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May 2004
Namgyal Institute of Tibetology
Gangtok, Sikkim
The Bulletin of Tibetology is published bi-annually by the Director, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim. Annual subscription rates: South Asia, Rs129. Overseas, $15.

Correspondence concerning bulletin subscriptions, changes of address, missing issues etc., to: Administrative Assistant, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok 737102, Sikkim, India (nitsikkim@yahoo.co.in). Editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editor at the same address.

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PRINTED AT KWALITY PRINTERS, 31A NATION, HIGHWAY, GANGTOK, SIKKIM
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PILGRIMAGE AND INCENSE:  
THE CASE OF CHORTEN NYIMA (MCHOD RTEN NYI MA)  
ON THE TIBETO-SIKKIMESE BORDER

KATIA BUFFETRILLE  
EPHE Paris

"La société n'interdit que ce qu'elle suscite"  

Among the many benefits said to accrue from pilgrimage to a sacred site is the purification of misdeeds, defilements and sins. Pilgrimage may also allow a person to regain his or her former standing in society after having committed a misdeed or indiscretion that disrupted the community. The case of mChod rten nying ma is a particularly striking one of the power of such a pilgrimage.

I. MCHOD RTEN NYIMA

I first heard of a sacred place called mChod rten nying ma in 1989. I had asked an old woman, a native of the village of Chiplug, in gTsang, what, in her view, were the most important pilgrimages. The first one she mentioned was that to mChod rten nying ma, adding that it was particularly efficacious in three cases:

- When "somebody sleeps with a relative," spun zla nying po byed pa (i.e., in cases of incest);
- Following parricide or matricide;

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1 This article was first published in Fitzner in "Tibetan Mountain Deities: Their Cuts and Representations." Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz, 18-24 June 1995. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Wien 1996: 19-42. I am grateful to A.M. Blondou, R. Humayun, and D. Lopez for their comments, suggestions and corrections. Last but not least, I want to thank P. Pierce of the Nepal Research Centre (Kathmandu) who assisted me with the English translation.


3 Tibetan spelling not restored.
• If one has a close relationship with a person of low status (rigs ngan).

She immediately made it clear that, although she had made this pilgrimage herself, she did not do so for any of these three reasons, and that pilgrims came in great numbers not only from Central Tibet but also from Khams.

The sacred place included, she said, a spring that Padmasambhava created with his stick; a mountain in the form of the shoulders of a lama wearing a cape; a sacred lake which gave rise to visions (usually that of a monastery which appeared in the lake to those who were successfully purified). She added that for the unsuccessful this same image was still perceptible, but upside down. She also mentioned the presence of a stūpa and a monastery.

I eventually discovered that this sacred place was very well known to many Tibetans. I had only to mention mChod rten nyi ma in the presence of people from gTsang or dBu, or to many Sherpas as well, and as soon, the notion of incest was invoked. Parricide and matricide were often mentioned as well. People would sometimes recite the reasons to go to mChod rten nyi ma like a litany, as had my first informant. Each informant also denied having gone there for one of these purposes; all considered this sacred place to be particularly potent and said that they had gone there for this reason alone. The A mdo ba and the Khams pa whom I questioned, however seemed not to even know its name, and there were many among them for whom the idea of a pilgrimage to purify the defilement of incest seemed almost unimaginable; if some would admit that this transgression might exist in Central Tibet, they denied completely the practice in the eastern provinces.

The literature contains occasional reference to this place, particularly the pass bearing the same name. The latter is located on the frontier between Sikkim and Tibet, and has been negotiated by various explorers including Captair J. Noel (see Lhalungpa 1983: 151); pandits such as Rinzin Namgyal⁴ (see Das [1902] 1970); climbers (see Freshfield [1903] 1979); and political officers (see White [1909] 1984: 92).

⁴ Rinchen Namgyal traveled around the Gangs chen mde’i luga (the Kānchenjunga of the alpinists) in 1885. Letter from H.E. Richardson: 11-1-1991.
mnChod rten nyi ma, also called rDo rje ngyi ma, is a sacred place to the south of Sa skya, on the border with Sikkim but still in Tibetan territory (see map). Located in a wide valley, it is dominated by high cliffs and snow-capped peaks. The mnChod rten ngyi ma Range consists of fourteen such peaks, with an average height of 6,700 meters; the highest, called mnChod rten ngyi ma, rises to 6,927 meters (Chan 1994: 808). D. Freshfield went there at the beginning of the 20th century, and he describes the place as having a lake (from which a river issues), a stupa, some monastic cells and carved stone walls. He adds that every year pilgrims from all parts of Tibet, as well as from Mongolia and China, make their way there. A. David-Neel arrived in 1912. She was struck by the beauty of the landscape and the aridity caused by the high altitude. At that time the monastery lay in ruins, she writes, though this does not appear clearly in her photographs (1979: 28). She speaks of one hundred and eight springs, some cold, others hot, the majority of which can be seen only by "those who have a particularly pure mind" (1929) 1977: 73-77) and notes that she rode on horseback for four days from mnChod rten ngyi ma before the golden roofs of the monastery of bkra shis lithu po, at Shigatsé, came into view (quoted by Miller 1984: 156). Lama Anagarika Govinda ([1969] 1976: 24) describes "a large and open place with, here and there, snow-capped peaks which pierce the sky, which is of the dark blue typical of these high altitudes." V. Chan (1994: 808) locates the site within a one-day walk from Sikkim; a newly built road leads there from the bridge at Sa skya; the pilgrims from Central Tibet now come by truck, their numbers often reaching one hundred a day during the season (which is not specified). In the past, this monastery accommodated a constancy of monks and nuns. When A. David-Neel passed through, there were four nuns in residence. Y. Chas (1994: 806) places the number at "12 nuns and some monks." According to an informant from rTa skor, a village located to the south of the sacred mountain of rTa liṅ, on the road heading from Nepal to Lhasa, the religious community resides there only in summer, conditions being too harsh during the winter because of the high altitude. V. Chan indicates (1994: 801-10) a line of stupas at the entrance of the monastic complex, the presence of three other

5 My translation.
6 My translation.
stūpas and a monastery, the most important chapel of which, on the western side, is dedicated to Hayagrīva.

2. Oral testimonies

All the informants agree on the presence of a lake, a spring, a mountain, a monastery and a stūpa, but the number of the latter varies from person to person: sometimes they speak of one, other times three, occasionally four (one big and three small), and once thirteen (which may correspond to the set V: Chan mentions). According to information A.M. Blondeau obtained in 1991,7 one finds there the Guru med rten, the history of which is as follows: when Padmasambhava came to this place, there were three demons (bhūdit) one of which was called Srin pc. In order to defeat them, the Indian saint drove his stick into the earth. One black stūpa was built there, and the demon is exorcised beneath it. This stūpa stands alone and is located in a deserted place (sa cha stong pa).

Two of my Sherpa informants localized the source of the spring as being under a stūpa (they did not specify which one). The lake that gives rise to visions is commonly noted not only for its purifying role but also for its function as a mirror: young single women can see in it the village into which they will marry (informant from Wulu gsho Gola, eastern Nepal). Also, not only one lake may be mentioned but two: one white (‘O ma msho) and one black (Nag po msho).8

There is general unanimity on the motives that lead people to go on pilgrimage to mChod rten czy ma, the most strikig being purification from incest.

During an interview I conducted in 1989, in Nepal, with an inhabitant of the village of bKong rta, located to the north of rTsho vi (southern Tibet), I learned that there was a case of incest among his kin. The daughter of one of his “aunts” had a relationship with the son of a relative (he could not specify the degree of kinship). The couple considered leaving but eventually decided to stay. Once the facts were known, they were beaten by the villagers and sent to mChod rten czy ma. There they were compelled to bathe in the lake and then in the

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7 Her informant came from gTsang and was about forty years old.
8 The theme of a malevolent black lake inhabited by a demon and located close to a beneficial lake is common. For other examples of malevolent counterparts, see K. Buffetrille (1993: 106).
spring. After the bath, they went to the monastery to obtain a letter affixed with a seal certifying their compliance with the rite. (To have gone back to bKong rtsa without this paper would have been equivalent, in the eyes of the community, to not having gone on the pilgrimage, and would have led the villagers to send them back to mChod rten ngyi ma once more.) When they returned, they re-entered their respective families and regained their former position in the community. One child was born from this union but died almost immediately, which obviated the determination of its status.

In this story, it is stated clearly that the couple was sent to mChod rten ngyi ma; but the villager from Walungchu Gola provided another scenario: if, in the guilty couple, the man belongs to a superior social class, his mother accompanies him, but if it is the woman who enjoys a superior status, her father accompanies her. Thus far, I have no other testimony corroborating this assertion. Other versions were not as detailed but did contain another contradiction: it is not always the couple who is sent to mChod rten ngyi ma but sometimes only the man.

One Sherpa informant who had lived in Lhasa for a long time maintained that the offenders were sent to mChod rten ngyi ma on a bullock and were accompanied by a man on a horse. On the way back, the pair had to walk. This information, although isolated, seems important. The expulsion of criminals by means of a brown bullock is, as we will see, a punishment already noted in the literature (Karmay 1591: 362).

My informants never mentioned any stigma being attached to incestuous persons who returned to their village with the certificate.

3. The stories

The information provided by Prince Peter of Greece (1963: 455) corroborates in part the preceding. In 1952, he met the abbot of the monastery of mChod rten snying (T. ma in Kalimpong [Bengal]), and inquired into his past:

It appeared that he was the abbot of the monastery at Chöten Nyingma, and that the latter was a very special nying in Tibet, because the waters of the lake had the property of being able to wash away the sin of incest. Anyone having had sexual relations with somebody within the prohibited degree of consanguinity could be purified of the pollution by making a pilgrimage to Chöten Nyingma Tso (lake) where, after having
plunged in its waters, he or she would make an offering to the monastery. The abbot whom I met would, in exchange, deliver a certificate that the person was now absolved of all sin, and the petitioner could go home satisfied and appeased. It appeared that the principal source of revenue of this particular monastery came from this trade in certificates, and that this was the reason for the prosperous appearance of the incarnation whom I just met.

One of the nuns at the monastery when A. David-Neel visited ([1929] 1977: 92) asserted that the lama of the place resided in Grang rlong, a one-day walk away, and was a very rich Tantrist, able to perform many wonders such as making rain or hail fall or stop. It is well-known in the Tibetan world that devotees make donations to the monastic community in proportion to their wealth or to their requests, which is a sufficient background to explain putative cases of influence among the priesthood.

II. QUESTIONS RAISED BY YCHOD RTEN NYIMA

1. Incest in the Tibetan world

Incest is a subject people only discuss reluctantly. People will often say that they have never heard of actual cases but recognize that the practice may occur. Most of my Sherpa informants maintain, however, that it does not exist in their homeland. Here, I will survey references to Tibetan incest in Western literature, references that are often at odds with the information I obtained from numerous interviews with Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

One may note that one term exists for incest in Tibetan (rnal), unlike in Turko-Mongolian languages. The term nyal [9] is unknown to the

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9 According to a Tibetan refugee in Paris who visited mChod rten nyi ma, the name Grang rlung ("Cold Wind") is justified by the icy wind that often blows there.


11 A Dunhuang manuscript that R.A. Stein studied (1971: 528 passion), which he called "Le conte des trois sœurs," speaks of a demon who kills his father, eats him, puts on his clothes and returns home to sleep with his mother (bnuul). Stein (ibid.: 529, n. 112) refers to "rnal/nyal: sleep" or bnuul; delitement and nyal: incest."
majority of contemporary Tibetans, and S. G. Karmay suspects that it is a word encountered only in ritual texts, and which has been retained there to the present. The Penal Code of Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302-1373), the Zhul cee ho lugs (1969-3: 74), includes cases of adultery and (a rather limited range) of incest under the single expression byi bsas pa (?), defined as: "to have [sexual] relations with the wife of someone else or one's [own] mother or sister." 12 The punishment consists in exiling the offenders after one of their limbs has been amputated. 13 These two misdeeds are thus dealt with identically on a penal level. The modern dictionary Bsdul rgyu sgo shing mtshar sken mo (p. 1523) describes mtshar as a household of the "same bone" (rus geig pa'i khyei ma). To be of the same bone means, in Tibet, to belong to the same patrilineal descent group (rus rgyud). 14 If one follows the definition provided by this dictionary, it appears that the possibility of incest on the maternal side, or on the side of "flesh" (shua), is not considered. One can immediately see the contradiction between this definition and that of Byang chub rgyal mtshan: mother and son are of the same "flesh", not of the same "bone." Theories about conception explain why bone figures in patrilineal filiation: "The father's semen generates bones, the brain, and the spinal cord. The mother's menstrual blood generates flesh, and the solid and hollow organs." 15 (Meyer 1981: 111). Such ideas are very widespread in India (Jaggi 1973: 97-101) as well as in the rest of Asia; "from Tibet to Assam, and on through all of China." 16 (Lévi-Strauss 1947/1967: 454), and also in Siberia (Hamayon 1950: 103).

How can we define incest in the Tibetan world? The exogamic rules differ in Tibet and in the Tibetan populations of northern Nepal. In Tibet itself, one needs to be cautious: we know now that it is rarely possible to assume the existence across Tibet of facts or rules observed in a particular area. In Central Tibet, there is at present no clear matrimonial prescription, or even preference. Marriage is prohibited between those with a kinsship status traceable over seven generations on the paternal side and between five and seven generations on the

12 gzhem gi shing nu dang ma'tsan ying nu dang brel ba'i phyangs la byi bsas pa.
13 Nor lag gi shing bsdus nas yul gzhem do phags par sbrul kyiung.
14 Concerning the concept rgyud, and its meaning among the Nyen bs, a population of Tibetan culture in the northwest of Nepal, see N. Levine (1984).
15 My translation.
16 My translation.
matriarchal side, according to the region (Guigo 1986: 109). It is likely that marriage with a cross-cousin was widely practiced in the past. Rather Desideri ((1937) 1995: 192), a Jesuit who lived in Tibet from 1715 to 1721 and who had a keen eye for detail, asserts that intimate relations with somebody of the same “bone” (rnyi) is regarded as incest, regardless of the degree of proximity; on the other hand, while it is prohibited to have such relations on the side of “flesh” with a person of first degree kinship (an uncle cannot marry his niece), wedding a maternal cousin (the matrilateral cross-cousin) is allowed and is not rare. Marriage with a matrilineal cross-cousin is even preferred in some Tibetan-speaking communities, including Dolpo (Jest 1975: 252); the Nyni ha community of western Nepal, where marriage occurs with cousins on both sides of the family (Levine 1988: 59); and Baragaon, where marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin is accepted and marriage with a matrilateral cross-cousin is preferred (Schuler 1983: 183; Ramble 1984: 138).

Is it possible to know one’s ancestors back to seven generations? There is no clear consensus. D. Guigo maintains that “Tibetans do not always have a very precise idea about the definition of exogamic kinship. At the first degree, it is obvious that all unions with first cousins are prohibited, but from the second degree the picture sometimes becomes blurred.”

This would mean that exogamic rules belong to the realm of norms and that the gap between them and actual practice can be great. According to S.G. Karmay, most of the families of his native area (Shar khog in Amdo) possessed a kind of written “genealogy” (rnyis yigs), such that it was possible to trace roots back to seven generations.18 During funerals, there was a ceremony for transferring merit to all dead ancestors (men and women alike), whose names were written on a paper called a “dedication support” (tshe gon rten). The name of the most recent deceased was added at his or her death.

In the mGo log vocabulary, an incestuous relation with a close relative is compared to murder (Guigo 1986: 113), which may explain why the three major crimes that lead people to mChod rten nyal ma are patricide, matricide and incest.

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17 My translation.
18 Genealogies may be oral: G. Condannias ((1957) 1974: 106) shows that some Mong Gar of Central Vietnam are able to recite long genealogical poems that go back to the fifteenth generation.
How was incest understood in the Tibetan world? Here, too, information gleaned from the scholarly literature is contradictory.

G. Patterson (quoted by Prince Peter of Greece 1963: 455) asserted that he knew the case of a father and daughter living together openly and publicly which, he claimed, aroused some reprobation but more commonly no more than a feeling of curiosity. 14 Again, Prince Peter of Greece (1963: 455) reports that an unnamed British commercial agent told him in 1939 that the Tibetans do not attach "moral stigma" to such a practice, considering it only harmful to the health of the couple and detrimental to the offspring of such a union. Nevertheless, the statements Prince Peter of Greece quotes relating to incest contradict this affirmation: "Kill the issue of incestuous relations" (pha sphan nmo dbyang na gsal), "incest between brother and sister must be confessed" (bu sring rian na phag frosa? pu mthad la bshag) also "brother and sister [who sleep together commit] black incest" (mring sring ndag), "incestuous brothers and sisters must be separated" (mring sphan ges srig na), "divine incest by the teacher" (slob dpon gyes bda na) . In the end, most of the Western authors (for example B. Aziz 1978b: 53) and all Tibetans interviewed agree that incest is regarded as a particularly horrible crime in the Tibetan world, and the difficulty in obtaining information is a further indication of the taboos surrounding the subject.

In the Himalayan and Tibetan world, the offence weights most heavily, of course, on those who have committed it. But incest is regarded also as an anti-social act, in that it invites calamities to befall the community as a whole.21 It is natural, therefore, that the whole group should be troubled by such an act. Incest disturbs the order of nature. All my informants said that if there was an incestuous couple in the village, storms, hail and avalanches would occur, the members of the offenders' families would die at an early age and all their undertakings would be doomed to failure. In the Limbu heartland of

14 G. Patterson is perhaps extrapolating. In Tibet it is possible for a step-father to have relations with his step-daughter.

20 This pronouncement and the following ones were provided to him by R.A. Stein in January 1955. The expression slob dpon the na d occurs in "a very widely practiced confession of sins containing a list of sexual relations regarded as "incestuous" or "prohibited" (my translation). This text called Slob dpon bshag "there is a syllogism of seventeen pages, without the author's name (R.A. Stein [1962] 1991: 129 and 172).

Nepal, "the village closes in on itself, being itself affected by the defilement"22 (Sagat 1982: 167). Other supernatural sanctions may occur. The old woman from Walunglu Gola who went on a pilgrimage to mChod rten nî ma added that grass turned yellow under the footsteps of offenders. In the Nyn ba population of West Nepal (Levine 1984: 574), those who violate this prohibition will develop cracks in their bones, verified after their death—a punishment that fits the crime, incest being unlawful relations between two people of the same "bone." Among the Rai, incest is actually called hadphora, "breathing the bones."23 In Doug ri (southern Tibet), the guilty are consigned to a state of perpetual pollution (Aziz 1978: 58), as are the Khumbu of eastern Nepal (Schicklergerber 1992: 733). The function of mChod rten nî ma is all the more striking in this light.

Traditionally, incest could be punished by death, as was the case in Dol po (Jet 1975: 259), where offenders were sewn into a yak-skin and thrown in the river, the same punishment for the murder of one's father or mother in Sikkim (Waddell [1899] 1978: 107), and which in general was reserved for major criminals. Often the incestuous couple was expelled from the community and exiled far away.24 "Beyond seven passes and seven rivers."25 In the Tibetan community of Gyasumdo (Central Nepal), carnal relations between a celibate lama and one of his nun disciples are regarded as "the worst kind of incest" (Mumford [1989] 1999: 238). There is no consanguinity in this case, but the relation between a religious man and his close disciple is regarded as a filiation, as the terms sras ("son") and thugs sras ("spiritual son") which refer to close disciples suggest, recalling the phrase quoted by Prince Peter of Grécée, "divine incest by the teacher" (sloe dpön gyis lha sal). One can qualify this relation as "second-degree incest" in the words of F. Hettier (1979) for whom "the symbolic aspect of incest, resting as it does on the solid pillars of identity and difference, does not necessarily have any connexion with real consanguinity, properly genealogical; on the contrary, it presupposes a logical, syntagmatic relationship that unites diverse orders of representation with each other.

22 My translation.
25 la böm ding chu bön gyal sgrub ngs.
26 The Tibetan spelling is uncertain: it may be rGYA gštön ndö.
representations of the individual and his parts, genetic representations of vertical and horizontal transfers operating between individuals by way of filiation or contiguity, representations of the relationship between the sexes and of the world of kinship, as well as representations of the natural world and the social order in their intimate relationship with biological man (1979: 239). The village of Tshap (Central Nepal) experienced such a case in the recent past. The accused was the lawa of the village. He had actively taken part in the propagation of Buddhist doctrine and in the abolition of the blood sacrifices practiced by the neighboring Gurungs; the nun was the daughter of the chief of the village. The whole community was shattered. The father of the young woman confessed that his honour had been sullied: "They have cut my nose," he exclaimed, an expression which recalls the punishment sometimes inflicted on an adulterous woman (Duncan 1966: 69; Tucci 1969: 260).

The mythology of numerous populations of Tibetan culture or of speakers of Tibetan-Burman languages contains stories relating to incest and the consequences which ensue. Among them are myths with a cosmogonic framework; these are frequent in Tibetan literature and form the mythical background of various rituals.28

Myths often have a social purpose: in the Eastem Tamung community, the first human marriage was one of primordial incest between a brother and a sister of the same clan (Steinmann 1987: 188, 195-97), just as it was in the Gurung community of Gyaumdo (Mumford 1989: 1990: 143) or among the Khumbu of eastern Nepal (Dienberger 1991: 145; Schickgruber 1992: 724). The latter have a myth of the origin of defilement (srib) among human beings. This myth relates the incest between a human son and his mother, an "entanation of Earth-Foundation-Mother" (sa zehu a mni sprul brt). This first incest resulted in the curse which leads all human beings to return to where they came from; to the womb of Earth-Mother. The

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27 "La symbolique de l'inceste qui repose sur les piliers solides de l'identité et de la continuité n'est pas nécessairement lié avec la consanguinité réelle, proprement génétique: elle suppose par contre un rapport logique, syntaxique qui tient entre autres diverses relations de représentations: les représentations de la personne et de ses parties, les représentations génétiques, les transferts verticaux et horizontaux qui s'opèrent entre individus par voie de filiation ou de contiguïté, les représentations du rapport des sexes et du monde de la parenté, mais aussi les représentations du monde naturel et de l'ordre social dans leurs rapports minés avec l'homme biologique." (My translation.)

