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Religious Revival and Artistic Renaissance across the Himalayas: An Introduction

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Introduction and conference report

This collection of articles is a direct outcome of the Fourth International SEECHAC Colloquium, which was organised jointly by the European Society for Studies of Central Asia and Himalayan Regions (SEECHAC) in Paris, under the presidency of Frantz Grenet, and the Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context', whose organising committee was headed by Birgit Kellner, Chair of Buddhist Studies at the University of Heidelberg.¹ The conference was held at the International Academic Forum Heidelberg in November 2015 and brought together twenty-five speakers from a broad range of national and disciplinary backgrounds. Under the title 'Religious Revivals and Artistic Renaissance in Central Asia and the Himalayan Region – Past and Present', the conference sought to address various forms of religious revivals or artistic renaissances in the Himalayas and central Asia, including northern India, northern Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Afghanistan, and the central Asian republics, from the viewpoint of a variety of disciplines and fields of study, in particular archaeology, art history, numismatics, social anthropology, and religious studies.

After an opening address by Frantz Grenet and Birgit Kellner, the first day of the conference began with four presentations on anthropological and social issues in the Himalayas and Tibet. Marion Wettstein discussed aspects of renaissance in the folk traditions of the eastern Himalayas,

1 We are grateful to Birgit Kellner, head of the conference organising committee, and Frantz Grenet, president of SEECHAC, for entrusting us with the publication of this special issue. Further, we would like to thank Beatrice Lewin Dumin for her meticulous copy-editing as well as William Sax for his assistance in preparing this publication for the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*.

focussing in particular on *sakela* dance and cultural performances as expressions of ethnic identity among the Rai. Drawing from the oeuvre of monastic guidelines (*bca' yig*), Berthe Jansen expounded on the different socio-religious strategies for revival and survival in Tibetan Buddhist monasticism. Clea Chakraverty engaged again with the eastern Himalayas, where she investigated examples of reform and revival in so-called 'indigenous' religion in Arunachal Pradesh. Jonathan Samuels, in turn, examined representations of religion and ethnicity in the Tibetan cultural borderlands, specifically among Tamang communities in Nepal. The afternoon session included another set of four papers, which were thematically split between more recent religious history in Tibet and the development of Buddhist art in the western Himalayas. With regard to the former, Joona Repo focussed on the figure of Pha bong kha bde chen snying po and his aristocratic connections in Lhasa, commonly perceived as forming a social and intellectual 'revival movement' in the first part of the twentieth century. This movement is often depicted as a reaction to an earlier period of religious and cultural revival in nineteenth-century eastern Tibet, which Markus Viehbeck discussed in his talk, using textual production as a lens through which to investigate its features. Clara Ma followed with a discussion of artistic production in the western Himalayan temple of Alchi, Ladakh, presented as an example of renaissance as regionalisation. The first day of the conference concluded with a keynote lecture by Christian Luczanits, who spoke about processes of revival in Himalayan Buddhist art through relations between Tibet, Kashmir, and Nepal.

The second day of the conference started with three contributions on Buddhist art and performance, focussing on central Asia. Ebru Zeren elaborated on Mahayana art in Turfan and, in particular, the contribution of Uyghur Buddhists to its tenth-century revival. The topic of Haiyan Hu-von Hinüber's talk was also set in central Asia and northern India, where she investigated Buddhist processions and performances through the lens of Faxian's famous travel account. Liying Kuo explored newly excavated cave paintings of the *Buddhoṣṇiṣavijayādhāraṇīsūtra* in Dunhuang and their religio-political relevance.

The second morning session shifted to cultural and religious history and historiography in both Tibet and Nepal. Through a comparison of (auto)biographical writings on the famous figure of Padmasambhava,

Lewis Doney addressed crucial changes in the historical as well as cultural outlook of Tibetans that emerged during the period of post-Mongol hegemony in the fourteenth century. In their joint talk, Daniele Cuneo and Camillo Formigatti introduced their vision of a larger project to study the political empowerment and cultural legitimisation of the Malla dynasty in Nepal, in which the study of literary classics and the production of new works, such as the popular adaptations of the story of Rama, establish an important link to the past.

Afternoon sessions were devoted to anthropological studies, ranging from Mongolia to Nepal and the eastern Himalayas of India. Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenko spoke about Buddhist purification practices in post-socialist Mongolia. With a focus on musical aspects, Galina Sychenko elaborated on the ritual practices of Hyolmo communities in present-day Nepal. Davide Torri's presentation also investigated the Hyolmo, in particular how they negotiate their cultural and religious identities between a Buddhist and non-Buddhist, shamanic heritage. Martin Gaenzle addressed the formation of a new Kiranti religion in the Sikkim Himalayas and its relations to earlier Bhakti traditions from Nepal. The day was rounded off with a second keynote lecture, delivered by Harry Falk, wherein he explored royal enthronement rites among the Kushans by comparing them to similar procedures in Commagene, focussing on the pivotal female deity Nana.

The third and last day of the conference was devoted to investigations of the anthropology and recent religious histories of the central Asian republics. Elena Paskaleva spoke about the importance of Amir Timur as a symbol of national and cultural identity in independent Uzbekistan after 1991. In her talk on the sacred geography of Kyrgyzstan, Gulnara Aitpaeva emphasised the link between religion and art in the perception of pilgrimage sites. Finally, Sophie Roche showed how Sufi women and their creative interpretations of Islamic ritual practices are countering the new wave of Islamisation in central Asia, a process in which ethnographic researchers have also acquired considerable agency. The influence of ethnography on social reality was also addressed by Susanne Martens-Finnis in her investigation of the Soviet acquisition of Bukhara and subsequent relations between the Muscovite centre and what was perceived as its Oriental periphery. In the afternoon, Nandini Bhattacharya spoke about the revival of miniature painting in

post-Soviet Tajikistan, using the work of Olim Kamalov as an example. The conference concluded with a round-table discussion addressing the general mechanics of revival, based upon individual examples from conference presentations.

As is obvious from this brief summary, the conference explored the topic of revival and renaissance through diverse examples and methodological approaches ranging from history to anthropology.² The papers presented also encompassed a wide span of time, from the first century BCE to the present, and a vast geographical area, from Mongolia to the Russian capital of Moscow. With its focus on the Himalayas, the current collection of articles thus reflects only a fraction of the geographical scope of the original conference, while fundamentally retaining the conference's interdisciplinary nature.

Revival and renaissance in the Himalayas and in Himalayan Studies

In Himalayan Studies, one immediately associates the topic of revival and renaissance with recent political history, in which processes of democratization, shifting state policies towards minorities, and associated questions of belonging among different ethnic groups have led to a so-called 'ethnic revival' (Toffin 2009: 25), particularly in Nepal and the eastern Himalayas. This political dimension has also been foregrounded in academic studies investigating these dynamics. Representative of a larger trend, one may mention Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka, and Whelpton's (1997) volume of collected essays, which is one of the first to address the relationship between the Nepalese state and its ethnicities from multiple perspectives; Shneiderman (2015), who investigates the public expression of cultural identities among Thangmi communities across Nepal and the eastern Himalayas; and Chettri (2017), who focusses on ethnic politics among Nepali groups in east Nepal, Sikkim, and Darjeeling.

Modern political developments in the Himalayas also provide the backdrop for two contributions in this special issue: Jonathan Samuels' study of cultural identities among Tamang groups in contemporary Nepal

2 A list of the full abstracts of the conference presentations as well as keynote lectures is provided at the SEECHAC website: <http://seechac.org/colloque/>, last accessed September 18, 2017.

and Martin Gaenszle's article on 'Kiranti religion', a highly syncretistic religious system that was able to unite different ethnical groups across Nepal and the eastern Himalayas in the past decades. With their focus on how ethnic revival is connected to shifts and transformations affecting the *religious* or *ritual* sphere—the influence of Buddhism among the Tamang and the multiple sources coming together in Kiranti religion—they add another dimension to contemporary Himalayan anthropology, one that has, in fact, recently gained more attention (Lecomte-Tilouine and Dollfus 2003, Lawoti and Hangen 2013, Gellner, Hausner, and Letizia (2016). As Gellner, Hausner, and Letizia (2016: 2) have argued in a collected volume that brings together several ethnographic micro-studies on different religious aspects in Nepal, 'the concepts of religion, secularism, modernity, and ethnicity are constituted and transformed in relation to each other'. The connection between a simultaneous sense of ethnic and religious revival warrants a closer look at the concept of revival itself. Within the context of Himalayan studies, it should be noted that religion (specifically Buddhism) has often been connected to concepts of revival or renaissance in both emic as well as etic perspectives. In Tibetan cultural memory (see, e.g., Schwieger 2013), the second wave of Buddhist transmission to the plateau (*phyi dar*) was conceived of as a reappearance of Buddhism after a period of decline, and Tibetan Buddhism was taken to be a re-emergence of its Indian original. Such images have also been adopted in academic representations (e.g., Davidson 2005).³ The notion of revival in the context of pre-modern Tibetan Buddhism is directly relevant to the articles by Lewis Doney and Christian Luczanits: for Doney in his effort to understand changes in the cultural outlook of Tibetans and their literary productions in the fourteenth century, and for Luczanits in scrutinising Tibetan art production and its ideological connections to India in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In juxtaposing these different interests—ethnic identities and religion in contemporary Nepal and the eastern Himalayas as well as Tibetan historiography and art production in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries—and bringing them together under the umbrella of 'revival and renaissance', this special issue bridges not only established disciplinary

3 Viehbeck *forthcoming* details the importance of Indo-Tibetan relations for Tibetan scholastic identities and makes an attempt to clarify emic and etic perspectives on these issues.

boundaries (of anthropology, art history, and textual studies), but also the over-simplified dichotomy of modern and pre-modern. It is precisely this ‘bridging’ that is one of the major contributions of this special issue—it provides an opportunity to consider the similarities as well as contextual nuances of revival processes in relation to diverse objects of investigation (art, text, identity, and cultural memory) and different historical settings. Spanning all of this, the religious dimension seems to play a pivotal role—as it did in all the revival processes scrutinised during the SEECHAC Colloquium—due to the ramifications it has within different spheres, its symbolic linkages, its connection with pervasive ritual activities (including non-overtly religious rites), and its influences over written, oral, and iconographic production. If we understand ‘revival’ as a process of meaningful production, as a way to better define or refine (identities, relations, practices, or ontologies) or even invent new modes of understanding and relating, we easily recognise ritual as an effective way to stabilise, emplace, and embody—in one word, to create—social systems. It has been argued that identity is itself a ritual (Shneiderman 2015), but the opposite is also obviously true: ritual is also creating society, and by attending community rituals people are intrinsically giving their assent to its definition, and representation (Sax 2009: 239).

While all of the articles have their point of departure in a rather loose and broad understanding of what constitutes a ‘revival’, their individual investigations point to striking structural and ideological similarities. A central underlying theme in all of the contributions is the special connection between a present and a distant past. This past figures as a source of orthodoxy—literally ‘correct opinion’ in ancient Greek—and enables a process of so-called ‘vertical referencing’ (Zoller 2001: 97), which can be observed whenever a ‘tradition’ claims connections with an established classic authority, canon, or revelation in order to establish and affirm its own legitimacy. This re-stating or re-invention of orthodoxy draws on ideological as well as de facto connections to the past in order to recover ‘the original’, but often entails acts of renovation and innovation to adapt to contemporary contexts. In their normative claims, processes of revival often involve an idea of purification—as if the passing of time inherently corrupts the original teaching, custom, belief, or practice. In this way, the immediate past becomes a spurious

time, or a time open to deviation, which stands between the ancient and the present. This two-fold dynamic—reconnecting to the distant past paired with a distancing from the immediate past—seems to be a key principle in various acts of revival. Understanding revival or revitalisation dynamics is, therefore, an effort at mapping continuities and discontinuities (and the relations between them) across history and imagination (see also Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Anderson 1983).

In the current political climate across the Himalayas, this process of revival unfolds as a reclamation of ethnic identities revolving around key aspects of an essentialist notion of culture, with religious overtones at the forefront; sometimes this process even results in violent clashes, as the current struggle for an independent hill-state of Gorkhaland vis-à-vis the plains of Bengal within the Indian context. Is a degree of violence always implicit in processes of ethnic or religious revival? If we understand ethnic movements as expressions of proto-, micro-, or ethno-nationalisms following the definition coined by Connor (1993), it seems that a certain level of tension is unavoidable, as shown, for example, by the simmering or bursting forth of confrontations between states and minorities from Kashmir to Nagaland (Baruah 2012). In Nepal, the issue of federalism itself—, which hindered the drafting of a new constitution between 2008 and 2015—can be read as the rise of micro-nationalities *against* the state and its apparatus, which were perceived as prerogatives of the hegemonic groups of the *Bahun* and *Chhetri*, the higher castes of the Hindu caste system. Against them, representatives of the *janajati adivasi* (indigenous minorities) and the *madhesi* (inhabitants of the Terai) organised themselves into various cultural organisations, political associations, or (in some cases) even armed underground outfits. To a certain extent, even the Nepalese Maoist-led rebellion (1996–2006) could be considered an aspect of this process, due to its creation of regional/ ethnic guerrilla fronts and their appeal to the dispossessed *adivasi*. In a brilliant contribution to the ethno-anthropological history of the encounters between states and minorities, Ferguson and Whitehead (1992) poignantly remark that states or empires encounter ethnic minorities (or ‘tribes’ as they were often called) twice in their histories: for the first time during the phase of expansion and for the second at the moment of collapse. This pattern also seems to be confirmed by events that characterise the

political life of post-colonial societies, the fall of the Soviet system, or the balkanization of the former Yugoslavia.

And yet violence may only be one aspect of these processes, since the same movements may pursue their aims peacefully and often show considerable potential for innovation; for example, in attempts to modernise cultural practices and alleviate aspects that are perceived, at a given moment in time, as backward and outdated—the reinterpretation of ritual offerings and the ban on animal sacrifice among various ethnic communities may be mentioned as cases in point (for details on Nepalese Hyolmos in this regard, see Torri 2016). Innovation as well as revival may be analysed as ways to cope with change and transformation, in an effort to adapt to new societal, economic, or cultural conditions. As such, they highlight and underline the intrinsic fluidity of categories like ‘traditions’, ‘rituals’, ‘customs’, and so forth, often perceived, from an emic point of view, as ‘static’, ‘unchanging’, ‘ancestral’, while actually embedded in continuous processes of revision and actualisation. The mechanisms we see at work here could also be analysed using the classic anthropological theory that explains *nativism* or ethnic revival as a reaction to acculturation (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits 1936). In the case of the Himalayan minorities, we find an assertion of ethnic identity that seeks to revive or revitalise it as a reaction to a social system that has relegated it to a lower status. The basic definition of nativism includes ‘any conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society’s members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture’ (Linton and Hallowell 1943: 230). If we combine this definition with that of revitalisation coined by Wallace, where revitalisation stands for ‘a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture’ (Wallace 1956: 265), we can come closer to an understanding of the contemporary processes within Himalayan societies that are struggling to uphold specific traits of their cultural systems, with a predominance of religious discourse. Their purpose is to negotiate an increased level of recognition and an ameliorated position (in terms of status) in the social systems in which they are embedded.

An initial problem arises, however, when talking about cultural systems as monadic structures, with crystalline borders: ethnic activists often struggle to give solidity to an essentialist, and as such

inherently fictive, notion of culture. The claim to conform to and derive (almost philologically) from the past, is paired with an effort to purify one's own tradition from *alien* elements; this process appears more as a reformulation (Thomas 1992), in which selected elements are rearranged to conform to an ideal way of life perceived as original and distinct. Yet reformulation is also reform since, as part of this process, many communities leave aside, minimise, or try to erase traits perceived as emblematic of backwardness, as in the aforementioned case of blood sacrifice (see also Michaels 2016). In the case of blood sacrifice, however, other factors are also implied, often related to the rise of an urbanised middle class, new ways of consumption in relation to material and religious goods, and the adoption of sets of values perceived as 'modern' (Gellner, Hausner, and Letizia 2016: 16–18). In other words, as Gaenzle's contribution seems to suggest, a new ethos needs a new ritual expression.

A further problem is the reconciliation between emic and etic perspectives: while the analytical focus on revival highlights transformative aspects of cultural production, it seems to directly contradict the emic perspective, that is to say, ethnicity as perceived in real life and not as analytically deconstructed. Cultural revivers and activists themselves formulate their ethnic identities in essentialist terms (as illustrated in the contribution by Samuels) that are rejected by the social scientist, but we should not forget that the *communitas* as lived, imagined, envisioned, or pursued by activists may not be the same as the one perceived by the people they claim to represent. On this particular point, we must acknowledge the existence, within a given group, of a multiplicity of voices, each with its own agency, that shape the discourse about identity.

The concrete political background of such processes, and the multiple discourses in which they manifest, are easily grasped in examples from today's Himalayan region. As the cases of art and historiography in this special issue show, similar dynamics also played out in pre-modern times, and we can safely assume that socio-political aspects were equally important in shaping them—even though these seem far less tangible from our temporal distance.

Contents of the special issue

In his article, Samuels takes into account critical aspects of the contemporary religious revival of Buddhism among the minorities of Nepal.

Drawing from his fieldwork and prolonged study of the Tamang *janajati adivasi*, he identifies at least three different sets of agents entangled in the dynamics of revival: people, activists, and academics all play a role in the ‘game’ of identity. Nepal’s contemporary political milieu calls for a sharp definition of ethnicity, and this focus on the particular largely minimises the role of broader contexts and transcultural exchanges. In the case of Nepal, as previously mentioned, the dynamics of ‘ethnic revival’ among the indigenous groups (*janajati adivasi*) began in the 1990s and today constitute one of the most evident aspects of Nepalese political and social life. Provocatively, Samuels argues that while indigenous activists postulate (and create) crystallised and ideal ethnic identities, anthropologists deconstruct those very same identities—yet both cooperate in distancing ethnic representations of the Tamang from associations with Tibet. But is it really true that ethnic activists and anthropologists are pitted against each other? After all, activists consider the academic productions regarding specific groups as evidence of their cultural uniqueness. Moreover, anthropologists, even when they criticise essentialist views, tend to do it from a group-centred perspective, thus contributing, in the end, to its reification. Regarding the issue of association with Tibetan culture, we could, perhaps, reply that the quest for ethnicity is taking place in the context of a wider political struggle inside Nepal, and also note the critical lack of ‘ethnicity’⁴ as an analytical theory in Tibetan studies (Shneiderman 2006: 12).

Lewis Doney revisits the revival of historiographic literature in the fourteenth century in which Tibetans, instigated by political developments in Tibet itself but also driven by their changing relations to India, brought forth new visions to situate themselves in the world. Through a detailed philological analysis of the Padma-vita genre, that is, biographical and autobiographical writing that is connected to the famous Indian saint Padmasambhava—in Tibetans’ cultural memory a key figure in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet—Doney addresses

4 The terminological absence of “ethnicity” as a key-category of analysis in Tibetan Studies stands out by contrast. Although the terms “ethnic Tibetan”, “ethnically Tibetan” and “Tibetan ethnicity” are used frequently in Tibetan Studies, there is very little discussion of what these terms actually signify, or of ethnicity as a relational system. Religious and regional differentiation is written about, but little attention is paid to the question of ethnic identity within the overarching category “Tibetan” (Shneiderman, 2006: 12).

the changes in historiographic writing that appeared in this special social and historical context. As he points out in his investigation of the famous and influential *Péma katang* (*Padma bka' 'thang*) and through a comparison to related works, these changes pertain to a more general renewal of interest in India, where Padmasambhava, his status as an emanation of the primordial Buddha, his travels to various Buddhist regions in south and central Asia, and the likening of his deeds to the model of the historical Buddha can be contrasted with other histories that focussed on the importance of Tibetan agents such as Emperor Tri Songtsen. Further, the detailed prophecies about difficult times under Mongol-Sakya rule are a clear reference to the immediate past, whose turbulences the text seeks to overcome by promoting Tibetan Buddhists' relations to India via the figure of Padmasambhava and by ascribing the Nyingma school's privileged access to his salvational power. It thereby adds a crucial episode to better understand the shifting dynamics of Tibetans' religious and cultural outlook via their political history.

Martin Gaenszle brings us to the eastern Himalayas, where the definition of the Kiranti (an umbrella term used to name members of the Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, and other Himalayan groups) as a community is religiously expressed through affiliation to a syncretic religion that combines elements derived from an oral, shamanic, indigenous set of beliefs and practices deriving from the Satyahangma movement of the Limbu reformer Phalgunanda Lingden (1885–1949), and from the Josmani devotional Hindu sect, which was very popular in nineteenth-century Nepal. The establishment of a unitary Kiranti religious system emerges from different strands of diverse traditions centred on the figure of the shaman, the ritual specialist known in Nepalese as *jhankri*. Despite the differences between various groups, and from shaman to shaman, a pivotal role is assigned to the knowledge of specific sets of myths and rituals collectively known as *mundhum*, which serve as the basis for the ancestral religion of the aforementioned communities. The creation of common ground shared by all entails a degree of homogenisation and formalisation, the increased diffusion of Kiranti scriptures, and a shift from purely domestic or healing rituals to collective and public displays of religious activities. This public dimension is further affirmed through the establishment of shrines and temples, a practice virtually unknown until recent times.

In his article on Buddhist art in the Himalayas, Christian Luczanits investigates art production in western and central Tibet and revisits its relationship to Buddhist art from outside the plateau, specifically from Kashmir and Nepal. Both of the latter are commonly taken to have provided normative models for Tibetan art, yet as Luczanits points out, even early examples—such as the adoption of Kashmiri art in western Tibet (from the eleventh to the thirteenth century) and Newar-derived art production in central Tibet (from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century)—exhibit a considerable amount of Tibetan adaptation and local agency. In later examples—Luczanits focusses on the fifteenth-century Red Temple of Tholing and paintings at Gongkar Chödé Monastery as well as the seventeenth-century Jonang Püntsoḳling Monastery and works by the 10th Karmapa—references to Kashmir and Newar art reappear, although in different terms. While close connections between different areas were often the result of direct exchange processes up to the fifteenth century, the later examples show a conscious and selective attempt to reconnect to a more distant past, where Kashmiri and Newari aesthetics stand for a broader, idealised Indian tradition, but also served to meet the demands of connoisseurship in Tibet and distinguish new art from local productions of the immediate past.

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Banishment of the B-word: interpreting ethnic and religious revival among the Tamang people of Nepal

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Since 1990, an ethnic revival (Toffin 209: 25) in Nepal has seen members of *janajāti* (indigenous nationalities) campaign for greater recognition and rights for their respective groups. Many anthropologists are strongly opposed to the way that activists project the identities of these groups as historical continuities. Questions about the antiquity and authenticity of their cultural and religious traditions also abound.

The focus of this study are the Tamang, one of Nepal's largest ethnic minorities. Recent changes in Tamang religious practices are considered within the context of the contemporaneous ethnic revival. After outlining the historical background of the current situation, in which some activists and anthropologists find themselves pitted against one another, this study argues that members of both groups are strangely united in their wish to distance representations of Tamang identity and religious affiliation from associations with Tibet. Hence, avoidance of the b-word: understood either as *bod*, the Tibetan term for Tibet, or as *bhoṭe*, the Nepali racial epithet derived from it. At issue here, for activist and academic alike, is the assertion of ethnic and cultural autonomy. But both sides' representations of the Tamang are weakened by this minimalisation of the b-dimension. In particular, the contention of this study is that the limitations they both impose make it impossible to fully understand Tamang perceptions of their own cultural heritage or the background and nature of contemporary changes occurring within their religious traditions.

1 I composed this article and conducted some of the research that led to it when I was a member of the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context - The Dynamics of Transculturality", University of Heidelberg. I wish to thank the organisers of the SEECHAC conference, at which the paper that gave rise to this article was presented, especially Prof. Birgit Kellner. I also express my gratitude to the editors of this featured edition of EBHR, Markus Viehbeck and Davide Torri, who read earlier versions of this article. I am also indebted to the journal's chief editor, Prof. William Sax, for his helpful suggestions.

Introduction: resurgence and rediscovery²

Following the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990, there has been something of an ethnic revival (Toffin 209: 25). A movement, spearheaded by individual activists and cultural organisations, has endeavoured to improve the lot of indigenous nationalities (*janajāti*): ethnic minorities, such as the Tamang (once widely designated *bhoṭe*), who are generally acknowledged to have suffered centuries of discrimination.³ Those in the Janajati Movement encourage solidarity arising from pan-ethnicity, while simultaneously arguing that each group has its own separate culture and traditions. Reinforced by cultural gatherings, publications, and media broadcasts, the impression given is of groups in the process of rediscovering their respective heritages. The movement's ideology and aims have been embraced by Nepalese officialdom, which largely accepts the manner in which it treats ethnic categories and cultural distinctions as self-evident realities.

Yet the contrast with understandings of ethnicity found in the academic community – particularly among anthropologists outside Nepal – could hardly be greater. Members of this community have long expressed dissatisfaction with the 'limited set of ethnic contrasts' (Levine 1987: 71) employed by an earlier generation of scholars to divide the Nepalese population, which included simple binaries such as caste/non-caste and Hindu/Buddhist, and have increasingly sought to highlight the fluidity and constructed nature of ethnicity. Today's scholars have greeted the way that the movement deals with ethnicity and culture with a combination of fascination and disquiet. The academic consensus has been to understand ethnic divisions in Nepal as evolving out of interactions between minority populations and the state. Featuring prominently in anthropological discussions, the Tamang are regularly presented as a

2 This study explores the background and ramifications of associations with Tibet for groups such as the Tamang in terms of the identity politics within contemporary Nepal. It also considers the issue of Tamang religious affiliation, something relevant both to political and academic discourse. Various scholarly works (mentioned below) have examined Tamang religious rituals, as well as their links with Tibetan traditions. Neither these nor their findings are discussed at length here, and only when they have some direct bearing on current discourse of a political nature are they cited.

3 In returning to the issue of the b-term(s), this study builds on Charles Ramble's important 1996 work, 'Tibetan pride of place: or why Nepal's Bhotiya are not an ethnic group'.

group that personifies the unreliable and shifting boundaries of ethnic categorisation. This study argues that the disproportionate attention given to the minority-state dialectic has meant that other crucial factors shaping the identities and cultures of ethnic groups (and the assertions that surround them) have been dealt with in an unsatisfactory manner. In the case of the Tamang, studies invariably refer to close religious and cultural affinities with Tibetans, but treat these as peripheral to investigations of Tamang ethnicity and culture. They also represent Tamang-Tibetan relations as positive, giving no explanation as to why, for instance, I should have encountered Tamangs who denied the existence of cultural links, or even occasional cases of those who seemed to display some degree of anti-Tibetan sentiment. This study attempts to address the complex and, I would assert, conflicted relations that Tamangs enjoy with Tibetans and Tibetan traditions. It also examines the reasons why this topic has been not so much overlooked as excluded from previous works. It will demonstrate how the relations are both relevant to but also take us beyond the limits of the minority-state framework. First, it is necessary to explain the historical background of current discussions about ethnicity.

Enter the state

The formation of the Nepalese state effectively began in 1769, when the military campaign of Prithivi Narayan Shah (the ruler of the small Hindu state of Gorkha) resulted in the seizure of the Kathmandu Valley and eventually the unification of the territories that today form Nepal. Prior to this, large swathes of land formed a patchwork of tribal territories (which also included some smaller Hindu kingdoms) that were organised as chiefdoms and inhabited by 'fairly culturally and linguistically homogenised population groups' (Toffin 2009: 28), who seem to have enjoyed relative autonomy. This new forced unification swept away the old order and brought about a vast migration of Parbatiya Hindus from west to east, into the tribal territories. The tribal loss of control over these regions was followed by an 'enduring process of Hinduisation' (*ibid.*). Caste-based groups that spoke Nepali settled and were afforded preferential status in areas where Tibeto-Burman-speaking peoples, living in societies that had owed 'very little to Indic culture' (*ibid.*), had previously predominated. An importation of caste values

was accompanied by the new rulers redefining pre-existing populations in terms of caste, thereby determining their social status in the new state. According to this system, the traditionally Tibeto-Burman-speaking tribal groups were consigned – like those of the impure castes and the outcastes – to a lower social status than those of high caste. The discriminatory, caste-based divisions were enshrined in the General Law Code (*Mulukī Ain*) of 1854, which buttressed them with prescriptions relating to commensality and social contacts.⁴ Furthermore, these divisions were used to justify social, economic, and political discrimination, the legacy of which the Janajati Movement strives to dismantle.

While the place of the high castes (*Bāhun* and *Kṣetrī*) at the top of the socio-political hierarchy was cemented, relative status below that was to some degree negotiable. Some tribal groups succeeded in raising their social standing. This they did by employing a mixture of strategies, including hypergamy, serving as soldiers for high-caste rulers (Toffin 2009: 26), and abandoning practices offensive to high-caste sensibilities (such as eating beef). Other groups, including the Tamang, appear to have been less willing to compromise, and along with all those who were perceived to have had some association with Tibet, were collectively dubbed *bhoṭe* (see below), and originally classified as *māsinyā matwālī* ‘enslaveable alcohol-drinkers’ (Höfer 1979: 45).

The transformed climate: restitution

1990 marked a watershed year in the development of the Janajati Movement: the year in which cooperation between different cultural associations established a united front.⁵ An umbrella organisation called the Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN) was founded (Toffin 2009: 29), and the new constitution of Nepal put forward a ‘conceptual design’ for ‘preserving identities’ (Jha 2004: 5–6) and removing the economic and social inequalities suffered by indigenous groups. In accordance with this, the government set up a task force called the Foundation for the Upliftment of Nationalities, and during the Civil War (1996–2006)

4 These are explored in Höfer’s seminal 1979 study of the code.

5 The restoration of democracy in 1990 followed thirty years of a partyless political system that had been organised around panchayat (councils). The current influence of the Janajati Movement owes a good deal to the prominence of its members who campaigned for the restoration.

official attempts were made to bring the *janajāti* into the ‘national mainstream’ (*ibid.*: 10). Based upon the recommendations of the task force, which had created a new way of defining ethnic minorities in its 1996 report, the government officially recognised a total of fifty-nine distinct ethnicities in 2002 (*ibid.*: 10), including the Tamang. Recognition has emboldened sections of the Tamang community, inspiring greater political engagement and the foundation of political parties such as the Tamsaling Nepal Rastriya Dal. The *janajāti* categorisation in Nepal resembles that of the Scheduled Tribes in India. On a national level, however, the minority issue potentially has greater implications in Nepal, both because the category encompasses a far greater proportion of the total population – 37% as opposed to 8% for India’s scheduled tribes (Toffin 2009: 27) – and because of the growing calls from activists for regional autonomy within the areas they identify as ancestral homelands. In the case of the Tamang, the name for their proposed homeland is *Tamsaling*.

