Exorcising the Illusion of Bon "Shamans":
A Critical Genealogy of Shamanism in Tibetan Religions

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In descriptions of the Bon religion in Tibet by western missionaries, travelers, and scholars over the last century, the term that has become most associated with Bon is "Shamanism." Shamanism has been used to re-name what is widely regarded as Tibet's primordial native religion; its endurance as a category demonstrates a need to designate the indigenous religion in familiar western terms. There is a deep longing felt by many scholars, both past and present, to recover Tibet's silent origins, to identify the tracks of Tibet's prehistoric religious development, and then to discover whatever modern manifestations might exist on the margins of Tibet. This longing exerts a powerful pull on the imaginations of Tibetans and Tibetologists alike. In introducing his study of the myths and legends of ancient Tibet, Erik Haarh expresses his own fascination with exploring Tibet's uncharted territory:

> Studying the ancient Tibetan concept of life and death means intruding upon virgin soil. This feature of old Tibetan culture is, indeed, so utterly unknown and unexplored, that the ideas which have been advanced above, in the first instant may even appear with the cast of chimera…. Very few Tibetologists have ventured forth to explore, even superficially, this blank spot on the map of ancient Tibetan culture and history.[1]

Haarh's description of the pre-Buddhist period as a "blank spot" on the Tibetan map might seem apt when one considers the paucity of archeological and textual evidence available today about pre-Buddhist Tibet. Yet there seems to be a magnetic quality to this lacuna. The "blank spot" has been filled in by the imaginative projections of pioneering Tibetologists, with Shamanism as the label of choice for mapping this territory. We will see that Shamanism itself has "the cast of chimera," for it is an elusive term that tells us more about the history and needs of the western researcher than of ancient Tibet.

Like its conceptual kin "Tantrism" or "Lamaism,"[2] "Shamanism" proves to be a remarkably complex, multivalent term that has informed our

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[1] Erik Haarh, *The Yarlung Dynasty: a study with particular regard to the contribution of myths and legends to the history of ancient Tibet and the origin and nature of its kings* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad's Forlag, 1969), p. 327.

[2] Both of these terms have served as emblems of Tibetan Buddhism in popular and academic discourse, and their usage has been investigated in a number of recent studies. The category of "Tantrism" has been scrutinized and its discursive purposes reviewed. See Christian K. Wedemeyer, "Tropes, Typologies, and Turnarounds: A Brief Genealogy of the Historiography of Tantric Buddhism" in *History of Religions* 40.3 (2002), 223-259. For an examination of the term Tantra in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist context, see Donald S. Lopez, "The Heart Sutra as Tantra" in *Elaborations on Emptiness* (Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 78-104. For a genealogy of Tantrism within the British colonial imagination, see Hugh B. Urban, "The Extreme Orient: The Construction of 'Tantrism' as a Category in the Orientalist Imagination," in *Religion* 29 (1999), pp. 123-146. Urban has examined the role of the category of Tantrism in New Age religious discourse in "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age, and the Spiritual

interpretation and evaluation of Tibetan religion, and especially the relationship of Bon to Buddhism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many western writers used Shamanism as a monolithic category to subsume a great variety of religious phenomena. Most often it was assigned to the "native" tradition of Bon, with its dark occult practices. Black magic, fetishism, sorcery, divination, demonolatry, necromancy, exorcism, ecstatic trance, spirit possession, and various other supernatural powers were all thought to lie at the heart of Bon Shamanism. Though this noun was used loosely and indiscriminately, its function as an emblem of Tibet's ancient religious substrata becomes most evident when it is working behind the scenes in the drama of Tibetan history, a drama in which scholars cast Buddhism in the spotlight. For many of the early Tibetologists, aboriginal Bon was regarded as "given" or "uninterpreted," which gave them license to impose their own categories to label its strange features. Like so many other categories used in the study of "native" religions, shamanism begs to be analyzed as an exotic essence that is used for identifying the religion of the other, marking a "primitive" stage of religious and social evolution.

This article will trace how the pejorative evaluation of Bon shamanism comes to be challenged in the mid-twentieth century with the development of phenomenological studies of Tibetan religion. These "scientific" studies of Tibetan shamanism systematically catalogue its typical features, and the investigators often eschew the barbaric rhetoric that had been used to dismiss Bon as "primitive." Once the features of shamanism are identified, and the shaman's social function is described, the phenomenologist devotes considerable attention to describing the shaman's experience and to interpreting the shaman's symbolism. There is no hiding the fascination that these scholars feel for the Bon shaman as the exotic explorer of the netherworlds, with his wild theatrical appearance. Some scholars seem under a nostalgic spell when they idealize shamanism as Tibet's genuine archaic spirituality.

Among recent anthropologists, shamans in Nepal and Tibet have come to be understood in relation to Buddhist lamas, with their social and religious roles interpreted dialectically. In pitting shamans in duel and dialogue with Buddhist lamas, the shamans are often celebrated as spirit mediums whose "deconstructive voices" subvert Buddhist textual authority and the hegemony of clerical values. Here shamans have been salvaged by anthropologists as authentic healers, whose ecstatic experiences place them in a privileged position to criticize and resist the official orthodoxy of Buddhist lamas. For some anthropologists the shaman, whose roots go back to ancient Bon, is a trickster who undermines the elitism of their Buddhist opponents, subverting their moral seriousness and their dependence on textual knowledge.

Some Tibetologists remain skeptical of the value of "shamanism" in plotting the religious features of Bon, for they recognize that the term itself has the "cast of chimera." Numerous European scholars who study Bon

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Logic of Late Capitalism" *History of Religions* 39.2 (February 2000), pp. 268-302. For a critical genealogy of the term "Lamaism," see Donald S. Lopez, "'Lamaism' and the Disappearance of Tibet" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38.1 (1996), pp. 3-25.

literature have pointed out that the abstract noun "shamanism" has no equivalent in the Tibetan language, and thus it is not a "native" category. They deny that the Bon tradition has any precise analogue to the Tungus *Śaman* of Siberia. "Shamanism" in their estimation, is simply inappropriate for describing Bon, or indeed for describing any aspect of Tibetan religion. These textual scholars have sought to banish the ghost of "shamanism" from the study of Bon entirely. Their wish to deflate the term's value in academic discourse about Bon and Tibetan religion has not proved successful, however. Shamanism has earned a widespread currency in academic exchange, a much-inflated value in popular western spiritual circles, and even acceptance among Tibetans practicing in the west today. Current anthropologists, not to mention western enthusiasts of Buddhism and Tibetan Bonpos themselves, continue to find new manifestations of shamanism in Tibetan religion. Despite the protests of some of the leading western Tibetologists then, shamanism continues to resurface in the literature available on Bon and Buddhism, proving its resilience as a critical term.[3]

From a vantagepoint located at some distance from the field of Tibetan Studies, it will become clear that shamanism is not a single natural object that has been progressively disclosed by the objective scrutiny of western scholars. Rather, shamanism is a term that has been employed for a variety of ideological purposes. What makes the Bon shaman such an interesting image to track, from the benighted primitive to the post-modern visionary, from the diabolical priest to the New Age spiritual healer, is that it serves as a mirror that reveals much about those who have sought (and found) the shaman. The Bon shaman has been variously identified and represented according to the changing imaginative and social needs of the investigators. Wherever it has been identified—whether in texts, or in a lived social environment, or in symbol systems—its location has influenced the form of reasoning used to render it intelligible. As Jean-Pierre Vernant stated succinctly, the subject of a scholar's study is constrained by the reasoning and the disciplinary methods available:

> Reason does not exist until human beings attempt to understand some aspect of reality and to apply what they learn. Scientific

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[3] For a study of "critical terms" in the discipline of religious studies, see *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), especially pp. 16-18. Also see *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). In the Introduction to this latter volume, the editors offer the following etymology: "A 'term' is a boundary line, a line of demarcation. It defines a field in which work can be done, within the limits of the term. But like all boundaries, even those meticulously surveyed, terms are social and arbitrary, not natural and inevitable. What divides my property from my neighbor's is not a natural boundary but a social system within which certain definitions or property prevail. It is important to remember that terms function in the same way. They limit and regulate our reading practices. But they do not do so by divine fiat…. It is not the job of this text to regulate those boundaries more carefully. Rather, these essays attempt to de-naturalize the limits that our critical system imposes." In this article I argue that "Shamanism" qualifies as such a "critical term" in the discourse on Bon.

> rationality defines itself as it constructs the subject matter and methodology of each new discipline. In the human sciences, moreover, there is no virgin territory to explore; the fields of investigation are continents mapped by tradition and explored by religious thought. Trails have been blazed, itineraries set out. The problems that arise in any new field of study are always in some sense echoes of current social concerns, questions of identity: society seeks to know its roots in the past, its responsibilities in the present, and its fate in the future.[4]

Far from being "neutral" or "objective," the methods used by historians, philologists, and anthropologists are inevitably socially conditioned and informed by religious tradition.

Vernant's comment that there is "no virgin territory to explore" in the human sciences applies to both ancient Tibet and modern Tibetology too, and it raises questions about Haarh's earlier assertion. When scholars like Haarh have set out to map the territory of prehistoric Tibetan religion, their representations have followed the paths already blazed by Tibetan Buddhists, who developed their own images, categories, and classificatory schemas to describe Bon as "other." What went unrecognized by many Tibetologists is how much their imaginative construction of ancient Tibetan history and Bon Shamanism was indebted to Buddhist apologetics and polemics. It is therefore a mistake to dismiss Bon shamanism as merely the product of the scholars' own disciplinary methods, religious biases, and intellectual fads, for their evaluation of Bon and their fixation on its strange "shamanic" features were informed by Buddhist polemical images too.

The purpose of this article is to explore some of these complex interconnections, the interplay between certain Tibetan and western categories in the evaluation of Bon as an object of study. In addition to presenting a rough chronological survey of the western study of Bon, and examining the varying features regarded as its shamanic characteristics, I will consider why the category shamanism is used and what discursive purposes it has served. Although a number of well-known Tibetologists have dismissed the word as inappropriate for describing Bon, I will not simply rehearse their objections but offer a critical genealogy of the term, which continues to be used in representations of Bon. My task is to historicize a category that has too often been treated as "natural" in discourse on Tibetan religions. In order to understand the fluctuating evaluations of Bon in terms of Tibet's religious development, I will also tease out their implicit historical models, noting at times their indebtedness to Tibetan histories and Buddhist-Bon polemics.

At the heart of this project lies a problem that has been identified as the "age-old distinction between the Same and the Other."[5] Seen in the Tibetan context, this is the problem of how to represent the Other (Bon) without

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[4] Jean-Pierre Vernant in his Forward to Maurice Olender's *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. viii-ix.

[5] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), p. xv.

collapsing it into the categories and definitions of the Same (the west, or Buddhism), and without making the Other so different and unique that interpretation becomes impossible. I do not pretend to offer a solution to this age-old problem here, but rather to show how this tension has been played out in a specific field of discourse, with a reflexive awareness of the inherent tensions in representing the other. Some degree of freedom may be possible once one recognizes the constraints of one's field.

The Pioneers Who Mapped Tibetan Bon as Shamanism

The earliest studies of Tibetan religions by Sarat Chandra Das, L. Austine Waddell, and Charles Bell, at the end of the nineteenth century and into the first few decades of the twentieth, were truly pioneering efforts. These authors were colonial administrators, civil servants, and explorers, who served as functionaries for the British imperial government that sought to exploit the unknown reaches of the world. Their interest in Tibetan religions as amateur Orientalists intersected with their government's colonial interests, particular in their effort to gain control over potential Tibetan subjects. In mapping out Tibet's ancient religious world, they relied on western categories and created comparisons with more familiar religions. As the pre-historic religion of Tibet, Bon was regarded as unmarked territory, which gave these Orientalists license to impose their own names on the primordial tradition: to name the native religion in western terms was to claim it. The labels used by these scholars for identifying this primitive religion varied, but they included "animism," "fetishism," "nature worship," as well as "shamanism." What these seemingly interchangeable categories share is their place in late nineteenth century western discourse about the evolution of religions, lying at the very origins or the earliest stages of religious development in uncivilized cultures. However labeled, this primitive religion was regarded as static and a-historic, incapable of changing or developing on its own. Vestiges of it were thought to still exist in remote areas of Tibet and in tribal border regions, for example among the Lepchas of Sikkim, or the Naxi of Yunnan. It is from their exposure to the beliefs and practices of tribal peoples in their travels that these amateur Orientalists were able to flesh out the features of pre-historic Bon. The isolation of these tribal people was thought to make them living fossils that preserved the indigenous features of "original Bon."

The early students of Tibetan religion all accepted that Bon changed once Buddhism came to Tibet from India. Buddhism was regarded as an agent of civilization, and the followers of Bon could not help but feel inferior to these newcomers, with their impressive texts, their profound philosophy, and their soteriology. The Bonpos responded by imitating Buddhism, adopting its symbols and placing their own practices in the service of Buddhist soteriology. In doing so, it is claimed that the Bonpos developed a literary tradition that mimicked Buddhism in form and content. The interaction between the native Bon and Buddhism created some confusion among Orientalists over how to assess their relationship, often described with metaphors of impurity and mixture. However, there is consensus among Orientalists that Buddhism was the more evolved and authentic religion.

Another common tendency found in these early reports and studies of Tibetan religion was to compare foreign Bon with more familiar beliefs and practices. Making sense of the strange in terms of the familiar, these frontier comparativists resorted to analogies between Bon practices and known religions and superstitions.

Let us begin by looking at how "Bon" was defined by H. A. Jäschke in his *Tibetan-English Dictionary* published in 1881.

> *Bon* 1. n. of the early religion of Tibet, concerning which but very imperfect accounts are existing (v. *Report of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Science*, 13 Jan. 1866); so much is certain, that sorcery was the principle feature of it. When Buddhism became the religion of state, the former was considered heretical and condemnable, and *lha chos* and *bon chos*, or shorter *chos* and *bon*, were placed in opposition, as with us christianity and paganism (v. *Glr* [*Rgyal rab gsal ba'i me longs*] and *Mil*. [*Mi la ras pa rgyud 'bum*]; at the present time, both of them seem to exist peaceably side by side, and the primitive religion has not only numerous adherents and convents in Central Tibet, but manifold traces of it may be found still in the creed of the Tibetans today.—2. = *bon-po*, follower of this religion.[6]

There are a few aspects of this definition worthy of comment. First, Jäschke points out that despite so few reliable western descriptions of early (pre-Buddhist) Bon being available, what can be said with confidence is that its main feature was "sorcery." He does not offer any explanation of what this "sorcery" entails, neither does he cite any Bon practices as examples. This might be asking too much from a dictionary entry, yet Jäschke himself promises in the Preface of his Dictionary that he will "give a rational account of the development of the values and meanings of words" and offer "accurate and copious illustrations and examples."[7] The simple metonymy (Bon —> sorcery) requires no further explanation because "sorcery" is not

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[6] H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary* (London, 1881, reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 372. The *Report of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Science* cited by Jäschke contains an article by Emil Schlagintweit, *Über die Bon-pa Sekte in Tibet*, Heft I. (1866), pp. 1-12. This appears to be the earliest scholarly article written about Bon.

[7] H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, pp. iii-iv. In a letter written to Sir Henry Yule on the topic of Bon, Jäschke reiterates that not much is known about this religion other than what Emil Schlagintweit published. "So much seems to be certain that it was the ancient religion of Tibet, before Buddhism penetrated into the country, and that even at later periods it several times gained the ascendancy when the secular power was of a disposition averse to the Lamaistic hierarchy. Another opinion is that the Bon religion was originally a mere fetishism, and related to or identical with Shamanism; this appears to me very probable and easy to reconcile with the former supposition, for it may afterwards, on becoming acquainted with the Chinese doctrine of the 'Taossé,' have adorned itself with many of its tenets." Sir Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (1870, reprinted in New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 324. The parallels between Bon and Taoism were often discussed and debated in the early scholarship on Bon. See note 28 below.

meant to describe Bon in any detailed way, or serve an analytic purpose; rather, the term evokes the essential character of Bon: dark, opaque, even sinister. It seems that Jäschke uses "sorcery" as an empty placeholder rather than an analytic description of Bon.[8] Its usage evokes a sense of mystery about Bon while placing it at the primitive stage of cultural evolution, more akin to superstition than religion proper.

Jäschke adds, however, that when Buddhism was adopted as Tibet's state religion, the Buddhists condemned Bon as heretical, just as Christians condemned pagan heresies. The tense relationship between *chos/bon* is described in Tibetan religious literature, and here Jäschke mentions two well-known Buddhist texts. What is noteworthy is that he accepts without question the Buddhist evaluation of Bon as heterodox. His comparison of Buddhism/Bon to Christianity/paganism is quite telling, and it foretells the Buddhist bias presumed by so many subsequent students of these two religions. "Original" Bon becomes equated with the dark and static native tradition, while Buddhism is likened to the enlightened and uplifting force of missionary Christianity. A Moravian missionary, Jäschke believed that Indian Buddhism had a civilizing impact on Tibet, for it prepared the Tibetans to accept the higher teachings of Christianity. In fact his dictionary was composed with the intention of disseminating Christianity among the Buddhists in the Tibetan-speaking regions of Central Asia.[9] Although Jäschke did not define Bon as "shamanism," his confident characterization of it as a primitive religion represented by its "sorcery" would be accepted by his Orientalist successors. However, many would dispute Jäschke's claim that primitive Bon continued to be practiced in convents in Tibet. Whereas Jäschke's definition treats Bon as a flourishing though primitive religion in central Tibet, we shall see in later accounts how Bon becomes marginalized, forced to the Tibetan frontier.

The next scholar after Jäschke to compile a Tibetan-English dictionary was the Bengali Tibetologist, Sarat Chandra Das. While Das was a well respected Bengali Babu, with numerous impressive titles (C.I.E., Fellow of the Royal Society, Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society), he also served as a spy for the British Survey of India and conducted fact-finding missions in

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[8] The term "placeholder" is borrowed from Wayne Proudfoot, who uses it to describe how certain terms function in the "ineffable" discourse of mystics. See his *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 127-129.

[9] H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, pp. iii. Jäschke's missionary purpose in compiling his dictionary was hardly unique. His predecessor, Alexander Csomo de Körös, the "Father of Tibetology," noted at the beginning of his Dictionary published in 1834 that "When there shall be more interest taken for Buddhism (which has much in common with the spirit of true Christianity) and for diffusing Christian and European knowledge through the most eastern parts of Asia, the Tibetan Dictionary may be much improved, enlarged, and illustrated by the addition of Sanskrit terms." This is quoted in the Preface of Sarat Chandra Das's Dictionary as the reason for compiling yet another dictionary with more Sanskrit terms. See Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary* (Alipore: West Bengal Government Press, 1902; reprinted in Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. v.

Tibet while posing as a Buddhist pilgrim.[10] Equipped with survey tools and a sextant, with a compass secretly stashed inside his prayer wheel, Das visited Tibet twice and managed to reach Lhasa undetected in 1882. The disguise worked for a while, but when the Tibetan authorities in Lhasa grew suspicious of his true identity, they banished him from the country. Das's excursion in Tibet proved not only useful for the British government, but his ethnographic studies of religion, his knowledge of colloquial Tibetan, and his smuggling of important texts out of Tibet, made a lasting impact on Tibetan studies.

