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Looking Beyond the Land of Rice: Kalimpong and Darjeeling as Modern Buddhist Contact Zones for Sikkimese Intellectual Communities

Abstract Tibetan and Himalayan forms of Buddhism have occupied an ambiguous position in the flourishing scholarship on the emergence of modern Buddhist movements around the world during the colonial period. Due to Tibet's isolation, Orientalist myths regarding its unique form of Buddhism abounded, often representing it as backwards and superstitious. This was in contrast to popular ideas about Buddhism that depicted it as a rational, scientific belief system that was compatible with Western colonial modernity. However, a number of Himalayan intellectuals were deeply involved with movements that overturned these binary representations of Buddhism and its Tibetan and Himalayan forms. A surprising number of these intellectuals were from the tiny Eastern Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim. This article will explore the life of Kazi Dawa Samdup, a prominent Sikkimese intellectual who undermined Orientalist depictions of local Himalayan Buddhist traditions through his campaigns of scholarship and activism between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will argue that the sites of Samdup's education and activities—Kalimpong and Darjeeling—enabled him to gain a uniquely transcultural education and awareness of global currents of thought about Buddhism as a result of their position between empires and as part of active trade networks. His exposure to global ideas found in Kalimpong and Darjeeling allowed him to keep actively engaged in these currents and to leave an important legacy that is often unacknowledged in studies on the formation of modern Buddhist networks.

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, interest in Buddhism proliferated in the public spheres of Europe and America (Almond 1988; Franklin 2008).¹ As scholars scrambled to publish the latest academic findings from texts translated from Pali, Sanskrit, and Chinese, and Buddhist discussion and practice groups appeared in major global cities, the Buddhism of Tibet remained comparatively understudied and almost absent from the European and American engagement with Buddhism. It was in this context that British colonial administrator and scholar L.A. Waddell (1854–1938) published his classic work, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, in 1895 (Waddell 1895). In his prologue, Waddell wrote that the book was his attempt to respond to “increased attention” to Buddhism in Europe in recent years, as demonstrated by “the speculations of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, and the widely felt desire for fuller information as to the conditions and sources of Eastern religion,” and particularly “the jealously guarded religion of Tibet, where Buddhism wreathed in romance has now its chief stronghold” (Waddell 1895, vii). Waddell’s emphasis on the exceptional nature of Tibet was indeed representative of the time, for unlike other Buddhist cultures, Tibet had not been directly colonized and therefore had not yet been systematically studied as part of the colonial scholarly enterprise. Instead, discussion on Tibet was speculative, and as Donald S. Lopez Jr. has noted, Tibet’s isolation was further reified by its apparent absence from other global networks of Buddhist exchange that emerged during the period (Lopez 2005, 250).

This absence was, however, only apparent. In actuality, a number of Tibetan and Himalayan practitioners and intellectuals were intimately tied to projects of Buddhist modernism, including the scholars based in Darjeeling who had assisted Waddell in his research. David McMahan has discussed this concept as a product of recent Euro-American history that has influenced the popular depiction of Buddhism as

[...] a religion whose most important elements are meditation, rigorous philosophical analysis, and an ethic of compassion combined with a highly empirical psychological science that encourages reliance on individual experience. It discourages blindly following authority and dogma, has little place for superstition, magic, image worship, and gods, and is largely compatible with the findings of modern science and liberal democratic values (McMahan 2008, 5).

1 I am grateful to the family of Kazi Dawa Samdup in Kalimpong and Sikkim for generously providing materials for my research, Mr. L.N. Sharma of the Sikkim State Archives, and librarians at the British Library, the University of California at Berkeley, and Stanford University for their assistance in the archives, and also to Markus Viehbeck for his helpful comments. I also thank my family for their suggestions and support.