The initial definition of a *janajāti*, as first set out in the 1996 report, was amended in 2003 to encompass a set of characteristics (reproduced in Jha [2004: 7]) that defines a *janajāti* as a group with:

- ‘A distinct collective identity;
- Own language, religion, tradition, culture, and civilization; Own traditional egalitarian social structure;
- Traditional homeland or geographical area; Written or oral history;
- Having “We” feeling;
- Has had no decisive role in the politics and government of modern Nepal;
- Who are indigenous or native peoples of Nepal; and, Who declares itself as Janajati’.

A discourse designed to redress historical injustices requires some degree of clarity in the concept of victim communities, as well as some degree of collaboration between the two sides in the concept’s production. That this particular checklist approach was the one alighted on and accepted in Nepalese political and intellectual circles must be seen as a major victory for the Janajati Movement.⁶ The premise upon

6 The list created by NEFEN in 1994 (reproduced in Gellner 1996: 21–22) is an obvious

which this form of definition rests, that is to say, the degree of clarity implied with regard to ethnic, cultural, and geographical boundaries, seems to go largely unquestioned by those involved in the process of preserving identities. In addition, there does not appear to be any obvious appreciation of the generative potential of such definitions. For observers outside the restorative bubble, it might seem at least likely that such a checklist could encourage or even incentivise those wishing to further distinguish their respective communities (from the mainstream and/or one another) to exaggerate group homogeneity and fabricate notions of standardised culture. It could also put pressure on those staking a claim to ethnic distinctiveness to demonstrate that the language, religion, tradition, culture, and civilisation of their community is *their own*.

Academic reactions

Non-Nepali scholars have responded to this turn of direction in debates on ethnicity with a mixture of incredulity, fascination, and in some cases, alarm. Generally speaking, the anthropological approach now favoured to ethnicity is one that highlights the ‘fluidity of ethnic boundaries, their construction over time, [and] the hybridity of various cultures throughout the world’ (Toffin 2009: 30). Some have even remarked upon a ‘bitter irony’ (Gellner 1997: 22) that just as academics outside Nepal were discarding as ‘hopelessly flawed’ (*ibid.*) the reliance upon simple binaries and definitions as a valid way of analysing Nepalese society, Nepali activists and intellectuals were enthusiastically adopting them. Shneiderman’s recent ethnography of the Thami people – where she sets out to ‘evaluate what ethnicity signifies for those who claim it’ in order to explain ‘how such forms of consciousness are produced’ (2015: 6) – epitomises how for many non-Nepali scholars the focus has largely shifted to the topic of ethnicity itself. That is to say, in line with the approach set out by Barth (1969: 1-38), these scholars seek to understand what ethnic identity means for the individuals and communities in question, as well as shine light upon the processes by which ethnic identities are formed. Sh-

precursor to this one, and illustrates the extent to which the approach advocated by activists has been accepted by officialdom.

neiderman's work also underlines the yawning chasm that separates non-Nepali academics and their activist subjects.⁷

For these academics, the various interlocutors involved in the national debate on *janajātis* are guilty of propagating essentialist views of ethnic categories and culture. The majority of these academics, while keen to observe the process, not only meticulously avoid involving themselves in what they believe is the production of identity, but would agree with sentiments expressed by Gellner (1996: 22–23), who feels that it is part of their mission to actively counter those views.

Academic objections to the essentialism noted here are not simply intellectual: they also have a moral dimension. Kuper's *Return of the native* (2003) outlines what he sees as a threatening aspect within the international indigenous-peoples' movement, vitalised by the United Nations' launch of A Decade of Indigenous Peoples (1995–2004). He links the movement's ideology with outmoded notions of primitive society and 'essentialist ideologies of culture and identity' (*ibid.*: 395), and more alarmingly, he aligns certain of the movement's propositions with those of extreme right-wing groups in Europe (*ibid.*: 390). It is to ward off the 'dangerous political consequences' (*ibid.*: 395) that anthropologists, he suggests, have some responsibility to challenge the popular premises upon which the movement's ideology is built. Voicing similar concerns with respect to the Janajati Movement, Toffin says its ideology is based on 'obsolete essentialist conceptions' (2009: 30) and even, more disturbingly, 'driven, fundamentally, by anti-Hinduism and anti-Brahmanism' (*ibid.*: 33). For some, the demands for tribal homelands obviously raise the spectre of separatist movements and further social strife.

The Tamang as a special case

While the renewed sense among academics of the need to oppose essentialist views is a reaction to the perceived growing menace of politicised ethnicity, it builds upon a consensus about how to approach ethnic categories in Nepal, which is itself a reaction against earlier

7 Working on the principle that any publicity is good publicity for their cause, activist-subjects generally welcome the prospect of scholarly attention, but seem to remain oblivious to the scepticism with which their views and actions are generally regarded and reported.

scholarship. Many have felt the need to counter the tendency of an earlier generation of ethnographers, who took “contemporary named groups and teleologically reconstruct cultures backwards in time to presumed original (unsullied) forms’ (Holmberg 1996: 13). In other words, they did not just essentialise peoples and cultures, but viewed ethnic groups as ‘unchanging continuities’ (*ibid.*: 12) traceable to an idealised tribal past. Contemporary ethnographers are, by contrast, skeptical about the historical integrity of certain ethnic groups, and consider many of them to be ‘relatively new categories, unknown until recent centuries’ (*ibid.*:13).

The prominent role that the Tamang play in these discussions is partly explained by the appearance of a work entitled *Tamba Kaiten*, which reportedly first appeared in 1957 (Macdonald 1984: 143). This short text, composed by Santabīr Lāmā, a Tamang resident of Darjeeling (and formerly the governor of Ilam district in Nepal), purports to describe the ‘genealogy, habits, customs and songs of the Tamang’ (*ibid.*: 129). As such, it seems to be the first published attempt by a member of one of the ethnic minorities (certainly of the Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups) to self-consciously represent it as a distinct population with its own culture. Macdonald first described the text in 1965, and then returned to it in 1989. In the intervening decades, anthropological understandings of ethnicity, culture, and their representation underwent major changes. Western academia’s new deconstructionist approach to ethnicity would also be reflected in Macdonald’s writing, and by the time of his 1989 discussion of the Tamang, he was far more skeptical about the idea that they are a single people with a shared culture.⁸

The Tamang have also been brought into the spotlight by anthropologists seeking to demolish the idea of ‘homogenous tribal identities’ (Macdonald 1989: 171–72). The Tamang are a large minority,

8 The *Tamba Kaiten* remains in print: the simplicity of its language (primarily Nepali) and style has contributed to its continued popularity among sections of the Tamang community. No little pride is attached to the existence of this work, and in conversations I have had with Tamangs about their culture, it has regularly been cited as a primary source of reference (see also Macdonald 1989: 175). It has undoubtedly shaped Tamang notions of identity and helped foster the belief that the Tamangs have (or at least until recently had) a homogenous culture. Whether its descriptions constitute an attempt to essentialise culture would be a more debatable matter.

numbering over 1.5 million,⁹ and they are widely distributed.¹⁰ A greater degree of variation in dialect and cultural traditions than among more geographically concentrated groups would seem inevitable. Instead of interpreting these as regional variations, anthropologists such as Levine (1987: 73) have cited them as *prima facie* evidence that the Tamang do not constitute a single group. Attention has also been drawn to various cases where certain communities have either adopted or rejected the designation Tamang.

Similarly, the Tamang have been a favourite subject of academic discussions about the historical identity of current ethnic groups. Much is made of a 1932 official proclamation, ruling that a portion of those hitherto designated simply as *Lāmā* or *Bhoṭe* should thenceforth be known as Tamang (Holmberg 1996: 11). Höfer concluded that prior to the decree, ‘the ancestors of the present *Tāmāng* had a minimal or nascent identity’ (1979: 148). Suggesting that this was insufficient, Macdonald declared that: ‘Tamang identity insofar as it can be said to exist is a Nepalese administrative invention and a concept formulated by non-Nepalese researchers to facilitate written communication between themselves’ (1989: 176). He also expressed ‘very serious doubts about the unity of Tamang culture, particularly in ancient times’ (*ibid.*: 171). For Holmberg, Tamang culture ‘was as much created as undermined in the genesis of contemporary Nepal’ (1996: 12). These scholars, therefore, lay great emphasis on the impossibility of understanding ethnic categories outside of the politico-historical framework of the Nepalese state; Tamang ethnic identity is presented as a phenomenon created through interaction with the state. As such, it is traceable only as far back as the eighteenth century. The impression of the Tamang within academic research and writing – one pressed home with insistent regularity (perhaps most forcefully by Levine 1987: 73) – is of a hybrid group, lacking homogeneity or clearly-defined borders, with a contrived identity.

9 More precisely, based on the 2011 census figures, 1,539,830, within a total population of 26,494,504. The Tamang are the third largest ethnic (*janajāti*) group, and the fifth largest ‘ethnic/caste’ group in Nepal. Tamang speakers also form the fifth largest language-speaking group.

10 The majority of Tamangs inhabit the middle hills area (distinguished from the lowland Terai and the highland Himalayan regions).

The forthrightness with which these scholars express themselves on these occasions should probably be viewed in the context of their mission to counter essentialist views and projections of ancient survivals. The anti-essentialist paradigm employed in anthropology with regard to ethnicity was established by Barth's seminal edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). However, as is evident in the various contributions to that volume, the exploration of a particular ethnic group within the state has not been considered incompatible with a conception of a precursor group (in this case, tribal forebears) in a pre-state era. In the case of the Tamang, so much of the discussion on identity and culture is premised on creation of the ethnonym that it seems to verge on the denial of a pre-state history for the group. Yet contrast this with current understandings of a group such as the Sherpa of Khumbu: many, including Ortner (1978: 18-19) and Macdonald (1984: 167), seem entirely willing to accept that they migrated from Tibet in the fifteenth century. The sources for this conclusion are indigenous (primarily genealogies and clan-histories), which do not seem to significantly differ in terms of content and reliability from those of the Tamang (indeed in some cases they are almost identical). The name Sherpa is no better attested in historical documents than Tamang, and as with the latter, there are well-documented cases of particular communities opting to adopt or abandon the ethnonym. It is difficult to see how the sources available warrant such divergent views on these two groups.

The autonomy of Tamang religion

What then of Tamang religion? Has an understanding of it been set within a similar framework? A substantial body of academic work pertaining to Tamang religious traditions exists. The studies of Höfer (1981, 1994, 1997), Holmberg (1996, 2011), and Steinmann (1987, 2001) all warrant mention, particularly Höfer's exhaustive analyses of ritual and oral recitations. These works illustrate the deep relationship between Tamang and Tibetan traditions, a subject which (as we briefly see below) has been vigorously debated by some of the scholars involved. The content of such traditions and what conclusions can be drawn from them must be explored elsewhere.¹¹ Here we consider

11 The connections between Tamang and Tibetan ritual and oral traditions and what

only that aspect of the academic discourse on religion that has direct relevance to contemporary identity politics and often stokes the most controversy and passion, the topic of religious affiliation. According to the census of 2001, the overwhelming majority of Tamangs identify themselves as Buddhist, and as numerous aspects of Tamang religious practice are patently of Tibetan origin, outside observers commonly characterise this religion as a form of Tibetan Buddhism. However, both Tamang activists and non-Nepali academics have voiced objections to this characterisation. Holmberg's studies published in 1989 (reprinted in 1996) and 2011 are the only significant works to grapple with issues of classification.¹² He categorises Tamang religious practices as a form of 'amonastic' and 'lamaic' Buddhism (1996: 175-76). He proposes that Buddhism takes a unique form in any given society and is determined by a particular set of socio-cultural conditions. In this case, he states that Buddhism 'took shape historically in a clan-based, agrarian society enclosed in the state of Nepal' (2011: 179). Stressing that it has developed in 'isolation from Tibet' (1996: 176), Holmberg contends that the most apt description is 'Tamang Buddhism'.

The argument for viewing Tamang religious traditions as autonomous – which partly stems from the belief that the primary goal of researching these traditions should be to understand what they mean to the community involved – must also be seen as a declaration that this is *not* Tibetan Buddhism. Holmberg suggests that much of the anthropology of Buddhism has been 'framed within the problem of the relative consistency between local Buddhist practices and high textual or monastic renditions of Buddhism' (2011: 179). Noting the tension between Buddhism as local iteration and high religion, his assertion that Tamang Buddhism represents an independent religion seems motivated by the desire to ensure that analysis does not descend into a discussion about the authenticity of Tamang traditions as viewed from standards of Tibetan high religion.

inferences about historical relations can be made from these connections were central areas that I investigated for my doctoral thesis. My findings, as well as an evaluation of earlier scholarship, will form the basis of a separate publication.

12 Holmberg's work centred on western Tamang communities. My own research was conducted several decades later, mainly on Tamangs in and around the Kathmandu Valley.

This hints at a particular problem with interpreting Tibetan Buddhism and its broader place in the Himalayan region. An emphasis on scripturalist approaches and an over-reliance upon literary sources (due partly to the absence of anthropological fieldwork caused by limited access to Tibet) has meant that descriptions of Tibetan Buddhism are still disproportionately influenced by textual and monastic visions of religion. While some anthropologists understandably wish to distance the traditions they research from this vision of religion, they may themselves unwittingly fall into the same trap of equating Tibetan Buddhism with high religion. An over-reliance upon a textbook version of Tibetan religion is at least partly responsible for the impression that Tamang traditions differ so significantly from Tibetan ones. However, there would also seem to be some justification for Holmberg's concerns. Skorupski, for instance, objected to Höfer's discussion of Tamang religious rituals, contending that without reference to their Tibetan counterparts 'it is impossible to understand, translate meaningfully or analyse the Tamang rituals' (1982: 205f). Whether or not this particular utterance amounts to a pronouncement that, 'as Tamang traditions derive from Tibet, for *authoritative* analysis and evaluation of those traditions, one must turn to Tibetan religion (and experts in that area)', such attitudes are not completely alien to specialists of Tibetan religion.¹³ It would be naive to think that the perceived need to resist imposition from Tibetological quarters was not a factor in assertions that Tamang practices form part of an autonomous religion.

Academic approaches to Tamang religion have therefore been affected by a number of quite reasonable concerns and considerations, including: the wish to distinguish Tamang traditions from the institutionalised, monastic Buddhism that is so readily associated with Tibet; the desire to understand what the traditions mean to the Tamang community, embedded within a socio-cultural and political situation unique to Nepal (which is seen as unrelated to the situation in Tibet); and the aspiration

13 Similar tensions surrounding the role and authority of Tibetan high religion have also surfaced in relation to the interpretation of Sherpa religious traditions. See for example Ortner's response (1993: 726) to Allen's review of her *High Religion: A cultural and political history of Sherpa Buddhism*. They are also detectable in the tetchy exchange between Steinmann and Höfer about the interpretation of Tamang oral recitations, related to Steinmann's review of Höfer's 1994 study (my thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for reminding me of this interaction).

to understand these traditions in their own terms, and protect their interpretation from the not infrequent overbearing attitudes emanating from those specialising in Tibet. All of these have manifested in efforts to dissociate Tamang traditions from those of Tibet. According to this position, the religious traditions of the Tamang are their own and are inextricably linked with their culture and ethnic identity; hence, Holmberg's portrayal of Tamang religion as the expression of an insular society 'enclosed in the state of Nepal' (Holmberg 2011: 179).

The notion of enclosure is one that supports Holmberg's argument regarding the independence of Tamang Buddhism, but for me, is one that he over-emphasises. It ignores a far more complex historical landscape of relations that exist outside, or run parallel to, the confines of state, in which Tibet (or Tibetans) must be recognised as a third player. Also (as discussed below), in terms of understanding certain aspects of the contemporary situation the notion seems inadequate.

However, to address another point, the analysis of Tamang religion, particularly with regard to the question of Buddhism, requires that we distinguish between two domains: the internal – that confined to members of the Tamang community – and the public – that of representation to those outside it. Outsiders attempting to engage Tamang subjects in conversation about their Buddhist traditions will invariably be met by the response, 'Go and ask the lamas!' Unequal distribution of knowledge and varying levels of commitment to religious practice within a population are predictable, as is perhaps some culture of deference. But this response indicates more than a simple ceding of authority to religious specialists. In sharp contrast to the Tibetan situation, the concepts of religious affiliation or belonging to a religious denomination seem foreign to traditional Tamang thinking. There are separate (although occasionally intersecting) ritual spheres that are supervised by specialists, such as the lamas (primarily responsible for funerary practices) and *bombos* (mainly engaged in traditional shamanic healing).¹⁴ Traditionally, lamas and *bombos* seem not to have been perceived, either by themselves or their communities, as representatives of organised religions. They would be consulted by

14 There are various other Tamang ritual performers, including those known as *tamba*, *lambu*, and *laptaba*. But none enjoy the universality (nor perhaps the prominence) of the lama and *bombo*.

individuals, as required, based on their functional role. Thus, in terms of traditional thinking, while the aforementioned inquiry about Buddhist practice has little meaning for most Tamang subjects, questions such as, ‘What does a lama do?’ make perfect sense, and are usually responded to enthusiastically.

The Tamang language has no terms for Buddhism, Buddhist, or indeed religion. Hence, a self-identification as Buddhist belongs entirely to the public domain, and arises only in the interface between Tamangs and outsiders, be they census-gatherers, foreign academics, or Tibetans. It is one that requires the adoption of foreign terms and categorisations.

This form of self-identification cannot be understood as the profession of religious faith in any simple sense. Instead, it seems to represent a shorthand expression of dedication to a particular vision of social order, supported by ritual spheres, in which lama figures (rather than a Buddhist religion) hold a prominent, but not entirely dominant, position. The sense that Tibet occupies *some* place in this vision is widespread, but the understanding of exactly how, already varied and uneven, is constrained (as described below) by socio-political factors. Hence, this seems less an unambiguous assertion of belonging to the Tibetan cultural sphere or a profession of religious faith than it is about the Tamang aligning themselves with an order outside of the Hindu-dominated vision of a state – it is a way of defining their identity in contradistinction to the state order.¹⁵

Tamangs self-identifying as Buddhist is nothing new, and it seems reasonable to infer that the distinction between the internal and public domains goes back at least as far as the era of the state. It is difficult to see how the question of whether to categorise Tamang religious practices as an independent form of Buddhism can be fully addressed without recognition of this divide.

The ethnic revival has strengthened the sense that the Tamangs need to better articulate their distinctiveness in religious terms, as well as account for the Tibetan-origin elements in their traditions. Tamang claims to be Buddhist invariably come back to, and in most cases rest

15 For a related discussion on how another ethnic group in Nepal reduce distinctions between populations to a simple set of contrastive ethnonym-based divisions and religious categorisations (including the Hindu-Buddhist dichotomy), see Nawa Katsuwa’s article on the Byansi (2000).

almost solely upon, the presence and prominence of the lamas in their society. The questionable assumptions that these lamas are comparable in their role to similarly-named individuals in Tibetan societies, and that their presence is evidence of an organised religion called Buddhism – assumptions that were once limited to outside observers – are, I would suggest, now gaining ground among the Tamang themselves. Questions are increasingly *resolved* through reference to a Buddhist identity. It might be said that the self-identification as Buddhist, which was once limited to the public domain, is increasingly being used in a self-conscious manner, to pose questions pertaining to the internal domain.

Tamang religious revival: the unacknowledged Tibetan role

‘Tamang Buddhism’ is, according to Holmberg, ‘undergoing significant reformation’ (2011: 179). He refers primarily to the appearance of a new breed of monastic lama, challenging the traditional model of the non-celibate, beer-consuming, ritual performer. This trend has correspondences with the growth in popularity of monastic Buddhism among groups in areas bordering Tibet, discussed by Ramble (1996: 408-11). But the trend among the Tamang is more recent. Unlike those border-inhabitants, who are classified as ‘Himalayan Janajati’ (Jha 2004: 8), the Tamang are ‘Hill Janajati’. Notwithstanding some exceptions, those in the former category are geographically, linguistically, and culturally closer to Tibet. Hill-dwelling groups, such as the Tamang, are more distant, and are likely to have more regular encounters with mainstream (Hindu) culture. Ramble’s description also links the rise in monasticism to the Himalayan groups embracing Tibetan-ness. This phenomenon is not considered in the aforesaid studies on Tamang religion.

The major (if not decisive) role that Tibetans have played in the recent shift in Tamang traditions can be described as follows: the influx of refugees into Nepal following the Chinese communist annexation of Tibet in 1959 strengthened the presence of Tibetans, particularly in the main Buddhist sites of pilgrimage in the Kathmandu Valley, bringing with it more sustained contact and interaction with local Tamangs.¹⁶ Various complicated land deals, impossible without the assistance

16 The influence of Buddhist monasticism on the Tamang is not limited to Tibetan traditions. Going back several decades, some Tamangs have become monks in Theravāda traditions, but these influences are minor in comparison to those from Tibet.

of sympathetic locals, allowed Tibetans to establish a number of monasteries, which despite shifts in population have generally retained a predominantly Tibetan character. During the 1980s and 1990s, the dwindling generation of older Tibetan monks was replenished by a healthy flow of newcomers from Tibet. In subsequent decades, the number of inductees from Tibet declined, while at the same time attitudes towards monkhood were undergoing change: pressures to make a lifelong commitment to monkhood eased, and increasingly large numbers of inductees enjoyed only a brief flirtation with monastic life. The shortage of new monks was seen to threaten the viability of the monasteries; hence, members of ethnic minorities, especially those with strong Tibetan Buddhist traditions, have found it successively easier to gain places within these institutions, where previous unofficial policy had been to maintain a Tibetan majority. Residence in a monastery represents an attractive option for many Tamang youths, particularly those from more remote communities with limited educational and economic opportunities. It boosts personal status, offers greater access to learning, and even serves as a conduit for those transitioning to a more metropolitan existence.

In recent decades, the Tamangs' new-found relationship with monastic Buddhism has developed, crossing the geographical borders of Nepal and established patterns of affiliation. For centuries, traditional Tamang lamas have maintained the closest affinities with the Tibetan Nyingma (*Rnying ma*) school of Buddhism. But today, it is not uncommon to find Tamang youths studying in Tibetan monastic institutions of other schools, including a significant number in the main centres of monastic learning of the Geluk (*Dge lugs*)—which were re-established in Tibetan refugee communities in southern India – the most monastically and scholastically-inclined of the Tibetan religious schools and the antithesis of Tamang village traditions. The impact of this new relationship stretches beyond the monasteries. For many Tamangs, the monastic experience lasts only a few years during adolescence, after which they may return to their communities, further facilitating dissemination of the various views and attitudes internalised during residence in the Tibeto-centric religious environment. These views and attitudes are often at variance with those prevalent in traditional communities, introducing the potential for certain tensions, as have been reported in other Himalayan

communities where monastic Buddhism encroaches upon village-based traditions (Balikci 2008). The resulting tensions cannot realistically be portrayed as wholly religious in nature. The acculturation that occurs in the monastic environment involves not only the internalisation of high-minded religious values and monastically-inspired institutional preferences, but also biases, prejudices, and cultural stereotyping that emanates from central Tibetan society. These include suspicions and prejudices directed against peripheral populations. Hence, engagement with monastic institutions has opened up a new channel for the expression of opinions critical of traditional practices. Tamangs seem progressively exposed, and sensitive to, charges that their religious practices represent a watered-down or corrupt version of Tibetan ones. This results in not a little defensiveness on the part of traditional practitioners, whose rituals prominently feature alcohol, and in the case of *bombos* and others, animal sacrifice (against which monastic Buddhism has waged a long campaign).¹⁷ In some quarters, this has prompted growing reflectiveness and some erosion of confidence in the traditions' efficacy.

Tamang society is accustomed to criticism of its traditional practices, and has clung stubbornly to them in the face of censure from the Hindu mainstream. If there is currently greater receptivity to criticism, coming from the Tibetan mainstream and channelled through religious institutions, this is undoubtedly because it is accompanied by a positive message: the possibility of inclusion. As Campbell argues (1996: 205–35), the Tamang have long nursed the sense of being caught in a no-man's land between Nepalese and Tibetan polities. Moving closer to the Tibetan mainstream version of religion, through greater involvement with the solid institutions of monastic Buddhism, allows further integration into a cultural sphere that is decidedly distinct from that of mainstream Hinduism. Many Tibetans, especially in the monastic community, see the advantages of strengthened ties and are particularly keen to cultivate, in those Tamangs who are amenable, the belief that they belong to the broader Tibetan cultural world: a belief encouraged by the invocation of legends, such as that according to which Tamangs are descended

17 For a recent study on the debate about animal sacrifice among another of Nepal's ethnic groups, the Hyolmo, see Torri (2016).

from the troops of the seventh-century Tibetan ruler, Songtsen gampo (Srong btsan sgam po). As with Tamangs adopting Tibetan dress and habits, such legends play an important role in breaking down a sense of cultural otherness; and reference to them and assertions of their veracity are markedly amplified in Tamangs who enjoy closer relations with Tibetans—including monastics, those working around Buddhist pilgrimage sites (such as shopkeepers and restaurant staff), and those with Tibetan spouses (marriages between Tamang women and Tibetan men being far from rare).¹⁸

For Tamangs wishing to gain greater acceptance among Tibetans, aligning themselves closer to the Tibetan Buddhist mainstream seems to be the most obvious route. And there is little that parochial Tamang practitioners can offer to counter the Tibetan religious juggernaut and the inroads it is making. A gradual acceptance of monasticism is symptomatic of a more general Tamang shift towards the Tibetan mainstream. However, changes in attitudes and behaviour are never presented as a form of conversion. If traditional Tamang practices diverge from those of the mainstream in a cultural world to which many seem increasingly prepared to believe their people have always belonged, they must, at some point, have strayed from what are essentially their own traditions. Thus, it is usually implied that what is occurring is a re-engagement with practices that have lapsed. This rhetoric of re-engagement with religious traditions is employed by Tibetan monastics as well as Tamang activists of the Janajati Movement.

The curse of the *Bhoṭe* (*Bhoṭiyā*)

Fed by the sense of alienation from and grievance against the Hindu mainstream, the Tamang community's deeper engagement with Tibetan religious traditions, made possible by the influx of refugees, has undeniably pushed them further into the Tibetan cultural sphere. It is rare, however, to hear open acknowledgement of this fact, either from the cultural associations, whose membership draws significantly from po-

18 The most indignant response I have so far received when expressing reservations about the legend was from a female Tamang shopkeeper I interviewed in 2016. The fact that she is married to a Tibetan and involved in a trade that relies heavily upon Tibetan monastic custom was perhaps not coincidental.

litically-savvy urbanites, or from residents in village communities. *Janajāti* rights are largely predicated upon the notion that groups such as the Tamang have *their own* identities and cultures. Also, while the term *janajāti* is commonly translated as indigenous or nationality, *ādivāsī*, the other popular designation for these groups, suggests autochthonous or original dwellers (Toffin 2009: 34). The idea that cultures and traditions have changed or been subject to outside influences is thought by some to potentially undermine claims of ancient continuity from an aboriginal past. Associating too closely with any culture that can be portrayed as a foreign other is fraught with further risks, as it might be used to question a group's Nepalese credentials. When that other is Tibet, it is perhaps the worst possible scenario.

The politico-historical background to the problem of associating too closely with Tibet is to be found in the *Mulukī Ain's* collective reference to all Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups in Nepal (with the exception of certain caste-based Newaris) as *Bhoṭiyā* and *Bhoṭe*. These terms derive from the word *bod*, Tibetans' own neutral designation for the entity of Tibet. The *bhoṭe* category did not distinguish between the Tibetan-speaking populations of the Himalayan border regions and the non-Tibetan-speaking occupants of the middle hills, such as the Tamang. Any perceived association (linguistic, cultural, or religious) with Tibet seemed sufficient grounds for being placed in this category (Höfer 1979: 43). Association with Tibet was, however, extremely disadvantageous. The formation of the Nepalese state did not meet with an enthusiastic reception from the Tibetan Ganden Phodrang (*dGa' ldan pho brang*) regime and tensions eventually erupted in a series of border wars. Thus, since its inception the Nepalese state seems to have harboured suspicions about the loyalties of minorities with apparent affinities to its occasional adversary. Probably fed by these suspicions, as well as more deep-seated prejudices, the term *bhoṭe* came to designate a 'reservoir for degraded persons' (Höfer 1979: 147); among high-caste Hindus it has wholly 'contemptuous connotations' (*ibid.*), fuelling and justifying unequal treatment both by the state and individuals of high caste. The designations *bhoṭiyā* and *bhoṭe* retain, to the present-day, their derogatory power. The situation is broadly comparable with that in India, where various scheduled tribes, also popularly known as *Bhotiya*, deem the term odious because of its association with otherness and inferiority. But in Nepal the offensiveness of the term(s) seems more

acute: in everyday interactions its usage will likely be received (and intended) as a racial slur, comparable, in a different cultural context, to the n-word.

On an official level, the story is different. As remarked by Ramble (1996), Bhoṭiya has never officially been recognised as a distinct ethnicity in Nepal (ethnic Tibetan seems to be a categorisation created by foreign academics). And no attempt has been made, even in the changed climate, to rehabilitate what seems to be regarded as an irredeemable term. Instead, we see the continuation of a process that began long before the ethnic revival, and can be presumed to have played a significant role in its development; namely, attempts to engineer escape from this unfortunate classification.