The contributions of Sarat Chandra Das to the development of Bon studies in particular cannot be underestimated. His very first publication in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* was devoted to "The Bon (Pön) Religion."[11] This article featured an English translation of a short chapter on Bon excerpted from a lengthy text entitled *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* (*Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*), a doxography written by the Buddhist scholar Thu'u bkvan Chos kyi nyi ma. Although Das only translated the section on Bon from this encyclopedic work without offering any of his own commentary, its content became the authoritative source for western representations of Bon, at least until quite recently. In addition to this article that we will discuss below, Das later published a Tibetan edition of a Bon history that he had smuggled out of Tibet, a fifteenth century Bon text named by Das as *Rgyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas (The Origins of Bon, a Royal Genealogy)*.[12] This is the first Bon historical text made available to western Tibetologists. While it received some attention from European scholars, the *Origins of Bon* played a less significant role in shaping how western scholars evaluated Bon than the short chapter that Das had translated earlier from *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems*.

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[10] Sarat Chandra Das's exploits as a secret agent for the British government served as a source of inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*, in which he was the model for the character Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, the Bengali scholar and spy. More recently the character Hurree Chunder Mookerjee has been immortalized in a novel by the Tibetan writer Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 1999), where Mookerjee serves as the traveling companion and sidekick to Sherlock Holmes, who travels incognito to Tibet as the Norwegian explorer Sigerson.

[11] Sarat Chandra Das, "The Bon (Pön) Religion," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 50 (1881), pp. 187-205.

[12] Sarat Chandra Das, *Gyal Rab Bon-Ke Jûng Neh* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1915; an earlier edition appeared in Darjeeling in 1900). The Tibetan text also appears in *Three Sources for a History of Bon*, edited by Khedrup Gyatsho (Dolanji: Tibetan Bon Monastic Centre, 1974), pp. 1-196. The name of this text is misleading, for Das invented it in the absence of the first page of this text. Das reported that these pages were lost, but that he had translated the content of the first page shortly after discovering the work in Tibet. Among Bon historians, this work by Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan is known as *Gling gzhi* [=*Gleng gzhi*] *bstan pa'i byung khungs*. A section of the *Gleng gzhi* appears in Namkhai Norbu, *Zhang Bod Lorgyus: la storia antica dello Zhang Zhung e del Tibet* (Napoli: Comunita Dzogchen, 1981), pp. 102-128. Three of the twenty-six sections of this text were translated into German by Berthold Laufer in "Über ein tibetisches Geshichtswerk der Bonpo," in *T'oung pao* Serie II, Vol. II. (1901), pp. 24-44.

Perhaps Sarat Chandra Das's most important scholarly contribution was his Dictionary, which became a standard resource tool for translating Tibetan texts into English. In it we find the following definition for Bon:

> *Bon* 1. The ancient religion of Tibet which was fetishism, demon worship, and propitiation by means of incantations. The word *chos* which ordinarily means religion is used as the antithesis to *bon*. Bon now signifies the kind of Shamanism which was followed by Tibetans before the introduction of Buddhism and in certain parts still extant; of this there were three stages, namely: *'dsol bon*, *'khyar bon*, and *bsgyur bon*.[13]

This definition presents both parallels to and contrasts with Jäschke's earlier characterization. Both definitions note the opposition between *chos*/*bon*, an indigenous Tibetan distinction; but here *chos* is associated with religion, while we are told that *bon* is the antithesis of *chos*, namely "fetishism, demon worship, and propitiation by means of incantations." Das then substitutes the umbrella term "Shamanism" for all of the superstitious practices of the Tibetans before the appearance of Buddhism. The identification of Bon with shamanism receives no further elaboration by Das, just as Jäschke simply substituted "sorcery" for Bon without any explanation or examples. Shamanism is the single term that Das chooses here and elsewhere for translating Bon.[14] While shamanism is never specified in any detail, Das does add that Bon appeared in three different stages in Tibet, namely *'dsol bon*, *'khyar bon*, and *bsgyur bon*, terms that are left untranslated and uncredited to any Tibetan writer. The reader is left with the impression that these three phases of Bon, which Das correlates to the periods of reign of specific "historical king [s] of Tibet," constitute the Bonpo's method of classifying Bon religious development. Yet the source for this three-fold schema of Bon historical development cannot be found in the *Origins of Bon,* the history Das later published, nor is it used in any Bon history. Instead, we must look to the chapter on Bon found in the *Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* (hereafter CMDS) as the source relied upon by Das. For reasons that will become clear, Das accepted the conceit of this doxography that it was a "crystal mirror" that accurately reflects the history of the Bon religion, while any Bon history was of questionable authority.

The meaning and content of the three-fold scheme found in the CMDS will be briefly reviewed here, and its appeal to Das and other scholars will be addressed. Thu'u kvan's short chapter on Bon serves as a survey of the religion, but it is certainly contentious, a not so subtle attempt to undermine and delegitimize Bon as an authentic tradition. This becomes apparent once the names for the three stages of Bon are translated properly. According to Thu'u bkvan the first type of Bon to appear in Tibet is *brdol Bon*, although Das writes this as *'dsol Bon* in his Dictionary. In his translation of the CMDS, Das leaves the first phase untranslated as "Jola Bon." This simple transliteration is unsatisfactory. The Tibetan term *brdol* has a polemical tone

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[13] Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, p. 879.

[14] The identification of Bon with Shamanism is also made in Das's preface to the *Gyal rab Bon-ke Jung neh* (p. 1) where he appends a note: "*Bon* signifies religion in the terminology of the Bon-po, the early *Shaman* of Tibet."

to it, meaning the Bon that "erupts" suddenly or "breaks out," like a boil or a pimple that mars the fair white landscape of Tibet. The formula used by Thu'u bkvan to encapsulate this primordial stage of Bon, when it erupted during the reigns of the first seven Tibetan kings, is that it "suppressed the demons below, made offerings to the ancestral gods above, and expelled [impurities] from the household hearth in the middle."[15] Other Buddhist polemicists agree that early Bon was downright barbaric, consisting primarily of black magic, untrustworthy divinations (*ju tig*), and the suppression of vampires (*sri gnon*).[16] In fact, the Buddhist descriptions of Bon correspond to some degree with late-nineteenth century stereotypes about primitive magic, sorcery, and demonolatry. By uncritically relying on these polemical images, Das and later scholars have used the generic category of "shamanism" to describe Bon in its earliest manifestations. What is common to both western and Buddhist conceptions of this earliest phase of Bon is their denial of any legitimate development to the tradition: it remains frozen in the past, like a fossil from Tibet's dark ages.

The second diffusion is called "erroneous" or "debased Bon" (*'khyar Bon*) because it required bloody animal sacrifices (*sogs dmar*). Upon the death of the eighth Tibetan king Gri gum btsan po, three Bon funerary specialists were said to have been invited from Kashmir, Gilgit and Zhang zhung to perform the necessary rites for the king's corpse. In addition to introducing these mortuary rites, they also brought with them new forms of magic and divination, which had not previously been practiced in Tibet. Thu'u bkvan also notes that the Tibetan Bonpos later developed their philosophical views, which were a mixture of "debased Bon" with the tenets of Śaivite heretics (*tirthika*).[17] This passage is the *locus classicus* for the diffusionist model of foreign influence on Tibetan Bon. From this initial germ of Śaivism the "virus of influence" will spread contagiously in later western scholarship to include Hinduism, Taoism, Manichaenism, Nestorianism, and even Gnosticism as the real source of "deviant Bon." Here we see a pattern often used in the representation of indigenous religions, namely the use of a genealogical model of history. The strange beliefs and practices of Bonpos were said to be derived from more familiar ancient sources outside Tibet, but in the process of their diffusion they became corrupted and mixed (*'dres ma*), hence "deviant Bon."

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[15] Thu'u bkvan Blo zang Chos kyi nyi ma, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'* (Lanzhou, Gansu: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984), p. 381. Sarat Chandra Das' translation of the same passage is much more dramatic: "The Bonpo of that age were skilled in witchcraft, the performance of mystical rites for suppressing evil spirits and cannibal hobgoblins of the nether region, the invocation of the venerable gods above, and the domestic ceremonies to appease the wrath of malignant spirits of the middle region (Earth) caused by the 'pollution of the hearth.'" "The Bon (Pön) Religion" in *Tibetan Studies*, ed. by Alaka Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1984), pp. 5-6.

[16] For example, see Shes rab 'byung gnas's polemic against Bon, the *Dgongs gcig Yig cha,* translated by Dan Martin in *Unearthing Bon Treasures* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 189.

[17] Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, p. 381.

The last stage of the dissemination of Bon is called "transformed" or "plagiarized" Bon (*bsgyur Bon*), which refers to the deceitful appropriation of Buddhist or quasi-Buddhist ideas in Bon texts. Thu'u bkvan identifies three separate occasions when individuals recovered apocryphal texts that were Buddhist in content but were claimed as Bon revelations. These individuals were not always Bonpos themselves, for he mentions specifically a "blue-robed paṇḍita" (*pandi ta sham thabs sngon po can*) who wrote heretical teachings (*chos log*) and hid them as "treasure texts" (*gter ma*), only to reveal them himself and then mix them with Bon.[18] Since these recovered texts were cached ahead of time by the so-called "treasure revealer" (*gter ston*), these texts are disqualified as fakes, or what we might call "pseudo-apocrypha," since they were not genuine revelations but merely heretical teachings or plagiarized Buddhist texts. Here Thu'u bkvan debunks the entire genre of Bon revealed treasure literature, which delegitimizes Bon claims to authenticity and severs their connection to the venerable past. It is easy to see how scholars like Das, who uncritically accepted Thu'u bkvan's presentation of Bon, adopted a dismissive attitude and a suspicious point of view toward Bon literature. Bon texts were never what they claimed to be.

At one point in his chapter, Thu'u bkvan apologizes almost parenthetically that he did not himself find a (Bon?) text that explained in detail how Bon spread and what its philosophical positions are; but he relied upon the account given by the "sage of 'Bri gung" for his explanation of how Bon arose during the three periods of dissemination.[19] Thu'u bkvan's

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[18] Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, p. 382. Sarat Chandra Das identifies *sham thabs sngon po can* in his Dictionary (p. 1231) as "a *Tîrthika* Pandit who preached a perverse system of Tantra and used to wear a blue petticoat," and he cites a passage from the Biography of Atisa (*Jo bo rje Ati sha'i rnam thar*). This passage is translated in his *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snows* ed. by Nobin Chandra Das (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1893, reprinted New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992), p. 56: "A certain heretic priest of the *blue robe* order has been preaching immorality and obscene doctrine. By admixture of these foreign elements the sacred doctrine of Buddha has been very much debased." This blue-robed Pandit frequently appears in Tibetan polemical literature, sometimes representing the perverse and lustful nature of Bon clerics (who wear blue robes), but at other times representing Buddhist tantrikas gone bad. This emblematic figure appears in a song attributed to Milarepa, when he is debating with a Bon priest and arguing why it is nonsense to believe that Bon is the "elder brother" of Buddhism. Here is an excerpt from Milarepa's song that provides a humorous etiology for the "blue-robed Pandit": "According to more modern sources [sings Milarepa] a very clever Buddhist pandit in the land of India visited the house of a whore. Arising before dawn, he dressed, but by mistake wrapped himself in the woman's skirt instead of his own. Returning to the monastery at dawn, he was seen wearing the blue skirt and expelled from the community. He made his way eventually to Tibet and with hard feelings in this land of exile created a perverse religion and named it *Bon*." From the *Rje tsun Mi la ras pa rdo rje' mgyur druk sogs gsung rgyun thor bu ba 'ga'*, trans. by Lama Kunga Rimpoche and Brian Cutillo in *Drinking the Mountain Stream: New Stories and Songs by Milarepa*, (Lotsawa Press, 1978), p. 148.

[19] Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, p. 389.1-3. The "sage of 'Bri gung" refers to Shes rab 'byung gnas (1187-1241), who wrote an anti-Bon polemical tract entitled the *Dgongs gcig Yig cha*, translated by Martin in *Unearthing Bon Treasures*. Thu'u

acknowledgement of his indebtedness to an earlier Buddhist author went unnoticed by Sarat Chandra Das and later scholars of Bon until quite recently, when Dan Martin showed that the CMDS is almost entirely derivative, a patching together of various earlier Buddhist polemical sources against Bon. By placing the CMDS in the context of early Tibetan polemics and demonstrating its constructed, intertextual character, Martin's research certainly diminished the authoritative status of this chapter on Bon. Today Thu'u bkvan's *Crystal Mirror* has been cracked, its anti-Bon polemical agenda revealed, and its reliability called into question because of its sectarian motivation and ideological agenda.[20]

Nonetheless during the period when Das first introduced this survey of Bon, Thu'u bkvan's critical perspective proved so persuasive that Bon texts were read with suspicion or with disappointment. Das's translation of this work in 1881 coincided with Anton Schiefner's German translation of a Bon Sūtra (*Klu 'bum dkar po*) entitled *Über das Bon-po Sūtra "Das weisse Naga-hunderttausend."*[21] The impact of the CMDS on subsequent scholarship was far greater than that of the Bon Sūtra, this despite the polemical character of the former and the genuine canonical status (in Bon terms) of the latter. While the Bon Sūtra presented a complex cosmogony and a detailed picture of the cthonic spirit (*klu*) realm, it lacked the encyclopedic scope and simplicity of the CMDS, and its overtly mythic character could hardly compete with the historical narrative set forth by Thu'u bkvan. The simplicity and vagueness of Thu'u bkvan's representation of early Bon especially excited western scholars who were drawn to its seemingly archaic and primitive aspects. The Bon Sūtra, on the other hand, contained far too many themes that were recognizable as Buddhist. One student of Bon noted that when Schiefner's translation of *The White Naga Hundred Thousand* appeared, "the scientific world was disappointed for it was considered not to be different from a Buddhist Sūtra."[22] That is, the content of the Bon Sūtra

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bkvan's indebtedness to Sher rab 'byung gnas was noted by the Bon scholar Dpal ldan Tshul khrims in *G.yung drung Bon gyi bstan 'byung* (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1972, Vol. 2, p. 535.

[20] Dan Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures*, p. 135 Also see Martin, "Beyond Acceptance and Rejection? The Anti-Bon Polemic Included in the Thirteenth-Century *Single Intention* (*Dgong-gcig Yig-cha*) and Its Background in Tibetan Religious History," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 25 (1997), pp. 263-305. Also see my "Cracking the Mirror: A Critical Genealogy of Scholarship on Tibetan Bon and the 'Canonical' Status of *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems*," *The Tibet Journal* XXIII.4 (Winter 1998), pp. 92-107.

[21] Anton Schiefner, *Über das Bon-po Sūtra "Das weisse Naga-hunderttausend*," Mémoires de l'Academie de St. Petersbourg, VII. série, Tome 28 no. 1, (St. Petersburg, 1881).

[22] Joseph Francis Rock, *The Na-khi Naga Cult and Related Ceremonies* (Roma: Istituto Italiano Per Il medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1952), p. 1. The Bon text translated by Schiefner, the *White Naga Bon Sūtra*, is discussed by William Rockhill in *Land of the Lamas* (1891) where he notes in a footnote on pages 217-218 that the "Lu-bum karpo" simply substitutes Bon terms for Buddhist words: "This work does not contain any theories or ideas antagonistic to the ordinary teachings of the

was not foreign enough, and it could only have contained what Thu'u bkvan identified as "plagiarized Bon" (*bsgyur bon*). What scholars were most interested to learn about was "original" or "revealed Bon" in its raw state, when it could be labeled as shamanism.

Another early pioneer in the study of Tibetan religion, who followed in the footsteps of Sarat Chandra Das, was a Japanese Buddhist pilgrim and scholar named Ekai Kawaguchi. Like so many other Buddhist pilgrims before him, Kawaguchi left his native Japan for India, Nepal, and Tibet in search of important Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, with the goal of bringing them back to the libraries of the Japanese Imperial University. Kawaguchi actually studied with Sarat Chandra Das in Darjeeling before setting out for Tibet disguised as a Chinese pilgrim. His Tibetan travelogue, written in a style similar to other travelers' tales about Tibet, emphasizes the exotic and is prone to exaggeration. Even the title of his book *Three Years in Tibet* is misleading, since he was there for barely two years. Kawaguchi's overall impression of Tibet and its Buddhism was quite unfavorable, and he repeatedly condemns the Buddhist monks he meets for being filthy, for their ignorance of true Buddhism, their greed for meat and sexual pleasure, and worst of all, their cruelty in the punishment of sinners. Filled with hatred, ignorance and greed, how could these Tibetan monks be true Buddhists?

What Kawaguchi finds especially repellent in Tibet are married monks who practice the "peculiar and ridiculous form of wedlock" known as polyandry, a perverse practice that he claims has its roots in "Old Bonism." What exactly constitutes "Old Bonism" is never explained by Kawaguchi, other than to mention a few depravities still enjoyed by Tibetans, such as animal sacrifice and the use of intoxicants. For the most part, however, he affirms that Bon "continues to exist only for its name's sake."[23] That is, Bonpos insist upon their distinctive name despite the fact that their doctrines and practices are copied from Buddhism. He explains that once Tibet adopted Buddhism, the Bonpos borrowed Buddhist teachings and practices and made them their own, hence his label "New Bonism:"

> In sooth, Buddhism is so deeply ingrained in the country that no other religion can exist in Tibet, unless it be explained by the light of Buddhism. Thus, the Old Bon religion has been greatly modified and has indeed entirely lost its original form and been replaced by the New Bonism, which resembles the Ryôbu Shinto

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Buddhists; its cosmogony is purely Buddhist; the same may be said of the ethics and metaphysics."

[23] Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1909), p. 131. Kawaguchi's comments on polyandry and Bon can be found on p. 373. Kawaguchi's distaste for Tibetans as dirty, aggressive, violent, and promiscuous can be heard echoing in the work of another Japanese scholar Hajime Nakamura, who characterized the Tibetan *mentalité* in a very similar manner. Like Kawaguchi, Nakamura argued that Tibetan marriage customs (and polyandry in particular) are quite ancient in origin, and their persistence is said to account for the unimportance of family lineage and filial piety. Like Kawaguchi, Nakamura also notes the similar characteristics between Bon and Shinto, "both of which are of shamanistic origin." See *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1964; reprint, 1985), p. 304, 309, 333.

> of Japan, in which the Sun God is interpreted as the incarnation of Buddha; but the Tibetan goes further than the Ryôbu Shintoist did. By Bon is meant Shinnyo or Truth, or rather the incarnation of Shinnyo, and it is considered to be one branch of Buddhism.[24]

It should not surprise us that Kawaguchi, a Buddhist monk, would accept the notion that Bonpos sought to recast their somber religion in the enlightened image of Buddhism, and were so successful at adopting it that their new religion is Bon "in name only." Elsewhere he writes that this religion is, in truth, "only Buddhism under another name."[25] His distinction between "Old" and "New" is meant to unmask the masquerade of Bon, that it merely mimics authentic Buddhism while still claiming the Truth for itself. To name is to claim, and once false names like "Bon" are revealed as empty designations, we see Kawaguchi staking claim to it with more familiar labels.

