartang speakers, and another related to the Khispi and Duhumbi speakers. As the Western Kho-Bwa speakers moved successively westward from Khoina and Jerigaon, settling in Khoitam and Rahung, some groups crossed the Bomdila pass into the Tenga river valley, then passed through Bugun territory, and settled on a plain area near the river in what is now Rupa. The clans that descend from these people are the *Məjiji*, *Məgẽji*, *Monoji*, and *Sinchaji*. They form a subordinate class known in Sherdukpen society as the *Chaw*. One of the clans that had settled in the Dirang area moved to Rupa, and their descendants belong to the *Musobi* clan.

At the time the first Western Kho-Bwa speakers were living in the eastern Gongri river valley, *Asu* 'grandfather' *Gyaptang* or *Japtang* and his entourage joined them (Jatso n.d.; Bodt 2012: 74–75; and Dollfus and Jacquesson 2013: 15–16). This group, thought to have come from Tibet,

became known as the *Thong* 'royal' class. They brought yaks with them and convinced the original inhabitants to sacrifice these to their deities in an annual community festival called *Thongjüdong* in the ninth Tibetan month. In return for the yaks, the local people gave them grains. When Asu Gyaptang's first wife died, he remarried a Shtang 'Puroik' girl. Knowing that the local people would strongly object to that because they considered the Shtang as inferior, Asu Gyaptang told her to behave like a mute when they came to bring the food grains. But while serving liquor, her cloth got stuck on a branch, and she exclaimed in Puroik 'hrükni hrani'.[28] The local people then knew she was a Puroik, and they withdrew their support from Asu Gyaptang and his Thong clan.[29] This forced Asu Gyaptang to move on, and he finally settled in Rupa. He and his people were the forefathers of the four contemporary Sherdukpen clans known as *Thongdok*, *Khəlengthong*, *Thongngon*, and *Thongchi*. Together with the Musobi, they form the *Thong* or 'royal' class in Sherdukpen society. Each Thong class has a subservient Chaw class: the Sinchaji linked to the Musobi, the Məgẽji linked to the Thongdok and Khəlengthong, and the Məjiji and Monoji linked to the Thongchi and Thongngon. Although the exact dynamics of these relations might have changed during different periods of history, these relations were probably more of a patron-client relation than of a master-slave relation. Nonetheless, until recently, a Chaw could only marry a Chaw from a different clan than his own, and a Thong could only marry a Thong from a different clan than his own. Till the present, in any interaction within Sherdukpen society and with outsiders, people of the Thong class will always take the initiative. Whereas the Thong clans mainly inhabited Rupa, Zagang (Jigaon), and Thongre villages, the Chaw clans commonly inhabited the smaller and more remotely located *pam* villages.

The Sherdukpen believe Asu Japtang to be the brother of *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel* (Tib. źab-druṅ ṅag-dbaṅ rnam-rgyal), who unified Bhutan, or a grandson of Lhase Tsangma,[30] although these are both possible attempts to legitimise the rule of the upper clans. Buddhist practitioners and the Tshangla people of the area generally relate Asu Japtang to *Khikha Rathö* (Tib. khyi-kha ra-mthod), a follower of *bon* who was expelled from Tibet during the ninth century,[31] whose descendants are also believed to have settled in eastern Bhutan.

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[28] The meaning of this sentence could not be verified.

[29] Personal communication with Chaphok Nathungji of Jerigaon, 23 May 2014.

[30] Personal communication Rincin Khandu Karma of Rupa, 10 June 2014.

[31] Personal communication Thektse Rinpoche, 6 April 2013; late Lopzang Rapten of Khamkhar, 12 April 2013; and Bodt 2012: 55-8.

At some later moment in history, an additional three clans settled in the Rupa area. They originated from Tawang, and probably even spoke Tawang Monpa, which explains the Tawang Monpa influence on the Sherdukpen language. These are the Thong clans *Khrime* and *Wangja* and the Chaw clan called *Dingla*. These clans are in a similar relation to each other as the other Thong and Chaw clans. The people of Rupa, irrespective of class or clan, are collectively known as *Thongji* 'Thong people'.

From Rupa, the Sherdukpen moved further westward and settled in the area now known as Shergaon 'Sher village'. The people of this village are collectively known as *Sẽnji* 'people of Sẽn', in which the etymology of *Sẽn* is from Tibetan śar 'the East'. Most of the clans and people in Shergaon belong to the Thong class.

In later periods, people of different ethno-linguistic backgrounds settled in the Rupa and Shergaon areas. Tshangla speakers from eastern Bhutan settled in the villages Musaksing and Mingmachur and were recently adopted into the Chaw class. Bhutanese Tshangla speakers also settled in the Shergaon area but were later expelled and moved to Bomdila and the Dirang area. Tawang Monpa speakers settled in Rupa, but particularly in Shergaon where their marks on the language can still be distinguished. In the early twentieth century, Khengkha and Chöcangaca speakers from Bhutan settled in villages near Shergaon. They were also expelled in the mid of the twentieth century. The Khengkha speakers probably returned to eastern Bhutan, but the Chöcangaca speakers moved northwards to finally settle in Rahung village and the Chug valley. Notwithstanding the linguistic influence that each of these migrant groups, particularly the Tawang Monpa, might have had on Sherdukpen, the new arrivals all linguistically assimilated to the Sherdukpen-speaking majority.

The Sherdukpen maintained a kind of patron-client relation with the Bugun people living in their immediate vicinity. Whereas the Sherdukpen inhabited the plain, lower parts of the Tenga valley, the Bugun villages were located on the higher slopes and ridges to the east and south of the valley. Bugun linguistic influence on Sherdukpen appears to have been minimal. The Sherdukpen were in turn themselves subject to yearly raids by the Hruso-Aka and Miji living to the east. In turn, the Sherdukpen conducted yearly winter trading missions to the plains of Assam where they would trade chilies, Sichuan pepper, and other local produce for rice, silk, and cotton cloth. This yearly *besme* is also the topic of the 2013 Sherdukpen feature film *Besmeh* (Lomekhar Artistes/Tribal Entertainers, director D.K. Thongun).