The principal route of escape has been the assertion that one's community has a distinct identity (and culture), and therefore deserves to be recognised as falling outside the category. The process has been aided by the willingness of both parties to negotiate identity and exploit the category's indeterminate borders. The success of the strategy can be measured in terms of the category's gradual shrinkage. Today, only a small pocket of the population – just one of the eighteen Himalayan Nationalities – is still known as Bhote (Jha 2004: 39). All others, including the Tibetan-speaking populations, such as the Sherpa, Dolpo, and Lhopa, and the non-Tibetan speaking ones, such as the Tamang, Limbu, and Chepang, have managed, at least officially, to distance themselves from the designation.

This does not mean that on a popular level the Tamang have been able to dissociate themselves from the term. It may surface in situations of friction, muttered, for example, by a high-caste Hindu departing the scene of some minor disagreement or testy exchange with a Tamang. On a number of occasions, I have heard individuals respond by shouting, 'I am Tamang! I am Nepali!' to their disappearing verbal assailant, attempting through these assertions to counter, somewhat forlornly, all the negative stereotypes of backwardness, racial inferiority, otherness, and disloyalty associated with the label.

A devotion that dare not speak its name

As already stated, earlier studies allude to longstanding and generally positive ties between Tamangs and Tibetans, but give little indication of

a more complex set of relations. As can be gleaned from the foregoing discussion, however, these relations can hardly be considered straightforward.

The message that by adopting more mainstream notions of Buddhism the Tamang people are re-engaging with their own authentic traditions takes advantage of pre-existing religious and cultural ties. While these are not the topic of the present study, suffice to say that I have yet to encounter any religious or ritual Tamang tradition that is not permeated with elements that owe their origins to Tibet. Expressed primarily through commitment to particular deities and traditions of practice, Tamang rituals display a deep-seated devotion to notions of origin and traceability rooted in Tibet. But this does not manifest in open declarations, either on the part of rituals or their performers, of being Tibetan. The view that Tamang religious traditions represent an adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism for the Tamang context is one I also find unsatisfactory. It relies too heavily on the notion of pre-existing religious categories, comprised of doctrines and canons, from which a society may borrow. Instead, I believe that the case of the Tamang says something more profound about the reception and integration of Tibetan elements throughout the Himalayas, within frameworks that do not necessarily conform to those of established religions.

In the normal execution of their duties, Tamang specialists do not query the nature or origin of the various elements within the rituals and recitations they perform; even given the changed social climate today, I detect no appetite for such enquiry. Instead, it is when they interface with those from outside the community that questions (and demands for clarification) might arise. The responses elicited when ritual performers are queried about the origins of their traditions vary, although the issue of the traditions' autonomy never seems far from the surface. Despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary, one elderly *bombo* I interviewed stoutly dismissed the idea that his practices owed anything to Tibetan traditions. The political implications of admitting the possibility of exterior origins seemed of little concern to him, but he was troubled by the idea that his traditions were in any way shared, and therefore not an inheritance exclusive to his own patriline. However, the majority of the Tamang have a less insular understanding of their practices. Most (depending partly upon the extent of their exposure to Tibetan religion)

freely admit to the presence of Tibetan elements. But as one astute young *tamba* (a recitation specialist, particularly important during the wedding ceremony) who I interviewed in 2016 candidly responded, there are two answers to the question of links between Tamang and Tibetan traditions: the *public* one, he said, does not acknowledge them. For he, like many others, feels that admission is potentially damaging to the *janajāti/ādivāsī* image.

Tamang ritual performers whose traditional practices show little sign of recent Tibetan influences, such as the *tamba*, usually have the best understanding of the deep ties between the cultures, and give the most measured and informative responses. Young Tamangs entering Tibetan monasteries generally have no such appreciation. They are, however, equally aware of the sensitivities surrounding these relational issues, and their residence in the monastery means that it is one they are regularly confronted with. In the face of challenges, they may commonly feel the need to defend their presence in the monastery, arguing that their motives are purely religious: they simply want to engage with the Buddhist traditions of their community. Often ready to rebut any suggestion of a political dimension to their actions, unlike their Tibetan counterparts, many studiously avoid Tibetan events deemed to have a political aspect.

Broadening the demographic dimension, females (who are almost entirely excluded from the religious domain) and large swathes of the lay Tamang youth, whose degree of commitment to traditional thinking varies and who are far from knowledgeable about the complexities of religious and cultural ties, also feel the urge to distance themselves from Tibet and Tibetans. The pressures they feel are similar to those experienced by members of other ethnic minorities, which occasionally lead even those generally categorised by outsiders as ‘ethnic Tibetans’ to make public disavowals, with titles such as, ‘We’re no Tibetans’(!)¹⁹

The sometimes febrile atmosphere of the Janajati Movement

19 An article bearing this title, in which Tashi Tewa argues that natives of Dolpo are not Tibetan because they are one of the fifty-nine recognised ethnic minorities, appeared in the *Kathmandu Post* on November 29, 2014 (<http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2014-10-29/were-no-tibetans.html>). Contributors’ articles and editorials in newspapers represent something of a battleground with regard to the issue of the national credentials of groups formerly designated as *bhoṭe*.

intensifies the need to assert the autonomy of Tamang identity and traditions. With ties between China and Nepal growing, the Tibetan brand may be seen not only as tainted, but indeed toxic. Tibetan political issues act as a lightning rod: members of the Tamang youth are often at the forefront of those denouncing or even assaulting those who publicly call for Tibetan independence. The continuing desire to cast off the stigma of the *bhoṭe*-designation, and perhaps heightened fears of being branded as closet Tibetans, can hardly be discounted as irrelevant in this context. Some individuals might even view these occasions as ideal platforms for proving their national loyalties through an affirmation of their non-Tibetan-ness.

It should be perfectly possible, as some Tamangs are aware, to cogently argue that while Tamangs and Tibetans have close cultural and religious affinities, this does not mean that they share an ethnic identity or a political cause. However, these Tamangs would be equally aware that sections of Nepalese society, disinterested in such finesse, are ready to pounce upon any public admission of ties in order to confirm their *bhoṭe*-prejudices, as if these were confessions of allegiance to some non-Nepali political or religious other. Hence, at the same time that sections of the Tamang community turn increasingly towards Tibet as a source of their religious traditions, there is also a growing sense that public attention is best deflected from the whole topic of Tamang-Tibetan ties.

Unacknowledged debts and undetected shifts

The ethnic revival adds impetus to attempts at demonstrating ethnic distinctiveness and cultural autonomy, increasing the pressure to create the image of homogenous, standardised cultures. This can, as shown in some recent studies, lead to creative self-deception in the search for an *authentic* version of culture. No doubt cynical, agenda-driven, or perhaps even menacing strands are detectable in the quest for cultural representations within the ethnic context. But a focus on these aspects does not do justice to what I see as the sincere motives of so many of those involved. In the Tamang case, numerous individuals have embarked upon a genuine quest, seeking answers about their historical identity and cultural heritage. Shared cultural elements among Tamangs, Tibetans, and various Himalayan groups are so abundant, and the boundaries between the cultures so poorly understood (and according to some, lar-

gely imagined), that individuals seek sources of authority, hoping for clarity about what constitutes their own heritage. Those counted as experts on Tamang culture have no desire to represent their culture as in any way deficient, so when requested to provide a Tamang term for a particular item, or elaborate on traditional practices and beliefs, they seem in cases of uncertainty ever more likely to turn for answers to the authority of Tibetan literary and religious sources. These acts of borrowing, by means of which Tibetan elements are presented as Tamang, enhance the image of Tamang culture as a coherent entity.

For reasons already outlined, Tibet cannot be acknowledged as the source of tradition. It might even be said that some Tamangs are responsible for contriving the image of an egalitarian, pan-Himalayan (or even transcultural) Buddhist tradition, which does not recognise hierarchies or authority derived from origins, but to which all of its members (Tamang and Tibetan alike) can lay equal claim. It is with reference to this image that traditions, such as monasticism, gain entrance into Tamang society, while being advertised as part of the Tamangs' own heritage. Similarly, we see an array of publications, such as those of Khyungba (2008), intended primarily for a Tamang readership, offering practical instructions, accompanied by helpful diagrams, about how to perform the basic Buddhist practices of prostration, water-bowl offering, and taking refuge. But these are all essentially Tibetan textbook descriptions, and the names provided are Tibetan – their mere existence underlining the foreign nature of these practices to their audience – while the section in which these practices are provided purports to describe the 'mother-tongue, religion, culture, and customs of the Tamang ethnic group'.²⁰

Such publications, and the various pronouncements of those considered knowledgeable about Tamang culture, should not, I believe, be regarded as symptomatic of a conscious campaign to inveigle Tibetan elements into Tamang practice in order to manipulate the representation of Tamang culture, or invent tradition. At worst, those involved are guilty of treating their audiences with a misguided, paternalistic attitude. Confusion about boundaries and the inability to publicly acknowledge (or explore) the Tibetan dimension are factors in cultural

20 *Tāmāng jāṭiko mātribhasha, dharm, saṃskṛiti, saṃskārharu* (2008: 103-68).

borrowing, but most cases occur, I feel, not so much surreptitiously as unconsciously.

Another example of borrowing manifests itself in the editing of language. Spoken Tamang contains numerous Tibetan loanwords, some of which differ in meaning from standard Tibetan. Where there are discrepancies in meaning between the two languages – particularly in terms of religious or cultural significance – the slow but (I believe) growing tendency in recent Tamang dictionaries, such as Moktan Dupwangel's *Tāmāṅ Tshigjo (Tāmāṅ-Nepāli Prayogātmak Śabdakośa)*, is not to supply the Tamang gloss, or both Tamang and Tibetan variations, but to list *only* the textbook Tibetan version. Hence, the term *chyoi* (Tib: *chos*) follows the Tibetan understanding of Dharma (roughly 'religion'), rather than the popular Tamang 'written text'; and *ghewa* (Tib: *dge ba*) is glossed as 'virtue', instead of the everyday Tamang understanding of 'funerary ceremony'.

Many factors contribute to the current situation: greater mobility and communication between communities and greater access to mass and social media have not only helped to bring the minority issue to the fore but persuade many Tamangs of the necessity to publically represent their community and culture. In a sometimes desperate search for points of reference, sources of authority, and indeed the *best* version of their culture, the asymmetries of relations between centre and periphery, Tibetans and Tamangs, and high religion and village-level traditions all come into play. Standardised textbook versions of established religion seem to offer a far safer point of anchorage than local and in general orally-transmitted traditions. Little is required to convince the majority that they should align their culture with some recognisable mainstream. This escape from parochialism simultaneously offers the possibility of being able to dissociate their cultural traditions from charges of backwardness or even deviance, as well as promising engagement with something greater, including wider religious communities and traditions. Increasingly, therefore, one sees an attempt to understand and account for the many apparently Tibetan elements in Tamang tradition by referring to a Buddhist identity and a religious tradition that are almost indistinguishable from textbook versions of Tibetan ones (which simultaneously deny being Tibetan). Continuing attempts to bring Tamang practices in line with those of the mainstream will inevitably take

the form of further acts of borrowing and cultural editing by those seeking to *correct* perceived divergences from the norm. This has the potential to erase important and informative variations. Thus, a great deal of the individuality of Tamang culture seems destined to destruction, largely at the hands of those who seek to champion it and assert its distinctiveness.

Conclusion

With the ethnic revival in Nepal set as the backdrop, this article has considered how members of two communities (academics and activists) have understood and represented the Tamang ethnic group, their culture, and in particular their reinvigorated religious traditions. While broadly agreeing about the political history that led to the current situation, their understandings of the Tamang seem, in other respects, implacably opposed. Despite this, the two sides share some interesting correspondences. The activists are battling against the historical legacy of the socio-political situation that denied recognition and rights to their people. Academics feel themselves to be countering the tendency, both of earlier scholars and some in the Janajati Movement, to essentialise tribal peoples and their cultures. A more general observation could be made that both are reacting to, and setting out to rectify, the distortions introduced as a result of their respective historical and intellectual legacies. More specifically, however, they both pursue their causes by arguing for autonomy: in the case of some academics, by demanding that Tamang religion be understood as an independent tradition. Their arguments differ dramatically in their sophistication and lead to diametrically opposed positions. Despite this, the most striking and curious correspondence is in their agreement to marginalise aspects of the Tibetan dimension. Principle and a deficit in requisite knowledge play roles in their decisions, as does expediency, particularly of a political nature. The particular circumstances here, once appreciated, make the positions understandable. But to pretend that they do not affect the interpretations of the Tamang and their culture would be naive in the extreme.

Moving away from the activist-academic domain, this study has sought to explain changes underway in Tamang religious traditions on the popular level. In neither scale nor magnitude should these changes be described as a revolution or transformation, but their trajectory is definite and their progress, while gradual and uneven, is steady. We see

a confluence of conditions: the ethnic revival and increased engagement with other communities through various media create irresistible urges in some to better represent groups and their cultures, prompting both a rediscovery of traditions but also a struggle to understand cultural legacies for which written sources often barely exist. Members of the community are subjected to increased pressures (both external and self-imposed) to settle upon a version of religion that they can claim as their own and which helps define their people. The Buddhist identity is one arrived at through a process of *rationalisation*: it seems to make sense of village practices (an order to which poorly-understood Tibetan elements can be thought to belong), but also offers the possibility of transcending those village-based practices and engaging with a more universal religion. Lurking in the background of Tamang efforts to improve the profile of their culture and religious traditions is the dreaded 'b' (*bhoṭe*)-label, and continued attempts to shed it. But herein lies what for many might seem the paradox of the Tamang situation: the very same political situation that compels Tamangs to draw increasingly from Tibetan traditions makes it increasingly, perhaps commensurately, more difficult to admit that this is occurring.

Finally, this study in no way challenges (and perhaps even reinforces) the message of other academics, that the politics of ethnicity is key to understanding the minorities in Nepal. No serious discussion about the identity, culture, and religion of the groups in question can afford to sideline the ethnic issue. At the same time, I would argue that it is not difficult to see how, in academic treatments of the Tamang, ethnicity has been allowed not so much to spill over into other areas, as to create a framework within which (it is proposed) the understanding of the people, their culture, and religious traditions must be confined. Such a framework is, I contend, far too narrow.

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Revelation and Re-evaluation: The Flourishing of Padmasambhava Biography after Yuan Mongol Decline

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Abstract

Tibetan historiography expanded and changed enormously after the twelfth century. The Mongol empire offered Tibetan Buddhists a new means of self-legitimation and narrating the past, while the gradual decline of Buddhism in India left Tibet as a key keeper of the flame. After the fall of the first period of Mongol hegemony in Tibet (1240–1340s CE) one sees an expansion not only of the genre of historiography but also of the Padma-vita genre, explored philologically in this article.¹

The main catalyst of this *florissance* was the Nyingma (*rnying ma*) master Orgyen Lingpa (*orgyan gling pa*; b. 1323) and his *Katang Dénga* (*bka' thang sde lnga*) and *Péma Katang* (*padma bka' thang*). The latter (auto)biography of the eighth-century Indian master Padmasambhava offered its readers a new vision of the protagonist as the predestined and eternally fully-enlightened saviour of Tibet. Orgyen Lingpa incorporated the twelfth-century *Zanglingma* (*zangs gling ma*) Padma-vita into his *Péma Katang*. Yet he also expanded the opening section to encompass a wider geographical and cosmological vista and added Padmasambhava's detailed poetic prophecies of the difficult times ahead for Tibetans under Mongol-Sakya (*sa skya*) rule. These details provide insights into the relationship between Orgyen Lingpa and the Pakmo Drupa (*phag mo gru pa*) leader Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen (*ta'i si tu byang chub rgyal mtshan*; 1302/3–1364), who wrested control of central Tibet from the Sakyas. Moreover, a text-historical analysis of these themes shows how they were incorporated into numerous later

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Padmasambhava biographies and general histories as part of the wider process of creating a post-Mongol cultural outlook and re-situating Tibet in the world.

Introduction

Every age reinvents its own history to suit its audience and the changing sensibilities of its culture. Within Tibet, these changes generally take place within a framework that accepts Buddhism as the ethical source of historiographical values and provider of the preeminent analysis of time and causation (see Schwieger 2000, 2013). Yet within this wider homogeneity, adherents of different schools view their own guru or culture-hero as best expressing these ideals and this analysis. Furthermore, these devotees tend to glorify the object of their worship in the highest possible terms. This means that different competing factions within the fourteenth-century period under discussion in this article vied to convince others of their particular vision of the past; perhaps less with cited sources and carefully sifted, first-person testimony than by fixing a vivid reimagining of a lost world in the minds of their audiences (see Doney 2016). Peter Schwieger, in his fine essay on Tibetan historiography and cultural history, cites the fourteenth century as the point at which, with regard to Buddhism's status within historiography, 'we would be justified in describing [it] as "stationary"' ('eine Kultur, die man mit Fug und Recht als eine "stationäre" beschreiben kann,' Schwieger 2000: 950, 2013: 67). However, the histories discussed in this article suggest that there remained room for movement regarding who best expressed Buddhism's ideals, and that biographical works created during this period still had the power to change later historiographical literature in this respect. One central theme of this changing literature (which it shares with historiographical works on figures as far removed as Constantine and Aśoka) is the complex relationship between religious and royal figures (see especially Ruegg 1997). Focusing on Tibetan life-writing, this theme is played out in the remembered relationship between Indian masters and Tibetan emperors during the latter half of the first millennium.

The opening lines of Buddhaguhya's letter to Emperor Tri Songdétson (*khri srong lde brtsan*; 742–c.800), which tradition ascribes to the eighth century, relate:

You have sent [the religious envoys] Era, Aro, Mañjuśrī, and retinue, with the best of wealth—silver and gold—to seek the Holy Dharma of India, so that they might open a window to illuminate the deep darkness of Tibet.

As the veritable Buddhaguhya (one who's secret is the Buddha), it gladdens my heart that the Meridian of Royal Authority in the world, the one who has straightened the crooked ways of power within his administration, the Supreme Lord in an unbroken stream of divine manifestations, the lord Trisong Detsen should order thus: 'Ride the high Plain of Dharma, human and divine!' (Peking vol. 129 pl. 284-1-6-8, quoted in Davidson 2002: 154-55)

As Davidson notes, this dialogue between religious figures and royal patrons is 'reflective of other discussions stretching back through the dialogues between kings and counsellors, the Buddha and Bimbisāra, the monk Nāgasena and the Indo-Greek ruler Menander' (Davidson 2002: 23).

A later dialogue, again attributed to the eighth century but dating from the twelfth, offers a very different depiction of the same Tibetan emperor's status with regard to another Indic religious master, Padmasambhava. This is contained in the *Zanglingma* (*zangs gling ma*) of Nyang Nyima Özer (*nyang nyi ma 'od zer*; 1124-1192). This biography of Padmasambhava has been fundamental to many Tibetans' sense of identity, since it closely ties Tibet to the Indian subcontinent where Buddhism was born and where Padmasambhava performed tantric practices before being invited to the land of snows. As will be shown below, this work gained extraordinary popularity and provided the archetypes for later Tibetan historians writing on Tibet's place in the world and its predestined relationship to Buddhism. In this sense, Nyima Özer may be seen as forging earlier elements of the Tibetan myth of imperial-period Buddhism into an enduring and influential narrative, one that was redacted by successive generations of Tibetan scholars to suit the changing requirements of its readership (Doney *forthcoming*).

When Padmasambhava arrives in Tibet, he treats the emperor (by this period in the maturation of historiography referred to as a king) like any other overly proud indigenous divinity. Tri Songdetsen thinks that the foreign master should bow to him, because 'I am the ruler of

all the black-headed [Tibetans].² Padmasambhava says: ‘King of Tibet, you red-faced savage, your mind is bloated with worldly conceit.’³ Both expressions contain old, indigenous appellations for the Tibetans, but while the former appellation refers to people (*mi*), the latter refers literally to bloodthirsty demons (*sinpo*; *srin po*).⁴

Padmasambhava humbles Tri Songdétsen in a humorous way: he bows to his robes of office and sets them on fire. The king then prostrates contritely to the *siddha*.⁵ His magical act of irony implies that the elevated status of kingship in Tibet, symbolised by Tri Songdétsen’s robes, diminishes the spiritual state of the actual king. It also accentuates Padmasambhava’s state of Buddha-hood in contrast to the king. Although Tri Songdétsen is an emanation of Mañjuśrī, according to the *Zanglingma*, he is deluded by his worldly status in this incarnation.

From this point in the story onwards, Padmasambhava is always superior to Tri Songdétsen. The *Zanglingma* humanises the king as a faithful but confused disciple rather than an enlightened being. Later in the narrative, Padmasambhava also prophesies that Tri Songdétsen will meet obstacles in a future life, due to his failings as a Buddhist in expelling several Tibetan Buddhist masters. Padmasambhava says of Tri Songdétsen’s reincarnation as Nyima Özer, the future discoverer of the *Zanglingma*:

Because Your Majesty damaged your *samaya* vows by expelling
Pagor (*pa sgor*) Vairocana, Nub Namkhé Nyingpo (*gnub nam mkha'i*)

2 Note the use of the non-humilific *nga* for ‘I’: ZLh 29a2: *rgyal po'i thugs la nga mgo nag thams cad gi rje yin*.

3 ZLh 30a3: *khyed gdong dmar srin po bod kyi rje / 'jigs rten dregs pa'i kheng sems can*.

4 The ‘kingdom of the black-headed Tibetans’ (*bod mgo nag po'i srid*) is attested in the Zhol inscription (south face, lines 12–13, Richardson 1985: 7). On early depictions of red-faced Tibetans in history, prophecy, and art, see van Schaik’s www.earlytibet.com/2007/09/18/red-faced-men (posted September 18, 2007; accessed 24 January 24, 2017). The addition of the denomination *rākṣasa* in the quote given in the next footnote—possibly on the basis that Tibet’s progenitrix was a bloodthirsty demoness (*sinmo*; *srin mo*; *rākṣasi*)—still requires investigation.

5 ZLh 30b1–2. Tri Songdétsen also accepts Padmasambhava’s identification of Tibet: ‘I am the lord of the red-faced *rākṣasas*, the Tibetan people are difficult to tame’ (*bdag ni srin gdong dmar bod kyi rje / bod kyi mi ni 'dul ba dka' /* ; ZLh 30b4–5). This definition of Tibet allows Tri Songdétsen and Padmasambhava to use different forceful means (royal laws and magic respectively) over the course of the rest of the narrative in order to tame the Tibetans as a prelude to spreading the Dharma among them.

snying po) and other religious masters at one time, as a result [in your seventeenth incarnation after this one] people will disbelieve your teachings. Even those with the strongest connections [to you] will all come to reject you at one time.⁶

This is not the only prophecy that Padmasambhava makes concerning the future decline of the Dharma in Tibet leading up to the birth of Nyima Özer, but the others are rather more general in nature.⁷

Most subsequent Tibetan histories, even to the present, share this more human depiction of Tri Songdétse, which accords with Schwieger's excellent analysis of the shift from a royal to a religious centre of society (Schwieger 2000: 947–49 and 962–64, 2013: 66–67 and 72–74). However, the extent to which historians contrast this depiction with a perfectly enlightened Padmasambhava (or not) depends upon whether they embrace the canon of works attributed to Padmasambhava or rely instead on the more orthodox Buddhist canon that was closed around the fourteenth century. Schwieger states that those groups that followed their own textual traditions as opposed to the orthodox Tibetan canon were marginalised within an increasingly homogenous and stationary culture (Schwieger 2000: 949–52, 2013: 67–68). It appears, however, that the compelling *Padma-vita* created at exactly this time (though based on earlier sources that expressed wider Indo-Tibetan Buddhist values and analyses) allowed Padmasambhava's devotees and their quite different (but equally Buddhist) cultural norms not only to survive but indeed find expression in the later narratives of the powerful in Tibet, thereby gaining a foothold in the higher echelons of power.

Mongol hegemony

After the twelfth century, the historical consciousness expressed in Tibetan histories changed enormously. Tibet was no longer to the same extent a post-imperial culture looking to the past and to South Asia for its Buddhism. Over the following centuries, the Dharma slowly died out

6 ZLh 83a3–5 reads: *rgyal po nyid kyi pa sgor bhe ro tsa na dang / gnub nam mkha'i snying pa (=po) dang / chos kyi bdag po rnam's thabs res spyugs pa'i dam tshig gi sel dang / las 'bras kyi chos la mi rnam's yid mi ches / chos 'brel gang che ba thams cad sna ba thabs res ldog du 'ongs pas....*

7 Translated in Davidson 2005: 214, based on ZLa (see below for more on this version).

in India and the Mongol empire's hegemony over Tibet (1240–1340s) offered Tibetan Buddhists a new means of both self-legitimation and narrating the past.

Between 1197 and 1206, the great library of the Nālandā Monastery burned down.⁸ After the Great Fire of Nālandā, Tibetan monasteries became some of the main repositories of tantric Buddhism. Having received much of its Buddhism from the south, Tibet began to communicate its learning to the north (though there exist some precursors Tibetan Buddhists' relations with patrons in central Asia). Tibetan Buddhist schools, beginning with the Sakya (*sa skya*) in the thirteenth century, transmitted Buddhist lineages to the Mongol court. Like the earlier Tibetan emperors, these Mongols had both the wealth and requisite imperial power to patronise and further spread Buddhism outside of India (Davidson 2005: 1–10). This marked an important shift in the status of Tibetan Buddhism in Central Asia, akin to a lineage-holder's transition from disciple to guru: the pupil had become the master of a new class of students. This change in status influenced Tibetans' self-representations in their own literature. For instance, the letter from the Sakya master Pakpa (*'phags pa*) to Qubilai Khan (c.1255–1259) begins:

We are happy to have heard that the Prince-Bodhisattva's noble figure is well and that his august activity extends everywhere. We, the righteous recipients of your generosity, are also well. You have looked on all with your great gracious love and have extensively acted with the intent to benefit generally both the kingdom and the Buddha's doctrine. But especially you have included even lowly persons like us into your inner circle (lit., heart's maṅḍala). Therefore, your speech has been like a stream of nectar. Moreover, as we have found the finer things, complete in all requisites, come into our possession by the power of your intention to invest us with them, our happiness has naturally increased. (Davidson 2005: 1)

While Pakpa is writing within a tradition of letters, his momentous meeting with the Khan greatly affected both Mongol and Tibetan cultures,

8 Willis 2014: 146; see Dutt 1962: 347–48 for a description of Nālandā's final days, based on the thirteenth-century account by Chag lo tsa ba Chos rje dpal (on whom see Martin 1997: no. 52 and references given therein).

including the changing depiction of the relationship between religious and royal figures.

Fourteenth-century historiography

Foreign influence on Tibetan literature was, of course, nothing new (see most recently Sørensen 2015: 153–55); for example, the literary form of the imperial *Old Tibetan Annals* owes a debt to Chinese historiography. However, the *Annals*' entries also maintain the closest relation to everyday events in the Tibetan emperor's inner circle of any of the Tibetan sources, except perhaps Tri Songdétsen's *Explanatory Edict* (*bka' mchid*; see Doney 2017). Such proximity to events gradually gave way to a re-imagining of the lost imperial period rather than the recounting of later occurrences contemporaneous to the histories' authors. These more idealised narratives also appear to have been increasingly influenced by Indic Buddhist literature rather than Chinese administrative works.⁹ Yet, as Gray Tuttle (in Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle 2013: 327) points out, the thirteenth-century Tibetan translations of Chinese annalistic history rekindled a passion for the recent past and personalised accounts. This is evidenced in the newly ascendant Pakmo Drupa (*phag mo gru pa*) leader Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen's (*ta'i si tu byang chub rgyal mtshan*; 1302/3–1364) *Situ Kachem* (*si tu bka' chems*).¹⁰ Tuttle states:

[T]he next several centuries of historical writing . . . were marked by a sharp break from the earlier focus upon Indian and imperial Tibetan history. For instance, *The Testament of Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen* (*Situ kachem*) of 1350, written by the Pakmodrupa ruler who took power away from the Sakya and controlled Central Tibet from the year the book was written, is exceptional in being concerned especially with contemporary affairs. Part of the dramatic shift away from earlier traditions can no doubt be credited to the 1285 translation into Tibetan of the *Book of China* (*Gyanak depter*), an annalistic history of China. This served as a new model for Tibetan history, as evidenced by Tselpa Künga Dorjé's 1363 *Red Book* (*Depter marpo*). This first

9 On Tibetan depictions of the Tibetan emperors Tri Songdétsen and Tri Songtsen (*khri srong btsan*; 605?–649), both adapting Indic narratives, see van Schaik and Doney 2007 and Mills 2012 respectively.

10 On this work, see van der Kuijp 1991: esp. 277–79. It is used extensively in Czaja 2013.

instance of a Tibetan *depter* (using the Persian word *daftar* for ‘book’) pays great attention to East Asian dynastic lineages. In this account, the Chinese, Minyak (Xixia), and Mongolian royal lineages interrupt the traditional Tibetan narrative, which in previous sources had proceeded directly from Indian to Tibetan royal lineages. The Tibetan royal lineage was thus narrated not directly after that of India but in a nonchronological sequence, listing the rulers of India, China, Minyak, and Mongolia before discussing Tibetan royalty of the imperial period. . . .

After the coming of the Mongols and the centralization of power in the hands of a few under their rule, there was a renewed sense that Central Tibet could and should be unified. Thus, there were constant struggles from the time of Sakyā dominance until the Gelukpa took control in 1642, and many of these accounts record the competitions and assertions of authority that accompanied them. (Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle 2013: 327)

Tuttle appears to be arguing against the earlier notion (in, e.g., Tucci 1999 [1949]: 110–11) that the histories of this period reflect a unified yearning for the past after a bloody period of destruction and degradation at the hands of Mongolian overlords. Instead, Tuttle sees these works as individual attempts, influenced by the traditions imparted during Mongol rule, to bring histories up to the present and take stock of or argue for the place of (central) Tibet in the world. Each work is doing this from the perspective of certain traditions’ claims to hegemony over the central Tibetan region rather than from a unified political and religious consciousness.