While McMahan's characterization of contemporary Buddhism is apt, in his study the colonial legacies in this construction are less apparent. In their research, Anne Blackburn, Richard Jaffe, and Alicia Turner have explored the role of local Asian actors in these movements and have made important contributions to understanding how this global Buddhist modernism developed (Blackburn 2010; Jaffe 2004; Turner 2014). These scholars have all demonstrated ways that Asian politicians, activists, intellectuals, scholars, and practitioners responded to popular re-imaginings of Buddhism and used these re-imaginings for different socio-political ends. In terms of the study of Buddhist modernism in Tibet and the Himalayas, Toni Huber has demonstrated that Tibet's isolation did not result in its absence from these networks. Instead, in contrast with Lopez's argument, Huber has found a number of Himalayan actors who made important contributions to the reinvigoration of Buddhist sacred space in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which involved diverse actors from around the world (Huber 2008). Himalayan participants included the Prince and later King of Sikkim, Sidkeong Tulku (Srid skyong sprul sku, 1879–1914),² who is referred to as Sikyong Namgyal Tulku in Huber's book (Huber 2008, 274, 281), and S.W. Laden la (Bsod nams legs ldan lags, 1876–1936), a Sikkimese civil servant and police officer for the British administration in Darjeeling (Huber 2008, 297–301).

It is no surprise that both of these men were from the Eastern Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim. Despite its small size and population, Sikkim played a central role in the development of global Buddhist networks. Samuel Thévoz has recently written of its importance in the career of the Belgian-French explorer and author Alexandra David-Néel (1868–1969), whose best-selling works were instrumental in disseminating information about Tibetan Buddhism around the world (Thévoz 2016). David-Néel was granted access to Sikkim through her friendship with Sidkeong Tulku, who at the time was interested in reforming Sikkimese Buddhism to respond to changes in Sikkimese society brought about by British intervention in the kingdom following the introduction of a British Political Officer in the 1880s.³ Sidkeong Tulku's reforms included inviting foreign teachers of Buddhism to Sikkim, implementing a new set of disciplinary rules for Sikkimese monasteries (Jansen 2014), and, perhaps most unusually, sending Sikkimese students to study Theravada Buddhism in Ceylon (Bhutia 2014 and Dorjee 2008). However, his untimely death, as well as the conservatism of the monastic establishment and the British administration in Sikkim led to the end of his reforms.

2 In this paper, I have mostly opted for the Tibetan Himalayan Library system for transliteration of Tibetan and Sikkimese words, which expands on the system of Turrell Wylie. The exceptions are instances where individuals had a preference for another spelling, in which case I have used their preferred spelling or the most commonly used form of spelling for their names. For more on Sidkeong Tulku, see McKay (2003).

3 This Political Officer was J. Claude White, whose memoir of his time in Sikkim was published as White (2005 [1909]).

Sidkeong was by no means the only Sikkimese Buddhist with an interest in the creative uses of Buddhism who was conversant with broader global changes. A key element that contributed to his perspective was his early education in Darjeeling at St. Paul's School, a Church of England boarding school, and his studies under the famed civil engineer turned Tibetologist and spy, Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917).⁴ Darjeeling at that time was a cosmopolitan center, which, along with its neighboring urban center Kalimpong, attracted traders, colonial officers, scholars, and travelers from the trans-Himalayas and around the world. Other Sikkimese intellectuals and activists also made their way to these towns. There, in an environment marked by both the inequalities of colonial power and an openness to new concepts and discussion, they were exposed to new ideas and participated in intellectual networks that spanned the world. Studies in this volume have demonstrated how Kalimpong functioned as a cultural, political, and economic contact zone where, in the words of Mary Louise Pratt, “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism” (Pratt 1992, 1). In this article, I will argue that both Kalimpong and Darjeeling functioned as contact zones where Sikkimese intellectuals encountered and engaged with diverse perspectives unavailable in their own home state, where forms of transcultural encounter were highly regulated by the presence of colonialism in the person and institution of the Political Officer. In Kalimpong and Darjeeling, these individuals met within an atmosphere of interaction: they studied at Christian schools and Buddhist monasteries, had tea with travelers and authors, and conceptualized ideas for socio-political change. These ideas were obviously not the intended product of intercultural communication, as facilitated by British colonial and missionary institutions. Rather, an exploration of these examples will reveal their resistant and subversive character, and thereby add another dimension to the preconceived notions of larger power asymmetries that are typical features of Pratt’s contact zone.

