

UNDERSTANDING SOVEREIGNTY IN AMDO

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Amye Nyenchen. Photo: Snying bo rgyal and R. Solomon Rino.



Guandi. Photo: Paul Nietupski.

I. Introduction¹

The hypothesis of this essay is that the Labrang Monastery estate (*lha sde, mi sde*, etc) in Amdo was, like other such communities throughout the Tibetan Plateau, under the sovereign control of the local authority, in this case the monastery. Monastery sovereignty was moreover, in the eyes of local peoples, at least in part derived from and validated by local deities brought under the control of the Labrang religious authorities.² Control of monastery properties was thus both a religious and a practical matter

1 Part of this essay was presented in the panel “Buddhism and Sacred Mountains” at the American Academy of Religion conference in San Francisco, 19 November 2011. At the Labrang Guandi/A mye gnyan chen Temple “A myes gnyan chen” is spelled “A mye gnyan chen.” In this paper the phonetic equivalent “Amye Nyenchen” is most often used, except where rendered in Wylie transliteration for accurate reference. In a few cases local Amdo phonetic equivalents are used, for example, “sha” for the Wylie Tibetan *bya*, etc.

2 Like all of Amdo and arguably all of Tibet, control was decentralized, properties loosely and inconsistently governed, and boundaries subject to change. These facts however did not preclude the Tibetan assumptions of sovereignty. For decentralized governance in pastoral nomadic societies see Bat-Ochir Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A Reconstruction of the ‘Medieval’ History of Mongolia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001); David Sneath, *Imperial Statecraft: Political Forms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia, Sixth-Twentieth Centuries* (Bellingham: Western Washington University Center for East Asian Studies, 2006); David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, & Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Paul K. Nietupski, “Understanding Religion and Politics in Amdo: The Sde khri Estate at Bla brang Monastery.” In *Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet*. Edited by Yangdon Dhondup, Ulrich

by which monastic authorities exercised authority over agricultural and pasture land, required tax revenues, corvée, and profits from livestock, and received a wide range of donations. Of the many Tibetan deities in Amdo under the control of monastic authorities, a key deity in the *gnyan* class (explained below) and a resident of the Xiahe/Kachu/Genjia-Dzöge Tö region, a significant part of the greater Labrang Monastery estate, is Amye Nyenchen (*a mye gnyan chen*).

In addition, several leading Amdo, including Labrang Monastery Tibetans and Mongols engaged and sought to control an aggressive outside deity, an embodiment of foreign power from nearby China, the Chinese god of war Guandi, “Emperor Guan” (關帝/关帝) (also known as Guan Gong, “Lord Guan” 關公/关公; Guanyu 關羽/关羽; Guan Yunchang 關雲長/关云长, and other names).³ This attempt to control or at least appease Guandi is made evident in the liturgies written—in Tibetan language—by prominent Labrang and other writers, and by the construction of the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple (關帝廟/关帝庙/*A mye gnyan chen gyi lha khang*) on what was Labrang Monastery property.

This essay first includes mention of Guandi, and then a discussion of the local *gnyan* deities, and especially Amye Nyenchen. Then, the applications of the power of deities is discussed, with a description of the Tibetan theories of “religions of gods and humans” (*lha chos, mi chos*), and the extent to which these categories apply. This section also includes a discussion of four prominent Amdo religious experts (the Second Jamyang Zhepa, the Third Tuken, the Third Jangkya, Rolpé Dorjé, and Chahar Géshé) and their liturgies written to control local deities, and in particular the Chinese deity Guandi. The last major section is a discussion of the construction and implications of the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple in the vicinity of Labrang Monastery.

II. Deities, what they represent, and how humans interact with them

Guandi 關帝, “Emperor Guan” and his son Prince Taizi (太子) are well known in China. There likely was a real person called Guandi (d. ca. 220) who served as a general in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Over time he became deified and is venerated in temples in Chinese communities around the world—and in a small temple a short walk down the road from Labrang Monastery.

Pagel and Geoffrey Samuel, 67-86. Leiden: Brill, 2013. For issues of nationalism see Georges Dreyfus, “Proto-nationalism in Tibet,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992*, ed. P. Kvaerne (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research, 1994) 1: 205-218; Paul Nietupski, “Nationalism in Labrang, Amdo: Apa Alo/Huang Zhengqing.” In *Studies in the History of Eastern Tibet. [PLATS 2006: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies. Königswinter 2006.]* Edited by Wim van Spengen & Lama Jabb, 179-208. Halle: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies GmbH, 2010. For early perspectives on the Tibetan world view, see Dan Martin, “Ol-mo-lung-ring, the Original Holy Place,” in *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places In Tibetan Culture: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Toni Huber (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1999), 258-304.