Some Tibetans whose schools were endowed with Mongolian patronage wrote histories legitimising their own religious lineages, such as Butön Rinchendrup (*bu ston rin chen grub*; 1290–1364) and other historians whom he references in his religious history (see van der Kuijp 1996: 46). Mongolian forms of writing also influenced works of history, such as the *Depter Marpo* (*deb ther dmar po*).¹¹ Its author, Tsel pa Künga Dorjé (*tshal pa kun dga’ rdo rje*; 1309–1364), used Mongolian sources in

11 See Martin 1997: no. 77, van der Kuijp 1996: 44–45 and 55, Sørensen 1994: 636, Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle 2013: 337–42.

addition to older Indic and Tibetan works in his compilation, and even used the Mongolian loan word *depter* (originally from the Greek *dipthera*, lit. ‘parchment’; Sørensen 2015: 159).

Other writers sought to free themselves of foreign, northern influence by emphasising Tibet’s indigenous traditions and those flowing from Indic soil: for instance, the *Gyelrap Selwé Mélong* (*rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*), attributed to Lama Dampa Sönam Gyeltsen (*bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan*; 1312–1375; see Sørensen 1994, but cf. also van der Kuijp 1996: 52). This important history of 1368 situates itself somewhere between allegiance to the Mongols and to the Pakmo Drupa, with a religious pedigree beyond reproach, just as the above mentioned historian, Butön Rinchendrup, seems to have positioned himself in his correspondence with Jangchup Gyeltsen.¹² These interesting metamorphoses are beyond the scope of this article, but worthy of further study.

Not only new historical works but also the redaction of existing historiographical traditions in this period would reward further investigation. Olaf Czaja recently noted that the fourteenth-century (or later) redaction of the *Lang Poti Séru* (*rlangs po ti bse ru*; Martin 1997: 47, no. 65) includes prophecies on the part of its legendary discoverer, Jangchup Dréköl (*byang chub 'dre bkol*; 960s?–1076). These prophecies come once from his own mouth and once in a scroll found in his reliquary, and concern the future prosperity of his clan and the rise to power of Jangchup Gyeltsen respectively (Czaja 2013: 15, 29–30).

Czaja also suggests that Jangchup Dréköl is depicted in the *Lang Poti Séru* as ‘similar to Padmasambhava, whose mind incarnation he is said to be’ (Czaja 2013: 15).¹³ Given that the notion of mind incarnation (*tuktül*; *thugs sprul*) does not appear to be prevalent in the eleventh or even twelfth centuries, I would suggest that this is a fourteenth-century identification, one that ties in to our discussion of Padmasambhava and his status in the Pakmo Drupa tradition (see below).

Furthermore, as R.A. Stein points out, Jangchup Dréköl therein meets the mythic Ling Gézar (*gling ge sar*), who acts as his patron (*yöndak*; *yon bdag*) and is himself identified as an incarnation of Tri Songdétsen (Stein 1962: 83). It is noteworthy that most details of the extant redaction

12 His letter, probably dating to 1330, is translated in Tucci 1999 [1949]: vol. 2, 673–74; it is reproduced and prefaced in Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle 2013: 348–51.

13 This argument is pursued in Czaja 2013: 65–68; see also Stein 1962: 79, 83.

appear to have been faithfully reproduced from earlier recensions, including indigenous ritual elements in the cosmogenesis narrative that have merely been augmented with Indic mythographical elements, such as the ‘Gods of Clear Light’ (*’od gsal lha, abhasvaradeva*) (Czaja 2013: 14, 31–32) to reflect Buddhist cosmology.

The *Lang Poti Séru* styles itself as a treasure (*ter*; *gter*): part of a literary tradition (discussed below) of works that claim to be written a long time ago, usually in the eighth century, and then buried to be found by later generations. In the case of (auto)biographical treasure literature, the logic of this burial implies that the narrative should relate events within the life of the supposed author, only narrating later history as prophecy (though exceptions exist). Any interpolations should also maintain this first-person perspective. The treasure text tradition is distinct from other historiographical traditions (such as the *Testimony of Ba*; see Doney 2013), which write in the third-person, historical voice. When elements are interpolated into these traditions, they tend to add narrative in the same third-person voice and are thus able to describe events that no eighth-century protagonist could have seen. In the tale of the *Lang Poti Séru*, Jangchup Dréköl is himself the treasure revealer (*tertön, gter ston*), the one who discovers the text rather than the one who interred it. Yet this addition to the treasure text is still written in the first-person. Therefore, although he clearly had to die in order for the prophecy to be found in his reliquary, this event itself is not recounted as part of any treasure text he interred—because he could not have written an account of it after his own death.

Expansion of the Padmasambhava biography

The tradition of treasure should be briefly explained in this context. The treasure biographies are also written from the third-person perspective. The major difference of the treasure tradition is the method of its revelation. These texts are said to have been discovered centuries after they were completed, often buried in the ground or deposited in sacred statues, or at sites of religious power such as temples or meditation caves that the imperial-era creators of these texts frequented or helped to establish. These sites themselves form a potent link with the past and help legitimise the proposed authenticity of the texts found there by later religious masters. The narratives of the burial and later

discovery of such treasures are retold in a terse manner in the colophons of some of the early treasure texts (Doney 2014: 15–19), but the nature of the act itself is ineffable and is bound up with the more general ineffability of the enlightened nature of the creator-interrer and the discoverer-disseminator of the treasure history. The *Zanglingma* claims to be a treasure text, and even prophesies the coming of its purported discoverer, Nyang Nyima Özer, at a time of dire straits for Tibetan Buddhism. The *Zanglingma* is said to be just one of Nyang Nyima Özer's many treasure revelations, which would turn the tide for the Dharma in Tibet and offer enlightenment to its people once more.

The *Zanglingma* account of Padmasambhava, his buried treasure and future prophecies, was so popular that the work was copied and redacted by generations of Tibetans (for example, the above-mentioned *Lang Poti Séru*). All extant versions of the *Zanglingma* recount the same basic narrative, but some provide more detail in certain places, and since this has a bearing on the fourteenth-century flourishing of the Padma-vita, I shall briefly outline their variety: these can roughly be categorised into three recensions—*ZL1*, *ZL2*, and *ZL3* (Figure 1; for more detail, see Doney 2014: 25–30). Recensions *ZL1* and *ZL2* contain extra information not found in *ZL3* (the white and grey bars respectively, interspersed among the black that represents the shortest and earliest attested narrative). Whereas *ZL1*'s novel content is spread throughout its narrative, that found in *ZL2* is clumped together in three different places: the beginning of the text, the middle, and toward the end. Importantly, the extra information in *ZL1* is not included in *ZL2*, and vice versa. This means that each of these redactions was almost certainly made independently and by interpolating narratives into a similar base text: one that resembled what is now *ZL3*, rather than into other recensions. Whereas recension *ZL2* does not appear to influence later Padmasambhava biographies, *ZL3* forms the basis for the *Péma Katang* (*padma bka' thang*) supposedly discovered by the famed treasure revealer Orgyen Lingpa (*o rgyan gling pa*; b. 1323). In contrast, *ZL1* was relied on by his contemporary, Sanggyé Lingpa (*sangs rgyas gling pa*; 1340–1396), in the creation of his quite similar *Katang Sertrang* (*bka' thang gser phreng*; see Doney 2014: 33–38). One of the most important ways in which the two fourteenth-century biographies differ from the *Zanglingma*, for our purposes here, is in the addition of much more specific prophecies that Padmasambhava gives

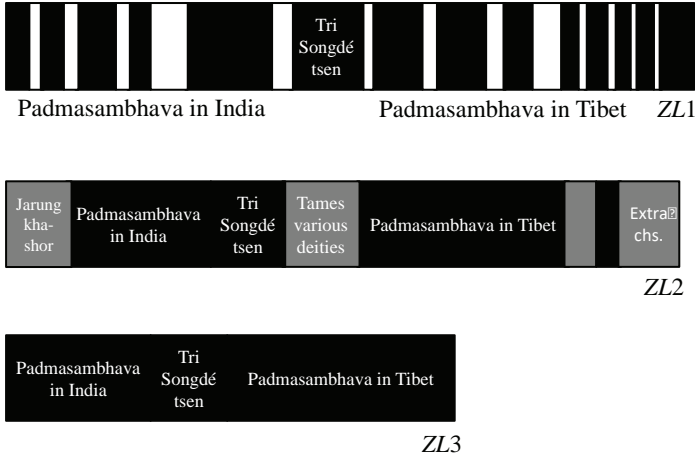


Figure 1: Comparison of extra material in ZL1 and ZL2 against ZL3.

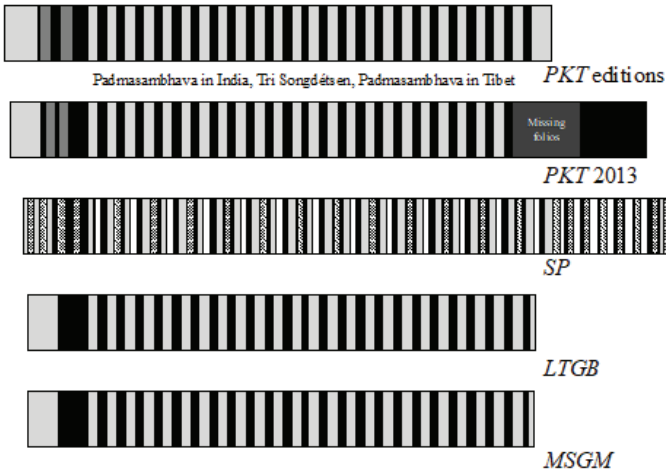


Figure 2: Comparison of most PKT editions against PKT 2013, LTGB, and MSGM.

concerning the problems that Tibet will face under Mongol and Sakya rule (see Blondeau 2000–2001: 119 and Dalton 2011: 129–32).

Therefore, while the Padma-vita tradition that flourished in the fourteenth century drew on the twelfth-century *Zanglingma* (and no

doubt other sources both literary and oral), it underwent a change in the scope of Padmasambhava's life and travels, and began to include new visions of both the past and present for Nyingma (*rnying ma*, 'Old School') Buddhists, as seen through the eyes of Padmasambhava and his biography. Both the expanded scope and the prophecy sections reflect many of the themes that are also displayed in contemporaneous histories. The main difference is that treasure biographies of Padmasambhava adapt these themes to legitimise the Nyingma school and the individual treasure revealers from that tradition.

The *Péma Katang* and its influence on other Padmasambhava biographies

For the Nyingma, the discovery of treasure texts marks the renewal of the blessings of the tradition.¹⁴ In addition, some may offer a revision (or re-visioning) of the tradition itself, which like the renewal of blessings is also purportedly intended by its interrer (say, Padmasambhava) for that particular moment in the history of declining spiritual practice. Orgyen Lingpa's *Péma Katang* is, therefore, squarely aimed at a fourteenth-century audience witnessing *inter alia* the fall of Mongol-Sakya hegemony over central Tibet and the rise of the Pakmo Drupa. Overall, the *Péma Katang* follows a narrative familiar from the *Zanglingma* on the travels of Padmasambhava in India and Tibet, renewing the blessings of this central storyline, while offering a number of innovations that can be read in the light of events contemporary to its discovery (especially at the beginning but also in its prophecies). This blending of ZL3 and new elements is marked schematically in Figure 2 by consecutive black and light grey bars, which are only intended to give a sense of what is a much more complex mixture. The *Péma Katang* consists of 108 chapters (far more than the forty-one in ZL3), yet omits the seventeen chapters recording Padmasambhava's final advice to Tibetans as he departs the land of snows.

It should be noted, however, that the *Péma Katang* cannot be read on its own. This is so because it was redacted in the sixteenth century by Miwang Sönam Topgyel (*mi dbang bsod nams stobs rgyal*; d. 1594), a member of the noble house of Chonggyé (*'phyongs rgyas*) in central Tibet

14 See Schwieger 2000: 956–57, 2013: 69–70, Mayer 2013/2014 (2015): 234.

(see Czaja 2013: 273); this redaction was completed in order *inter alia* to bring it into line with the *Zanglingma* (Kapstein 2015: 180–81). Though the latter does not contain the prophetic chapters, it remains unclear what exactly was changed at the time. These uncertainties also apply to changes made prior to the Fifth Dalai Lama's (1617–1682) printing of the work in 1676, the version produced in the 1730s at Dergé (*sde dge*) Monastery, and the 1755 corrected print by the imperial preceptor (*da guoshi*, 大国师), Changkya Khutugtu Rölpe Dorjé (*lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje*; 1717–1786), which seemingly pushed all earlier versions of the *Péma Katang* into the shadows. Yet recently I was fortunate enough to gain access to a manuscript from Tawang that contains a different recension of the *Péma Katang*, as well as to read in detail a number of other revealed Padmasambhava biographies that appear to have been inspired by that of Orgyen Lingpa (see Figure 2). In a recent article (Doney 2016), I analysed a few telling chapters found in these works, which describe Padmasambhava's adopted childhood home of Uḍḍiyāna and the Dhanakośa Lake, where he first emanated onto a lotus (earning him the name Padmasambhava, 'lotus-born'). These chapters are marked in dark grey in Figure 2 (not to be confused with the darkest grey in Figure 2, which marks missing folios discussed below).

Let me now try to summarise my preliminary findings on the relationship between the works that appeared with the flourishing of the Padmasambhava biography in the fourteenth century. First, Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell kindly shared with me a very interesting manuscript exemplar, which Ngawang Tsepag photographed for them in the village of Sanggyé Ling (*sangs rgyas gling*), Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, in the summer of 2013 (henceforth PKT 2013).¹⁵ It differs from the Beijing and other published editions of the *Péma Katang* (e.g., PKT 1987) in a way that suggests another, perhaps earlier, recension of PKT has survived. In general, it correlates with other editions in its mixture of old and new material, except that it contains 122 chapters rather than 108, most notably including many chapters of Padmasambhava's advice upon leaving Tibet. However, it is not certain how many chapters, since a

15 Robert Mayer (personal communication, July 1, 2015). It was photographed as part of the University of Oxford digitisation program titled *The Ancient Tantra Collection from Sangyeling* (*Sangs rgyas gling Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*), directed by Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer (with an award from the John Fell OUP Research Fund).

number of folios are missing just at the point when the narrative moves to this section; the foliation is also confused from this point forward.

Figure 2 shows this section in black—reflecting its dependence on ZL3— with its missing folios in darkest grey; though it does not show the many points where *PKT* 2013 diverges (for example in being entirely in poetry rather than prose-poetry, a trait it shares with the other *PKTs*). Oddly, its closeness to the *Zanglingma* is what one would expect of Miwang Sönam Topgyel’s edited version rather than the divergent *PKT* 2013, since Miwang Sönam Topgyel claims to have edited *PKT* to bring it into line with the *Zanglingma* (see above).

Second, Sanggyé Lingpa’s fourteenth-century prose rendering of the *Péma Katang*—titled *Sertreng* (*gser phreng*; henceforth *SP*)—provides another key to unlocking something akin to the original *PKT*. It consists of 117 chapters, in prose and poetry, and though it follows *PKT* and thus ZL3 (marked in Figure 2 by light grey and black bars respectively), *SP* also includes its own unique elements (marked with diagonal-line bars) as well as parts uniquely taken from ZL1 (shown in white). At the end of its narrative, *SP* includes Padmasambhava’s advice (like *PKT* 2013), but once again follows ZL1 and in its own brand of prose and poetry (the black, white, and diagonal-line bars indicate this only as a caricature of its complexity). *SP*’s final colophon returns to being similar to *PKT*.

Third, Dorjé Lingpa’s (*rdo rje gling pa*; 1346–1405?) treasure biography of Padmasambhava, the *Lotsé Gyurjang* (*lo tsha’i ’gyur byang*; *LTGB*) in 100 chapters, follows *PKT* in the majority of its narrative. Though there are certain indications that it is closest to *PKT* 2013 at the beginning, it omits Padmasambhava’s final advice and its narrative is followed by a very short colophon that does not admit of conclusions. Figure 2 reflects *LTGB*’s general similarity with *PKT* in its interspersed black and light grey bars, but does not reflect its many small divergences, all of which have yet to be identified.

Lastly, Péma Lingpa’s (*padma gling pa*; 1450–1521) treasure biography, the *Münse! Drönmé* (*mun sel sgron me*; *MSGM*) in 105 or 106 chapters (it is a bit unclear toward the end) is the youngest, and may be based on Dorjé Lingpa’s work and, therefore, *PKT* (2013?). The content shared by *LTGB* and *MSGM*, but not found in the other works, is not represented on the graph (nor are *MSGM*’s unique elements), in order not to confuse the issue at hand, which is the light that these works shed on *the Péma*

Katang and the major trends in Padmasambhava biography taking place between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁶ Orgyen Lingpa's treasure biography evidently inspired emulation among other treasure revealers as well as future redaction to reflect new zeitgeists. Future scholarship triangulating between these five sources could shed light on the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century positions of these important masters and some of their followers, and on the period as imagined through the prophecies of Padmasambhava; while their divergences might allow us to see possible areas of tension within this depiction.

Innovations in the biography of Padmasambhava

What light does all this shed on the changing depiction of Padmasambhava? In the following section, the importance of Padmasambhava as the archetypal *siddha* in treasure biography literature should not be forgotten, nor should the importance of Orgyen Lingpa discovering a new, greatly expanded narrative of this lay religious adept at that moment in history (followed shortly by other discoverers in their particular times and places). The end of Sakya hegemony meant the collapse of one instantiation of a wider trend witnessed from at least the eleventh century onwards in Tibet, that of the celibate monk standing for the highest ideal and centre of ruling power in central Tibet. Some Nyingma lay masters like Orgyen Lingpa may have viewed with suspicion this ideal, identified by Ronald Davidson (2005: chapter 10) as a 'neoconservative' vision, despite the Nyingma's Katok (*ka thog*) Monastery apparently having been founded in the late twelfth century. This monastic ideal, coupled with Sarma (*gsar ma*, 'New School') criticism of many religious practices that *seemed* to have no basis in Indic tradition, likely represented a threat to the Nyingma and their treasure texts' legitimacy; at least they appear this way in the eyes of the twelfth-century Nyang Nyima Özer (see Doney 2014: 8–12). Jangchup Gyeltsen, though toppling the Sakya hegemony, was also ostensibly a celibate ruler from a pro-clerical Pakmo Drupa tradition (Kapstein 2006: 120), and so the contemporary audience who read the *Péma Katang* or heard it recited may also have interpreted it *inter alia* as an alternative to his authority and the values of his school.

16 For a more in-depth but still preliminary comparison of all of these works, see Doney 2016.

As in the *Zanglingma*, the lay *siddha* Padmasambhava is always the key to Tibet's salvation in the *Péma Katang*. The twelfth-century work's emphasis on the *siddha* ideal is retained in the fourteenth-century text, despite the fact that Padmasambhava is ordained for a while in the *Péma Katang* (which may suggest the growing influence of the above-mentioned monastic hegemony). The work paints the contemporary ruler of Tibet, Tri Songdétsen, as professing the laudable intention of building the eighth-century Samyé (*bsam yas*) Monastery, yet this does not detract from his comparatively deluded character and inferior status vis-à-vis Padmasambhava (see Doney 2017). Lastly, it is important to imagine the ways that this narrative—discovered in 1352—would have resonated with an audience exposed to it after Samyé was destroyed a year later, and rebuilt by Lama Dampa with the blessing of Jangchup Gyeltsen. The *Péma Katang* relates at length the crucial role that Padmasambhava plays in the very existence of Samyé Monastery by taming the site for its original construction.

The innovations of the *Péma Katang* include first a large amount of detail (roughly twelve chapters) preceding Padmasambhava's appearance on a lotus in Uḍḍiyāna. Whereas the *Zanglingma* states at the outset that Padmasambhava is an emanation of the primordial buddha Amitābha and the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara (ZLh 1b1–2), the *Péma Katang* recounts these existences at length and in so doing fixes these facts within a compelling narrative. Such a cosmogony vies with that of Avalokiteśvara as found in the *Gyelrap Selwé Mélong*, as well as in earlier narratives including the *Maṇi Kambum* (*maṇi bka' 'bum*) treasure text partially compiled by Nyang Nyima Özer (see Sørensen 1994: 14–27, 2015: 159–61). The *Maṇi Kambum* relates that Avalokiteśvara emanated as Emperor Tri Songtsen (Khri Srong btsan; 605?–649), but not Padmasambhava; whereas the *Péma Katang* does the opposite. In future, this section of the *Péma Katang* might be usefully contrasted with the *Gyelrap Selwé Mélong*'s narrative, in order to study competing views of the role this bodhisattva played in Tibet's salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*, see Schwieger 2000: 965–66, 2013: 74).

Second, Padmasambhava's travels around the Gangetic Plains of India before visiting Tibet are augmented with narratives of his journeys to or emanations in Khotan, China, Sri Lanka, Bengal, Kashmir, and so forth. Perhaps this extended peregrination is in line with the expanded

geographical awareness evidenced in other fourteenth-century histories, which recount the royal lineages of China, Khotan, and Mongolia, in addition to India, before turning to Tibet (see above quote from Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle 2013: 327). As part of this journey, Padmasambhava receives ordination under *Ānanda*, the disciple of the Buddha, and the work then refers to Padmasambhava as a ‘second Buddha’ (*sangs rgyas gnyis pa*), both as part of the third-person narrative and in the mouths of his converted devotees (for example, see PKT 2013 51a7 and 61a7). In this part of the narrative, Padmasambhava performs the majority of eleven deeds or acts, a number redolent of the Buddha’s famous twelve deeds, and most likely emulating their example. Thus, Padmasambhava is not only an emanation of buddhas and bodhisattvas, but his life-story takes its inspiration from the historical Buddha’s biography more than in the *Zanglingma*.

Third, specific prophecies that are included toward the end of the work bring the biography up to the date of the revelation of the *Péma Katang* itself. This innovation, which Per K. Sørensen calls ‘historiographical providentialism’ (2015: 161), is where the literary precedents and the influence of the times really intersect. Here, Orgyen Lingpa draws on the *Zanglingma* and other intervening works in order to legitimise the Nyingma school to which he belonged. However, this legitimisation was not always in accord with the concept of the land of Tibet as envisioned and ruled by the Pakmo Drupas. The evidence for the relationship between Orgyen Lingpa and Jangchup Gyeltsen is equivocal, yet it is difficult to tell if it was positive, negative, or mixed. Giuseppe Tucci (1999 [1949]: vol. 1, 113 col. i) states that Jangchup Gyeltsen ‘was extremely devoted’ to Orgyen Lingpa. Ramon Prats (1980: 257) suggests the same, but believes that the relationship went sour because Jangchup Gyeltsen was upset by Orgyen Lingpa’s prophecies. Matthew T. Kapstein (2000: 165–66) has offered evidence, which he admits is rather late, suggesting that the treasure revealer was threatened by the rise in Pakmo Drupa hegemony. However, Jacob Dalton (2011: 132) suggests that Orgyen Lingpa’s *Péma Katang* describes Jangchup Gyeltsen as an emanation of Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi bringing ‘a little happiness’ to central Tibet—though the difference between ‘a little happiness’ and ‘little happiness’ (i.e., almost none) is slight. He also makes reference to the Fifth Dalai Lama confirming the identification of the emanation of Vajrapāṇi with

Jangchup Gyeltsen (Dalton 2011: 253, n. 18). Perhaps it is rash to be too strictly exclusivist in answering such a question, looking for undeniable signs of a definite close or antagonistic relationship. It may be that Orgyen Lingpa's stance was similar to conciliatory position of Butön Rinchendrup (and perhaps Lama Dampa) between the Pakmo Drupa and the earlier Mongol rulers, discussed above. Orgyen Lingpa may have been exhibiting balance or pragmatism in his choice to not demonise the new ruler of central Tibet, and perhaps Tucci's source is right that they shared a positive bond at least at the time the *Péma Katang* was purportedly discovered. Given the mixed evidence on Orgyen Lingpa's relationship with Jangchup Gyeltsen as well as the new exemplar PKT 2013, it would be worth returning in future investigations to his representation of the Mongol-Sakya hegemonic period and Jangchup Gyeltsen in the prophecies of the *Péma Katang*.

Yet viewed from a wider perspective, the *Péma Katang* describes Padmasambhava as alone in offering not only salvation but also succour during these dark times. It draws again on the precedent of the *Zanglingma*, whose above-mentioned short praise implies that he still exists in the world rather than having died in the eighth or ninth century (ZLh 1b1–2). However, the *Péma Katang* goes further and has him promise to return for future generations on the tenth day of every month (an event still celebrated in today's pan-Tibetan Buddhist calendar, see Schwieger 1997). Thus, not only was Padmasambhava there at the beginning of beginningless time, but will forever remain in the world for the sake of all Tibetan Buddhists. Furthermore, just as the historical Buddha prophesies the coming of Padmasambhava in chapter 11 of the *Péma Katang*, so at its end Padmasambhava prophesies that Orgyan Lingpa and other Nyingma masters will offer salvation to Tibet due to their connection with him as disciples during their previous lives.

In this way, the *Péma Katang* incorporates the wider Indo-Tibetan Buddhist worldview (discussed in Schwieger 2000 and 2013) into its specifically Padma-centric narrative. It uses this shared basis to argue for Padmasambhava's preeminent status as a fully enlightened protector of Tibet and the Nyingma's privileged access to his salvational power, seemingly in contrast to other historiographical representations of the time.

Conclusion

Biographies and histories do more than merely educate or entertain on a local or universal level. They also attempt to persuade their readers of things the author thinks self-evident,¹⁷ as well as win followers for their cause. Historiographical works such as treasure biographies can therefore be read (with due caution) to reveal their revealers' devotion to certain practices and the perceived patronage they seek in order to continue and spread them. This is only one of many possible readings, but seen from this perspective the *Péma Katang* is only ostensibly Padmasambhava's own testimony to the future faithful and those in need of conversion to the growing cult of the Indian master himself. In a deeper sense, it reflects Orgyen Lingpa and his Nyingma milieu's attempt at channelling the imperial period through the conduit of treasure biography in order to speak to a fourteenth-century readership, poised at the beginning of a chaotic time in Tibetan history, about the benefits of belief in the Precious Guru rather than Sarma monastic schools. Other Nyingma masters evidently agreed with his vision of central Tibet's place in the world and Padmasambhava's importance to its society, and as such sought to renew the blessings of his treasure biography by discovering their own similar versions after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty.

These treasure biographies later became extremely influential, despite legitimising the Nyingma more than any of the schools that held most of the power after the fourteenth century. Their popularity, perhaps among the Pakmo Drupa but certainly with the later Gelukpa (*dge lugs pa*) school, seems to have given the Nyingma a back-door access to the hegemonic discourse of Tibetanness. Kapstein writes about the later importance of the *Péma Katang* and *Mañi Kambum* as follows:

For, following the conversion of Altan Khan in 1578, though the Dge-lugs-pa emerged as the predominant Tibetan sectarian trend among the Mongols, a number of *gter-ma* [treasure] traditions were soon promulgated among them as well, above all those of the *Mañi bka'* 'bum and *Padma bka'* thang. . . .

17 Perhaps, in the context of treasure revelation and following Robert Mayer, it would be preferable to use the term 'tradent' (meaning one who both transmits and contributes to the tradition of their religious lineage) rather than 'author' (in the modern sense applied to 'innovative creative writers,' Mayer 2013/2014 [2015]: 232).

Indeed, one of the notable innovations of the Fifth [Dalai Lama]'s works, and those of his regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho [Sanggyé Gyatso], was their explicit political use of prophecy drawn from *gter-ma*. In this connection, the *Padma bka' thang*, with its elaborate prophecies of the *gter-ston* [treasure revealers] themselves, that is, its prophecies of the prophets, must have assumed a privileged position, the mother, as it were, of Tibetan prophetic revelations in general. (Kapstein 2015: 172–74)

The Fifth Dalai Lama was born in a part of central Tibet especially connected with Padmasambhava's activities and—like Padmasambhava—claimed to be an emanation of the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara (see Kapstein 2015: 169, 173, 181). He asserted that some of the specific so-called historical references in fourteenth-century prophecies actually foretold his consolidation of power, thus setting Padmasambhava's seal of approval upon it. In fact, the prophecies were themselves created from pre-existing, vaguer twelfth-century prophecies—perhaps as a reflection of wider trends toward more detailed, up-to-date historiography. In this way, the Fifth Dalai Lama can be seen to have taken the next logical step in the increase of prophecy's political significance by interpreting these prophecies as preeminently referring to and legitimising himself and Gushri Khan (1582–1655) as saviours pre-ordained to rule (see also Schwieger 2000: 965–67, 2013: 74–75). Whatever tension may have existed during the fourteenth century between the cosmogony of the *Péma Katang* on Padmasambhava and *Maṇi Kambum* on Avalokiteśvara, it was seemingly resolved during the period of Gelukpa hegemony, and this perhaps not coincidentally (see Sørensen 2015: 160).

I have here only just begun to outline the many ways in which the *Péma Katang* influenced later Tibetan and Mongolian literature and Buddhist culture. The revelation of the *Péma Katang* was apparently of great importance not only for Nyingmapas but also Gelukpas living through these periods of great change, causing a major shift in how they conceptualised their world and history. Yet its central narrative seems to set itself in contrast (and perhaps reaction) to those expressed in other fourteenth-century histories. Beneath the surface of a largely homogenous Buddhist view of history prevalent in Tibet at the end of the Yuan period, lay different Tibetan cultural perspectives that existed

in tension with each other, and had yet to be unified. While in hindsight this period may appear as an era of unchanging and singular culture—this picture being one mirrored in Tibetan emic representations—by digging a little deeper one reveals vibrant, varied, and changing times that were not quite as static or monocentric as sometimes stated.