To demonstrate the subversive elements of these contact zones I will look at the cases of two significant Buddhist scholars who produced their work in the Darjeeling-Kalimpong area, and who produced examples of what Pratt discusses as ethnographic and autoethnographic work about the region (Pratt 1992, 9). The first of these scholars is L.A. Waddell (1854–1938), who became renowned for his book *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism* (1895). This work was hugely influential for many years, despite Waddell’s general attitude towards Tibetan Buddhism, which he dismissed as mostly “deep-rooted devil-worship and sorcery [...]. For Lamaism is only thinly and imperfectly varnished over with Buddhist symbolism, beneath which the sinister growth of poly-demonist superstition darkly appears”

4 This education is outlined in India Office Records documents, most notably in Letter from Sidkeong Tulku to Political Officer of Sikkim, 23/8/1905. British Library documents, Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok.

(Waddell 1895, xi). Despite its apparent focus on Tibet, the book was actually written in and based on material from the Darjeeling-Kalimpong region. The second scholar is Kazi Dawa Samdup (Ka zi Zla ba bsam grub, 1868–1923),⁵ who became internationally known as the first translator of the classic *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In his prolific career as a translator and scholar, Dawa Samdup made use of his hybrid education and training in the British civil service in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Dooars region to counter pejorative colonial claims made by Waddell and others about Buddhism. To do so he returned to the foundational texts of Tibetan Buddhism, including Treasure literature (*gter*), the Tantras, and the life of the saint Milarépa (Mi la ras pa), as a way to correct what he saw as misconceptions about Tibetan Buddhism. His body of work in many ways functioned as “autoethnographic expression,” which Pratt defines as an instance “in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (Pratt 1992, 9). Kazi Dawa Samdup’s English translations of Himalayan Buddhist texts used the conventions of Western scholarly texts and introduced the West to Tibetan Buddhism, radically reconfiguring what was known of Himalayan Buddhism at the time. However, Dawa Samdup had his own agency in terms of what he decided to work on and in his presentation of these materials, which demonstrate the subversive elements in the creation of autoethnography noted by Pratt. Waddell’s and Dawa Samdup’s connections to Kalimpong and Darjeeling were significant, as these were places where the very different perspectives and goals of these scholars could be articulated, explored, and actualized.

Constructing colonial perceptions of Tibetan Buddhism: L.A. Waddell’s *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism* and Darjeeling

What was it about Kalimpong and Darjeeling that allowed these diverse views to be developed? In large part, it was its position as a contact zone. Historically, Kalimpong had long been a trans-Himalayan trade mart, and following the Younghusband Mission in 1904, it became even more integral to a set of economic connections that went far beyond the Eastern

5 Kazi Dawa Samdup’s name was transliterated in a number of ways, including Dawasandupp, Don Samdup Kazi, Dousamdud Kazi, Dousamdap Kazi, Dousand Up, Kazi Daosamdud, Donsamdud Kaji, Kazi Dousamdud, and Kazi Dawa Samdrup. Here I have opted for a relatively consistent spelling found in his work. This multiplicity reflects the lack of standardized spelling for transliteration from Tibetan language at the time, but makes tracking down all of his work quite challenging.

Himalayas.⁶ On the other hand, Darjeeling only rose in importance following the annexation of the area in 1835 by the British colonial administration, which intended to develop it into a tea production center and sanatorium (Bhattacharya 2012). Its pleasant climate and strategic location led it to become the summer capital of the Bengal Presidency after 1864. This necessitated the development of additional infrastructure in the area, including a railway and schools set up by different missionary groups for the children of civil servants. This infrastructure was in turn built by labor from across the Eastern Himalayas, leading to the development of a cosmopolitan atmosphere (Sharma 2016).