Kawaguchi seems struck by how much New Bonism resembles the syncretic tradition of his native country, *Ryôbu Shinto* ("Two-Sided" Shinto). Here Kawaguchi engages in a form of ethnographic comparison that posits an analogy between Bon-Buddhist syntheses in Tibet and the Shinto-Buddhist combinatory patterns in Japan, where native Shinto kami were reinterpreted as Buddha manifestations. Ethnographic comparison does not rely on geographic proximity or any direct historical connections between Japanese and Tibetan religions, as a genealogical model would require, but it relies instead on the travelers' impression of similar features. The traveler uses comparison as a way to link the foreign world he encounters with the familiar world in which his narrative of the other is recounted, and thereby pass from one to another. With an apt metaphor François Hartog captures how travelers' comparisons operate:

> It is a net the [traveling] narrator throws into the waters of otherness. The size of the mesh and the design of the net determine the type and quality of the catch. And hauling in the net is a way of bringing home what is "other" into proximity with what is the "same." Comparison thus has a place in the rhetoric of otherness, operating there as a procedure of translation.[26]

The net used by our Japanese traveler here is designed to identify Tibetan patterns of religious synthesis and assimilation. Just as "New Bonism" reinterprets Tibetan indigenous deities as the manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, so does "Two-Sided Shinto" identify the native Sun Goddess and ancestress of the imperial family (Amaterasu at the Ise Shrine) with the Sun Buddha (Mahāvairocana). This comparison between Buddhism/Bon and Buddhism/Shinto might yield considerable fruit were Kawaguchi to consider the esoteric Buddhist themes in Japan and Tibet that enable these

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[24] Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet*, p. 562.
[25] Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet*, p. 131.
[26] François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* trans. by Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 225.

combinatory systems to operate.[27] However, his casual broaching of the comparison reveals no interest in exploring these structural parallels in any sustained manner.

What troubles Kawaguchi about the transformation of Old Bon into New Bon is what is lost in the process of assimilation, almost as if the indigenous Bon deities and practices, once robed in Buddhist symbols, become robbed of their distinctiveness. Kawaguchi notes how the Tibetan stubbornly insists that "Bon" represents Truth, or in his own language, "Bon" incarnates "Shinnyo." It is not altogether clear to me what Kawaguchi intends here. It is possible that he wishes to underscore the discontinuity between "Old" and "New", since all that they share is their referent, the empty term "Bon." But if "New" Bon incarnates "Truth," and this singular Truth is identified by Kawaguchi with Shinnyo (Skt. *tathātā*), understood as the very root of Buddhism, then Bon must be seen as an offshoot (or "branch") of Buddhism. Kawaguchi appears to shift from an impressionistic feeling about the similarities between Tibetan and Japanese religions to a genealogical comparison once he locates the real root of Bon ("Shinnyo"). This linguistic sleight-of-hand makes New Bon truly Buddhist, but it leaves Old Bon nowhere.

Kawaguchi is certainly not the first outsider to see striking similarities between foreign Bon and his own "native" tradition. We know that the Chinese who encountered Bonpos in eastern Tibet considered them to be Taoists, and some believed that Gshen rab, the founder of Bon, was really Laozi.[28] In return, there were Tibetans who regarded as Bonpos the Chinese Taoists, whose founder Laozi was merely a manifestation of Gshen rab; in fact, Thu'u bkvan himself advances such a claim in his *Crystal Mirror of*

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[27] Kawaguchi's ethnographic comparison of Buddhist/Bon synthesis in Tibet with Buddhist/Shinto synthesis in Japan could be elevated to a more systematic comparison by examining the use of *honji suijaku* theory in the esoteric Buddhism of Japan and the use of maṇḍalas, *upāya*, and emanation bodies (*sprul sku*) in Tantric Buddhism, especially in the "Universalist" (*Ris med*) movement.

[28] William Rockhill testifies that the Bonpos in eastern Tibet were usually identified by the Chinese as Taoists, and Gshen rab identified with Laozi, but Rockhill himself dismisses this comparison as superficial. Bon, he argues, bears much more similarity to Buddhism than Taoism in terms of its present doctrine, dress, monasteries, and so on. Rockhill does not go as far as Kawaguchi in identifying Bon and Buddhism, for Bon contains non-Buddhist indigenous theories and practices that antedate Buddhism, and he adds that they are especially proficient in "juggling and magic." See *Land of the Lamas*, p. 217-218, n. 2. Nonetheless, the views about Bon and Taoism expressed by the Chinese that Rockhill sought to discredit remained quite popular, as noted by Tsung-lien Shen, in his book *Tibet and the Tibetans* (Stanford University Press, 1953, reprinted in New York, Octagon Books, 1973), p. 37: "Bon-Po, one form of Shamanism, is considered by some scholars to be a Tibetan copy of a later decadent phase of Chinese Taoism. It lacked depth, having, in default of a philosophical base, a mixture of exorcism and primitive worship. However, by borrowing too freely from the abundance of Buddhism, it was not long before Bon-Po lost its own characteristics and became absorbed into its rival." This particular genealogy of "original" Bon sees it as derived from a decadent phase of Chinese Taoism, with very few distinctively Tibetan features except perhaps its mixture of exorcism and primitive worship.

Doctrinal Systems.[29] It should not surprise us that a certain Tibetan Buddhist Lama, who once visited the Ise Shrine in Japan, remarked of the *Kagura*-dance performed there, "It is just like the sacred dance of the Bon religion."[30] Such comparisons do not shock us since we all need to make the foreign familiar. It is only "natural" for non-Tibetans to see in Bon and in Buddhism a mirror of their own religion as it relates to another.[31] But in seeing these similarities, experienced subjectively like the uncanny feeling of déjà vu, the comparativist often puts forward some objective explanation, as Jonathan Z. Smith points out in his essay "In Comparison a Magic Dwells:"

> In the vast majority of instances in the history of comparison, this subjective experience is projected as an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like. It is a process of working from a psychological association to an historical one; it is to assert that similarity and contiguity have causal effect. But this, to revert to the language of Victorian anthropology, is not science but magic.[32]

Smith's sly observation here, that comparative studies as an enterprise bear more resemblance to magic than science, will be more challenging (and embarrassing) for later comparativists who claim their work is "scientific," such as for Helmut Hoffmann and Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, two phenomenologists who produce detailed descriptions of Tibetan Bon shamanism that we will examine shortly. For the Europeans to first encounter Tibetan religion, the Christian missionaries who preceded scholars like Das and Kawaguchi, the similarities they saw between Tibetan religion and their own Christian tradition could only be explained by "magic." More precisely, the eerie resemblances they sensed were regarded as the worst form of "black magic," being the work of the Devil. The mirror-like images they encountered in Tibet, where monks also wore robes, rosaries and vestments, with sacerdotal mitres on their heads, were understood as demonic plagiarism.

The first European Catholic missionaries to gain contact with Tibetan monks frequently observed how familiar they seemed in their dress and ritual performances, with their liturgical chants and baroque ceremonies,

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29 Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, pp. 412 ff.

30 Cited in Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples,* p. 333.

31 The act of comparison is an intellectual operation, and thus the realization of similarity (or difference) is not "natural" or "given," although it might be experienced by the comparativist as such. Jonathan Z. Smith makes this point quite clearly: "In the case of religion, as in the case of any disciplined inquiry, comparison, in its strongest form, brings differences together within the space of the scholar's mind for the scholar's own intellectual reasons. It is the scholar who makes their cohabitation—their 'sameness'—possible, not 'natural' affinities or processes of history. Taken in this sense, 'genealogy' disguises and obscures the scholar's interests and activities allowing the illusion of passive observation (what Nietzsche has termed [*Zarathustra* 2.15], the 'myth of the immaculate perception')." See *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianity and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 51

32 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 22.

altars and images, candles and incense. Yet these apparent similarities caused them consternation. For the near mirror image they saw before them could only be explained as the work of the Devil, the demonic other incarnate. There is a strong sense of anxiety apparent in the words of the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, who said of the Tibetan's faith in the Fifth Dalai Lama:

> Here are plainly evident the wiles of the Devil. To make a mock of holy things and rob God of the honor due unto Him the Evil One has by a trick of his usual cunning caused these barbarians to imitate us, and induced them to pay to a human being the reverence due to God and Jesus Christ alone. He profanes the most holy mysteries of the Catholic Church by forcing these poor wretched creatures to celebrate these mysteries at the place where they keep hideous idols. Because he has observed that Christians call the Pope Father of Fathers, he makes these idolatrous barbarians call that false god Grand Lama or high priest.[33]

The Tibetan barbarian's mimicry is deeply menacing to Kircher, who relies on the theory of demonic plagiarism to account for the similarities between Catholicism and Tibetan religion. The idea of demonic plagiarism was invented by Justin Martyr and the early church fathers of the second and third centuries to explain away any apparent correspondences between the Catholic and rival pagan traditions. Since the Catholic Church must of necessity be entirely unique and original, any similar religious practices must be demonic copies. The Devil's wily handiwork knows no geographic boundaries of course, and thus He can coerce the credulous Tibetans to express their devotion towards their pseudo-pontiff, the Dalai Lama. Through this strategy, the Christian missionaries were able to co-opt the purity of origins and assign their Tibetan counter-parts the corrupt state of the derivative. The Tibetan monk becomes most threatening to Catholic missionaries not when seen as utterly other, as a pagan idolater for instance, but when seen as too-much-like-us. Distance between the Tibetan monk and the Catholic missionary can be restored once the other is revealed to be demonic and derivative. Still, the demonic double of the Dalai Lama and of mocking monks unsettles the presence of the belated missionary in Tibet.[34]

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[33] Kircher's account of Tibetan religion appears in the appendix to Jan Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Chan, Emperor of China*, John Ogilby, trans., reprint ed. (Menston: Scholars Press 1972). 40-43. Cited by Donald Lopez in "'Lamaism' and the Disappearance of Tibet," p. 11. Much of my discussion of demonic plagiarism is borrowed (but not plagiarized!) from this article.

[34] Here I am indebted again to Jonathan Z. Smith who made the following observation in his University lecture in Religion at Arizona State University entitled "Differential Equations: On Constructing the 'Other." "Rather than the remote "other" being perceived as problematic and/or dangerous, it is the proximate "other", the near neighbor, who is most troublesome. That is to say, while difference or "otherness" may be perceived as LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, it becomes most problematic when it is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US or when it claims to BE-US." Cited by William Scott Green in "The Difference Religion Makes," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62.4 (Winter, 1994), p. 1205.

The earliest Catholic missionaries were largely ignorant of any real (or imaginary) differences between Tibetan Buddhists and Bonpos.[35] Later Protestant missionaries and amateur Orientalists, including Jäschke and Das, were well aware of two distinct religious traditions in Tibet. We have seen the invidious distinctions that they made between Buddhism and Tibet's native "pagan" tradition, distinctions that were reinforced by the binary categories and polemical labels used by the Tibetans themselves. During the Victorian period another development can be detected in the western descriptions and evaluations of Tibetan Buddhism and Bon. Protestant missionaries and travelers brought into Tibet a certain amount of polemical baggage from home directed against Catholicism. In particular, the pure "true religion" of Protestantism was contrasted with the "pagano-papism" of Roman Catholicism, understood to be a complex of magic, fear, the deification of the dead, and the worship of objects in the forms of icons, statues or relics. What seems ironic, in light of Smith's observation from "In Comparison a Magic Dwells," is how Victorian scholars projected and transposed into Tibet their critique of Roman Catholic magic and superstition, which they found lying at the very core of Bon and lurking in "Lamaism." Their imaginative juxtaposition of Catholic and Tibetan magic and idolatry, of popes and lamas, reveals the mark of their own magical thinking.

The Victorian scholar whose studies of Tibetan religion played a central role in the codification of "Lamaism" as a descriptive category for Tibetan Buddhism was L. Austine Waddell. A British functionary based in Sikkim for ten years, Waddell learned enough Tibetan to read some Buddhist texts, but he confesses that he could not make much sense of the Tantric texts and practices without the assistance of lamas, who were bound to oaths of secrecy. In the preface of his *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism* (1895), Waddell describes his ruse to gain the confidence of the local lamas of Sikkim, an act of "participant observation" that established his own ethnographic authority:

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[35] In *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (1870), translated and edited by Sir Henry Yule, there is a note written by Yule on Marco Polo's description of a group of extreme ascetics who ate nothing but bran mixed with water and who wore black and blue hemp robes. Yule identifies this as a reference to the Tibetan Bonpos, and he summarizes all that is known about this religion. He mentions a missionary named Rev. Gabriel Durand who visited a Bonpo monastery in Tsodam (Tsaidam?) Eastern Tibet in June 1863. The Rev. Durand wrote, "In this temple are the *monstrous idols* of the sect of Peunbo; horrid figures, whose features only Satan could have inspired. They are disposed about the enclosure according to their power and their seniority. Above the pagoda is a loft, the nooks of which are crammed with all kinds of diabolical trumpery; little idols of wood or copper, hideous masques of men and animals, superstitious Lama vestments, drums, trumpets of human bones, sacrificial vessels, in short, all the utensils with which the devil's servants in Tibet honour their master." One of the "monstrous idols" he identifies as that of *Tamba-Shi-Rob*, the great doctor of the sect of the Peunbo," that is, Ston pa Gshen rab. This might be the first clear description of a Bon monastery by a missionary, and in it we see the same rhetoric of the demonic, and demonic plagiarism at work.

> Realizing the rigid secrecy maintained by the Lamas in regard to their seemingly chaotic rites and symbolism, I felt compelled to purchase a Lamaist temple with its fittings; and prevailed on the officiating priests to explain to me in full detail the symbolism and the rites as they proceeded. Perceiving how much I was interested, the Lamas were so obliging as to interpret in my favour a prophetic account which exists in their scriptures regarding a Buddhist incarnation in the West. They convinced themselves that I was a reflex of the Western Buddha, Amitābha, and thus they overcame their conscientious scruples, and imparted information freely.... Enjoying in these ways special facilities for penetrating the reserve of Tibetan ritual... I have elicited much information on Lamaist theory and practice which is altogether new.[36]

Waddell's strategy of gaining an insider's insight into Tibetan religion differs from that of S. C. Das and Kawaguchi, who both donned a disguise as pilgrims to gain access to Lhasa. Waddell instead remained outside Tibet and played the role of a lay patron by purchasing a Buddhist temple and gaining the lamas' confidence. Waddell's patronage was received by the lamas as the generous act of a pious western layman (*sbyin bdag*), and they apparently welcomed him as an emanation of Amitābha. Waddell felt no need to disabuse the lamas of their misunderstanding, for he believes that he has been accepted as a genuine "insider," not simply a western Buddhist but the Western Buddha Himself.

Viewed by the lamas as a Buddha, Waddell refuses to see his lama informants as true Buddhists. In his opinion, the religion they practice is such a corruption of what he considers the original teachings of the Buddha to be that it is best described as "Lamaism." He maintains an attitude of dismissive contempt towards Tibetan Buddhism and especially towards the "popish" lamas. Yet he also correctly points out that the term "Lamaism" is not used by the Tibetans themselves:

> The Lamas have no special term for their form of Buddhism. They simply call it "*The* religion" or "Buddha's religion;" and its professors are "Insiders," or "within the fold" (*nang-pa*), in contradistinction to the non-Buddhists or "Outsiders" (*chi-pa* or *pyi-'ling* [sic.]), the so-called "pe-ling" or foreigners of English writers. And the European term "Lamaism" finds no counterpart in Tibetan.[37]

Waddell's observation here reinforces his authority by displaying his knowledge of emic categories. His interpretation of the Insider/Outsider distinction is somewhat idiosyncratic, and perhaps self-serving. The Buddhists of Tibet do identify themselves as "Insiders" (*nang pa*) and non-

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[36] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism,* pp. viii-ix. For another view of Waddell, see Donald Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 259-263.

[37] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism,* pp. 28-9.

Buddhists as "Outsiders" (*phyi pa*), but those usually designated as "Outsiders" by Buddhist polemicists are Hindu "heretics" (*mu stegs pa*) and the Bonpos, not the "so-called 'pe-ling' or foreigners of English writers." His gloss suggests that Europeans are the usual targets of Tibetan Buddhists as "Outsiders." Such a characterization reinforces his own position of authority, as we have already learned that he, an Englishman, was accepted by the lamas as a Buddha, thus an Insider. What he fails to mention is that the Buddhists of Tibet were not the only ones to regard themselves as "Insiders." Bonpos also use this label for themselves, while their Buddhist rivals might be dismissed as Outsiders. Thus the Insider/Outsider distinction in Tibetan is more elusive than Waddell indicates, for its meaning depends entirely upon who is in the position to assign others as outsiders. One can imagine that a Bon monk in Sikkim might dismiss Waddell's description of Tibetan religion as inaccurate and heretical, the work of an Outsider.

Waddell's understanding of Bon's impact on the formation of Tibetan Buddhism does help explain why he insists on using the neologism "Lamaism," despite it not being an emic term. He prefers "Lamaism" to "Tibetan Buddhism" because the Tibetans place their faith in Lamas, the sacerdotal priests whose "cults comprise much deep-rooted devil-worship and sorcery," and these practices are of Bon origin. "Lamaism," he opines, "is only thinly and imperfectly varnished over with Buddhist symbolism, beneath which the sinister growth of poly-demonist superstition darkly appears."[38] Here Waddell introduces his own inside/outside distinction: once the historian strips away the thin surface of Lamaism (with its veneer of Buddhist symbolism) he reveals the dark depths of non-Buddhist superstitions, swollen to sinister proportions. Again we hear echoes of the demonic rhetoric used by Waddell's missionary predecessors, although he does not rely on the theory of demonic plagiarism to account for its sinister character. In his opinion, there are two primary sources for the demonic dimension lurking in Lamaism: it originates in part from the primitive paganism of Bon, and in part from Indian Tantrism. We need not review Waddell's historical account of how the rational and ethical teachings of the Buddha, free of all superstition and ritual, gradually degenerated in India with the development of Mahāyāna ritual, Yogacara mysticism, and debased Tantric demonolatry.[39] Our interest lies in his interpretation of Bon and its impact on Tibetan Buddhism, so we will pick up his historical narrative in the seventh century in Tibet, when Buddhism first came to Tibet.

Waddell paints in broad brushstrokes a dark and savage picture of pre-Buddhist Tibet:

> Tibet emerges from barbaric darkness only with the dawn of Buddhism, in the seventh century of our era.... Up till the seventh

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[38] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, p. xi. Also see pages 29-30.

[39] For Waddell's discussion of how the noble and human teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha came to be corrupted with supernaturalism, ritualism, idolatry, metaphysical speculation, and sexual perversion found in Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism, see *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, pp. 5-17. For an analysis of Waddell's historical model of degeneration, see Donald Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," pp. 259-263.