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Bhakti and Shamanism: Josmanī influence on the New Kiranti Religion

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Abstract

Though Kiranti (*Kirānti*) religion is still largely an oral tradition, the importance of script and writing has increased over the last decades. It is well known that the *Satyahaṅgmā* movement of Phalgunanda Lingden (1885–1949), a Limbu religious reformer from Panchthar in east Nepal, was a driving force in this development. Taking inspiration from developments in Darjeeling, he propagated the use of the *Śrījaṅgā* script as the symbol of a reformed Kiranti religion, which still retains certain shamanic features. What is less well known is the important influence that the Josmanī – a Bhakti sect that spread throughout Nepal in the nineteenth century – had on this movement. Although the Josmanī started as a Brahmanic Sant tradition, it increasingly opened itself to the lower castes, including many Rai and Limbu, for whom it was a novel encounter with a reformed religion. Phalgunanda had grown up with these egalitarian ideas and apparently integrated them into his reform movement. During the rule of the Rana dynasty in Nepal (1846–1951), the Josmanī tradition was regarded as oppositional and therefore its followers were often prosecuted; some escaped to Sikkim, where we still find a relatively large community. This article looks at the religious sites and shrines of both the Josmanī and followers of Phalgunanda, as well as his main successor Atmananda. It is based on preliminary research in Panchthar, Ilam, and southern Sikkim.¹

Introduction: what is Kiranti religion?

Ever since Nepal was declared a multiethnic and multilingual state in the Constitution of 1990, the various ethnic communities have intensified

1 Data were collected in November 2013 during a research trip financed by the Austrian Science Fund (as part of the FWF project P 23204-G15). I am grateful to this agency for its support.

their endeavours to define their cultures and traditions by opting for certain labels and filling them with distinct content. In the case of the Rai and the Limbu, this has led to the establishment of two major ethnic organisations: the *Kirāt Rāi Yāyokkhā* represents the numerous Rai groups and the *Kirāt Yākthung Cumlung* represents the Limbu, or, as they now prefer to call themselves in Nepal, the Yakthumba. In most matters of cultural politics these two organisations operate separately. However, it is interesting (and unique) that the two groups claim to share a common religion. Since 1991, the Census of Nepal has officially recognized the term *Kirāt* as a religious affiliation – representing 3.1% of the nation’s population, which translates to approximately 850,000 individuals, making it the fourth largest affiliation after Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim. It is not entirely clear who was behind this move, but it reflects a commonly held perception that in spite of the considerable differences in their languages and the numerous differences in the details of their cultural practices, the Rai and Limbu have a very similar religious ethos. However, as this article will try to demonstrate, this commonality – though it has a certain historical foundation – is in many respects more a matter of construction and intention than of fact.

As I have shown in earlier research on the Mewahang Rai (Gaenszle 2000, 2002) and the Puma Rai (2012), there are a number of features that characterise traditional Rai religion, and these features can also be seen as typical of Kiranti religion as a whole: First, the religious tradition is transmitted orally; above all, it lives in the spoken word. Second, there is a comprehensive mythology that recounts – in a series of narratives – the origin of the world, the migration of ancestral beings, and the establishment of cultural institutions. Third, in ritual practice a distinct register of speech is used to address these various ancestral beings and communicate with them through words and deeds (particularly through offerings). The totality of this ritual and mythological practice, which is closely linked to the kinship system, can be described as an ancestral religion. Among the Kiranti it is known as *mundhum*, or by various cognate terms.² In many ways, this is their ethos, their way of life, as inherited from their forebears.

2 Other terms are *muddum* (Mewahang), *mundum* (Puma, Bantawa), *mindum* (Yamphu), *ridum* (Kulung), and *ḍiumla* (Thulung), cf. Gaenszle (2002: 41f).

Though the numerous Kiranti groups have their own distinct ritual systems (and there is indeed considerable variety not only in detail), it is a common and pervasive feature that the ritual specialists are of at least two kinds: on the one hand, there is a priest (sometimes called tribal priest)³, who is in charge of ordinary ancestral rituals; on the other, there is a shaman, who is in charge of healing rituals in the case of affliction. Whereas the former (who is always male) performs his recitations exclusively in the indigenous tongue, the latter – who shares many features with the pan-Nepalese *jhānkri* (shaman) – includes in the nightly séance recitations in Nepali, though recitations partly include the local language as well. In practice, however, these divisions are not always clear-cut, as the priest may also perform healing rituals (during the daytime) and the shaman is involved in non-healing events, such as funeral rites. Moreover, some traditions have developed additional categories of specialists, although some of these can more precisely be described as ritual roles that one and the same person can perform.

What is important for the purpose of this study is the recent move away from domestic rituals towards a greater public presentation of religious practice. This is most evident in the construction of new temples, which did not traditionally exist. One particularly significant example is the Kiranti temple at Hattiban in the Kathmandu Valley (see Gaenzle 2016). A temple of this type is called a *mañghim* (god house) and many have been built in eastern Nepal over the last decades. What is unique about the temple at Hattiban is that it is *explicitly* a Kiranti temple, housing four shrines for the four major Kiranti groups.

The main entrance in the west leads to the shrine of the Limbu: an eight-storeyed pyramidal structure on which offerings are placed; this is the now-common aniconic altar in modern Limbu worship (see below). The northern entrance leads to the shrine of the Rai: a typical domestic fire-place with three hearth stones, which are ordinarily used to support cooking vessels but in ritual practice are seen as seats of the ancestors. To the east is the shrine of the Sunuwar: a simple flat stone with eight amulets and seven *trisūls* at the back. And to the south is the shrine of the Yakkha: a blue, metal, cage-like structure in which offerings are placed. Above the four entrances are located the logos of

3 Cf. Allen (1976).

the four ethnic organisations: the logo of the *Kirāt Yākthung Cumluṅ* is a quadrangular magical diagram with bamboo wands; that of the *Kirāt Rāi Yāyokkhā* includes a drum, cymbals, bow and arrow, with a gourd in the centre; the Kirat Sunuwar Welfare Society's logo is a bow and arrow as well as the sun and a bird; and lastly, that of the *Kirāt Yākkhā Chummā* is an image of an altar with two gourds containing beer offerings.

This temple can be regarded as a symbolic structure representing the present self-image of the Kiranti, who are made up of these four distinct groups (albeit varying in size and with internal divisions) and whose worship may differ in its respective forms but is nonetheless similar and thus united under one roof. The character of this worship can be described as traditional, that is to say, making use of typical objects important in *mundhum* rituals: in particular, gourds for beer offerings, bamboo structures, drums, and cymbals. Significantly, animal sacrifice is not allowed at the temple, although it is widely practiced in village rituals; while it is not forbidden, blood offerings can only be made outside the temple compound.

These observations on a unified temple worship lead us to the main question of this study: what influences have affected this modern form of a unitary Kiranti religion? As is evident, it has retained its traditional style as a largely shamanic ancestral religion, marked by oral recitations accompanied by drumming. In this context, the practice of dancing is also important to note, as the Sakela Dance is a major practice of worship during festivals, especially at full moon in Baisakh and Mangsir (see Wettstein 2018). But on closer inspection it becomes clear that there is also a new ethos involved, which seems to have a different source. This is most evident in the shrine of the Limbu: the eight-storeyed shrine that is neither found in traditional contexts nor is it typically Hindu. Thus, to speak simply of Hinduisation is not enough; instead, we must look at the history of Kiranti religious reform.

The most significant type of reform in Kiranti religion has been the introduction of the Kiranti (or Limbu) script. This distinct system of writing is said to have been introduced by a Sikkimese monk named *Śrijaṅgā*, and is therefore also known as *Śrijaṅgā* script. His biographical circumstances are not entirely clear and much is surrounded by legend. For example, it is often recounted that the original *Śrijaṅgā* lived

some eleven hundred years ago, and that his invention was lost and later rediscovered by another *Śrījaṅgā* in the eighteenth century (see Subba 1995: 32). The latter, it is said, was killed by order of Sikkimese authorities, and is therefore regarded as an early martyr of the Kiranti cause. So what is true about these stories, what actually happened? Even though few scholars have worked on this issue, there is now hardening evidence that the script was indeed introduced in the eighteenth century by a Limbu monk, who largely based it on existing scripts with the intention of uplifting Limbu traditions through the scripturalisation of the Limbu language. According to the historian Ramesh Dhungel (who studied the Hodgson manuscripts in the British Library), the monk was actually known as Rupihang and appears to have been an early activist fighting for Limbu independence and thus regarded by the Sikkimese king as a separatist (Dhungel 2006). Whatever the exact circumstances surrounding the introduction of the script, it is clear that this innovation was a political act and represented a claim to a distinct cultural and religious tradition on a par with other scriptural traditions (such as the Lepcha, the Tibetans, and the Hindus).

The script did not, however, play a significant role until the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was popularised by Iman Singh Chemjong and Phalgunanda (see below). But today it is without doubt an important symbol of Kiranti identity, especially among the Limbu. So what kind of scriptural tradition is it that has been created in recent times? Little is known about this so far, and several questions arise: How are the texts produced? Are they primarily religious in nature, and if so, are they identical with the oral texts, that is to say transcribed from performance? How are they used in ritual practice? And lastly, has scripturalisation changed the ritual tradition in any basic manner?

In order to understand the changes in Kiranti religion and the effects of its scripturalisation one must look at the early twentieth-century reform movements active in the border areas of eastern Nepal, Sikkim, and west Bengal. Above all others, one reformer played an important role: the founder of the *Satyahaṅgmā* movement, Mahaguru Phalgunanda. He not only propagated the Kiranti script and called for a formal system of education, he also preached a more temperate and pure style of living and a new form of religion and devotion.

Phalgunanda's religion

Today, Phalgunanda Lingden (1885–1949) is seen as a founding ancestor of modern Kiranti religion: his picture is found in many homes and temples and the anniversary of his birth is regularly celebrated in urban centres such as Kathmandu and Dharan. Yet it should be stressed at the outset that he is not without controversy, as his form of religion represents a radical revision of traditional Kiranti practices. So who was this Mahaguru?

Phalgunanda was born in November 1885 (on Kartik 25, i.e. mid-November) as Nardhoj Lingden in Cukcinamba, Panchthar district, a small rural Limbu village in eastern Nepal (for a detailed account of his life, see Gaenszle 2013). Already as a child he had religious leanings, visions, and experiences of possession and derangement – the typical signs of a shamanic calling. Eventually, he left the poverty and narrowness of his village to join the British Army, where he first served in Burma and then during WWI he fought in Italy. It was there that he realised the vanity and insanity of war, and he soon returned to India and became a *sādhu*, wandering through the subcontinent and eventually returning to the Himalayas of Nepal. It is said that during one of his pilgrimages and wanderings through the mountains he discovered letters of the Kiranti script in a cave. Whatever the truth of this story may be, this was indeed a time when the Limbu community was under pressure from the Rana government and its land policies (Caplan 1970) and actively began to organise itself and redefine its customs. In 1931, the major Limbu chiefs under the leadership of Phalgunanda held a large meeting on the Silauti Hill to decide on basic changes to their traditions. During this meeting, which came to be known as the *Yākthung Cumlung Satya Dharma Muculkā* [Limbu Convention on True Religion], they pledged to reform their marriage customs (e.g. reduction of marriage payments), and above all else to purify their practices by giving up alcohol and animal sacrifice. This was the beginning of the *Satyahaṅgmā* movement, which sought to follow a spirit of truth (*satya*) that would become the new divinity (*haṅgmā*, in Limbu). By following this new ethos – the Satya Dharma – Phalgunanda promised his fellow Limbu that they would regain their land, which had partly been lost to immigrating high-caste Hindus, and eventually their former political power as well. Not surprisingly, this public agitation was viewed as a dangerous development by the Ranas and was thus closely followed.

The movement reached its peak in the 1940s as Phalgunanda propagated the script (which had been revised by Iman Singh Chemjong, see Limbu 1978) for use in regular schools, as books were printed, and many temples were built with funds raised by the Mahaguru and his followers. But when he died in 1949, the movement seemed to lose ground and almost disappeared (Jones & Jones 1976: 45). Yet his far-reaching reform ideas had only little effect on common practice, and if not for a few disciples, the memory of Phalgunanda would have quickly waned. In the 1950s and 1960s, after the fall of the Rana regime, the general situation in Nepal changed as various political parties emerged upon the scene. Then in the 1970s, new leaders appeared claiming to embody the master's spirit, in particular Atmananda Lingden (a relative of Phalgunanda), and the reform religion experienced a revival. Today, Atmananda – who lives in Larumba (Ilam district) on the hill inhabited by his followers (see below) – is widely acknowledged as the Mahaguru's successor and regarded by many as the Spiritual Leader of the Kiranti.⁴

Before I take a look at the present situation, the question should be raised: What kind of religion was it that Phalgunanda propagated? Was it simply a Hinduised form of Kiranti religion, or was it perhaps a kind of tribalised (or de-Sanskritised)⁵ Hinduism? On the one hand, it is clear that there are ethnic elements, such as the shamanic possession of the young Phalgunanda; on the other, there is a certain aspect of Shaivism (as he is often depicted with a *triśul*). Yet above all, the Sant version of Bhakti devotionalism exerted a strong influence, in particular the Sant *sampradāya* of the Josmanī, which was very popular in the Panchthar district at the time (and to date) and had a lasting impact on Phalgunanda; it is even said that he was initiated into this tradition early on. Apparently, he synthesised various strands of tradition, and only with this in mind can one understand current developments and factions.

4 There were other claimants to reincarnation as well: one was Jyotinanda, a Rai from Bhojpur, who died in 1984. The other Rai spiritual leader, Omnanda (born 1979), is today a global preacher of Loveism, who has increasingly moved away from his Kiranti heritage. He is a typical example of the new kind of gurus popular among members of the urban, educated middle-class attracted to individualistic forms of religion (cf. Toffin 2016).

5 Lecomte-Tilouine 2003 describes the process of de-Sanskritisation in the case of the Magar.

The historical figure of Phalgunanda remains enigmatic, as few textual documents exist. Thus, in order to understand his religious outlook we must search for traces he left in the form of disciples, their lines of transmission, local narratives, and the places of worship they established and maintain. Today, numerous temples (*mañghim*) can be found throughout eastern Nepal (partly established by Phalgunanda himself) as well as in the Kathmandu Valley. However, it should be stressed that there is no unity of tradition, but rather a number of competing spiritual lineages. Nevertheless, a closer look at these places of worship can provide us with clues to the foundations of Phalgunanda's beliefs.

Phalgunanda shrines in Kathmandu

Apart from the Kiranti community, few people know that there are several shrines run by disciples of Phalgunanda in the Kathmandu Valley. Though the Mahaguru does not have any representation at the Hattiban temple—as leaders there are against fundamental reform of the *mundhum*⁶ – there is a significant religious site on the sacred field of Lord Paśupati (in Deopatan).

Paśupatināth

Close to the Kirāteśvar temple (located in the northwest sector of Mṛgasthāli Hill) on the eastern side of the Bagmati River, there is a relatively new temple area that is known as New Kirāteśvar, or simply *mañghim* (god house). For more than a century (at least) the old Kirāteśvar temple has been a site of pilgrimage for the Rai and Limbu of east Nepal; however, since the temple itself is in Brahmanic hands, the Kiranti built their own temple nearby, apparently with the tacit approval of the authorities.

When walking from the old Kirāteśvar temple up towards the new one, one passes a small shrine that houses a rather realistic statue of

6 Especially ethnic activists are critical of the Satyahangma movement, regarding it as too much influenced by Hinduism. At the Hattiban temple, therefore, even though the Limbu altar is of the Satyahangma type, Phalgunanda, who is highly respected as a historical figure, is absent and not worshipped. Moreover, the followers of Atmananda are seen as sectarian and have been expelled from the premises: they now have their own shrine at Lubhu (see below).

Phalgunanda, sitting in the lotus position and holding a *triśul* in his right hand. According to the metal plate below, it was donated by Aitahang Serbandung Fenduwa and family, a Limbu from Patan, in memory of his parents and parents-in-law. The plate refers to the honoured figure as ‘Kirat Dharma Guru, Tapasvi Maha Guru Falgunanda Lingden Satya Hangma’, adding his dates of birth and death. The date of the donation itself is not given, but as it is expressly stated that the guru was ‘Declared the 16th National Luminary of Nepal B.S. 2066 Mangsir 16 Gate’ (i.e. on December 1, 2009),⁷ it seems likely that it was installed on this occasion or soon after.

On the occasion of Phalgunanda’s annual birthday celebrations on Kārtik 25 (mid-November) special pujas are performed to honour the Mahaguru. These rituals take place both at the memorial shrine as well as the temple and are the responsibility of the acting pujari, who in 2013 was a 76-year old Limbu from Panchthar. The main temple, a simple roofed structure, was previously open on all four sides, but due to the numerous monkeys roaming through the forested area, it has been closed in with metal sheets or fenced with netting wire. What is important here is that the central place of worship is the same eight-storeyed pyramidal structure as the Limbu shrine found in the Hattiban temple. As we shall see, this is the common type of shrine used by all followers of Phalgunanda.

When I witnessed the celebrations in November 2013, the main



Fig. 1. Phalgunanda statue at Paśupatiṅāth (Kathmandu).

⁷ The title of National Luminary (in Nepali, *rāṣṭriya vibhūti*) is recommended by a commission of the Nepal Academy but must be ratified by the government’s cabinet, which was done on December 1, 2009.

pujari was accompanied by a second, younger priest, a Sampang Rai from Taplejung, who had previously acted as a *dhāmi* (shaman). Now, rather than perform oral recitations from memory, the priests recite by reading from a book with invocations written in the Kiranti script. They accompany this with offerings of flowers, fruits (bananas, oranges, and apples), rice, water, incense, and the sound of cymbals and drumming with a *damaru* (hand-drum). The main rituals are done inside the temple (e.g. Chasok, for the new harvest), but there are also smaller shrines located outside the temple, in particular that of the Limbu territorial deity Laje Tangma Yuma (*jagat ko dhani*). Considering the kinds of offerings that are made (flowers, fruits, oil lamps, etc.), these are pure rituals, in line with Hindu pujas, and blood offerings have no place. At the same time, much – especially the language – appears to be in keeping with traditional Limbu ritual practice.

Lubhu

Another kind of shrine where the tradition of *Satyahaṅgmā* rituals is maintained is near Lubhu, on the rim of the Kathmandu Valley (close to the hamlet of Sankhadevi). Here, the followers of Atmananda Lingden have established a temple complex, consisting of two main temples. One of the temples is an open structure with a fireplace in the shape of an eight-pointed star, where fire offerings (*hom*) are made. This temple is called *Khijoklung*. Beside it sits a smaller temple with the eight-storied pyramidal altar inside, along with large *triśuls* and images of Phalgunanda. This shrine is known as the *Mujoklung* and is always open for the purpose of offerings. For example, if requested a Mangenna ritual for raising the soul can be performed. Most visitors arrive on Saturday, as this is the main day of offerings, and the main pujari can be employed for special rituals that day. A caretaker lives at the compound, which is surrounded by a fence.

This temple complex clearly bears the imprint of Atmananda and his ashram in Larumba: several priests are active performers and all have been trained in Larumba. Moreover, the texts they use (known as *Sāmjik Mundhum*) are also produced in Larumba. Thus, visitors who make it to this somewhat peripheral site are nonetheless all orthodox followers of the Atmananda line. It seems that this line is only now beginning to establish a presence in the Kathmandu Valley, even though many

Limbus remain somewhat sceptical about it. In the eastern part of Nepal, the influence of Atmananda seems to be much stronger.

Atmananda in Larumba

In order to reach the premises of Atmananda Lingden in Larumba (Bajho VDC [Village Development Committee, the lowest tier of local government at the time], Ilam district) from the Tarai town of Damak, one must drive for about three hours on an unpaved road that leads to Rabi in the Panchthar district and then joins the main road to Taplejung in Ranke. This entire stretch of road is, somewhat euphemistically, known as Phālgunanda Rājmarg (Phālgunanda Highway), and there is in fact a memorial statue of the Mahaguru in the midst of a roundabout at the beginning of the road in Damak and another one near Larumba.

The village of Larumba consists of settlements spread across a hill that was acquired by Atmananda Lingden. It is now inhabited by some 7,000 of his followers, who are designated, interestingly, as *bhaktas*. Their houses, mostly sheet-metal constructions, can be identified by the triple flags (one white, one red, one white) hoisted in front – a sign of Atmananda’s community. The major settlement – Mangsebung – includes a sports ground as well as a helipad, which is connected to the guru’s premises by a broad asphalt road, upon which guests of high standing travel by limousine. A large meeting ground is located at the centre of the hill, where Atmananda holds conventions of followers, addressing them and giving *darśan*.

Located above the meeting ground is the temple (*mañghim*) complex, which in typical fashion consists of a main temple and a roofed fireplace (*dhumi*) for the fire offerings. Inside the temple there is a large eight- storeyed pyramidal altar, where offerings are presented: metal containers with flowers, rice, conch, and so forth. In the back, there is a wooden tripartite shrine containing three plates of offerings, an image of Phalgunanda, bells, and other ritual objects, with the whole flanked by *triśuls*. In another corner, there are several stone images of Phalgunanda and round stone plates with Kiranti script mantras inscribed upon them, the latter apparently presented as votive offerings.

The whole area is seen as the rising sacred centre of the spiritual leader of all the Kiranti. In fact, one follower described it to me as their Vatican City. While realising that his comparison was perhaps somewhat of an



Fig. 2. Temple (maṅghim) in Larumba.

exaggeration, the Dharmaguru (as he is called) – who is privately a rather modest person – does indeed have a few court-like officers: for example, a personal assistant, a finance secretary, and security officers. The mini-estate is in the process of growth and expansion, with no apparent dearth of sponsors and donations. An important part of the community's activities is the production of religious literature, most importantly the printing of the *Sāmjik Mundhum*, the core religious

text, which is produced as a kind of holy book of the Kiranti and used for standard rituals. Such scriptures derived from the oral *mundhums* have existed since the propagation of the Kiranti script by Phalgunanda, but this version of the *Sāmjik Mundhum* bears the mark of Atmananda, who claims divine inspiration in his dreams. What exactly constitutes the contribution of Atmananda remains to be studied, but it is clear that he sees himself, as did Phalgunanda before him, as part of a civilising mission: he is fighting against the backward practices of blood sacrifice and alcohol offerings that remain an important part of the traditional *mundhum*. Thus, he propagates a new, sanitised Kiranti religion that is attractive to a well-to-do, middle-class following that is growing in numbers worldwide. In fact, there are plans to translate the *Sāmjik Mundhum* not only into Nepali, but also Hindi, Bengali, and English. There seems to be no limit to the proselytising spirit of Atmananda and his followers who strive for nothing less than a globalised religion.

Yet the question remains: what was the real religion of the historical Phalgunanda? It is in this region along the ridge dividing the Ilam and Panchthar districts that the Mahaguru was active, moving around as an itinerant *sādhu* with his *triśul*. The village of his birth, Cukcinamba, is

Fig. 3. Tomb of Phalgunanda in Silauti Danda.



close to Larumba; and so is his place of death, Silauti, which is today perhaps the main site of commemoration and pilgrimage for his various followers.

Silauti

The hilltop known as Silauti Danda is located near the road leading to Taplejung at Ranke. It is a strategically important location because from here one can see much of eastern Kirant: one looks down into the Tamur Koshi in the west, or towards Sikkim in the east, and one sees Kanchanjunga in the north, and the plains to the south. This is also a historically significant place, as it was here that the *das limbu* (the Ten Limbu Chiefs) gathered in 1931, having come from throughout the region to decide on how to proceed in order to retain their ancestral lands. This famous meeting – known as the *Yākthung Cumlung Satya Dharma Muculkā* [lit. Commitment to the Religion of Truth by the Limbu Community] – was the beginning of a movement that strove for greater autonomy during the time of Rana autocratic rule. Phalgunanda was crucial in bringing the meeting about, and he gave a major speech urging the Limbu to reform their culture and religion (Gaenszle 2013: 57).

In fact, it was in Silauti that Phalgunanda, who generally moved from place to place, liked to spend the hot season. For him, the place held special meaning because (according to the grandson of the present temple priest) it is here that he attained enlightenment (*gyān pāeko*). He eventually built a temple there and made it his ‘home base’, his place

of preference.⁸ It was for this reason that in 1949, when his health was failing and he felt that the time of dying was near, he expressed his wish to return to Silauti. Although he was carried there by his disciples, he died along the way, in a place called Immung, shortly before reaching the top. But Phalgunanda was buried on the hilltop and his tomb (*samādhi*) is marked on the side by a stone relief of his bust (in the style of an ascetic, with *mālā*, earrings, and hairknot) and flanked by *triśuls*. Today, the tomb is surrounded by a small fence and guarded by the military post next to it.

Of greatest interest, however, are the interior spaces of the three temples located below the hilltop (towards the west). One is a larger edifice, actually consisting of two sections, an entrance area and the inner sanctum, which contains a rather unusual wooden structure as

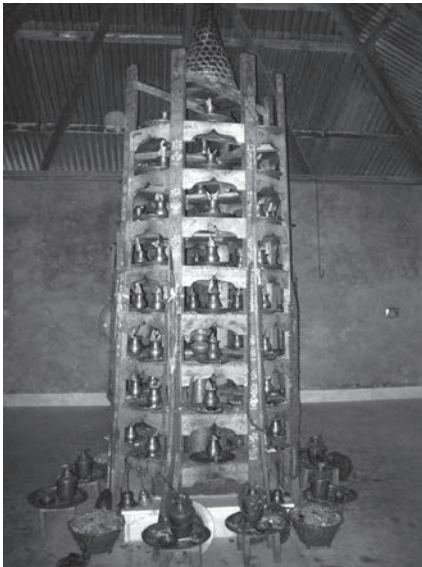


Fig. 4. Shrine in the main temple of Phalgunanda in Silauti.

the major shrine and place of offering. This structure consists of eight levels of octagonal shelves fixed on eight vertical beams, thus providing space for eight times eight, that is to say, sixty-four niches for offerings of water containers (*loṭā*) with flowers. While this has the appearance of being a rather singular kind of shrine, structurally it seems to be a conceptual variant of the previously discussed eight-tiered pyramids. At the side of the inner sanctum there is a small altar that displays relics: the wooden sandals of Phalgunanda, his fire tongs

8 As I learned after writing this article, during a further visit in September 2017 (together with Mélanie Vandenhelsken), there is an older temple a few kilometers further to the northwest, at a place known as Labrekuṭi, which is the first temple founded on the Silauti ridge by Phalgunanda already in 1923. This sacred site has since been expanded, more recently with the financial support by Atmananda.

(*ciṃṭa*), a yak tail, and the well-known photographic image of him holding his *triśul*. It is said that this building is the place where the Mahaguru gained enlightenment.

The other temples seem to be older (although they both have recent tin-roof constructions). The one in the middle contains a simple fireplace (the *dhuni*), while the second, smaller temple once again houses a pyramidal shrine, but here it has only six layers and is the seat of the worship to *Him Sammaṅg* (the house deity). This smaller temple is the one that Phalgunanda used for his daily worship: it contains a large shamanic drum that is said to have been crafted by the Mahaguru himself from a tree and covered with the skin of a deer. The impressive instrument is a strong indication of the shamanic heritage in Phalgunanda's ritual practice. But one also finds other elements present in the temple: for example, two relatively modern-looking, coloured Shiva statues with one sitting on a tiger skin and the smaller of the two holding a *triśul*.

All in all, this temple and its objects clearly show that Phalgunanda was an ascetic (*sādhu*, *tapasvin*) who regularly went into retreat. Though we know that he had many followers and disciples, he also cherished solitude. At the same time, it is evident that the shamanic tradition, which he knew well from local Limbu healers (*yebas*) and tribal priests (*phedangbas*), was also an important element of his ritual practice. It is through these ritual practitioners that he most likely acquired his good knowledge of the *mundhum*.

Yet besides these influences of shamanism, Shaivism, and asceticism, there is an element of Bhakti tradition, which we still have not properly identified. It appears to be manifested in the eight-storeyed pyramidal shrine constructions, but where do these come from? As has already been indicated, there is evidence that Phalgunanda was strongly influenced by the Josmanī *paramparā*, a Bhakti sect of the Sant tradition that worships the divine as *nirguṇa* (formless). This tradition is little known today but was widespread in nineteenth-century Nepal. It is not entirely clear whether Phalgunanda was formally initiated into the order, but according to his biographers (Gurung & Dahal 1990: 21) he received the teachings from a disciple of Śaśidhar (c.1747-1849, according to Timalsina 2010: 202) in Burma, where in 1913 he was stationed as a soldier in the British Army. This unnamed teacher taught him *Vedānta* and also gave him the name Phalgunanda (his birth name

having been Nardhoj and his nickname Phalam Singh). However, he had been practicing *bhakti* before this and it is likely that he had come in contact with the Josmanī early on. It was particularly in the area of his birth, in and around the town of Rabi (Panchthar), that the Josmanī had and still have many followers, due to the strong influence of Gyān Dil Dās (1821–1883), who actively proselytised in the region (see below). What kind of religion and practice was it that the Josmanī spread?

Traces of the Josmanī

The Josmanī *paramparā* was a Sant tradition whose adepts, as followers of *nirguṇa bhakti*, rejected all forms of image worship. This was a highly syncretistic form of religion which blended Śrī Vaiṣṇava Bhakti and Nāth Yoga traditions (Timalsina 2010), and though the original founders seem to be mainly of high caste origin, the ethos was clearly against Vedic elitism and became more and more inclusive socially. According to the standard work by Janaklal Sharma (1963), the founder of the Josmanī sect was Harischandra, but we only reach firmer ground with his successor in the fifth generation, Śasīdhar Dās, a Brahmin from the Paudyal clan born in Prasutpuri (Trisulaganga), Nepal, who travelled to India and stayed for some time in Puri (Orissa) before returning to the hills. It is said that it was he – a contemporary of the nation’s father, Prithvi Narayan Shah – who spread the Josmanī creed throughout Nepal, including to the various ethnic groups such as the Magar, Gurung, and Kiranti (Rai and Limbu). We know that even one of the Shah kings, Rana Bahadur Shah, was an initiated follower, who adopted the name Nirvāṇānanda (see Sharma 1963: 65).

