NARRATIONS OF CONTEST: COMPETITION AMONG REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL LEPCHA BELIEF AND GURU RINPOCHE IN SIKKIM

JENNY BENTLEY
University of Zürich/ Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

Myths of a magical contest between a practitioner of local religious tradition and a Buddhist counterpart are common in large parts of the Himalayas and have been well documented. The most famous account of these mythological competitions is between the Bonpo religious practitioner Narubon (or Naro Bonchung) and Milarepa at Mount Kailash.[1] There is a less known narrative of a competition between a *bóngthíng*, a protagonist of Lepcha religious tradition,[2] and Guru Rinpoche, a Buddhist protagonist,[3] told among the Lepcha of North Sikkim that has recently been compiled in written form in Lepcha language. The magical contest is said to have taken place in Chungthang where footprints can still be traced in a rock and rice grows despite the high altitude. This sacred place is known as Guru Ney do (Lepcha *nye dho*, Tib. *gnas rdo*, holy rock). The Lepcha are a Tibeto-Burman group living in the southern Himalayas in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. In their religious tradition the landscape around them is inhabited with

[1] For the Buddhist versions of the competition see Hoffmann 1950a: 197–210, 277–90; Hoffmann 1950b: 65–77; Das 1984 18–24; for version from other perspective see Karmay 1972: 86–93, Reynolds 2005: Chapter 5, Blondeau 1973: 63–94, Helffer 1995: 121–40; Tucci 1937: III, Tucci/Heissig 1970: 260ff.

[2] In the following I will use the term Lepcha protagonist or Lepcha religious practitioner. Hereby, I am not primarily referring to the ethnicity of the protagonist, but to his function within the local religious tradition of the Lepcha community.

[3] In the collected accounts the narrators use different names when referring to the Buddhist saint. The most detailed oral narrative uses the name Guru Padmasambhava. This is Sanskrit and means 'he who is born from a lotus' (see Grünwedel 1898: 447). Most other oral versions speak of Guru Rinpoche. In the written version the saint is called Guru Udyen. This comes from the Tibetan *U rgyan pa*, meaning 'the person from Udyana (Kafiristan) (Grünwedel 1898: 447; Grünwedel 1896: 529). For the sake of consistency I will use the term Guru Rinpoche in this article unless in direct quotations. Guru Rinpoche is a historical and mystified figure whose real name is not known. He was born in Kafiristan and called to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen (reign: 740–786 AD) to subdue the demons preventing the construction of the monastery in Samye. On his way he is supposed to have subdued many local supernatural beings all over the Himalayan region (Gründwedel 1869: 529). On Guru Rinpoche in Sikkim see also Stein (1972 [1962]: 66) and Waddel in Risley (1972 [1894]: 244).

supernatural beings and spirits. Any disturbance of the supernatural causes disease, natural disaster or social conflicts and disputes. Two different kinds of religious practitioners mediate between spirits and humans. The *bóngthíng* is always male, has knowledge of medical plants and controls evil spirits solely through ritual performance, but cannot function as a medium. The *mun* on the other hand can be male or female and fits into the classical definition of a shaman.[4] His or her soul can travel; a *mun* works as spirit medium and appeases evil spirits. Tibetan Buddhism[5] was propagated in the Lepcha inhabited territory since the 17th century and was the state religion until the Sikkimese kingdom became an integral part of India in 1975. Today, most Lepcha in North Sikkim are Buddhists and practise elements of their earlier religious tradition side-by-side or integrated into Buddhist rituals. The spread of Buddhism provided a new religious context for the Lepcha people, and also went hand in hand with the establishment of an entirely new political system—a kingdom with a feudal ruling class.

The narrations of competition from different cultural groups all over the Himalayas, including the ones I collected among the Lepcha, portray the fragile nature of the relationship between local religious traditions and Buddhism, some more openly indicating the greater power of the latter[6] whereas others give validity to both. They open a discourse on themes such as cultural and religious assimilation and subjection, often however, they do not describe a conflict between two incompatible belief systems ending with one suppressing the other, but result in delineating fields of religious competency and ritual activities.[7] Further, the origin of respective characteristics of the shamanic and Buddhist drum is explained,[8] or the loss of script in tribal communities arises from the competition.[9] The variations of the competition narrative among the

---

4 For definition of 'shaman' see Shirokogoroff 1935; Eliade 1964 [1951]; Reinhard 1976.

5 Most Lepcha in North Sikkim follow the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhism in Sikkim as well as other parts of the Tibetan world has fused with local religious belief such as the worship of Mount Khangchendzönga. In the following I will be using the term Buddhism to refer to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim and its localised specialities.

6 Oppitz 1968: 134–5 (Sherpa).

7 Höfer 1975: 1–7 (Tamang), Mumford 1989: 54 (Gurung), Macdonald 1976: 319 (Muglan).

8 Mumford 1989: 52 (Gurung), Vinding 1998: 414–5 (Thakali), Riboli 2000: 105 (Chepang), Oppitz 1998: 334ff. (Naxi and Moso).

9 Vinding 1998: 414–5 (Thakali), Hoffmann 1956 (Ghale), Mumford 1989: 53 (Gurung), Oppitz 2008.

Lepcha in Sikkim stand out due to two other distinctive features. First, their main focus lies on the integration of the Lepcha community into Buddhism understood as the religion of a new state structure dominated by a foreign ruler from Tibet. Therefore, the narrative additionally addresses questions of political subjugation and domination by people perceived as 'others'. Second, an extensive part of the numerous versions are told in the genre of prophecies, the content of which can vary greatly depending on the narrator. Some of them are read as fulfilled, others debated about. These prophecies are told as integral part of the competition narration, but also in combination with other myths. Analytically, I will use the term 'magical contest' to refer to the verbal and physical disputes between the Lepcha *bóngthíng* and the Buddhist saint; and 'prophecies' to refer to the words spoken and acts performed by Guru Rinpoche after the actual contest is over. The magical contest and the prophecies are understood as components of the collected versions of the competition narration, thus this term encompasses both of them.

Searching for the mythical traces in the landscape, it was surprising to find that the imprints and other markers at the location where the competition is said to have taken place, are predominantly connected to a different account in which Guru Rinpoche fights and kills a female demon. The majority of the people from the region tell this alternative narration in connection with the sacred space and do not mention a competition or even an encounter between the Buddhist saint and a Lepcha religious practitioner. This led me to a more detailed investigation on different levels than previously expected: If not known or narrated locally, in which section of the Lepcha community is the competition narration told? Why did this competition narrative emerge? What makes it an interesting and productive account to narrate?