L.A. Waddell was a representative of the British administration in Darjeeling, originally serving as the Principal Medical Officer of the Darjeeling District in 1888. He was already a keen philologist, and used his post as an opportunity to further develop his academic credentials in Asian languages, as well as to study religions and philosophies that were popular in Europe.⁷ However, his initial overtures to local Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist authorities in the area were not received with enthusiasm. This led Waddell to make a unique decision to facilitate his research himself. He writes: “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” (Waddell 1895, viii).⁸

Despite Waddell’s suggestion that he enjoyed a collaborative relationship with the local lamas (which he explained as being due to their opinion that he was “a reflex of the Western Buddha, Amitabha,” Waddell 1895, ix), not much evidence is left to represent the agency of the lamas in these collaborations. This is mostly due to Waddell’s opinion that his object of interest was Tibetan Buddhism, which he saw as an entity distinct from Buddhism in the local area. This led him to seek out Tibetan informants (Waddell 1895, viii) and to underacknowledge his local Sikkimese, Lepcha, Bhutanese, and Tamang collaborators. At the time this was part of a broader trend in which colonial scholars perceived locals as somehow less authentic Buddhists than their Tibetan coreligionists, which in turn led Waddell to undervalue his local sources. The reasons behind this logic were complex, and partly connected to Tibet’s political isolation during this period, which made it seem more “authentic” in comparison with the already hybrid—and thereby tainted—environments of Kalimpong and Darjeeling.⁹

6 Harris (2013) provides an overview of the development of Kalimpong as a trade center.

7 Preston (2009) outlines Waddell’s life.

8 Unfortunately, it is not clear what the historical situation was of the temple he actually “purchased.” Harris (2012) discusses the temple and its position in global circulations of Buddhist material culture in more detail.

9 Harris describes this trend in relation to the photographic archive in Darjeeling in Chapter 3 of Harris (2012).

This unidirectional representation of Buddhism is demonstrated by Waddell's liberal use of European categories and pejorative depictions of Tibetan Buddhism. His book includes a historical overview of "Lamaism" as it developed from the time of the Tibetan Empire and the arrival of Guru Rinpoché, whom he dismissed as practicing a "highly impure form of Buddhism, already covered by so many foreign accretions and saturated with so much demonolatry" from his homeland of "Udyan and Kashmir" (Waddell 1895, 29). He refers to Guru Rinpoché's teachings as "Primitive Lamaism [which] may therefore be defined as a priestly mixture of Sivaite mysticism, magic, and Indo-Tibetan demonolatry, overlaid by a thin varnish of Mahayana Buddhism. And to the present day Lamaism still retains this character" (Waddell 1895, 30). Waddell then covers the dissemination of Lamaism throughout the Himalayas and Mongolia. He goes into some detail regarding Sikkimese Buddhism, but remains skeptical throughout, describing local details in the life of the influential *terton* (*gter ston*) Lhatsun Namkha Jikmé (Lha btsun nam mkha' 'jigs med, 1597–1654) as "a curious mixture of the crude and the marvellous" (Waddell 1895, 47. The summary of Lhatsun's life can be found in pages 47–51). He dismisses the *terton* tradition as "fictitious" while claiming Guru Rinpoché never visited Sikkim (Waddell 1895, 45). He continues with an overview of other "sects" of Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist metaphysics and philosophy, monastic life, religious hierarchy, pilgrimage sites and traditions, "worship" and ritual, and finally, a perspective on religion in daily life in which "[p]rayers ever hang upon the people's lips. The prayers are chiefly directed to the devils, imploring them for freedom or release from their cruel inflictions, or they are plain naïve requests for aid towards obtaining the good things in this life, the loaves and the fishes" (Waddell 1895, 572–73). The inclusion of Christian terminology here is not accidental; Waddell was the son of a clergyman, and much of his derisive characterization of Tibetan Buddhism seems to be tied to the Protestant anti-Catholic polemics of his era, with Tibetan Buddhism functioning as a stand-in for Catholicism.¹⁰

Waddell's *Tibetan Buddhism* remained hugely influential for decades. As Clare Harris has written, one of its most important functions was to provide a guide for collectors of Tibetan antiquities, which had become popular in the West (Harris 2012, 44–47). Waddell also assembled the section on religion in Sikkim for the *Gazetteer of Sikkim* edited by H.H. Risley in 1895, which was also characterized by its meticulous detail and encyclopedic nature (Risley 1894, 241–391). Darjeeling and Sikkim therefore played a central role in the development of knowledge about Tibetan Buddhism in scholarly and popular circles. However, his work was not universally lauded, and a number of the characterizations of Tibetan Buddhism made by Waddell set in motion the development of new projects that both engaged with and countered his assertions about local religion.