### 3.4. *The smart and the foolish brother: the story of Sangthi and Chug*

The people of the fertile and heavily forested Chug valley to the west of Sangthi are known to the outside world as *Chukpa* but prefer to call themselves *Duhumbi* 'people of Duhum' and their language *Duhumbi ngak*, 'language of the people of Duhum'. Although some people believe that the *Tukshipa tshan* of Sangthi and the *Thukshipa tshan* of the Chug valley originate in *Jora Kharta* (Tib. byo-ra mkhar-ta) in southern Tibet,[32] this might be a conscious attempt to associate with Tibet. Based on linguistic evidence, a shared origin of the Sartang and Sherdukpen and the members of the Tukshipa *tshan* seems likely. This relation is also upheld in the local origin and migration histories. They are thus distinct from the Mundapa tshan, who are a different ethnic group.

The first part of the story is only told in the Sangthi valley.[33] After the Tukshipa had settled in Sangthi and the Mundapa had settled in Bishum, a man from Bishum fathered two sons to a woman from the Tukshipa tshan. The sons were called *Au* (elder brother) *Kukpa* 'fool' and *Anying* ('the smaller one') or *Bonying* 'younger brother' *Cangmu* 'smart one'. Since they were the result of an inter-tshan and inter-tribe union, their father did not acknowledge the children and ran away, and their mother raised them. One day, the Tukshipa tshan members went to Bishum village to claim the sons' rightful inheritance. But the Mundapa people killed all the Tukshipa people, except for the two brothers, with aconite poison in the meal and drinks they offered. Fearing for their lives, the two brothers ran away, chased by the Mundapa. The Mundapa only gave up when reaching the ridge between the Sangthi and Chug valleys. There, the two brothers met with a *bu ata* 'tiger' named as *Ata Nambu* (from Tshangla *ata ɲambu* 'grandfather cat'), who was an emanation of the deity *Ata Nambai* 'Grandfather Moon' and had just killed a *serow* (*Capricornis sumatraensis*). As they were hungry, he offered them the meat. He also told them to look down into the next valley, where a fire was burning.

From this point of the story onwards, the Chug valley stories connect to the Sangthi valley story.[34] The two brothers, often referred to as *masang* in Sangthi and Chug, a kind of legendary strongman from the

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[32] Personal communication Sange Tsering Tukshipa of Sangthi, 21 April 2013.

[33] Personal communication Sange Tsering Tukshipa of Sangthi, 21 April 2013 and Tsorgen Thinlay of Phudung, 7 November 2013.

[34] Personal communication Sang Khandu of Chug, 17 April 2012; late Lam Nguru of Chug, 26 April 2012; Sange Tsering Tukshipa of Sangthi, 21 April 2013.

Tibetan mythology, settled in Meykhang or Khidu. They hunted a *serow* but although one of them retrieved water from a well, they had no fire to cook its meat. The other brother then saw a fire burning down in the Chug valley on the opposite side of the river at Shakya, and they decided to go there. They met a mother and her daughter (in some versions of the story two sisters) from Lungthang, who had been left behind in the Chug valley, whilst the rest of their people moved back up to their village after coming for the seasonal winter migration. This mother and daughter were believed to have been reincarnations of the *Yeshe Khandroma* (Tib. ye-shes mkhaḥ-ḥgro-ma 'wisdom fairy'). Whereas the elder brother married the mother, the younger brother married the daughter. They settled in the valley, but continued to propitiate the deity Ata Nambai with the tiger Ata Nambu as its totem. One night, Ata Nambu appeared in their dream and told that one of them should return to Sangthi. Taking a lucky dip thrice, the elder brother was selected to return, with the younger brother stayed behind. On departure, they vowed to stay like brothers for times to come. The Tukshipa[35] tshan of Sangthi and the erstwhile Thukshipa tshan of Duhum are a single tshan from a single descent.

All local people claim it is this purported descent of the people of Chug and Sangthi valleys that explains the age-old relations between the two people. For many generations to come, the people of Sangthi and Chug shared their resources and conducted their rituals together. Uniquely in the area, the Sangthi and Chug valleys had no defined border. Until two decades ago, the older generation in Sangthi village used to speak the same Western Kho-Bwa language still spoken in the Chug valley.[36] In Duhum, the village in the Chug valley from which the people and their language derive their name, a few households still claim to be of the *Thukshipa tshan*, and 'thuk-shi' in Duhumbi means 'village-give'. In Duhumbi, *atha namba* literally means 'grandfather moon' or simply 'the moon', and the main local deity propitiated by the people of Sangthi, Atha Nambai, derives his name from the Duhumbi language, not from Tshangla. Both valleys share the unique annual ritual of *kakung tor*, in which parched newly harvested rice is offered to the local deities, both in the individual households as well as in a community ritual. Both valleys are the main rice-producing areas of West Kameng district. In both valleys, a specific role in the propitiation of the local deities used to

[35] The spelling Tukshipa is most commonly seen in official records, and many people belonging to this tshan now even call themselves this way, although the original name is Thukshipa.

[36] Personal communication Tsorgan Thinlay of Phudung. 7 November 2013.

be assigned to a religious practitioner called *tsangmi*, who had to belong to the *Tukshipa tshan*. The topography and many of the loconyms of the valleys are like a mirrored image, and their upper reaches are said to be a *ne* (Tib. *gnas*) 'holy place' called *Ne Dershing* (sometimes called *Ne Dengshing*, with *dengshing* the Kalaktang Tshangla name for starch palms). Its inhabitants are believed to be a pure, devout, and secretive people originating from eastern Bhutan, speaking archaic Tshangla, with women wearing the archaic eastern Bhutanese *zhapzha* (*guntsuma*) tunic, who were kept there as the seed of humanity to repopulate the earth after a catastrophic event would have annihilated humankind.[37] Perhaps only the changes that occurred during the twentieth century resulted in a gradual drifting apart of the two communities. As Tshangla became the predominant language in the Sangthi valley and the people of Sangthi were absorbed into the mainstream Dirang Tshangla culture under increased inward migration from the Dirang area, the traditional links with the Chug valley loosened.