THE MAGICAL CONTEST AND GURU RINPOCHE'S PROPHECIES

The sources I rely on in this article stem from fieldwork conducted in Dzongu (Zónggú in Lepcha), the Lepcha reserve area in North Sikkim, and in the village Chungthang that lies just outside this protected area. I collected a number of oral variations of the competition narrative as well as contextual data on which this article is based. These are one long and detailed oral account, a number of shorter versions as well as follow-up discussions and interviews on the magical contest and the prophecies.[10]

[10] I have been conducting fieldwork among the Lepcha since 2005. The data used in this article was collected in 2009 and 2010. In respect for the anonymity of the narrators

Further, I rely on a recent written source in Lepcha language, in which the author compiled this oral tradition from a version he had heard from two senior members of his village community (Lepcha 2009). In the following, I first discuss the protagonists mentioned in the various versions I have collected. Then I give one coherent account of the competition myth based on the version compiled in written form. This written source is considered an oral text (see Finnegan 2007: 10ff), e.g. oral tradition compiled and written down. It has large amount of detail, but for the sake of this article, I focus on the main narrative strand of the competition. Then I discuss additional prophecies attached to the competition story. In contrast to written texts, oral accounts are transmitted interpersonally with no fixed reference point and memory in oral transmission is not verbatim. Consequently, many variations of one narrative are the norm. Some highlight certain episodes, whereas others omit them completely (Goody 2000: 37–8). Therefore, the variations to the competition story found in other collected oral versions as well as the alternative flavours and connotations they add are discussed in later parts of the article.

The protagonists

The Lepcha counterpart is not always clearly defined as a religious practitioner, but described as a venerable old man or great-grandfather (*thikúng*) and only his actions reveal supernatural powers. In the written and in the most detailed oral version the old Lepcha man is called Thikúng Ádik, who is defined as a famous Lepcha priest with strong magical abilities (Tamsang 1980: 462), sometimes he is also referred to as the first Lepcha king. Three versions of the collected competition narrative speak of Thikúng Munsalóng participating in the magical contest with Guru Rinpoche. Thikúng Munsalóng is a well-known legendary figure simultaneously described as a powerful *bóngthíng*, Lepcha leader, hunter, and scholar. He has the air of a supernatural being and is also perceived as an ancestor and historical figure. In some regions Thikúng Munsalóng is associated with the economic shift from hunting to cultivation (Simick 2001), but according to the accounts most commonly known he is believed to have invented Lepcha script as well

and my interview partners I am not going to name the source of the versions of the competition narrative or discussions referred to in this article, but indicate when a different version is given.

as assisted Lhatsun Chenpo (1597–1654?)[11] and/or Guru Rinpoche[12] in pacifying local demons and spreading Buddhism in Sikkim (Namgyal/Dolma 1908: 31). When this incident is narrated in the Lepcha community, Thikúng Munsalóng is said to have taught Lhatsun Chenpo about the rites, beliefs, and the sacred landscape of the Lepcha people which the latter then incorporated into Tibetan Buddhism to create a unique Sikkimese form (see also Foning 2003 [1987]: 188). Therefore, naming Thikúng Munsalóng as the protagonist, adds a different connotation level. Indirectly, the 'new' religion (e.g. Buddhism) is portrayed as having been shaped by adopting elements from the Lepcha indigenous belief and not vice versa. Lepcha religious tradition is consequently placed in a more powerful position, it is not described as dominated by Buddhism but as actually nourishing it. Syncretic influences are reversed.

Main narrative compiled from the written source

Guru Rinpoche comes up from the plains on his way to Tibet and subdues demons in Lepcha territory. Then he meets Thikúng Ádik at a hill called Damchu.[13] He addresses him as the master of evil spirits and accuses him of provoking demons so that they torture human beings. Thereupon Thikúng Ádik responds:

> 'I, Ádik, am the ruler of light and fire here. If illness and disaster befalls my people, I will extinguish it myself.' The devout Uden [Guru Rinpoche] said: 'Inflicting evil spirits onto mankind, bringing trouble onto brothers and relatives is a great sin. Now you also should follow the lessons of the Lord Buddha.' Thikúng Ádik said: 'I am the ruler of light and fire in the ancestral land of the Lepcha people. What is the

[11] Lhatsun Chenpo or Lhatsun Namka Jigme (*lha btsun chen po Nam mka' 'jigs med*) was a Dzogchen master, his birth and death dates vary in different sources (Vandenhelsken 2003: 56). He is considered the main propagator of Buddhism in Sikkim (Balikci 2008: 22–3, 88–90, see also Waddel in Risley (1972 [1894]: 248-50). However, Mullard argues that the position ascribed to Lhatsun Chenpo has little grounding in historical facts being more the result of the construction of historical narratives during a later phase in the political history of Sikkim (Mullard 2011).

[12] There is confusion about whether Thikúng Munsalóng lived during Guru Rinpoche's or Lhatsun Chenpo's time, some even say he lived long enough to meet both of them. The encounter between Lhatsun Chenpo and Thikúng Munsalóng is also mentioned in the *History of Sikkim* (Namgyal/Dolma 1908: 31, 32). More research is required on this legendary figure.

[13] The written version is the only collected version where this first encounter does not take place at Chungthang but further down near the plains.

> reason for you to teach me things now you and I have to meet?' (Lepcha 2009: 3)[14]

They arrange to meet at a place called Numjiit plains.[15] The Lepcha protagonist goes there through a hole in the cliff and comes out at the rock up north, whereas Guru Rinpoche walks.[16] Both protagonists reach at the same time. This shows Thikúng Ádik that his adversary is a man of magical mastery, and he remarks that Guru Rinpoche possesses the powers of the god Tukshe. On hearing this, the Buddhist saint gets angry and says:[17]

> I am not Tukshe who mates with your pig, or who settles down with your fish. I am not Tukshe who wants to marry your daughters. I was born from a pure flower as a child of the living god. I am able to sit on water by making myself as light as the wind and I can sit calmly in the midst of a fire. (Lepcha 2009: 3, 4)[18]

Thereafter, Thikúng Ádik suggests competing with their supernatural powers and initiates the magical contest. He transforms into a small fly and sits on a leaf of a plant without bending it under his weight. Guru Rinpoche also turns into a fly, but he is still too heavy and the leaf gives way. The young Lepcha men and women watching rejoice. The saint

---

[14] go lyáng áresá satsuk samik pawú ʔádik yumbá kasusá migyâ zónnyin gunká ʔádók ʔánót plâganglá godâ sumsho, gyelúng ʔúngdennu libá múngmáthápnu zónnyinká numnu tsángkoká kidukbishangre luyo ʔátim gum. ʔálang hólá sónggyerumsá kónyengát ma ʔo. thikúng ʔádiknunlibá gore máyel málúk lyángsá satsuk samik panú mám pó. hó kasum ʔáring hlápgáttung shúgó hósá gá tsumdogátpá.

[15] This name is also found in the most detailed oral version and the narrator uses this name synonymously with the place name Chungthang. All other versions collected name the Ney do (or sacred rock) at Chungthang as the place of the competition.

[16] In Lyangsay village in the Kalimpong Subdivision there is a system of caves, villagers narrate that Thikúng Munsalóng entered these caves and came out at a point further north. An oral version states that Guru Rinpoche comes to Chungthang riding a sunbeam and then meets Thikúng Ádik there. That the Buddhist protagonist rides on a sunbeam is common in other contest narrations found in the Himalayas, usually they are racing to the top of a mountain as a main part of the magical contest.

[17] The following short verbal dispute on the god Tukshe thíng is only found in the written version of the competition story.