3 For a detailed summary of Guandi in Chinese history and culture see Prasenjit Duara, “Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 47.4 (Nov., 1988): 778-795. For a brief identification of Guandi, see Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “Guandi,” accessed April 23, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/324162/Guandi>. See also the overview and references at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guan_Yu#General_worship, accessed 17 May 2014.

There are books, plays, movies, and video games about Guandi. He is mentioned in the Chinese classic *Records of the Three Kingdoms* and at the Guandi Temple in Xiahe he holds the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Besides being associated with warfare, the key virtues he represents are loyalty (*zhong*, 忠), presumably to the Chinese authorities, and righteousness (*yi*, 義). He is in sum an important figure in Chinese folk religion, in Confucianism, Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, and in modern Chinese national sensibilities, noted in detail in Duara (1988).

Similarly, Tibetan *gnyan* and their retinues are in power relations with humans and other deities, resident usually if not most often on mountains. Tibetan *gnyan* in particular are place-specific deities who assert control over the elements, disease, and all negative circumstances. When properly invoked and maintained, the *gnyan* protect their communities, until they are requested to return to their former or new places of residence. The visiting deities can “eliminate outer and inner obstacles, fulfill the community’s wishes, provide for their long and prosperous lives, healthy livestock, not too much or too little rain, and bountiful crops.”⁴ They can expedite Buddhist practice and merit making activities, and here most importantly can at least in the eyes of local Tibetans, provide grounds for political sovereignty in their designated fields of control.

The mountain home and territories of Amye Nyenchen were mapped by Joseph Rock in 1956.⁵ On Rock’s maps Amye Nyenchen’s territory extends about forty miles east and about thirty miles west of Labrang (to Amye Nyenri, *a mye gnyan ri*) and is bordered by other *gnyan* deities’ territories. Amye Nyenchen’s primary residence is on Amye Nyenchen mountain near Dzögé Tö (*mdzod dge stod*), north of Hezuo/Tsö (合作/*gtsos*). In Rebong he is ranked below Amye Shachung (*a myes bya khyung*), Amye Machen (*a myes rma chen*), and others. However, Amye Nyenchen is also resident in several villages in Rebong (*reb gong*), e.g. Bipa (*bis pa*), Thebo (*the bo*),⁶ Shakar Lung (*bya kar lung*), and others,⁷ where he does assume an important tutelary role.⁸

4 Mentioned throughout the liturgies in Dkon mchog ’jigs med dbang po. *Collected Works of Kun mkhyen dkon mchog ’jigs med dbang po*. Vol. *tha*, no. 60, fols. 1a-98a. There are many different kinds of local deities in Amdo, including *yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*, *gnyan*, *gdon*, *bgegs*, *rbad ’dre*, *rbod gong*, *klu*, and others.

5 Joseph F. Rock, *The Amnye Ma-chhen Range and Adjacent Regions: A Monographic Study*. Rome: Is.M.E.O., 1956, map sheets 2/5, 3/5.

6 Lawrence Epstein and Peng Wenbin, “Ritual, Ethnicity, and Generational Identity,” in *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, ed. Melvyn C. Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 121.

7 Snying bo rgyal and Rino, 239, see their list of other villages; personal communication with K. Stuart, October 2011.

8 Katia Buffetrille, in her work on Khri ka temple, has a reported similar phenomenon in oral accounts, not in actual iconography. At this point I do not have further information on the Khri ka deity, whether it is Amye Nyenchen, or a different deity. Amye Nyenchen’s influence does however extend to the Rebong region. Buffetrille wrote: “Khri ka’i yul lha (appelé aussi A myes yul lha), dieu du terroir de Sog ru. Il est identifié à Wenchang, le dieu de la littérature en Chine, mais aussi à Guan Yu, célèbre général chinois de l’époque des Trois Royaumes (220-250), appelé généralement par les Chinois Guangong ou Guandi, «Empereur Guan»” in Katia Buffetrille, “Le jeu rituel musical (*glu/klu rol*) du village de Sog ru (Reb gong) en A mdo.” *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 35 (2004): 3. See Kelsang Norbu 2011.

Amye Nyenchen is the prominent local *gnyan* in the Xiahe region, and the juxtaposition of Tibetan and Chinese territories and divinities is mirrored in the local labeling of the mountain residence. There are three peaks on Amye Nyenchen mountain. The first is said to be the residence of the primary deity Amye Nyenchen, the second of his consort Tsimri, and the third, and lesser, of their son, known to the Chinese faithful as Taizi, the ancient Prince thought to be a son of Guandi. Here it is notable that Guandi does not appear on Amye Nyenchen's mountain residence.