### 3.5. *A truly mixed origin: the Khispi of Lish*

To the south of the Chug and Sangthi valleys, a few kilometres beyond Dirang town, lies the large clustered village of Lish and its' associated hamlets. The people refer to themselves as *Khispi*, but are called *Lispa* (commonly written as *Lishpa*) by outsiders. The Khispi language is mutually intelligible with Duhumbi, but that is where all correspondences between the people end. The Khispi origin and migration histories[38] are much more detailed than those of the Duhumbi. They include a presumably native element, contributions from Tibet and Bhutan, contributions from the plains of the Brahmaputra, and contributions from Tawang.

The Khispi believe their forefathers came from the east and descend from the *hu*. *Hu* is the Khispi and Duhumbi word for a class of local subterranean deities inhabiting stagnant water bodies such as lakes, marshes, ponds, springs, and wells. In the Bodish languages and the Tibetan Buddhist literature these deities are known as *'lu* (tib. klu), whereas in Sanskrit and Hindu literature they are known as *nāga*.[39] *'Lu*

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[37] Personal communication Sange Tsering Tukshipa of Sangthi, 21 April 2013; Lama Pema of Sangthi, 20 April 2013; and Sang Khandu of Chug, 17 April 2012.

[38] Personal communication Nima Tsering of Lish, 22 May 2012 and Lama Sange and Ngorup of Lish, 19 January 2015.

[39] Probably due to the homophony between the Sanskrit and Hindi word for *klu* '*nāga*' and the name of the tribe from Nagaland and surrounding areas, Naga, ethnographically

are generally represented as beings with the head and torso of a human and the lower body of a snake. They usually manifest themselves as either very dark or very light snakes of medium to large size living in or around stagnant water bodies. Like most local deities, the *hu* are generally benign in nature and cause no harm to human beings. But if in some way disturbed, for example by defecation, consumption of taboo aliments, or drainage for construction near their habitat they will retaliate by causing various illnesses, most notably *'lune* (Tib. klu-nad '*nāga* disease') 'leprosy'. Therefore, people used to refrain from disturbing snakes and their humid habitats. The purported descent from the *hu* made the Khispi supposedly immune to leprosy, which other people of the Gongri valley often contracted during their winter sojourns in the plains of Assam and spread in their home villages upon return. Local Khispi informants, however, admit that at least by the mid-twentieth century the people of Lish did suffer from leprosy, and that this was only halted by the introduction of western medicine after the advent of the Indian administration in the late twentieth century.

In addition to these first settlers, the Khispi origin stories acknowledge two additional migratory streams. The first concerns a person referred to as *Atha* 'Grandfather' *Sarpa* (the Khispi rendition of Tib. a-mi gsar-pa from the Gyelrik) and his four daughters, who settled in Lish after coming from Bhutan. Atha Sarpa worked together with *Atha Libu* who descended from the first settlers to subdue the local deities of the Lish area and to improve the customs and habits of the people. Again later, three rich brothers came from the holy mountain of *Yalung Shampi*

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interested Indian civil and military administrators of the area extended the *hu* origin of the Khispi to a purported relation with the Naga people of Nagaland. This was picked up by Christian missionaries and teachers from Nagaland who found some similarities between their mother tongues and Khispi. There is, however, no historical evidence for people from the Naga areas to settle in the Gongri valley in sufficient numbers to make a substantial linguistic impact. Whereas the British used Nagas as porters for their various expeditions into what was then known as the North East Frontier Agency, and some of them perhaps did not return to their feud-striven homeland, the nearest expedition to the Gongri valley was the Aka Promenade of 1914 (p.c. Toni Huber). Linguistic correspondences, then, are probably the result of a shared inherited core vocabulary from a proto-language. The word *nāga* itself did not become well-known in the area until the construction of the roads, with a few temples and numerous small shrines dedicated to the *nāga* spirits constructed at water sources and streams along the road to pacify them and prevent them from causing damage to the road. Notable is the fact that the Cambodian Khmer speakers, or at least the first royal Funan dynasty, claim descent from the Indian Brahmin king/prince *Kambu Swayambhuva/Kaundinya I* (Khmer: *Preah Thaong*) who in the year 68 CE marries the daughter of the king of the *nāgas, Mera/Nagi Somā* (Khmer: *Neang Neak*) (Coedès 1968:47, 66 and Stark 2006).

or *Yarlha Shampo* (Tib. yar-lha sham-po) on the Tibetan plateau. This homeland is perhaps a later addition under influence of the *Sridpai Lhabon* liturgical texts (Huber 2013:71, Fig. 3). The three brothers are considered the illegitimate sons of *Lha Wangpo Japshin* (Tib. lha dbaṅ-po brgya-byin), the originally Hindu deity *Indra*. Whereas the middle sibling went towards Bhutan, the elder and the younger one settled in a cave near Lish. When they were hunting, they met Atha Sarpa, who allowed them to stay and gave his daughters in marriage.

Later, the two brothers went to Naktengthangka, near present-day Balemu in Kalaktang circle, shot a pigeon, and inside its crop were paddy grains. Curious as to what this was, they moved down into the *lego* (Tib. las-sgo, lit. 'work door', commonly called *duars,* from Indo-Aryan *darvāzā* 'door'). The *lego dakpubak* 'hosts of the *duars*' received them with food and liquor and requested their help to overcome a man-eating demon who annually collected a tax among the people, including humans as his food. The two brothers, understanding the suffering of the people, killed the demon with bow and arrow in return for the right to collect the tax that the demon used to collect, minus the human tax. From that time onwards, the people of Lish were entitled to collect tax among the Kachari[40] people of *Metsi Mela* and *Tatsi Dola* in the plains of Assam. Their pounder, pestle, and an agreement written on stone can still be found at Dimatsang Betali (cf. also Tada *et al.* 2012: 102-105). Like the Sherdukpen of Rupa and Shergaon in the Doimara area, the Tshangla people of Pemagatshel in Bhutan in Tshoki and the people of Khaling in Bhutan in Darrang, the Khispi thus travelled down to Balemu in the plains and set up winter camp there to barter and trade.