The movement was particularly successful in eastern Nepal, and this seems largely due to the activities of the well-remembered guru Gyāndil Dās, an Upadhyaya Brahmin born in the district of Ilam.⁹ According to the biographic account in Sharma (1963: 86–113), early in his youth he was already keen on staying in caves to meditate. Eventually, he received formal initiation through Śyāmdil Dās in the village of Nagin, Panchthar district, and went to Rumjatar in order to spread the Josmanī

9 Sharma (1963: 86) states that it is unclear whether his birthplace was in a village called Phikal in Ilam or (according to another source) Dhankuta. In fact, more recent research provides evidence that it was Āmacok, a VDC (Village Development Committee) in Ilam district (Rai & Dumirai 2013: 169).

Fig. 5. Temple of Gyāndil Dās in Geling (Sikkim).



creed. There he preached against image worship and the caste system, converting many locals, especially among the Gurung. He also reached Kathmandu and was well respected among the Ranas, despite the fact that another follower of the Josmanī, Lakhan Thapa, had organised a revolt and assassination attempt against Jang Bahadur Rana. According to Sharma, he initiated Ranaudip Rana into the order and was given explicit permission by the prime minister to proselytise in eastern Nepal, where he returned. However, after the death of Jang Bahadur Rana in 1877, the local *Baḍa Hakim* (Chief District Officer) in Rumjatar banned his activities and Gyāndil Dās eventually had to escape to India.

After spending some time in Darjeeling and other places, Gyāndil Dās eventually established himself in western Sikkim, in a place called Geling (west of Namchi), where he stayed until his death in 1883. It is here, at the site of his temple and *samādhi*, that one still finds a lively, active community of followers who keep the spirit of the Josmanī tradition alive: *bhakti* devotion, especially through the singing of songs composed by the guru, is practiced by the followers and many play the *ektāre* (a one-stringed lute) typically used by devotional singers throughout Bengal.

What is interesting in relation to our search for Phalgunanda's religious roots are the sacred shrines used by the Josmanī: they resemble the abstract multilayered pyramidal constructions mentioned above, but here they have only four tiers and the shape is not a quadrangle (or octagon) but, in the case of the main temple, an eight-pointed star.



Fig. 6. *Nirmāṇ Dās dhām* in Geling (Sikkim).

In some instances they are round, as are the shrines of two deceased disciples of Gyāndil Dās (Koī Dās *dhām* and *Nirmāṇ Dās dhām*), which are kept as memorials. In fact, these shrines look like simple, archaic *caityas*! But in ritual practice these shrines are used as altars, where offerings (mainly flowers) but also all kinds of ritual objects are placed: oil lamps, conch shells, water containers, yak tails, bells, *ḍamaru*, *rudrākṣa mālās*, images, and so forth. As in the case of the *maṅghim* in Nepal, where followers of Phalgunanda worship aniconic

icons, the *Josmanī* here worship a formless god in the form of an abstract object.

The *Josmanī* in Geling do not use ritual texts, as the songs they sing are all sung by heart. Yet, it is known that Gyāndil Dās was a prolific composer who also wrote down many of his songs and ideas, and indeed many of these are recorded in Janaklal Sharma's book. And perhaps even more exist, as the temple priest keeps stewardship over a black metal box in which it is said there are more of the guru's writings.

In fact, Gyāndil Dās's learning is well remembered and emerges in local narratives. Foremost among these is the story of the guru engaging in a public debate with the Christian missionary Reverend Archibald Turnbull, who belonged to the Scottish Mission in Darjeeling. Apparently, there was conflict due to the spread of the colonial presence and the British tried to counter the increasing *Josmanī* influence in the hill country. So, according to the oral legend (see Sharma 1963: 100-102), Turnbull told Gyāndil Dās to leave Darjeeling, but the latter said he would only do so after having met in person. Turnbull agreed only under the condition that his adversary submit to him as a student of Christianity. In turn, Gyāndil Dās challenged Turnbull to a duel with words between

equals, a debate that would decide whose religion was superior. The loser, it was agreed, would burn all his books. The debate went on for several days and was eagerly followed by the public. Eventually, so the story goes, Gyāndil Dās won – and Turnbull had to burn the Bible! The ashes thereof were retained in the following manner: the guru mixed them with honey and made beads of them, which he distributed to be worn as a necklace; this is how the memory of the victory is visibly kept alive up to the present day.¹⁰

Though the tradition seems primarily to have flourished in Sikkim (there are also sites further east in Assam, Bhutan, and even Tripura) one can gain some insight into the powerful impact it once had in eastern Nepal. There is no doubt that Phalgunanda's own ideas were to a considerable degree affected by it; however, he took it up (or rather adopted elements from it) in order to convert these into something new. By the late 1930s, the *Satyahaṅgmā* movement had become a distinct and independent *paramparā* in Nepal, alongside the Josmanī, who continued to have their following among both Hindu high castes and various ethnic groups. Yet the new *Satyahaṅgmā* religion with its own scriptures in Limbu language was entirely restricted to the Limbu community – it was the beginning of an ethnic movement, which though split into numerous contemporary lineages, continues to be a powerful force in today's Nepal.

Conclusion

Returning to our initial question concerning the characteristics and constituents of the new Kiranti religion, we can observe the following: the reformed religion of the Kiranti is the result of numerous influences that have affected, complemented, and transformed the traditional practice of the *mundhum*. At base, there is still a strong core of indigenous religious practice, which can be characterised as shamanic, and is strongly linked to the local Kiranti languages and ritual idiom. In the biographies of the gurus we find the typical narratives of shamanic calling, the initiatory experiences of divine possession in the forest, and dreams and visions of Kiranti deities. The drum, the most emblematic

10 Today there are two lines of Josmanī: the Tyāgi ascetics follow a strict vegetarian diet, while the Khāgi (= *khāg*, 'ashes'), those who received a necklace, are married followers who eat meat.

symbol of the shaman, plays an important role in ritual practice, along with other instruments such as the cymbal. Above all, the recitations in a distinct ritual register of the ancestral language are the central focus of ritual performance; there is hardly a ritual that is not accompanied by the words of the *mundhum*.

But alongside this base of traditional ideas and practices we find many elements derived from Hindu traditions, such as fire sacrifice (*hom*) and the importance the holy syllable *om* (or variants).¹¹ Most evident is the ubiquitous *triśul* that is found on the shrines, with a particularly large one held by all of Phalgunanda's images. But though this seems to point to a strong Shaiva influence and *sādhu* ethos, a closer look shows that a more pervasive impact came from the encounter with the Josmanī order and the devotional tradition of *nirguṇa bhakti*. In the temples – the god houses, the *mañghim* – the divine is clearly worshipped in an abstract (formless) form, even though the names of Kiranti divinities, such as Yumahang, do play a role in the recitations. The major form of ritual practice is the singing of songs (*bhajan*) accompanied by the playing of drums and cymbals – something that everyone is able to do, that is to say, without official initiation.

A third element that makes up the new Kiranti religion is the use of a written text: the printed version of the once entirely oral *mundhum*. First discovered and propagated by Phalgunanda and Iman Singh Chemjong, the Kiranti script has become not only an important symbol of a distinct Kiranti culture and identity, it is now also the major medium of ritual practice – a book that can be used by practitioners. Thus, Kiranti religion has become a scriptural religion, like the other great traditions that have existed in the region for centuries: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. The use of the script also reflects a new valuation of education, which was an important aspect of Phalgunanda's creed.

Thus, the reformed Kiranti religion is a hybrid (or syncretic) result of historical developments during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the Bhakti movement, British colonialism, Christian missions, the coming of print culture, and the fight against Rana autocracy and Hindu hegemony. The resulting traditions are far from homogenous, and

11 While, according to the few available sources, Phalgunanda himself used the syllable *om* (as do some of his followers until now), the followers of Atmananda use the syllable *ot* instead. This is typically emphasised as a mark of distinction.

it should be stressed that the different lineages (e.g. Atmananda and Omnanda) compete with each other regarding which of them follows the right path. What the reformers agree on is the critique and rejection of the traditional Kiranti religion as backward. However, there are still many Kiranti, in fact the large majority, who simply continue following their ancestral ways in their own villages. At a time when many are redefining their place in the federal republic of Nepal, the new religion is an important - perhaps the single most visible - expression of a modern ethnic identity among the Kiranti.

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Revival and renaissance in Tibetan art: imagining Kashmir and Nepal in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries

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Abstract

Both Kashmir and Nepal have been sources of inspiration throughout the history of Tibetan art. The art of Kashmir was adopted and adapted in the Purang-Guge Kingdom (circa 950–1100 CE) and its successors, and Nepalese artists were instrumental in the creation of a considerable portion of early Tibetan art. In this article, the early adoption of art from these two regions is contrasted with specific examples from the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries that consciously link back to art forms associated with Kashmir and Nepal. Analyses of these later examples provide insights into the processes involved in reviving historic art forms, and demonstrate the increasing distance between the actual artistic production and its alleged origin(s). The processes of revival perceivable in these examples are varied, yet all of them share a conscious and selective approach and a substantial degree of re-imagination. As such, the revival of these older art forms in newer works serves as both a subject and a messenger.

Introduction

The art and craftsmanship of Kashmir and Nepal are closely linked to early Tibetan art.² Artists and craftsmen from these two regions are credited with producing the highest quality artworks in the wes-

1 I am deeply grateful to Brigit Kellner for her invitation to deliver a keynote at the Fourth International SEECHAC Colloquium on 'Religious Revivals and Artistic Renaissance in Central Asia and the Himalayan Region - Past and Present'. I would also like to thank the many friends and colleagues who have provided photographs over the years, without which I would not have been able to discuss in necessary detail the examples that I have chosen for this study. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers, their critical comments triggered considerable improvements to the work.

2 Here the term Tibetan art is used synonymously with art in the Tibetan cultural sphere, it thus includes the Tibetan-speaking regions of India and Nepal and excludes the Śrinagar and Kathmandu valleys.

tern Himalayas³ and central Tibet⁴ respectively, and their creations are considered crucial sources of inspiration for Tibetan craftsmen. Consequently, west Tibetan art dating from the eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries is often considered to simply be a type of Kashmiri art, and much of the central Tibetan art of the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (and regionally beyond this period) is seen as a product of Nepalese artisans living and working in Tibet.

In this article, I will first take a closer look at these early connections and contrast them with specific later examples, to explore the nature of and variations in later relationships, which serve as case studies for the intellectual processes involved. In conclusion, I will assess if in any of these cases it is possible to speak of revival - or even renaissance. In this context, I understand revival as the mere visual referencing of earlier artistic modes, while a renaissance includes a set of norms taken over with it.

The examples used in this study are based on previously published research and summarise their evidence and findings, using the most telling examples. Bringing these case studies together and focusing on their elements of revival provides a new perspective on how Tibetan art styles may have come about. Analyses of the processes of adoption and adaptation in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, a time for which we have broader circumstantial evidence, also shed light on how the original adoption of Indian stylistic modes in Tibet may have worked. This provides further evidence that the original adoption of Nepali and Kashmiri art is much more complex than commonly thought, a perspective that is incorporated in the following discussion of the original adoption of Kashmiri and Nepalese art in Tibetan areas.

Kashmir

The close relationship of the art of Kashmir to early western Himalayan art is uncontested, but the chronology and the nature of the relationship are disputed. Generally speaking, the literature presumes that Kashmi-

3 In this context 'western Himalayas' refers to the regions of Tibetan culture from Gilgit to West Tibet and excludes regions east of the watershed, such as Mustang, that are often counted among the West Tibetan regions.

4 Central Tibet refers to the central Tibetan regions Ü (*dbus*) and Tsang (*gtsang*) combined.

ri art production ceased during the eleventh century and consequently that all sophisticated art production in the western Himalayas dates to this same period. However, this is contradicted by Alchi and related monuments that, in my assessment, can safely be attributed to the late 12th and early 13th centuries.⁵ Accordingly, early western Himalayan art developed from the tenth to the early thirteenth century, and Kashmir art production likely continued into the thirteenth century as well.⁶

Among early western Himalayan monuments, two may be singled out as most closely reflecting the art of Kashmir at different periods. For the early eleventh century the paintings of the northwestern *chöten* (*mchod rten*) in Tholing, which fragmentarily preserves a sculptural triad of Śākyamuni flanked by Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi in a three-family configuration (see Namgyal 2001 and Heller 2010), can be linked closely to Kashmiri sculptural production of the same period.⁷ The depiction of the offering goddess Lāsya, one of the secondary figures flanking the standing Buddha image on the main wall of the northwestern *chöten* (Figure 1), compares directly to the goddesses seen on Kashmiri bronzes, among them a well-known bronze triad of a six-armed Avalokiteśvara also flanked by goddesses (Figure 2). A dedication inscription during the reign of Queen Diḍḍā (980–1003) dates this bronze to 989 CE (Siudmak 2013: 482–85). Despite the differences in medium and size, these works are clearly related to one another. They share the following features: a straight continuation of the nose line that begins at the forehead, a set-back but clearly marked chin, a veil that covers the hair and forms to a point above it, a bodice that reveals much of the breasts and emphasises the abdomen (found only in the sculpture), and a voluptuous abdomen. These can be considered features of Kashmir art. However, we do not

5 Here I follow the reattribution of the Alchi Sumtsek to the early thirteenth century, as first proposed in Goepper (1990). Even though overwhelming evidence speaks for this dating (e.g. Goepper & Poncar 1996, Goepper 2003, Luczanits 2003a, 2006, 2007, 2011, Luczanits & Neuwirth 2010) it has continuously been contested without providing positive clues for a suggested earlier date or reacting to the supporting evidence brought forward for the later date (the latest published attempt I am aware of is Denwood 2014).

6 The arguments for this assessment have been the subject of several of my publications, the latest being Luczanits (2014a, 2014b and 2016c).

7 I am aware that the comparison of art in different materials is methodologically problematic, and accordingly am rather cautious with my conclusions based on this comparison. Further evidence is presented in Luczanits (2014b).

know if the relationship of the paintings to the art of Kashmir was of any importance to the donor.⁸

Western Himalayan art continued to develop over the next two centuries in direct exchange with Kashmir and other northwest Indian regions, producing a wide array of interrelated styles, at times differing considerably even within the same monument. For the latest phase, the strongest case for Kashmir art in the western Himalayas can be made in relation to the paintings of the Alchi group of monuments. In my estimation, the strongest argument for foreign agency in this particular case is neither appearance nor style but the fact that the group's monuments are distinctive and can be attributed to a relatively narrow geographical region and timeframe. In addition, the gradual disappearance of this style coincides with the decline of royal power and Buddhism in Kashmir from the mid-twelfth century onwards (Naudou 1980: chapter VII and Digby 2007). It is, therefore, not surprising that the style of the Alchi group of monuments found no local successor.⁹

There is also internal evidence for a Kashmir origin for the Alchi group paintings; for example, a Kashmiri valley environment is hinted at by the paintings on the *dhoti* of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the Alchi Sumtsek. Here one sees Hindu and Buddhist monuments flourish side by side - some of them identifiable as specific places in the Kashmir Valley (Goepper 2003) - and the depicted architecture is typical of that in the valley of Śrīnagar. There is also a yet undeciphered two-line in-

8 In this connection, it is worth noting that the renovation inscription in the Tabo Main Temple (dating to c.1042) does not specify the origin of the artists responsible for the new paintings and sculptures, even though it explicitly states that they had to be gathered together first. Nevertheless, its murals are often quoted as examples of Kashmiri workmanship in the western Himalayas.

Tabo renovation inscription: rje rgyal lha btsun byang chub 'od de yis // mes kyis mdzad pa rnyings par gzigs nas ni // mkhan bzo' du ma stsogs te rgyu sbyar nas // zab pa'i bka' yis bdag cag bskos nas ni // (6) legs par byi dor byas nas bcos pa yin // after Steinkellner & Luczanits (1999: 17, editorial signs removed).

'When this sovereign, the lHa btsun Byan chub 'od, regarded the work of the ancestor as old, he gathered many masters and craftsmen, and provided the materials. When we, then, were commissioned by (his) profound order, we purified [the place] well and [the work] was done.' (Steinkellner & Luczanits 1999: 23).

9 Poor attempts to continue the painting tradition of the earlier temples are found in a number of later monuments on site, such as the Lotsawa Lhakhang and several *chöten* (Luczanits 2014a).

scription in Indic script underneath the paintings in this niche.¹⁰

Other peculiar features, such as the lotus represented above the head of the Alchi Sumtsek sculptures, also point towards a close connection to Kashmir art (Luczanits 2004: 248–49).

The famous Green Tārā located on the left-side wall of Avalokiteśvara's niche in the Alchi Sumtsek (Figure 3) bears stylistic features consistent with those defined above as pointing towards Kashmir: notably, the bodice is now a regular part of a goddess's attire. We may thus take the comparison of the goddess Lāsyā in Figure 1 with the Green Tārā in Figure 3 as reflecting the development of Kashmiri painting from the early eleventh to the early thirteenth century. Even if one considers the difference in size between the two representations - the Tholing goddess is roughly one-quarter the size of the goddess depicted at Alchi - the miniaturisation of detail in the Alchi paintings is striking, and it is one of their characteristic features.

These examples suffice to demonstrate that the relationship of early Western Himalayan art to Kashmir is not a linear process, but has to be evaluated in relation to specific centres at particular times and specific places, as well as across a considerable span of time that saw continuous interaction. If the Tholing *chöten* indeed reflects Kashmir art, Alchi can be seen as documenting its revival in the western Himalayas a good 150 years later. But while the art documented in Tholing found local successors, the art of Alchi remained an outlier. In this scenario, the distinct Alchi style might also indicate that direct artistic exchange between Kashmir and western Tibet had diminished considerably by the late eleventh century.

Nepal

The interrelationship between the art of the Newars in the Kathmandu Valley and areas of central Tibet (in particular the Tsang region) is continuous throughout the early history of Tibetan art. So much so that much of central Tibetan art from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century is considered to have been produced by Newar artists, or is at least the legacy of Newar art production in Tibet.¹¹

10 I have provided detailed black-and-white images of this fragmentary inscription to both Oscar von Hinüber and Lokesh Chandra, neither of who could make much sense of it. I am grateful for their attempts.

11 On the impact of Newar artists on Tibetan art, see in particular: Lo Bue (1985a, 985b,

Despite this close relationship there is hardly a period in which works made for Tibetan patrons can be confused with works produced for the Kathmandu Valley. This is not only true for the different religious concepts expressed in the works of these two regions - for example, Kathmandu Valley paintings emphasise the ritual specialist and the donors at the bottom of a painting, while Tibetan paintings stress the derivation of the teaching through a teaching lineage at the top - but also in stylistic terms. Even the most Newari among Tibetan paintings, which share the open composition and colour scheme of their Kathmandu Valley counterparts, generally appear less free in their expression and detail. Yet, it is precisely in the details that one can directly compare relevant Tibetan paintings to those of the Kathmandu Valley. The famous Green Tārā at the Cleveland Museum of Art is debatably an exception to this rule.¹²

As an example, one may compare a *paubha* of a six-armed red form of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara from the Kathmandu Valley (Figure 4)¹³ with a *thangka* of Buddha Amitābha from a set of five Buddhas (Figure 5),¹⁴ although the *paubha* is considerably larger. In addition to their composition and colour scheme, these two paintings share a wide range of motifs that attribute them to the same artistic environment. Observing the details in the Amitābha painting, only the more strictly conceived

1997, 2012), Kossak (1994, 1997), Jackson (2010), as well as the many catalogues that tie these two regions together, such as Kramrisch (1960), Chow (1971), Uhlig (1976), Béguin (1987), and Pal (1991, 2001).

12 For the Cleveland Green Tārā see Kossak & Singer (1998: no. 37), Kossak (2010: fig. 68), Jackson (2010: fig. 5.13), and <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1970.156>. While this excellent and interesting work is often attributed to Aniko/Anige (1245–1306), a Nepalese artist famous for his work at the Yuan Court (Jing 1994), it is still commonly termed a Tibetan painting (e.g. Weldon 2010, 'On recent attributions to Aniko'. Available on <http://www.asianart.com/articles/aniko/index.html>. Accessed 2 January 2015).

13 For the Kathmandu Valley *paubha* from the Musée national des Arts asiatiques-Guimet, see Uhlig (1981: no. 52) and Béguin (1990: 172–75), the latter dating the painting to ca. 1300 CE.

14 For the *thangka* of the five-Buddha set see Kossak & Singer (1998: no. 36) and Kossak (2010: figs. 63, 65). On stylistic grounds, I disregard the argument that the representation of the two lay donors on the Amoghasiddhi painting associates it with the great Sakya hierarchs, thereby dating the paintings to the third quarter of the twelfth century, as put forward in Jackson (2010: 67–71). To my mind, the stylistic association of these paintings with late-thirteenth and fourteenth-century murals across the Himalayas cannot be denied.

composition and the absence of the ritual specialist and donors at the bottom of the painting identify it as an artwork made for Tibet. In addition, the Amoghasiddhi painting from this five-Buddha set further supports this reading, as it depicts two Tibetan lay practitioners in the bottom row (Jackson 2010: figs. 4.3A and 6.3). The paintings most likely stem from the late thirteenth century, when contacts between Kathmandu Valley art and Tibet appear to have been closest, with the *paubha* a bit earlier than the *thangka*. Not incidentally, it was at this same time that the Nepalese craftsman Anige (1245–1306) was referred via Tibet to the Chinese court (Jing 1994).

In terms of sculpture, Newar workmanship was likely even more decisive than that evidenced in paintings, and contact with the Kathmandu Valley even closer. But here, too, sculpture produced for the Tibetan market and sculpture produced for Nepal can most commonly be differentiated.

The process apparent in the case of Nepal is an extremely close exchange between the Kathmandu Valley and areas of Tibet. It is likely that when Tibetan demand for portable artwork accelerated in the thirteenth century, Newar masters had their own workshops in Tibet with Tibetans working as apprentices; the latter, in turn, established their own workshops and may have also continued contact with their masters in the Kathmandu Valley workshops. Their Tibetan clients clearly had specific demands, both in terms of subject matter and style. For example, there is no doubt that the preferred style for a painting depicting the founder of the Taklung School, Taklung Thangpa Chenpo, is what has retrospectively been termed the East Indian Painting Style (*shar (b)ris*), regardless of who actually made the painting. Thus, in my opinion, retrospective designations such as Nepalese Style (*bal (b)ris*) or East Indian Style (*shar (b)ris*) - first used systematically in the seventeenth century in reference to early Tibetan art (Jackson 1996) - likely say less about the artists that produced these works than about the stylistically embedded associations their subject matter required, or that their clients wished to have expressed.

If we consider issues of revival we must also be mindful that the original adoption and adaptation process, which refers to Kashmir and Nepal respectively, was rather complex from the outset. In both west and central Tibet, local demands appear to have had an influence on

the appearance of the artworks. This is not only expressed in the depictions of Tibetans in these works of art and their inscriptions, but also in stylistic and iconographic choices. From my perspective, this local agency makes the resulting artwork inherently Tibetan, regardless of who actually made it.

Having examined some of the broad processual patterns recognisable in the early adoptions of Kashmir- and Nepal-derived styles in areas of Tibetan culture, we now move forward to selected later examples that may constitute cases of revival. Of interest in this regard are the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, which were both periods of innovation in Tibetan art.

Fifteenth Century

Regarding Tibetan painting, the early fifteenth century is characterised by the development and promotion of distinctive regional art styles that build on a common vocabulary. Thus, while easily recognised individually, the paintings of Gyantsé in central Tibet, Lo Manthang in Mustang, and Tholing and Tsaparang in west Tibet use similar motifs and are distinguished from earlier paintings through a richer colour palette and an emphasis on floral motifs, including fanciful scrolls, which largely replace the dividing lines used in earlier paintings (Figure 5). In other words, while still rather strictly organised, early fifteenth-century art and its successors leave an impression of greater compositional freedom. Nevertheless, these paintings are still traditionally classified as a continuation of the Nepalese legacy in Tibetan art (Jackson 2010: chapters 7-8).

In the following sections, I focus on two examples related to Kashmir and Nepal respectively: the Red Temple of Tholing and a scroll painting. The latter can be viewed as representative of the tension between conservatism and the stylistic revolution that took place during the second half of the fifteenth century, primarily through the adoption of a unified landscape background.

Red Temple

The art of the Guge Kingdom in west Tibet (ca. 1400 to 1630) is of particular interest vis-à-vis earlier western Himalayan art, which was developed

in exchange with the art of Kashmir.¹⁵ One of the earliest examples of this new artistic style is the Assembly Hall Ornament of Jambudvīpa (*'du khang 'dzam gling rgyan*), today simply called the Red Temple (*lha khang dmar po*) of Tholing. It was built at a time when lavish royal patronage for the construction of new Buddhist monuments was resuming. Interestingly, much of this revival took place under New Kadampa (*bka' gdams gsar ma*, later *dge lugs pa*) guidance, through the activities of Chöjé Ngakwang Drakpa (*chos rje Ngag dbang grags pa*), a disciple of Jé Tsongkhapa (*rje Tsong kha pa*: 1357–1419), after the former returned from central to west Tibet during the reign of King Namgyel Dé (rNam rgyal lde, who likely lived 1372–1431, Vitali 1996: 79–82, 130–34, 471–508). The main donor depiction in the Red Temple emphasises Śākya Ö (Śākya 'od), one of the three princes who invited Ngakwang Drakpa to subdue a female demon (*'dre*). This donor is depicted as a Drigung monk, while King Namgyel Dé is in a secondary position among the flanking secular personages (Namgyal 2001: 28–29).¹⁶

As the murals of the monument document, art in the region once again reached exceptional standards of material quality and workmanship. Stylistically, the Assembly Hall murals clearly draw on an earlier heritage, in particular the art of the mid-eleventh century, as a comparison between the Bodhisattvas of Tholing (Figure 6) and of Tabo (Figure 7) illustrates: while clearly referencing earlier representations, the eyes now narrow even further (with the bottom line being practically straight), the mouth is even more reduced, and the chin and earlobes are emphasised. Additionally, profile depictions such as the head of the Goddess of Sound (Figure 8) show that previously identified Kashmiri elements have also merged into Guge art: there is only a slight depression at the root of the nose that interrupts the straight continuation from the forehead, and the chin is equally set back, while the veil becomes an occasional adornment and the bodice continues to be a regular part of female attire, now revealing the breasts in their entirety.

15 This theme is taken up in the exhibition catalogue Linrothe (2014), with Kerin (2014) focusing on the relevant period.

16 I owe photographs of this assembly to the late Tsering Gyalpo, who also published detailed descriptions of western Himalayan monuments, including Tholing (Gyalpo 2005: 175–88). The historical context surrounding the establishment of the Red Temple still needs to be studied in detail.

Artistically, the Tholing murals build as much on Newar heritage as the roughly contemporaneous murals of Gyantsé Monastery. In the colour palette, red tones now dominate their overall appearance and green is used more prominently as well, especially where vegetal motifs and scrolls are depicted.¹⁷ While blue is still used for the background in the Assembly Hall it is overpowered by the general density of decoration (as well as its darkening over the ages) and only comes to the fore again in later Guge monuments, which are decorated with less sophistication in both modelling and detail.

While the regional derivation of style and iconography is overwhelmingly present in Guge-period art, closer inspection reveals the integration of motifs that originated in different regions as well as various schools of painting, likely mediated via central Tibet. Newar-derived motifs fill background surfaces with flower scrolls, lotus-blossom pillars are used to frame figures (Figure 8), and more elaborate throne constructions - that now include all six ornaments, a term referring to the animals represented above and to the sides of the throne - become standard. Chinese elements are mostly found in the representations of cloth and textile patterns, such as the fabulous bird or cloud pattern used throughout the monument. The dragon entwining the right lotus-blossom pillar in Figure 8 also represents such a motif. While these elements are dominant in terms of workmanship, they play a minor role in the overall appearance of the paintings.

Even though Guge-period paintings were part of the regional establishment of the New Kadampa School, the main iconographic topics of the temple also refer back to the eleventh-century Purang- Guge. In the Assembly Hall of Tholing all major surfaces are dedicated to Yoga-Tantra assemblies of the same mandalas that were also popular during its earliest phase. This is clearly a reference to the teachings associated with the Great Translator, Rinchen Zangpo, even though the interpretation of the root texts on which these paintings are based differs from those in the eleventh century.

Given that the most important elements of Guge-period art are dependent on earlier local prototypes, we can consider it a true renaissance.

17 There is considerable variation in the colour palette of Guge-period monuments, with a tendency towards a greater variety in later Tsaparang painting (Aschoff 1987, 1989, Ba 2000, Xizang ren min chu ban she 2011).

sance of Purang-Guge art. As the paintings in the Red Temple and the composition of the Chronicle of Ngari (*Ngari Gyelrap, Mnga' ris rgyal rabs*) indicate, this renaissance was largely a concerted, top-down effort quite similar to the way organised Buddhism spread during the eleventh century (see also Kerin 2015: chapter 5). Remarkably, this renaissance was supported across ruling elites and Buddhist schools. To my knowledge, however, Kashmir - which by that time was governed by Muslim rulers - played no role in this renaissance.¹⁸ It is, therefore, doubtful that the link of Purang-Guge art to the art of Kashmir contributed in any meaningful way to this revival. Needless to say, at the time there must indeed have been many Kashmiri works extant in west Tibet, which could have been used as models.

Hevajra Thangka¹⁹

When I first encountered a Tibetan scroll painting in a private collection (Figure 9) it triggered a feeling of sensation, connecting what I had seen before in unexpected ways. Against a dark blue ground, colourful figures emerge that are familiar and yet differ associatively. The central deity (Figure 10) with its retinue resonates with the paintings in the Hevajra Chapel (Kye rdor lha khang)²⁰ at Gongkar Chödé (Gong dkar chos sde) Monastery, possibly painted by the famous Kyentsé Chenmo and his workshop around 1470 (Figure 11).²¹

18 I am unaware of any distinct historical reference in this regard, which may well be due to the fact that Buddhism has disappeared in the meantime. Today, Ladakhi Buddhists hesitate to attribute art to Kashmir, which may well be due to the association of Kashmir with Muslim, as apparent also in the use of the same Tibetan or Ladakhi term (*kha che*) for both.