Gnyan are usually invisible, but embodied, deities. They establish very real parameters for the extent of community authority, limits that are applied to pasture and water rights, agriculture, and local political sovereignty. This results in, or at least amplifies assertions of land ownership. Regionally prominent deities like Amye Nyenchen, Amye Machen, Nyenpo Yurtsé (*gnyan po yu rtse*), Amye Shachung, Triké Yullha (*khri ka'i yul lha*), and others are associated with actual territories and communities. In this way the Tibetan worldview asserted an organic relationship between the invisible gods of this world, literally the "grandparents" (*a myes*), and humans.⁹ The *gnyan* and other rituals (e.g. *klu rol*) have recently attracted much attention, particularly in studies of Rebgong and surrounding communities.¹⁰

Amye Nyenchen is in a hierarchical relationship with other *gnyan* deities, showing that here, as elsewhere a locally dominant deity can appear as a subsidiary deity in a neighboring community. Amye Nyenchen is dominant in the greater Dzögé Tö and Labrang region but is a lesser deity in neighboring places. Further, building on the work of J. Rock, R.A. Stein, and others, Katia Buffetrille has noted that the *gnyan* deities have relationships with each other, as spouses or lovers, offspring, or, in the case of Amye Nyenchen and Amye Machen, competitors.¹¹

This competitiveness is an expression of territoriality, not of petty disagreements. Deity invocation and place-identification is a political process asserted by local lay chieftains and Buddhist leaders, who derive their authority not only from the central Tibetan or other government, but also from the invoked and resident deity or deities.¹² The *gnyan* deities can be thought of as patron deities, or as above, "grandparents" in control of their resident territories, in contractual or covenantal agreements with their communities. These deities are subject to rituals performed by qualified individuals, who can invoke and control the deity. For example, the Dobi

9 Nebesky-Wojkowitz, and others following him have charted the territories, rituals, and communities of the *gnyan* deities. See René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956); see R.A. Stein, *Grottes-Matrices et Lieux Saints de la Déesse en Asie Orientale*. (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988), 207.

10 Rnam sras, "Mtsho sngon lho shar du dar ba'i drug pa'i klu rol skor gleng ba," *Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig* 4: 154-171; see Epstein & Peng, Buffetrille 2004, 2008, *et al.*

11 Katia Buffetrille, "Reflections on Pilgrimages to Sacred Mountains, Lakes and Caves," in *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, ed. Alex McKay (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), 20-21. Again, how this "competitiveness" or territorial prominence manifests in actual communities is evident in specific places and events, for example when the Second Jamyang Zhepa moved and re-installed a deity in Dngul rwa.

12 Buffetrille 1998, 22-23.

(*rdo sbis*) labtsé ritual could be used to dislodge a local deity and install it in a different place.¹³ In this sense Amye Nyenchen serves as a political agency in living communities. He defines ownership of land, he establishes boundaries, and asserts his, and the community's territorial and political autonomy.

Guandi and Amye Nyenchen are housed together near Labrang Monastery in Xiahe, the town that grew out of the local market and village. The monastic authorities at Labrang were called on to invoke and control the deities Guandi and Amye Nyenchen—here understood both as embodied deities and as political and military forces—with a view to controlling territories impacted by those deities and their human followers. In this case the human followers of Guandi and Amye Nyenchen included to varying degrees local Tibetans, Mongols, Muslims, local Chinese communities and their political and military institutions.¹⁴ All were brought under the control of the leading Tibetan Buddhists at Labrang Monastery. The myths and realities of Guandi, and increasingly, the *gyan* deities are well studied. What is remarkable here is their close proximity to a major Tibetan Buddhist monastery in a predominantly ethnic Tibetan environment. This proximity of deities again signals the proximity of social, political, military, and economic forces.

III. *Lha chos* and *mi chos*: religions of gods and humans

There is much discussion about the status of local deities, here including Amye Nyenchen and Guandi. R.A. Stein (1988) argued that the *gyan* deities are engaged in human, mundane *laukika* religion (*mi chos*), as opposed to the religion of the transcendent *lokottara* tantric gods (*lha chos*). In the former sense, the *gyan* operate in this world, and are important in establishing local political sovereignty. They are often classified as “folk” religious deities, and are actors in apotropaic religious practices. As such, they are said by some to be less concerned with matters of religious insight and Buddhist enlightenment. Consistent with this view, the invocation, worship, request, and control rituals for *gyan* are usually performed outside of Buddhist monastic buildings and on mountain pilgrimage sites, though celebrations on monastery grounds (i.e. inside the *sīma*, “sacred space”) are not unheard of.

While the community is on the surface concerned with its everyday well-being and the control of local territory, these apotropaic matters are however often cast in the context of larger religious (*lokottara*) objectives. It appears that local lay people and even well-educated lamas did not strictly differentiate between the categories of the religions of gods and men. Epstein & Peng noted that local lay people did not hesitate to ask the Buddhist tantric deities for mundane favors:

13 Interviews, Machu 2004; see Kelsang Norbu, “The A mdo Tibetan Rdo sbis *lab tse* Ritual,” *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 10 (2011): 9-40.