The Khispi have two stories of how they lost this right to collect tax. In the first, the newly arrived Tibetan administrators made a contest between the leaders of Thembang, Lish, and Dirang involving a horse race. The Khispi, never having seen a horse before, could not even mount it. The leader of Dirang managed to mount it, but ended up sitting on it backwards. The leader of Thembang, having experience in horse riding since he was a descendant of a Tibetan prince, won the race, and with it the right to collect the taxes. The second story tells that after the Kachari people had been made subservient to the Ahom and Assamese, the Khispi did not know the language of the Assamese and thus had to depend on a translator of the *Melongkharpa tshan* of Domkha Morshing to translate for them. The translator fooled the Khispi by saying that the

[40] Or, more precisely, *Kōcharī* slaves. Kōcharī is the Assamese pronunciation of *Kācharī*, an Indo-Aryan term referring to the speakers of the various Boḍo-Garo languages still spoken in the plains and hills of Assam and West Bengal.

Assamese want them to kill one of their cows. The Khispi killed the cow, and the Hindu Assamese, considering that a great crime, stripped the Khispi of their right to collect taxes, and instead gave it to the people of Domkha Murshing.[41]

Whereas this is the Khispi interpretation of their relation with the Kachari people of the plains of the Brahmaputra, other people in the area commonly consider the Khispi to be the descendants of Kachari porters and stonemasons brought to the Dirang area by the Tshangla speakers.[42]

Another Kachari connection can be found in an oral history and its' associated songs that is most commonly narrated among the Brokpa of Nyukmadung and Senge. This 'Omchungma' (Tib. ḥo-ma-chuṅ-ma 'small milk girl' or ḥo-chu-ma 'milk water girl') story appears to be modelled on the famous story of how the late sixth/early seventh century Tibetan king *Songtsen Gampo* (Tib. srong-btsan sgam-po) obtained his Chinese wife, *Gyasa (Kongjo) Mungchang* (Tib. gya-sa (kong-jo) mung-chang, Chin. Wénchéng Gōngzhǔ) and/or his Nepalese wife *Bemoza Thritsun* (Tib. Bal-mo-bzaḥ Khri-btsun, Nep. *Bhṛkuṭī Devī*). However, in the Khispi story, the origin of the Tibetan king's queen is placed among the people of the *lego* (Tib. las-sgo 'work doors'), the plains of Assam.[43]

As the king of Tibet did not have a male prodigy and heir to his throne from his first wife, he assembled his people and presented them with a few tests to select the wisest of them all. An old man simply called *lumpa apa* 'father of the valley' attended the meeting, in which the king asked his subjects to stitch *lungshep* 'flat stones' together into *bempu* 'rag cloths'. The next day, the father sent his son, aptly called *Lonpo Rikpacen* (Tib. blon-po rigs-pa-can) 'minister logician', a name alluring to the Brahmanical *Nyayāyikā* school of logicians called *rig-pa-can* in Tibetan. When the king asked him where his father was, he answered that his father was busy making stone thread from sand. Every day, the king called upon his subjects and asked them something impossible to do, such as bringing a horse with horns, or a *dzo* (a male yak-cow crossbreed) that has given birth to a calf. But whereas the other subjects had nothing to say, Rikpacen at least had a smart excuse why his father could not attend the meeting.

Convinced of his cleverness, the king sent Rikpacen and 100 of his subjects through the Monyul area to the plains of the Brahmaputra to get

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41 Personal communicaiton Lama Sange and Ngorup of Lish, 17 January 2015.

42 Personal communication late Lama Kukpa Tashi of Khamkhar, 21 April 2013; Khatuk Nampo of Rahung 12 May 2013; and late Lopzang Rapten of Khamkhar, 12 April 2013.

43 Personal communication Nima Buti of Nyukmadung, 27 January 2015.

him the girl known as *Jama Omchungma* (Tib. rgya-ma ḥo-chu-ma) 'Indian milk-water girl', perhaps alluding to *Sujātā*, the woman who offered a golden bowl of milk rice to the Buddha on the day of his enlightenment. The Tibetans stayed at Omchungma's best friend's house, and Rikpacen asked her mother how to find Omchungma. The mother said she cannot not tell it directly, as Omchungma's father is their king. So, she devised a trick. On a big plain where Omchungma used to pass by once a week, she placed three hearth stones, with on top of that a *therpu* 'cauldron' filled to the brim with water, and on top of that wooden blanks, and on top of that, Rikpacen sat down. She covered him with a bamboo firewood basket and filled all the holes but one with fur. Then she gave him a bamboo flute and told him to count 100 beads on his rosary. The 101st person in the procession is Omchungma, and he can recognise her by a mark of a jewel on her forehead. He then has to blow the flute, and order his servants to stick a *dadar* 'ceremonial arrow' in her clothing to fix the marriage. Doing in this way, he took Omchungma with him. Omchungma's father asked his astrologer where she might be, and the astrologer remarked she was taken by the one with the long nose living in a bamboo hut on a flat area above a lake on three rocks on the great plain. The king was puzzled and enraged by this cryptic description and burnt half of the astrologer's books, which is why till date the *tsipa* (Tib. rtsis-pa) 'astrologers' have only half their knowledge. Nonetheless, the king found out where Rikpacen and Omchungma were.