[18] gyálúng ʔúdenre sáklyáklung ʔámik prengpreng ʔátim ngâklung gore ʔádosá móngúdyepká ʔáyu mátlung tukshe magúnne gore ʔádosá ngútsâl taʔyumótkupká brimát bám tukse magunne gore ʔádosá taʔyumókup ʔágyápdepká brimátlung ʔáyumáttungbámshibú tukshe magúnpá liyámmaʔo. gore ʔátsóngripsá ʔábúrlómgyekthobú júmrumsá ʔákupgum. gore ʔúngplangká sukmutzang ʔákyâng mátnu ngánkhâtbú minóngká ʔákyet mátnu ngánkhât liyám ma ʔo.

acknowledges his defeat, he bows his head and says, "You are my teacher" (Lepcha 2009: 4).[19] Thereafter the Lepcha people enjoy themselves, eat meat and drink alcohol. Guru Rinpoche refuses to accept the rice and yams they offer him and accuses the Lepcha people of not being open to his words warning them that he came to this place to spread his knowledge, but now the people of Tibet will receive his wisdom. Then Guru Rinpoche takes boiled or beaten rice and predicts that after receiving his teachings favourably, the descendants of Tibetan people will set up their rule in Lepcha territory, if the cooked rice turns into a rice grain and a rice plant grows. He throws the rice and paddy sprouts. Seeing the miraculous powers of Guru Rinpoche and also recognising the threat of a foreign ruler in their lands, Thikúng Ádik and the attending people beg for forgiveness and protection:

> Holy teacher, you who cannot be hurt by fire, you were right. You who cannot be lifted up in the wind, who cannot be flooded away by water, who is born from a flower bud, who does not know death or sickness, who is like a god, our reverent saint, we were not capable of recognising you. We did not know to pay attention to your words. Though our eyes have reddened, our tongues are now faulty and we have come to a dead end, we ask you to correct our fate. (Lepcha 2009: 7)[20]

On hearing this, Guru Rinpoche throws cooked yams, which again turns raw and then shoots. The yam plant wraps itself around the paddy, so the saint picks it up and throws it to the other side of the valley. Thereby Guru Rinpoche prophesises that the Tibetans will only continue to rule over Lepcha territory, if they respect the local people of the place and let their religion thrive. If they suppress the Lepcha, their reign will be over.[21] The Buddhist saint mentions other prophecies and thereafter

---

[19] kasusá lopân hódokátyumbá libán phyókphokát yámmaʔo.

[20] minu dúpmalyelbú gyelúng lopân hó thâng yám ma ʔo sukmut nunlá lyâmmakhâtbú ʔúngnunlá bunmakhâtbú ribúmribúr lóm gyekthópbú ʔámák ʔádók manyinnubú rumzangbú chinyiwámbú gyelúng hóre káyúnun ʔádommum thyák malekne yámmaʔo. ʔádoringká thyom mamát nón yám maʔo. káyú ʔámikre zâlnónganglá ʔálire kyólnónganglá lómtónglómpálnónganglá ʔáringtómsung nákbongátmyáyám maʔo.

[21] The same prophecy is also attached to legendary account of the brotherhood treaty between the Lepcha chieftain and religious practitioner Thikúng Tek and the Tibetan noble man Gye Bumsa. In the official version the two meet and combine their lineages eternally in a blood brotherhood. This treaty is the mythological grounding for the political and cultural alliance of the Lepcha and Bhutia in Sikkim, commonly clubbed together as BL. There is however a second version prevalent in the Lepcha community. In this adaptation Thikúng Tek and Gye Bumsa do not make a treaty of eternal brotherhood, but the Lepcha chief binds the Tibetan noble man to a vow that his descendants

Guru Rinpoche leaves for Tibet carrying a skull gifted to him by Thikúng Ádik to help him subdue evil spirits if required (Lepcha 2009: 11). [22]

Additional prophecies

The main prophecies spoken by Guru Rinpoche as part of the competition narrative are what I will in the following refer to as the 'rice' and the 'yam' prophecies and are found in the vast majority of all versions collected. In some oral versions they only emphasise religious aspects. It is said that after Guru Rinpoche loses the competition, he claims this area is not ready to be tamed, but later a lama will return, subdue the demons and convert the Lepcha people to Buddhism. Lhatsun Chenpo is usually named as this lama whose arrival Guru Rinpoche foretold. Depending on the version there are also additional prophecies on future religious and political incidents and power struggles included in the narrative. Their fulfilment is either considered to have not occurred yet or is debated about. They range from the image of Lepcha religious tradition and Buddhism coexisting peacefully in Lepcha land, to the Lepcha religious tradition being dirtied and Lepcha women safeguarding it, to Buddhism being suppressed in Tibet and Lepcha land becoming the last haven of Buddhism, from the Indians having a grip on Lepcha land to the fear of China taking over Sikkim if the Indian government does not take care of the welfare of the Lepcha people. Depending on the context the account is told in, the narrator and the listeners will speculate about these prophecies. Their phrasing is cryptic, referring to people born in certain years of the Tibetan calendar and leaving space for individual interpretation and debate especially on particular present and past political circumstances. The prophecies are considered powerful, as the 'rice' and the 'yam' prophecies are perceived as already fulfilled, but they are not told as if engraved in stone. Their fulfilment depends on actions taken and deeds done at respective times to prevent the foretold from happening, or enabling it. This gives additional importance to the debates happening in the narrative setting. The following quote from the written source is given as an example for such a prophecy. Here the

---

will never suppress the Lepcha people. The very prophecy is mentioned, in case the pact is violated. This version, but not including the prophecy, was first recorded by Halfdan Siiger from his informant in Kalimpong in the late 1940s (Siiger 1967: 28).

[22] gyelúng lopân gúrú ryúmbúchire thikúng ʔádiknu bi thómbú mân thyákʔyúng bunu lómká múngmápang tyulung pât panú hrísúng dicensámpáthárúsá drikâ khyâká ʔábryángká sámye linbú lyángká rumsá likát zúmyám maʔo.

Lepcha are told to be careful in times of certain future rulers, or else there will be loss of fortune:

> In the future, at a time similar to now, in a Monkey year, the posterior of a Lepcha mother of a Tiger year may accept bribery which shall be sweet. If the Lepcha do not pay heed to knowledge, they will never retrieve their fortune. The Lepcha should pay heed to knowledge. If they know how to search, the lost jewels of Tibet shall be found. If they do not know how to search, their fortune will fall into the hands of monkeys. (Lepcha 2009: 10)[23]

CONTESTED NARRATIONS: ON A DEMON AND INTEREST GROUPS

When narrating the competition between Guru Rinpoche and a Lepcha practitioner traces are pointed out in the present-day landscape. Still today in Chungthang, there is a flat land where red rice grows[24]—a plant that usually cannot be cultivated in this altitude and climate—and a village beyond Chungthang, in the direction Guru Rinpoche threw the yams, is called Búk, which is Lepcha for 'yam'. Interestingly however, these landscape markers mentioned in all versions of the competition narration are locally related to alternative accounts: Guru Rinpoche is on his way to Tibet subduing the demons of the land. He preaches Buddhism to a Samo mung, a female demon. In some versions she attacks him actively. Guru Rinpoche then chases and fights her. Some sources say the imprints in the rock occurred then. Thereafter, the saint shoots arrows at her, the first arrow misses, and leaves a hole in a cliff above Chungthang. The second arrow hits the demon. She is killed at a place called Maltem, approximately 5 km from Chungthang in the direction of Lachung. There Guru Rinpoche chops the demon into pieces and hangs her body-parts on a rocky cliff. The stone formations can still be seen. After, or in some variations, during the fight Guru Rinpoche rests for lunch, some boiled rice falls to the ground and the rice field comes into existence. His lunch packet is tied with strings of the yam plant, this he

---

[23] tsângnámká tyúʔálom gyúrbá sathangnámbú róngkupnunre máyel ʔámúsá tacekre pâ-tkupsá gizobán suhunámká ʔumshang mátsho. Róngkupsangre ʔothánámká rikbú mamátgang róngkupsangnu ʔyóng ʔore sathálá lódup makhâtnayám maʔo. róngkupsang rikbú mátnubám gát yám ma ʔo. dóngyâlágang ʔorenámká fátnónbú pâtlyángsá nórpú ló dupkhut ma ʔo. dóng mayângang nám ʔothá aʔyóng ʔore sahusá ʔákâká shornónshang gun máʔo.