28 Oral information received from A.-M. Blondeau (Paris 1995).
myth further explains that since that time, birth, death and conflicts are the deities which must be purified if one wants to belong to the social order ruled over by clan organization (Schickgruber 1992: 723-734).

C. Lévi-Stauss (1947] [1977: 29, 35) explained that the prohibition of incest "constitutes the fundamental step on the basis of which, by means of which, and more particularly during which the passage from nature to culture is accomplished [...], and it expresses the passage from the natural fact of consanguinity to the cultural fact of marriage alliances."

These myths delineate a cycle, from a state of social disorder that comes to a head with an act of incest, to order being restored by marriage rules, the transgression of which again plunges society into chaos.

2. *Fate of offspring born from an incestuous union*

All my informants agree on at least one point: a child born from an incestuous union has no place in society. It is generally described as afflicted with physical defects, it will be blind according to the Shar wa of A mo (Gnigo 1986: 109), or else paralysed, dumb, or facially deformed; Lepchas and Nyin has believe that such a child will be retarded and short-lived (Gorer [1938] 1984: 151, Levine 1984: 57).

Some add that the birth of a child excludes all possibility of purification and leads to the permanent expulsion of the couple and the child.

3. *Ordeal or simple trial*

From the various interviews I conducted, it seems clear that the pilgrimage to mChod ren nyt ma has something of the nature of a trial, and perhaps even of an ordeal (in which there is a divine intervention).

To be purified, one must bathe, but the water is so cold, people said, that even the bones are affected; some informants added that if one dips one's finger into the lake, circulation stops, and that if boiled tea or boiled soup is not drunk immediately, death ensues.

At the village of gNas 'og, to the north of rTib n (Southern Tibet), I was told that one

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29 "La prohibition de l'inceste constitue la démarche fondamentale grâce à laquelle, par laquelle, mais surtout en laquelle, s'accomplit le passage de la nature à la culture [...], et qu'elle exprime le passage du fait naturel de la consanguinité au fait culturel de l'alliance." (My translation.)
must dip one’s arm in the lake: if it comes out stiff and frozen, one is condemned, and death will follow shortly; escaping unscathed is the sign that the misdeed has been purified. Information that A.M. Blondeau obtained indicated that common people guilty of incest had to bathe in the frozen water of the Black Lake and that most of them died from this. An informant of hers related that if a Sa skya pc hierarchy takes a woman from an inferior social stratum, he breaks the lineage of the lamas (bla ma'i 'brog yula). To atone, he must bathe several times in the White Lake, or Milk Lake, which only lamas, regardless of their school, are allowed to enter. When the defilement is purified, the stiipa emanates light (sdzad). I never was able to determine whether a lama also has to obtain a paper testifying to his sojourn.

Ordeals are not unknown in the Tibetan world. One law code stipulates that in order to ascertain the guilt of a thief, two stones, one white and the other black, be placed in a tub full of boiling oil. The defendant has to dip his hand into the oil and draw out one of the two stones; if he takes out the white one, he is judged innocent; if the other, he is guilty.30 Tibetological literature provides other examples. Some centuries ago, a quarrel arose between two hamlos in northwest Nepal, one inhabited by Nyin ba people. The argument was settled, according to the traditional custom, by an ordeal which consisted of inserting a red-hot iron into the mouth of a representative of each group. The one who was unscathed was recognized as innocent (Levite 1984: 65).

There existed at least one other type of trial in the Sharwa area (A ndo), namely the ritual hunt, which in some respects, is comparable to the case of nChod rten nyi ma. The wildlife in the surrounding mountains and forests belong to the territorial god (yul bu), master of the soil, and as such, cannot be hunted. Nevertheless, every year a great hunt of herbivores was organized; to participate in this hunt could lead to death, and the hunters who survived were the "rect" of the territorial god (Karmay-Sagvat 1998). The risk they incurred was real; the outcome, whether good or bad, was regarded as a "sanction," which may be compared with the "sanction" of nChod rten nyi ma; we will return to this in the conclusion.

The example of nChod rten nyi ma shows that the defilement produced by incest can be "washed" away by going to this particular place, provided one survives a fearsome physical test. As far as I know, this kind of rite during a pilgrimage is very rare. Moreover, one should

30 Oral communication of S.G. Karmay, who refers to a text of laws he is unable to identify at present (Paris, May 1995).
note that the possibility of being purified by circumambulating one of the stūpas, the lake or the sacred place, while reciting mantras, performing prostrations and making offerings (usual pilgrimage practices), was never raised; the unique nature of the trial is a mark of the serious and specificity of the misdeed.

If mChod nen ngyi ma the only case, or are there other places of pilgrimage known for their ability to expunge the defilement reeking from such crimes? I know of the following examples:

- An inscription from Baragaon, in Nepal, confides to C. Ranibet that a one-week walk from Multinath there exists a place where pilgrims go in cases of incest. He said he knew a myth on that topic but refused to give more details because it was necessary that the name of the site remain unknown so that those who go there may do so anonymously. This confirms the difficulty of obtaining information on such sensitive and taboo subjects.

- The upper cave of Halage-Maratika in south-eastern Nepal contains four “paths to hell” (bshra>Glas lama)31. When one enters such a narrow crevice, one is unsure whether one will be judged innocent or guilty. The notion of ordeal is present, and with it that of supernatural sanction. The Sherpa lama of the place, Maratika Lama, assigns to one of these “paths” the ability to purify the defilement generated by incest or by carnal relations between a monk and a woman. Pilgrims seem to be unaware of the specific nature of the path, or do not devote any particular attention to it; it is only the pilgrimage guide written by the lama32 that indicates its properties.

- The Tibetans who settled about one hundred years ago in the area of Gyuntsuo, east of Manang, in Nepal, also make pilgrimages in order to be purified of serious defilements. In the 1980’s, a Tibetan from a high family ran away with a woman of low birth. When he

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31 These “paths to hell” are one of the constant features of pilgrimage places. They often take the form of narrow cavities burred in the rock or narrow paths between the rocks that the pilgrims cross to purify themselves and to overcome fear of the intermediary state between death and rebirth (kar dpal) at the time of death.

came back, he was compelled to undertake a pilgrimage to Muktinath (western Nepal) and wash out his mouth with the water of the springs in order to be purified before being able to partake of food and drink with his peers (Mamford 1989: 46). One should note in this case that only the man (not the couple) was sent on the pilgrimage, and that no stigma seems to have been attached to him upon his return.

However, an essential difference exists between the two sacred sites cited above (Malale and Muktinath) and mChod rten nyi ma: the great famine of the latter in matters of incest. To this day mChod rten nyi ma appears to be a most uncommon, if not unique, case.

III. THE PILGRIMAGE GUIDES

The tonantry of pilgrimage informants on the impulse that drove them to mChod rten nyi ma was striking. All of them said they their knowledge came from pilgrimage guides. I have found two such guides.34

The first one bears the title “Pilgrimage Guide of rDo rje nyi ma, Secret Register” (rDo rje nyi ma' gi gnas rgyung bu'i dker chos). Its subtitle is: “A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Hidden Land in Sikkim Revealed from Its Place of Concealment by Rig ‘dzin gdod kyi Idem ‘phu can (1337–1408).” It was published in Delhi in 1983. Written in block capitals (bau can), it is composed of twenty-four leaves each with five lines (with the exception of the first three, which have one, two and three lines.)

The main theme is the story of the construction of the various stūpa of rDo rje nyi ma (not called mChod rten nyi ma but in actuality the same place). The father Rig ‘dzin nthong mchog, of Hung rje lineage, had a son called rDzi bu (shepherd) on account of his primary occupation. In fact, he was Nam mkha’i anying po, one of the twenty-

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34 F. K. Etchart provided me with the first text. I found a second copy, not long after, in the library of Khruul ‘dod Rapjoch, in the monastery of Thub btan chos gling (Sherpa country, eastern Nepal). A. Chayet brought the second one to my attention. I wish to thank both of them. The translation of these two guides is in K. Buffetrille (2000: 201–26).

35 Henceforward: Iturje 1.
five disciples of Padmasambhava. Mahakaruna was his tutelary deity, and his faith was so deep that various miraculous signs appeared. One day, the Red Hayagriva issued from the heart of Mahakaruna. The shepherd asked him to be allowed to build a stūpa to “clear away the defilements of the living beings in these degenerate times.” He was granted his wish [1-7]. On the tenth day of the fourth month a yak appeared on the Gangs chen mdzod lnga (Kaschenjunga) and the shepherd followed him with his flock of yaks and sheep. He eventually arrived in Tibet and, in a vision, saw Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsos rgyal. He questioned the Indian saint about the corrupt conditions and the signs of the times. Making a spring of nectar miraculously gush from the base of the throne, Padmasambhava answered:

From the base of the throne of the Buddhas of the three times, a hundred springs of nectar have appeared. If one bathes in them, sicknesses will disappear [and] demons, [the creators of] obstacles will be pacified. If one drinks from them, karmas and defilements will be purified. In particular, [a time will come during which] one will commit the ten non-virtues36 and the five deeds of immediate retribution37. During the degenerate times there will appear a sign, which is incest between brother and sister.38 At that time the essence of the earth, having been weakened, will be swept along by the wind, and it is certain that people will go to the hell of vajra. Because people will have had [sexual] relations with [someone] from a low social stratum or because they will have carried a corpse, their intelligence will be blocked and the ducts of semen will be dried up. [11] This will be clear as [in] a mirror of polished copper. Nevertheless, all misdeeds, such as the five

37 The mthams med lnga are: patricide, matricide, murdering an Arhat, maliciously causing blood to flow from a Buddha, and causing dissension in the monastic community.
38 rgyas dus sphan zha sning sning 'dzol ba'i ba. The Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo (2249) gives for ’dzol ba: nor ba'i am ’khrul ba dang ’god ba: to make a mistake or to breach the norm (i.e. to do something beyond the acceptable), to disturb the harmony.
forgivable sins, will be purified. [...] The central mountain is the sacred mountain (genas ri), seat of the planet Rāhula. Behind it there are three lakes, one of gold, another of turquoise and a third of conch. The next descendants of the shepherd are designated by prophecies to open this place.

A short description of the sacred site follows; it mentions a lake in which one’s own karma appears as everything that will happen in the next life, and a mountain with images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Ye shes mtsho rgyal then questioned the Master on the degenerate times. Before answering, Padmasambhava stuck his stick into the ground, and in that place “a nectar, medicina water with the eight qualities,” started to flow; then he explained the beneficial qualities of this water.

Next comes the story of the construction of the three stūpas, one by the shepherd (that is, Nam mchās shnyig po), the other one by Ye shes mtsho rgyal and the third built by the two of them together, according to the instructions of the Master. One day, while the stūpa (nyi ma) rose, the shepherd saw in a vision a vajra (rdo rje) with five points appear in space, hence the name of the place, rdzogs rje nyi ma, “[19] As for the names [of these stūpas], they are called, on account of the omens described above, the stūpa of rDo rje nyi ma (Vajra-sun), and their fame echoes like the sound of the summer-drum [– the thunder].”

The benefits obtained by doing prostrations and circumambulations and by making offerings to these stūpas are numerous, including, among others, obtaining children in the case of women [19]. In a short description of this sacred place, rdzogs rje nyi ma is described as “the northern door which gives access to the hidden land of Sikkim” [22-23]. The text ends with the history of this treasure-text, the pilgrimage guide, its having been written and hidden by Ye shes mtsho rgyal and then discovered by one of the descendants of the shepherd, “the second Rig ’dzin rgyas ding, scion and emanation of the word of the shepherds,” and in the end printed by an heir to the Hām ra lineage.

The second text, “A Short Summary of the Pilgrimage Guide of the stūpa of rdzogs rje nyi ma” (rdzogs rje nyi ma mchod rten gyi gua yig myungs bkhor) is, as the title indicates much less detailed than the previous one. It was narrated by the Lord of Oddiyana

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39 The nye bu lnga are: raping a female Arhat, killing a Bodhisattva, killing a monk, taking property belonging to the monastic community, destroying a stūpa.

40 Henceforward Donee 2.
(Padmasambhava) to Ye shes mtsho rgyal and recorded by her. It is attributed to the treasure-discover (gter ston) rDo rje rgyal mtshan.41 The version I have is written in block capitals (dbyung can) and is composed of five folios with an irregular number of lines (from four to six). The spelling mistakes are numerous, and were corrected for me by religious scholars living in Nepal.

The text begins with an encomium to Avalokiteśvara, rDo rje nyi ma being the meditational place devoted to him. The site is composed of “a high snowy peak, and a river of nectar with the eight qualities flows through it” [1b]. Ye shes mtsho rgyal wants to know “the marvellous signs [manifested] in this place excellent above all.” In response, the Master sets forth the various qualities of rDo rje nyi ma, then the specific benefits that the site confers:

[4b] If one makes prostrations and circumambulations in this place, the five sins without remission, the five deeds of immediate retribution, the five forgivable sins [and] the ten non virtues will be purified. All wishes will be spontaneously fulfilled, and one will obtain sidhi, the common as well as the supreme. In particular, [it is] an excellent [place] for a woman who wishes for a child. The fruits obtained by merely hearing the name [of these stūpa] [will lead one to be reborn] as god or as human.

The sacred place is described as containing self-arisen stūpa, a lake that produces visions to living beings who, untainted by the defilements of bad karma, possess good fortune.

41 Unidentified. May be another name of Rig 'dzin rgyed Idem.
IY. TWO TRADITIONS, TWO DISCOURSES?

1. The oral tradition

According to oral and written traditions, mChod rt'en nyi ma was created, or rather, "opened", by Padmasambhava. It is a perfect sacred place, featuring a lake and a mountain and also a spring, three characteristics of the landscape ofomenants never fail to cite; it is only as an afterthought that they add to their description what must be regarded as the main element of the site, if toponomy is any indication: the one or more stūpa. In fact, in none of the collected stories does the stūpa play a role except when the guilty lamas bathe in the Milk Lake and light is emitted from the stūpa, the sign of the purification of these religious dignitaries. According to two Sherpa informants, the only function of the stūpa seems to be to shelter the spring. Although all the
people I questioned knew the name rDo rje nyi ma, “Vajra-Sun”, they only used its other name, mChod rten nyi ma, “Stupa-Sun,” thus recollecting the presence of the one or more stūpas, of which the stories hardly speak. A. David-Neel ([1929] 1977: 73-74) explains the name mChod rten nyi ma by reference to a stupa “containing precious relics [which] miraculously transported itself through space, from India to this place.”^42 This story of a flying stupa was never confirmed to me.

If one follows the oral tradition, the stūpa of mChod rten nyi ma have no particular value for pilgrimage, which leads one to think that they are later constructions (both literary and physical), an interpretation put forward by Buddhists to divert attention from its original significance. The light which is said to emanate when a monk or lama purifies himself merely confirms this hypothesis. The importance of the monastery is more pronounced in the stories: it is there that offenders obtain the letter testifying to their presence and to the fact that they have been purified, and thus to the success of their undertaking. Unfortunately, I have yet to learn when the monastery was built.

The main role, however, is played by the waters, those of the lake or of the spring that Padmasambhava tapped. The stories are not always very clear on this point. The oral tradition takes no note of a benefit clearly mentioned in the two guides, which commonly leads Tibetans to go on the pilgrimage, i.e., obtaining a child. Only two informants seemed to be aware of this, the most detailed information on the subject having been collected by A.M. Biondetti. If a childless couple performs a circumambulation (of the lake?) of the stūpa and has sexual relations that evening, they will be blessed with a child, to whom they will be expected to give a name that includes the term Gu ru, for example, Gu ru’Strol ma if it is a girl or Gu ru’Tshe ring if it is a boy, in recognition that the child was born following a wish made at mChod rten nyi ma, the sacred place of Padmasambhava.

2. The written tradition

The written tradition highlights the construction and the existence of the one or more stūpas from which the sacred place takes its name. The presence of a sacred mountain is cited in the two guides (Dorje 1: 11 and Dorje 2: 1b). The one discovered by Rig ‘dzin rgya Idem recalls the

^42 My translation.
rise of incest as the true sign of degenerate times, as are sexual relations with someone from a low social stratum or the act of carrying a corpse. It specifies in effect that these defilements (like those resulting from the five deeds of immediate retribution, the five forgivable sins and the ten non-virtues) will be purified if one goes on a pilgrimage to rDo rje rNying ma, the northern door of the hidden land of Sikkim.43

The second text contains nothing to suggest that there is any connection between this sacred place and the purification of defilement incurred from incest or sexual relations with someone from a low social stratum, unless a statement by the author in citing the benefits obtained at this site can be so interpreted: “What is there to say about the main pollution owing to the impurities?” [3a]. Is this a discreet evocation of the major pollution of incest? On the other hand, patricide and matricide are among the five deeds of immediate retribution (mitshams med /lugs/) which are explicitly purified at the site.

Incest is obviously not the main theme of these guides. There is thus a striking gap between the discourse of the laypeople and that of the texts (and therefore of the religious figures). mChod rten rNyima demonstrates that even if the priesthood proposes a scenario, laypeople provide their own emphasis. They are not two parallel lines of discourse; they are intertwined. One of the pilgrimage guides prophesied that during degenerate times the phenomenon of incest will appear, and the oral tradition transmits the idea that the defilement of such an offence can be purified by going to mChod rten rNyima.

Unfortunately no source provides any reason why this particular place is able to cleanse such misdeeds. Both of the pilgrimage guides and the informants are silent on this point. Only the place itself may hold the clue, but its location on the Tibetan-Sikkim border makes access difficult.

V. AN ATTEMPT TO INTERPRET THE PILGRIMAGE OF MCHOD RTEN NYI MA

The pilgrimage to mChod rten rNyima appears to be a means of responding to the transgression of a forbidden act, a crime which

43 The guide points out, fol. 18r, that “the benefits [obtained] by doing prostrations and circumambulations and by making offerings to these springs (Chu RTing bummies tseg), that is Muktinath.” It would be interesting to know if the people with whom S. Menonford worked knew this text.
rebounds against the community as a whole, unleashing various calamities. It allows reintegration into the group for those offenders who survive the trial of freezing water, proof that they have been purified. The presentation of a myth may help to understand the relationship between pilgrimage, incest and trial.

1. From myth to reality

One finds the following amazing passage in the *bKa' 'chens ka khod ma* (1989: 305-06), “The Testimony of Srong btsan sgam po: Hidden in a Pillar”, a treasure-text discovered, according to tradition, by Attila (982-1054).44

At the time ‘Bum thang monastery was being built, King Srong btsan sgam po left for ‘Phan yul’ to look for craftsmen:

[305] There were there a father and a mother who did not have a clan-name and who had two daughters and two sons as beautiful as gods. Because they loved each other, [the girls] refused to leave [for somewhere else] as brides, [and the boys] did not agree to bring women [from outside]; but because they were ashamed [to do so], they did not dare to settle down as [married] couples [with each other]. They were craftsmen.

The king said to them: “You must come and become my craftsmen.”

The craftsmen answered: “[There are four conditions]: 1. not to be compelled to follow the rules of decency; 2. not to have to seek another occupation; 3. to have a hot meal before [work]; [306] 4. to wear a cape. King, if you accept [these conditions], we will go.”

The great king accepted and, having invited them, they worked as craftsmen in, among other places, ‘Bum thang, Ra mo che, nKhar brag. Them bu kog pu, and Mig mangs shis. They were

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44 I am grateful to S.G. Karmany for drawing my attention to this part of the work. It is necessary to point out that the version of the *bKa’ ’chuns ka khod ma* published in *Literary texts in Ladakh*, Vol. 1, Darjeeling, 1972, in 14 chapters, and the one of the *Ma’ rongs lung bstan gsal bu’i gnua ma* (Man tras shes rig spendent, Vol. 33, Leh 1973) in 12 chapters do not include the above extract.
happy. The four, brothers and sisters, were living as couples, and their children grew to number happily. It is said that there were seven large villages called the Seven Households of the Happy People.45

Ong Cong [the Chinese wife of the king] said: “These people are shamelessly increasing happily beyond bounds. [So] they received as clan-name that of Happiness ([i]kyi[d]).”

A Ben po from Sun pa46 [called] Kakari said: “Your craftsmen having committed the impurity of incest, the king’s pho lha has been stricken by the impurity, [and the monarch] will fall sick and die. Do not let them act in this way. If they do not obey, I will perform black magic.” He made an evil spell of lice (kunga) and cast it. In no time the lice became as large as pigeons. They filled the inside and the outside of the Seven Households of the Happy People; but whatever was done [the craftsmen] did not agree to leave and so it was said, their number continued increasing.

Then, the Seven Households of the Happy people took fright; the sister-wives were sent away as daughters-in-law, and the brother-husbands asked spouses to come [from outside]. Thus they multiplied even more than before and filled the whole of dBu ru [Central Tibet].

Because they said: “The center (dbyil shod) of this country is [the homeland] of the tribe of [i]Kyi[d],” the name dBu ru [i]Kyi[d] shod was given to it; and because they said: “We drink from this turquoise-blue river,” the name Kyi ([i]Kyi) chu stgon po was given to the river.