Rikpacen wanted to take Omchungma to Tibet, but she made a prayer that only when she could take the statue of her protective deity with her, she would go. Miraculously, the statue shrunk to the size of a *gaw* (Tib. gaḥu) 'amulet box'. This statue is later said to become the *Lhasa Jowo* (Tib. lha-sa jo-bo) statue, variously credited to having been brought by the Chinese and the Nepalese wife of king Songtsen Gampo. Omchungma had no choice but to go, but when her father found out where she was, he wanted to have a replacement for the statue of the protective deity. Within a week, Rikpacen, through his skill and craftsmanship, made a new statue. But then the king refused to let him go, because he was so incredibly gifted and smart. Rather than his own daughter, he preferred to keep Rikpacen. Again, Rikpacen was put to the test by asking him to string a conch shell to a thread. Rikpacen tied the thread to the waist of an ant and blew the ant through the conch shell. The king then asked him to drink liquor without touching it with his tongue. Rikpacen drunk the liquor through a bamboo flute. Whatever test the king devised, Rikpacen passed it, but still the king did not let him go.

Finally, Rikpacen pretended to be seriously ill due to the heat of the plains. He said he needed to go to Tibet to propitiate his deities. When even then the king refused, Rikpacen and his servants took Omchungma and all the wealth from the king and ran away into the mountains. When the king found out they had escaped, he called for 100 of his best men and told them to either bring back Rikpacen, or never return to his kingdom. Rikpacen left a trail of tests on the way to distract the pursuers, saying he would surrender to them, for example, if they managed to straighten the dried horns of a ram. Failing all the tests, hungry, weary, and feeling increasingly cold the pursuing party was told that Rikpacen and Omchungma had reached Tibet. They gave up the chase and settled halfway in the place now known as Lish. Because of this, the people of Lish are known as *Kya Lispa* (Tib. rgya slis-pa) 'Indian Lishpa' to the Brokpa, and one of the possible etymologies of the autonym Khispi 'people who returned' is from Khispi *khish* 'to return'.

When Rikpacen and Omchungma arrived in Tibet, Rikpacen decided to keep Omchungma as his own wife. He told the king she is unfit to marry him, because she has no nose (compare the story of *Chogyal Norzang* (Tib. chos-rgyal nor-bzang), often performed during the Tibetan *lhamo* opera). He told Omchungma that since the king smells so bad, she better walk with her nose covered when she is near him, thus making the king believe Rikpacen's story. Omchungma had a son by Rikpacen. When the king questioned Rikpacen why the boy calls him father, Rikpacen answered that he has been giving him walnuts, and that after giving walnuts to any random child for some time, they will automatically start calling him father to get even more. When one day the king discovered that Omchungma did have a nose, he accepted her as his wife and Rikpacen's son as his heir. Omchungma is also credited with bringing the seeds of all grains to Tibet.

The Khispi belief in their origin from the *hu* is reflected in, or perhaps based on the Gyelrik (1668: ff.27b-29a), as per which the lineage of *Jojo Ganpa* (Tib. Jo-jo rGan-pa) descended from the *klu* of *Namko* lake (Tib. gnam-sko-mtsho) located to the east. Jojo Ganpa's brothers and nephews of the *Bagi* (Tib. ba-gi) *tshan*[44] spread in the Dirang area including Sangthi (Tib. sang-thi), Yewang (Tib. ye-spang), Lis (Tib. slis), Chuk (Tib. phyug), Bishum (Tib. bhi-shum), and Namshu (Tib. nam-shu) (Gyelrik ibid. ff.31a). The Bagi clan and its descendants could well be a population descending from the Proto-Western Kho-Bwa speakers

[44] The *Bagi* clan is still recognised as a *Gila* or lower clan in Dirang. Most of the traditional non-Buddhist *phrami* and *yumi* practitioners of Dirang used to be from the *Bagi* clan.

further east, who spread in this part of the Gongri river valley. In the Khispi origin stories, they are represented by Atha Libu and the other descendants of the *hu*. Whereas the ruling Bagi lineage was later replaced by descendants from Jowo Khampa, represented in the Khispi origin stories by Atha Sarpa, who is mentioned in the Gyelrik as Ami Sarpa, the people themselves were ethnically and linguistically absorbed in Tshangla-speaking populations in most villages of the area.

In fact, there is other evidence that the people of villages such as Dirang, Yewang, and Namshu, like the people of Lish, were Western Kho-Bwa speakers and that these villages only gradually assimilated to Tshangla speakers. The Khispi have native names for Dirang and Yewang village, namely *Durma* and *Shiling* respectively, that are pure toponyms and do not carry some pejorative connotation. The name with which Western Kho-Bwa speakers refer to the people of Namshu people reconstructs to **nam-ʦʰaw-brji* 'people of Namtshaw', indicating perhaps that the village was already an established settlement before the arrival of the Tshangla speakers. Like the pairing of the *tsho* (Tib. tsho, a word referring to a 'group, band, clan or tribe (of people)' but in the context of the Monyul region also to a unit under the Tibetan administration), the *tsho apa* 'father *tsho'* Dirang and *tsho ama* 'mother *tsho'* Lish, the villages of Thembang and Namshu are always mentioned as *tsho apa* Thembang and *tsho ama* Namshu. Tshangla as it is spoken in the Dirang area is markedly different from the Tshangla spoken in eastern Bhutan and the Kalaktang area, and this may well be attributed to a substrate language.

There is, however, a disconnect between the belief of the Khispi that they are the descendants of the original settlers of the area, and that it was them who had the original right to collect the tax among the Kachari people, and the widespread beliefs among other people of the region. The Tshangla speakers relate how the Bapu clans of Thembang and the seven *rajas* 'kings' of Domkho, Morshing, and Kalaktang[45] were considered as the original tax collectors among the Kachari people, and other sources indicate it was indeed these Bapus and rajas that collected the tax. Pandey and Nanak (2007: 97) describe how the Ahom, a Tai tribe from Burma who progressively established themselves in the Brahmaputran

[45] In the late seventeenth century, the Tibetan Ganden administration established itself at Dirang and *Taklung* (Tib. stag-lung) dzongs 'fortresses'. From then onwards, the *Sāt Rājā* of the Domkho, Morshing and Khalaktang areas collected the taxes. They also introduced the Tibetan term *lego* 'work door'.