14 See for example Duara, p. 791: “It is precisely because of the superscription over, not the erasure of, previous inscriptions that historical groups are able to expand old frontiers of meaning to accommodate their changing needs. The continuity provided by superscription enables new codes of authority to be written even while the legitimacy of the old is drawn upon. Thus symbolic media focus the cultural identities of changing social interests pursuing sectional ends, even as the symbols themselves undergo transformations.”

. . . as Samuel and others have pointed out, the Tibetan folk and more formal religious traditions have interpenetrated each other to the extent that it is difficult to disentangle them. Monks, for example, often perform readings of religious texts for laymen, which, in the eyes of the latter, accomplish the same this-worldly ends as do, say, folk rituals of purification. They also confer some degree of otherworldly merit on them. Similarly, Buddhist or Bon rituals and texts are often employed in folk rituals.¹⁵

The point here is that even if formally separated there is a conflation of the categories of religions of gods and men into what might be a third category, a fusion of religious deities (tantric and non-tantric, *lokottara* and *laukika*) and religious goals (apotropaic and transcendent).¹⁶ Religious and political, temporal motives and goals are not separate in these communities, including in the Labrang community, in the recognition of Amye Nyenchen, Guandi, and the many tantric deities resident in the monastery.

The religious vision of the unity of human and divine realm, and the applications of divine power to the physical realities of economics, weather, territorial sovereignty and warfare were, as above, arguably very real in Amdo. There is concrete evidence of this in the Labrang Monastery and greater Amdo community, notably in the lives and works of four eighteenth and early nineteenth century Amdo scholars and political leaders who serve as key examples.

The four prominent and at least loosely Labrang-affiliated leaders mentioned here are the Second Jamyang Zhepa ('Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po, 1728-1791), the Third Tuken (Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 1737-1802), Chahar Géshé (Cha har dge bshes Blo bzang tshul khriims, aka Cha phring 'jang gsar bstan 'dzin, 1740-1810), and the Third Jangkya, Rolpé Dorjé (Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje, 1717-1786). These four well known and very prolific scholars knew each other, and were often in teacher-student relationships, and often in tantric guru-disciple relationships. These bonds were powerful; such connections also extended to the relationships between these and other prominent teachers and members of the Qing court.

These four celibate monk-scholar-politician-diplomats were parts of the network of Amdo Gelukpa monasteries and communities. They all had connections to Lhasa, and all four had diplomatic and religious ties to China and Mongolia. All four were also authors of liturgies written in Tibetan and designed to invoke and control Guandi, the Chinese god of war. One was written by the Second Jamyang Zhepa, one by the Third Jangkya, Rolpé Dorjé, one by the Third Tuken, and three by Chahar Géshé, (though authorship of one of the liturgies in Chahar Géshé's collected works is attributed to Tuken). The Sixth Panchen Lama, Pelden Yéshé (1738-1780) also wrote a short liturgy to Guandi,¹⁷ but he was not from Amdo. It is clear from these literary

15 Epstein and Peng 1998, 121.

16 Stein has shown that there are places in Tibet, for example Mt. Kailash, that are primarily residences of Buddhist tantric deities. See R.A. Stein, *Grottes-Matrices et Lieux Saints de la Déesse en Asie Orientale*. (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988), 37-49.

17 See Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po, "Ma hA tsi na'i yul gyi dgra lha chen po dmag dpon bye ba 'bum gyi sde dpon kwan lo ye gyi mchod gtor?" ["Mthu stobs kyi mnga' bdag ma hA tsi na'i yul gyi dgra lha

compositions that the Tibetans sought to control Guandi, the invisible apotheosized Chinese general/god of war, and a wide spectrum of Chinese virtues. Their biographies arguably also show that they were well aware of the power of the human Chinese government and its armies, and sought to control those as well. The liturgies to Guandi are composed in the same formats and in similar language as those for local Tibetan deities, and they carry the same implications for control of physical and metaphysical realities.

With regard to Labrang, local deities first appear in the Amdo oral traditions which record the First Jamyang Zhepa's engagements with Amye Nyenchen.¹⁸ More substantially, and not unlike other Tibetan writers' mentioned here, the works of the Second Jamyang Zhepa contain about ninety-eight folios (*tha* 1a-98a) with about sixty liturgies to *gnyan* and other "local" deities, including to Amye Nyenchen.¹⁹ In addition, there is a latter day account of a pilgrimage to Amye Nyenchen mountain by the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa, Apa Alo, and others.²⁰ These traditions and literary accounts show that highly educated tantric-specialist monks and teachers were deeply involved with local deities.