This story that the bKa’ chens ka khol ru relates in providing the etymology of toponyms can be interpreted as a legend of the origin of a primal clan. From it one can see that incest and lack of shame existed before the organization of the clans, otherwise, the attitude of the king and the craftsmen would not be understandable. The forebears accept


46 A place in north-eastern Tibet.
the conditions set by the craftsmen, which suggests that he is not aware of the possible consequences; the others insist not only on being allowed to continue in their incestuous relationship but also feel unashamed. This text explains that the pho lha of the king, affected by the de’element of incest, is responsible for the potentially fatal illness of the monarch. The legend of Gri gum recalls the seriousness of deserting the pho lha, dgra lha or mug lha of a king.  

The pho lha, god of the male lineage, belongs to the group of five gods born with men (go ba lha), which reside on various places on the body. The list of these gods varies, and authors do not even agree on the parts of the body the gods occupy.

S.G. Karmay (1995: 166) relates a legend taken from the gzi brjads in which it is said that one day the demon Khyab pa lag ring threw a thunderbolt containing the nine impurities at the head of gShen rab mi bo with the aim of killing or at least polluting him, but without success. A list of these nine impurities is given: “Homicide/fratricide (dmyo), the birth of a child just after its father dies (mug), incest (snag), shamelessness (busog), imprecatory signs (thun), bad omens (ltus ngon), something possessed by the mind (bya), impurity owing to the death of a husband or wife (yug), pollution of the hearth (thub mkhon).” Another myth may help to understand better the implications and consequences of the offence of incest for Tibetans. While Bon

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49 This is the longest biography of gShen rab mi bo, the founder of Bon, according to tradition. See S.G. Karmay (1975).
50 C. Ramble (1998: 130, n. 14) notes that in Baragam (southern Mustang) where people speak a form of Western Tibetan called locally the Drdzadzung dialect, “snag is never used in the Drdzadzung dialect, and dmyo unquestionably signifies incest. The expression dmyo ree bo means ‘to commit incest’ (ree bo: ‘to mix’), and dmyo phug denotes a child born from an incestuous union. The apparent difference in meaning is perhaps resolved by the notion, common to both interpretations, of a prohibitively close degree of kinship within which an otherwise legitimate (or at least non-polluting) activity takes place. This suggestion is borne out by one of the definitions of dmyo phug given in the Bod RigGst brgya rdug chen mo: srga dus kyi shod srol du rgs rin chos pa’i snag la sgrugs hung khol phan chen grub res byas pa dang pho mu bralbo pa’i sgrugs.” In popular usage in the past, “impurity from reciprocal killing or sexual relations between members of the same clan or close relations.”
51 My emphasis. The translation is also mine.
declined in Tibet, King Khri Sen gyat ba, following his order that Buddhism be practiced by his subjects, fell ill and numerous scourges beset the country (Karmay 1972: 84-84 and 1991: 365). The monarch called a soothsayer to learn the reasons for this and to determine the most effective rituals. The soothsayer explained:

"O Lord, it is because of the pollution of a child born from an incestuous union and from the magic of the demon Na' mi zan snying dmar (Anthropophagous Insect, Red Heart) [...]. There are misfortunes in this country because the thirteen pure deities of this world are unhappy about the existence of this child." Everyone was worried about [...] The ministers said to him, "O clear-sighted soothsayer, we ask you to find this child and to tell us the ritual whose execution will be beneficial." The soothsayer said: "[...] The eighteen Bonpos belonging to the various clans must perform the rite Glang nig thar sel. For this rite, it is necessary to have a brown ox loaded with objects of offering and ransom for the man and the woman with, on top of these, the incestuously produced child. The expulsion must be in the southwest direction; this will be beneficial."53

Several themes of this mythical story can be found repeated in the pilgrimage to mChod rten snyi ma, namely that of incest, the various calamities which befall the community, and the child which is the fruit of the incestuous union and which, if it survives, has "monstrous" characteristics.54

3. Mountain-deities and insect

S.G. Karmay explains in a footnote (1991: 365, n.157) that the thirteen pure deities are all mountain-deities. When angry, they send various calamities. By the ritual and the expulsion of the child on an ox loaded

52 This is the title of a ritual the text which has yet to be found. S.G. Karmay advised against attempting to translate the title under these circumstances.

53 This part, translated by S.G. Karmay (1991: 365), is extracted from the Srarı rgyud of Khod po Blo gros thugs med (13th century), a text which deals with the expansion and decline of Bon during the royal epoch. (My translation from French to English.)

54 The theme of the ransom (evoked by the expulsion of the incestuous couple on an ox) will not be touched on in this article for lack of space.
with ransom, the defilement of incest is eliminated and the mountain-deities are sacrificed.

The concept of mountain-deities being responsible for the order of nature and for prosperity is well-known in the Tibetan tradition. Dunhuang documents point out that "the prestige of the royal person and his health, the stability of the kingdom and that of the government, the absence of sickness among men and cattle [and] the abundance of food" depend upon the appeasement of the sku bla. "mountain-deities, ancestors and the support of the vital principle of kings" (ibid.: 309). We have already emphasized that all informants and the Tibetological literature recognize that in cases of incest, calamities (such as storms and hail) are bound to occur. When hail falls, say S.G. Karmay and P. Sagar (1987, 251), it is the rül bha who is called upon because "the attitude of all the other gods over whom he exercises his empire depends upon his good-will as the master of the soil (gzhi blegs)." The rül bha (territorial-god and mountain-deity) is generally regarded as the ancestor of the population that lives around. It is not surprising that the territorial-god, ancestor of the community, reacts in a violent way to incest, patricide, matricide, and even to sexual relations with someone of low birth. In a manner of speaking, one can say that it is a "family affair." Becoming angry if he notices transgressions, he turns away, and the territory along with the population living in it no longer enjoy the protection of the god and are abandoned to all manner of malevolent forces.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE EXPIATING OF THE "YIRMU"

The nature of the rite performed at mChod rten nyi ma is difficult to determine with certainty. Let us be cautious and say that it is a trial which has characteristics of an ordeal. The judgment would be not of the guilt or innocence of the couple but on whether they are forgiven or not. Thus the transgression of the taboo on incest would not be entirely irremovable.

56 My translation.
57 It seems that this concept is unknown in Bhutan (Pottemare 1996: 30-50), and in Zanskar (1996: 23-28).
The connection between incest and the calamities launched against the community by the yul luu leads to a possible interpretation of the purificatory rite at mChod rten nyyi ma. For the community, would it not be the territorial god (yul ba'i) who is expressing his displeasure? (the written and oral traditions mention the presence of a mountain.)

This hypothesis is supported by the usual treatment reserved for the incestuous. By expelling them, the community hopes to escape from the supernatural retribution sent by the territorial god. This expulsion must allow it to recover its lost honour. (Recall the fate of the young nun in the village of Gyanamdo.)

But it is here that Buddhism intervenes at mChod rten nyyi ma. The society requires certification of the trial that incestuous persons have undergone; this they will obtain in the monastery. Anyone who goes on a pilgrimage without having committed any serious misdeed does not need this certificate. Buddhist religious authority intervenes at this time the letter is delivered; it contains itself with satisfying an irreparable fault decided by the trial. Thus Buddhism gives its seal of approval, recognizing that the pilgrimage has the capacity to purify the delinquent produced by, among other things, incest. Without this certificate, the pilgrimage is null and void in the eyes of the community. It is proof that the man (the couple?) really has been to mChod rten nyyi ma, that he has submitted to the trial and that he has been purified. His survival proves to the community that henceforth he will not be stricken by supernatural sanctions.

The case of mChod rten nyyi ma shows that, in some parts of Tibet and in some populations of the Himalayan regions, the death penalty or definitive expulsion is not the only way to deal with members of the group who transgress the prohibition regarding incest.

We have already singled out the story of Lama Dorje. Although all the villagers agreed that his misdeed was a very serious one, and although some of them confessed that they no longer trusted the monk, most of them wanted him to stay on and were ready to forgive him and to see him return to the monastery, this time as a named lama. An old lama intervened and gave two possible reasons to explain the "crime" of Lama Dorje: the first was that, in a past life, he had committed a very serious sin, the retribution for which was the cause of the present tragedy; the second was that his qualities were almost exalted qualities (yul khor), which brought about his fall, even though he was close to

[17] If this is the case, it would mean that the jurisdiction of the yul luu extended over people not dependent upon his territory. The question is still open.
realization. As thus there was no truly malevolent intent on his part; the community was able to reinstate harmony without resorting to expulsion (Mumford [1989] 1990: 238-239). The villagers as well as the monastic community needed such an active religious figure, which explains the lama’s intervention. Thus it is easier to understand the arrangement made to reintegrate him, as a lama married to his young disciple.

“To put things in order in the realm is essential for preparing the return to civilization and for allowing people to find again the purity necessary for their vitality, for their prosperity”59 writes P. Sagant (1982: 167), and he shows how the same ideas exist not only in China but also in Southeast Asia, for example among the Monong Gar of Central Vietnam (Condonnings [1957] 1974: 97-134).

Buddhist authorities could not accept that the “crime” of incest was purified by a simple physical trial based, if my hypothesis is correct, on the traditional cult to the yul lha. They therefore transformed this site into a sacred place opened by Padmasambhava. Pilgrimage guides tell us, and travellers confirm, that a stūpa and a monastery were built. In this way, the monastery succeeded in controlling a socio-cultural unity with no previous link to Buddhism.

POSTSCRIPT: An article published in the journal China’s Tibet (Vol. 6, No. 5, 1995: 22) sheds new light on mchod rten nys ri ma. We learn that during the last millennium, Indiano, Bhutanese, Sikkimese, Nepalese and Tibetan pilgrims came to immerse themselves in the waters of mchod rten nys ri ma. Every day some eight hundred and twenty tons of water flow by. Numerous devotees go back home loaded with bottles filled with this water, which they offer to the members of their family and their friends. At the beginning of the 1980s, the inhabitants of the place realized the value of these sacred waters, and in 1989, they sent water samples for scientific testing. In 1990, the Tibet Autonomous Regional mchod rten nys ri ma Holy Water Committee certified that it was, in fact, mineral water. In August 1992, the Chinese Ministry of Geology and Mineral Resources announced that this water contains rare elements beneficial to health that enhance the appetite, favour bone development, improve blood circulation, strengthen the heart and have curative effects on goitres. In 1993, the Tibet mchod rten nys ri ma Development Company was established and a bottling factory began operation soon after. The first bottles were offered to the late Tenth Lachen Lama’s funeral stūpa. The article does not mention the purification of incest.

59 My translation.
among the benefits of the waters. Is it possible that, from now on, offenders will be content to go to the Lhasa bazaar to buy bottles of mineral water in order to be purified of all defilements resulting from incest, patricide, matricide or sexual relations with someone of low birth?
TIBETAN SOURCES

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This paper was written in December 1999 for the Franco-Austrian Seminar on "Myth, territoriality and ritual in Tibet" which took place in Vienna (Austria). Today, it is published as it was at that time without any amendments or updates. It is a reflection on the yul lha, the "deity of the territory" in Bhutan, from material which I have collected over the years, but more precisely during fieldwork from 1996 to 1999. Some of it has already been published elsewhere, but the focus was then on the categories of local deities and their function. Therefore, this paper does not dwell on the different categories of local deities, or the classification of the yul lha, as those issues have already been addressed, if not satisfactorily.7

While adding new material, this paper aims at giving an overall view of the deity of the territory in relation to his or her space and people that inhabit it. I will first examine the connotations of the word yul (Dzongkha: yul/gyu, gyu)1 and try to place it in the Bhutanese context; in the second part, I will present the close links between the yul lha and the territory from four perspectives: kinship, area of control, power and rituals.

1. THE TERM YUL

In the West, it is the standard practice to translate yul as "territory". In Bhutan, while this translation certainly applies, yul also means "village" and "home". It is explained as meaning "native place" (shoves)

1 I would like to thank Kunsang Choden for her information and comments.
4 The spelling of the words is given in classical Tibetan. When the Dzongkha spelling is used, the word will be preceded by Dz. The words in other non-written languages of Bhutan will be preceded by "*.
5 This meaning is also found elsewhere in Tibet and the Himalayas, for instance in the Tibetan region of Amdo. Personal communication from Samuel Karmay, August 1999.
su; hon. 'brang yul'. The word lung pa, whose Dzongkha form is lham and which is widely used, at least in Central Tibet, is seldom used here, and is replaced by the term yul. Sometimes the word used in Dzongkha is g yul 'ku (new Dzongkha spelling). One would therefore ask: 'Where do you come from?'; "What is your birth place?" (Ch'i ya kori le mo? or Ch'i yula kori le mo?) The word with the new Dzongkha spelling of g yul, translated as 'village', is also found in the Dzongkha-English Dictionary Topic-based Approach (Rinchhe Khandu 1998: 287).

This equation territory/village can be explained by the fact that a village as we understand it in the West is relatively rare in Bhutan. For example, the title and function of rgyag (Dz.) (Tib. rgyal pos, translated into English as "village headman", refers in fact to the headman looking after a group of several clusters of houses which is now referred to by the administrative term rgyal 'og (Dz.).

The classical term grong, which means village, is used in Bhutanese texts written in classical Tibetan, such as the Code of Laws, bk'u' bkims, dating from 1729 (Aris 1986: 111b-154, 113b-158), and is noted in one of the Dzongkha dictionaries (Dzongkha Dictionary, Department of Education 1993: 54), but grong is not used in the colloquial language. It is a written administrative word. However, to designate a cluster of houses coming under one name and being part of a yul, the Dzongkha word g yul tshun is prevalent all over the country while the word grong gsep (Tib. grong gsheb) is used mostly in the western region. In Bumthangkha, the language spoken in the central regions, the word 'grongtshan (Tib. grong tshan?) is used, while in Tharagla, the language of the eastern region, the word *dung is the colloquial term for village.

The terminology which tries to cover fluid concepts does not appear to be really fixed and the issue is rendered more complex by the different Dzongkha spellings that are encountered. Today, in the Dzongkha Dictionary published by the Dzongkha Development Commission, under the entry g.yus, one finds grong gsep as an equivalent (1993: 494).

A "village" was traditionally composed of several clusters of houses, sometimes a distance of one hour's walk from each other. It was, in fact, an area coming under one general name, and each cluster

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of houses (Dz. grong gsep) had its own name. A yul is therefore quite similar to the now outdated connotation of the French word "pays", meaning not the country but the region of origin, and found in the old colloquial expression "on est pays": "we are from the same region/village". In the Bhutanese conception of living space, one could therefore say that the reference unit is the yul.

Yet, if the term yul implies an inhabited settlement, it also includes the mountains and is part of the landscape where human activities take place. Contrary to certain regions of Asia where there is a clear differentiation between domesticated and wild spaces, in Bhutan the yul as territory does not infer this restrictive notion. It would therefore include inhabited settlements, fields, pasture lands, forests that are used by the people and necessary to their daily life as well as ri mountains. Mountains may or may not be the residence of the yul lha, the deity of the territory, or may be the deity himself or herself. These five elements of the Bhutanese landscape make up a territory. When the monsoon is late at the end of June or the beginning of July, bringing drought at the time when the rice is due to be transplanted, a ceremony of "encircling the fields" (thing skor), such as the one described by Ramble in Mustang takes place (1995: 88). This ceremony is not performed on an annual basis and does not encompass the whole territory (yul) but only the fields as usual.

In the popular representation of the yul, a territory is defined by the people living on it, and its borders are delimited by the people's conception of where their local deity's power and influence stops.

Of course, the territory is also the product of diverse historical circumstances and, in particular, can be linked to clan structures closely related to the local deity. Unfortunately, in Bhutan, the clan structure has all but disappeared, and sources which might prove that the local deity was a clan's deity have yet to come to light. On the basis of the 'Gyal rig, a 17th century text (Aris 1986: 12-85), Aris showed that clans existed at least in Eastern Bhutan, and traced their common ancestor to the Tibetan prince gTsang mi (Aris 1979: 94-110, 1986: 25-47). This historical ancestry may explain why there is, so far, no evidence that the Eastern Bhutanese clans (rol) had a deity that they would consider their ancestor. Moreover, the clans found in the historiography do not refer to clans of the common people who lived in a territory and about whom very little is known, but only to the

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7 For practical purposes, I will use the classical spelling.
8 On these aspects, cf. Pommaret 1996: 39-56. Although the majority of yul lha are male, some are female.
ruling clans, called rgs or more often referred to by the honorific term gling. The term gling became the title for the petty rulers of the central and South-central region of Bun thang and Kheng. The clans mentioned in the rGyal rigs are clearly the ruling clans and the rGyal rigs retraces the history of the rulers, not of the ordinary people.

For the ruling clans of Central Bhutan, divine ancestry is sometimes involved but so far there is no textual or tangible evidence that the deity became the yul lha of the whole territory. For example, in the case of Bun thang the rGyal rigs says:

Now I shall speak about the history of the origins of the gdung [families] of the four districts of Bun thang. Now then, in previous times after the few subjects who came in company with King Khyi ka ra thod had, in the absence of a lord-chief, con tended and quarrelled, they searched for a unanimously chosen chief. Since there was no royal family [among them belonging to] a great clan, they did not find a chief and so they worshipped and supplicated the God of Heaven.2 Od de gung rgyal.3 Od de gung rgyal enjoined saying: "The divine son Gu se lang ling,4 having grasped the divine rnu cord, will descend to Ul ra", and he melted into the light. After he [Gu se lang ling] had resided in the womb of bSod nam dpal 'dren, a woman who possessed the marks of a diktön of Gnosi, in order that he may be born as if by a miracle, a voice from space declared: "Oh! This boy is a divine son and for many generations [his descendants] will come to act as lord-chiefs."

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1 Od de gung rgyal is a very-well known mountain-deity (physio) in Tibet as he is considered the ancestor of the Tibetan kings. Cf. Tucci 1986: 730; Karunay 1996: 61.

2 The eponymous mountain (69,998m) is situated in 57, kha about sixty kilometers to the east of rBtsed thang and close to the town of Zangs ri on the north bank of the gSum po. This deity’s name appears in mythological accounts in Bhutan, and one may ask whether this reveals a possible place of origin for some of the people who came from Tibet, or if it is simply the attribution of a myth of origin to a prestigious deity.

3 Gu se lang ling does not appear in the list provided by Karunay (1996), nor in Tucci (1988), which does not mean that he is not listed in another yet unknown text. It might also be a local variation.

4 Aris 1986: 46-47. rGyal rigs folios 32a-b: Da ni bun thang sde levi gling rnam kyi chad khangs (khang thod kyang rgyud par gyi'lo) de nas ngsan rgyal po khyi kha na rDzug dang mnyam po yang bo'i mi ser 'char ba ye yod pa rnam rgyi dpun med par 'khrugs cing (gtsod pa las) khang rtag rnam kha ntbun gis ye dpun 'bofh
Therefore, unless new sources, textual or oral, surface, it can first be said that when the clans are mentioned, they refer only to the ruling class of a territory and do not concern the general community; second, that the deity of a particular ruling clan neither appears to have become the yul lha of the territory, nor is recognized consciously as the ancestor of the community.\footnote{As is the case in Amdo. Cf. Karnay 1996: 67.}

As for the relationship between skyes lha and yul lha, which needs to be briefly touched upon in this context, it is becoming increasingly clear that if a person is born within the family’s territory, his or her yul lha and skyes lha will be the same deity. Given the stable structure of the rural Bhutanese society of the past, this makes sense. But if the person is born outside the family territory, his or her skyes lha will be the deity of his or her birthplace, while his or her yul lha will still be the deity of the family territory. With the increasing mobility of the society in the past ten years, a new concept has appeared: the bom sa (Dr.), this is the place where one grows up, which may be different from the birthplace. It will be interesting to note which deity is worshipped.

In Bhutan, at least in Bum thang and Paro, skyes lha and yul lha do not therefore automatically mean two different deities, but two different roles given to the same deity controlling a general territory. As for the term gzhi bshag (mastery of the ground), it is often equated with the term yul lha.

For practical purposes I will use only the term yul lha in this article, while keeping in mind that it can be replaced according to the locality by gzhi bshag gnas bshag, gnas po, and even gter bshag. Several terms are used in the colloquial language and the term yul lha, although understood, is often confined to ritual texts. If asked about the yul lha of the area, the villager will reply but will automatically revert to the local term.

This apparent dichotomy in terminology could be explained by the strong local particularities and the fact that ritual texts were written in

\footnote{On the pho lha of the “local clan” who became the yul lha of the community, cf. Hazat 1996: 84 and Schickpaher 1996: 123.}
classical Tibetan by clerics for whom the reference was the Tibetan corpus of texts. It would be interesting to know if this lexical difference can also be found in remote areas of Tibet.

For example, the term gnas po (Dz. gnas po) is very common and can be equated with yul lha in the colloquial language. To my knowledge, the use of the word with this particular connotation has yet to be recorded in Tibet, but is found in Mustang (Ramble 1996: 144). Gnas po, of course, means "host", which reflects the deity's ownership of the place, and the inhabitants are therefore considered as his or her guests. This implies that, as in every society, host and guest have duties towards each other and have to respect a certain code of conduct so that the cohabitation can be harmonious.

If each territory has its deity, each cluster of houses on the territory also has a minor deity. It is also called gnas po or gnas bdag and is represented as the main deity's emanation, servant or part of his entourage.

For example, the Hum ral mgon po who is the yul lha of the area around the fortress of Pano, is the gnas po of the fortress, but he is called the a'o nep (Dz. Brg g'sp gnas po) by the villagers, who consider him as an emanation of the Hum ral mgon po.14 dMug btsa is the powerful yul lha of part of the upper Tôngsa region, but the fortress itself is protected by a gnas bdag called Ga rah bhang phyug to whom a shrine is erected inside the fortress.