plains after 1228,[46] called the people of the hills to the north of the plains of the Brahmaputra *Bhutia*. This terms seems to have referred to the Monpa of present-day Tawang and West Kameng districts, the Sherdukpen, and the people of Bhutan, i.e. all the nominally Buddhist people of the sub-Himalayan ranges between the hills east of Darjeeling in the west till the Bharoli river in the east (Pandey and Nanak 2007: 48, 94-95). Pandey and Nanak further state that since the time of the Ahom king Pratap Singha (imp. 1603-1641), the Bhutias of Char Duar and Kariapar Duar (i.e. the area roughly between present-day Bhalukpong till the Bhutan border) were given traditional *posa* rights to visit the plain areas, and collect and trade things not available in the hill areas in return for a tribute. Especially during the Moamaria Rebellion of 1769-1794, with later incidental uprisings, the Bhutias took advantage of the weakness of the Ahom rule by conducting regular raids on the duars, carrying away 'large numbers' of Assamese as slaves (Pandey and Nanak 2007: 48). Peace was brokered in 1802, but by 1826, the Ahom rule was abolished, and the British took over control of Assam. After the British took over the *posa* system was continued. In 1836, the rights of the kings of Thembang and the Sherdukpen to collect *posa* were replaced by an annual cash amount (Gait 1926 and Bose 1997:57-59). Between 1830 and 1844, and particularly in the winter of 1843-1844, the Bhutias raided the Char Duar and Kariapar Duar areas. The Aitchison treaties of 1844 made an end to these raids, with cash compensations replacing the *posa* collected from Kuriapara Duar (Gait 1906). In the winter of 1852-1853, a final raid by the Bhutia took place. After that, peace with the Bhutia was maintained. The *posa* system was later replaced by a yearly monetary compensation (see also Tenpa, 2012). According to some local sources, an envoy from the Assam state government continues to come and pay this compensation to the Bapu of Thembang once a year in Bomdila, although this could not independently be confirmed. However, as the Khispi stories indicate, it may be that whereas the Khispi were the original collectors of tax among the Kachari people of Assam, this right was later lost to the people of Thembang and the people of Domkho, Morshing, and Kalaktang.

The Tshangla speakers of the area similarly maintain that the inhabitants of Namshu and Lish are descendants of Kachari 'slaves' raided by the Bapu rulers of Thembang and Dirang respectively. They were originally required to work as stonemasons during the construction of the *dzong* (Tib. rdzoṅ) 'fortress' and houses in the fortified villages of

[46] Interesting to note is the fact that, like the Khispi, the Ahom claim descent from *Lengdon*, i.e. *Indra* (Pandey and Nanak, 2007: 16-17).

Thembang and Dirang. Later, they became the porters carrying the annual in kind tax from Thembang and Dirang till Senge dzong. Intermarriage between the Tshangla speakers and the people of Namshu and Lish was for long restricted. Such sanctions were later lifted in the case of Namshu, whose population intermixed with later Tshangla, Tibetan, and Brokpa arrivals and the people of Thembang and became linguistically assimilated to Tshangla. The people of Lish maintained a strict separation from the people of Dirang, including a prohibition on intermarriage till modern times (Chowdhury 1975:47). The people of Dirang looked down upon the Khispi as an inferior, subservient people. This situation persisted well into the twentieth century, and derogatory and pejorative sentiments regarding the people of Lish still prevail among other ethnolinguistic groups of the Gongri valley.

Reference to a population inhabiting the Dirang area before the arrival of the Tshangla speakers is also made by later British sources, such as Kennedy (1914) who reported that the Dirang valley was once inhabited by a tribe called *Lopa* (Tib. klo-pa), a general Tibetan term referring to any non-Buddhist tribal, especially those in central and eastern Arunachal Pradesh. According to the same source, later Tshangla settlers at first lived cordially with them, until conflict arose and the Lopa were expelled. Perhaps, these Lopa were the original Western Kho-Bwa speakers of the area who became progressively assimilated with the Tshangla-speaking majority and later migrants.

There is another indication that the people of Lish belong to an indigenous Western Kho-Bwa population that once extended from the Sartang area till Lish and Chug. The people of Thembang village celebrate a yearly festival called *Hoyshina*. There are three characteristic and unique features to this festival. First is the collection of a cracked, scratched, broken, or defunct household item like a plate or cup from each household. The household items are brought to the village community building, blessed, and then thrown off a cliff, symbolising the removal of misfortune for the coming year. Second, two youngsters dressed in Miji clothes, i.e. a loincloth and characteristic headdress. Brandishing Miji *dao* 'machetes' and bows and arrows, they force their way through the gate of the village while two guys in Monpa dress unsuccessfully try to prevent them from entering. The Miji actors then make a round of the village collecting a handful of food grains, some dried chillies, and some dried fish and dried meat from each of the households, shouting 'hoyshina, hoyshina'. Finally, the festival used to see a human sacrifice. A male virgin would be brought from Lish village as tax, tied to a pole next to the community building, and ritually killed

with arrows and machetes. Later, this human sacrifice was replaced by a dough effigy with a dried gourd filled with sheep entrails and blood as head. The sheep entrails and blood have now been replaced by red coloured water, but the dough effigy is still ritually sacrificed and cut into pieces. The Bapu clans of Thembang say the Hoyshina festival commemorates their yearly collection of tax among the Kachari people of Assam and is held to avert possible black magic by the Kachari people. The Sartang and Khispi people, on the other hand, state that the festival, in fact, represents the yearly Miji raids on the Western Kho-Bwa and later Tshangla villages of the area and the subjugation of the Western Kho-Bwa people of the area by the Bapus of Dikhri *dzong*. The latter explanation is supported by the etymology of 'hoyshina' as a muddled version of archaic Western Kho-Bwa 'hoy shima', an imperative meaning 'give food!'.

The actual origin and migration story of the Khispi people and their relation with their neighbours can only be ascertained when more archaeological, linguistic, genetic, oral, and written historical evidence is collected and compared.