> century Tibet was inaccessible even to the Chinese. The Tibetans of this prehistoric period are seen, from the few glimpses we have of them in Chinese history about the end of the sixth century, to have been rapacious savages and reputed cannibals, without a written language, and followers of an animistic and devil-dancing or Shamanist religion, the *Bön*, resembling in many ways the Taoism of China.[40]

This image of pre-Buddhist Tibet assumes a Chinese vantagepoint. Tibet is judged as backward and barbaric when seen from the perspective of the civilized Chinese. Waddell seems unconcerned with the possibility of ethnocentrism, or the Chinese propensity to view all of the peoples on their frontiers as barbarian savages. Even his comparison of Bon to Taoism follows an association that the Chinese were apt to make. His characterization of Bon as an "animistic and devil-dancing or Shamanist religion," however, reveals less debt to the Chinese (for whom none of these labels are familiar), than to contemporaries like Sarat Chandra Das. While Das introduced terms like "fetishism" and "demon worship" to describe Bon, only to replace them with the generic "Shamanism," Waddell uses "animistic" and "devil-dancing" in apposition to the Bon "Shamanist religion." None of these terms are ever explained or illustrated with any examples, for their function is less descriptive than evocative of barbarism. Bon "Shamanism" is shorn of any context, either historical or literary, for it is assumed to be static and lacking any literature. This proves to be an effective rhetorical strategy because no interpretive questions arise. Bon Shamanism is treated as self-evident; nothing about it is problematic.

Much like Das and the Buddhist apologists before him, Waddell subscribes to an evolutionary model of Tibetan religious development. He ascribes a positive value to the introduction of Indian Buddhism to Tibet, a catalytic event that transformed Tibetan culture from an essentially barbaric state to a more civilized and humane one:

> The current of Buddhism which runs through its tangled paganism has brought to the Tibetan most of the little civilization which he possesses, and has raised him correspondingly in the scale of humanity, lifting him above a life of wild rapine and selfishness, by setting before him higher aims, by giving milder meanings to his mythology, by discountenancing sacrifice, and by inculcating universal charity and tenderness to all living beings.[41]

This passage indicates Waddell's evolutionary theory of Tibetan religion. Indian Buddhism bears the light of civilization to Tibet, while dark and sinister shadows are cast by the native tradition of Bon. For Bon is the source of the savage mythology and the barbaric sacrifices to which he refers, the religion that promoted the life of "wild rapine and selfishness." The shift Waddell describes from barbarism to civilization, from selfishness to compassion, and the discoun-tenancing of bloody sacrifices, can be found in both Buddhist *and* Bon narratives about the impact of their own religion on

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[40] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, pp. 18-19.
[41] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, p. 566.

Tibet, although Waddell seems under the spell of the Buddhist versions. I will briefly review some of the themes found in Buddhist narratives in order to illustrate how the images of Tibetan "paganism" found in the scholarship of Waddell and his contemporaries are not fabrications that western scholars alone have invented. For these western pioneers too were charting territory that had already been mapped by Buddhist polemicists.

In the Tibetan Buddhist myths that address how and why Tibet converted to the true religion, we find a Buddhist *mission civilisatrice* expressed in moral and pragmatic terms: the country needed to be tamed, civilized, and in fact totally reconstructed, not simply set on the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Crucial to this project is the creation of a negative image of pre-Buddhist Tibet. It is depicted as an insignificant border region to India, paralyzed by the influence of dark demonic forces, its benighted human inhabitants living in fear, lust, and lawlessness. According to these narratives, pre-Buddhist Tibet is the "land of the cruel ones" (*gdug pa can gyi yul*), a country "beyond the pale" (*mtha' 'khob*). The Tibetans themselves are depicted as stupid and savage, with an innate propensity for violence and a thirst for bloody sacrifices as "red-faced flesh-eaters" (*sha za gdong dmar*).[42] This barbaric state of affairs in Tibet was destined to change upon the arrival of Buddhism, which introduced literacy, a legal system and moral code, a higher standard of living, as well as bringing Buddhist enlightenment to the land of darkness. Buddhist historical narratives tell how Tibet was providentially civilized by Mahāyāna, when it introduced new spiritual and practical techniques for cultivating the snowy land of Tibet, sowing the seeds of karma, merit, and enlightenment. Tibet's conversion to Buddhism is represented not merely as a "spiritual" event but as a cultural revolution, impacting everything from law and politics, morality and native intelligence. All of these things were of a piece, resulting in the complete reformation of Tibet from a backward, barbaric place to a civilized nation under the rule of enlightened kings.

While Waddell's theory of religious evolution in Tibet may mirror Buddhist narratives, his version of "pure" Buddhism departs significantly from the standards of orthodoxy accepted by Tibetan Buddhists. Whereas Tibetan Buddhists maintain the conceit of having inherited Indian Buddhism in all of its richness, culminating in the sophisticated practices of the Vajrayāna, Waddell disparages Tantra as a degeneration from Śākyamuni's pure message, a teaching that promoted morality, reason, and agnostic idealism, free of all superstition, sacerdotalism, and sexual perversion. Waddell's Orientalist assessment of Tibetan religions is in no way taken whole cloth from Buddhist apologists, attached as it is to Protestant polemics against the "Catholic" elements in Tibetan Buddhism. He regards the Lamas not as genuine Buddhist monks but as priests (crypto-Catholics), who play upon the credulity and fear of Tibetan lay people by

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[42] These descriptions of Tibet and the Tibetans all appear in the *Bka' thang sde lnga*, namely the *Lha 'dre bka' thang*, the *Rgyal po'i bka' thang*, the *Tsun mo bka' thang*, as well as the *Mani bka' 'bum*. All are quoted by Rolf A. Stein in *Tibetan Civilization* trans. by J. E. Stapleton Driver (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 40-1. Also see Janet Gyatso, "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," *Tibet Journal* 12.4 (Winter 1987), p. 38.

promising them relief from demons if they support the priests' performance of exorcism rituals:

> A notable feature of Lamaism throughout all of its sects, and decidedly un-Buddhist, is that the Lama is a priest rather than a monk. He assigns himself an indispensable place in the religion and has coined the current saying "Without a Lama in from there is no (approach to) God." He performs sacerdotal functions on every possible occasion; and a large proportion of the order is almost entirely engaged in this work. And such services are in much demand; for the people are in hopeless bondage to the demons, and not altogether unwilling slaves to their exacting worship.[43]

The sensitive reader today is struck by Waddell's sovereign confidence in being able to single out what is truly Buddhist, while dismissing his lama informants as un-Buddhist. For him, true Buddhism can only be found in the texts that record the words of the Buddha, not in the contemporary rituals of Tibetan Lamas, whose practices have become so corrupt and distant from noble Śākyamuni's original teachings.[44]

Waddell's attitude of dismissive contempt towards his Tibetan informants is not unknown among scholars today. Sometimes the disdainful scholar is himself a Tibetan Buddhist. The Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa wrote an imperious article that surveyed Bon, wherein he describes in familiar fashion how the Bonpos adopted and adapted Buddhist ideas. In doing so, Trungpa claims that the Bonpos diluted and even forgot their own unique teachings and practices. It is pointless, Trungpa asserts, to ask a contemporary Bonpo about pre-Buddhist Bon beliefs, since he is only familiar with the hodge-podge of Buddhist-Bon ideas found in these late texts.[45] For Trungpa (as for Waddell), the contemporary Tibetan informants

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[43] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, p. 153.

[44] Waddell's views on Buddhism are very much of his times, a Victorian evaluation based on a textual ideal, as summarized by Philip Almond: "The image of decay, decadence, and degeneration emerged as a result of the possibility of contrasting an ideal textual Buddhism of the past with its contemporary Eastern instances. Simultaneously, this provided an ideological justification for the missionary enterprises of a progressive, thriving Christianity against a Buddhism now debilitated." *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 40.

[45] Chögyam Trungpa, "Some Aspects of Pön," *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*, ed. by James F. Fisher (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), p. 306. He writes: "The investigation of the Pön religion is further complicated by what is called in Tibet "white Pön," which is what amounts to a Pönnized Buddhism. In "white Pön," Buddhism has been adopted basically, but Buddha is called Shenrap, the Buddhist *vajra* is replaced by an anticlockwise swastika, and the bodhisattva is called *yungdrungsempa* [yungdrumsems-pa], that is *swastikasattva*. Where a text mentions "dharma," the word "pön" is substituted. There are Pön equivalent names for all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and also for the ten stages of the Bodhisattva Path, that is, the Sanskrit *bhumis*. The contemporary Pön believer is therefore a poor source of information concerning the pure tradition of his religion."

who call themselves "Bonpos" are really "outsiders" with regard to the origins of their own tradition.

After Waddell published his study of Lamaism in 1895, the next scholar to write a survey of Tibetan religion was Charles Bell in 1931 with *The Religion of Tibet*. Like Waddell, Bell was a British colonial administrator and member of the Indian Civil Service, who in 1901 was transferred to Sikkim, where he began his lifelong relationship with Tibet. His career culminated when he became the British Representative in a diplomatic mission to Tibet. Unlike earlier travelers to Tibet like Das or Kawaguchi, who donned a disguise in order to enter Lhasa secretly, Bell went to Tibet as an invited guest and personal friend of the Dalai Lama. His presentation of Tibetan culture and Buddhism is generally more sympathetic than that of his predecessors. He gained access to a large number of Tibetan historical sources, and his discussion of Tibet's history makes generous reference to them.

Bell does not cite any Bon histories in *The Religion of Tibet*, however, and his interpretation and evaluation of Bon has much in common with his predecessors. Here is how he introduces "the old faith" of Bon:

> Before Buddhism came to Tibet, the religion of the people, known to themselves as Pön, appears to have been a form of Shamanism or Nature worship. It is over a thousand years since Buddhism established itself, and it is therefore difficult to give direct influence as to the form which Shamanism assumed in Tibet. The Tibetan histories pay but little attention to the pre-Buddhist period, regarding it as unworthy of serious attention. Such few references as there are show a belief in spirits of earth and sky, spirits good and bad, the worshipping of the former, and the propitiation of the latter. Magical tambourines were among the necessary equipment of a professor or priest of this religion, enabling him to travel in the sky.[46]

Bell's use of Shamanism here is placed in conjunction with "nature worship," another term used in evolutionary theories of religion to describe the most primitive stage of belief, made popular by Max Müller. Bell is well aware of the scant evidence that survives about Bon, and he suggests that the rise of Buddhism eclipsed the original religion. Compared to earlier descriptions, Bell's characterization of Bon is more specific, mentioning the belief in spirits, their propitiation and veneration; later he adds that some other features of Bon include the exorcism of demons who bring sickness, as well as animal and human sacrifice.[47] Most notably, Bell mentions the "magical tambourine" used to fly in the sky, and we will see how this drum (*phyed rnga*) becomes the symbol most often singled out in identifying a Bon shaman, especially in the taxonomies created by phenomenologists of religion.

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[46] Charles Bell, *The Religion of Tibet* (Oxford University Press, 1931, reprinted in Delhi by Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. 8.

[47] Bell, *The Religion of Tibet*, p. 10.

Bell does not limit his characterization of Bon to ritual practices as described in ancient Tibetan and Chinese sources. He also believes that one can gain some insight into ancient Bon by examining the primitive practices found in tribal regions bordering contemporary Tibet, especially in the eastern Himalaya and western China, among the Lepchas, Limbu, the Lolo, Lissu, and Moso tribes. "It is probable that in those rites we have to this day a survival of the Pönist religion but little changed from its life in Tibet two thousand years ago."[48] Bell's suggestion here, that Bon can be found still practiced on the margins of Tibet, among the primitive tribal peoples, was accepted by many of his contemporaries and by later Tibetologists.[49] Even today many anthropologists continue to study shamans in the Himalayan regions bordering Tibet with the ethnohistorical purpose of reconstructing Tibet's pre-Buddhist religion.

The notion that the study of contemporary "primitive" societies will offer insights into the religious orientation of archaic or prehistoric societies was first formulated by Edward Tylor. Most famous for his evolutionary theory of religion that plotted human progress from savagery to civilization, Tylor noted that even today's civilized peoples retain vestiges of the most primitive religious attitudes, such as the animistic belief that the world is pervaded by spiritual beings. Tylor developed his "doctrine of survivals" to account for the persistence of archaic ideas in the present, although he offers little explanation for why the "survivals" have, in fact, survived.[50] The best place to look for these relics of a more primitive age and mental condition would be in the simple tribal societies located on the periphery of the

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[48] Charles Bell, *The Religion of Tibet*, p. 10. On page 15 he adds; "If one seeks for the nearest approach to the old Pönist faith, he will find it among the aboriginal tribes of the eastern Himalaya and western China, and among Tibetan tribes, such as the people of Po in south-eastern Tibet, who live in close contact with these aborigines or in similar surroundings."

[49] Alexandra David-Neel, in her *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (originally published as *Mystiques et magiciens du Thibet* Plon: Paris, 1929, English translation Claude Kendall, New York, 1932, reprinted by Dover 1971), repeatedly states that one can find evidence of Bon, "the shamanist aborigine," still practiced in the remote regions on the frontiers of Tibet. See pp. 36-39. One of the tribes of western China mentioned by Bell, the Mosso, were later studied by Joseph Rock, who found remnants there, and especially in the neighboring Na-khi, of ancient Bon practices. One reason why Rock spent so many years learning to decipher the pictographic texts of the Na-khi is that he believed that their literature was "of purely Bon origin." Drawn to the Na-khi's pictographic script, he was convinced that the texts were Bon fossils, and the Na-khi living remnants of the ancient Bon religion of Shamanism. See Joseph Francis Rock, *The Na-khi Naga Cult and Related Ceremonies*, (Roma: Istituto Italiano Per Il medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1952). For a critique of Rock's identification of the Na-khi literature and ancient Bon, see Anthony Jackson, "Tibetan Bön Rites in China: A Case of Cultural Diffusion," *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*, ed. by James F. Fisher (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), pp. 309-325.

[50] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researched into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* 2 Volumes (London: Murray, 1873, 1874). On this theory of "survivals," see Margaret T. Hogden, *The Doctrine of Survivals: A Chapter in the History of Scientific Method in the Study of Man* (London: Allenson, 1936).

modern civilized world. Tylor's theory of "survivals" informs not only Bell's claim that primitive Bon can be found among Himalayan tribal regions, but it survives too in the work of contemporary anthropologists.

It is easy to smile somewhat condescendingly at the missionaries and pioneering Tibetologists, who worried so much about idolatry and demonic plagiarism, and who subscribed to evolutionary theories of Tibetan religion that today seem so *outdated*. There is an implicit teleology lying behind the scholar's smile of superiority, for it arises from the assumption that we are no longer subject to the biases and naivete that afflicted earlier scholarship. Today, of course, scholars are dubious about the quest for the origins of religion, and evolutionary theories of religious development have fallen out of favor. When reviewing the work of earlier Tibetologists, it is tempting to distance ourselves from that past, and to protest that *we don't do that sort of thing now*. Yet despite our discomfort with evolutionary models of religion, we have hardly abandoned the conviction that the field of Tibetan studies must advance beyond the errors of the past. By denying the formative influence of past scholarship on the present, we blind ourselves to the historicity of our disciplinary formation, including the constitution of "Bon" as a research subject. The denial of our own on-going entanglement with issues debated by past scholars results from a fantasy that, once the past has been denied, we are now located "on the clean slate of the present, where there is nothing but 'the real data' to confound us."[51] This fantasy continues to motivate some scholars of Bon literature today, who distance themselves from earlier students of Tibet, whether for their armchair scholarship, or for their Buddhist biases, or for their ignorance of canonical Bon literature. By disavowing past scholarship, these philologists place themselves on the *tabula rasa* of the present, where their task is to provide a more historically accurate etymology of the terms found in Bon texts, including "Bon" itself. What remains dubious about this approach is the assumption that the scholar can retrieve the history of Bon or Buddhism from primary sources alone.

The pioneering scholars of Buddhism and Bon introduced a number of comparative strategies and historical models that were used by later scholars. For instance, there is a common tendency to shift from analogical comparisons (Bon is like central Asian shamanism, or Tantric Buddhism) to a theory of causality or genealogy (shamanism or Buddhism is the source of Bon). The genealogical model of comparison always establishes a relation of dependence or borrowing, with one religion serving as the more prestigious and pure source, while Bon is consistently designated the later "mixed" tradition. Too, the pioneers that we have reviewed relied on binary categories to distinguish "original" Bon from Buddhism that prove long lasting. These binary distinctions include the association of Buddhism/Bon with adjectives like active/passive, developmental/static, light/dark, and ethical/barbaric. These binarisms derive in part from Buddhist apologetic literature, as well as from a distinction introduced in nineteenth century scholarship between "ethical" and "natural" religion.

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[51] Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 32.

It is striking, for instance, how many of the pioneering scholars claimed that the most important contribution of Buddhism to Tibet was the ethical doctrine of karma, described as "you reap what you sow."[52] Buddhism civilizes and uplifts the Tibetans because it introduces them to a noble soteriology, ethical teachings based on karma and "charity," and virtues such as tolerance and gentleness. Moreover, it is a missionary religion based upon the dissemination of sacred texts, with a proselytizing ethic and universal orientation that is familiar to western scholars steeped in Christianity. Bon, on the other hand, was represented as strange and sinister. Its shamanism served as the demonic other, the religious matrix of the Tibetan natives. When Indian Buddhism crossed the Himalayan threshold in the seventh century it penetrated the Bon matrix of Tibet, and the product of their intermingling was a bastard child identified as "Lamaism." Lurking behind the image of Lamaism as a corrupted form of Buddhism lies Bon shamanism. Everything about Lamaism that seemed frightening and demonic, antithetical to "pure" Buddhism, was identified as the legacy of primitive Bon. In this historical narrative, Bon shamanism serves the purpose of establishing temporal and cultural distance from the pure origins of Indian Buddhism, marking Bon as the sinister other that is indigenous to Tibet.

Shamanism Afloat A Sea of Family Resemblances

In the 1950s, shamanism acquired a distinctly different meaning when used by Mircea Eliade, Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, and Helmut Hoffmann to describe Tibetan religion, and Bon in particular. In their work, we see a new approach to shamanism emerge that is explicitly comparative, "scientific," and grounded in both ethnology and textual study. These authors are all schooled in the phenomenology of religion, and this influence is apparent in their effort to catalogue systematically the typical features of

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[52] Ekai Kawaguchi identifies two valuable characteristics in the "creed" of the Tibetans: 1) they recognize the existence of a superhuman being and protector; 2) their belief in the law of cause and effect. *Three Years in Tibet*, p. 561. Sarat Chandra Das devotes an entire lecture to the "Doctrine of Transmigration" in *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, where he notes that the interest in causality has so penetrated the Tibetan popular consciousness that "the priesthood has constructed elaborate works on the art of divination, and necromancy, based on astrology." Das's point here seems somewhat critical of the role assumed by the "priests" of "Lamaism." But he also adds that the Lama meditates on the transcendental virtues of the Bodhisattva, and "with indifference, [they] dismiss the doctor and endeavor to become lost in meditation for the purpose of being restored to a higher stage of human existence after death." (pp. 81-2). Waddell generously notes of Lamaism that "notwithstanding its glaring defects, Lamaism has exerted a considerable civilizing influence over the Tibetans. The people are profoundly affected by its benign ethics, and its maxim, "as a man sows he shall reap," has undoubtedly enforced the personal duty of mastery over self in spite of the easier physical aids to piety which are prevalent." *The Buddhism of Tibet*, p. 154. Thus the individualistic ethical orientation of karma appeals to these writers as a civilizing force on the Tibetans' psyche.

shamanism, in their preoccupation with its morphology. For them, the original form of shamanism is to be found in the hunting cultures of North and Central Asia, but pre-Buddhist Bon constitutes the national Tibetan form. All agree that shamanism is found among hunting peoples, which accounts for the sacrality of bones, feathers, weapons, and blood in shamanic rituals. These features are described with much more detachment than their predecessors. As good phenomenologists striving for *epochê*, they manage to avoid much of the barbaric rhetoric and lurid labels that were commonly used by their predecessors to describe Bon shamans as devil-dancing sorcerers of a sinister sort. Despite their best intentions to bracket their own judgments about the truth or falsehood of the shaman's vocation and experiences, their evaluations of shamanism and Bon become apparent. When conflicts between Bon shamans and Tibetan Buddhists are discussed, the representations of the Bonpo are inevitably drawn from Buddhist apologetic sources. The Bonpos come off as the historical losers in their confrontation with their more sophisticated opponents, forced to the margins of Tibetan religious development, or assimilated into "Lamaism."