2. THE TERRITORY AND ITS DEITY

An examination of the links between a specific territory and its deity can include many different aspects; these include, for example, myths and history, studied recently for the Tibetan dynasty by Karmay, and in Southern Tibet and Northern Nepal by Diemberger and Hazod.15

The present paper deals with four of these aspects that seem to be most relevant to Bhutanese society: kinship relationships, area of control, power, and rituals.

As seen elsewhere,16 the deity of the territory, yul lha or gnas po/gnas mo can be male or female, but the frequency of female deities

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14 On these deities, Cf. Pommeret 2002 and 2003.
of the territory in Bhutan may differ significantly from other Tibetan areas, although this point needs to be researched.15

Kinship

The local deity is clearly linked to a territory and if he or she is not explicitly considered as the ancestor of the people living on the territory, the term by which the deity is addressed shows that there is a sense of bond, of kinship between the people and him or her. The term Apa/Apa ("father"). A nyag (Dzongkha) or Me wi (Tsangkha) ("grandfather"), and Ana ("mother") are used in the colloquial language to refer to the deity of the territory. They are more terms of endearment rather than kinship terms as such, but underline the closeness between the people and their Bu or, to give a few examples, Dge lha'i ba'is ga me len in northern Tshangpu, Od dod pa in northern Pato, Khyung dod in Haa, Ra brag in dBang lugs pho brang, and Yerpa/Yesab (Yab zup) in dRod she ga are referred to as: "Apa dGe lha'i ba'is", "Apa Od dod pa", "Apa Khyung dolkhor", "Apa Knyab" and "Apa Yelzop". Sometimes they are also called A ga, ("older brother"). The upper Tongsa district is the territory of a deity residing on the mountains above Bon shis, who is addressed as A rgyas dMigs btsan, and the people of Kha gling in Eastern Bhutan call their deity Mze dZang rling, Gzhi sKyes mkhar, the deity of Sog gyeng, is called Ana Jomo ("Lady elder sister"); mSd'og san phreng, the deity of Bu in Kheng, is also called Ana mlo sman.

The term Apa/Apa may also exclaim "father", since, according to popular belief, the deity often fathers children in his territory. These children are always by women who belong to the deity's territory, and their male offspring are declared the deity's own because of their fierce temper or unusual strength. The people from Haa are afraid because they are said to have inherited the temper of Khyung bdod, but also because this deity can curse people who antagonize his sons.

Pala and Pila, the ancestors of the royal family of Bhutan, who came from the north-eastern region of Aksar sted, were believed to be the sons of the deity of the territory who passed on to them his strength

15 I am grateful to the late R.B. in Krong po for Yar'od alan been also called Bon ni Ana (1997: 174-176).
16 Kartay 1996: 59-70
17 In this particular case, the terms mean "Father" and "Mother", but depending on the region and the context, the meaning of these terms can be respectively "husband" and "waste".
and power. Similarly, in Tibet, in the 'Dan khog region of Khams, if a man was tall and strong, he was believed to be the son of gNyan chen-thang lha.20

One myth about the origin of the noble families (gDungs and rJe) of Central and South-central Bhutan tells the story of a woman bearing a child by Gl se lang ling, the divine son of 'Od de gung rgyal. Gu se lang ling had become the lha bstan of the Mukulung region (Aris 1986: 50 53).

The sexual encounter between the deity and the women of his yul is vividly symbolised and ritualised in O rgyam chos gling in sTang. Brun thang, where the local deity, called lhabsrablha, was offered a cake (tsheogs) in the shape of a vulva and called by the now rarely used term tsheogs ama or "mother offering."21

A yul lha may often be married to a mtsis ho dam chen living in a lake, but would never marry a lake deity outside his territory. If the yul lha is the mtsis ho dam, as in the case of 'Bu li (Pommaret 2004), she is married to the bstan, deity of the rock, but once again not outside the territory.

This couple formed by a lake and a rock or a mountain - whichever of the two is the deity of the territory - is one of the constant cultural traits of the Tibetan world.22 The theme of a lake deity marrying a man is well-known in folk literature.23 Sexual encounters between a mtsis ho dam and a man can also produce an offspring such as in the case of Seng ge mam rgyal, the powerful 'Bu li don po, who lived at the end of the 19th century (Rigden and Pelgen 1999: 40).

It is clear that for the people of a particular area, the men are, metaphorically or otherwise, the sons of the yul lha. In the same way, because they are under the protection of The dge mna who is their yul lha, the girls from the upper Paro Valley are said to be very pretty because they are considered this deity's daughters.

This sense of belonging to the yul lha is therefore expressed in terms such as "father", as already mentioned, but it can also take other forms such as the marriage practice peculiar to sTang in Brun

20 Personal communication, Stas mna Churh Wangmo, July 1999.
21 I will not elaborate here on the sexual symbols present in many local Bhutanese rituals, especially in the eastern region. Cf Pelgen 2000: 671-683.
22 Cf among others, Bellerza 1997.
In this area, it is common for a girl to become pregnant before making a relationship official. The girl is then obliged to declare that she is pregnant and name the child's father because failing to do so will bring calamities upon the area. The community then considers the couple impure and that a marriage and purification ceremony called gyisang ma ("pure") must be performed to remove the pollution (gyagpa) and avoid them bringing disaster upon their households and themselves.28

The purgation ritual (sangphod) is first performed for the hearth deity (chokdhas), in the kitchen, then outside the house for the deity of the territory (grolhri) and the birth deity (tshulmey). If the boy recognizes the child as his, he sits with the girl and is offered a cup of arak. But when he wants to drink, the cup is withdrawn and villagers scold him for having done something so reprehensible. This is repeated three times and only then the boy and girl are allowed to drink from the same cup, a gesture that formalizes the marriage.

In case the boy refuses to recognize the baby, the girl must find a "substitute" (tsho) who is willing, for payment, to act as a husband for the time of the ceremony. If she cannot find anybody to accept this role, she must have a ransom cfugy (gshug) made and this ransom cfugy, as substitute, is thrown away after the ceremony. If the girl has children from other men, she must repeat the ceremony each time.

The extent to which a girl must go to restore the social order and remove the pollution seen to be caused by her action is highly unusual in Bhutan. It certainly reveals the importance given to the local deities in this particular region. The whole ceremony is obviously aimed at removing the pollution from the territory so that the birth deity (tshulmey) and the deity of the territory (grolhri) do not get angry and inflict calamities upon the community. However, in a country where for a girl to be pregnant out of wedlock is generally accepted, this ceremony from Yungthong seems to go beyond the act of purification and needs to be researched further. If it were simply a cleansing ceremony, the purification ritual should be enough. The importance of the presence of a husband - either real or substitute - highlights, among other things, the ambiguous role of the deity of the territory: at the same time "father" of all the members of the community and potential sexual

29 Braune (1999: 116) speaks of a "beer drinking" ceremony which has the same purpose in the village of Thongtha, in the Cho Chu valley of Bhutan.
30 I have chosen the spelling hung rather than bhang.
partner of the women. In either role, the deity would have to make sure that the child is not fathered by a stranger - always a potent of danger - or even by a demon likely to harm the community through the girl and the child. This may explain the importance given to the husband and to the kinship link between the deity of the territory and the women of his community.

In sTang, the sense of belonging to the deity of the territory is very strong. I was told the story of a young couple, both from sTang but living in Thimphu, who had a baby but had not gone through the proper ceremony in their village. They were so frightened of some impending disaster that they came back to sTang for the gTsang ma ceremony.

Another example of this special relationship between the community and the deity of its territory is the annual worship of Ama Jomo, in the Eastern Sag gleng region. Every summer in the 8th month, the whole community goes up the mountain where Ama Jomo resides. On that particular day, once people enter her domain,

all barriers are lowered when it comes to sharing salacious jokes. Most Brokpa jokes are sexual, and crudely so, but under normal circumstances such jokes would never be shared by individuals between whom sexual relations would constitute incest. About two kilometers away from Ama Jomo Phodrang, every pilgrim goes through the motion of "hanging his or her embarrassment" on the stump. Having done this, no daughter should feel inhibited from sharing crude jokes with her father, uncle or brother. The entire day is spent making jokes, drinking, dancing and horse-racing. When the pilgrims return from Ama Jomo's Phodrang and cross the boundary of the tree stump, normal relationships are resumed - crude jokes are shared only by those between whom sexual relations are not forbidden by incest prohibitions (Wangmo 1990: 143).

This custom could be understood as a sign that all the people are equal before the deity of the territory and consider themselves her children. Whatever the explanation may be, it shows that a special
relationship exists between the deity and her people, which transcends the social norms and behaviours.\(^{22}\)

Control of space and residence

People have a very clear idea of the space - the territory - ruled by the yul lha and they can even indicate its exact limits. There might not be any man-made physical mark in the landscape, but certain points in the landscape, especially mountains or rocky outcrops, mark the boundaries between two territories, and long prayer-flags (idar khor) or even gates made of wood, like those which formally existed in Sag gteng and La g.yug, are often erected on the "border".

The yul lha can live on a mountain, in a rock, or in a grove. His residence is usually referred to by the term "palace" (pho khang) and is considered "sacred". A soul-lake (tha ntsos) may be attributed to him, such as 'Od dod pha's soul-lake in the upper Paro valley; he also has a grove in the forest which is considered his playground.

The shrine dedicated to the deity is a small square construction made of stones with a slanted roof and can be called tgas khang, btsa khang, or la btsas\(^{23}\) in Eastern Bhutan, although this last term generally refers to a stone caen at the top of a mesa. It is generally built on the spot of the deity's residence, or not far from a cluster of houses. Prayer-flags are usually erected next to it. The "palace" and the shrine should not be disturbed, otherwise calamities will plague the community, as in the case of the shrine of Brag dmor dpal bzang, the deity of Rukubji, described by Dujardin (1997: 78-81). It is also known that in the mid-1990s the feeder road from gShum 'phrug to Shing mkhar in the Ura region of Dung thang was lengthened in order to avoid passing through, and therefore disturbing, a rocky area which was the palace of the territory deity.

In most regions, the deity of the territory is also represented inside the local Buddhist temple, either in the chapel for the fierce protectors (rgyon khang), or in a special shrine placed at the side of the main altar. It can be just a mask or a painting, but it is frequently a kind of effigy adhered in accordance with the deity's iconography - either a fierce-looking general in armour, or a figure clad in white brocade with a flat rigid hat called A ma'o phyin zhua ("felt hat from A ma'o"). It is very often surrounded by weapons and shields, offered after a

\(^{22}\) Cf. Buffierelle 1996b, vol. II: 350, and forthcoming (Dhgy) concerning the pilgrimage to Kha lha dkar po.

victory against enemies. The chapel for the fierce protectors is usually off-limits to women, except if the vul lha is female. Contrary to what has been assumed, the vul lha does not always stay on his or her territory but travels about as Buffetrille notes regarding the Reb gong area in A mio (Buffetrille 2002).

I have also been told that in the 'Dan khog region of Khams, the sudden breaking-up of the ice at the end of winter meant that dGe bsnyen, the vul lha, was travelling back to his place.29

This seems to imply that in some cases, the deities of the territory migrate at certain times of the year, a belief that is also found in Bhutan. Drag/Drags pa dmam btsan, the deity of the Dur territory in Bhut, migrates in winter to warmer regions, and the high pastures are closed until he returns.30 In Kha gling (Eastern Bhutan), where people used to migrate in winter to the Assam-Bhutan border to graze their sheep and trade, Drang ling, the deity of the territory, leaves the lake that is his palace high up in the mountain, and in the 11th month migrates to the warmth of the south. When he comes back in the 2nd month, people welcome him with alcohol and butter, and present the cattle to him as he doubles as a deity of cattle and wealth (nor lha).

In some places another type of migration is associated with members of a family who leave the area. In O rgyan chos gling (sTang, Bum thang), the family has numerous deities to worship, eight of them being klu, worshipped especially by women. These deities (vul lha and klu) travelled with the persons who came to marry into the religious nobility family (chos rje) of O rgyan chos gling.31 When the names of all these deities are recited during the annual ritual, it is possible to trace the territories of origin of family members, and this can be assimilated to a "geneo-geographical" chart.

As this is an aspect of the subject that I discovered recently, I have not yet carried out a proper study of the travelling deities of their territory. However, I am under the impression that at least in Bhutan,

29 Personal communication from Stas ma Chime Wangmo, July 1999.
30 Several anthropologists have noted this. Among others, cf. Diemberger 1996: 223.
31 Personal Communication from Kunzang Choden, October 1998. She also told me as an example that Jo ma, the important female local deity of Eastern Bhutan, is worshipped in O rgyan chos gling because in the middle of the 19th century, stod ma, who became the wife of the dPon slas of Shes skyes rdo rje, came from the eastern region of BKa shis gyang rie and brought her deity with her.
these migrating yol lha belong mostly to areas where cattle migrations take place, but this has to be confirmed by further research.

On the other hand, it is said that the people of rTsas mang in Mon-sgar district who migrated to Kheng (Zhal sgang district) at the end of the 19th century, still go back every year to rTsas mang to perform the rituals for their deity (Rigden and Pelgen 1999: 25).

Adjacent or historically linked territories were often ruled by deities of the territory who were brothers. Five yol lha of the Paro and Haq Valleys in western Bhutan are said to be brothers: Yel 'dod pa, Jo bo brag skyes, Khyung bdud and Bya rog btsan (Schickagner 1997: 153-175). Brag Brags pa dmar btsan, the yol lha of Dur in the upper Chos khog valley of Bum thang, is said to have nine brothers who live on the ridges surrounding Dur, but he appears to be the main deity of the territory.

An absolute and ambivalent power

One of the most important and well-known roles of the yol lha is the protection of his or her territory and its well-being and fertility. This includes not only human beings but also cattle and the whole landscape, and implies a strong notion of ownership. The yol lha has to preserve the integrity of the territory against enemies, and this is why he is often also considered, as the warrior-deity, the aggra lha, and is depicted as a warrior with armour and helmet. We know of the case of Khyung bdud defending the region of Haq against the Tibet-e invaders (Pommaret 1996: 47).

Even kinship does not prevent the yol lha from fighting with their siblings for their own territories. Numerous stories regarding the rivalry between Jo bo Brag skyes and Khyung bdud, and between Khyung bdud and Dge lugs pa me len bar, testify to this (Pommaret 1996: 46). The rivalry often concerns the welfare and the

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32 A delightful story which took place in Tibet is told in the short account of mkHyung rgyal lha by Ogyen Tshewa Gungtse (1988: 18) on the gling around the territory of a deity called Saoken Khamgyur (Btan pan-khyung par) and subdued lha. The deities came to see him. After he left, the lama said that the deity has complained in such terms: "Heading towards Lhasa you made cleansing offerings to Nyentsha Dzangdza and the other but gave me nothing. As I am also important I created this obstacle: Nyentsha Dzangdza and I are the same, accepting the orders of Gyur pa po che in the same way." Chokling answered: "You are not the same. Shall I call Nyentsha Dzangdza right now?" 'Please do not say that' replied Svealer Khamgyur."
prosperity of the deity's territory, such as the water dispute between Haa and Paro.

Sometimes this rivalry can turn vicious and we find yul lha harbouring fierce enmity towards each other. In Dzongkha, one of the yul lha cut the other's arm with a stone from his sling-shot. In Eastern Bhutan, the yul lha is jealous of the yul lha of Yon phel la, the two places facing each other, each on a mountain ridge separated by a deep river valley. The yul lha of Yon phel la's yul lha to a game of stone throwing. He won and seized all the wealth of Yon phel la, including, in particular, the cattle.

Archery is a bond between people from the same territory who compete against adjacent territories, and hence the deity of the territory is involved. Participation in archery is widespread to the point of obsession, and a match usually takes place after the ceremonial offerings to the deity of the territory. It is clearly linked to the yul lha, but one may ask whether it is not because he can also be the pho lha, the male deity. In the traditional context, archery is an all-male game and women are forbidden to touch the bows and arrows. Before a match against another territory, the archers go and sleep in a house where no women are allowed, and together with the astrologer (Dz. rtsi / Tib. rtsi po), they perform rituals dedicated to the yul lha / pho lha mon of the night, invoking his protection and help to defeat their adversaries, even resorting to magical means. As in the case of war, the yul lha must protect the mon of his territory and fight side by side with them. An interesting case is a female deity (mu lha) who is also a water deity (nagpo swan) worshipped by archers from one area of Thimphu, and this needs to be further researched. A journalist from the national newspaper vividly reports about the deprecation of the deity's shrine:

13 In eastern Bhutan, the yul lha is often called gyer buheg.

14 Since 1982, Bhutan has had an Olympic archery team that includes women, but the context is so different from the traditional set-up that the admission of women was never an issue.

15 The archers may also sleep in the nagpo khang in order to obtain the protective deity's empowerment.

Losing an archery match has often led to wrathful scenes at the playing arena. But not until last week have some dared to vent their anger on the deity they had invoked in order to win. The real loser in last week’s archery semi-finals between Chang gong and the Finance Ministry happened to be the Jashi Mom chorten in Changzamtog. The chorten, known for its supernatural spells, was found at the end of the day smeared with human excrement. It is hard to say who did that exactly, whether someone from the losing team in a fit of anger over the Molha’s (the chorten’s female deity) failure to help, or a winning member to inflame and distract her from supporting the opponent team which had sought her help. It could be either way. While the chorten’s Kunye (caretaker), Ap Pema, suspects the archers the most, he does not rule out the mischief of the children in the locality. Inhabitants in Chang Bangdu are inclined to believe that the sacrilegious deed was the act of the desperate archers. Within Thimphu, the chorten’s Molha is highly regarded for her power to enervate the opponent’s vitality at games. Her intervention is much sought after by archers, footballers, basketballers and even boxers. “The spells of the deity, Molha, is believed to be very powerful and always comes true”, says Ap Pema. Only except this time. The chorten’s history remains a mystery bus, as far as Dophu (an old-timer) remembers, people in and around Thimphu always did come to seek its help whenever there happened to be big matches. While some archers believe that the Molha grants her favours on a “first come first serve basis”, some believe that her powers cease to be effective if one crosses a river or a stream. According to a regular visitor to the chorten, Jashi Mom chorten is also known for her generosity in granting wishes. “The Molha flirts with every man coming to seek her help and tries to please everybody equally,” the visitor said. But the wishes are fulfilled on one condition: the archery range should not be located across the river from the chorten.

Weird as it may sound, many archers also believe that the Molha greatly favours the team which has the player with the biggest male organ. The man is usually sent to seek her favours. Ap Pema recalls an incident where a soldier who had this reputation was hired purposely to seek her help. However, Ap Pema believes that the chorten is losing its power,
especially after it was vandalized by robbers a few years ago. With such strong beliefs in the divinity of local deities, archers can be very apprehensive about winning and losing a game."

However, when archery is practised in the context of a propitiation ritual of the yal lha, it lacks this competitive or aggressive inter-territorial edge, and it is rather seen as homage to please the deity. It is also a way to find out which man in the territory has the favour of the yal lha, as the winner sees his prestige and influence considerably enhanced. This recalls the ritual hunt and horse-race described in the Shur wa soccey of A mdo, or in Dolpo (Karmay and Sagant 1999; Schickleruber 1998: 106).

Belief in the deity's power is far from disappearing. In a golf tournament, which took place in Haa in May 1999, the winner, Major Gurung, posted in Haa as a Royal Bhutan Army officer, thanked Ap Khyung bhad. The Veteran's Cup winner was also from Haa and the weekly newspaper, Kuensel, dated May 8th, 1999, headlined the article "Haa Golf: Was Ap Chhundu involved?".

The yal lha can also "offer" his territory and the people living in it as a sign of submission to a powerful lama, thus giving the latter political legitimacy over the territory (Pommaret 2002). The Hum ral mong po of Paro "prostrating himself completely in front of the Zhabs drung [Nag dbang ram rgyal], offered him as his subjects all the areas which are crossed by the Paro river from top to bottom" (Ho'i choe 'byung, folio 42b). A lord has to placate and propitiate the yal lha if he wants to rule a new territory without any problems. A similar process has been noted by Karmay regarding the Tibetan kings' annexation of local deities: "If one local chief annexes neighbouring territory, he seems also to adopt the local deity of the annexed territory for propitiation in order to safeguard his annexation" (Karmay 1996: 63). The links between the deity of a territory and political power in Bhutan is a topic in itself and will be examined elsewhere. Here I simply want to stress the sense of ownership that the yal lha has over a given territory.

The deity of the territory has to be kept happy because he or she looks after the water supply -- going to such lengths as to try to steal water from another territory (Pommaret 1996: 46) if necessary, but drying up a lake or bringing other disasters if angered (Pommaret 2004). In 1996, the bursting of a glacial lake in the northern region of Lug nag nag and the ensuing flash flood were attributed by the people
to the anger of the deity of the territory. In the Shar pa region of the upper Pare valley, 'Od do pha is seen to control the flow of the river towards Paro and has a small shrine near the river, to which people make offerings to prevent floods.

In the south-western jungle region of stTag ii chut which is crossed by the road linking the capital to the Indian border, some people attribute frequent car accidents to the wrath of a powerful local deity (called here gnas po) to whom people used to sacrifice animals on a large flat stone high on the mountain. As these stopped, it is believed that the deity is taking revenge in this way.

Cattle, in particular, are the subject of the care or the wrath of the yul lha who often doubles as a deity of the cattle and wealth (nor lha), such as Tshe ring ma. Within the herd, yaks or sheep consecrated to the yul lha wear red tufts of wool on their ears and usually walk at the head of the herd when it moves. The literature provides examples of yaks, among other animals, consecrated to the local deities such as the lha g.yag, mentioned in the Tibetan manuscript translated by Macdonald under the title "Histoires du Vrasha d’or XIX" (1972: 29-33).