chen po dmag dpon bye ba 'bum gyi sde dpon kwan lo ye gyi mchod gtor/]. In *Gsung 'bum, Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po*. (Bla brang par ma), 683-687, Volume 10 of Work W1KG9560. Location: ff. 21b-23b (pp.672-676). TBRC W1KG9560. (New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1971). [http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O4CZ28036|O4CZ280364CZ298014CZ29843\\$W1KG9560](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O4CZ28036|O4CZ280364CZ298014CZ29843$W1KG9560);

Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje. "Kwan lo ye'i gsol mchod." In *Gsung 'bum, Rol pa'i rdo rje*. TBRC W28833. 5: 473 - 476. (Beijing: Krung go bod brgyud mtho rim nang bstan slob gling nang bstan zhib 'jug khang, 1995). [_http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O00PD107753|O00PD1077537934\\$W28833](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O00PD107753|O00PD1077537934$W28833); Blo bzang tshul khriims,

Cha har dge bshes blo bzang tshul khriims (Cha phring 'jang gsar bstan 'dzin). "Bkwan lo ye'i gsol mchod 'dod don kun stsol (na)." ["Bstan srung rgyal po chen po bkwan lo ye'i gsol mchod 'dod don kun stsol"].

In *Gsung 'bum, Blo bzang tshul khriims*. TBRC W23726. 6: 219-238. (Sku 'bum byams pa gling, 2002).

[http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O2CZ5408|O2CZ54082CZ5704\\$W23726](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O2CZ5408|O2CZ54082CZ5704$W23726); Blo bzang tshul khriims. "Bkwan lo

ye la gser skyems 'bul tshul 'dod rgu 'gugs pa'i lcags dkyu (na phyi ma)." ["Dbang phyogs tsi na'i yul gyi dgra lha'i rgyal chen bkwan lo ye la gser skyems 'bul tshul 'dod rgu 'gugs pa'i lcags dkyu"]. In *Gsung 'bum, Blo bzang tshul khriims*. TBRC W23726. 6: 239-244. (Sku 'bum byams pa gling, 2002).

[http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O2CZ5408|O2CZ54082CZ5705\\$W23726](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O2CZ5408|O2CZ54082CZ5705$W23726); Blo bzang tshul khriims. "Dgra lha'i

gsol mchod 'dod dgu'i char 'bebs (pa)." In *Gsung 'bum, Blo bzang tshul khriims*. TBRC W23726. 6: 245-

270. (Sku 'bum byams pa gling, 2002). [http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O2CZ5408|O2CZ54082CZ5706\\$W23726](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O2CZ5408|O2CZ54082CZ5706$W23726);

[Thu'u kwan] Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma. "Rgyal chen bkwan yun chang gi lo rgyus dang gsol mchod

bya tshul 'phrin las char rgyun bskul ba'i 'brug sgra" ["Khams gsum bdud 'dul rgyal chen bkwan yun

chang gi lo rgyus dang gsol mchod bya tshul 'phrin las char rgyun bskul ba'i 'brug sgra"]. In *Gsung 'bum,*

Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (Lhasa: Zhol par khang gsar pa, 2000). Volume 5 (ca), ff 783-796. Work W21507.

[http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O00CHZ0102865|O00CHZ01028652870\\$W21507](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O00CHZ0102865|O00CHZ01028652870$W21507). In addition, Guandi appears

in a ca. 1793 temple with Gesar, near Chakpori in Lhasa, credited to the Reting Regent, Losang Yéshé

Tenpa Rabgyé (1759–1815). Thanks to Gray Tuttle for reminding me of this temple. The Sixth Panchen

Lama Pelden Yéshé (1738-1780) also composed a liturgy to the deity; see Dpal ldan ye shes. "rgya yul

gyi gzhi bdag kwan lo ye'i gsol mchod/." In *gsung 'bum/ dpal ldan ye shes*. TBRC W2046. 4: 342 - 343.

new delhi: mongolian lama gurudeva, 1975-1978. [http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O00EGS103132|O00EGS1031324CZ346914CZ347784CZ347854CZ348274CZ348384CZ348494CZ34860\\$W2046](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O00EGS103132|O00EGS1031324CZ346914CZ347784CZ347854CZ348274CZ348384CZ348494CZ34860$W2046).

18 Interviews, Machu, Rngul rwa, etc. 2004; see also Mkharrtse rgyal, *'Jig rten mchod bstod: Mdo smad Reb gong yul gyi drug pa'i lha zla chen mo'i mchod pa dang 'brel ba'i dmangs srol rig gnas lo rgyus skor gyi zhib 'jug*. (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrung khang, 2009), 297. For the details of the First Jamyang Zhepa and Amye Nyenchen, see Nietupski 2011.