[24] Since a few years now, rice does not grow anymore on this specific piece of land. At present (early 2010) the area is strewn with garbage and partially polluted with sewage from the adjoining houses (see also NOW! Newspaper. 4th of May 2011, page 2).

throws away towards the opposite side of the valley. Some sources say the traces in the stone are also made during this time.[25] This alternative narrative is also mentioned in a publication from the mid-1960s (Olschak 1965: 165). No prophecies are attached to this account.

These unexpected findings raised questions and triggered the need to investigate the relevance and the meaning of the competition narrative in the wider cultural setting of the Lepcha community. Oral narratives are understood as social action performed by tellers to specific audiences (real or imagined) in a particular time, place and setting, while being constituted by repetition and patterning (Tonkin 1992: 97f.). Narratives always have narrators, oral texts (recounted, enacted, or written down) are therefore not just there (Finnegan 2007: 159), but are cultural products moulded by different interest groups and players in society. So was the competition narrative locally not known at all? Who tells which story? And what do the various members of the Lepcha community think about the different mythological explanations of the landscape markers? In Chungthang and the surrounding villages of Dzongu the majority of the villagers regardless of their age had no recollection of a magical competition or even a meeting of Guru Rinpoche and a Lepcha religious practitioner. The informants telling me about the competition narrative mainly came from a section of the Lepcha community involved in the strengthening of Lepcha culture and active in the civil society of Sikkim. One of their main activities is to compile and publish works on Lepcha oral tradition, and organise rituals and other cultural functions. In this process they are canonizing Lepcha culture (see Goody 2000). The Lepcha have a script of their own, but the narrative corpus on Lepcha religious and cultural tradition called *lúngten sung* in Lepcha was transmitted orally. The majority of old documents in the Lepcha language are translations of Buddhist scriptures with only a few texts with indigenous traits, later on Bible translations and textbooks were produced (Plaisier 2007: 17; Klafkowski 1980a, 1983). Only recently did the spread of literacy spur a production of publications in Lepcha language and script, but still hardly any literature in Lepcha language originates from Dzongu. The competition narrative is one of the oral

[25] Two sources combine elements of the competition narrative and the account on the female demon. Guru Rinpoche comes on a sunbeam and Thikúng Munsalóng through a cave underground. They meet at the stone, have lunch, when Guru Rinpoche drops the rice and throws the yam-string, Thikúng Munsalóng puts his walking stick in the ground and a specific tree (Sámbráng kúng in Lepcha, species in the genus *Schima* (Family *Theaceae*) grows of it. These are the only variations collected in which the two religious practitioners meet, but do not have a contest. Guru Rinpoche then goes on to chase and kill the demon after the mutual lunch.

narratives considered important enough to be published in written form. The written version of the competition narrative, *Gúrú ɔúdyensá námthó*, is one of the few books from that area in the recent years. So who is the audience of these tellers or writers? In the preface the hope is stated that the publication will stir interest among the Lepcha youth in their literature and encourage them to promote their culture by writing down Lepcha traditional narratives. With dominant written traditions (such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity) surrounding the Lepcha community, the written and printed word is considered to have the power of historical accuracy and to grant visibility. And both these qualities are also required in the political system of India today, perceived as necessary for cultural preservation. Political and economic rights are given to tribal groups (as well as castes) on the basis of quotas. In order to be acknowledged as a 'tribe' in this system, it is important to become and stay visible as a tribal group. One way of achieving this is to emphasise the written documentation of history and culture of the respective ethnic groups, the 'older' the sources the better. The competition story is presently also promoted in Dzongu in connection with a proposed statue project of Thikúng Munsalóng, who is sometimes mentioned as the protagonist. In this context short versions of this narrative were recently narrated or mentioned during large public gatherings organised by the local Lepcha association. Interest groups among the Lepcha community are therefore consciously or unconsciously emphasising the competition narrative over the alternative and possibly older account of Guru Rinpoche fighting a demon which is connected with the same landscape. They are doing it in the context of promoting Lepcha culture and addressing various different audiences (youth, gatherings of villagers) in written and oral form.

When asked about the two different narratives explaining the identical landscape markers, the reactions among the Lepcha community differed. The competition narrative studied in this article is itself a variation of a genre common in Lepcha oral tradition found and known around the locality, even though not many villagers in Chungthang have heard this specific one. There are other accounts on contests between Buddhist Bhutia (Lhopo) or Tibetans and the Lepcha prevalent in the same region. For example, the local legend in which a Lepcha supernatural hero and a Bhutia noble compete in carrying water up a hill above Ship Gyer, a village in Dzongu, is known and widely told in the village community and beyond. Those Lepchas in Chungthang and surrounding who had never heard of a competition mostly shrugged and said, I must have gotten wrong information, as in their knowledge Guru

Rinpoche was fighting a female demon. Sometimes it was also mentioned that people with political or vested interests had invented the competition narrative. Efforts are also made by local members of the civil society to merge the two alternative stories connected with the landscape markers. It cannot be pinpointed when the competition narrative started to be prominent in Lepcha civil society and there was no conscious replacement of the previous account of the fight with a demoness. There are indications and locally made assumptions that the story in which Guru Rinpoche is chasing a demon is older, but it is also possible that versions of the competition narrative have been subliminally present for quite some time, maybe more so in the Lepcha areas outside of Sikkim, but were not the dominantly locally known narratives. Informants telling me about the competition narrative believed the myth to be ancient and quoted older people they remembered hearing the story from. Namgyal Lepcha who compiled the account in written form, got the details of the narrative from two senior residents in his village. Interestingly, both of them had ties to the Kalimpong area just outside of Sikkim. The age and authenticity of the competition story relating to the landscape markers are therefore locally contested.