As already noted above, in some areas such as Dur in Bun thang, the grazing periods are controlled by the yul lha, as one cannot go to the high pastures unless the deity has returned from his winter migration. Disease among the cattle is attributed to the anger of the yul lha caused by a breach of social norms, or by pollution, such as that mentioned earlier. The female water-deity (mtho sman), who is the yul lha of Kheng 'Bu ri in South-central Bhutan, caused the death of all the cattle in the house in which she was residing because she was displeased (Pommaret 2004). The importance of the deity of the territory as lord of the cattle and wealth (nor lha) is well symbolised by the fact that a deity in a high region is often mounted on a yak, such as 'Od do pha of upper Paro or g.Yag dbud nag po of U ra in Bun thang. Also the sacrificial cakes (gter ma) dedicated to them often represent a yak, as is the case for 'Od do pha, Tshe ring ma, Khyung 'dud or g.BoM/g.BoMo of g.Gar sa.

Of course the yul lha is concerned with the crops that he or she protects or can destroy by hail or drought. Depending on the region, a short ritual is performed for the yul lha at each important step of the agricultural calendar: ploughing, sowing, transplanting (in case of rice), and harvesting.

The deity’s intercessor (renla 'byor ma, 'bo po, or dpal mo, gter bding, lha 'babs) plays an important role in the daily life of the
community as he or she is called whenever an unwelcome event disturbs the life of a house or the community. Through possession of the medium, the deity reveals the causes of social or physical disturbances and therefore acts to re-establish harmony. This is a well-known process which does not need to be commented upon here. The intercessor also performs divination either for individuals or for the community and performs certain rituals of exorcism for certain categories of spirits. An intercessor seldom leaves the deity's territory unless he or she is called by somebody from the territory but living outside of it, and for the annual general ritual of the intercessors, about which not much is known to date.

Unless he or she is engaged in squabbling with another deity, a yul lha will only rarely extend his or her almost infinite power over the daily life of the people by bringing misfortune to people outside of his or her territory. They belong to another deity and territory, and it is just as if they did not exist. On the other hand, if strangers come to the deity's territory, they have to obey certain rules so as not to incur his or her wrath. The case of a soldier in upper Paro who did not believe in 'Od 'od pa, uttered derogatory remarks on the deity and died the next day after meeting a black dog, is documented by Schicklgruber (1997: 169). Pollution (zgriñ) rules are also to be respected by strangers.

In Sag gieng, Sos, La g.yag and Gling bshi, high-altitude regions devoted mainly to yak herding, the deities are so sensitive that they cannot tolerate being polluted by any kind of "dirty smoke", and that is why dead bodies are never cremated but exposed to the vultures. Therefore, as soon as strangers enter these deities' territories, they are advised not to burn garbage or to smoke, lest they meet the wrath of the yul lha (Pommaret 1996: 52). More generally, if a woman alien to the territory is menstruating, she should also obey the rule and not go near the sacred domain of the yul lha.

These attitudes attributed to the yul lha towards the outside world, ignoring it in one sense but obliging it to respect his or her rules in the other, show once more that the deity exercises his or her power over a specific and well-defined territory.

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57 The specific attributions of the intercessor and the local priest will be examined elsewhere.
Rituals

In exchange for the protection and well-being of the territory, the community performs rituals for the yal lha, a process that is well documented throughout the Tibetan world. However, throughout Bhutan the style of worship has no set pattern and each territory has its own customs and rituals, although basic characteristics such as circumambulations (ksang) and libations (gsar skyrung) seem to exist everywhere.

Two specific cases of worship have to be briefly commented upon: the deity of the territory as "birth deity" and as "warrior deity".

Individually a person - man or woman - would appear to go for annual private worship (ksang and gser skyrung) either to the Buddhist temple where the yal lha is housed, or preferably to the palace of the yal lha. In fact, this individual worship is not for the yal lha as such, but for the "birth deity", the skyes lha who, as we have seen earlier, is usually the same deity. Therefore, it seems to me that there is no individual worship of the yal lha but only of his skyes lha.

If the deity of the territory is also the warrior deity (dgra lha), as is often the case, he might, for this specific role, be dedicated a special annual ceremony, like the propitiation ritual for the warrior deity (dgra lha yig skyed pa) of the fortress of Paro.

This is a short ceremony performed, as one would expect, only by men dressed as a general and his soldiers. Led by the intercessor (gri pho), they make offerings and libations to the warrior deity and perform a dance, swinging their swords and shouting at the top of their voices.

Besides these specific cases, as a yal lha, the deity is worshipped annually by the whole community, and its members living far from the territory try to come back for this occasion. In Bhutan this ceremony has almost as many different names and dates as there are territories, and this makes it really difficult at times to discern whether or not this particular ceremony is for the yal lha, unless one attends it. However, the two most common terms used for this propitiation ceremony are yig skyed pa and metho pu. This annual ceremony may also have different phases and women are included in some of these.

To take a few examples of this diversity: in Paro Dor phu sher ri (Dz. Dophra ri), in skyabs khyed, or in Bun thang, only men go to the palace of the deity and each house has to send there at least one man or a representative. They offer fumigation and libations (klong and
gser skyes) to the deity. The prayer to the yul lha names the deity of the territory but also all the neighbouring deities who, as we have seen earlier, are often related to him. The prayers are usually led by the local priest called by different names according to the region: rits pa (Dr. rtags, phu po, bhe po or phyinun), but monks from the state clergy are never involved and do not participate. Women join the nuns only later and then archery matches, drinking and dancing start.

The deity's intercessor (i.e. phyin ma dpal bo, or dpal nang, gser khang) may become possessed by the deity on that day and utter prophecies regarding the territory and its people, but possession does not always occur.

Women are included in the main ceremony for the worship of Khyung bdud in Haa, which consists of a procession and the killing of a yak (Pommaret 1990: 47). In Kherg 'Bu li, where the yul lha is a female water-deity (mi.tha gsum), women and men worship together.

In most Tibetan areas, the worship of the deity of the territory includes archery contests and horse racing; sometimes both coincide with acentric performances (Schöcklgruber 1998: 99-108). Because of the rugged nature and steep slopes of the terrain, horse races do not take place in Bhutan where the people are not great riders. However, as mentioned earlier, archery plays a part in most celebrations for the deity of the territory and a competition may take place after the ceremonial offerings at a concluding event, but it can also be the essential part of the ritual to the yul lha. Archery is also associated with fertility, and it is believed that an archery match on a day of celebration to the yul lha increases the fertility of the place. At g.Yag sa, a small settlement in northern Paro where yak herding provides the livelihood, an archery match which takes place in the second month, starts with a mar chung offering to Jo bo brag skyes and his brother Khyung bdud. If this ceremony does not take place, Jo bo brag skyes is displeased and calamities befall the settlement and the cattle. In the

5 Pheunts is the word used in Yushugla (Tshangla Shur phyogs pa'i khun), and therefore has no written form. However, we may ask whether it does not refer to the Tibetan word phun me. This word is found, for example, in Mi la ras pa's Tshun du Tshunpo Sang (Tibetan Song) by gTsang samten, when Mi la ras pa questions beautiful young women on the whereabouts they are in today: "Aar me, brag skyes akse!" (phu melee). Cf. Chang 1977, vol. 1: 314, and is cited by the 5th Dalai Lama in his choms yag and translated by Netsky-Wojnowicz as "witch" 1976: 91, 169-173. Also Lász 1977 gives the meaning of "magical forecasts". However, one needs to understand what is pho mei seem to be applied only to women, and not to men.

6 For an explanation of mar chung, see below.
same way, archery is considered to be the most important part of the annual ritual to Me me Drang ling, the deity of Kub ling in Eastern Bhutan, who male and lives in a lake.

Offerings to the yul tha can also differ according to his or her nature. They can simply be dried cakes made of flour (rice, wheat, barley), alcohol, and sometimes even milk. In many cases, it also includes chunks of meat, and even the sacrifice of a whole animal such as a yak or a sheep. There is a general consensus in Bhutan that animal sacrifices were common in the past, except maybe in Bum thang, and that it is only quite recently (the last 35-50 years) that the practice has been slowly disappearing. The sacrifice was performed by the local priest, who then offered the best pieces of meat to the deity, and the people shared the rest according to a pattern which has already been analysed in a historical and anthropological perspective.  

The worship of the deity of the territory may also include a mar chang ceremony. It is a ceremonial offering of alcohol, butter and an arrow to protective as well as local deities. A large copper or bronze vat containing alcohol is placed on a stand in front of the person representing the lord or high authority of the territory. The vat is ornamented with horns made of butter. The master of the ceremony who stands in front of the vat facing the lord, offers a ladle of alcohol while saying a short prayer. Then he brings the lord a long arrow (mde’ dar) wrapped in pieces of cloth of five different colours. The lord quickly touches it, ending the short ceremony, which is clearly at the same time a ritual of propitiation and allegiance to the deities.

Besides this particular occasion, the mar chang is also performed in many other circumstances and there is no official function in Bhutan which does not include a mar chang. To my knowledge, this ceremony has not been mentioned in any ethnographic or historical writings about Tibet, although the symbolism and role of the arrow is well documented.

In the course of the year, a fumigation ceremony (tha thang) for the deity can be performed by individual houses if they fear they have angered the deity or polluted him, or simply if they have a request to make regarding the well-being of the household. This ritual always includes the notion of g.yang gyang, “the calling of the fortune”, and a g.yang gtö is added to the sacrificial cakes representing the deities. If

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40 On ritual disembemnt in Tibet and the Himalayas, cf. Stein 1959: 466; Macdonald 1988: 299-308; Dienstberger and Haas 1997: 267-279. However we may argue that we have here a case of sharing of meat as a social act, and not a disembemnt which creates a society.
the rol lha is also the deity of the cattle and wealth (nor lha), the gyantse gter will be ornamented with yak horns or a yak head made of dough, as in the case of Tshe ring ma, who looks after the border region in the upper Paro valley,14 or indrabhuti who rules over O rgyan chos gling in Bum thang.

In areas where cattle migration is part of the way of life, as in northern Paro, Bum thang and Sagyeleng, people will not go up to the high summer pastures without making offerings to the deity once they reach them. By this gesture, they ask the deity permission to graze the cattle on his or her property.

In this context of rituals to local deities, one must mention the numerous festivals of Eastern Bhutan, especially, those that have a strong sexual component and where men and women alike participate. In the present state of research, it is difficult to say whether these festivals are linked to the worship of the deity of the territory or if they are simply fertility festivals. The Bhutanese classify them as Bon chos and the local priests (phu po, bo po, phrelang, etc.) preside over them.

Buddhist ceremonies also often include a part which is dedicated to the deity of the territory. Examples of this include the bshag gso of O rgyan chos gling in Phang (Bum thang),15 the mechad pa in Kheng 'Bu ri (Pommaret 2004), the festival of Chho stod Nam khor fra khang in Phang (Bum thang), and the Lha rtenong (Dr. Hang tsho) festival in the Thimphu region. In O rgyan chos gling, Indrabhist the host (gnas po) of the place, as well as other local deities which came from Tibet with Klong chen and Do tse gling pa, and sKu lha nkar ri, dGong dbar klu bsdud gi gtags pa rgyan rtsalan and Lo bo lha dan, are invoked in the bshag gso ritual dedicated to the protector (chos snang) mChos po Ma ming. At Chho stod nam khor lha khang, in the 10th month, dPal ldan lha ma and mChos po, as well as the local deity, here called a gter bdag, are worshipped. At this place, the local deity has a yak head and his name, Rwa skyes, reminds us of course, of Zo ra rwa skyes, a complex deity present in this valley and also found in other parts of the Himalayas.16

Another instance is the Hong tsho mechad pa. On the second and last day, once the religious dances are over, the deity of the territory, here also called "host" (Dz. gsnap/ Tib. gnas po) Yazar/ Yasab (Yab

15 This ceremony will be studied in a forthcoming article.
zap), is taken out of the temple where he resides the rest of the year. Addressed by the villagers as Ap Yazar, he is also the yul lha of Gnod mce (Chodaki 1994: 111), which is located on the other side of the rDo skyongs to pass closer to Paro than to Thimphu. The fact that he is also the deity of Hong thane village, most probably reflects the ancient seasonal migration pattern between the Thimphu and Paro valleys. Ap Yazar is represented by a huge effigy dressed as a warrior. He is accompanied by two other effigies, also housed in the temple and called mgon yab yum which are said to represent a male and female form of Manakala. Preceded by the main festival officiant dressed as a Tantrist priest with a black hat, and lay attendants carrying sacrificial cakes made of dough, the three deities are taken in procession to a field at the heart of the village where the offerings are thrown and burned in an exorcism ritual (gar rgyud). Although the ceremony of this village is not entirely dedicated to the deity of the territory, it is being carried in a formal procession from the temple to the limit of the village bears witness to the importance that the villagers accord him for the protection of their properties.

These are only a few examples that illustrate that the deity of the territory is also worshipped in different ways during Buddhist rituals.

CONCLUSION

The information provided here, although still sketchy, raises some questions and allows some remarks. It is quite impossible to give a definite pattern for the worship of the deity of the territory (yul lha) in Bhutan, but we can remark that, albeit prototypical, it is alive and requires the participation of the whole community. The size of the territory controlled by one deity makes no difference to the importance he or she has for the community, and the worship is carried out with the same diligence. However, there is clearly a hierarchy among the deities of the territories, and it seems that it is linked to the extent of power attributed to the deities.

In this context it appears that certain deities who are also present in Tibet, such as Knyang lha, yul gsum, and Tshe ring ma, are considered the most powerful, owing to an origin which gives them prestige over the more indigenous deities, even if this is not articulated in such explicit terms by the people.

The yul lha, and its association with a territory, imparts a strong sense of identity to the people who live in osmosis with their
respective deities to the point of acquiring certain of their characteristics (toughness, witiness, beauty, etc.). This has certainly played a role, along with other geographical and historical considerations, in the difficult emergence of the concept of Bhutanese nationhood.

Although the Bhutanese state (dzongdrap) has existed since the 17th century, it was seen as a political entity superimposed by a centralised power, and people identified themselves first with their territories of origin. The idea of a Bhutanese nation is relatively new and is linked to the monarchy - in Dzongkha, "nation" is translated by the term rgyud khab, "kingdom"41 and to the feeling of having to fight for survival in a particular geo-political and demographic context.

The first allegiance of the people was to the deity of the territory and his or her human representative, who could answer their immediate needs. It is interesting to note in this context that the government policy of the past thirty years has been to strive to get closer to the people through a process of decentralisation which would "serve" them better. The great prayer-flag (dar khang) which is erected near the fortress housing the provincial government and is dedicated to the protective deities (chos srong) of the nation, is a telling symbol. Each household of a district must send a member on the day when the prayer-flag is to be renewed, otherwise a fine is imposed.

From the four perspectives examined above, the deity of the territory emerges like an anthropomorphic lord ruling an estate with a large range of rights over individuals but also duties regarding their protection and well-being. If the deity also takes the function as is often the case, of birth-deity, cattle-deity and warrior-deity, his or her powers over daily life are almost unlimited. In exchange, the people offer him or her rituals which are testimonies of allegiance, gifts, supplications and subsidized taxes, and they try not to break the social and physical order so that the lord is not offended. This alliance - one might also call it a contract - has a strong feudal component and creates a powerful bond which is reflected in the relationship between the territory and its human ruler.

Indeed, the relationship between the deity of the territory and the political power is one of the key issues for any comprehensive study of

41 In Tibetan too though, but in Bhutan the word started to be used with the connotation of "nation" in the specific context of the monarchy.
this deity, as well as for an understanding of the traditional political set-up in Bhutan.

In this context, two issues must be taken into account: first, the disparity of politico-historical contexts which differ greatly from one region to another; second, the apparent lack of related myths and historical texts that might allow an in-depth study such as those carried out by Dienberger, Hoad and Kannay. Even the ritual texts of migration and initiation rituals have been disappointing thus far as they often contain no more than just a list of names, far from the poetic and descriptive style found elsewhere.

We still remember the pioneering assessment of Stein, who forty years before this field of study became en vogue, wrote:

"Il nous semble digne de remarquer que, par la nature même des documents, nous avons constamment été obligés de passer des faits religieux et légendaires à des faits réels. C'est que dans la religion indigène des Tibétains, chaque groupe humain honore à sa manière un ancêtre, dans l'espace, au site qu'il habite et, dans le temps, aux ancêtres dont il descend et de communier avec eux. Car l'ancêtre est intemporel de la montagne sacrée qui l'accueille, comme le pays habité et communiqué avec le ciel. Les relations des chefs et de leurs chefs avec les divinités qui peuplent le territoire, sont aussi connues des habitants de famille." (Stein 1959b:85).

This assessment obliges us to ask whether, in some regions, the yul lha is considered the ancestor of the community and whether he is the deity of the rulers who took over the territory. Part of the answer may lie with an investigation of the "personal role deity" (pho lha), which can also function as the deity of the territory (yul lha).

However, according to the short mythic accounts related at the beginning of this article, the deity of the rulers did not become automatically the deity of the territory. It is also known that Shel ting dkar pa, the pho lha of the King of Icags mchek, who is believed to have ruled from thang in the 8th century, did not become the yul lha of the valley where Icagu mchak was located. In Eastern Bhutan where Prince Gtsang ma is said to be the royal ancestor of all the ancient clans, his deity's name is not even recorded. Some deities are believed to have arrived with great lamas after people had already settled within a territory, such as Ra brag in dBang 'dus pho brag, or the yul lha of
U ra in Bum thang. On the other hand, certain deities came with the people as did A ma Jo got in Sog gting.

The question of ancestorship is therefore too complex and too linked to each local history to be answered easily. The socio-historical framework of the regions of Bhutan, which differ greatly from one another, must also be taken into account. While the western part of the country became the stronghold of religious schools as early as the 12th century, the eastern part remained divided into fiefdoms ruled by petty kings (rgyal po) until the 17th century; and the central region was ruled, also until the 17th century, by a nobility of chiefs who combined, by way of marital alliances, prestigious religious descent, and royal origin from Tibet.

And yet the yal lha is addressed in kinship terms and he or she is identified with a specific territory. Is the historical perspective at odds with the ethnographic findings? The deity of the territory is a trickster and may well deceive strangers stepping into his or her territory.

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Abstract: Although the biography and iconography of Hā btsun chen po nam rgya' brtsan (1597-1638) are usually well known in Sikkim, people are generally unaware that he is also the object of an important oral tradition following the example of Guru Rinpoche’s. Numerous accounts narrated by shamans, lamas and villagers enrich the historical actions and events surrounding Hā btsun chen po’s visit to Sikkim, of his encounters with the saints and heroes of the past as well as his visions and prophecies. These narrations mostly refer to the sSkam zhés, an important ritual celebration where visual metaphors relating to Hā btsun are openly expressed. Using a number of accounts collected in northern and western Sikkim, I attempt to analyze the anthroposological role of Hā btsun’s images which seem to refer to a myth found throughout the Himalayan region: that of the encounter between the Tibetan guru and the indigenous shaman who share a world of practice and belief spanning the extent of the territory they’ve conquered.

« Toutes les méditations se rencontrent sur un même terrain que soit la solution apportée: la question de l’image n’est pas fondée sur les objets, mais sur la nature des regards portés sur eux. Ces regards ont à voir avec le désir, et la passion de voir doit faire le deuil de son objet. »

Marie José Mondzain, Le commerce des regards (2003)

« Pour beaucoup de théologiens du Moyen Âge, la vue était reconnue comme le plus parfait de nos sens. “C’est par la vue que pénétrèrent les corps sublimes et lumineux”, écrivaient Bonaventure et Thomas...
d’Aquin[2]. Il en est ainsi au Sikkim pour ce qui concerne la vue des images attachées au corps de l’ascète tibétain Iha btsun chen po nam mkha’ ’jigs med (1597-1650), dont l’iconographie dans le pays est aussi omniprésente que l’écriture. Sa statuaire, les fresques riches et variées des dgon pa et le thang kha montrent Varjatārabhairava sous des tailles diverses[3], mais toujours en méditant, assis jambes croisées, le ventre gonflé, la barbe en pointe, la coiffure en chignon auréolée de cinq cranes humains; il enserre un khār pa’ gning sous le bras gauche et tient un rlung gling dans la main droite et un kāpāla dans la gauche. Son corps, entièrement vert ou bleu, révèle ses affinités avec Mīla rabs, tous deux réputés s’être nourris exclusivement d’orties pendant leurs retraites.

Auteur de ce personnage central du bouddhisme sikkimais, introducuteur de la doctrine du rdzogs chen[4], se déroule une fois tous les trois ans l’un des rituels les plus secrets du Sikkim, le ’khang bzhed (lepcha ḍochentlo) où, littéralement, « séchage » (des vêtements du saint). Des pélerins se rendent une fois tous les trois ans, au mois d’avril, jusqu’au sanctuaire retiré de Do lung à Drongu, dans la réserve lepcha du district Nord, une région tenue elle-même aussi secrète que la doctrine qui s’est propagée par le saint au 17ème siècle. Ils vont assister au kāra’ bzhed très particulier de Iha btsun : des malles scellées, qui contiennent les effets personnels du saint, et maints précieux trésors du lamaïsme sont ouvertes une à une, tandis que le ’khang chen de Lachen présente successivement à la foule les vêtements de Iha btsun et de précieuses reliques humaines et animales de toutes sortes, avant de procéder au « séchage » proprement dit des étofes au soleil.