19 See liturgies to *gnyan*, 45b1 ff, 48a ff, 51b6 ff, 57b6 ff, 70b2 ff, *et al*. Some of the liturgies are very short.

20 Li An-che, "Our Pilgrimage to a Tibetan Sacred Mountain," *Asian Horizon* 2 (Summer 1949): 39-48.

The Second Jamyang Zhepa's liturgies to local deities also include many well-known bodhisattvas and tantric deities, including Vajrapāṇi, Avalokiteśvara, Vajra Bhairava, and Mahākāla. The liturgies often include elaborate Buddhist visualizations; a typical formula in the liturgies is “the generation of oneself as whatever appropriate tutelary deity ...” (*yi dam gang yang rung ba'i bdag bskyed ...*).²¹ There is often mention of Buddhist theoretical principles, like “transforming into emptiness” (*stong pa nyid du 'gyur*), “from emptiness” (*stong pa 'i ngang las*), and again of ritual processes like tantric “self-generation” (*bdag bskyed*, 73a2 ff). High level monks were well versed in and often performed tantric initiations at the same time as invoking and controlling *gnyan* deities.

As noted, the physical and non-physical worlds were not separated in Amdo and Tibet (in this respect not unlike China); *gnyan* and other local deities were associated with specific places and persons. Resident deities were clearly linked to actual community sovereignty. To local peoples, this was not simply a matter of metaphysics. It was moreover incumbent upon local authorities and communities to defend their places, properties, and boundaries.

The Second Jamyang Zhepa's liturgies are for example directed to specific places like Ngulra (*ngul rwa*, 64a2 ff),²² Nangra (*snang ra*, 10a ff), Sertok (*gser thog*) Monastery in Tsongka (*tsong kha*, 10a5 ff), to the deity and the Nyenpo Yurtsé region, written from Ngawa (*rnga ba*, 16b1 ff), in Trika (*khri ka*, 16b2, 31a1 ff, 74b1 ff, *et al*), at Mugé (*dmu dge*) Monastery (19a6 ff and 41a6 ff), at Drakar (*brag dkar*) in Genjia (*rgan kya*, 26b1), at Shachung near Rebgong (32b1 ff) and in many places in Qinghai, in Métö (*rme stod*) in northern Sichuan (36a ff), Dzögé (*mdzod dge*, (51a4), Kumbum (*sku 'bum*, 58a3 ff, 64a1 ff, *et al*), Kotsé (*kho tshe*, 60b5), and so on throughout the collected liturgies. Moreover, the liturgies are linked to specific requestors and sponsors, for example: local lords, a Rongbo governor (*nang so*) (5a), the Olöd Mongol chief Jikmé Yéshé (*jigs med ye shes*, 13b2), other Mongols, and many persons in and around Labrang's extended estate.

Linking deities to places and persons was intentional and is expressed in the Second Jamyang Zhepa's liturgies as the exercise of a political process, the implementation of monastery authority in lay communities, the “unity of religion and lay” authority. There is nothing ambiguous or implied about this; it is so stated repeatedly in the liturgies (e.g. 9a1, 13a1, 22b3, 33b5, 51a2, 68b6) and was intended to secure real political control of territories and communities.

In sum, the lines between invisible deity realms and physical territories, the lines between Buddhist tantrism and local deity control, between the “religions of gods and men,” were not so clearly drawn in Amdo. Invoking a Tibetan and here a Chinese deity and identifying it with a specific place and sponsor was a mechanism for political control, the exercise of the “unity of religious and lay” life. The implication is that the Labrang and Amdo Tibetans assumed control of their homelands, even in close proximity to powerful neighbors.

21 Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *Collected Works of Kun mkhyen dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po*. Labrang edition, Vol. *tha*, no. 60, (New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1971), fol. 75b3.

22 See Paul K. Nietupski, “Labrang Monastery's Jamyang Zhepa Invokes Protective Deities.” In *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*. Edited by Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, 600-604. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

IV. Guandi & Amye Nyenchen at Labrang: the deities' townhouse



Amye Nyenchen Temple. Photo: Sandar Aung

The mountain resident deity Amye Nyenchen appears at Labrang/Xiahe together with Chinese Guandi and several other Chinese deities (see Appendix). This reflects a kind of religious and topographical border crossing, a negotiated shared space, and the deities' claims to ownership of, or at least legitimate presence in the Labrang Monastery territory. As noted, the First Jamyang Zhepa had to negotiate with Amye Nyenchen in order to build Labrang Monastery on deity property. Similarly, the site of the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple, and the Chinese community,

were also located on Labrang Monastery estate property. Negotiation between the Chinese and the monastery authorities was necessary. The relatively small temple, the *gnyan*, and the Chinese deities are outside the monastery walls, but tolerated by the monastery authorities.

The temple itself is predominantly Chinese in style, but the *gnyan*, from his mountain home asserts his claim to local authority even in the midst of many Chinese deities. The religious hierarchies are clear; the temple with its local and non-Buddhist Chinese and Tibetan deities was allowed on monastery estate property, but across the Sangchu/Xiahe River and on the far side of Xiahe town. The monastery was the dominant power, and while the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple and deities were allowed, they had less authority and power. The temple's internal iconographic arrangements give pride of place to the Chinese deities, but the Tibetan *gnyan* is also located in an important position in the central temple.