The competition narrative has become prominent in a certain section of the Lepcha community, the question remains why? Why do oral traditions change? Why does one emerge among certain tellers and become more prominent than others connected to the same markers in the landscape? Narrators in different locations draw on their recollection of a transmitted collective memory which constitutes culture while formulating their accounts, but in the process of reproduction the oral accounts change. Reasons therefore vary; certain transformation is inherent in oral transmission because of forgetting or personal creativity for example. Adaptations can also occur due to pressure from the outside, the teller's own interests of various kinds or changed needs and requirements in the community. In the case of oral accounts on Sikkimese history for instance, Saul Mullard has clearly analysed that commonly known narratives on events and people in the early Sikkimese history do not document history as it happened, but were modified or even emerged later on in train of the construction of a national identity (Mullard 2011). The speed of change in oral traditions varies, it can occur slowly and unconsciously to the people telling them (see for example Goody 2000: 31 and Ong 1982: 48 on how genealogies adapt). In this case the transformations are hardly contested within the community. But sometimes events and innovations in the surrounding world change them

harshly and consciously, maybe even radically breaking with older traditions and weakening or destroying previous social, religious, or political structures and institutions. These kinds of new adaptations are more obvious, perhaps distinguishable as 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1–5), and their authenticity can also become debated within the communities. Oral traditions are therefore not an unchanged relic of the past nor 'naturally' in existence, as no elements of culture are, but are part of a construction and re-construction process which forms all culture(s) during which cultural identity is formed, negotiated, strengthened, and transformed. On this analytical background I am interested in two central questions. Does the competition narrative deliver more efficient or contemporary ways of dealing with the present-day religious and political context of Sikkim, and become more popular in Lepcha civil society due to recently occurred changes as far-reaching as the transition from a Buddhist kingdom to an integral state of the Republic of India? In which way is this narrative, defined as social action and constitutive moment in cultural identity formation, more productive in the present day context than the alternative account on Guru Rinpoche fighting the demoness?

COMPETITION NARRATIVE AND THE PRODUCTIVITY OF ORAL TRADITIONS

Religious Conversion and Collateral Influences in Sikkim

The initial theme taken up both in the account in which Guru Rinpoche is fighting a female demon and in the competition narrative is religious conversion or even subjugation. In the Lepcha villages in North Sikkim Lepcha religious tradition and Buddhism co-exited (Gorer 2005 [1938]: 181) and still co-exist in a fairly well balanced, but also fragile relationship. Lamas and shamans practice side by side. There is no specific division of work, but also no direct competition. In the Lepcha villages the religious practices are characterised by syncretism, Lepcha mythology and rituals have incorporated Buddhist elements and vice versa. Following Siiger's description Lepcha belief "seems ready to adopt significant traits from other religions without losing its own character and it responds in a sensitive way to important changes in the people's way of life." (Siiger 1975: 302) In the past fifty years, however, there have been various changes in Sikkimese Buddhism unsettling this fine balanced syncretic relationship, especially triggered by the immigration of knowledgeable lamas from Tibet, who were trained outside of Sikkim. The rapport between Buddhism and elements of

Lepcha traditional belief is being questioned more than in previous years, it is being redesigned and sometimes also heavily criticised. Slowly, but steadily an awareness is growing among the Lepcha that they are actually following two distinct religious practices. In the Lepcha reserve area, Dzongu, and its relatively remote village areas the fragility of the intertwined religious systems is less noticeable, but becoming increasingly evident. Animal sacrifice in Lepcha traditional healing or annual rituals, a crucial element of Lepcha belief, is one of the main issues of contention (see also Balikci 2008). Strategies are adopted to minimize the contradictions; as an example the number of animals killed during sacrifice is reduced, cooked meat is offered, but blood is not sacrificed anymore, or rituals formerly performed combined are now done individually by either the lama or the *bóngthíng*. In some cases more radical steps are also taken. Animal sacrifice has been stopped in many places in Sikkim. On the other hand, sections of the Lepcha community, mainly in Kalimpong, are renouncing Buddhism (or Christianity) and reconverting solely to Lepcha religious tradition (or a revived version thereof) – another strategy to deal with the inherent contradictions of religious coexistence.

The altered and disputed perception towards syncretism and Lepcha religious tradition as a whole offers a possible explanation for why versions of the competition narration gained importance in the Lepcha civil society, as the need has increased to discuss the relationship between both religious systems and maybe even defend elements of the traditional Lepcha belief. Guru Rinpoche is portrayed as the conqueror of the demons in Lepcha territory and the propagator of Buddhism in both accounts. In contrast to the account where Guru Rinpoche is subduing a demon, the competition narration shows an interaction between two representatives of different religious tradition in Sikkim thereby allowing debates between the protagonists. It gives both protagonists a voice, whereas in the alternative narrative the demoness (as such connoted negatively) remains mute and merely Guru Rinpoche's activities are portrayed. This verbal and physical exchange provides space to discuss conditions of syncretism, entangle power relations and negotiate their terms.

In the collected versions of the competition narration Guru Rinpoche respects the abilities of the Lepcha protagonist after initial misunderstandings and accusations, and the Lepcha religious practitioner acknowledges Guru Rinpoche's strength, when the latter proves his magical powers during the prophecies. The narrative describes both contenders as equally strong, however not in direct

competition: The Lepcha protagonist wins in the magical contest, but Guru Rinpoche demonstrates his powers during the prophecies, which scares the people and causes them to seek his protection. This establishes Buddhism as a superior and powerful state religion without degrading the Lepcha religious tradition. Both religious practitioners go through a change from believing their own religious system is superior or stronger to accepting the knowledge and power of the other. Further syncretistic elements are introduced, such as Tukshe thíng. The short dispute on Tukshe thíng (also called Tashe thíng) quoted above adds an interesting dimension to the discussion on certain syncretic elements of Lepcha belief and Buddhism. The characteristics and actions mentioned by the Buddhist saints with a very derogative tone, refer to legendary stories on Tukshe thíng known and told in Lepcha community. He is a figure in Lepcha mythology connected to Guru Rinpoche as well as the Lepcha progenitor Tukbo thíng.[26] The latter mythological figure is merged with Tukshe thíng to such an extent that double names exist (Tukshe tukbo thíng or Tukbo Tukshe thíng).[27] At the same time Tukshe thíng is a Lepcha name used for Guru Rinpoche (Siiger 1975: 298, 302). This blending of mythological figures becomes apparent in the oral narrations on Tukshe thíng, as for example compiled in Stocks de Beauvoir (1975 [1925]: VII, VIII). Some of the characteristics and events described in them such as marriage with animals and the origin of various sacrificial elements of the Lepcha religious practitioners seem more applicable to Tukbo thíng, but similarly mythology and iconography of Guru Rinpoche are also intertwined in the accounts. Tukshe thíng is for example depicted with a pointed hat and a moustache. Stocks de Beauvoir refers to these narrative elements as “more modern beliefs” (1975 [1925]: 12) and thereby implies that the narrative elements clearly attributable to Guru Rinpoche were included in the mythologies at a later time as the ones referring to the Lepcha progenitor. Tukshe thíng as Guru Rinpoche can be understood as an adoption from another religion and stands as a syncretic element in Lepcha mythology. Some Lepchas are sceptical about this (see also Klafkowski 1980a) and according to K.P.

[26] Tukbo or Takbo thíng means ‘the lord who protects, protector, guardian, defender’ in Lepcha (Tamsang 1980: 434). This is a name used for the Lepcha progenitor more often called Fadróng thing. See also Siiger 1975: 306, Beauvoir Stocks de 1975 [1925]: 11.

[27] See also Siiger 1972: 239 for use of the name. Dualistic notion of deities is common in Lepcha belief, such as for example Ítbú debú rum, the creator and destroyer god, or Sakyu sánom rum, the fertility and fortune god. Sometimes one deity is connoted female and the other male, sometimes their properties are oppositional, but the dominant gender of each is not known. In ritual language and poetry this dualistic rhyming is used.