## 4. *A regional enigma: the Tshangla*

The Tshangla are a large ethnolinguistic group with a homeland in south-eastern Bhutan, numbering over 200,000 people in Bhutan, India, and China (Bodt 2012: 175-188). Most linguists assume the Tshangla language to be either Bodish (e.g. van Driem 2001) or a Bodish creole (DeLancey 2014). But this Bodish classification of Tshangla has been disputed (Bodt 2012: 215-216) and the presumed Bodish affiliation might be the result of intense historical and contemporary contact with neighbouring Bodish languages.

As we saw in the previous section, upon their arrival in the Gongri valley, the Tshangla intermixed with existing Western Kho-Bwa populations. The Tshangla speakers probably introduced the social stratification of society in *tshan*, placing their arrival well before the seventeenth century, by which time this system had largely disappeared in the eastern Bhutanese homeland. The *tshan* to which families belong reflects their historical origin and thus the system was perhaps a conscious attempt to create some order and stratification in the otherwise complex ethnolinguistic situation. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to describe all these *tshan* in detail, for this see Huber (forthcoming), but a fourfold division of society can be discerned in the Tshangla-speaking

villages that adhere to the *tshan* system.[47] The highest *Bapu tshan* claim origin from ruling lineages related Lhase Tsangma and include the ruling clans of Thembang such as the *Dirkhipa* (named after the Dikhri/Dirkhi fortress), *Atjepu* (from *ata jepu* 'grandfather king') and *Khoichilu* (from Tshangla *khoi* 'valley' and *chilu* 'large'). Other *tshan* claim origin from similar royal lineages from a certain locality, such as the *Dungkarpa* (Tib. gdung-mkhar-pa) from Lhau Dungkhar (Tib. lhaḥu gduṅ-mkhar, Gyelrik 1668: ff.30b) and the *Khrimu* (Tib. khri-mo, cf. also the Sherdukpen Khrime clan) from Tshodum Khrimo (Tib. mtsho-gsum khri-mo, ibid., ff.31a), both in Tawang. Others trace their descent to a common ancestor related to Lhase Tsangma who settled in the Dirang area, such as the *Phechupa* (alternatively called Phaichurpa or Phaichilupa, from Tshangla *phai* 'house' and *chilu* 'large', Tib. khyim-chen-po), the Jamtshenpa (Tib. rgyam-btsan), and the Serthipa (Tib. ser-rdi, ibid., ff.30a-b, 31b).

A second division are the *Gila* or subservient *tshan*. These *tshan* include the most indigenous element of a certain village, before the introduction of the *tshan* system, as well as later migrant groups. Examples of the former include the Tukshipa of Sangthi and the Bagipa of Dirang. Examples of the latter include the *Bomyakpa* and *Tsongkapa* of Sangthi who claim descent from Tibet and the *Lhopa/Lhaupa* of Thembang from Lhau in Tawang. A large migrant group constitutes the descendants of Central Bodish Brokpa speakers such as the *Merakpa* from Merak (Tib. Me-rag) in eastern Bhutan, the Kom or Komo (Tib. sKom) from Dungtsho Karmathang (Tib. gduṅ-mtsho sKar-ma-thang), and the Gonpapa (Tib. sgon-pa-pa) descending from *Lama Jarepa* (Tib. bla-ma bya-ras-pa, Gyelrik 1668: ff.31b-32a, also viz. Bodt 2012:304-308 and section 5). A third division are the *Yenlak*, who have a cognate in Sherdukpen society called *Yanlo* (Dolffus and Jacquesson 2013). The Yenlak appear to represent an indigenous population stratum not adopted within the *tshan* system. They do not have *tshan* divisions and do not carry *tshan* names. A final division are the *Kakpa*, descendants of later (mostly post-1962) migrants mainly from Tawang who paid land-tax to the original inhabitants.

## 5. *The Brokpa connection*

The Central Bodish speakers who call themselves *Brokpa* constitute an important migration stream to the Gongri river area. In a written

[47] Personal communication Sange Tsering Tukshipa of Sangthi, 21 April 2013.

manuscript (Bodt 2012: Annex VIII, original on ff. 7a) the Brokpa people are described as fleeing from *Tshona* (Tib. mtsho-sna) together with Lama Jarepa and settling in the high-altitude areas of the Zela massif bordering the Gongri river valley. This Brokpa origin and migration history links the three eastern bands, now the Brokpa of *Mago* (Tib. ma-sgo), *Thingbu* (Tib. theng-po-che), and *Lungthang* (from Lunggorthang, Tib. lung-gor-thang), three villages and circles in Tawang district, to the four western bands, now the Brokpa people of *Nyukmadung* (Tib. smyug-ma-duṅ) and *Senge* (Tib. seṅ-ge) in West Kameng district, and Merak and Sakteng in Bhutan.[48] Lama Jarepa established a temple called *Nyamgateng* (Tib. ñams-dgaḥ-steṅ), the ruins of which can still be found on top of a hill west of the Chug valley, and his twin sons, *Nyima Özer* and *Dawa Özer* (Tib. ñi-ma ḥod-zer and zla-ba ḥod-zer) established the temple called *Shartang* (Tib. śar-thaṅ), the ruins of which are still located at the confluence of the Chug and Gongri rivers. The Brokpa arrival thus had a considerable religious impact on the region, contributing to the spread of Buddhism among the people of the area (see for more on this impact Bodt, forthcoming).

The Brokpa contribution to the people of the Gongri river valley has been considerable. Brokpas settled among basically every community in the region. The Komu, Merakpa, and Gonpapa tshan of Dirang and Sangthi, and the Merakpa *tshan* of Thembang all descend from Brokpa settlers. As was mentioned in section 3.4, the female blood line of the people of the Chug valley is traced to two women from Lungthang. As the Brokpa from Lungthang had used the Chug valley as seasonal migration ground, in the beginning the Duhumbi people had to pay tax to the people of Lungthang. However, after a quarrel, the people agreed not to set foot in each other's territories anymore. In the case that a Duhumbi would set foot on Lungthangpa land, the Duhumbi would have to place a saddle of gold on a white horse and send that as tax to the Lungthangpas. Similarly, if the Lungthangpa's would set foot on Duhumbi land, they would have to place a saddle of gold on a Tibetan yak and send this down to the Chug valley as tax.[49]

Another local story recounts how in the distant past, six nomadic Brokpa households stayed in the Chug valley, and six Duhumbi households stayed in Lungthang. Because the Duhumbi knew agriculture but not transhumance livestock herding, and the Brokpa were yak and sheep herders but did not know agriculture, the latter proposed to shift

[48] Other places mentioned in the same manuscript, such as *Paptra* (Tib. spab-kra), are also existing places in the highland border area between Chug, Sangthi, and Lungthang.