Certains voient dans ce rite « la réalisation des vœux de paix que Iha btsun chen po aurait faits jadis pour le Sikkim », d’autres y trouvent « un véritable râleïcément » ; d’autres encore voit associé aux « miracles » qui se produisent immédiatement lors du déplacement

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des effets personnels de l'Hô basnon et de ses trésors. Dans tous les cas, tout le monde s'accorde sur le caractère profondément merveilleux des phénomènes qui se produisent ce jour-là, et sur le fait que l'Hô basnon mère bien le qualificatif de mchod zhes (« qui libère par la seule vue »). Le merveilleux se révèle en particulier à travers les pouvoirs posthumes du saint à conserver en vie les poïs qui habitaient sur ses vêtements : on les voit encore le jour du skam zhes. En outre, l'Hô basnon apparaît en rêve à beaucoup de ses disciples, et dans les récits où on décrit ses exploits, il se métamorphose, role dans les airs, et convient ses apparaîts de se convertir à sa doctrine par des procédés pursément spirituels. En cela, il déploie les mêmes talents que le Guru Rinpoche, confronté à ses adversaires, chassant ou divinétant mauvaises de l'Himalaya, qu'il convertir à la doctrine par ses pouvoirs de guru.

Tous les objets et trésors qui sont montés au monastère de Do lung le jour du skam zhes se trouvaient jadis à Pad ma gyang ril. Ils furent soustraits à la face iconoclaste des envahisseurs gurkhas du Népal au 18e siècle, au temps du cinquième chos rgyal du Sikkim (Namgyal Phuntsog 1722-1780), et furent mis en lieu sûr dans ce sanctuaire retiré dans le nord du pays, lieu par où précisément, aux dix-sept habitants du Nord, l'Hô basnon serait arrivé du Tibet.

L'image de l'Hô basnon, propagée et revivifiée lors du ritue, se dévoile donc non pas seulement à travers des reliques vestimentaires, mais bel et bien comme une présence encore vivante, quasi chérubine bien qu'invisible : ex témoignes les parasites corporels qui continuent d'habiter sur ses vêtements. L'image est celle d'un être à la fois réal et imaginaire, un personnage historique à l'origine des enseignements taniyogiques et sacrés, les secrets de la secte rNgag ma pa, mais aussi un magicien capable de produire des illusions et des apparitions. Les rites et dévotions qui l'entourent, si les nombreux récits qui constituent d'extérioriser sa légende, vont nous permettre d'envisager cette image au-delà de ses fonctions proprement esthétiques. En tant qu'elle relie du culte plutôt que de l'art, et qu'elle a partie liée avec la relique, cette image n'est pas seulement un objet défini à travers ses seules fonctions esthétiques ; on peut en effet y voir plusieurs modalités :

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5 De 9e chos rgyal phags pa mwa rgyal ma gya lha Yoes sgyal ma History of Sikkim (typescript, unpublished) 1968 p. 5065.
• Celle d’une effigie matérielle, la statue de l’aucète, présente dans de nombreuses dagor pu du Sikkim, principalement dans l’ouest et le nord;
• Celle d’un corps, investi d’une véritable corporeité de substitution, qui se traduit aussi bien par des parasites vivants que par les reliques contenues dans les statues;
• Celle d’un personnage céleste, bhodisatvā, qui reste présent aux hommes sous une forme immatérielle; ou d’un magicien agissant dans les rêves.

Ces trois types de réalité, « statue, corps, personne céleste », forment un système en tant qu’ils sont différents et qu’ils s’appellent l’un l’autre pour assurer ensemble l’efficacité des croyances et des comportements rituels. On a ainsi une certaine structure de références autour de ihn Ha bsun, qui comprend des récits de miracles, veinant corroborer une situation sociale ou une institution (définie par un list, des scènes et des objets concrets), la construction symbolique d’un espace (défini par la manifestation ostéique de l’image), et enfin des usages politiques du culte (au sens large).

Nous allons envisager successivement ces trois modalités à travers la biographie du saint telle qu’elle se raconte maintenant, et à travers les récits de ses exploits magiques : récits oraux, rêvés et visionnaires.

* Pour la compréhension du lien profond entre image et corps, voir les briliantes analyses de Marie-José Mondrain (Image, icône, économique. Les sources byzantines de l’imaginaire contemporain. Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 29), qui montre comment, pour ce qui concerne la doctrine byzantine, « La doctrine de l’incarnation et celle de l’icône ne sont qu’une seule et même chose, identité que subsume le concept d’iskonomia (…), premier concept organisant et fonctionnant qui concerne simultanément la chair du corps, la chair du découpage et la chair de l’image (…) Dans une société chrétienne, il ne peut y avoir de légitimité politique sans constitution d’une doctrine articulant sans défaillance l’adhésion doctrinale au dispositif institutionnel qui légitime le pouvoir temporel ! Crée et obtre sont les deux versants d’un même montage symbolique, qui met en œuvre l’équivalence du faire croire et du gouverner. (…) On passe insensiblement du « ne croire qu’à ce que l’on voit » au « n’oubli qu’à ce que l’on croit ». » Est-ce-à-dire en acceptant d’avoir relativement perdu de vue ce qui pourrait devenir l’objet d’un savoir ou, plus encore, d’un doute. L’économie fonctionne comme une face de l’emprise.

qui constituent sa légende et qui sont évoqués en particulier au sujet du sKam zhal. Ces récits vont nous permettre d’analyser l’enjeu des pratiques dévotionnelles autour de l’Ha bstan.

LA FABRICATION DU MYTHE: L’ENTRÉE DE L’HA BSTAN PAR LE NORD OU TRANSNATIONALISME SAINCT

Le mythe transparaît tout d’abord à travers des récits caractéristiques des « tragés » et « déplacements » du saint, l’un me fut raconté par un membre d’une famille sikkimese Phota résident sur les terres où a été bâti le monastère contenant les reliques de l’Ha bstan; et l’autre par une nonne lépha (Nyung ma) pa résidant dans un monastère Nyung ma pa du Sikkim du Nord. Tous deux présentent une certaine vision du patrimoine et des traditions sikkimeses inaugurées par l’Ha bstan, dans le monde laïc et dans le monastique :

Récit 1 :

« Notre famille descend de trois frères qui vivaient au Tibet, à Sakya, il y a sept à huit générations. L’Ha bstan cherchait par les voies directement à Do lung, là où se trouve le monastère actuel contenant les reliques du saint. L’aîné et le cadet des frères firent une erreur et confondirent Do lung avec Waling (situé au nord-est du Népal). Plus tard, l’Ha bstan vint et les trouva à Waling. Il leur dit :

« Vous vous êtes trompés; vous avez voulu retourner à Do lung, un lieu sensible à un don. Les deux frères revinrent donc à Do lung et cette fois, un corbeau leur indiqua le chemin. Ils arrivèrent par la vallée de Lhoman, au-dessus de Chungu, par les lieux dits Dawa Thong, Dh Thong, Sheva, Ringgis, Phedang Quedal ils arrivèrent à Do lung, il y avait là un ancêtre lépha nommé Khyung Bzik; ce dernier, très effrayé à leur arrivée, voulu les tuer avec son arc. Mais la flèche se planta dans le corbeau qui s’échappa. On voit toujours l’arc à Sheva. Les frères voulaient du sel, et les léphas avaient une plante qui colorait l’eau. Ils firent du vin. Les Tibétains avaient des animaux, de l’or, des marchandises. Mais là où ils s’arrêtaient, une avalanche s’emporçait les cornes d’animaux dans lesquelles étaient dissimulés les trésors, l’or et l’argent de la famille. Chaque année, notre famille fait une poja en l’honneur et le corbeau qui avait guidé les frères vers le Sikkim revient. Dans l’un des lieux où se tient notre famille, à Chang, on continue d’adorer (yan,
pakh). Si quelqu'un consomme ces plantes sans notre permission, sa bouche se met à brûler. Tous les trois ans il y a une grande célébration : le Gom chen de Lachen vient et montre les vestiges de l'Ha btsun chen po et tous les trésors. C'est le Skom zhed. On met les vestiges à fleurir au soleil. Les Lepchas viennent assister et font des offrandes devant le mchod rten du ral. Ils offrent des parties de la tête, des pattes et des entrailles d'un taureau, qui sont insérées dans un récipient de bambou et qui sont effectes devant le mchod rten. Comme c'est pour l'esprit du ral (dont les reliques se trouvent aussi à Do lung), il est permis de faire une offrande animale. La puja du Skom zhed commence ensuite. Alors, le lama ouvre les brêlées une à une et montre les objets. Il montre aussi des livres de taille différente, comme des ostéments stratifiés, des pierres précieuses, de l'ivoire, de l'or, de l'argent, des pots en terre. Beaucoup de trésors ont été accumulés, et il y a également des thang khás dont l'un date de l'époque de Dipankara.

En 1980, on a voulu démonter le monastère ; nous avons été très troublés et toute notre fouille s'est remise à Do lung. A ce moment-là, j'ai vu le premier Skom zhed. Il y avait le lama JDo sgrub chen. Cette année-là (avril 2003), il y a eu un arc-en-ciel aérien depuis le Jowo (maître) lorsque le Gom chen l'a monté. Ce jour-là est une sorte de premier prêtre sacré.

Le récit continue avec la relation du rêve que fit la troisième réincarnation de l'Ha btsun chen po "Jigs med dpal bo", au temps du cinquième chos rgyal du Sikkim (Namgyal Phuntsog) :

"Jigs med dpal bo rêva que le Népal allait envahir le Sikkim. Le roi ne voulait pas croire en rêve du saint. Les Gurkhas du Népal envahirent alors le Sikkim et menèrent le royaume de destruction. C'est alors qu'on envoya tous les trésors du monastère qui se trouvaient dans le monastère de gShing rgyas chos gling (dans l'ouest du Sikkim), à Do lung. Mois aujourd'hui, il y a encore une chaussure de l'Ha btsun qui se trouve à Pad ma gyang rye, et une autre à Do lung.

Dans ce récit, retenons tout d'abord le fait que le saint se manifeste en rêve directement à ses descendants, et leur confère ainsi une forme de propriété à la fois matérielle et spirituelle sur les biens et les terres du monastère, qu'ils revendiquent encore aujourd'hui en tant que gardiens des trésors qui y sont recelés. Ce droit de propriété se manifeste en particulier par des signes magiques : on ne peut s'emparer
des terres de la famille qui sont protégées par des plantes aux pouvoirs extraordinaires, en corrobore le chemin aux ancêtres, le saint lui apparut en rêve tout comme il est apparu en rêve au roi pour indiquer que le pays était menacé par les Gurkhas. Les images et les trésors furent donc sauvés de la fureur incompréhensible des ennemis et transportés à Do long, mais une chaussure du saint reste à Pad ma g-yang rits, lieu historique de la fondation de la royauté sikkimaise.

Le récit insiste sur le fait que l’image du saint ne pouvait être vénérée sur les lieux mêmes de son intervention humaine. La biographie de lui bstan chos po monje du qui serait d’abord arrivé, en tant que personne physique, à l’ouest du Sikkim, accompagné d’autres lamas. Ce récit, qui le fait voir par le nord, tend donc à montrer que le saint aurait choisi lui-même son lieu d’élection, le lieu où son culte se propagera ; on retrouve ce thème du « déplacement » ou de la transeption dans les cœurs de saints de l’Occident médiéval. Le saint divinise en quelque sorte ses pouvoirs et un miracle se produit : l’une de ses chaussures reste à Pad ma g-yang rits, tandis que l’autre se retrouve à Do long. Ce mythe du « monadologie », selon E. C. Schmitt, « fait partie d’un ensemble mythique attesté depuis les histoires d’Édie et de Jason, jusqu’aux contes populaires contemporains », ici, le saint conserve un pied dans chaque monastère important attaché au culte du roi et des reliques par les populations bhots du lepcha du Sikkim. La mention des offrandes animales qui sont faites par les Lepchas dans le réceptacle funéraire du roi à Do long est un des éléments importants des usages « politiques » au culte, qui souligne la situation de relative subordination des Lepchas aux Bhoutias bouddhistes.

Récit II

Le récit suivant est celui d’un moine enseignant la philosophie dans un petit monastère Nying ma pa lepcha du nord du Sikkim. Les Lepchas proclament volontiers aujourd’hui qu’ils ont été « convertis » au bouddhisme par les Bhoutias qui ont répandu le pays à la doctrine du Guru Rinpoche.

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* Nous empruntons ainsi à E. C. Schmitt (op. cit., 239) et schôtia décrit des pouvoirs et des initiations des saints du Moyen Âge. Bien qu’il s’agisse d’une archéologie latine, les phénomènes mérovingiens décrits à leur sujet dans la chronologie sont des similitudes à ceux que l’on rencontre chez les moines indiens et tibétains.

* Nul.

* J’ai recueilli ce récit en langue népalaise et non pas lepcha.
"Il a bien connu peu avant obtenu une très grande connaissance. Au début, il méditait comme nous. Il était de la même couleur que nous. Quand il étudiait à l'école, il était un vêkogs srid sangha ou "un véritable lion des études bouddhiques et de la pratique" 7. Au Khams, il était devenu un uranrse en méditant sur les livres de méditation. Un jour, il a eu un rêve où en lui enjouait de se rendre à Sbat yel 'bras mo jongs. Il arriva à l'hostel, à dPa' bo hang ri (le tout premier monastère du Sikkim, aujourd'hui disparu). Là, il vit un lieu extraordinairement vert et il fut rempli d'une paix immense. Alors, sa couleur changea et il devint vert. Finalement, est il un thang gling à la main? En ce temps-là, il n'y avait pas de dharma au Sikkim, mais seulement les ascètes des Lepchas. Il a essayé le lieu de fKrwa shis slings, il y a des monastères de l'ouest fondés par Ilha btsun et rencontre Mun Salong, un puissant sorcier 7 lepcha. Ils discutèrent ensemble, et Ilha btsun lui enseigne le dharma. Mun Salong prit un épi de maïs, le fit griller et le coupa en deux : il reconnaît le visage du Guru Rinpoche sur l'un des deux morceaux, et il comprit alors que Ilha btsun avait bien le pays. C'est ainsi que le pays devint bouddhiste.

Ilha btsun alla méditer ensuite à bKrwa shis slings. Les Lepchas ne comprenaient pas le tibétain, mais ils capturaient les paroles de Ilha btsun par l'esprit. De là, Ilha btsun se rendit ensuite à Yeckum (lieu de la couronnement du premier roi). Il y avait un arbre, sous lequel il médita également. Il rencontrera les trois tumas (yokma) et ils couronnaient le roi Phunshog. Ils formaient un groupe et construisirent un spud dga' dgon pa. C'était l'époque de Chogyor Namgyal, qui inventa l'écriture lepcha. À l'époque de Tensung Namgyal, Ilha btsun se rendit à Dzong lung, il rencontrer le roi et lui dit : «il faut construire trois mchod dten à mChad rgyun dgon pa (Gangtok) ». Mais le roi n'obéit pas. C'est alors que les Gurlhos, ainsi que les Bhoutanais, vinrent attaquer le Sikcm. Ilha btsun souffrit beaucoup en déclarant qu'il ne resterait pas à s'agne sugga, chos gling. Il envoya son vajra, qui arriva jusqu'à Do lung. Il y avait beaucoup d'eau là-haut; le vajra arriva sur un lac, sur une feuille de lotus. Ilha btsun fit alors batur une petite dgon pa avec l'aide des mimayin bshat-pret, qui bâtissaient la nuit. Ilha btsun médita et

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7 Il s'agit d'une expression métaphorique où l'on traduirait en fait vêkogs srid simple par "som de la vacuité et des phénomènes montants".
8 L'informateur a utilisé ici les termes anglais de 'witch', 'wizard', et non pas le terme générique népal pour shaman : shaks.
Tensang Nangyal regretta de ne pas avoir été là. Les éléphants de yak offraient aussi leur aide à Mja bsum.


Les Bhotanais virent de nouveau faire la guerre. Ils arrivèrent à Nombog Poyon (à l’est de Mangan). Les lepchas purent repasser les Bhotanais car ils avaient été convertis. Les Ghanka révèrent aussi et vinrent jusqu’à Geyzing. Ils avaient des méthodes de construire les populations, et les Ghanka leur furent repassés. Mja bsum revint à Do laung, puis il retourna enfin au Tibet où il mourut. Un de ses élèves se trouvait à Tegchen (Khan Dronkyi), un autre à Has Gyalbang (Bar Deognyi) et un autre à Tingmach (Khan Deognyi). Ils étaient d’extraordinaires élèves lepchas et avaient auparavant à maitriser la grève. Ils furent très en colère ce qui provoqua que leurs mères étaient morts au Tibet. Ils s’y rendirent et combattirent avec les Tibétains. Ils voulurent ramener le corps de leur maître. Le soir, ils comprimèrent la tête de Mja bsum avec leur couteau (tangnag). Comme ils étaient de puissants pantins, ils pouvaient facilement les arbre, arrêter la fille, etc. Ils arrivèrent à Lachen avec la tête seulement et se repassèrent. De nouveau, ils étaient pris d’une très grande joie de n’avoir pu ramener le corps entier. Ils manifestèrent de nouveau leurs pouvoirs et construisirent le méthod mask de Mja bsum. À cette époque, il n’y avait pas d’armes de très vieille époque. Tous le monde fut réuni pour faire la dgeg pu. Les trois élèves entrèrent alors en état de méditation (Rgongs dam) et moururent un arène cédé boîtes, en même temps que le soleil, à pluie des fleurs.»

Le narrateur évoque ensuite sa propre époque du Mangan et les empêchent de pas du sain dans les relics tout autour. II décrit le petit lac qui est sous le bâtiment et tous les miracles qui virent sa monastère, dont un bâton réincarné du ligurage de Nga dbul Jampa chen po (Khungpo Tsetup Ngagden Dampa). Enfin, il décrit un miracle : le fait son des tuyaux d’irrigation le jour de la pleine lune, sans l’obtenir les individus vertueux. Puis il évoque le Ngal du Rgyun grel.
« Sur tous les vêtements, il y a des poux. Ceux qui étaient sur les vêtements de Hda btsun ne moururent jamais. Ce jour-là, on montre la couronne de Hda btsun, les pendentifs qui ornent sa patrine, son sceptre et sa coupe émaillée. Lorsqu'on assiste au sKam zhed, on obtient le don de longue vie et la réalisation de ses vœux. C'est une réalisation des vœux de paix que Hda btsun fit pour le Sikkim. Beaucoup de gens sont venus en effet vivre ici et ont pu coexister. Le kochen le ti l'emploie à ce moment-là le terme lchezha est connu un médecin pour les Sikkimais. Les gens voyaient Hda btsun avec les yeux intérieurs. »

Ici, la première manifestation des pouvoirs ésotériques du saint est la transmutation du corps, qui change de couleur de façon mimétique avec l'environnement. La statuette de Hda btsun reflète cette variété de couleurs asséculés qui vont du bleu au vert, métamorphose du saint interagissant directement avec la nature : par mimétisme, tous les éléments naturels se transforment en image du corps du saint (l'épi de maïs), image qui, à son tour, s'inspire dans les rochers et dans le paysage. Une autre manifestation récurrente est l'épiphanie lumineuse du saint qui a un double sens : il agit sur la lumière, il provoque arc-en-ciel et lumière solaire; inversement, il est « vu » avec les yeux intérieurs », il apparaît en rêve. Mais la narration insiste sur le fait qu'on voit le saint en rêve, et non pas qu'on « rêve de lui ». Cette vision comporte donc un élément conscient. Enfin, Hda btsun a pu voir sur la vie puisque les poux de ses vêtements lui survivent et qu'il confère la « longue vie » à ses dévots. En revanche, les pouvoirs du saint peuvent devenir mémérs puisqu'il laisse les ennemis envahir le royaume lorsque le roi n'obéit pas à ses ordres.

Hda btsun est donc lui-même un visionnaire, il voit l'avenir du pays qu'il maîtrise. Il produit à la fin des enseignements tirés des lieux mêmes qu'il a conquis par ses pouvoirs. Le son du chung gön dirigé ses pensées, qui atteignent les lieux où seront découverts les enseignements.

Le rêve fait par 'Fgs med dpa' bo est relaté dans l'histoire du Sikkim des 9es souverains, MaharajahNagöb Namgal et Maharani Dolma of Sikkim12 ; il a été repris à leur propre compte par les héritiers

12 History of Sikkim, op. cit., 1968, s略rs maṁ ngag, l'un des deux rédacteurs de l'Histoire du Sikkim ou 9th Chos ngag, qui en est le cinquième épouse de Tse pünt maṁ ngag (le même le 5éme Chos ngag, 1785-1863, le successeur de Tse pünt son deuxième fils, Son kyöp maṁ ngag, 1817-1874, qui règna avant s略rs maṁ ngag).
précémands de saint (voir récit I) comme modèle de stratégie centraleisatrice et guerrière. Le roï est menacé lui-même de perdre ses pouvoirs s’il n’obéit pas au saint, de la même façon que tous ceux qui font allége à sa sanctuité des biens ou des objets qui sont en contact à Do lung avec le corps du saint, sont menacés de maladie ou de mort.

À travers les récits transmis oralement qui évoquent la biographie de la bénisse, apparaît de façon récurrente un autre personnage historique important, Mon Salung, que l’histoire lepcha présente soit comme un lettré lepcha, soit comme un manzan. À côté de la version lepcha boudhique dominante et descriptif, le récit lepcha est aussi (bien que par sa rareté) insiste sur les modalités du pacte de pouvoir qui fut scellé entre le saint boudhiste et le sorcier lepcha Mon Salung, lui aussi maître de vie. Dans ce récit recueilli à Ben Gyan (las Dzong), les Lepchas revendentiquent leur autonomie à travers un lien intrinsèque avec le sol, producteur des ressources et de la vie.

Récit III :


14 Henri Plasson, dans l’important catalogue des manuscrits lepcha de la collection Van Manen qu’elle vient de publier (Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection, Leiden: KITLV; 2003 : 19), mentionne que : « Lepcha tradition has it that the script was accepted by the Lepcha scholars by King ren sa long ». Concernant Mon Salung, qui est censé avoir été contemporain de Lama Jhayon (Chung, t. 7, « Lama tshadam Namkha Ams (1597-1654), the patron saint of sikkim, is considered to be responsible for the conversion of Sikkim to Buddhism ». Elle mentionne également comment c’est sous la rubrique « shaman » que Mon Salung est décrit dans les veronts rouges qui narent les mythes (ibid., 21).