Guandi is a Chinese god of war and for some, material wealth, two forces very active at Labrang. He is again associated with Daoism and Confucianism, and among other virtues, exemplifies the Confucian virtue of loyalty (忠 *zhong*), featured in the 1930 (*geng wu* 庚午, renovated 1990) inner, which reads "loyalty forever" (*zhong yi qian qiu* 忠義千秋). The 1929 (*ji si* 己巳) outer entry sign (not to be confused with the inner entry sign) also promises respect to teachers and disciples.

The main temple houses statues of Guandi and Amye Nyenchen, and the secondary temples hold statues of Daoist divinities, also with promises of fertility and prosperity. The enduring loyalty noted here has sometimes been interpreted to mean loyalty to the political authority of the Qing or Chinese state, as well as its sense of loyalty to principles, to family, community, and so on. Indeed, the Confucian system does always not differentiate between these.

The construction of the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple reflects the plurality of Labrang's environment.²³ By the mid and late nineteenth century there was a matrix of diverse social, political, and religious forces at work here and elsewhere in Amdo. In those years, building on the connections established by his predecessors, the Fourth Jamyang Zhepa (1856-1916) and others became involved with the Manchu court, Wutaishan, Ulaan Baator, Lhasa, and regional monasteries. In 1884 a Russian delegation visited Labrang to promote trade in wool and hides. Also in 1884 the Labrang authorities allowed the re-construction of a small mosque (a rebuild of an 1854 original).²⁴ In 1887, the Nyingma-derived Ngakpa College was founded. The Guandi/Amye Nyenchen project was not unprecedented, but this was not a period of open-minded religious pluralism, made evident in the records of Christian missionaries who attempted to proselytize and spread the Christian teachings at Labrang. In 1892 William Christie and his colleagues were not at all well-received, and barely escaped, under a barrage of rocks.²⁵

23 Writing of social and political pluralism in Lhasa, Emily Yeh identified "subaltern cosmopolitan" trends in some ways similar to those in Amdo. Emily T. Yeh, "Living together in Lhasa: Ethnic relations, coercive amity, and subaltern cosmopolitanism," in *The Other Global City*, ed. Shail Mayaram (Routledge, 2008), 54-85.

24 Che, Manbao 车满宝 (ed.), *Xiahe Xianzhi* 夏河县志 (Lanzhou: Gansu Culture Publishing House, 1993), 259-260; Chen, Shiming. "Xiahe xian musilin ji qi qingzhensi jianjie," *Huizu yanjiu* 4 (1993): 23-37.

25 William Christie, May 1891 to October 1907. "Christie Letters," unpublished documents, Christian and Missionary Alliance Archives, Colorado Springs, CO.

Chinese traders were present in Xiahe's markets since the late nineteenth century, with them Chinese sense of politics, law, and religion. At the same time, the location of the Tibetan mountain deity Amye Nyenchen, in the heart of the predominantly Guandi Chinese temple shows that the deities and their human communities sought to exert some presence and authority as local groups, even while all groups were under the umbrella of the monastery.

The Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple was founded in ca. 1886 by an as yet unidentified Chinese businessman from Shanxi (山西), reportedly motivated by the difficulties he was experiencing at the time, and his wish to relocate a temple from his homeland. The presently available sources provide no other details of the founder.²⁶

This period was marked by economic, social, and religious development at Labrang, but the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also politically turbulent, which had an impact on Guandi and the local Chinese community. By 1918, the Xiahe merchants' association had twenty-one members, all Han and Hui Muslim, but all were temporary residents. Later, from 1924 to 1927, Ma Qi's son Ma Bufang (1903-1975) occupied Labrang. Many buildings at Labrang were destroyed and the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple sustained extensive damage.²⁷

In 1927, in a Republican Chinese movement endorsed by General Feng Yuxiang against the Xining-based Ma clan, jurisdiction of Xiahe County was taken from Qinghai and formally placed under Gansu Province. This was followed by migration of Chinese and Muslim refugees into Labrang's newly secured safe haven. In 1929 the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple was rebuilt and renovated. Shortly thereafter, in the 1930s, Labrang's Chinese population increased significantly, marked by modern advances at Labrang.²⁸ The relative stability of the late 1940s and early 1950s was followed by the chaos of the late 1950s and 1960s. The Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple was dismantled. Labrang's minorities were called on to put aside their respective heritages, lifestyles, and religions, and adopt a new, Chinese state defined identity to take their place.²⁹ To this end, the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen temple was turned into an elementary school for a new industrial production unit.³⁰