What all three scholars display as phenomenologists is an interest in classifying shamanic phenomena systematically, with numerous comparisons drawn to the shamanism of North and Central Asia. There is a noticeable shift away from simply labeling the primordium of Tibetan religion as "shamanism," towards interpreting this term as a constellation of ingredients that manifest interrelated patterns. Once these shamanic elements are identified and placed in some meaningful order, these scholars shift to an analysis of the shaman's function in society, his religious and healing role. Their identification of Tibetan shamanism is not limited to Bon, for they find shamanic elements surviving in the practices of Lamaism. Their approach reveals a tendency to decontextualize contemporary Bon and Buddhist practices and see them as remnants of something more primary, an archaic substrate of shamanism. How each scholar evaluates the substrate varies.

The single most influential study of shamanism is Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, first published in 1951. Although not a Tibetologist, Eliade's role in defining shamanism and identifying its essential features plays a formative role for these and subsequent scholars of Tibetan religions. At the very outset of his sweeping study, he offers an essential definition of shamanism; however, his conception expands as the work progresses to include a broad range of functions and symbolic motifs, until the phenomena become truly ubiquitous. According to his definition, the single most essential element involves the shaman's ecstatic experience: "the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld."[53] Ecstatic soul travel enables the shaman to establish a relationship with a celestial being. Eliade claims that the shaman's interaction with a Supreme Being residing in the heavens was the original underlying ideology of

[53] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Originally published in French as *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* Paris: Librarie Payot, 1951; revised and enlarged in the translation by Willard R. Trask, Princeton: Bollingen, 1972), p. 5.

shamanism. This ideology is based on the ecstatic experience of soul flight, an experience that he sharply distinguishes from spirit possession, when deities are persuaded to descend into a medium's body. It is his controversial judgment that spirit possession is a later degenerate development, and not properly shamanic at all.[54]

The shaman's ability to abandon his body and roam to the spirit world enables him to serve as a healer, when he combats evil spirits who are responsible for causing illness among ordinary folk, and to function as a psychopomp, who guides the souls of the recently deceased to the netherworld. In addition to describing the various social roles of the shaman, Eliade broadens his conception even further when he identifies certain symbols as archetypical "shamanic motifs." These include the shaman's exotic paraphernalia, his feathered costume, the tools of his trade (e.g. the drum), as well as more abstract features like the odd numbers commonly appearing in cosmological classificatory schemas. Eliade insists that all of these shamanic symbols are integrated in a religious microcosm, and their intrinsic meaning remains unaffected by their changing roles in different traditions. In constructing this ideal type, Eliade turns the shaman into a timeless mystery, almost a metaphysical being, who soars effortlessly across cultural boundaries, transcending historical particularities. By applying such loose criteria to a myriad different phenomenon, he finds shamans and shamanic elements everywhere, Tibet included. For Tibetologists like Hoffmann and Nebesky-Wojkkowitz too, there is a great deal of excitement in discovering the shaman in his Bon incarnation, or in his Lamaist disguise.

There is striking agreement among Eliade, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, and Hoffmann in what constitutes shamanism and where its manifestations might be found in Tibetan religions. Their consensus is no coincidence, for they were all familiar with each other's research, as evidenced from their mutual referencing in their citations. All agree that the classic example of a Bonpo practicing shamanic flight occurs in the tournament of magic at Mount Kailash between Milarepa and a Bonpo. In that story, Naro Bon chung flies to the summit mounted on a drum and wearing a blue cape, just like the shamans of central Asia.[55] Other instances of the flight of Bon magicians are declared shamanic, as well as their healing rituals recalling lost souls (*bla khyer*), their reliance on thread crosses (*mdo*) as "spirit traps," and their use of effigies (*glud*) during exorcism rituals. The effigies are understood to be a substitute for the bloody animal sacrifices that were

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[54] Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 505-507.

[55] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 433, where he cites Helmut Hoffmann's translation of the *Collected Songs of Milarepa* in his *Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Bon-Religion* Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, Franz Steiner Verlag (Wiesbaden, 1950), p. 275; also see Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet* (originally published as *Die Religionen Tibets* Karl Alber Verlag, 1956, English edition translated by Edward Fitzgerald, Macmillan, 1961), pp. 98-9; Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1956; reprinted in Kathmandu, Tiwari's Pilgrims Book House, 1993), p. 542. Also see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, "Die tibetische Bön-Religion," *Archiv für Völkerkunde* II, (Vienna, 1947), p. 38.

originally practiced in pre-Buddhist Tibet. The early Bon priests who presided over the funerary rites for the Tibetan kings are also viewed as psychopomps. Eliade and Hoffmann concur that there is plenty of evidence for the "supreme being ideology" in the Bonpos' preoccupation with heaven, and in the early kings' celestial descent and ascent via the sacred rope (*dmu thag*). However, both Hoffmann and Nebesky-Wojkowitz depart from Eliade's conception of what is properly shamanic when they consider examples of spirit possession, the Tibetan mediums and oracles (*lha 'babs*) that they believe emerged from ancient Bon.

In a chapter from his classic study, Eliade protests that "it would be chimerical to attempt in a few pages to list all the other shamanic motifs present in Bon-po myths and rituals and persisting in Indo-Tibetan tantrism."[56] "Chimerical" though it may be, the remainder of his chapter attests to his interest in cataloguing a broad range of shamanic techniques and symbols that originate in Bon and persist in Lamaism. These motifs range from the most abstract elements found in their cosmologies to mundane materials like fur and feathers, or the mirrors and drums used by Bon and Buddhist ritual specialists. Nebesky-Wojkowitz and Hoffmann are no less zealous in revealing shamanic motifs, which they list in encyclopedic fashion. All three scholars agree that the pre-Buddhist cosmology, which divided the world into three cosmic realms (heaven, earth, and underworld), is shamanic in origin, especially when ritual specialists are believed able to transport themselves and communicate between the realms. Furthermore, the penchant for odd numbers (especially 7, 9, and 13) found in Bon texts for classifying groups of deities and texts is cited as a shamanic motif, since these "mystical" numbers are frequently used by Siberian and Mongolian tribes too.[57] These numerological parallels between Bonpos and central Asian shamans may seem to us entirely superficial, if not misplaced. However, we must remember that it was only natural for these scholars trained in comparative phenomenology to search for (and find) structural similarities between the little known pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet and the neighboring shamanism of central Asia.

By far the most frequently cited examples of shamanic motifs focus on the apparel worn by Bonpos, as presented in literary descriptions. Their cataloguing of shamanic symbols pays particular attention to the exotic accouterments and costumes of Bon priests. The paraphernalia include the tambourine drum (*phyed rnga*) and the mirror (*me long*), the thread crosses (*mdo*) used as spirit traps, the use of felt mats (*phying stan*), arrows (*mda' dar*), daggers (*phur bu*), and swords (*gri*); the costumes feature feathered coats (*stod le*), felt hats (*phying zhva*), and blue capes (*sham thabs ngon po*)—all of which seem to them to be nearly identical in appearance and function to those worn by Siberian, Altaic, Buriat, or Mongolian shamans.[58] These materials, the dramatic emblems of power, add considerable weight and

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[56] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 433.

[57] Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 274 ff. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, pp. 538-9; Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, pp. 19-20.

[58] See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, pp. 542-553; Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 177 ff.; Hoffmann, *Quellen*, pp. 201 ff.

solidity to their identification of Bon shamanism that is otherwise missing in their flights of fancy about "mystical" odd numbers.

Yet it is important to realize that for these scholars the mundane materials are not as earthly as they seem at first sight. Their value for Eliade and others lies in their abstract religious meaning; they are regarded as cosmic symbols that disclose "hierophanies" of the sacred, and patterns of "metapsychic itineraries."[59] It is assumed that the ancient Bonpo priest understood, perhaps only intuitively, the authentic sacred reality (the "depth of meaning") in the symbolism of his costume. Furthermore, as these shamanic symbols and forms have genuine ontological status for Eliade, they cannot be destroyed or lost, only mutilated or camouflaged when assimilated into later Lamaist rituals. This form of interpretation leads to a de-historicized perspective on Tibetan shamanism as an abstract type, an ideal type that was manifest most purely in the distant past.

The fascination with the theatrical costume and equipment of the Bon priest is not limited to western historians of religion and anthropologists, however. Bon historical texts also describe the foreign origins of the priest's "wild" (*rgod*) costume and ritual paraphernalia, although there is little or no interest in interpreting their symbolic significance. According to their historical perspective, most of the exotic materials were offered to the Bon priests as decorations of honor by Tibetan kings during the pre-Buddhist period. Bon histories present an idealized image of pre-Buddhist Tibet, when Bon flourished and Bon priests served as the royal "bodyguards" (*sku srung gi gshen*), who protected the kings and offered them sage political advice. A stock phrase repeated in many Bon historical texts sums up this golden age, when Tibet was under Bon rule:

> At that time, the Tibetan kingdom was the land of Bon; the kings were great, the priests were dignified, laws were strict, and the subjects were happy. In Zhang zhung and Tibet as kings were gods, human beings were well protected. As the priests served as royal bodyguards, the kings were able to live long. As they lived mainly in virtue, they were happy in all their rebirths. As the divine rope hung from heaven, the ladder for ascending [to the heavens] was solid. As they invoked undefiled gods, they received protection from them. As the ministers were wise in their counsel, the government was stable: the activities of the unified religio-political system spread and flourished.[60]

The texts add that the Tibetan kings patronized Bon monks, and they especially revered the Bon priests and yogins who possessed supernatural powers. In recognition of their superior spiritual status, the kings paid

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[59] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 145.

[60] This phrase appears in many Bon texts, with some variation. The version quoted appears in Shar rdza Bkra shis Rgyal mtshan's *Legs bshad rin po che'i mdzod* (or *A Precious Treasury of Good Sayings*) (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985), p. 170.12ff; but also see *Rgyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas* (from *Three Sources for a History of Bon*), p. 115.4 ff; *G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, p. 22.1ff; and Spa ston Rgyal bzang po's *Bstan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron me* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991), p. 141.18ff.

homage to the Bon priests in three ways, in honor of their body, speech, and mind. Most important for our purposes were the crowns and clothes given by the king to his Bon priests as signs of respect for their body (*sku la gtsigs byin*):

> Their strands of hair were tied in a topknot and left uncut. In their white silk turbans were stuck tufts of eagle feathers, the king of birds. They wore a golden bird horn crown and a turquoise forehead ornament. They dressed in a cloak of white lynx and jackal fur. They were given tiger, leopard and caracal paws, and aprons made of white lion fur, and a pair of silken shoes with silver laces.[61]

While Eliade would surely see the bird horns and feathers as ornithological symbols that recall shamanic flight, while the white fur resembles the costume of the Buriat shaman, Bon texts present these materials as royal rewards for the priest's magical power and counsel.[62]

One Bon history, *The Collected Works on Eternal Bon* (*G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*) even offers an explanation of how the kings acquired such exotic emblems. According to this text, the Tibetan empire expanded significantly during the time when Bon flourished, well before the reign of Srong btsan

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[61] *Rgyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas* p. 116.3 ff. For a shorter version, see *G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, p.22.3; *Legs bshad rin po che'i mdzod* p. 171.5ff; *Bstan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron me*, p. 142.13ff; *Sgra 'grel* (or *Bden pa bon gyi mdzod sgo sgra 'grel 'phrul gyi lde mig* in *Srid pa'i mdzod phugs kyi rtsa 'grel* (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Yungdrung Bon Student's Committee, 1993), p. 23.18ff. The term "bird horn" (*bya ru*) is not one of those stock phrases quoted in Tibetan monastic debate to illustrate non-existent phenomena (such as "the horns of a rabbit" or "bird tracks in the sky"). Rather, the literal referent for the term *bya ru* are the horns that appear on the head of the mythical *khyung* bird, the bird most sacred to the Bonpos, which became identified with the Indian *garuda*. However, more commonly *bya ru* refers to a device found atop the finials of Bon chortens. But in this context it appears that the "bird horn" is a symbol of royalty. For a discussion of this symbol, see Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet* pp. 237-8; Roberto Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang* (Dharamsala, 1996), pp. 162-164; and Dan Martin, *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*, pp. 118-137. Both Vitali and Martin argue that the bird horn is a royal symbol that originates from Persia, where the Sassanid kings wore winged crowns.

[62] For Eliade's analysis of the Buriat shaman's white fur, see *Shamanism*, p. 150. The fur of a white lion is not only found as an emblem of distinction in the Bon tradition, for Buddhist historical texts also present it as a mark of honor. See Dpa' bo Gstug lag phreng ba's *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, ed. by Rdo rje Rgyal po (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1986), p. 379.2-3, where a collar made from the fur of a white lion was awarded to a member of the powerful 'Bro clan; another passage cited by Vitali in *Kingdoms* p. 169 n. 231 comes from the earlier Buddhist text, *Lde'u jo sras chos 'byung* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1987), p. 112.8-12., where it is stated that another member of the 'Bro clan "owned the white lion fur collar. This was his sign of greatness." From these two examples, Vitali concludes that the white lion fur denotes the 'Bro clan, as its special mark of distinction. Such a conclusion would certainly be contested by the Bonpos, who offer their own etiology for the white lion fur.

sgam po, the king usually acknowledged as Tibet's empire builder. It records how the Tibetan kings would lead their armies on expeditions to the frontiers "to subdue the border regions" (*mtha' 'dul*). Each campaign proved successful, due in no small part to the assistance of Bon priests who performed various rituals, such as the ritual to suppress demonic enemies (*dgra sri phyogs gnan*). As a reward, the Tibetan kings decorated the bodies of their Bon priests with the booty and spoils from the defeated countries. From Nan-chao ('Jang), a Bon priest was decorated with three wild markers as insignia of rank (*yig tshang du rgod gsum*): a turquoise bird horn crown, a cloak of white eagle feathers, on which were attached tiger paws. After defeating China, the Tibetan king presented his helpful Bon priest with a white silk turban, and the text notes that "even now Bonpos wear turbans on their head as an everlasting sign." After Bhutan (Mon) was conquered with the help of ritual bombs (*btso*) prepared by a Bon priest, he was rewarded by the king with a cloak of tiger and leopard skin, and the author explains "this is the reason why the Bonpos wear tiger skin cloaks."[63]

The point of this narrative is clearly to present an etiology for the foreign-looking garments and gear that Bon ritual specialists wear and use even today on special ceremonial occasions. But the narrative also glorifies the mythic past, when Tibetan kings heeded their Bon priests, and "the king's power was generated by Bon" (*rje'i mnga' thang bon gyis skyed*). What is noteworthy about these narratives is that they present the Bon priests as political actors and ritual specialists, rather than as shamanic healers, psychopomps, or masters of ecstatic trance. Their power is represented as less "spiritual" than political, for it supports the centralized authority of the king and his goals of imperial expansion. The "wild" symbols are not "borrowed" by the Bon priests from neighboring shamans, rather these neighbors are conquered and "tamed" by the powerful rituals of Bon priests working on behalf of a centralized imperial government, and their "wild" resources are appropriated. The bold display of these emblems is meant to embellish both the Tibetan king's and the Bon priest's power as a form of symbolic conquest and metonymic domination. Such a picture, however fantastic and mythical, does not fit well with the traditional representations of Bon "shamanism" by western scholars.[64]

With the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet, Tibetan histories agree that Buddhism and Bon came into conflict. According to Bon histories, once pro-Buddhist kings came into power, most notably Khri srong lde btsan, the Bonpos were horribly persecuted, being forcibly converted to Buddhism or sent into exile from Central Tibet. This forced assimilation or marginalization is only a temporary setback according to the Bon histories, for after a few generations the Bon "treasure texts" (*gter ma*) that had been hidden in the ground were rediscovered, and a Bon renaissance takes place. A somewhat similar scenario is imagined to occur in the narratives of western scholars. "Original" Bon is suppressed by Buddhism but it does not disappear altogether; for its shamanic elements went underground, as it

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[63] *G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, p. 30.4-31.4.

[64] For a revisionist perspective on the shaman and his political role, see *Shamanism, History and the State* ed. by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

were, to become the religious substratum of Tibet. How well shamanism survived there in the substratum, and what impact it had on Tibetan culture, was debated.

Although Eliade was not a historian of Tibetan religions, he hazards that "Lamaism has preserved the Bon shamanic tradition almost in its entirety. Even the most famous masters of Tibetan Buddhism are reputed to have performed cures and worked miracles in the purest tradition of shamanism."[65] He acknowledges that some of the esoteric practices found in "Lamaism" might have Indian Tantric roots, yet he insists that many of these practices are motivated by the shaman's pursuit of an ecstatic experience. Using the metaphors of surface and depth found so often in the analysis of Lamaism, he claims that if one peeled away the thin veneer of Buddhist theology and symbolism in many Lamaist rituals (e.g. the dismemberment rites (*gcod*), skeleton dances (*'cham*) and visits to Buddhist hells (*'das log*), one will find underneath the "soul" of archaic shamanism, with its initiation rites, ecstatic techniques, and psychopomp function. While these shamanic practices and symbols have been reinterpreted to fit into a Buddhist theological framework, and thus redirected away from goals that are properly ecstatic, Eliade insists that Bon shamanism somehow remains preserved in Lamaism. In his own theological argument, he makes the problematic claim that the normative Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*) presented a serious challenge to the realistic doctrine of the soul that is essential to shamanism, yet he sees the archaic shamanic spirit surviving in Lamaism, animating many of its rituals.[66] It is as if the essence of shamanism, its very soul, anchors the transhistorical category for Eliade, bringing it back to earth. Without it "shamanism" might float free as a signifier into space, like the limbs of a body disassembled in the Tibetan ritual of *gcod*. The archaic Bon substratum preserves more than distant memories of shamanism, for in certain remote areas of Tibet shamanism still flourishes openly, and Eliade considers that to be evidence for the genuine spiritual value of these archaic practices.[67]

While Nebesky-Wojkowitz might balk at Eliade's romantic vision of Lamaism being animated by archaic shamanism, he agrees that Lamaism contains various traditions that are survivals of early Bon shamanism:

> The exceedingly numerous class of protective divinities comprises many figures who originally belonged to the pantheon of the old Tibetan Bon faith. A study of the Tibetan protective deities and their cult, apart from giving an insight into a little known aspect of Lamaism, reveals new facts regarding the beliefs of pre-

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[65] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 434.

[66] Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 440-441.