Tamsang, Tukshe thíng is "the omniscient lord, *n*. the prophet, having infinite knowledge; […] the founder of Lepchaism" (Tamsang 1980: 412).[28] In the written version of the competition narrative Guru Rinpoche describes himself as pure and declares he has nothing to do with transformations into animal bodies, animal consorts, and animal sacrifice; activities clearly disliked. Thereby, he distances himself from any syncretic elements regarding Tukshe thíng. This describes a purified conception of Buddhism which does not accept syncretistic beliefs and activities, nor respects the powers of the local religious specialist. Guru Rinpoche's attitude towards the local religious tradition and its practitioner however begins to change in course of the narrative compared to during the initial verbal disputes. This assumption is further solidified at the end of the written source when Guru Rinpoche leaves for Tibet where he uses a sacrificial device given by the Lepcha religious practitioner to aid him tame evil spirits in the landscape. Here elements of Lepcha belief are imported into Tibetan Buddhism. There are also prophecies implying the same. In versions of the narration naming Thikúng Munsalóng as the protagonist the notion of Buddhism nourishing from Lepcha religious belief is emphasised, turning any form of syncretism into an adoption of Lepcha belief by Buddhism.

Most versions of the competition narration underline the strength of Lepcha religion and the mutual respect between the two religious traditions, which are historically rooted in Sikkim, but increasingly contested in the recent decades. In form of a legendary religious account the competition narration delivers a historical and religious justification for the mutual understanding and respect between the religions. Tension becomes obvious, but is resolved. Namgyal Lepcha, when asked, gives a similar reason for bringing the oral tradition into a written form—he wants to draw attention to the close relationship of the Lepcha, who also follow their own belief, to Guru Rinpoche and Buddhism. The prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled, leave room for voicing fear and debating the validity and entanglement of both religious traditions.

---

[28] This definition implies that Tukshe thíng is the most important figure in ancient Lepcha belief. It could be possible that a pre-existing Lepcha supernatural being with the name Tukshe thíng (Tukshe tukbo thíng or Tukbo Tukshe thíng) did exist, but then was over time merged with the Buddhist saint—a view I think quite credible as a hypothesis, but requires more research and a thorough translation of the Lepcha book (*námthár*) *Tashi sung* (see also Plaisier 2003: 39, 42). Based on his preliminary research done on versions of this book collected in Kalimpong in the 1970s Piotr Klafkowski classifies Tashi sung as a text of Lepcha religious tradition which has been revised under the influence of Buddhism (Klafkowski 1980b: 112-13, 1980a, 1983). See also Mainwaring (1876: XI).

The characteristic of the prophecies turns more obvious when analysing the ethno-political context.

Prophecies and Multiple Voices on Political Suppression

The second and in some cases a lot more dominant theme addressed in the competition narrative is the political subordination of the Lepcha. In all versions collected Guru Rinpoche is clearly described as stranger and outsider coming into the region inhabited by the Lepcha with missionary intentions. In the written source the interaction between Thikúng Ádik and Guru Rinpoche starts out as a conflict over religious views and supremacy. Political supremacy and suppression is explained by possession of religious knowledge and becomes a topic in the end, as Guru Rinpoche prophecies that the Tibetan people, enriched with his religious knowledge, will set up their rule in Lepcha land. However, many versions of the competition narrative do not predominantly highlight the religious aspects, but describe the threat of suppression of the indigenous people by the Buddhist divine ruler as well as potential other rulers. In the most detailed oral version for example the first spoken dispute and the contest are already introduced with a more political overtone when Thikúng Ádik describes the Lepcha as the powerful kings of the respective region. By solely referring to the earthly powers of the Lepcha people, the contest is given an ethno-political, rather than religious component from the beginning, and political control over the area is at stake in the contest and the prophecies. It describes a contest between the insiders versus the outsider, who is threatening the existing political order.

The discussion on political supremacy becomes especially apparent in the prophecies and delivers further explanations for the growing interest in the competition narrative. Summarised all prophecies have the same core elements: If the people and especially the rulers do not respect Buddhism, Lepcha religious tradition, and especially the dignity and welfare of the Lepcha people, then their reign will perish or various other negative effects will occur.

In the first prediction the Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche lets rice grow and foretells the political subordination of the Lepcha to a Tibetan and Buddhist ruler and then, while letting yams grow, he utters another prophecy protecting the Lepcha and their local religious tradition. One can read an analogy into these prophecies also mentioned by Scott (2009: 200); rice stands for the ‘state’ or ‘civilisation’, whilst tuber or roots symbolise ‘swidden’ or ‘non-settled cultivation’. Guru Rinpoche lays the

sediment of the Buddhist state, but also protects the religious and economic lifestyle of the indigenous people of the area. In some versions the prophecy specifies that the reign will be ended after twelve generations if the Lepcha are not respected, a time frame which corresponds with the length of the rule of the Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim.

Both the 'rice' and the 'yam' prophecy are considered fulfilled by all the narrators, as people from the Tibetan region came, established a kingdom in Sikkim, and the reign of their descendants, the Namgyal dynasty, ended in 1975. The prophecies can therefore be told as a critique of the previous kingdom and additionally express pride in the present democracy with its existing alliances. The fulfilled prophecies also stand as warning for the present ruling class, as a warning of what can happen if the people indigenous to the place and protected by Guru Rinpoche are not treated with respect. They further bear hope that whatever political system might come, the Lepcha and their cultural and religious tradition will be eternally protected by the saint and will outlive it eventually.

However, among the Lepcha community (again only a certain section) there is not only a notion that the Sikkimese kingdom, but also that the present-day Sikkimese government is eroding their rights. This feeling of deprivation often goes hand in hand with the perception of being ruled by 'foreigners' and not by their own people—irrelevant of the fact that many landlords in the kingdom were of Lepcha ancestry and that there are also Lepcha representatives in the present government. The fear of losing privileges and reservations so far protected by Sikkimese law is ever-present in Lepcha society and is growing due to ongoing political debates. Additionally, the implementation of hydro-power projects and the protest against them have further split the Lepcha civil society into fractions, created insecurity, and intensified the controversies in the preservation of sacred landscape, the importance of Lepcha cultural heritage, and the political domination of the indigenous people in their own motherland. The not yet fulfilled prophecies give a platform for debating such topics. The prophecies warn the listeners to caution and provide hints about potential rulers in Lepcha land and the dangers they might bring. Their cryptic form allows speculation about misdeeds of the ruling class, allows a safe space to voice critique about the present political situation, and express fears.

Prophecies and Debates on Ethnic Domination

In a number of versions the rulers and potential suppressors are associated with the entire ethnic group of the Bhutia regardless of any historical accuracy. Therewith the historical suppression in a feudal structure is turned into the timeless domination of one ethnic group, the Bhutia, over another, the Lepcha. Thus a new level of connotation and material for debate is added.