19 A more detailed discussion of this painting and its relationship to the Gongkar murals and the Mindrölling *lamdré* lineage sculptures is found in Luczanits (in press) - a study that resulted in a re-identification of several sculptures in the Mindrölling set and a reattribution of the set.

20 Also called the Chapel of the Aspiration Deities (Yi dam lha khang). The murals of Gongkar Chödé Monastery and its Hevajra Chapel are introduced in Jackson 1996: chapter 4, and now published comprehensively in Luo Wenhua / 罗文华 sKal bzang chos 'phel / 格桑曲培 2016. There is also a Japanese publication on the Gongkar murals (Masaki & Tachikawa 1997) that has not, however, been accessible to me. Photographs of the Yi dam Chapel are also provided on HAR (Himalayan Art Resources), <http://www.himalayanart.org> [Accessed 27 December 2016], under Tibet: Gongkar Chode Monastery.

21 See, for example, the description by Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo in Akester 2016: 258.

By contrast, the lineage figures surrounding the main deity in the thangka exhibit facial features familiar from a famous set of repoussé sculptures of teachers from the Path with the Fruit (*lam 'bras*) lineage, preserved at Mindrölling (Smin grol gling) Monastery.²² In this regard, it is sufficient to compare the respective depictions of the lay ascetic, who has two prominent teeth visible between his lips and holds a garland of prayer beads in his left hand (compare Figure 12 with Figure 13). The thangka identifies him by caption as Zhangtön Chöbar (Zhang ston chos 'bar: 1053–1135), the teacher of Sachen Künga Nyingpo (Sa chen Kun dga' snying po: 1092–1158). Close resemblances can also be noted when comparing other teacher representations.

Concluding from the lineage, the thangka painting can be dated to circa 1500, as it depicts Gongkar Dorjédenpa Künga Namgyel (Gong dkar rDo rje gdan pa Kun dga' rnam rgyal: 1432–1496), the founder of Gongkar Monastery, and his pupil Khenchen Chödrup Sengge (*mkhan chen Chos grub seng ge*), who are located in the top two corners on either side of the main deity's halo.²³ The thangka painting thus postdates the mural version.

Stylistically, the thangka can be considered archaic for the period and context, both in its use of the blue background and in its strict composition. These elements link the painting back to Newar craftsmanship and contrast it with the depiction of the same subject in Gongkar Chöde Monastery, where Hevajra is set against a continuous landscape background (Jackson 1996: pl. 10, Luo Wenhua & Gesang Qupei 2016), one of the main artistic features that Khyentsé Chenmo was famous for introducing. In this connection, however, it is important to note that the background in the Hevajra Chapel is of lesser importance than in other more narrative or historic paintings, and it is also used to a much lesser extent in the chapel's other murals. In other words, the composition of

For more or less detailed descriptions of Gongkar Monastery and its different parts, see Fermer 2009: 137–41, Henss 2014: 351–499, Jackson 2016: chapter 4, and Akester 2016: 255–60.

22 Comprehensive accounts of the Mindrölling sculptures are available in von Schroeder 2001: 972–85, fig. XV-11, and pls. 236A–241F, Lee-Kalisch 2006: 118–51, and Jackson 2016: chapter 6. This study corrects some of the identifications suggested in von Schroeder 2001 and followed by all subsequent authors consulted.

23 Captions: *|| rje tsun kun dga' rna[m] rgyal | on the left and right, *|| *mkhan chen chos? grub seng ge* |

the thangka is less unusual than a decontextualised comparison of the two Hevajra paintings might imply.

The Mindrölling set of sculptures is considered a product of Newar craftsmanship in Tibet, as can be deduced from *nāgarī* numerals reportedly on the repoussé bases. Research on the set in relation to the Hevajra thangka, however, allows me to conclude that the set considerably predates the time when Shalu Lotsawa Chökyong Zangpo (Zhwa lu lo tsā ba Chos skyong bzang po: 1441–1528) is thought to have ordered it for Drathang Monastery.²⁴ Instead, the sculpture set appears to be closely connected to Gongkar and date into the 1460s - the time when Kyentsé Chenmo was most active at Gongkar - as the set's last figure represents the teacher of Gongkar Dorjédenpa Künga Namgyel.²⁵

None of the crucial elements that make the lineage depictions so distinctive can directly be linked to Nepal. In this sculpture set, Newar craftsmen appear merely to have served its technical execution. I conclude this in connection with the conceptual thinking that underlies the set and is also partially reproduced in the thangka painting. Close inspection of the sculptures reveals that their dress, posture, and portrait features are conceived symmetrically in both appearance and typology. For example, the meditative equanimity of the set's youthful eighteenth figure, Lama Dampa Sönam Gyeltsen (Bla ma dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan: 1312–1375, Figure 14), finds its counterpart in the symmetrically positioned, somewhat aged Lochen Jangchup Tsémo (Lo chen Byang chub rtse mo: 1302–1380), who is located on the other side of the central Vajradhara and shown with similar concentration and in an alternative posture of meditation (Figure 15). This conceptual symmetry is further emphasised by a mirroring of their facial features and dress, with the collar of their vests overlapping in opposing directions. This feature is consistent throughout the set and goes so far that the pendant legs of the two outer figures - Tekchen chöjé Künga Trashī (Theg chen chos rje Kun dga' bkra shis: 1349–1425) and his pupil Draktokpa Sönam Zangpo (Brag thog pa bSod nams bzang po) - literally form a bracket that en-

24 This argument presented by von Schroeder (2001: 972–74) hinges on the alleged origin of the set at Drathang Monastery, from where it is said to have been brought to Mindrölling.

25 For the full argument see Luczanits (in press). Recently, Jackson has come to the same conclusion (2016: 122–124).

closes the entire set. Except for the central image of Vajradhara, the sculpture set is thus preserved in its entirety.

The expressive portraiture in symmetry of the lineage figures is as much an innovation to Tibetan art as are the landscapes introduced by Khyentsé Chenmo in his paintings at Gongkar Chöde Monastery. His paintings also consciously supersede Newar precedence, as is apparent in the rendition of Hevajra's arms: instead of fanning out all secondary hands at the same level to the sides of the body, some appear in front of the body, endowing the deity with motion and immediacy. Not accidentally, it is this rendering of wrathful figures that becomes a lasting legacy of this great painter in later Tibetan art.²⁶

Thus, while Newar craftsmanship was still used in the context of southern Ü province, artistically Tibetan craftsmanship had moved on. In fact, one can read much of the art production of the fifteenth century in this way. For example, the Gyantsé paintings are often cited as the foremost example for the establishment of an art form that is distinctly Tibetan in both workmanship and aesthetics. And yet the Gongkar examples go even further, as they integrate new artistic concepts at a level of sophistication that would have a lasting influence throughout the following centuries. These further developments have no direct connection to Nepal and were of little consequence there, even though the Newars had contact to the same sources. A good example in this regard is the Newar sketchbook by Jī varāma dating from 1435, which documents the adoption of new Chinese-derived Tibetan elements into Newar art.²⁷ However, these innovations had little consequence in Nepal itself.

Seventeenth Century

The developments outlined here for the fifteenth century do not imply that a Newar aesthetic played no role in later Tibetan art, to the contrary. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw repeated revivals of

26 See Jackson (1996: 142 and 2016: 67–74), partially translating an account by Penba Wangdu.

27 See Lowry (1977) and Sharma *et al.* (2006: no. 61). As the bilingual captions, distinctive motifs, and the subjects indicate, this book was meant for the production of artwork for the Tibetan market. The drawings document the adoption of Chinese motifs and more expressive facial features, but remain largely in line with more traditional approaches.

Nepalese styles in Tibetan art, the earliest of which is the subject of the following example.

Jonang Püntsokling

The Jonang School scholar Tāranātha Künga Nyingpo (1575–1634) is well known for his interest in the Indian Buddhist tradition, even identifying himself as an Indian (Templeman 2009). He also had a keen interest in painting and sculpture, and devoted a chapter of his *History of Buddhism in India* (*Rgya gar chos 'byung*) to the latter.²⁸ Additionally, in his collection of liturgies, the *Rinjung Gyatsa* (*Rin 'byung brgya rtsa*), he included *sādhana* that he feared might fall out of practice.²⁹

A keen interest in Buddhist India - an interest that was unusual for his time (Templeman 2009) - and in the past are also apparent in the murals of the third-floor chapel of Jonang Püntsokling Monastery, the so-called Nyungne (*smyung gnas*, *bsnyung gnas*) Lhakhang.³⁰ However, these early seventeenth-century murals reference Newar art in both iconography and style. In an open composition that is set against a continuous landscape background, the murals masterfully integrate Newar figural types, which themselves reference older painting traditions.

For example, the seated eleven-headed and eight-armed Avalokiteśvara in Figure 16 references a much older figural type, particularly apparent in the way the legs relate to the body (compare with Figure 4). It also features motifs of older imagery, such as the rosettes above the ears used for Buddha Amitābha atop his stack of heads, the highlight on the ridge of the nose of the central face, the dress that clings to the body, and specific types of jewellery. An interest in rare iconographies is expressed by the two forms of Avalokiteśvara that reference Śiva and Viṣṇu, which flank the stack of heads: these are Hālōhala and Hariharivāhanodbhava Avalokiteśvara, the former featuring a blue neck and the latter seated on Viṣṇu atop garuḍa and lion.³¹

28 See Schiefner (1869), Lama Chimpa & Chattopadhyaya (1990), Klimburg-Salter (1999).

29 Also *Yi dam rgya mtsho'i sgrub thabs rin chen 'byung gnas* (W12422, TBRC [Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center], <https://www.tbrc.org/>. Accessed 21 February 2017), Willson & Brauen (2000).

30 This temple is the focus of a study by Linrothe (2011).

31 On the blue-necked Avalokiteśvara, also called Nilakanṭha in direct reference to this feature, see de Mallmann (1986: 108, no. 8), described according to SM28. In comparison to this description, the Püntsokling version is simplified. For Hariharivāhanodbhava

Such cross-referencing iconographies are typical for Newar culture, but enjoyed little popularity elsewhere. The boy Sudhana, standing to the side of Avalokiteśvara, wears an ankle-long *dhoti* and has his hair bound in buns decorated with flowers.

None of the features in this and other paintings in this chapel directly refer to an Indian prototype. Nonetheless, we may deduce from the murals that the embedded references to older imagery were an attempt to establish an Indian derivation. By the seventeenth century, early Newar artworks may well have stood in for the art of Buddha's homeland, which by that time had long since ceased to be a source of inspiration. The adoption of Newar models is selective and appears to be at least in part driven by connoisseurship, that is to say, the knowledge and appreciation of the art of the past. This is also true for the style of the figures themselves: their improbable flatness contrasting with the soft landscape at their back. Yet rather than refer to a particular time, the past is evoked as a continuum through deities that literally appear as if they are historical cut-outs. Thus, both stylistically and in terms of motifs, the revival of Newar features in these paintings can be likened to the use of quotation in order to demonstrate one's broad knowledge or wide reading. Even though their Nepalese precedence is relatively easy to deduce, the new works are imaginative and unique and conform to the scholarly pursuits of the monastery's founder.³²

Tenth Karmapa

Even more imaginative is the way the tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorjé (1604–1674), included Kashmiri artwork in his oeuvre.³³ His affinity for Kashmiri sculpture is repeatedly recorded in his biographies. On one occasion, he praises a Kashmiri statue of the Buddha as the most precious among all bronze statues.³⁴ In this connection, we

Avalokiteśvara see de Mallmann (1986: 109, no. 13).

32 Interestingly, we see this process repeated towards the end of the seventeenth century in the work of the exceptional Mongolian artist and teacher Zanabazar (1635–1723), who has been recognised as an incarnation of Tāranātha.

33 I have dedicated an entire essay to the question of the relationship of the Karmapa's artwork to that of Kashmir (Luczanits 2016a). This section is a summary of that lengthy study and uses its most important example.

34 See von Schroeder (2001: 789) and Mengele (2012: 38). On another occasion, he praises one of his own Buddha statues as having the characteristics (*bkod pa*) of Kashmiri

must assume that by the seventeenth century Kashmir sculpture referred not only to the regional art of all northwestern India (which maintained Buddhism into the early mediaeval period) but also to early west Tibetan art.

Most textual references, including the sources mentioned above, focus on the depiction of the Buddha in the Karmapa's works, both sculptures and paintings. However, in the absence of any Buddha sculpture in bronze by the Karmapa we are left only with painted depictions, especially the central Buddha in the Ljiang set of the Sixteen Arhats, inscribed as 'painted in their entirety by his [Chöying Dorjé's] own hand' (Figure 17).³⁵ This Buddha indeed relates to a Buddha-type common in Kashmir and Gilgit in the seventh and eighth centuries. A good example in this regard is an extremely sophisticated Buddha bronze located at the Norton Simon Museum of Art (Figure 18), which also resonates in many other ways with the Karmapa's oeuvre.³⁶ While far from being identical, there can no doubt that the folds of the Buddha's robes in the painting reference such bronzes. Particularly characteristic are the broadening towards the shoulder of the folds at the robe's edge, the folds on top of the Buddha's left thigh, and the way the robe falls underneath the Buddha's crossed legs.

The Norton Simon Buddha bronze also provides a perfect western Himalayan example of rocks that are crowded with a range of attendant deities, donors, musicians, and animals, just as also found in the artwork of the tenth Karmapa.³⁷ Located at the same level as the Bodhisattvas' lotuses, the rock forms a platform that supports four additional figures placed in front of the Buddha's rock throne: the kneeling female holding a vase is the earth goddess who witnesses the Buddha's awakening; the three other figures are donors, with the monastic donor in the position of honour to the side of the earth goddess. The symmetry of the composition is noteworthy, with its inclusion of numerous animals in matched pairs, each in turn occupying a discrete space.

sculpture (Debreczeny 2012: 59–60, repeated in Alsop 2012: 221–22).

35 On this set, see Debreczeny (2012: chapter 3), on the painting, see Debreczeny (2012: 97–103, fig. 3.1).

36 Norton Simon Buddha (Pal 1975: no. 22, Czuma 1989: fig. 14, Alsop 2012: fig. 8.26, Jackson 2012: fig. 10.1).

37 See also Pal (2003: no. 62).

A silver reliquary made by the Karmapa for the remains of his teacher, the Sixth Shamar Chökyi Wangchuk (Chos kyi dbang phyug: 1584–1630), after his death in 1630, is described as follows:

Below the lion throne, there was a pair of turquoise parrots and a relief (*'bur len*) of a pair of geese in gold, looking as if they were walking. On the aureole (*bya skyibs*) of the lion throne were musicians from Kashmir playing the flute, their wives bringing them vessels of *chang*. On the right side, there were two people holding as an offering crystal vases decorated with coral trees with overhanging branches. On the left side, there were two men from Kashmir holding crystal rosaries. The surrounding landscape was covered with many wild animals. (Mengele 2012a: 165)

The earlier example ascribed to the Karmapa's own hand (Figure 17) presents a simpler, more traditional version of such a relief-work throne, with only some of the features described in the text above. A more closely comparable example is the throne in another painting, wherein Śākyamuni is flanked by his disciples, which is attributed by

Karl Debreczeny to the Karmapa's workshop (Figure 19).³⁸ The shape of the throne-back, with tree foliage projecting from the top and featuring a goddess, in part takes its inspiration from objects such as the Kashmiri throne-back in Figure 20. With its bands of ornamental flames, intricate lotus scroll, and pearl blossoms, the figured aureole emphasises the miraculous nature of the Buddha's awakening. In the Karmapa's painting, the Buddha is teaching and the elaborate throne with the abundance of precious objects and pearls before it expresses the preciousness and celebration of the teachings. At the level of the Buddha's head, two musicians play lute and drums. And at the foot of the throne there are four figures (Figure 21): In the centre, two small musicians form a couple, with the man playing a flute and the woman offering a bowl of *chang* in one hand and holding a larger vessel in the other. The outer figures appear to be female: the one on the left is holding a vase with a coral tree and the one on the right holds a small object in her

38 Teaching Śākyamuni flanked by his main disciples from Lijiang, see Debreczeny (2012: 129–32, fig. 4.1), Jackson (2012: fig. 10.5).

hand, which is raised towards the Buddha, and a flask in her other. Birds are present as well, along with other animals.

This composition in front of the throne closely resembles that of the Norton Simon bronze (Figure 22). Thus, there can be no doubt that a bronze similar to this served as an inspiration for the painting. While the figures are comparable, their attributes have been adapted to the scene. For example, in the bronze the earth goddess witnesses the awakening of the Buddha holding a vase in her hand, which is her identifying attribute. In the painting, the vase contains a coral tree, a symbol of high official status when taken in combination with the peacock feathers directly behind it (Bartholomew 2006: 5.25.4. and 8.29.12); this symbolism of status and honour may also offer a possible rationale for the switching of the birds in relation to the Norton Simon bronze.

The two Kashmiri sculptures used here for the purpose of comparison also offer an explanation for one of the most curious elements in the Karmapa's oeuvre: the prominence of bead jewellery. It is likely that the Karmapa derived his inspiration for his exuberant representations of jewellery from the small attendant figures in such sculptures, where bead jewellery was disproportionately large and emphasised, its relative proportions comparable with that in Karmapa sculpture. Again, the earth goddess on the Norton Simon bronze and her painted counterpart are exemplary. Generally speaking, it appears as if the Karmapa converted the frequent occurrence of beads in Kashmiri bronzes - for example, in Figure 20 where rows of silver beads and bead blossoms in diverse metal alloys are used to dazzling effect - into assemblages of jewels studding the ground, as is apparent in both the paintings we have discussed.

Textual references to Kashmir other than the one cited above also demonstrate that the Karmapa's image of Kashmir was both idealised and imaginary and that it closely related to his own personal experiences. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that even if his depictions are closely dependent on sculpture from the wider region of Kashmir (as is evidenced in the last comparison), the material culture - the dress, musical instruments, and offerings - depicted in his work are those of his own lifetime. Based upon the similarities between the compositions and details in some of the tenth Karmapa's works and western Himalayan sculpture, there can be no doubt that Kashmir was a rich source

of inspiration for the development of the Karmapa's unique style and imagination.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Karmapa's work profits from the detailed accounts available from and about the artist, with the role of his workshop still in need of further study. In the case of Püntsokling Monastery, the appearance of a top-floor chapel generally fits the agenda of the Jonang School scholar Tāranātha, but it remains unclear how exactly the paintings of the chapel were conceived. Both examples share an impressive degree of connoisseurship in relation to Newar and Kashmir art respectively, and it is this knowledge derived from concrete historic examples that is apparent in the works themselves. In Püntsokling, the art of the past is quoted in both style and motif, yet it is also set in an entirely new context that transforms its citation. Judging from this chapel, it would appear that Nepal was the closest one could get to India in the early seventeenth century, even though direct Indian examples were likely available as well.

By contrast, the tenth Karmapa lets dazzling metalwork from Kashmir inspire his art. His imagination literally transforms the past and in effect conceals the sources of his inspirations. Would writings by and about him not insist throughout on the high regard he had for Kashmiri metal sculpture, the connections made above would be far from apparent. Yet the Kashmir that is evoked in the Karmapa's works is an imaginary one, a Kashmir richer, more playful, and livelier than even the best sculptures from the western Himalayas communicate. Thus, the revival of Newari and Kashmiri elements apparent in these seventeenth-century examples is both conscious and selective, and their integration results in a transformation. From my perspective, these seventeenth-century examples are rather remote from what might constitute a renaissance.

Moving back in time to the fifteenth century, the two examples presented are quite different in their nature and context. The murals of the Red Temple are part of a reformation movement that was apparent in early fifteenth-century art across the Himalayas. This resulted in regional styles that were distinct one from the other, but drew on the same vocabulary. Nevertheless, the revival of Kashmiri aesthetics in fifteenth-century Tholing can indeed be considered a renaissance. And yet

what was reborn was not the art of Kashmir but that of the Purang- Guge Kingdom of the eleventh century. Directly referencing the Great Translator Rinchen Zangpo and the conservative nature of the art of his time perfectly suited the reformist agenda of the Géluk School and the legitimacy of its royal donors. In this instance, referencing the remote past also entailed skipping over more recent history; this process occurred across the entire western Himalayas. It is not by accident that today almost all monuments preceding the rise of the Géluk School are attributed to the Great Translator, and portraits of the founder of the Drigung School, Jikten Gönpö ('Jig rten mgon po: 1143–1217), are reinterpreted as representations of Rinchen Zangpo. Nonetheless, the Drigung School was dominant in the western Himalayan region from the thirteenth to the early fifteenth century and many of the extant monuments must be attributed to their legacy (Luczanits 2014a).

The art produced by and in succession of the great painter Khyentsé Chenmo takes a much more revolutionary approach. Introducing new elements - such as continuous landscape, expressive movements, and seemingly realistic facial features - these works cannot be seen or understood as solely building on the Nepalese legacy. Although using a considerable number of Newari elements - in particular the bodily proportions and jewellery of the deities - artists consciously went beyond these, particularly where they may have been considered weakest, namely in individual expression and variety. The underlying characteristic of the art introduced by Khyentsé Chenmo is a degree of realism never attempted in Newar art. Instead of being a model for his work, Newar art has become a yardstick against which his production can be measured.

Both fifteenth-century examples presented in this study can be read as expressions of a new political self-consciousness and emerging artistic connoisseurship. It may well be that these developments were triggered by early Ming art production, a considerable amount of which was made for Tibet, as well as close contacts with the Chinese court at the beginning of the century. It cannot be accidental that the painters considered to have founded the first distinctive art schools - Menthangpa Menla Döndrub (Sman thang pa Sman bla dön grub) and Khyentsé Chenmo - were both famous for their integration of Chinese landscapes.

Compared with the original adoption of Kashmir and Newar art into

areas of Tibetan culture, the re-emergence of Kashmiri and Newari aesthetics in later Tibetan art appears more selective and intellectually driven. To different degrees and with quite varied effects on the appearance of the artworks, both Kashmir and Nepal stand in for the continuation of an Indian tradition. While the fifteenth-century examples can be read as the result of a new drive to distinguish oneself from contemporaneous art schools in neighbouring regions, the seventeenth-century examples demonstrate an unprecedented engagement with the past that is driven by connoisseurship. Stated in another way, quoting the old had become both intellectual play and inspiration - the past had become an expression of the artist's imagination.

As the examples have demonstrated, the revival of older art forms in later Tibetan art was never just a simple looking backwards, but was an integral part of a new artistic vision. Thus, referencing the art of Nepal and Kashmir was in itself a primary subject of these new works, serving as a messenger that anchored the new in the past. As such, the examples of revival examined above may best be understood as an attempt to expand the artistic tradition to also include the remote past. Only in the case of the tenth Karmapa does the quoted past explicitly go beyond the Tibetan tradition, yet in his oeuvre it is also most fully integrated and reinterpreted and, therefore, most difficult to decipher.

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Figure 1:
Offering goddess
Lāsyā; Tholing,
northwestern
chöten; second
or third decade of the
eleventh century;
after Namgyal
(2001: 131).



Figure 2: Detail of
flanking goddess
from a triad of
the six-armed
Avalokiteśvara
with a dedication
inscription
during the reign
of Queen Diddā
(980–1003 CE);
Kashmir, 989
CE; bronze; h.
9 5/6 in. (25
cm); Sri Pratap
Singh Museum,
Srinagar; photo
courtesy of
the American
Institute of
Indian Studies,
no. 112-4.



Figure 3: Six-armed Green Tārā; Alchi Suktsek, Avalokiteśvara niche; early thirteenth century; photo J. Poncar.

Figure 4: Six-armed, red Avalokiteśvara; Nepal; second half of the thirteenth century; pigments on cloth; 65 × 53 cm; Musée national des Arts asiatiques-Guimet; after Béguin (1990: 174).

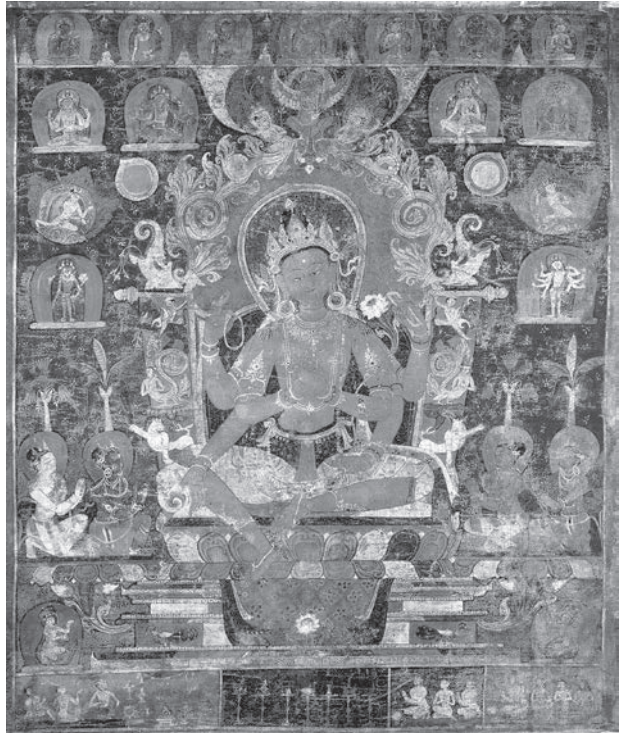


Figure 5: Buddha Amitābha; Central Tibet; second half of the thirteenth century; pigments on cloth; 41 × 33 cm; Boston Museum of Fine Art, 67.818; after Kossak & Singer (1998: no. 36b).



Figure 6: Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi; Tholing, Red Temple, main wall of apse; early fifteenth century; photo J. Poncar 1993 55,3 (WHAIV).



Figure 7: Bodhisattva Mahābala; Tabo main temple, ambulatory; ca. 1040; photo J. Poncar 1984 (WHAV).



Figure 8: Goddess Vajraśabda playing a lute (vīṇā); Tholing, Red Temple; early fifteenth century; photo J. Poncar 1993 43,07 (WHAV).



Figure 9: Hevajra with *lam 'bras* lineage; Central Tibet (southern *dbus*); ca. 1500; pigments on cloth; private collection; photo C. Luczanits 2015 (D0323).



Figure 10: Heads of Hevajra; detail of Figure 9; photo C. Luczanits 2015 (D0330).

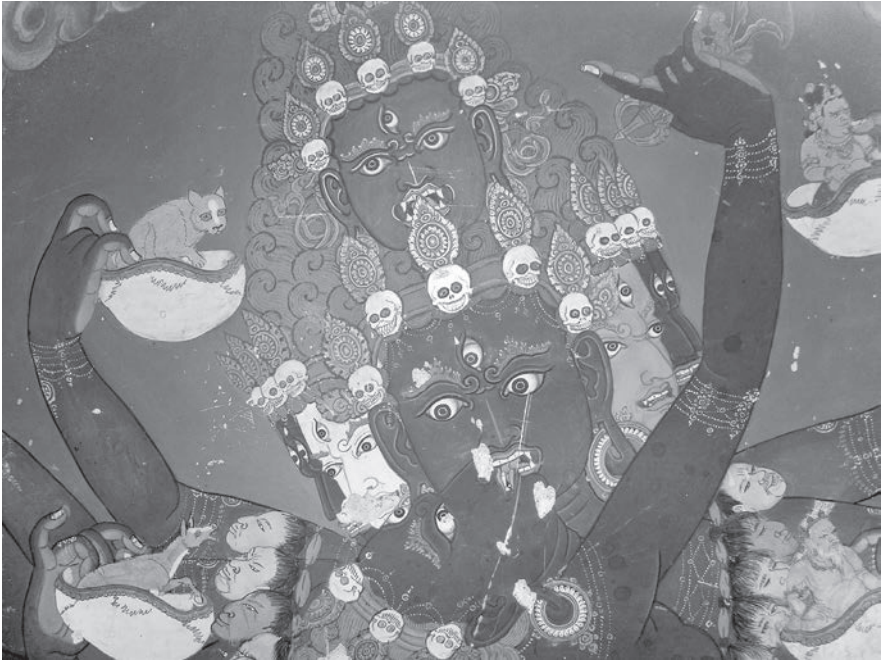


Figure 11: Heads of Hevajra; Hevajra Chapel of Gongkar Chödé Monastery; Central Tibet (southern *dbus*); second half of the fifteenth century; photo Anne Breckenridge Dorsey 2005.



Figure 12: Zhang ston Chos 'bar (1053–1135); detail of Figure 9; photo C. Luczanits 2015 (D0361).

Figure 13: Zhang ston Chos 'bar (1053–1135); Central Tibet (southern *dbus*); second half of the fifteenth century; gilt and painted copper sheets; h. 93 cm; Mindrölling Monastery; after von Schröder (2001: 239B).



Figure 14: Lama Dampa Sönam Gyeltsen (1312–1375); Central Tibet (southern *dbus*); second half of the fifteenth century; gilt and painted copper sheets; h. 93 cm; Mindrölling Monastery; photo C. Luczanits 2007 (D9393).



Figure 15: Lochen Jangchup Tsémo (1302–1380); Central Tibet (southern *dbus*); second half of the fifteenth century; gilt and painted copper sheets; h. 92 cm; Mindrölling Monastery; photo C. Luczanits 2007 (D9303).

Figure 16: Eleven-headed and eight-armed Avalokiteśvara; Jonang Püntsoḱling Monastery, Nyungne Lhakhang, north wall; early seventeenth century; photo C. Luczanits 2007 (D1278).



Figure 17: Central Buddha of the Lijiang set of sixteen arhats painted by the tenth Karmapa; Lijiang, Yunnan Province, China; dated 1660; ink and pigment on silk; 26 3/4 × 16.5 in. (68 × 42 cm); Lijiang Municipal Museum, no. 439.1.



Figure 18: Buddha and adorants on the cosmic mountain; Kashmir or Gilgit, northwest India or northern Pakistan; ca. 700; bronze with silver and copper inlay; 13 1/4 × 9 1/2 × 4 3/4 in. (33.7 × 24.1 × 12.1 cm); Norton Simon Foundation, F.1972.48.2.S; © 2012 The Norton Simon Foundation.