[67] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 437: "These few extracts suffice to show the transformation that a shamanic schema can undergo when it is incorporated into a complex philosophical system, such as tantrism. Important for our purpose is the survival of certain shamanic symbols and methods even in highly elaborated techniques of meditation oriented to goals other than ecstasy. All this, in our opinion, sufficiently illustrates the genuineness and the initiatory spiritual value of many shamanic experiences."

> Buddhist Tibet and their relation to the early shamanistic stratum out of which the Bon religion developed.[68]

For Nebesky-Wojkowitz, original Bon can be reconstructed by considering all the weird and overlooked magical practices of Lamaism, including the cult of terrifying protective deities such as Dorje Shugden (Rdo rje shugs ldan), and realizing that they too derived from the ancient shamanic substratum. Much of his ethnographic and textual research is oriented towards reconstructing these elements, in addition to demystifying the shaman's ecstatic techniques.

There is a marked ambivalence about Nebesky-Wojkowitz's research on Tibetan shamanism. His scholarship combines scientific disclosure about the esoteric techniques and tricks used by ritual specialists, with the coyness of the historian who is stripping off the veil of time from ancient secrets, seen for instance in his descriptions of the shamanic "séance." His scientific interest in explaining the oracle medium's trance reveals some of the pharmacological techniques used to induce the trance state, ranging from the inhalation of juniper smoke to the secret ingestion of hashish and Guinea pepper. His own suspicions about the authenticity of the oracle's trance state remain unvoiced, but instead he lets us know of well-educated Tibetan skeptics who regard the oracles "if not as impostors, then at least as strange pathological cases."[69] Ironically, his study has attained a certain dark occult status among some well-educated Tibetans today. The author's sudden untimely death, shortly after the book's completion, was thought to have been brought about by Tibet's protective deities, who were avenging his efforts to reveal their secrets and magic power. At the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, when I tried to check out Nebesky-Wojkowitz's text for my research, I discovered that it was not on the shelf with most other books but kept separate under lock and key. Only after offering the Tibetan librarian my American passport as collateral was I permitted access to the work, although not before being warned of its dangerous content.[70]

Nebesky-Wojkowitz's contemporary, Helmut Hoffmann, also presents himself as a historian who is lifting the veil of secrecy from Tibet and its history. At the very outset of *The Religions of Tibet* Hoffmann disparages "the tremendously swollen romantic literature" that has been written by earlier travelers and scholars, "much of it of very doubtful value, and including the curious dissertations of eccentric followers of mysticism and occultism." Contributing to this mysterious and mystified image of Tibet was the country's "hermetic isolation," its geographic and political inaccessibility.

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[68] Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, p. vii.

[69] Nebesky-Wojkowitz, , *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, pp. 440, 547. He adds that "I have often been asked by Tibetans the question what I thought of their mediums, and whether I had the impression that really some supernatural forces were manifesting themselves in the course of these ceremonies." While he never tells us his answer, as if doing so would violate his "objectivity" as a scientist and transgress the phenomenologist's ideal of *epochê*, his own skepticism is apparent.

[70] Debunking the Tibetan shaman and his magic may be hazardous to one's health.

This mythical image is problematic, of course, because it made Tibet appear as if it lacked any "real history." After explaining why the mystical image of Tibet is mistaken, thereby clearing a space for the historian to reconstruct the real Tibet, Hoffmann declares that only recently have a few Western scholars been able to reveal a truly historical picture of Tibetan religion, one that is scientific and comparative:

> Tibet can no longer be regarded as without history. The veil of secrecy is gradually being raised, and we shall come to know more and more about this strange world from within, to understand it in accordance with its own laws of development, and be able to find its place in the total history of Asia major, together with the newly-discovered civilizations along the edge of the Tarim Basin.[71]

For Hoffmann, understanding "this strange world from within" means that Tibetan culture and history should be accessed through Tibetan literature. Indeed, one of his strengths as a philologist and textual scholar is that he used a broad range of Tibetan sources in his survey of Buddhism and Bon. Still, much like his predecessors, his presentation of Bon favors Buddhist apologetic and polemical sources, with *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* featured prominently in his historical narrative about Bon's development. Hoffmann does not simply reiterate the tri-fold schema of Bon's development found in the CMDS. He also explains its "own law of development" by using western models of religious evolution and diffusion, always with the intent of explaining what is implicit in the "original" text. Finally, his analysis of Bon is explicitly comparative. He argues that early Bon corresponds quite simply to Central Asian shamanism, though its shamanic motifs are found throughout Asia major, while the second phase of Bon reveals many foreign influences from India and Persia. Since we have seen all of this before, it might seem that the "veil of secrecy" lifted by Hoffmann will disclose only more of the same clichés about Bon shamanism. Yet his views on Bon are often unusual and even startling, and they manifest his biases quite clearly.

Hoffmann identifies two main forces in the formation of Tibetan religious culture: the dominant force of Indian Buddhism, and the indigenous Tibetan worldview of Bon, "which, though outwardly defeated, has nevertheless filled all the spiritual and psychological channels of the country's national life." One may well wonder what exactly this "autochthonous" Tibetan tradition entails, since Hoffmann traces everything about it that is recognizable elsewhere in Asia Major. Leaving aside what "autochthonous" might mean, let us see how he distinguishes between the impact of these two forces on Tibet, and how he identifies ancient Bon in particular:

> The internal situation of Tibet may be said to turn on a polar reaction between a luminous, dynamic, fructifying and historical element on the one hand, and a sombre, static, and fundamentally unhistorical element—the ancient Tibetan religion—on the other. The origin of the word 'Bon' to describe it is lost in the past, and it is not readily definable, but in all probability once referred to the

[71] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, pp. 13-14.

> conjuring of the gods by magic formulas.... Until quite recently, we knew very little about this old Bon religion. Today we are in a position to say with some certainty that the original Bon religion was the national form of that old animist-shamanist religion which at one time was widespread not only in Siberia, but throughout the whole of Inner Asia, East and West Turkestan, Mongolia, Manchuria, the Tibetan plateaux and even China.... Comparative religious historical study of the present-day Shamanist tribes of Siberia, and of the old Turkish, Mongolian and Tungusan peoples of Inner Asia (before the advent of missionary activities) ... promises to afford us valuable assistance in our efforts to understand the autochthonous beliefs of Ancient Tibet.[72]

Hoffmann's differentiation between Buddhist and Bon cultural forces, reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss' binary opposition between "hot" and "cold" societies, denies temporal coevalness between Buddhism and Bon. It also raises questions about how two opposing forces could ever interact or coexist, for it makes Tibetan culture appear somewhat schizophrenic. We might ask why he designates Buddhism as the "luminous, dynamic, fructifying and historical" force, while Bon is "sombre, static, and fundamentally unhistorical." As a missionary religion that traveled across national boundaries, Buddhism parallels the historical tradition of Christianity. Buddhism is also viewed as a classic literary tradition, with an ethical orientation and philosophical corpus that enables the educated Buddhist to evolve to greater spirtual depths and achieve higher levels of doctrinal sophistication. "Original" Bon, on the other hand, is represented as the non-literate native tradition, the national religion that remains stuck in the mire of animistic beliefs and shamanic rituals. Like Waddell and many others sympathetic to some form of "pure" Buddhism, Hoffmann views Buddhism as a bridge between Tibet's primitive origins and the post-Enlightenment worldview of the Europeans. Once Buddhism is adopted as the national religion, Tibetan civilization advances along the Buddhist path. But Bon remains nothing more than a "moribund side channel of Tibetan cultural history—one capable of providing us with interesting indications with regard to the past, but not one which played any further role in shaping the life of the nation."[73] Such an evaluation is sharply at odds with Eliade's romantic view of Bon shamanism as an active spiritual force animating contemporary Tibetan Buddhist practices.

Hoffmann's suggestion that the study of contemporary Siberian shamanism will shed light on Tibet's ancient native tradition is reminiscent of Tylor's "survival" theory, but with an added comparative component. Like Eliade and Nebesky-Wojkowitz, he finds it remarkable that some Bon priests are depicted with ornate headdresses, blue robes, fur cloaks, and drums, all of which make up the paraphernalia of Siberian shamans.[74] Hoffmann would no doubt seek to support his diffusionist theory in the

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[72] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, pp. 14-15.
[73] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 85.
[74] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 25.

accounts of the foreign origins of the wild costume and paraphernalia described earlier in the Bon histories. However, it would be a mistake to accept these Bon etiological narratives as accurate historical records. There is simply no evidence from Tibet (aside from these Bon apologetic works) or from neighboring territories to corroborate Tibetan imperial expansion under the early kings and their Bon priests. Moreover, the Bon etiological narratives present the magical powers and ritual prowess of the priests as prior to the headdresses, bird horn crowns, and fur and feathered cloaks offered as gifts by the king to honor his priests. There does not appear to be any link in the Bon texts between the costumes and the Tibetan subjugation of foreign "shamans." The foreigners are simply described as demons on the frontier who need to be "suppressed" and "tamed," a common Tibetan euphemism for defeating one's enemies and converting them to the true religion.

With the death of king Gri gum, Bon is said to undergo a major transformation. It becomes preoccupied with funerary rites, for which Hoffmann offers a diffusionist explanation following the narrative found in Thu'u bkvan's CMDS. Hoffmann tells how funerary rituals were introduced from Kashmir (Kha che), Gilgit (Bru sha) and Guge (Zhang zhung), along with divination and magical practices. He also notes the syncretic character of this stage of Bon, adding Tantric, Gnostic, and Manichaean influences to Thu'u bkvan's theory of Śaivite influence. His diffusionism becomes most pronounced in his theory of Manichean influences on "primitive" Bon. "The Bon religion seems to have been a rather primitive animism, but by the time Zhang zhung was incorporated into the new Tibetan empire the religion must have undergone certain changes connected with the adoption of ideas from Iran.... This is not surprising since the western Himalayan districts were at all times open to the neighboring Iranian peoples."[75] Many of the "Manichean" dualisms that one finds in Hoffmann's work (good/evil, white/black, sacred/demonic) have their parallels in the insider/outsider distinctions found in Tibetan polemical literature, although they are also compounded by Orientalist binarisms.

Hoffmann claims that the early Bon tradition was transformed yet again once it came into contact with Buddhism. However, these transformations (*bsgyur*) were merely in imitation of the superior Buddhist doctrines and practices, a process that Hoffmann describes with the rhetoric of the demonic:

> Just as the medieval Satanist desecrated the Host, so the Bon-po turned their sacred objects not in a dextral but in a sinister fashion. For example, the points of their holy sign the swastika did not turn dextrally as that of Lamaism do, but sinistrally, to left

[75] Hoffmann, *Tibet: A Handbook* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1975), p. 102. For a critical assessment of the Manichean and Iranian influences on Bon, see Per Kvaerne, "Dualism in Tibetan Cosmogonic Myths and the Question of Iranian Influence," in *Silver on Lapis: Tibetan Literary Culture and History* ed. by Christopher I. Beckwith (Bloomington: The Tibet Society, 1987), pp. 163-174.

> instead of to right. The Bon religion had become ossified as a heresy, and its essence lay largely in contradiction and negation.[76]

In language strikingly similar to that used by Christian theorists of demonic plagiarism, as well as by those European missionaries who first encountered Tibetan lamas as satanic doubles, Hoffmann suggests that the entire thrust of Bon became heretical, a deliberate inversion and perversion of Buddha's pure teachings. Using this figure of reversal, Hoffmann translates the difference between Buddhists and Bonpos as anti-sameness. It is as if the Bon tradition were a concave carnival mirror whose grotesque distortions invert orthodox Buddhism, but in the process the High Tradition is also flattened out. Positioning himself as the righteous judge condemning Bon heresies, Hoffmann's harsh verdict is that "transformed" Bon became somewhat less primitive but more sinister. Even though the Bonpos were imitating a "luminous, dynamic, fructifying and historic" tradition, they ultimately never achieve full historicity themselves, becoming instead "ossified as a heresy." All of Hoffmann's judgments about Bon and its marginal position in Tibetan culture mirror that of the Buddhist polemicists, who place themselves at the center, as the legitimate and orthodox "insiders" in contrast with their heterodox Bon opponents.

Not surprisingly, later European scholars who collaborated with Tibetan Bonpo monks and scholars would come to dismiss Hoffmann's view of Bon as inadequate because of its Buddhist bias. In his survey of research on Bon, Per Kvaerne sums up Hoffmann's scholarship thus: "Hoffmann's work,

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[76] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 98. On page 74 he adds: "The later Bon-po led an isolated existence apart from the main stream of spiritual development as a discarded heretical sect, as a provincial tendency in religious belief whose main tendency was and still is a purely negative one, namely anti-Buddhist." The trope of "reversal" or "inversion" is a common motif used in popular literature to dismiss or disparage Bon. Helmut Hoffmann's countryman, Ernst Hoffman, better known under his self-appointed name Lama Anagarika Govinda, writes in his *The Way of the White Clouds* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1970), p. 223: "Since it is only the Bon-pos who reverse the direction of the cicumambulation or who pass a shrine or sacred place (as for instance Mount Kailas) with the left shoulder towards it, our suspicion that the abbot was not a Buddhist but a Bon-po was confirmed, and when we entered the main temple our last doubt vanished, because everything we saw seemed to be a reversal or at least a distortion of Buddhist tradition. Thus the swastika sign of the Bon-pos points to the left, while the Buddhist one points to the right." Likewise, Fosco Maraini expresses his sense of discomfort when visiting a Bon temple, where everything is backwards: "If first impressions are to be trusted, I do not like the Bon religion. There is something uncanny about it, though that is only an impression, I repeat. Perhaps it's the feeling that it is a primitive religion, which only came to have proper temples, scriptures, ceremonial, and art because of contact with its Buddhist neighbor. Finally there is the fact that no great human spirit has expressed himself in it—a sure sign of inferiority. Its spaces have never been illuminated—they have remained gloomy and nocturnal." Maraini then goes on to describe how savage and "robustly barbarous" ancient Tibet was with its Bon religion. See his *Secret Tibet* (New York: Viking Press, 1952), p. 204.

originally fruitful, had become ossified and now represented a dead end."[77] Kvaerne's assessment sounds ironic in that he echoes Hoffmann's language in order to put him in his place. Hoffmann is recognized as the first scholar to explore the Bon tradition in any serious and systematic way, and his exploration of Bon based on Tibetan literature is said to be fruitful. Yet the fact that he persisted in judging Bon as anti-Buddhist in essence led us down a blind alley. After the ancestor of Bonology is dutifully invoked and praised by Kvaerne, his later work is declared pleonastic, an ossified relic. Such an assessment anticipates a dramatic shift in the evaluation of Bon, one that is more sympathetic to interpreting Bon from its own historical and literary perspective, and that calls into question whether Bon is truly a form of shamanism. It is to this revisionist perspective on Bon that we shall now turn.

Exorcising the Shaman from Bon Studies

During the 1960s and 1970s, Tibetologists such as Rolf Stein, Giuseppe Tucci, David Snellgrove, and Per Kvaerne came to reassess Bon, which consequently lead to the rejection of the category of shamanism by most western scholars specializing in the study of Bon texts. How did such a radical reassessment come about? First, these scholars realized that they cannot follow the dualistic approach of Buddhist purists and regard Bon as Tibet's only other religion, containing all the leftover, marginal, and "superstitious" elements that do not belong to their own elite tradition. In their surveys of Tibetan religion, both Stein and Tucci introduced a new category to describe the popular religion of Tibet. This religion, sometimes referred to in early Tibetan literature as *mi chos*, the "religion (or customs) of the people," is neither Buddhist nor Bon but is understood to be Tibet's indigenous tradition. Stein names this the "nameless religion,"[78] while Tucci

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[77] Per Kvaerne, "The Bon Religion of Tibet: A Survey of Research," *The Buddhist Forum* vol. III, ed. by Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), p. 133.

[78] Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 191. Stein addresses the problem of locating Tibet's indigenous religion, and how it differs from both Buddhism (or Lamaism) and Bon: "It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that all non-Buddhist elements absorbed by Lamaism in Tibet were indigenous. Tibetan historians themselves have clouded the issue by constantly mixing up two separate points: the fact that Bon was there before Buddhism, and the judgment that everything preceding the latter religion was naturally 'barbarous', uncivilized and appropriate to an age of darkness. Hence the somewhat over-simplified conclusion drawn by early European students, who tended to present Bon as the primitive religion of Tibet. Further, by equating 'primitive' with 'savage,' everything in Lamaism that seemed frightening, twisted and demonic or mediumistic soon came to be regarded as Bonpo and primitive. From that to describing it all as 'Shamanism' was but a step. The truth is more complex. It is often impossible to tell which of Lamaism's not specifically Buddhist elements is indigenous and which foreign, which one was really Bonpo and which was not." Stein here presents a very clear analysis of European misconceptions of

calls it the "folk religion."[79] For both scholars it serves as the ancient religious substratum of Tibet: all that is not specifically Buddhist or Bon is relegated to this category. This religious substratum was reconstructed from two kinds of historical sources: the ancient Tibetan texts recovered from Dunhuang that had received little attention from earlier scholars, as well as later Bon and Buddhist sources. While we might expect a more precise picture of Bon to emerge, what is interesting about both of their surveys is that the problematic Bon tradition is dealt with last, after Buddhism (or "Lamaism") and the "folk" or "nameless" religion are carefully delineated. Despite the discovery of another popular religion in Tibet, and its displacement of Bon as the indigenous substratum, the boundaries between Buddhism, Bon and the folk (or "nameless") religion can hardly be fixed.

One of Stein's major contributions to the study of early Tibetan religion rests on his distinction between Bon and the substratum of the non-Buddhist folk tradition (*mi chos*), which he calls "the nameless tradition." Of course the very fact that Stein names this latter "tradition" at all has important consequences for recognizing and validating it. But the dividing line between all three Tibetan religions can only be murky and obscure, as he remarks in his concluding comments about assimilated Bon:

> The beliefs of systematized and adapted Bon are consequently identical with Nyingma-pa doctrines, apart from names and technical terms. The rest of Bon merges to a large extent with the nameless religion discussed earlier. Is this because Bon by itself really represented that indigenous tradition, as is often thought? Or is it because the Bon sorcerers necessarily had to relate to and integrate with it? It is hard to tell, in absence of any specifically Bon *exposé* of their religion.[80]

These are questions that remain unanswered today, for no "specifically Bonpo *exposé*" has yet been revealed with the answers to all our questions about the boundaries between Bon, Buddhism, and Tibet's indigenous religion—nor will this likely ever happen. The very idea that such a "Bonpo *exposé*" exists rests on the assumption that there was once a discrete Bon tradition in the distant past, prior to becoming all mixed up with Buddhism or Tibetan popular religion.

Tucci also notes the difficulty of distinguishing between Buddhism, Bon, and the "folk religion," but he adds that Bon manifests distinct phases in its development, each in succession reflecting higher degrees of synthesis:

> If we are discussing the Bon religion only at the end of our account it is, among other things, because our preceding descriptions, especially of the folk religion, and of certain special aspects of Lamaism, have in some degree opened the way to understanding Bon. If we can disregard some short texts found in Central Asia, we

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"primitive" Bon and how Buddhist texts have lent support for these misunderstandings.

[79] Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, trans. by Geoffrey Samuel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 163-212. It first appeared as *Die Religionen Tibets unde der Mongolei* by Tucci and Walther Heissig (Stuttgart, 1970).