In Sikkim, there is a historical political and cultural alliance of the Lepcha and the Bhutia, described as brotherhood and honoured by many in Sikkim. Both are considered the original Sikkimese and for example share a quota in the Legislative Assembly as well as in government jobs and education. Now, in present-day Sikkim the notion exists that some political forces, often associated with 'the Nepalese,' are trying to weaken and divide this historical Bhutia-Lepcha (BL) alliance. Heated debates on this topic have for example repeatedly been induced by the demand of Lepcha associations for separate Lepcha quotas or exactly 50% of the existing BL quotas. On this background, the competition narrative can be, and is by some informants, interpreted as a 'recent invention' of vested political interest groups attempting to split the historical alliance of the Bhutia and the Lepcha by giving a mythological justification for the felt suppression of Lepchas through the entire ethnic group of the Bhutia. It can also be narrated by interest groups to underline exactly these demands for separate representations.

Debates and Prophetic Powers

The competition narrative in its different versions gives means to analyse, in which way and to what extent actors of a socio-cultural group accept the ruling power and their policies, and debate shifts in power and dominance. Is the ruling class and the decisions made by it welcomed, ignored, resisted? As shown, the prophecies are debated about and the reading of the narrative is contested in the Lepcha community. Depending on the version, compliance with certain political setups and ideas are expressed whereas others also bear a subtext of criticism of past as well as possible present or future suppression. Any critique, fear or implied suppression of past or present-day actors of the ruling class is voiced through cryptically phrased prophecies uttered from the mouth of a most respected Buddhist saint and the discussion of these, but not expressed directly. The competition narrative draws on cultural elements native to and present in Lepcha as well as Sikkimese Buddhist culture (such as prophecies) and remains in the norms of a 'traditional' narrative. Certain versions of the competition narration can be read as 'weapons of

everyday resistance' (Scott 1985), but caution is called for when talking about individual intent, as the narrators are not necessarily consciously reacting to religious changes or shifts in ethno-political situations in Sikkim (see Scott 1985: 290, 300–1). The competition narrative is usually not told as part of a political strategy or anything close to resistance, but as a normal part of the mythological fundus, in with the prophecies create a situation where opinions and fears can be debated and expressed, each version adding a different flavour to it.

CONCLUSION

Documenting the account of a competition between a Lepcha religious practitioner and Guru Rinpoche led down an unexpected path, as there is another, locally more common narrative of the Buddhist saint fighting a demoness connected with the marks in the landscape. In the Lepcha community it is discussed, even disputed, when the competition narrative arose, some claiming it to be very recent and politically vested, others claiming it to be ancient. This directed me to thoughts on 'invented tradition' and on a quest for understanding why the competition narrative emerged as an important narrative. A rigid distinction between 'old' and 'invented' tradition cannot be drawn, as creativity and innovation are internal to the process of oral transmission, and the relation between changes in cultural narrations and changes in a surrounding is not a straight forward one. There might be cases, where it clearly can be shown that a narrative or a ritual has emerged from a new political setting, a drastic natural catastrophe or some other specific occasion and certain actors that can be pinpointed. But then, people, their stories and culture adapt to changes in various contested ways. Some adaptations are consciously motivated by actors and openly disputed, while others happen in slower and subtler ways. Some voices and stories are mere whispers in certain times, but being muffled does not make them new when they turn louder. Other narratives are only noticeable as echoes of obscure origin. Fixation on the distinction of old and new can be beneficial in some occasions, but often the question of authenticity and of 'the real' or 'the older' tradition blocks the view to more interesting questions—the questions like, why this narrative has become popular in Lepcha civil society, regardless of whether it was there beforehand? What makes the narrative productive and interesting in a cultural setting?

In comparison to the narration in which Guru Rinpoche chases and kills a female, there have been various shifts in content and genre. First, the focus of narration has changed. The protagonists are not a saint and

a demoness anymore, but two representatives of different religious traditions. Depending on the variations they are also described as representatives of two political interest groups as well as different ethnic groups. Instead of addressing the subordination of an evil spirit, which indirectly implies the subordination of previous religious traditions, the competition narrative shows a contest during which religious, political and ethnic supremacy is more explicitly negotiated. Second, the competition narration emphasises interaction. By holding a physical and oral competition both contestants get a say, can bring over their point, but also change their point of view in the course of the narration. The narration becomes more dynamic and personified in contrast to the alternative story during which Guru Rinpoche speaks through action and the demoness remain mute. Debates are not only opened up between the protagonists of the story, but also among the public listening to or reading the story. Third, a large part of the competition narration comprises of prophecies, not mentioned in the version where Guru Rinpoche kills a demoness, but also known as parts of other narratives. The two main prophecies are the same in all versions, while the additional ones sometimes mentioned differ. They leave space to speculate and discuss present and future events. Fourth, these dynamics are enhanced when the versions collected are compared, as each one of them includes different emphasises and views on topics such as religious, political or ethnic domination and relations. Summarised the range of topics discussed has been enlarged in the competition narrative and the focus is more on relationships, interaction, debate, and power negotiation.

The competition narrative can be used as a medium for dealing with, understanding, debating, maybe even influencing the current situation, and therefore becomes or remains an interesting narrative to tell, write, and share. The narrative with its different variations, interactive elements and the prophecies allows the expression of attitudes and feelings, and the discussion of questions concerning religious and political interaction, mutual respect, domination and suppression. The context of the telling of the narration and more specifically of the prophecies offers a space for people to debate what is on their mind; the sadness about their traditional belief being side-lined in comparison to Buddhism, the harmonious relationship of Buddhism and Lepcha belief and the threat to it, the fear or the necessity of a split between the traditional Lepcha Bhutia alliance, the frustration with past or present governments for stripping the Lepcha of their rights and suppressing the indigenous people, the chances of modern democracy compared to the feudal

system, and not least the power of religion over politics. All these opinions and problems can be and are voiced through this narrative and its variations, by changing emphasis, and discussing the prophecies.

In this line of thought oral traditions can be conceptualised as a discursive matrix through which different fears and opinions prevalent among the society are channelled. Oral tradition or myth does not give us insight into 'a' culture as a whole, but in close analysis of dynamics such as emerging oral narratives, the increasing emphasis on certain oral accounts, and existing variations and versions enables the deeper understanding of debates and dynamics on the current cultural field and the process of cultural identity formation and negotiation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Kachyo Lepcha for his continued assistance and friendship, the *bóngthíngs* of Dzongu, elders and other interview partners for sharing and discussing their stories with me. Further, I express my gratitude to Mickma Lepcha for the commitment and accuracy in the translation work on the written Lepcha source, and Heleen Plaisier for help in editing the translation. Thanks to Marietta Kind, Mark Turin, and Kerry Little for constructive inputs on earlier versions of the presentation at the IATS-conference 2010 and the present article. The research for this article was carried out during fieldwork for my doctoral thesis funded by the *Janggen Poehn Stiftung* and the *Forschungskredit der Universität Zürich*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balikci, A. 2008. *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors. Village Religion in Sikkim*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Blondeau, A. 1973. *La vie de Pema-Öbar: drame tibétaine*. Paris: Publications orientalistes de France.

Das, S.C. and A. Chattopadhyaya. 1984. *Tibetan Studies*. Calcutta: Bagchi.

Eliade, M. 1964 [1951]. *Schamanismus und archaische Ekstasetechnik*. New York: Pantheon Books [*Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*. Paris: Payot].