Tous les trois ans, lorsqu'au vent les hojas contenant les trésors de Ilia bissam, un éclat jaillit, le tombeau germe. Un jour, j'ai entendu l'explosion; je suis allé demander à des ouvriers qui travaillaient à la construction d'un pont. Mais ils ne savent pas d'où cela provenait.


Padmasambhava était aussi passé par ce lieu, à Lachen, un peu en dessous. Changzhang, là, il y a un endroit appelé Guru Longshok, où Padmasambhava rencontra le Lechpa Thokling-Adk. Les Lechpas offraient des sacrifices funèbres (ban tharla); ils discutèrent : « Il y a des Tibétains d'un côté et beaucoup de Lechpas de l'autre ». Padmasambhava dit qu'il voudrait précher. Les Lechpas et Padma firent une compétition à Mungdeur, il y a une paille; qui pousser

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Guru Padma avait aussi prédit le futur. Si les Lepchas se conduisaient bien, ils vivraient jusqu’à la seizeième génération, sinon, les gens devaient que dure générations, jusqu’à une année du cochon. En effet, le dixième chos rgyal était de l’année du cochon. Après viendra l’année du tigre, celle de l’Union à l’Unek, puis quelque an de l’année du sang viendrait de Chine pour guérirer le Sikim. sula va brusque lung, signifie tout pas « pas caché où passe le riz » mais « pas prédit par le riz ». La prédiction du tigre est arrivée : les Indiens ont dévasté notre pays et maintenant ils construisent des barrages pour le moyer... »

La première partie de ce récit relate la partition des pouvoirs entre Ha btsun et le roi, et parallèlement, entre Bhotias et Lepchas ; les Lepchas demeurent les maîtres du sous-sol et des fondations, tandis que les Bhotias maîtrisent l’air et la doctrine. Sont citées ensuite les pouvoirs du sorcier sur l’eau et des fondations des temples, et ceux de Ha btsun sur le sceptre et la fondre. Les Lepchas (qui attirent l’origine de l’écolant et des montagnes au tomervi), ont reconnu Ha btsun comme le maître de ces forces naturelles, signe de leur conversion. Le narrateur s’attache ensuite à évoquer la conversion des Lepchas au bouddhisme à travers les rites funéraires : on s’est mis à faire des cérémonies avec la dépouille du roi dont les reliques sont à Do lung (et aux plus des écrivains, selon la coutume lepcha). Ce fut l’origine d’un culte aux reliques royales, qui est restée lors du skra kho, devant le method rten du roi. Ce culte des Lepchas est décrit ainsi par les Bhotias résidant à Dzunga : « Les Lepchas transportèrent le corps du roi depuis Pad ma g.ying rgya jusqu’à Do lung et lui offrirent le corps d’un cochon, la tête d’un boucan et le corps d’un lièvre dépouillé de ses poils. »
Enfin, la dernière partie du récit relate le mythe de ṢHa btsun à travers celui de Padmaambhava, qui rencontre aussi un sorcier lepcha, Thikung Adik : la partition initiale entre les ressources du sous-sol attribuées aux Lepchas, et la maîtrise de la doctrine attribuée aux bouddhistes, est justifiée par une divination par le riz qui prend un tour apocalyptique : l’issue du débat est incertaine. Pour les Lepchas du Nord de Dzongu, le rêve de Ṣha btsun chen po n’indiquait pas une destination fixe. Les volumen lepchas pensent que Ṣha btsun aurait “fait un compromis”. Il serait d’abord arrivé à Peotong et ensuite seulement, il se serait rendu à Do lung. Le narrateur suggère en fait que les Lepchas n’ont jamais été réellement convertis par le saint. Ce sont surtout ses exploits magiques qui sont mis en exergue par eux.

La revendication de l’établissement d’un centre de diffusion des pouvoirs tantriques de Ṣha btsun oscille donc entre l’ouest et le nord ; les récits lepcha tendent à réaffirmer l’antiquité des pouvoirs de leurs sorciers par rapport à ceux des saints bouddhistes : seul le sorcier lepcha aurait pouvoir sur la vie et la croissance des plantes; quant aux Bhotias, ils assimilent la venue du saint à la légitimité d’un lignage et à la revendication d’une terre et des trésors matériels qui y sont amassés ; le prouve encore cet autre récit, complément du Dêcu 1, et issu de la même famille :

« Notre ancêtre eut une vision pendant son sommeil Ṣha btsun lui apparu et annonça qu’il y aurait un désèje. Il finirait quitter Do lung et trouver un autre royaume. C’est pourquoi la famille partit s’installer en dessous, à Chuang, à treize kilomètres plus bas, là où l’eau se mit à tomber, seule la statue du Guru Rupché qui est dans votre maison peut surnager. À côté, il y a un champ qui a la forme d’un yak où voit les marques de ses sabots dans le sol. Si les paysans (des couvreurs népalais) mangent des racines de yam qui pousse dans ces champs sous notre permission, cette nourriture les empoisonne. »

A ce récit de défense de la propriété par l’impression du corps du yak, qui représente le gardien et la richesse principale des Bhotias, correspond tout un ensemble de récits dans lesquels les Lepchas, soupçonnés de manger les tubercules en question, sont inversement soupçonnés ou accusés d’être eux-mêmes des « empoisonneurs ». Parallèlement, les voleurs qui tentent de s’empêtrer des trésors du monastère sont soumis à des châtiments naturels :
« Sur le chemin de Dô long se trouvaient deux mutons lepchas (...). Ces gens fabriquaient du poisson, ils empoisonnaient les commerçants. L’un d’eux était mort sur le chemin de Dô long (...). En dessus de Dô long, se trouvaient des trésors périssables dans les rochers : ce sont des livres, et les empreintes de mains des voyageurs qui s’en emparaient. Grâce aux pouvoirs terribles des dieux de Dô long, les voyageurs perissaient également. On avait bâti l’une des cymbales de Hôh tshon chen po à Pad ma gyung risé, et l’autre au monastère de tête chen. Les gens mouraient tous de diarrhée. On a compris que les cymbales avaient été volées à Dô long et on les a ramenées. Tout est retourné dans l’ordre. Le plus étonnant est que rien n’est jamais abîmé : mais on a changé les mâles de bambou pour des mâles de métal. »

Si l’intervention d’une autorité civile et militaire est nécessaire pour conserver les trésors de Dô long, néanmoins, le pouvoir des magues, des statues et des effigies du monastère, tout particulièrement ceux de mîxod loga, à se projeter eux-mêmes, est un fait largement admis à Dzongu. Un thème de jugement par orale apparaît de façon récurrente dans les récits et les mises en garde : les justes et les saints surmagent, tandis que les voyageurs qui tentent de s’emparer des trésors et des biens attachés à la personne du saint, via celle des propriétaires, sont « empoisonnés » et « avolés » par les rochers et par la terre. Le récit de ces miracles et injonctions divines, répété à sujetti, ne constitue pas tout un corpus d’histoires auxquelles on croit, que d’histoires stoïques on doit citer : il s’agit d’indiquer un certain habitat, un ordre qui a été transmis et qui doit continuer à se transmettre aux descendants afin de légitimer leur statut. Ainsi, les Lepchas, en tant que principaux rivaux des bhoutsus pour la maîtrise des ressources dans cette réserve naturelle, sont-ils constamment décrits comme les fauves barbares des confins, en même temps que les indispensables médiateurs de la continuité du culte de la dépouille royale.

LA FABRICATION DES RELIQUES : OSTEÆNN ET TRAVITUS

Si les récits racontent le geste des pouvoirs qu’on attribue à Hôh tshun, l’autorité du saint appartient exclusivement à un monastère, à une communauté de mornes ou de clerks. Ce sont les monastères qui sont les détenteurs des images et de la statuaire de Hôh tshun. Ainsi, le mode d’apparition du saint, qui passe par l’événement au grand jour des trésors, habituellement cachés, ne vise pas tant à raconter l’histoire de
Il n'a bistun, qu'à en livrer une figuration symbolique qui transcende les contingences de la simple perception. C'est une mise en scène matérielle, irrigée et rituelle, tout autant que politique, qui permet cette figuration. Ainsi que l'explique M. J. Moundzain (voir note 2), « on a relativement perdu de vue ce qui pourrait devenir l'objet d'un savoir ».

En effet, à côté des pouvoirs de « déplacement » du saint ou translato, il aurait également celui d'être « vu » par ses disciples et par les devôts avec les « yeux intérieurs ». On touche ici directement au pouvoir des reliques et à la faculté de passage ou de transfert (transitus) des vœux des devôts vers le corps du saint, dans son réceptacle religieux, pouvoir médiatisé par le fait de montrer (ostension) les vêtements. Certains objets ayant été en contact direct ou indirect avec le corps du saint, ainsi que le corps de certains animaux, assurent ce passage. Réciproquement, le fait de montrer (ostension) les objets lors du rituel du Khim ched s'appuie sur certaines croyances relatives au transitus.

Quels sont les objets de dévotion et d'adoration ?

Ce sont les ustensiles du culte bouddhique (rido rje, chang gling, ossaments, livres), tous objets qui ont touché le corps de Ilha bistun, qui en sont issus ou qui lui ont appartenu. C'est-à-dire des matières du corps humain (vêtements, ornements), d'autres qui lui sont consubstantielles (poussière), des instruments du culte, des objets mystérieux et magiques qui se trouvent dans une sorte de surmature (corne de cheval, pierres de foudre, des matières précieuses et brillantes (or, argent, ivoire).

Comment fonctionne le transitus ?

La propension à « voir » le saint et à pouvoir communiquer avec lui est expliquée différemment par les Lepchas et les Bhutias, selon qu'ils sont laïcs ou religieux, installés ou non sur les terres du monastère. Mais la communication avec les esprits, en revanche, se fait chez les uns et les autres par l'intermédiaire d'un « animal véhicule », le geang ou geang phing. Il peut s'agir d'un cochon, tel celui offert par les Lepchas en hommage au chag pung a Lo hung, d'un hévre (ceux qui sont entièrement découpé et dépoilée de ses poils) ou encore d'un yak. Lors du rituel du geang, la viande de l'animal sacrifié est entièrement débitée et mélangée à des bollettes de tsé séché. Les chamars lepchas (dangling, ang, palung) offrent aussi aux esprits (rin) du gingembre, du poisson séché, des feuillages variés et des céréales, des poissons et...
des petits oiseaux desèchés. Tous ces parcelliers d’offrandes sont répartis sur un plateau. Cette offrande, lors du khaam zhel, est dite « destinée au roi » car c’est vers le corps du roi que vont les yeux des lépchas. Ils branlent n’ont d’importance que pour les bêtes lépchas (sikdak). Pour les champs, ce qui importait avant tout étaient les circuits d’offrandes qui circulaient entre la capitale où résidait le roi, les montagnes et les villages lépchas.

Du temps du demier chos rgbul, le père du banghong Nong Haou, à Tingyong (Haut Bromgu), se rendait ainsi à pied à Gangtok pour offrir la pozy amnech au roi. Il revenait avec un yek enne offert par le souverain. On sacrificait le yek, on le découpait entièrement et on le mélangeait à du vin séché. L’offrande était déposée au mont Kitochhun et transmutait par les espaces souterrains. L’année d’après, le banghong revenait à Gangtok, il franchissait les portes de la ville et sur le rocher élevé situé en dessous du palais royal, offrait le bénéfice de l’offrande précédente à l’esprit du roi. Outre la méditation d’un mammifère, yek ou cochon, les lépchas issus beaucoup sur celle des oiseaux et des poissons.

La mythologie lépcha permet de comprendre l’importance des poissons, en tant que médiateurs de la consécration, et celle des mammifères, intimement liés à la génération et aux femmes. Dans une légende (unsung), on raconte comment le chasseur Thong (Gwokma) voulut attraper une femme-poison des rues. Il mit l’attrape que gracieusement lui massa le visage sous l’eau. Lorsqu’il put attraper la femme-poison des rues, cette dernière secoua les reins de sa tête qui tombèrent dans le lac et devinrent des poissons. Ces poissons firent considérer désormais comme santois et sources de vie. Une autre histoire raconte l’origine de l’aït-kon et convenait une vieille femme avant d’attraper le lac et devenir un cheveu. Le cafard voulait se jeter de la lisière. La vieille femme enleva le cafard sous une ruche convertie, mais ce dernier, qui pouvait voir à travers les mailles de bâtonneries de panier, hypotheso les pois du riche femme, qui l’endormit, ainsi, il put lui voler sa lisière.

Pois, levure et consécration vivante, érotiquement mêlées, circulent à travers les eaux, les fleurs, les oiseaux et les espaces souterrains. Ils soulignent l’importance que les lépchas accordent aux pouvoirs de vie et de reproduction de leurs roisres, mâtres des espaces cachés, en lieu des saints bouddhistes, qui se déplacent dans les airs et les profondeurs et...
lacs sont ainsi pour les Lepchas avant tout des lieux où l’on va pour se
soigner, des lieux où la vie elle-même prend son origine.
Tous, Bhotias et Lepchas s’accordent sur l’idée que l’établissement
d’un musée pour entreposer les trésors du monastère ne ferait que
provocer maladies et désastres. Les objets les plus investis de pouvoir
sont les plus brillants, les pierres précieuses, les diamants, l’or. Les
pierrres et l’or ont un rapport étroit avec les images dont ils manifestent
la puissance active : le joyau reluit, l’éclat de l’or rehausse les peintures
et les fresques. En outre, l’action du saint tantriste règle le temps et
fait briller le soleil. Un Tibétain (Khampa), qui s’est rendu trois fois au
sKan zhed, affirme :

« J’ai tout vu, tous les événements, des événements usés; il y encore les
poux vivants dessus; j’ai vu les clochettes, tous les objets tirés des
malles. Lorsqu’on a suspendu les événements sur un fil pour les faire
sécher, la pluie qui tombait s’est arrêtée tout le temps du séchage.
Ensuite, elle a recommencé à tomber. »

Opposition des modèles de la nature

Si les bhotias voient dans les montagnes un modèle hiérarchique social,
les Lepchas y voient avant tout le lieu des origines et des fins dernières.
Pour les premiers, la société est verticale; les offrandes au dieu mDzod
Inga se font à travers un rite qui reflète cette structure : la puja de
mDzod Inga, décrite dans le gnos gsol17, commence par le bangs aux
dieux d’en haut, les évoquations des noms des principaux gs hi bdag du
Sikkim dont mDzod Inga et les ofrandes aux gens supérieurs; elle
continue par les dieux des montagnes du sud du Sikkim, puis par les
dieux qui habitent avec l’honma (go ba’i bha lngo), les dgra bha, et se
termine par les offrandes (gser skyents) aux gens inférieurs.

Chez les Lepchas, la structure des offrandes est circulaire. Les dons
venus d’en haut, de la personne du roi, circulent à travers tout le
village, et reviennent au roi après être passés par les montagnes, en
suivant les chemins qu’empruntent les âmes.

Tandis que pour les Lepchas les richesses sont attachées aux sous-
sols (par exemple les racines de certains arbres contenant les
empreintes des sorciers, les traces animales des êtres surnaturels
habitant les lacs et les grottes), le déploiement des trésors de la nation
est pour les Bhotia une partie intégrante de la persona des saints.

17 History of Sikkim, op. cit.
L'hagiographie de l'Ha bisun insiste sur le fait que les kamás bâtissent tous des monastères et des mekhel men : le premier avait été sôndê se à Angon pa, bâti par l'Ha bisun, le deuxième le lHadj chang dmar po, bâti par mënya bëng, le troisième le monastère de Kadhôg, et le roi avait bâti le bKra shis xeng khâ. Les statues de l'Ha bisun se trouvent dans les chapelles des grands monastères de Pad ma gyang riše et de gyang bynggas rhos yêng, et aux étages supérieurs dans les monastères de mon ñê Sikkim. Au contraire, pour les Lepchas, les images importantes sont celles qui se trouvent spontanément dans la nature: des statues du Guru Rinpoche se trouvent dans les principales grottes des daïx saints, comme à nDe chen, phug par exemple, et sont objet de vénération. Aujourd'hui, les Lepchas se disent animistes à l'inverse de ces usages. En effet, les Lepchas ont cependant conservé une certaine idéalisation de la nature. Les Lepchas soulignent l'expressivité propre de la nature à travers la forme des montagnes, qu'ils réfléchissent à des éléments de l'univers quotidien; par exemple, le mont Longyong est une femme portant son enfant sur le dos, ou encore Frongbo, un montagne qui porte l'enfant. Les cascades sont des métaphores des cheveux des femmes. Les mythes d'origine évoquent le caractère qui, en se lavant, trouve dans sa main le cheveu de femme recueilli dans une cascade, il suit le fil et parvient dans une grotte où lui apparaît le roi des serpents, père de la femme qu'il convoite. Il doit subjuguer le serpents pour se rendre maître de la femme de la cascade. Les montagnes, quant à elles, sont produites par la foudre, le tonnerre et les éclair. Le tonnerre, à son tour, a un rapport direct avec le rie humain : on risque d'être tué par la foudre lorsque l'on rit devant certains animaux, à certains moments de l'année. De même, le tonnerre est le premier à avoir gelé aux boissons alcoolisées fabriquées par les hommes; la foudre peut-être subjuguée grâce à l'apparition d'alcool dans une pièce. La montagne et les forêts qui l'habite sont en rapport direct avec la vie des hommes. Pour accéder aux montagnes, on doit emprunter des voies souterraines, des grottes et des lacs, Cheveux, cascades, serpents ressemblant de l'univers des femmes, pois, tonnerre, alcool, de l'animal des hommes. Tandis que les Bhônas vénèrent les masques et les effigies, les Lepchas vénèrent les ombres, les abris sous roches, les eaux et les racines des arbres.
Les rêves du saint, les visions des pélerins, l’otentso des reliques, jouent dans une rôle d’opérateur logique en même temps qu’idéologique. Ils rassemblent des images différentes, des récits multiples, leur assignent une place dans la hiérarchie des objets de dévotion, et surtout, ils permettent de modifier constamment cette hiérarchie. C’est ainsi que les prétendants à la garde du saint et à la possession du domaine de Du lung, reconstituent une généalogie de leurs propriétés ancières à la mesure de la généalogie royale, en lui donnant un sens de fondation de pouvoir sur la communauté. Historiquement, la position des chos rgyal a toujours changé, de même que les thèmes de la dévotion, le nombre des images et les groupes qui en assurèrent la production. Dans l’histoire du Sikkim, les dgon pa et les statues sont tout autant des monuments érigés à la gloire du monarachisme et de ses fonctions politiques, que des jalons dans l’histoire collective des rêves. Etirement associées au mythe de fondation de la royauté et à la centralisation opérée par l’expansion de la doctrine bouddhique Nying ma pa, leurs emblèmes ont néanmoins sans cesse varié, de même que l’importance des ordres Nying ma pa chargés de diffuser les enseignements secrets de lHa brum.

Dans l’histoire du Sikkim des souverains10, la présentation de la biographie de lHa brum insiste sur les pouvoirs astracelseau du saint et contribue à propager la sainteté du culte de la personne même des souverains, dépositaires au bénéfice du culte des deux monastères attachés aux lieux ou naissent lHa brum.

être simple, naturellement, tout en étant capable de réaliser des œuvres magnifiques. Il était un maître en la matière, tellement que ses contemporains le respectaient et l'admiraient. Sa technique était si précise et si parfaite que même les plus grands artistes de son époque ne pouvaient rivaliser avec lui. Il était connu pour sa capacité à créer des œuvres d'une beauté si sublime que même les dieux étaient émerveillés par son art. Sa vie était remplie de créations artistiques et d'innovations, et il est devenu un symbole de l'excellence artistique pour tous ceux qui l'ont connu et apprécié.
Le roi du Sikkim fut donc consacré comme un cakravartin, un roi selon le dharma. L’identité politique du pays s’est constituée à partir de cette imposition d’un ordre spirituel enraciné dans les monuments, qui sont décrits dans les récits oraux comme des émanations directes des pouvoirs des saints et des sorciers locaux mis à leur service. Dans l’Histoire du Sikkim, bKra shis rgyudings est décrit comme le lieu central de propagation de la doctrine3*), un arc-en-ciel apparaît, et le roi et les lamas construisent le mChod rten mthong ba rang ‘grol (qui libère par la seule vue). L’arrivée de lHa bsun est prédite dans le dGongs ’das, ainsi que sa rencontre avec le sorcier Thi Kong Salang à Chu dkar spang gshong, puis à Khrag ’thung rong et Phag mo rong, ainsi que Lha rgyu bying phug et Yang gyang phug, et enfin bDe chen phug. Des traces miraculeuses de Thi Kong Salang apparaissent aussi comme autant de témoignages historiques, des traces de pied à Khrag ’thung rong, et des bosquets de bambou qu’il planta.

La direction des domaines de Do lung ne daterait en fait que de la première décennie du 20e siècle. Une famille fut chargée de la garde et de l’entretien du monastère, et a revendiqué les terres lepchas, traditionnellement inaliénables et propriété privée de la reine. Cette occupation a tendu à éliminer les Lepchas dans des régions plus reculées encore. Un mouvement général de reviviscence identitaire a touché à la fois toutes ces populations minoritaires du nord, ainsi que les anciens possesseurs de domaines qui subsistaient à travers une forme de commerce ritualisé, enraciné dans le culte de dieux du sol et des montagnes. L’image des saints bouddhistes demeure une référence essentielle à ce passé valorisé, mais les modalités du culte ont changé sous les transformations internes des écoles bouddhistes et les rénovations incessantes des monastères. Les rites bouddhiques sont

3* Voir Saul Mullard. 2003, op. cit.
CONCLUSION

Dans cette analyse de la fonction anthropologique de l'image de Hua Bishan, nous avons essayé de prendre en compte trois aspects du saint : la statue ou effigie matérielle, le corps-reliquaire et la personne céleste. Pour rendre compte de toute la structure de référence autour de l'image, le sujet figure l'événement, les matériaux, sa mobilité, les lieux de son exposition, l'identité des possesseurs de l'image et les usages dont elle est l'objet sont autant d'éléments importants dans l'élaboration du mythe dont il fait l'objet.