[80] Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 241.

> can deduce that the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet had to undergo a vast process of evolution to become able to compete with the incomparably more solid doctrinal structure of Buddhism.[81]

When Tucci turns his attention to analyzing how Bon developed within the context of Tibet's social transformations, he relies entirely upon the "traditions that have come down to us" in the three-fold system of the *Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems*.[82] Evidently it is the text's "handed down" or "given" quality (a crucial characteristic of all canonical texts) that keeps Tucci from critically interrogating its content and categories (*'jol bon, 'khyar bon, 'gyur bon*). Reading Tucci's analysis of these phases produces an eerie feeling of déjà vu all over again.[83]

So what exactly is Bon for Stein and Tucci? Together they might answer that Bon includes both of the above (Buddhism and popular religion) and a little more. That is, they agree that Bon is syncretic, adopting and adapting Buddhist and popular religious themes. But what determines the unique identity of Bon is that it has its own canon, a system for classifying its "own" teachings, its own cosmogonies and theogonies, and a lineage stemming from its own founder. There is an important shift here towards recognizing the indigenous categories found in Bon literature as legitimate, or at least as legitimizing a distinct identity. Yet the brief resumes of Bon by Stein and Tucci are still quite indebted to Buddhist polemical literature. The CMDS in particular informs their presentation of how Bon "evolved" from a simple religion preoccupied with apotropaic rites, divination, and magic, to a state-supported religion featuring a royal mortuary cult, and finally to a religion with a sophisticated doctrinal "superstructure," lifted mostly from Buddhism, as well as from Kashmir Śaivism, Gnosticism, and Manicheanism.[84]

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[81] Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 213.

[82] Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 224.

[83] Tucci himself insists that the model of religious development found in the CMDS corresponds to an "inner law", namely that the tradition develops naturally from its primordial state to a more sophisticated religion, overseen by a priestly class with unique powers distinct from the king's. He explains on p. 224 of *The Religions of Tibet* that "from a primitive starting-point of purely magical or shamanistic character, varying from place to place, we come in the time of Grigum (who doubtless indicates an especially significant factor in the development of the Bon religion) to the first beginnings of an organizational process probably brought about through the contrast between the royal authority and the magical powers of Bon." Such a statement about the "inner law" of religious evolution is revealing, not so much for its insight into the actual development of Bon, nor as an explanation of what Thu'u bkvan "really meant;" rather, it tells us that Tucci (like so many earlier historians of religion) regarded this model as a universal pattern for explaining change in "primitive" religions.

[84] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization,* p. 232. Stein uses the CMDS historical overview of Bon a bit more critically than the other scholars discussed, although not any more sparingly. His method for reconstructing the history of Bon relies upon the narratives present in Thu'u bkvan's text as well as in other Tibetan Buddhist histories. He enumerates all three phases of Bon development, but devotes most of his attention to the second and third phases. He refuses to speculate about the

With the displacement of Bon as Tibet's non-Buddhist popular religion, there developed a much more critical attitude toward labeling Bon simply as a form of shamanism, especially as defined by Eliade and supported by the textual and ethnographic examples of Hoffmann and Nebesky-Wojkowitz. Stein and Tucci both found little evidence of the ecstatic trance state of the shaman in Bon rituals. Likewise, they found no support for the "supreme being ideology" that Eliade argued was so central to shamanism. Tucci explicitly rejected Hoffmann's claim that Bonpos believed exclusively in Heaven, personified as a celestial being and understood as a *deus otiosus*; thus Tucci denies that Bonpos ever subscribed to a version of the shamanic "supreme being ideology."[85] Too, Stein and Tucci recognize that many of the shamanic motifs singled out by earlier scholars are found in Indian Tantric literature, and they question whether these elements were historically disseminated into Tibet from central Asia, as Hoffmann had suggested. Nonetheless, Tucci accepts that many of the shamanic motifs do appear in the ritual roles of early Bon priests, who were described as riding though the air, magically using their drums, and calling back the souls of the dead or dying.[86] Stein, on the other hand, remains more skeptical than Tucci about labeling such practices as shamanic, pointing out that the funerary and healing rites performed by Bon priests were concerned primarily with the details of ritual syntax, with no sign of the priests breaking out into any

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nature of what he calls "revealed Bon," and to his credit, he eschews the categories of animism and shamanism altogether. Yet when narrating the second phase of "deviant Bon" he presents the story of the three foreign Bonpos being invited to Tibet as if it were a historical event. Furthermore, he suggests that Thu'u bkvan's theory of Śaivite influence is plausible, adding on page 247 that Taoist, Manichaean, and Gnostic influences are possible as well.

[85] Tucci writes in *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 218: "Nothing however allows one to define Bon as a religion characterized exclusively by the worship of heaven. Such worship only takes place in special circumstances and at particular moments, that is when there is mention of a *gnam bon* a "Bon of heaven." Then again on p. 246 he writes: "One scarcely does justice to the old Bon religion if one affirms it is a religion of the sky, although certain Bon concepts (e.g. *gnam bon*) could justify this name." Tucci's criticism here is explicitly directed against Hoffmann, but Hoffmann was simply reinforcing Eliade's theory that shamanism must have a sky or heaven orientation for its supreme being ideology. In both Buddhist and Bon polemical literature one way the Tibetan writer would dismiss his opponents was to claim that they "like the sky/heaven" (*gnam la dga'*). This phrase is used by both Nelpa Pandita and Sum pa mkhan po in reference to Bonpos, when Bonpos advance the claim that the very first king of Tibet, Gnya' khri btsan po, descended from the sky, rather than from a royal lineage traced back to India. In their polemic, "liking the sky" is a mark of primitivism, perhaps comparable to the 19th century images of primitive "nature worship." The phrase evokes the naïve reverence paid to the skies or heavens, a mundane focus on the visible. Bon writers themselves also used this polemical strategy, as Kvaerne noted in the *Gzi brjid* there is a rejection of Mongolian religious practices as based simply on reverence for heaven. See Per Kvaerne's article "Mongols and Khitans in a 14th-century Tibetan Bonpo Text," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 34 (1980), pp. 89.

[86] Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 241.

spontaneous ecstatic trance.[87] Stein also notes that the stereotypical description of the blue-caped, long-haired Bonpos flying through the air astride a drum may sound shamanic, but this drum riding feat is also found among Indian *siddha*s. Moreover, Tibetan Buddhist writers attribute blue capes and long hair to any "heretic," whether it be Bonpos, Śaivites, aberrant Tantrists, or those generally hostile to Buddhism.[88]

Snellgrove and Kvaerne continue this exacting critique of Bon "shamanism," mostly from the standpoint of textual specialists and philologists who argue that this western category does little to elucidate Bon literature and rituals. Their close reading of Bon texts paid less attention to the antagonistic voices of Buddhists and relied instead upon the cooperation of contemporary Bonpo scholars, who helped them understand these texts from "inside" Bon orthodoxy. Thus their revisionist representations of Bon coincided with their cooperation with Bonpo Geshes (*Dge bshes*), who knew nothing about the foreign category of "shamanism." Snellgrove must be recognized as the first western scholar to "discover" these Bonpo "treasures" (like a Tibetan *gter ston*). With the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation he invited three Tibetan Bonpo monks to study at the University of London and collaborate with him on a translation of chapters from the *Gzi brjid*, which was published as *The Nine Ways of Bon*.

Snellgrove's action served to legitimize or "consecrate" the Bon tradition in at least three ways. First, *The Nine Ways of Bon* offered a systematic summary of genuinely "canonical" teachings (from the Bonpos' perspective) and its difficult technical terminology was explained with the assistance of Bonpo scholar-monks. Second, when two of the Bonpo monks, Tenzin Namdak and Sangye Tenzin, returned to India they eventually established the first Bon monastery in exile at Dolanji, with the financial backing of western aid organizations. Tenzin Namdak and Sangye Tenzin, who became the chief teacher and the abbot respectively at this monastery, also initiated a publishing venture so that scores of Bon canonical works were published and disseminated to western libraries, such as the American university libraries designated as the repositories for India PL-480 texts. Third, the remaining Bonpo monk, Samten Karmay, stayed at the University of London to study under Snellgrove, and he became one of the pre-eminent scholars of Bon to write in both English and French. In 1972 Karmay published the first Bon history of Tibet in English, *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, followed by "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon" in 1975, both of which superceded the superficial summary of Bon found in the CMDS.[89] As a result of Snellgrove's "discovery" then, and due to the industriousness of these Bonpo monk-scholars, the new historical picture of Bon that began to emerge in the west during the 1970s came much closer than any previous portrait to understanding Bon from within. This

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87 Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 238.

88 Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 235. Also see note 18 above.

89 Samten Karmay, "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon" in *Memoires of the Research Department of the Tôyo Bunkô*, vol. 33, (1975), pp. 171-218.

transformed Bonpos from mere objects being acted upon to actors in their own right.

Yet the revisionist picture of Bon that Snellgrove and Kvaerne produced was not very sympathetic to the claims made by Bonpos that their tradition was the authentic and original religion of Tibet, predating Buddhism. Rather, they regarded Bon as a heterodox form of Tibetan Buddhism that emerged only as a distinct constituted tradition in the eleventh century. Yet even then it was already syncretic, drawing upon the Buddhist and popular traditions of Tibet, as well as religious elements from other cultures (central Asian shamanism excepted). Snellgrove and Kvaerne dismissed as misdirected their predecessors' quest to recover a pure Bon prior to Buddhism. While Snellgrove notes the importance of gaining the Bonpos' own "insider's" perspective on their history and literature, this becomes problematic in understanding pre-Buddhist Bon. He writes in his Introduction to *The Nine Ways of Bon*:

> In giving an account of any religion we cannot ignore what the practisers say about themselves.... In the case of the *bonpos* we have to accept them and understand them as they are, while still trying to unravel the historical development of their religion. An understanding of them on their own terms is all the more important nowadays, because we need the assistance of their few remaining scholars in order to understand something of their early texts. Tibetans who can help with these texts are now very rare indeed. Educated *bonpo* monks are brought up in the *dGe lugs pa* ('Yellow Hat') Way, trained in conventional Buddhist philosophy and logic and receiving after examination by debate the academic degree of *dGe bshes*. They know their monastic liturgies and the names of their own *bonpo* gods, but very rarely indeed are they at all experienced in reading the sort of *bonpo* texts in which we most need assistance, namely material which represents 'pre-Buddhist' traditions. This lack of familiarity on the part of present-day *bonpos* with what Western scholars would regard as real *bon* material, may come as a disappointment.[90]

Snellgrove here identifies one of the challenges that a philologist or historian faces in working with native scholar informants to read historical texts. The Bonpos' familiarity with the web of intertextual allusions and with the exegetical commentaries on key concepts found in any work of Bon literature makes them very valuable informants. However, the Bonpos' lack of interest in or awareness of the historical development of their literature often leads them read ancient texts in an anachronistic manner. Moreover, many of the divination practices (*mo*), astrological calculations (*rtsis*), methods of medical diagnosis (*dpyad*), and rituals for placating gods and demons (*gto*) that one finds in Bon literature employ an archaic vocabulary that is unfamiliar to contemporary Bon scholars, since these practices are no longer part of the living Bon tradition. Here the historian might be better served by comparing the descriptions of these practices to what appears in the archaic Dunhuang manuscripts and ancient epigraphy on these topics,

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[90] David Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, p. 2.

while recognizing how problematic it would be to identify such practices as belonging either to the indigenous religion or to pre-Buddhist Bon.

From the perspective of Snellgrove, Kvaerne, and subsequent scholars of Bon literature like Blondeau and Martin, the interest that earlier European scholars had in locating the Bon "shaman" was misplaced. From their critical perspective the Bon "shaman" becomes somewhat of a scapegoat, representing the ignorance of these earlier scholars, a scapegoat better banished in future discussions of this religion. One of the effects of their collaboration with Bon informants is their desire to police the boundaries of "Bon" as an object of western investigation, and forbid the use of the foreign term "shamanism." However, the desire to exorcize the "shaman" from discourse on Tibetan religion has proved unsuccessful, as contemporary anthropologists and new-age enthusiasts have redefined the term. "Shamanism" has proved to be an elastic and elusive term, and much like "fetishism" or "totemism" it has been reclaimed from its earlier pejorative connotations by current anthropological usage.[91]

The desire to delineate and deflate "shamanism" as a powerful yet insubstantial notion echoes the analysis of "totemism" by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his groundbreaking study on *Totemism*, Lévi-Strauss presented one of the first critical deconstrutions and reconstructions of an anthropological category. His chapter on the "Totemic Illusion" opens with the following profound insight:

> To accept as a theme for discussion a category that one believes to be false always entails a risk, simply by the attention that is paid to it, of entertaining some illusion about its reality. In order to come to grips with an imprecise obstacle one emphasizes its contours where all one really wants is to demonstrate their insubstantiality, for in attacking an ill-founded theory the critic begins by paying it a kind of respect. The phantom which is imprudently summoned up, in the hope of exorcising it for good, vanishes only to reappear, and closer than one imagines to the place where it was at first.[92]

For Lévi-Strauss, the category of "totemism" is an illusory one, a reified concept that has haunted the minds of many western anthropologists, both ghostly and ghastly. What disturbs Lévi-Strauss about the ghost of "totemism" is how it has been projected by anthropologists into the unsuspecting minds of "primitive" peoples, marking them as "savage" or "other", literally akin to animals and plants. Especially repugnant to civilized Christians, the category of totemism affirms continuity between man and beasts, an extremely "primitive" or "pagan" idea.[93] Thus "totemism", much like "hysteria" claims Lévi-Strauss, was created by western scientific minds to distance themselves from the abnormal and

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[91] For some revisionist interpretations of fetishism as a useful category in anthropological discourse, see Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[92] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. by Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 15.

[93] Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, p. 3.

immoral other. As self-appointed exorcist, Lévi-Strauss intends to demonstrate the illusory quality of this category. But before he can dis-illusion his fellow anthropologists he first must reconstruct their images of totemism, which effectively reactivates their potency. Thus the paradox of "entertaining some illusion about its reality," for merely by paying respect to their illusions, those illusions may come to have a life of their own. Such is the risk Lévi-Strauss runs in debunking this potent western category, which has had the *real* effect of separating us from them. Yet our author suggests mysteriously that even after the phantom of totemism seems effectively eliminated, it reappears even *closer than one imagines to the place where it was at first*.

Hitchcock has shown us that to give away the ending does not eliminate all suspense in a narrative, so I will give away his conclusion, in anticipation of another argument advanced by an anthropologist. Lévi-Strauss believes that totemism is in fact not "out there" in the archaic minds of savages, but its truth is found within all our intellects, as a certain mode of metaphorical thinking. For some anthropologists of Tibet too, "shamanism" is to be identified as a mode of analogical thinking that includes "totemism."[94] Despite the strenuous efforts by textual scholars of Bon to eliminate "shamanism" from scholarship on Tibetan religion, the term has reappeared in the work of anthropologists, New Age enthusiasts, and even among the Bonpos themselves: shamanism appears even *closer than one imagines to the place where it was at first*.

Soundings of Tibetan Shamanism by Anthropologists

Over the last three decades shamans have resurfaced in numerous anthropological studies on Nepal and Tibet, but the scholar's perspective on the shaman has changed once again. One of the most important transformations to occur in recent ethnographic studies is that the shaman's social and religious role is examined in relation to Buddhist lamas, resulting in a dialectical approach to defining the two ritual specialists. To consider shamanism relationally within a contested social arena marks an advance over the free-floating conceptions and definitions of shamanism used by earlier scholars. Since the 1970s there have been numerous dissertations and monographs in anthropology published on shamans in Nepal, but most do not address the historical relationship between Buddhist lamas and the shamans in Tibet.

A few anthropologists such as Robert Paul, David Holmberg, and Stan Mumford have pursued their research among Tibeto-Burman groups in Nepal where shamans and Buddhist lamas compete as ritual specialists. Moreover, their research has an ethno-historical purpose in trying to reconstruct diachronically the tense relationship between Buddhist lamas and their Bon "shaman" counterparts in Tibet. Many of the Nepali shamans in fact claim Tibetan descent, and some even trace their lineage back to the

[94] Geoffrey Samuel, "Early Buddhism in Tibet: Some Anthropological Perspectives" in *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization*, ed. by Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein, (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1985), pp. 384.

Tibetan Bonpos, such as the Tamang Bombos studied by Holmberg,[95] the Ghyabrê and Paju shamans researched by Mumford,[96] and the Sherpa shamans described by Paul.[97] These (fictive) lineages give these anthropologists license to reconstruct pre-Buddhist culture in Tibet teleologically, using the contemporary shamans as the basis for recuperating the original form of Bon shamanism. Their ethnography is thus meant to fill in the silences of the Tibetan historical record, and to account for the process of "Lama-ization."[98] Inevitably, the images they present of the Bon shaman and the Buddhist lama are oversimplified. The anthropologists tend to exaggerate the gap between the complex and hybrid forms of Shamanism and Buddhism that they encounter in the field and the ideal type of the shaman and the lama that are retrojected into the past.

There is a common dialectical model found in the research of Paul, Holmberg, Mumford, and Samuel that places shamans in duel and dialogue with Buddhist clerics. The shaman and lama serve as two opposing "ideal types" with conflicting modes of authority. The modern Nepali and ancient Tibetan shaman is understood to be a practitioner of ecstatic techniques and healing rites, concerned with restoring harmony to their ailing clients. These scholars tend to regard their authority as nearly autonomous, deriving from their ecstatic experiences, their charisma, as well as their understanding of the local deities and demons who require propitiation, a form of "local knowledge" passed down orally by shaman practitioners. Tibetan lamas, on the other hand, are presented as elite representatives of a universal "great" tradition, with its hierarchical monastic institutions and strict moral injunctions. Their clerical authority derives from their institutional affiliation as well as their ability to read sacred texts. Yet despite all their institutional ties, the lamas are preoccupied above all with the "otherworldly" concern of liberation, rather than with achieving harmony in the world. The anthopologists' shaman/lama dichotomy is identified (and subsequently critiqued) by Brigitte Steinmann as follows:

> Nothing differs more than the lama and the shaman. They seem to stand at opposite poles of religious experience. The shaman acts out of a world of irrationality, trance and possession, delirium and dream and forms part of a community ruled by the force of sacrifice, personal powers and a chieftain's charisma. The lama, in contrast, presents himself as the embodiment of measure and

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[95] David H. Holmberg, *Lama, Shaman, and Lambu in Tamang Religious Practice,* unpublished Ph.D dissertation (Cornell University, 1980), p. 288. Holmberg quotes a ritual recitation of the Tamang bombo "shaman," who affirm their own identity with the ancient Bon lineage of Tibet: "I [am] of the ancients. Watch in front, watch within. Ancient to ancient, Bon to bon…. I am the bon of an ancient trunk, the branch in a line. I am in the pillar of a bon."

[96] Stan Royal Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 52-3.

[97] Robert Paul, "Some Observations on Sherpa Shamanism" in *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalaya*, ed. by John Hitchcock and Rex Jones (Delhi: Vikas Publishing Co., 1976), p. 141-152. For a more recent study of the Yolmo Sherpa shamans, see Robert R. Desjarlais, *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas* (Philadelphia: University of Penn. Press, 1992).

[98] Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, pp. 7, 12, 30-1.