Gauchan, S. and M. Vinding. 1977. The history of the Thakaali according to the Thakaali tradition. *Kailash* V (2), 97–184.

Finnegan, R. 2007. *The Oral and Beyond. Doing Things with Words in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Foning, A. 2003 [1987]. *Lepcha. My Vanishing Tribe*. Kolkata: Sailee.

Goody, J. 2000. *The Power of the Written Tradition*. Washington, London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Gorer, G. 2005 [1938]. *Lepchas of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Pilgrims Publishing. First published: 1938. *Himalayan Village. An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim*. London: M. Joseph Ltd.

Gründwedel, A. 1898. Padmasambhava und Mandarava. Leptscha Übersetzung des Mandarava-Legende. *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 52, 447-61.

—— 1896. Drei Leptscha Texte, mit Auszugen aus dem Padma-than-yig und Glossar. *T'oung Pao* VII, 522-61.

Hobsbawm, E and T. Ranger. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Höfer, A. 1981. *Tamang Ritual Texts*. Wiesbaden: Steiner.

—— 1975. Urgyen Pema und Tünsur Bon: Eine Padmasambhava-Legende der Tamang, Nepal. *In* H. Berger (ed.) *Mündliche Überlieferungen in Südasien: Fünf Beiträge*. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1–7.

Hoffmann, H. 1956. *Die Religionen Tibets: Bon und Lamaismus in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*. Freiburg: Alber.

—— 1950a. *Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Bon-Religion*. Mainz: Akademie d. Wissenschaften u. d. Literatur.

—— 1950b. *Mi-la Ras-pa. Sieben Legenden*. München: O.W. Barth.

Holmberg, D.H. 1989. *Order in Paradox: Myth, Ritual and Exchange among Nepal's Tamang.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Karmay, S.G. 1972. *The Treasury of Good Sayings: A Tibetan History of Bon*. London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Klafkowski. P. 1983. …But they don't have any literature!' Or a few words in the Rong (Lepcha) heritage. *In* E. Steinkellner and H. Tauscher (eds.) *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History and Culture*. (Proceedings of the Csoma de Körös Symposium held at Velm-Vienna, Austria, 13-19 September 1981, Vol. 1). Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 163–73.

—— 1980a. Athing Joseph Rongong's manuscript of the Rong (Lepcha) story of Tashe Thing – a preliminary communication. Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zürich II, 137–42.

—— 1980b. Rong (Lepcha), the vanishing language and culture of eastern Himalaya. *Lingua Posnaniensis* 23, 105–18.

Lepcha, N. 2009. *Gúrú ɔúdyensá námthó*. Gangtok. Prashansha Printing Press.

Macdonald, A.W. 1976. Preliminary Report on some jhãkri of Muglan. *Journal Asiatique* CCL-1, 119–23.

Mainwaring, G.B. 1876. *A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language as it Exists in the Dorjeling and Sikim Hills*. Calcutta.

Mullard, S. 2011. *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History*. Leiden: Brill

Mumford, S.R. 1989. *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Namgyal, T. and Dolma, Y. 1908. *History of Sikkim (including Section 2: Pedigree of Sikkim Kazis).* Translated from Tibetan by Lama Dawa Kazi Samdrup. Unpublished typescript.

Olschak, B.C. 1965. *Sikkim. Himalajastaat zwischen Gletschern und Dschungeln*. Zürich: Schweizer Verlagshaus.

Ong, W.J. 1982. *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*. London, New York: Routledge.

Oppitz, M. 2008. *Die verlorene Schrift*. Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum.

——1998. Ritual drums of the Naxi in the light of their origin stories. *In* M. Oppitz and E. Hsu (eds.). *Naxi and Moso Ethnography: Kin, Rites, Pictographs.* Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich, 311-344.

—— 1997. *Eine Schamanenrüstung aus dem Himalaya*. Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich.

——1968. *Geschichte und Sozialordnung der Sherpa*. Innsbruck and München: Wagner.

Peters, P. 1981. *Ecstasy and Healing in Nepal: An Ethnopsychiatric Study of Tamang Shamanism*. Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications.

Pignède, B. 1966. *Les Gurungs. Une population himalayenne du Népal*. La Haye and Paris: Mouton.

Plaisier, H. 2003. *Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection*. Kern Institute Miscellanea 11, Leiden: Kern Institute.

—— 2007. *A Grammar of Lepcha*. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region 5. Leiden: Brill.

Reinhard, J. 1976. Shamanism and spirit possession: the definition problem. *In* J.T. Hitchcock and R.L. Jones (eds.) *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*. Warminster: Aris and Philips.

Reynolds, J.M. 2005. *The Oral Tradition from Zhang-zhung: An Introduction to the Bonpo Dzogchen Teachings of the Oral Tradition from Zhang-zhung known as the "Zhang-zung snyan-rgyud*". Kathmandu: Vajra Publications.

Riboli, D. 2000. *Tunsuriban: Shamanism in the Chepang of Southern and Central Nepal*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.

Scott, J.C. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press

—— 1985. *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.

Shirokogoroff, S.M. 1935. *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*. London: Routledge.

Siiger, H. 1975. The Gods of the Lepchas of Sikkim. *Proceedings of the XIIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions 1970. Studies in the History of Religions.* (Supplements to Numen) XXXI, Leiden, 298–304.

—— 1972. A Himalayan goddess of procreation. From the Lepchas of Sikkim. *Ex Orbe Religionum, Studia Geo Widengren, Pars altera*, Leiden, 236–45.

—— 1967. The Lepchas. Culture and religion of a Himalayan people. Part I. Results of anthropological field work in Sikkim, Kalimpong, and Git. *Publications of the National Museum. Ethnographical Series* XI,1.

Simick, P.T. 2001. *Rong kup lung ten ah bong chyo kung sung. [Legend of the Origin of Some Customs and Rituals of the Rong-Kups (Lepcha)]*. Kalimpong: P.T. Simick.

Stein, R. A. 1972 [1962]. *Tibetan Civilisation*. Stanford: Stanford Press. [*La Civilisation tibétaine*. Paris: Dunod Editeur].

Steinmann, B. 2001. *Les enfants du singe et de la démone: mémoires des Tamang, récits himalayens.* Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie.

Stocks, C. de Beauvoir. 1975 [1925]. *Sikkim: Customs and Folk-lore*. Delhi: Cosmo Publications. ["Folklore and customs of the Lap-chas of Sikkim." *Journal and proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal new series* 21, 325–505].

Tamsang, K.P. 1980. *The Lepcha-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Kalimpong: Mayel Clymit Tamsang. [Reprinted 2009]

Tonkin, E. 1992. *Narrating our Past. The Social Construction of Oral History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tucci, G. and W. Heissig. 1970. *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Tucci, G. 1937. *Santi e briganti nel Tibet ignoto diario della spedizione nel Tibet occidentale 1935*. Milano: Hoepli.

Vandenhelsken, M. 2003. Secularism and the Buddhist Monastery of Pemayangtse in Sikkim. *Bulletin of Tibetology* 5(1), 55–73.

Vinding, M. 1998. *The Thakali: A Himalayan Ethnography*. London: Serindia Publications.

Waddell, L.A. 1972 [1894]. Lamaism in Sikkim. *In* Risley, H.H. (ed.) *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Skylark Printers, 241–52.