[49] Personal communication Tshegye of Chug, 23 December 2012.

places. Henceforth, the Brokpa would herd their livestock in the high-altitude Himalayan alpine meadows of Lungthang, and the Duhumbi would practice agriculture in the Chug valley. Whereas the Brokpa would continue to provide the butter and cheese annually demanded by the Miji raiders, the Duhumbi people would supply the grains. Agreeing thus, they exchanged location. The next time the Miji came to raid the Chug valley, they didn't find the Brokpa there. They asked the Duhumbi where the herders had gone, who answered they had moved up to their original home in the mountains. The Miji decided to go after them. When they reached the lake of Dawa Photsang Motsang on the way, the lake had frozen over and a layer of snow covered the lake. The Miji had never seen snow or ice, and made a contest: whoever could reach the opposite side of the snow-covered plain first would be their leader. Saying this, they ran across, and halfway to the other side the ice cracked and all the Miji drowned. Their spirits are still said to hunt the area. Since then, the Miji did not raid the Brokpa people of Lungthang. The Lungthang Brokpa continued to cross into the Chug valley with their livestock every winter, to escape the cold and snow in their own valley. At that time, they exchanged cheese and butter with the Duhumbi for food grains. This practice has ceased several generations ago.

The Brokpa influence on the Duhumbi language is considerable, with much of the lexicon of the higher semantic domains as well as grammatical structures having been directly borrowed from Brokpa. The Brokpa language has also influenced Khispi, and some of the main distinctions between Khispi and Duhumbi on the one hand, and Sartang and Sherdukpen on the other, can be explained through the influence of the Central Bodish Brokpa language. Although in Chug and Lish the migrants linguistically assimilated to the Kho-Bwa speakers, because of the intense linguistic contact with Tshangla and the Bodish languages, including Tawang Monket, Tibetan and Brokpa, Duhumbi and Khispi have ostensibly become the most 'Bodish' of the Kho-Bwa languages.

## 6. *Concluding thoughts*

A migration stream not further described in this article are the Tawang Monpa, who started settling in the Gongri river valley mainly after the establishment of the Tibetan administration in the area in the late seventeenth century, with a large number permanently settling after the 1962 invasion by China. Tawang Monpa speakers settled in many villages, forming *tshan* such as the Lhoupa in Thembang, and clans such as the Khrime, Wangja, and Dingla of Rupa. They also established

entirely new villages, such as Lish Gonpatse near Lish, and Laphek and Samtu in the Chug valley. Of course, after Indian Independence and the takeover of Tibet by China, many other people have migrated to the area, including Tibetan refugees and Nepalese.

The origin and migration stories of the Western Kho-Bwa groups all indicate that the people of the Gongri river valley between Khoina in the east and the Zela pass in the west once formed a Western Kho-Bwa *Sprachbund* that later became fragmentised. Two distinct initial migrant groups, one from the east, the other from the northeast of this area appear to have merged around Khoina and spread westwards from there, as well as southwest into the Tenga river valley. Later migrant groups, including Tshangla speakers from eastern Bhutan and Central Bodish speakers from the Tibetan plateau, intermixed with these original inhabitants and in many places replaced them, such as in Dirang proper and more recently in Sangthi valley. Except for the Sherdukpen in the Tenga river valley, the contemporary Western Kho-Bwa speakers are a numerical minority in the Gongri river valley. There, the Miji and Tshangla migrants socially and economically marginalised them. On top of that, the oppressive taxation imposed by the Tibetan administration from Tawang drained the local resources significantly. Only when the Indian administration progressively entered the area in the 1950s and 1960s did they curtail these practices.

One of the main distinctive cultural features between the Eastern and the Western Kho-Bwa linguistic groups is the difference in livelihoods. The Eastern Kho-Bwa groups, particularly the Puroik, continued to depend largely on the forest for their livelihoods, cultivating sago palms in forest plantations, collecting non-timber forest products, hunting, and trading sago starch, raw forest produce, and handicraft items with other groups surrounding them. Even at present, many Puroik groups practice only limited shifting cultivation and permanent agriculture and raise only limited livestock, and may spend several months a year trekking through the forest, living in permanent wood-and-bamboo house settlements for the remaining months. The small Bugun tribe, though now largely living in permanent settlements and practicing shifting cultivation, similarly continue to depend heavily on the nearby forest and often live in wood-and-bamboo houses.

On the other hand, the Western Kho-Bwa groups settled in relatively large clustered and walled or fenced villages in strategic positions on a hill spur or hillock along the river banks and largely depended on the cultivation of grains crops and transhumance rearing of cattle. Although initially depending on buckwheat, millet, and local unirrigated varieties

of rice in shifting cultivation hamlets, they later adopted wetland rice cultivation and maize and wheat. They kept cattle on barren agricultural fields near the river bed or in the subtropical evergreen forests at lower altitudes during winter, and brought this cattle to temperate deciduous forests and pastures at higher altitudes during summer.

The origin histories of the people of the Gongri valley are a rapidly disappearing intangible cultural heritage. There is a pressing need to record and publish the, often divergent, versions of these origin stories, in the vernacular language with translation in Hindi and English for both a local and an external audience. Similarly, the religious practices deserve documentation before they disappear.

Whereas this article focused only on the origin and migration stories of the people, following publications will describe the linguistic evidence (Bodt 2017) and some notes on the religious practices among the Western Kho-Bwa speakers (Bodt, forthcoming).

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