> exegesis. He has chosen his vocation within a lineage of men organized according to hierarchic principles. His deeds are founded on a doctrine transmitted according to the tradition, and in writing.[99]

The formation of these opposing "ideal types" raises a host of interpretive issues, but here I will limit my analysis to some of the problems with the representation of the shaman.

Paul argues that many of the characteristic features of Tibetan shamanism, such as the spontaneous ecstatic experience or the soul journey to the netherworld, have been transformed in its confrontation with Buddhist clerical religion. In the institutionalized context of monastic Buddhism, monks pursue experiences that bear a structural resemblance to shamanic ecstasy, but the highly ritualized form of Buddhist meditation has substantially changed the archaic shamanic techniques. Paul contends that the overlap of spiritual domains and functions resulted in tension between the shaman and the lama. Because they represent two distinct social strata, their similar religious powers become opposing social forces. The shaman, a highly charismatic layperson, unaffiliated with any institution and not under the jurisdiction of a formal ethical code of behavior, becomes a subversive threat to his spiritual colleague the lama, who represents the monastic institution and abides by its strict moral prescriptions. Historical development, however, favors the lama as the representative of the institution, over the village shaman. Paul subscribes to a Weberian view of historical evolution, in which the telic thrust of history is towards greater rationalization, the growth of institutions, hierarchies, and the routinization of charisma:

> Whereas religious virtuosity may once have coincided for the Sherpa with magical power or charisma, which could be had by village shamans, today it corresponds to obedience to a higher number of moral regulations. I have no particular hypothesis to put forward as to why this should be the case, other than it seems to be the overall direction of the movement of history, as Weber and the Hegelians before him pointed out.[100]

Paul suggests that the shaman's future in Nepal and in the Tibetan cultural context will be insignificant, as he will become drowned out by the rising wave of historical progress.

While Paul views the shaman's institutional and ethical independence as a liability, Mumford, Holmberg and Samuel tend to idealize and overstate

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[99] Brigitte Steinmann, "Shamans and Lamas Exorcise Madness," in *Les habitants du Toit de monde* ed. by Samten Karmay and Philippe Sagant (Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 1997), p. 419. Steinmann concludes her analysis of the exorcism rituals of a Tamang bombo "shaman" and a lama priest by noting their similarities, since they operate in the same "field of religious representations." She concludes that "our vision of the shaman as more original than the lama consequently seems a highly romantic delusion" (435). Steinmann's conclusion here is compatible with those made in this article.

[100] Paul, "Some Observations on Sherpa Shamanism," p. 149.

the shaman's radical and transgressive ecstatic experiences. From their perspective, the shaman's purported autonomy gives him a privileged place on the boundary, capable of criticizing the official orthodoxy and the hegemonic social authority of the lamas. Sounding much like Ch'an masters,[101] the shamans claim that their ecstatic experiences and healing abilities are not dependent on words and scriptures, and they position themselves as the only mediators with direct access to the divine, open to the influence of alien spirits during their spontaneous experiences. For instance, Mumford records how the modern Ghyabrê and Paju shamans in Nepal interpret the story that features the famous competition of magic between Milarepa and the Bon siddha named Naro Bon chung, in which the traditional Buddhist accounts present Milarepa as the victor. According to the Paju shaman's version of the story, however, after Naro Bon chung was defeated in the contest by Milarepa, the Bonpo destroyed his own written texts by burning them in a fire. As he watched his sacred texts turn into ash, the Bonpo siddha heard a divine voice that commanded him to commit the content of the texts to memory. He proceeded to eat the ashes and "swallow the knowledge," thereby internalizing it. To this day it is claimed that the Paju shamans who descend from Naro Bon chung have their ritual and magical knowledge safely sealed in their minds, while the rival lamas must rely on texts that they can hardly read in the dark, when exorcism rituals must be performed.[102] One can see the shaman's one-upmanship operating here against the lama, whose knowledge is lost without his texts, while the shaman's authentic knowledge is based on direct experience and not dependent on texts.

Mumford argues (contra Paul) that shamans are better able to adapt to cultural change, while the lama remains bound to a conservative and hegemonic institutional ideology. His characterization of the shaman turns him into an enlightened social critic, an ironic and elusive trickster who undermines the lama's moral seriousness, and especially his preoccupation with karma and individual destiny:

> [The shamans] do not draw a boundary around their identity.... They embrace the interpenetration of different wills, allowing spirits from the periphery and from previous eras to enter their own being. They enter alien realms on behalf of the community.... Because of this self-image the Paju and Ghyabrê are able to view their own motives and images as unbounded, incomplete, and historically changing.... They view their own truths as partial and in need of further elaboration from other sources.[103]

Such a view of the shamans' self-identity as reflexive, dialogical, and decentered tells us more about Mumford's Bakhtin-inspired idealization than about the Nepali shaman or the Bonpo, who undoubtedly consider their own role and tradition to be centered within the boundaries of the true

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[101] Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
[102] Mumford, *Himayalan Dialogue*, p. 53.
[103] Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, p. 246.

insider. The anthropologist perhaps unconsciously identifies his own ambiguous status, moving betwixt and between cultures, with the shaman moving effortlessly between divine and human realms and serving as a mediator for their clients. Anthropologists often succumb to "ethnographic ventriloquism" (to use Geertz's phrase) when they speak not just about another form of life but speak from within it. While a few anthropologists have sought to become the shaman's apprentice in order to learn about their trance states,[104] others like Mumford and Holmberg use their ethnographic authorial control to give voice to the shaman's immediate experience. The idealization of the shaman's healing role in restoring harmony to the world may also reflect the western anthropologist's quest for re-enchantment in nature and redemption from modernity, with its repressive bureaucracies and hegemonic hierarchies.

Holmberg's characterization of Tamang shamans (the Bombos) and their soundings also underscores the immediacy of their experience. He voices their claim to be "less dependent than the lambus and lamas on the formalities of training and the necessity of texts and proper procedures." One of his Bompo informants tells him that "Lamas read from books, bombos must speak from their mouths. All comes from the innards. It is not poured from a flask or dumped from a basket [the way lamas and lambus practice]. If you have no consciousness you cannot do it."[105] What seems overlooked here is how the shaman's "spontaneous" experiences and apparently effortless performance is carefully regulated and ritualized, the result of intense formal training, learned from teachers whose authoritative knowledge has been transmitted through a lineage. While Holmberg notes the importance of lineage for the Bombo shaman, who receives initiation from a preceptor, he finds their rhetoric of immediacy persuasive and the elusiveness of their authority intriguing. He declares that the Bombos are enigmatic figures and masters of paradox and ambiguity, who dwell in the breach "reveling and revealing enigmas of experience and order." In response to the dominant narratives of the lamas, who impose closure and hegemonic order, the Bombos offer a "deconstructive voice" that fathoms the "arbitrariness of the social order."[106] Again we see the image of the shaman as a trickster, who offers an alternative and liberating perspective on society, an authentic perspective that he gains through his dreams and from his direct religious experience with the gods.

After Holmberg and Mumford, the most recent anthropologist to use a version of the shaman/cleric dyad model for interpreting Tibetan religions and societies is Geoffrey Samuel. His work *Civilized Shamans* presents an ambitious effort to encompass all of Tibetan religion within the twin categories of shamanic and clerical, taxonomic categories that are sometimes presented as complementary dyads, and other times as tensely

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[104] See for instance Robert Desjarlais, *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).
[105] Holmberg, *Order in Paradox*, p. 149.
[106] Holmberg, *Order in Paradox*, pp. 167, 216, 221.

antagonistic.[107] For Samuel, the "shamanic" is present in analogical, metaphorical, and mythic modes of thinking, in the visionary states and ecstatic experiences of the spirit medium and tantric siddha, in a sociocentric sense of self with a charismatic form of authority, and in small-scale decentralized societies. The clerical, on the other hand, is present in rational, linear, and goal-oriented modes of thinking, it gains its authority in the mediations of scripture and texts, and it is found in centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic societies. Although Samuel repeatedly emphasizes that both shamanic and clerical modes are present in Tibetan religions, it is clear that he values more highly the shamanic mode: "I believe that the sophisticated body of shamanic practices within Tibetan Buddhism probably constitutes Tibet's most important single contribution to humanity."[108] In doing so, Samuel reiterates the valorization of the shaman over the clerical monk found in the work of other anthropologists, which also reverses the valorization of the Buddhist monk over the diabolical Bon shaman found in the pioneering studies by Das, Kawaguchi, Waddell, and Hoffmann. The "civilized shamans" found by recent anthropologists are inverted mirror images of the uncivilized shamans found by pioneering Tibetologists.

How does the shamanic-clerical model map on to Tibetan religions? For Samuel, the shamanic is most clearly evident in the folk or "nameless" religion. Both Bon and Buddhism have shamanic and clerical aspects, although he distinguishes Bon and Nyingma as more shamanic because they are less centralized and hierarchical orders, while the Dge lugs pa and Sa skya monastic orders manifest the clerical hierarchies. What Samuel finds especially valuable about the shamanic mode of the Bon and Nyingma traditions is their reliance on creative visionary experience and revelation, as manifest in their "treasure literature." What is neglected or overlooked in Samuel's somewhat romantic image of direct, unmediated religious experience is the extent to which the practitioners were concerned with legitimizing their treasure texts and revelatory experiences in terms of past precedent, making them more conservative and traditional (and clerical) than he supposes.[109]

Mirroring and Intercultural Mimesis in Discourse about Bon Shamans

My line of argument in this article has involved criss-crossing back and forth between western representations of Tibetan religion and common Tibetan representations of the "other." My intent is to emphasize how the discourse of Tibetologists repeats (consciously or unconsciously) Tibetan polemics. In his pioneering study on *Orientalism*, Edward Said sought to grasp the "sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and its redoubtable durability."[110] What Said failed to appreciate in that work is the

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[107] Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 435

[108] Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 8.

[109] Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 34.

[110] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 6.

extent to which Orientalist discourse may be knitted out of strands found in Asian text(ile)s. By criss-crossing back and forth between western scholarship and Tibetan polemical literature, some of their common discursive strands may come unraveled, revealing that the images of Tibetan religion found in recent scholarship are not fantasies or demonic delusions that western scholars alone have invented. The point of this exercise is to recognize how western representations of Tibetan religion took form, informed at times by Tibetan descriptions of the other religion. I do not intend either to place blame or excuse earlier scholars for their representations. Rather than assuming the moral high ground and criticizing earlier stereotypes of Tibetan religion, my intent is to problematize an assumption made by some Orientalist critics that western scholars and missionaries have invented a discourse unconnected to native representations. The dialogical reading technique promoted here relativizes the cultural identities of Tibet and the west.

The technique of criss-crossing pursued here also relies on metaphors of mirroring and mimicry. The reduplicated term "criss-crossing" itself suggests a reflexive movement. It involves moving betwixt and between the hierarchiesand histories of Tibet and the west, showing that the mirror of alterity present in western images of the Tibetan others picks up reflections found in the mirroring historical narratives of Buddhism and Bon. I have focused on the mirror image in particular as an ambivalent trope with its own agency, not because the mirror image functions as a universal archetype, or because it serves as a key to the psychic unity of mankind. Mirror images are deceptive, never identical or fixed. Just as mimicry in the Tibetan context often creates something novel and unusual, so too does the western discourse that mirrors Tibetan polemical categories produce new effects. As we have seen, Waddell is instrumental in codifying the category of "Lamaism" to describe Tibetan Buddhism, while Hoffmann plays a similar role in the codification of the category of "shamanism" to describe Bon. Both of these categories have been appropriated by some Tibetans as legitimate (and legitimating) terms to describe and authenticate their own traditions. Yet once again, these terms are transformed in the process.[111]

Many more examples could be cited to illustrate the "elective affinities" between the historiography of western Orientalists and Tibetan styles of self-representation. But the above examples are sufficient for my purpose of demonstrating how criss-crossing between the iconic extremes found in Tibetan polemics and western interpretations illustrates a form of "intercultual mimesis."[112] By reading certain regnant images of the other

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[111] Two well-known Tibetan scholars in exile, Samten Karmay and Tsultrim Kelsang Khangkar, have accepted the term "Lamaism" as an appropriate term for describing the Lama-based Buddhism of Tibet. See K. Dhondup's interview of Tsultrim Kelsang appearing as "'Lamaism' is an Appropriate Term" in *Tibetan Review*, 13.6 (June 1978), pp. 18-19. Likewise, Tenzin Namdak, the leading scholar of Bon living in exile, has come to embrace the term "shamanism" to describe Bon, as has his student Tenzin Wangyal, who leads weekend retreats on Tibetan shamanic practices.

[112] I borrow the phrases "elective affinities" and "intercultural mimesis" from Charles Hallisey's article "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of

cross-culturally, we begin to delineate more clearly the intersection of western and Tibetan forms of history. Criss-crossing is a technique which can illuminate this complex process of intercultural borrowing, bringing out the local flavors and particular cultural culinary genius behind the celebrated "pizza effect."

Much of what follows in this style of analysis is indebted to the insights of the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha. Mimicry is a common ploy used to incorporate the other as almost the same, but not quite, resulting in a stereotype of the aping other as derivative and partial. Bhabha aptly characterizes this effect of mimicry in the western colonial construction of the other as "not quite/not white".[113] The racist stereotypes found in colonialist discourse about the Simian Black, whose mimicry of the White Man's manners only makes him more akin to the monkey, or the Lying Asiatic, whose essential duplicity makes him a shady figure according to the white standard of truth, always makes the other recognizable, yet not-quite-white. Such stereotypes appropriate the native into a sub-class only to show how inappropriate he or she really is.

Yet what Bhabha explores is not how crude and simplistic these stereotypes are, but rather their dynamic and ambivalent qualities, which produce some anxiety for those who use them. Aping stereotypes present the other as partial, a somewhat grotesque distortion which, when the mimicking other returns its gaze, is distinctly unsettling to the self-same identity of the stereotyper. Herein lies the menacing side of mimicry. The mimic man inadvertently undermines the authority of the original, and the fixity of the white standard of normality starts to slip. Mimicry always makes a difference that threatens to be total, but not quite, so it must be disavowed, only to bring the other disturbingly close into the presence of the colonialist. As Bhabha puts it,

> The discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.[114]

The ambivalence of mimicry leads to a kind of double-trouble, or better yet, a double agent. Situated in a shifty position between difference and sameness, mimicry assumes an agency all its own, without a subject. As a

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Theravada Buddhism" in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. by Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 31-61. Hallisey defines intercultural mimesis as "when some aspect of a culture of a subjectified people influenced or otherwise enabled the investigator to represent that culture." (p. 34). For a recent application of this model to Buddhist studies, see Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999), and especially his section on "Intercultural Mimesis and the Local Production of Meaning," pp. 148-160.

[113] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 92.

[114] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Men," p. 86.

form of imperfect repetition, mimicry seems to produce unanticipated effects: "the whole question of agency gets moved from a fixed point into a process of circulation.... Mimicry at once enables power and produces the loss of agency."[115] The ambiguous nature of mimetic agency can be illustrated in the latest manifestation of Tibetan and Bon "shamanism" to appear in the west.

With the anthropological studies of Nepali and Tibetan religion, shamanism appears to have earned a widespread currency in academic circles. Yet its value is even more inflated in popular spiritual circles, especially among American New Age adherents. Evidence for the commodification of shamanism can be found on the Internet, where one can buy shamanic paraphernalia, and in the popular spiritual literature that has flooded the American market for consumption by new-age enthusiasts. In magazines like *Shaman's Drum* and in popular do-it-yourself shamanic guidebooks, the experiential benefits of shamanic techniques are touted, and the ancient wisdom of the shaman, who is in contact with another "separate reality," is pursued. The connection between the anthropologist's fascination with shamanic experience and the New Age participant in shamanic vision quests is no mere coincidence. Many neo-shamans read ethnographic accounts of shamanic experience as a script for enactment. Indeed, it was Eliade's proposal that students of religion practice "creative hermeneutics," meaning that they ought to strive towards reliving and recreating the sacred experiences and events of the past. This message has been adopted wholeheartedly among the contemporary apologists of shamanism, who read Eliade's study of *Shamanism* as a guidebook for their own ecstatic vision quests.[116]

Understandably, savvy American fashion designers have sought to cash in on this opportunity to sell Tibetan shamanic exotica as the "latest" in primitive chic. In a 1995 J. Peterman Company Catalogue, one can find a "Tibetan Shaman's Jacket and Cap" for sale, advertised in the section called "Booty, Spoils & Plunder:"

> It's official. Crystals are out, Tibetan Buddhism is in. The monasteries are springing up across America; stars of Hollywood, Rock, and Wall Street are chanting *Om mani padme hum*. But why play catch-up when you can be a jump ahead? Long before Buddhism came to Tibet, native Bon shamans were doing quite nicely without having to give up (as good Buddhists must) a belief in one's personal existence. Empowered by ceremonial jackets like the one you see here, they focused on practical matters like curing toothaches and assuring a bumper crop of *Hordeum vulgare*. They could fly through the air, communicate by telepathy (cheaper than MCI), do interesting things to their enemies. Isn't there someone you'd like to torment, perhaps launching nine

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[115] Robert Young, "The Ambivalence of Bhabha" in *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 148.

[116] For a very insightful analysis of western neo-shamanism or parashamanism, see Ronald L. Grimes chapter on "Parashamanism" in the revised edition of *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 253-268.

> kinds of destructive hailstorms against? Authentic Bon shaman's jacket, handmade in northern India by Tibetan refugees who know how.... Price: $175.

What is striking about the J. Peterman image of the Bon "shaman" is that he is less a master of ecstatic trance and a spiritual healer than a powerful magician whose jacket represents "booty, spoils and plunder." We might recall that according to Bon histories, the exotic emblems (including the tiger and leopard fur-lined capes and jackets) worn by the Bon priests in ancient times were granted as gifts by the Tibetan kings, in reward for their role in suppressing demonic enemies. The kings decorated the bodies of their Bon priests with the booty and spoils from the defeated countries, and their bold display of these emblems was meant to embellish the priest's power as a form of metonymic domination. Today, the Bon "shaman" jacket is less a reward for power than a symbol of the aspiration to power. The advertisement even proclaims "You *bet* you'll get the table you want when you wear this one."

What makes the J. Peterman advertisement even more revealing is its suggestion that Tibetan refugees, who fabricate "authentic" Bon jackets, are now active participants in the western consumer's appropriation of Bon shamanism. Today one can read notices in *Shaman's Drum* or attend New Age institutes for retreats with authentic Tibetan masters, where "the ancient shamanic techniques of Bon" are taught.[117] Following in the footsteps of Carlos Castenada, people sign up for Tibetan Bon seminars on Shamanism hoping to meet the Tibetan Don Juan. These examples illustrate how "shamanism" has become commodified into a popular image of Bon, not only for western consumers, but for Tibetan Bonpos who participate as well. The Tibetan Bon teachers have discovered their own identity as "shamans" by looking into the mirror of alterity that western disciples hold up to them.

[117] For other examples of New Age appropriations of Tibetan religion, see Frank J. Korom "Old Age Tibet in New Age America" in his edited volume *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1997), pp. 73-97. Another version of Korom's essay appears as "The Role of Tibet in the New Age Movement" in *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasises* ed. by Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), pp. 167-182.