After 1980, the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple was rebuilt and expanded, with support of the Sixth Gungthang, Jikmé Tenpé Wangchuk (1926-2000). In 1990, the Temple was renovated, and is, as of 2013, undergoing further extensive renovations and expansion. These are largely financed by Han Chinese residents, in a new stage of community history. Xiahe is now a bustling town, a magnet for tourists and new businesses. The town markets are active, with traditional livestock and wool sales, and with manufactured goods, hotels, and restaurants to serve local

26 See 红泥, "西行散记," 中国道教5 (2002), China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House, <http://www.cnki.net>.

27 Mei Yibao 梅贻宝 (1930), *Labuleng zhi xing* 拉卜楞之行, in *Zhongguo xibei wenxian congshu* 中国西北文献丛书, ed. Zhongguo Xibei Wenxian Congshu Weiyuanhui (Lanzhou, 1991), 315.

28 See Nietupski 2010, 2011.

29 Charlene E. Makley, *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

30 Mette Halskov Hansen, *Frontier People: Han Settlers in Minority Areas of China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 90-91.

residents and the increasing numbers of tourists. Amye Nyenchen is present, but his presence in the shared temple is somewhat overshadowed by the influence of the Chinese and the Chinese deities.

V. Conclusion

Amye Nyenchen is alive and well on his mountain home, in his village properties near Rebgong, and with Guandi at Labrang. It appears that the flourishing temple will continue to be an indicator, or index of change in Xiahe, and of change in sovereign control of the region. While relations are tense at times, the predominantly Tibetan community, the Labrang monastic community, and the ethnically and culturally plural greater Xiahe community, with its Muslims, Chinese, Mongols and others live together in close proximity and in shared space. Xiahe, a regional marketplace in the early period, has grown into a bustling town. The Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple continues to grow and prosper, but it is difficult to predict what such growth signals for the coming years.

In the end, the message is one of gradually increasing ethnic pluralism and likewise gradually changing patterns of sovereignty. Beliefs in deities of any description, in the gods of industry and economic development, in Guandi, in local *gnyan* or tantric deities, or in Allah, and their abilities to assert control of the natural and human worlds all served, and still serve as rallying points and discourse for control. The levels of community control and sovereign power have changed since the mid-eighteenth century, then mostly under the control of Gelukpa monastic authorities bolstered by Mongol royalty and local nomad lords. The network of Tibetan monastic scholars and leaders, including the sample of the four given in this essay was made up of astute diplomats in their engagements with local lords, Mongol princes, and Manchu emperors. In later years their successors engaged Muslim and Chinese generals, and today the Chinese state. The result has been that the sovereign control of Amdo in general and the Labrang estate in particular, have shifted, as measured in the Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple.

VI. Appendix

Description of the Xiahe Guandi/Amye Nyenchen Temple

After entering the main gate, from the west, there are four main structures situated around a courtyard. The one directly in front of the entry gate is the entry hall (*guo dian* 过殿). After passing through, or if locked around the entry hall, one is in the courtyard with the main temple facing in the east, and a temple to the left and right, or north and south.

Each of the three main temples has three statues. The temple on the left/north has mural paintings in Chinese style on each side of the row of statues. The temple on the right/south has three statues, again in Chinese style and content. The main temple in front of the entry hall/east, has three statues, murals, incense tables, and decorations, primarily in Chinese art style, but in the case of Amye Nyenchen, with distinctive Tibetan components, both in artistry and in content.

The statues in the left/north temple, from left to right, are three sisters, goddesses called Sanxiao Niang Niang (三霄娘娘). Their names are Zhao Yunxiao (赵云霄), Zhao Qiongxiao (赵琼霄), and Zhao Bixiao (赵碧霄). They hold slips of wood in their hands, and have elaborate headdresses. The mural on the left flanking wall is of Sanhua (散花), and the mural on the right flanking wall is of Songzi (送子) or Songzi Niang Niang (送子娘娘). The attendant remarked that prayer to Songzi, in particular, would help one give birth to a child. The overall tenor of this temple is of prosperity and fertility in the world.

The statues in the right/south temple, from left to right, are called Tudi (土地), Huashen, and Yaowang (药王). These are all male, bearded, elderly, and exemplify Daoist themes.

The statues in the main/east temple, from left to right, are called Amye Nyenchen, Guandi, also identified as Caishen (财神) by the attendant,³¹ and Erlang (二郎). Amye Nyenchen is mounted on his horse. Guandi holds a book in his left hand (clearly titled the *Spring and Autumn Annals*) and sits on a lion throne. Erlang is white in color, looks more anthropomorphic than the other statues, has no beard, and has his right hand outstretched with his first two fingers (index and ring fingers) extended. There is a white dog sitting in front of Erlang on his right side.

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31 See Duara 1988, 789.

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