Ce mythe s'élabore en premier lieu à partir de la translatio du saint jusqu'à son lieu d'élection propre. Ce mythe est entretenu par les récits de ses exploits merveilleux. L'osseion des reliques est inventée ensuite par tous ceux qui ont intérêt à maintenir l'intégration du royaume dans ses pratiques religieuses, ancrage pour le maintien d'un ordre social dans l'histoire du culte de la personnalité royale. Ce culte a des référents variés, visant même antagonistes, pour les Lepchas et les Bhoteas. Ces populations attachent des valeurs différentes aux échanges de ressources et ont une vision différente de la nature. Si, pour les Bhoteas, le déploiement des trésors de la nation est une partie intégrante de la personne des saints, pour les Lepchas, reliquées par la conquête à une place politique inférieure, l'image saine est qu'un élément de la nature, sans laquelle on se vêra sur les traces des anciens croyants, les espaceurs et souterrains, l'épanouissement des forêts, là où les Bhoteas veulent les lieux lumineux, métaphoriquement représentés par les miracles opérés par le saint. En témoignent les cultes aux montagnes des uns et des autres, qui passent respectivement par les airs et par les souterrains. Enfin, l'hagiographie du saint, retravaillée par ses hérétics présomptifs, a servi de garantie pour la reconstitution d'un royaume.
entraîn de se désagréger, et pour la diminution sur des ressources et des domaines dont le sens n'était plus lié à la relation avec un corps royal, mais à de l'argent, domine par des forces coloniales extérieures. Cette décadence royale s'accompagne de visions apocalyptiques qui se déplissent également sous forme de thèmes divinatoires, intégrés dans le mythe de IHa ltsun.
THE DZUMSA OF LACHEN: AN EXAMPLE OF A SIKKIMESE POLITICAL INSTITUTION

SOHIE BOURDET-SAPATIER
translation ANNA BAUKHE-DECHOHPA

Every society requires some kind of political framework to ensure its continued existence. In most regions of the world, today this structure is provided by a strong central government that determines the behaviour of the various populations inhabiting its territory. Indigenous political systems were once numerous and varied allowing social groups isolated from the centre of power to organize themselves according to their own particular needs and circumstances. In recent decades, these local structures have increasingly been threatened by national governments and their decentralisation policies. Many have already disappeared, and it would thus seem interesting to consider the prospect of the surviving ones. Within the Himalayan context, the dzumsa (dzens na) of Lachen provides an interesting example of a political institution inherited from the past that has managed to survive and adapt itself to changing circumstances.

Located some fifty kilometres from the Chinese border, the village of Lachen falls within a restricted area of Sikkim's North District.

1 This study of the dzumsa of Lachen is part of a larger research project undertaken for the degree of Ph.D. in Geography (Paris X Nanterre) focusing on the political, social and economic activities of the people of the Lachen region. Fieldwork research was carried out from January 2002 until November 2003; a two-year period during which my husband and myself shared the life of Lachen society. Setting up household in the village, we shared their life-style, interacting and participating in all social events such as monastic dinners, funerals, marriages and village council meetings. In order to better understand the regeneration process, we stayed in Lachen at 3000 m as well as in Thangu at 4000 m. In order to pay some understanding of this complex society, I collected data directly from the different areas of production and through a large number of interviews. I was usually confronted with a number of difficulties such as the busyness of the climate, the lack of local understanding and cooperation; the army's restriction of our movements and the language barrier. Eventually, thanks to the moral support of my family, my thesis supervisor and my partner, and thanks to the intervention and support of the Chief Secretary of Sikkim S.W. Tenkong as well as the Pujiom of Lachen Ann Lachopma and my loyal friends and translator Phuning Cheweng Lachopma, the situation rapidly improved and I was able to continue working on the research I had come to Lachen for.
Under military surveillance, access to the valley is strictly monitored and few scientific researches were ever carried out in the region. Only some short term studies were undertaken usually by government servants for the purpose of the Sikkim administration. From a socioeconomic viewpoint, the valley of Lachen, even more so than that of Lachung, remains relatively unknown. This study is an attempt to throw light on the institution of the dzamso, the political system of the people of Sikkim’s extreme north which today can still be witnessed in Lachen, one of Sikkim’s remotest valleys. The case of Lachen appeared interesting for two reasons: 1. This local political system not only seemed robust but seemed to have preserved its status and powers (or part of these) despite the establishment of a strong Indian governing system following Sikkim’s integration within the Indian Union in 1975; and 2. The agro-pastoral practices of Lachen are of a particular kind. Like most societies settled at high altitudes, herding is a central economic activity of the valley. Pastoral-nomadism has always been practiced by local populations, but contrary to usual practices, the entire Lachenpa community moves with the seasons, leaving the rest of the valley, and notably the main village of Lachen, practically empty of inhabitants for most of the year. Even though practices have changed with new economic conditions, all households still gather their members and together migrate with the seasons in search of better pastures for their yaks and sheep.

What is the dzamso?

The dzamso is the traditional administrative system of the villages of Lachen and Lachung, high altitude communities speaking a Tibetan dialect and settled in Sikkim’s North District. This system of self-governance was initially established during the first half of the 19th century in order provide structure and cohesion for these societies and their activities. These communities were too far removed from the central authority to follow rules applicable to other regions of Sikkim. Many similar cases can be found throughout the world, particularly in Nepal and Tibet. The studies of Te in Nepal presented by C. Ramble (1991, 1993) and of Nyi-shang by Ph. Sagar (1990) provide interesting comparative examples. During the time of the Sikkimse kingdom, the dzamso and the pipsam (gpi dpam) or village chiefs were recognized and used by the king (chos nzul) as a means of delegating his authority. In the 1970s, when the Indian Government initiated the reorganization of Sikkim’s administration and introduced the
panchayat" system of local government, the new system was not imposed in the valleys of Lachen and Lachung. Eventually, the dzuwa was officially recognized in 1985 and continues to function today. The dzuwa is an interesting example considering that few of these surviving political systems throughout the Himalayas were officially recognized by the governments in place (see for example the case of Ny-shang in Nepal where the system ceased to exist in 1977 after the establishment of the panchayats).

The word dzuwa has three meanings. Literally, it refers to the 'gathering place' but also to the institution in-charge of administering and organizing activities within a given territory, as well as to the general council of villagers composed of household heads.

The dzuwa - or general council of Lachenpa villagers - is directed by a group of people, elected or designated by villagers depending on the period, to represent them and manage village affairs. This council of representatives, referred to as the lheyne (las sna) and now better known as the panchayat, is composed of two pipos, six gomha (gyug ba), two tsepas (rtse pa) and two gryugpas (rgyug dpun). This council or lheyne is changed every year unless the public wishes to renew its mandate. It is responsible for the application and respect of the community's laws and regulations, and for the organization of the main village events. It schedules the meetings of the village's general council where decisions are taken and issues before each one in order to discuss the agenda and measures to be proposed. Within the lheyne, the pipos and the gomha see the issues of orders while the gryugpas and the gryugpas are there to assist them. The two pipos, originally called chyugpas (gyi dpun) or 'king of the public', are the village chiefs, possessors of authority, spokespersons of the lheyne and Lachenpa's representatives to the outside world. Since 1978-79, they are no longer nominated as was customary but are elected by the general village council. The gomha, literally the responsible people of the village, are to assist the pipos in their functions, in taking decisions, in making the system work and in dispensing justice. They were previously designated by the pipos but are now also elected by the public. The tsegpas or 'accountants' were previously the collectors of the various taxes that were to be handed over to the Chegyal. They have now lost that function and instead are responsible for calculating times and maintaining the books. The gryugpas finally are designated by each of the pipos as their assistants during the village meetings notably by calling members to assemble by announcing the traditional "tsen naavy" (tsen naavy).
The elections of the thevna take place every year at the time of the lunar New Year just after the monastic mask dances. Until about thirty years ago, the pipons were not elected as it the case today, but were nominated by a group of people called thevna (duon rnyi) who were considered to be the most respected, honest and experienced members of the community. In the mid-1970s, Sikkim entered a new era following its merger with India. The entire Sikkimese administration was upset and restructured, and the repercussions of this upheaval were felt in the remotest corners of the old kingdom. The dzimsu did not remain unaffected by these changes and gradually took on a structure that would be considered as 'more democratic' by Western societies. This new system gave an equal voice to all villagers when it came to choosing the group of pipons, which was not the case in other Himalayan Buddhist societies whereby village chiefs were often chosen by means of ritual (Sajani 1990). In Lachen, this new measure even served to better legitimate the pipon's status. The first elections were in 1978-79 and continue to be held this day. After closing the accounts and wrapping up any unfinished business, the thevna officially resigns by ordering the dzimsu (gyi's sun) or last common meal and returning the dzimsu house keys to the public. Elections are organised in the next couple of days by a transitional group designated by the general council of villagers. In order to give more legitimacy to the new thevna and channel the votes, a list is compiled which consists of those considered to be eligible for the status of pipon. Elections begin once the general council of villagers and the lamas (who have been participating in elections since the early 1990s) agree on who should be included on the list. Everyone receives two voting ballots (with the seal of the pipon of Lachen on the reverse in order to avoid fraud) and writes on these the name(s) of his candidate(s). Once the voting is completed, the ballots are sorted by name and counted. The candidate with the most votes becomes the first pipon and the runner-up becomes the second pipon. Those from the third to the eighth place are elected gomchos and those in the ninth and tenth position are elected pipons. Once the elections are over and the new thevna is in place, the public shares the meal offered by the departing thevna.

The general village council is composed of Lachenpa households heads residing for the most part in Lachen. All Lachenpa household heads are not necessarily council members or khampo (khas po) either because they are lamas or because they recently separated from the main household. Further, only men can become members of the dzimsu, and no women are officially authorised to attend the various
meetings. However, a widow will take her husband’s place until their son is old enough to take charge or if they had no son, until she adopts one. When, according to villagers, the dzomsa of Lachen was first established during the first half of the 19th century with Dorje Samdup as the first pipom, it had a very small membership and anyone who wished to join could do so if he met the previously mentioned conditions. The pipoms of those days even promised land to those willing to join. The number of members then rose from about 60 to 1936 to 80 in the early 1970s and to 175 in 2003. In the early 1990s, new measures were put in place in order to limit the membership’s rapid growth, and today the rules are much stricter. Only Lachenpas by birth can now join the dzomsa, and the general village council only accepts two new members a year.

Meetings are held in the dzomsa’s new house or ning khrim (ning khyim) built in 1984–85, and which today represents the ‘gathering place’. After the ‘zur namo’ call to meetings, people have thirty minutes to assemble and make their presence known to one of the pemchos taking attendance. Members then sit in a circle without following any specific order or reserved seating except perhaps for the theyna in order to favour discussions and debate. If the lamas join the meeting, as it is the case when the matter of the day is of interest to them, they will sit on the central benches facing the theyna. Dzomsa meetings are held as often as situations call for them. Previously, they only happened a few times a year in order to organise the main religious festivals, set tithing dates and when to move the herds. They are now much more frequent and varied. The functions of the dzomsa have evolved and multiplied since Sikkim joined the Indian Union, and the body itself has become the intermediary between the government and the people and acquiring, in this sense, more and more responsibilities towards both. Today the dzomsa has new functions that call for regular meetings, such as calls for tenders and the redistribution of property and money, topics to which we will return later on.

The dzomsa’s historical functions

As previously mentioned, the dzomsa was established to favour cohesion within the community by organising activities shared by the entire social group. In order to accomplish its objectives, the dzomsa has since the beginning enforced a number of rules of conduct. The old rules however were not compiled in a register, and it is only in 1991
that they were put down in writing in a 'book of rules' written in Tibetan and called terchen (deb chen).

The dzumsa of Lachen has a number of social responsibilities. First of all, it has a strong judicial role. The dzumsa determines the conduct rules to be followed by all individuals and sees to their implementation and respect. These paramount policing and judicial functions exemplify the system's rigidity and socialising role. Before a police station was established in the village, the dzumsa had the power to arrest all those who broke the law, but now only intervenes in the event of minor offences committed within its sphere of influence. The 'old' rules are numerous and the dzumsa also sanctions absences and lateness to meetings, disrespect of dates set for sowing or for moving herds, absence from community work, failure to make the required wood contribution to funerals and of butter for the laments at the monastery. The dzumsa can formulate new rules such as not being allowed to attend village meetings or monastic dances (cham) in a state of drunkenness, to fight, to gamble to the extent of putting the household's finances at risk, to throw tsampa (tsam pa) on the phani (dag mi) or middleman in-charge of negotiating marriages, etc. Whenever a rule is broken, the dzumsa imposes a fine which varies according to the gravity of the infraction and is recorded in the accounts' register. At the end of the year, before the new elections, a tupo (accountant) and a gompo work out the total fine to be paid by each individual and collect the dues that are kept in a common fund. In its judicial capacity, the dzumsa arbitrates disputes and conflicts within its own community without having resort to the courts of Chungthang or Mangan. In such a case, a complaint is first registered by the theyna who then becomes the only referee and judges the case. Cases handled by the dzumsa are numerous and varied: these may concern illegal land occupation, defamation, adultery or physical and moral injury. Judgement is pronounced by calling and informing the 'guilty' party who must then apologize and offer a khada and a chang to each member of the theyna and to the other party. The 'winner' is then offered a khada and a chang by the theyna.

Since its inception, the dzumsa also plays the role of intermediary between the different social strata and the government. It facilitates exchanges by acting as collector and distributor, notably in regard to taxes. Under the monarchy, the pipon collected the grazing, forest and land taxes once a year that were then handed over to the king by the new pipon when he presented himself after taking up office. Today, the pipon still collects some land tax for the government. The dzumsa
also serves as intermedial between the lay society and the monastery, a relation that involves a number of obligations towards both. During the important rituals, the dzomtsa takes care of collecting the supplies necessary to prepare the torma (griimmu) and feed the lamas. It also takes care of the annual collection of butter or malaay (mar skala) to feed the monastery's butter lamps. Once a year, it collects kitchen wood from each household for the council's meeting house. Each member is to supply the prescribed quantities or pay a fine.

The dzomtsa plays a very important role at the time of traumatic events such as death or repeated natural calamities when its solidarity function comes into full play. Death is a particularly important moment both for the concerned family and society, and the dzomtsa offers its support to be former by monopolizing the entire community. Strict rules are to be followed and each household has to contribute to the funeral by bringing, as soon as the gyapom has made the coil, a bundle of wood for the house of the deceased (khau shing) and one or two logs for the funeral pyre (ri shing). Log and bundle sizes are checked by the gyapom with a bamboo ring and names are entered in the register. Since 1991, new rules regarding cremation have been put in place testifying to the evolution of the dzomtsa. For example, in order to reduce funeral expenses, it was decided that only 15 people would help with the cremation and accompany the deceased. Workers are chosen by lot among volunteers while the cost contributes Rs25 that the dzomtsa hands over to the family to help with expenses. In 2002, the dzomtsa also decided that no meat or alcohol would be consumed at funerals.

The dzomtsa is also in-charge of organizing collective works undertaken for the benefit of the community. During the time of the monarchy, these were mainly concerned with the visits of high ranking civil servants or the building of communal structures such as the monastery or the dzomtsa house. Since the establishment of the new decentralizing government, more and more responsibilities are delegated to the Dzomtsa such as the organization of plantation works, construction of drainage channels, etc. These represent an important source of income for the dzomtsa and hence the local population. Important works intended for the benefit of the entire community are carried out jointly by all members of the village's general council and the monastery and are referred to as mandatory and non-excurable. Every household has to participate and absences are severely penalized. In the case of smaller tasks, such as the construction of welcome gates...
or the sweeping of streets prior to the visit of high ranking officials, a small number of workers are selected by lot.

The dzumsa of Lachen has always carried out a certain number of economic functions and played an important role in the organisation of traditional activities. In order to coordinate the community's efforts and give everyone the time to repair the fences that will protect their crops from the animals that roam freely throughout the entire territory, the dzumsa sets the sowing and harvesting dates for the different levels of the valley, especially for the village of Lachen and the hamlets located to the north of Samdong. In order to favour the re-growth of the grass, the dzumsa also sets the dates for moving the herds and determines the altitude below which the animals are not allowed to graze during the summer months. It sets the dates for bringing in the hay from public lands in order to give everyone the opportunity to put up adequate winter reserves.

Adapting to emerging challenges: the new roles of the dzumsa

Even since Sikkim joined the Indian Union, the dzumsa's responsibilities have not ceased to evolve and the original system has shown a high level of flexibility and adaptability when faced with new economic and political situations. The challenges have indeed changed, and the dzumsa's position as a viable institution is constantly being re-evaluated.

On the economic front, the dzumsa now has additional duties. Sikkim merger with India and the closure of the Chinese border have caused a number of changes in traditional activities that were then primarily centred around agro-pastoral activities and trade. The Lachenpas used to barter wood and oranges originating from Sikkim's lower regions for Tibetan barley since the locally produced quantities were insufficient. With the establishment of an Indian bureaucracy, the local population found itself stripped of certain rights, notably that of managing its own territory and its resources. For example, pressure from the army has gradually and continuously reduced the extent of the territory exploited by the people of Lachen, and the government restricted access to protected forests and the gathering of minor forest products and medicinal plants. As a result, the people of Lachen have had to look for alternative sources of income and re-orient their activities. Today, most households still practice agro-pastoralism and agriculture as their basic economic activity but all are also investing in
new economic ventures such as tourism, contract work, employment with the government or the army, etc.

In response to this changing economic landscape, the dzamna adapted itself by implementing a number of measures allowing it to take advantage of the situation. For example, it has put in place a very strict system for the allotment of government jobs that do not require a qualification beyond Class X - such as electrician or watchman -, or for the allotment of government contracts that are auctioned during the meetings of the village’s general council. Contract go to the highest bidder, whether a layman or a lama, although they cannot be given to non-dzamna members. Once a contract has been allotted, the successful contractor must quickly deposit the due sum in exchange of which the lhya is issued a certificate or agreement (gau rgyis) in order to protect him from any extortion attempts. The entire sum is paid into the communal dzamna account which, as we will see, will be equally redistributed among members of the general village council, including the lamas.

The dzamna has also implemented a business tax. Every year, at the time of Drug ko takes bchi - one of the annual Buddhist festivals held during the summer -, it collects a tax on shops, gaming parlours and cinemas that varies depending on the size and revenue of the business and which is paid into the communal dzamna account. Since 1985, it has also been setting the price of certain local products, particularly butter, cheese and livestock in order to protect the poorer members of the community. Before this measure was put into place, prices were sometimes very high for the profit of the rich who produced a surplus and to the detriment of the poor who were forced to buy from them.

Finally, the already mentioned redistribution role of the dzamna is one of its most important. It represents a significant means of financial help for the entire community without which many households would find themselves in difficulty. This redistribution role is relatively recent and came with the changes previously discussed. The money collected from auction sales, taxes and fines is accumulated in the dzamna account and redistributed among members as need be.

2 In most cases, the lhya sets very reasonable rates: Rs150-180 for one kg of butter, Rs 120-150 for cheese compared to Rs200-250 in Gangtok. The price of a medium sized bull is set at Rs 9,000, Rs5,000 for a yak and Rs 1,000 for a sheep. These prices have not changed since 1996 and whoever tries to sell at a higher price risks a very stiff fine.
dzumas of Lachen, unlike that of Lachung, does not redistribute once a year but whenever it is most required by the population, generally four or five times a year. This usually coincides with important religious or social events when people have to incur important expenses like in December before the monastic dances or in June before moving the herds or harvesting the first potatoes.

The greatest challenge for the dzumas of the 21st century is met on the political front where important pressures constantly put into question the viability of the system. The greatest 'danger' comes from the intrusion of state level politics, and the dzumas indeed nearly failed during Sikkim's 1999 general election. The dzumas was then divided in two distinct factions, one supporting the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) party and the other the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP). At the time of the lheynds' annual elections, instead of putting aside their differences and prioritising the welfare of the whole community, each party elected its own representatives and further divided the community. Relations between households became tense with some taking radical measures against opposing families. The population remained divided for nearly a year until the next general elections with two separate dzumas organising the usual activities such as sowing and moving herds, independently. Later on, the lheynds supporting the SDF party gained full legitimacy, and gradually, a few influential persons, saddened to see the system disintegrate, preached for a reunification which did eventually happen a few months after the elections. In order to prevent a recurrence of such events and protect their institution, the leaders of the dzumas decided to take some measures before Sikkim's general elections of April 2004. Several motions were voted and adopted by the entire population. For example, displaying party flags in the village or talking politics during the village's general council meetings became punishable offences.

Conclusion

The role of indigenous political systems is increasingly being questioned by government institutions that favour uniformity within their territory. National policies have taken over and few local systems can resist the economic and political pressures. For the time being, the dzuma of Lachen seems to be adapting itself and finding ways to survive the pressures of state politics; it has indeed proven itself capable of adapting to changing circumstances. Structural changes within the dzuma have been numerous since Sikkim became a part of...
Indus, and the Lachanás seem more than ever determined to defend their interests and an institution that is so beneficial to village life. But for how long will the dzogsal be able to face these internal and external threats? Is this structure really indispensable and will it keep on renewing itself successfully?

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