Figure 19: Śākyamuni flanked by his main disciples; tenth Karmapa's workshop; Lijiang, Yunnan Province, China; seventeenth century; ink and colour on silk; $30 \frac{3}{4} \times 20 \frac{1}{2}$ in. (78 × 52 cm); Lijiang Municipal Museum, no. 2387.11.



Figure 20: Aureole with etched Buddha at awakening and attendants; Kashmir; eighth century; brass, silver, and copper; $14 \frac{7}{8} \times 9 \frac{9}{16} \times 3 \frac{3}{8}$ in. (37.7 × 24.3 × 8.5 cm); private collection; after Heller 1999: 23.



Figure 21: Detail of Figure 19 showing throne with flanking figures.



Figure 22: Detail of the throne in Figure 18 with secondary figures in foreground; photo C. Luczanits 2005 (D2688).

BOOK REVIEWS

The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India

by Sarah Besky. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. 2014; 264 pp., 27 black and white photos, ISBN 9780520277397, price 45.92 €/1767.30 Rs.

Reviewed by Romita Ray

Sarah Besky's *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India* is an insightful analysis of the complex relationships between labor, Gorkha identity, and local and state politics that are entangled with the fair-trade movement in Darjeeling, the remote Himalayan region best known for the flavorful tea it produces. Based on extensive fieldwork that Besky conducted in the area between 2006 and 2012, *Darjeeling Distinction* focuses on how notions of fairness and justice for plantation laborers are constructed by three interlinked developments: the World Trade Organization Geographical Indication Status or GI, which restricts the use of the term 'Darjeeling tea' to 87 tea plantations that are registered with the Tea Board of India; fair-trade policies and practices that tea planters in Darjeeling have embraced since the 1990s; and the Gorkhaland agitation for a separate Indian state splintered from West Bengal, the state in which Darjeeling is located (Besky's fieldwork coincided with the second wave of the agitation).

Comprised of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion, *Darjeeling Distinction* adds to a robust corpus of academic research on tea plantation labor that scholars like Ranajit Dasgupta, Usha Thakur, Piya Chatterjee and Debarati Sen have produced over the past two decades. It is the first book, however, to challenge the ways in which fair-trade initiatives fail to align with the Indian Plantations Labour Act or PLA (1951), and with the politicization of Gorkha identity in Darjeeling's tea plantations. It also examines how fair-trade overlooks the relationships between land and family that are so fundamental to the vision of 'justice' promoted by the Gorkhaland movement (p. 139).

Chapter one introduces the reader to some key landmarks of Darjeeling, the colonial era hill station after which Darjeeling tea is named. A discussion of colonial gardening and botanical practices is

juxtaposed with an analysis of the contemporary statue of the Nepalese poet and writer Bhanubhakta Acharya installed in the Mall, a material reminder of Gorkha identity in one of Darjeeling's most public spaces. Besky therefore sets the stage for investigating how tea workers identify with the Gorkhaland movement through historical links to colonial Darjeeling (Gorkhas were loyal workers in colonial plantations), and also through what she calls 'primordial terms' that resist historical framings (Gorkhas are the 'natural' inhabitants of the land) (p. 139).

In her next chapter, Besky takes us into the plantation where kinship patterns forged by the tea plant define labour-management practices and labour-plant relations (her discussion of the latter is particularly engaging). By examining how Gorkha labourers interface with plantation owners, managers, and tea bushes, Besky demonstrates that workers perceive a breakdown of trust in labour-planter relations. Planters are more interested in profit than in reinvesting in facilities (*faciliti-haru*) to improve the living conditions of tea laborers. Her proximity to women tea workers with whom she forged strong bonds during her fieldwork enriches Besky's ethnographic writing. But the planter's voice is conspicuously absent in her analysis. As a result, it is difficult to grasp how and why the network of relations that make up a plantation, have resulted in the neglect of *faciliti-haru*. What political forces intervened to disrupt labour-planter exchanges? Here, a closer look at the role of the Communist Party or CPI(M) in fomenting labour unrest throughout the 1970s and 80s in Bengal, would have added greater depth to a chapter that informs the reader that the Gorkhaland movement ended communist influence in the Darjeeling area (Besky goes into greater detail about this in her last chapter). How did the shifting pieces of plantation culture and state politics pave the way for the Gorkhaland agitation, and subsequently, for the embrace of fair-trade in plantations scarred by two decades of political tension? By paying close attention to the labourer's voice, Besky spotlights a critical—and often overlooked—component of the plantation. But contextualizing that voice is also important and necessitates a scrutiny of the political pressures that planters had to cope with during the turbulent era of CPI(M) rule.

In chapter three, Besky moves onto the evolution of GI and 'the political economy of taste' (p. 102) defined by the branding of Darjeeling tea. GI enables the Indian Tea Board, its custodian, to transform

Darjeeling plantations into what she calls ‘a Third World agrarian imaginary’ where labourers become performers and good marketing fodder, instead of being given agency as caretakers of plantation land and partners in the plantation’s management structure. Besky’s discussion of how GI nurtures a ‘heritage’ image for Darjeeling tea is nuanced and informative. But a deeper engagement with the structural workings of a tea plantation would have fleshed out her analysis of the ‘performance of *terroir*’ (pp. 105-110). For instance, tea tasting, a daily ritual during the tea manufacturing season when planters carefully monitor the taste of Darjeeling tea, could have been used to explicate the hierarchies of ‘performance’ in a plantation. A clarification of how GI is sustained across the tea industry would have also bolstered her analysis; specifically, how GI is sustained by the industry network comprised of plantations, the Indian Tea Association (ITA), the Indian Tea Board, and the Tea Research Association of India (TRA) (the TRA, a vital arm of the tea industry, is only briefly mentioned on page 118).

Chapter four focuses on fair-trade certifications and the failure of global agencies of social reform to reconcile with local politics and histories. Besky astutely observes that fair-trade ‘undermines existing state structures’ like the PLA that were created to protect plantation labourers (p. 115). Instead, fair-trade has enabled planters to further exploit labour-planter relationships. Here, Besky focuses mainly on ‘Keshav Roy’ and his plantation ‘Windsor’ Tea Estate (pp. 115-135). ‘Roy’ pioneered fair-trade practices in Darjeeling plantations. While Besky’s focus on ‘Windsor’ makes sense, a concurrent analysis of the impact of fair-trade on plantations owned by large tea companies like Goodricke and Jayshree Tea whose footprint is far more extensive than privately-owned Windsor’s, would have given the reader a more complete picture about the challenges that fair-trade ushered into the Darjeeling area.

In her last chapter, Besky addresses the Gorkhaland movement in both the plantation and Darjeeling town. The formation of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), its violent clashes with the CPI(M) and the central government of India, and the evolution of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM), are used to highlight the distinctiveness of Gorkha identity that is woefully undermined by both the state and the center. Inseparable from plantation labour, Gorkha identity is actively forged through the Darjeeling Tea Management Training Center

founded in 2008, and rallies like those organized by the Nari Morcha (the GJMM's women's wing) in Darjeeling. One of Besky's strongest chapters, it draws upon the density of her fieldwork among laborers and activists, while also positioning the fragility of 'justice' for Gorkhas in a landscape fraught with tensions between government and labour, and between labour, plantation management and government.

Darjeeling Distinction is an engaging read, but it leaves the reader wondering about the relationship between fair-trade and the pricing of tea. The prices fetched by Darjeeling tea in the international market together with the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) reveal that when it comes to price realization, Indian tea lags behind other beverages like coffee. Low sale prices directly affect the ability to invest in *faciliti-haru*. An investigation of the tea market would have shaped a more complex analysis of the impact of fair-trade on labor-management.

Despite its limitations, *Darjeeling Distinction* is beautifully written and is a valuable addition to the fields of anthropology, food studies, agrarian studies, South Asian studies, and Himalayan studies.

Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland: Constructing Democracy

by Mona Chettri. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 2017, 182 pp., 8 b/w illustrations, 5 tables. Hardback, ISBN 978-90-8964-886-0, price €79,00.

Reviewed by Markus Viehbeck

With her book *Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland*, Mona Chettri contributes to a growing body of literature in Borderland Studies, which has only lately discovered the eastern Himalayas as a region of interest. As with other recent studies (e.g., Shneiderman 2015 and Middleton 2016, which are rightly referenced), Chettri focuses on the present socio-political situation of Nepali communities in the Nepalese and Indian Himalayan hills as a source from which to investigate more generally the relationship between ethnicity and politics. In this regard, her work crosses borders in at least two significant ways: Firstly, by choosing east Nepal, Darjeeling, and Sikkim as her main research sites, Chettri is able to point to contiguous features of Nepali communities within different political contexts, while simultaneously highlighting the contextual nuances effected by regionally specific politics. And secondly, in terms of research methodology her study draws from a remarkable combination of historical, anthropological, and political analyses that produce a complex, multifaceted perspective on the social realities of Nepali communities in the eastern Himalayan hills.

As Chettri explains in the introduction, her research is based not only on formal anthropological study (primarily conducted in 2010–2011) but also on her own personal experience of having been raised in the hills. This combination of first-hand knowledge and critical, reflected investigation contributes to the quality of the book and adds to its credibility within and beyond a purely academic context. The main body of the book consists of five chapters, bracketed by a brief introduction and conclusion. The chapters generally follow the same structural organisation, whereby the author addresses a central theme and its local manifestations within each of the three research sites.

Chapter One functions as a general historical introduction. Here,

Chettri offers an account of the political and social processes that contributed to the eastward migration of different ethnic groups from Nepal to the eastern hills. Among others factors, these included economic oppression within Nepal itself coupled with economic opportunities that were provided through British colonialism, foremost the employment on tea plantations and recruitment in the 'Gurkha' Army in British India. With attention to detail, Chettri describes how the Nepali language greatly influenced the construction and homogenisation of ethnic identity, fostered by productions of the elite literati and its usage by Christian missions active in the area during the first half of the 20th century.

The second chapter discusses the existential problems that people in the hills face on a daily basis, and how their grievances are formulated in ethnic terms (especially in this regard, the lack of reference to Besky 2014 comes as a surprise). Though their political settings differ, similar dynamics are at work in both east Nepal and Darjeeling, where socio-economic problems are ascribed to what is seen as ethnically discriminatory neglect at the state level, that is to say, favouritism towards upper-caste Hindus in Nepal and Bengalis in West-Bengal. In both cases, this has led to claims for a separate 'homeland': Limbuwan for Limbus in east Nepal and Gorkhaland for 'Gorkhas' in the Darjeeling hills. In Sikkim, by contrast, the state encourages ethnic affiliations insofar as the distribution of public goods, considered by some to have created a system of dependency on governmental aid, is regulated along ethnic lines.

In the third chapter, Chettri investigates how ethnic identities are mobilised politically in region-specific ways. In Darjeeling, political parties invoke the image of the Gorkha as a 'brave martyr' in an attempt to establish cultural and political difference from the Bengali plains—an image loaded with colonial history but one that is also effective among present-day plantation workers. A sense of discrimination and protest is also prevalent in east Nepal, in this case against the dominance of upper-caste Hindus that emerges from within the political centre. Here, issues of indigenous rights are influenced both by global discourses and the ethnic claims that were also encouraged by the Maoist movement. In Sikkim, however, ethnic distinctions are part of the state apparatus, which uses ethnicity in its distributional organisation of public goods.

Chapter Four shows how ethnic identities are politicised and presented in the public sphere. All three regions have seen a process of cultural revivalism in which tangible objects (most importantly ethnic 'dress codes', sometimes enforced with considerable pressure) as well as cultural knowledge (such as the revival of ethnic festivals or attempts in language preservation) figure prominently. These activities are driven by a shifting range of agents: While one sees ethnic associations proliferate throughout the hill region, individuals as members of a new form of cultural elite are also able to exercise influence in the political sphere.

The various changes in political agency are addressed in a more elaborate, abstract way in the fifth chapter, with an arc that encompasses all three local contexts and works well to round off the main body of the book. In this context, Chettri articulates her central conclusion: that ethnic politics in all three research sites can be seen as an effect of the 'vernacularization' of democracy, where the encounter of modern political principles with traditional social structures and forms of governance led to region-specific adaptations. Democracy and claims of ethnic identity are not seen as standing in direct opposition; rather, as ethnic politics in the hills show, they led to changes in both political agency and the cultural elites—a process that despite all factual social problems must be seen to have enabled a larger body of individuals to become politically relevant and active.

Throughout the book, Chettri shifts between detailed analysis of specific local contexts, corroborated by in-depth anthropological and political research that is exemplified through interview excerpts or economic and political data, and an emphasis on more abstract conclusions that function to bridge the three research sites. At times, these latter abstractions appear somewhat repetitive and their explanatory potential is limited by their generalising character. While this is perhaps a natural outcome of the author's chosen compositional structure and the compact size of the book in general, I would have preferred to see more ethnographic detail. Unfortunately, a sense of repetition is also notable on the linguistic level and along with rather frequent grammatical and syntactical mistakes encroaches upon an otherwise well-articulated and lucid style of writing.

These, however, are minor qualms about an intelligent and timely book

that will be relevant in a number of ways: as an innovative contribution to Borderland Studies in more general terms and as an insightful analysis of contemporary ethnic politics in the eastern Himalayas. Especially in the latter regard, it is hoped that this book will also be well received beyond the academic sphere, offering an alternative to populist rhetoric that is seen to proliferate in the strained climate of the hill region's current politics.

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OBITUARY

Alexander William Macdonald (1923-2018)

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A pioneering figure in Himalayan Studies passed away on 4th February 2018. Born in Scotland in 1923, Alexander William Macdonald enlisted in the army at the age of 17 and discovered Asia during the war: he fought against Japanese in Burma, learnt Nepali from Gurkha soldiers and French in Phnom Penh.

His interest in Southeast Asia and the work of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient led him to France in 1949 where he followed the teachings of Paul Lévy, Louis Renou, Louis Hambis, Paul Mus whose work particularly influenced him, and then those of Rolf Stein at the Collège de France, which focused on the Gesar epic. His vast classical and textual knowledge of Asia was rooted in this period. Ethnology did not



A.W. Macdonald presenting Samten Karmay with the CNRS silver medal in 1991.

lag behind: Macdonald studied with Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Dumont (whose courses he taught), and at the Musée de l'Homme. Though he could have taught in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies, he chose to settle in France and joined the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) in 1951. His first works in the 1950s bear the mark of his interest in South and South-East Asia and are based on textual sources or second-hand documents, since fieldwork in Southeast Asia proved impossible.

It was in Kalimpong that he carried out his first field enquiries in 1958 and 1959, during a critical period in Tibet's history. Macdonald actively took part in the Rockefeller program, which enabled several Tibetan monks and scholars to come to the West, including three who came to France; this had a considerable impact on Tibetan studies. Macdonald's stay in Kalimpong was noteworthy in more than one way. He met a Khampa, Bstan 'dzin 'phrin las, an exceptional though illiterate person with whom for many months he recorded the Gesar epic and "the Tales of the Corpse" (*ro-sgrung*), improving—thanks to this bard—his knowledge of Tibetan (by means of the Nepali he had learnt during the war!). It was also during this stay that he met Nepalese *jhānkri* healers in Darjeeling, prompting him to write a foundational article in 1962 on Nepalese "shamanism". In 1961 he went on a fieldtrip to Nepal to study wandering Nepali minstrels (*gaine*) and recorded a large corpus of songs on which, after his return, he worked with the ethnomusicologist Mireille Helffer regarding the musical aspects. This was a pioneering era for field studies in Nepal.

These high points of his discovery of Asia, occasioned by his war experience, along with his textual and ethnological training explain the very broad perspective and the continual shift back and forth between past and present that he adopted in all his works and in his teaching at Paris Nanterre University. For him, the Himalayas were to be studied across boundaries, as a frontier world characterized by a "shifting and very varied" substratum subjected to influences both from India, and from Tibet and China, a vision inculcated by his masters, and in particular Paul Mus. His attention was particularly drawn to what he called "Buddha-isation", namely the processes by which Buddhism, and more specifically Tibetan Buddhism, imposes itself: a process of a "conversion of places" that is accompanied by a "subjugation of local



Among the Tharus, Dang Valley. The “wooden horse” performance (*kathgodha*), Maghi Festival. Seward village, Nepal, 1967. Cl. A. W. Macdonald

deities” and precedes the conversion of men. The ambition to combine the textual with what was then called popular practices is to be found throughout his work, which explores certain recurring patterns, such as the “conversion of places”, “creative dismemberment”, the *maṇḍala* concept or issues relating to the dissemination of specific topics, for example in folk tales. Macdonald emphasised the oral transmission of texts. He was fascinated by the creativity of each “storyteller”, attaching great importance to the personal weight of a life course and leaving his named interlocutors to speak in several of his works. Ethnology is “a nasty form of bartering” as he liked to say.

The importance he placed on personal relationships in fieldwork enquiries is evident in the book he produced in collaboration with Sangs rgyas bstan ’dzin, a Sherpa lama he met in 1967 in Junbesi (Nepal), in one of those “frontier” areas where “Buddha-ization” had left its mark. Written in Tibetan and in keeping with Tibetan genres (a history of Buddhism in Sherpa country, a history of clans and the “autobiography”, *rnam-thar*, of Sang rgyas bstan ’dzin, founder of a monastery in Junbesi),

the book (1971) was distributed in Sherpa country. Macdonald was to come back to the making and content of this book in several of his articles.

Macdonald used to say that “a book is only alive if it is commented on”, and that’s what he practiced in his teaching at Nanterre University from 1970 onwards, often asking provocative questions and exploring ramifications that puzzled novices or stimulated their curiosity, emphasizing the importance of the text, also among students about to embark on the ethnological study of oral tribal societies. Macdonald introduced Himalayan Asia to university studies of ethnology within the new Department of Ethnology created at Nanterre by Eric de Dampierre in a spirit of openness to all regions of the world. E. de Dampierre prompted his involvement, from 1967-1968 onwards, in creating the *Laboratoire d’Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative*, which is affiliated to CNRS, and where Macdonald spent his entire career. He also taught at Berkeley, California and in Hong Kong in the 1980s.

Thanks to a project launched by Ernest Gellner, Macdonald founded the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu in 1972 and defended the idea of teaching Tibetan. He contributed to the birth of *Kailash, a Journal of Himalayan Studies*. He was one of the founders of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in 1979 and helped edit JIABS (*Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies*). He founded and directed the *Haute Asie* book series at the “Société d’ethnologie” created by Eric de Dampierre at Nanterre, where in 1997 Samten Karmay and Philippe Sagant published a book as a tribute to him, which reflects the importance of the links he had established with a number of researchers, Tibetologists and anthropologists. The lecture-cum-seminar he expertly ran at Nanterre until the end of the 1980s was a meeting place where novices and their elders held discussions, sometimes over a drink. Macdonald cultivated one-to-one relationships with those who wished to benefit from his vast culture and atypical personality, the fruit of a life of research that had begun during the war and had prompted him to cross several borders, urging people to break down the barriers that divided Himalayan regions.

Alexander William Macdonald (1923-2018)

C'est une figure pionnière des études himalayennes qui nous a quittés le 5 février 2018. Né en Ecosse en 1923, engagé à 17 ans, Alexander William Macdonald découvrit l'Asie durant l'épreuve de la guerre : il y apprit le népalî avec les soldats Gurkha, combattit contre les Japonais en Birmanie, puis s'initia au français à Phnom Penh. Son intérêt pour l'Asie du Sud-Est et pour les travaux de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient le conduisit en France en 1949, où il suivit les enseignements de Paul Lévy, de Louis Renou, de Louis Hambis, et de Paul Mus dont les travaux l'influencèrent particulièrement, puis ceux de Rolf Stein au Collège de France, enseignements qui portaient alors sur l'épopée de Gesar. Sa vaste connaissance classique et textuelle de l'Asie y puisa sa source. L'ethnologie ne fut pas en reste, Macdonald se formant auprès de Claude Lévi-Strauss et de Louis Dumont (dont il assura les cours), ainsi qu'au Musée de l'Homme. Il fut sollicité pour enseigner à la SOAS (*School of Oriental and African Studies*) à Londres, mais il choisit la France et intégra le CNRS en 1951. Ses premiers travaux dans les années 1950 portent la marque de son intérêt pour l'Asie du Sud et du Sud-Est. Ils s'appuient sur des sources textuelles ou des documents de seconde main, le terrain en Asie du Sud-Est s'étant révélé impossible.

C'est à Kalimpong, au Nord Est de l'Inde que Macdonald entama ses enquêtes en 1958 et 1959, une période critique au Tibet. Il participa activement au programme Rockefeller qui permit la venue en Occident de plusieurs érudits tibétains, dont trois en France, ce qui eut un grand impact sur les études tibétaines. Ce séjour à Kalimpong fut marquant à plus d'un titre: Macdonald y rencontra un barde du Khams, Bstan'dzin 'phrin las, personnage exceptionnel quoiqu' illettré, avec lequel il enregistra durant de longs mois l'épopée de Gesar et des « Histoires du cadavre », peaufinant grâce à lui sa connaissance du tibétain (grâce au véhicule de la langue népalî apprise durant la guerre !). C'est aussi durant ce séjour qu'il rencontra des guérisseurs népalais jhānkri à Darjeeling et rédigea un article fondateur en 1962 sur le « chamanisme » népalais à partir de récits de vocation. En 1961, il partit en mission au Népal afin d'étudier les ménestrels népalais Gainé et enregistra un important corpus de chants sur lequel il travailla à son retour avec Mireille Helffer pour les aspects musicaux (1968). C'était l'époque pionnière des études de terrain au Népal.

Ces moments forts de sa découverte de l'Asie, engendrés par l'épreuve de la guerre, et sa double formation textuelle et ethnologique expliquent la perspective très large et l'incessant retour entre passé et présent qu'il adopta dans tous ses travaux et dans ses enseignements à l'Université de Nanterre. L'Himalaya sera abordé sans cloisonnements, un monde frontière travaillé par une double influence, celle de l'Inde et celle du Tibet et de la Chine sur un substrat « remuant et fort varié », une vision inculquée par ses maîtres, particulièrement Paul Mus. Ce qu'il appela « bouddha-isation » retint particulièrement son attention: à savoir comment le bouddhisme, spécifiquement tibétain, s'imposa, par un processus de « conversion des lieux » précédant la conversion des hommes et s'accompagnant d'une « soumission des divinités locales ». L'ambition d'unir le textuel à l'expression orale et à ce qu'il était alors convenu d'appeler les pratiques populaires, courent tout au long de ses travaux. Il y explore des schèmes récurrents, comme la « conversion des lieux », le « démembrement créateur » ou le concept de maṇḍala et la diffusion de thèmes spécifiques, ainsi dans les contes.

Macdonald mettait l'accent sur la transmission orale des textes et était fasciné par la créativité de chaque « conteur », accordant une grande place au poids personnel d'un parcours de vie, laissant parler ses interlocuteurs, nommés, dans plusieurs de ses travaux. L'importance qu'il attachait à la relation personnelle dans l'enquête de terrain est manifeste dans l'ouvrage qu'il réalisa avec Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin, un lama sherpa rencontré en 1967 à Junbesi au Népal, dans une de ces régions « frontières » où la « bouddha-isation » avait eu lieu. Rédigé en tibétain et suivant des genres tibétains (une histoire du bouddhisme en pays sherpa, une histoire des clans et « l'autobiographie » *rnam-thar* de Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin, fondateur d'un monastère à Junbesi), l'ouvrage (1971) fut diffusé en pays Sherpa et servit à l'enseignement du tibétain en France. Macdonald, qui décrivit l'ethnologie comme « une méchante forme de troc », reviendra dans plusieurs articles sur sa fabrication et son contenu.

« Un livre n'est vivant que s'il est commenté » avait-il coutume de dire et c'est ce qu'il pratiquait dans son enseignement, à l'Université de Nanterre à partir de 1970, avec des questionnements souvent provocateurs et des ramifications qui pouvaient laisser perplexe le débutant mais stimulaient sa curiosité. Il insistait sur l'importance du

textuel, y compris auprès des étudiants qui envisageaient l'étude ethnologique de sociétés tribales orales Macdonald fit entrer l'Asie himalayenne dans le champ universitaire de l'ethnologie, au sein du nouveau département d'ethnologie créé par Eric de Dampierre à Nanterre dans un esprit d'ouverture à toutes les régions du monde. Ce dernier le fit participer dès 1967-1968 à la naissance du Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, associé au CNRS, où Macdonald accomplit toute sa carrière. Il enseigna aussi dans les années 1980 à l'Université de Berkeley en Californie et à Hong Kong, dans le cadre d'un projet d'échange universitaire.

Macdonald fonda grâce à un projet d'Ernest Gellner le département d'anthropologie et de sociologie à l'Université Tribhuvan à Katmandou en 1972, y défendant l'idée d'un enseignement du tibétain. Il participa à la naissance de *Kailash, a Journal of Himalayan Studies*. Il fut l'un des fondateurs de *The International Association of Tibetan Studies* en 1979 et participa à l'édition du *JIAS (Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies)*. Il fonda et dirigea la collection *Haute Asie* à la « Société d'ethnologie » créée par Eric de Dampierre à Nanterre et dans laquelle, Samten Karmay et Philippe Sagant publièrent en 1997 un livre en son hommage, qui rend compte de l'importance des liens tissés avec nombre de chercheurs, tibétologues et ethnologues. Le cours-séminaire qu'il anima tel un *guru* à Nanterre jusqu'en 1988 était un rendez-vous où novices et aînés discutaient, parfois autour d'un verre. Macdonald cultivait la relation de personne à personne avec ceux qui souhaitaient profiter de sa grande culture et de sa personnalité atypique, fruit d'une vie de recherches commencée durant la guerre et qui lui fit franchir plusieurs frontières, incitant à faire tomber celles qui divisaient les régions himalayennes.

Alexander William MACDONALD

8 October 1923 – 4 February 2018

Annotated Bibliography and Archives

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Vinyl Record

Castes de musiciens au Népal / Musicians castes in Nepal: enregistrements
de M. Gaborieau, Mireille Helffer, C. Jest, A. W. Macdonald. Editions du
Département d'ethnomusicologie du Musée de l'Homme, LD20, Musée
de l'Homme-CNRS, Paris 1969 (disque microsillon 33t)

[It includes recordings and a short note from A.W. Macdonald]

ARCHIVES

Musée du Quai Branly- Jacques Chirac

37, quai Branly, 75007 Paris, France

Ph : +33 1 56 61 70.00

Objects

Collection 71-1967-58 (ancient collections 67.58 and 70.30 from Musée
de l'Homme, Paris)

124 objects acquired in Nepal, mainly in predominantly inhabited Tharu
villages in Dang valley (basketwork, jewellery, religious artefacts, textile
and clothes), but also 7 Tibetan Buddhist scroll paintings (*thang-ka*),

10 armlets, anklets, bracelets and other bone ornaments worn during Tibetan Buddhist ritual dances, and a copper plate with an inscription in old Nepali (18th century) [on this copper plate, see article 38]

<http://collections.quaibranly.fr/#b3f292aa-e7c9-4df2-9072-4b9c-754b2a33>

Photographs

231 items :

- 11 contact sheets

- 210 black and white prints (12 cm x18 cm) taken in Nepal in 1967, mainly in predominantly inhabited Tharu villages in Dang valley, Nepal, 1967.

- 3 black and white prints mounted on cardboard, showing a manipa (Buddhist religious mendicant) and his wooden altar, in Kalimpong, West Bengal (India), 1958-59.

- 7 black and white prints mounted on cardboard, taken among the Gaine low-caste of musicians in 1961 in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

<http://collections.quaibranly.fr/#5b310061-1d8d-4499-bd77-33c0583ac820>

CREM - Center for Research in Ethnomusicology

Audio-archives of the CNRS-Musée de l'Homme managed by the CREM, <http://lesc-cnrs.fr/crem>

98 items (unpublished) recorded between 1958 and 1971 in India and in Nepal.

1958-59, Tibetan music and songs including *drekar* song, and Gesar epic (fragments) recorded among Tibetan refugees in Kalimpong (Western Bengal), India.

1961, Instrumental Music, Nepali songs and Epics recorded among the Gaine low-caste of musicians in Kathmandu valley, Nepal.

1966, Tamang songs and myths recorded in Timal and Thulo Parsel (Eastern Nepal), and in Kathmandu.

1967, Tharu songs recorded in Dang Valley, Terai, Nepal.

1970, Religious instrumental music, dance songs and songs sung during theatrical performances recorded among Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala and in the Tibetan camp of Tashi Dzong near Paprola village, Kangra district (Himachal Pradesh), India.

1971, Buddhist religious music recorded in a Nyingmapa monastery at Junbesi (Dudhakhunda), Sherpa region, Nepal. <https://archives.crem-cnrs.fr/search/advance/>
 collecteur : Macdonald Alexander William

CDAT-Centre de Documentation de l'Aire Tibétaine. Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Paris <https://www.ephe.fr/bibliotheques/bibliotheques-et-centres/centre-de-documentation-de-l-aire-tibetaine>
 Audio-archives, notebooks and photographs:

- some 70 magnetic tapes recorded among Tibetan refugees in India and Tibetan speaking population in Nepal. It mainly includes recordings of stories of Tibetan zombies, *ro-langs* (« risen corpse »), but also few recordings of Tibetan theatre performances [1970, Himachal Pradesh?] and of a ceremony dedicated to Padmasamhava [1971, Nyingmapa monastery at Junbesi, Sherpa region ?], see CREM archives.

- one magnetic tape was recorded in Nepal and contains Yolmo songs. The Yolmo people are native residents of the Helambu valleys situated to the North of Katmandu in Eastern Nepal.

The few photographs and the dozen notebooks include in this archive are related to the recordings. The notebooks contain fragments of transliteration and translation.

LESC -Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative Université Paris Nanterre, 200 avenue de la République, 92001 Nanterre Cedex

Bibliothèque Eric-de-Dampierre

<http://lesc-cnrs.fr/bibliotheque-eric-de-dampierre>

The library has a special collection, named « *Fonds de tirés-à-part A. Macdonald* » and consisting of 552 off-prints and 7 books from his personal library.

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