10 Donald S. Lopez Jr. has discussed how this allusion may also be seen as a justification for colonialism. Lopez (1996, 20).

Subverting colonial perceptions of Tibetan Buddhism: the life and work of Kazi Dawa Samdup between Sikkim, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling

One of the many periodicals that promoted *The Buddhism of Tibet* was *The Maha Bodhi Journal*, a major print forum for the circulation of ideas about modern Buddhism that served as the print outlet of the international Maha Bodhi Society. Edited by the Society's founder, Buddhist activist Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), the journal had many of the same aims as the Society, including the promotion of Buddhist revivalism in India, the development of educational and social welfare activities that mirrored those of Christian missionaries to promote Buddhism, and most significantly, the aspiration to create a transnational Buddhist community by promoting Bodh Gaya as the center of the Buddhist world for all Asians. The *Journal* was also a forum for exchanging news and for scholarly discussion. The latter was particularly important because at the time, Buddhism was associated with rationality, empiricism, and philosophy. This fashionable interest in Buddhism was demonstrated by the lists of national representatives on the back cover of every issue, which illustrated the connections the Society fostered between European and Asian elites and practitioners. Here, highly regarded scholars of their day, including Professor T.W. Rhys-Davids and Sir Edwin Arnold of England, Dr. Karl E. Neumann of Vienna, and Professor Leon de Rosny of Paris, were listed alongside Thai princes, wealthy Sino-Burmese businessmen, and Japanese monks. Such a list suggests the contours of some of the political friendships and anti-colonial networks that pulsed through Buddhist movements.

An interesting addition to the list, and apparently the sole representative of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural world, is the Darjeeling representative, one “Don Samdup Kaji, Tibetan Interpreter” and secretary to the Maha Bodhi Society (figure 1). Who was this person, and how did he come to appear on such an international list? Don Samdup Kaji was an alternate transcription of the name Kazi Dawa Samdup, a crucial figure in the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism to the West who has become hugely famous following the publication of his translations by American editor, scholar, Theosophist, and self-styled mystic, W.Y. (Walter Yeeling) Evans-Wentz (1878–1965).

Sadly, and somewhat ironically, the text that made Kazi Dawa Samdup known in Buddhist studies circles was only published after his death in Calcutta in 1922. When Evans-Wentz published the original edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the center of which was Kazi Dawa Samdup's translation of the *Bardo Tödröl* (*Bar do thos grol*), a Treasure Text revealed to Karma Lingpa (Karma gling pa, 1326–1386), he acknowledged that “I have really been little more than a compiler and editor of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*” to the deceased translator—who combined in himself a greater knowledge of the Occult Sciences of Tibet and of Western Science than any Tibetan scholar of this epoch—the chief credit for its production very naturally belongs” (Evans-Wentz 1960, xx). A number of important studies



Figure 1: Kazi Dawa Samdup, exact date unknown.

about *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and Evans-Wentz have explored the collaboration between Evans-Wentz and Kazi Dawa Samdup, but they have not yet focused on Kazi Dawa Samdup and his significance as the translator of “the Occult Sciences of Tibet and of Western Science,” or elaborated on his wide-ranging career and motives. Recent studies note Kazi Dawa Samdup’s interest in translation as a means for spreading knowledge of Buddhism (Samdup 2008, Martin 2016), but he also had other soteriological motives that can only be understood by looking broadly at his activities and their position in the contact zones of Gangtok, Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

Kazi Dawa Samdup was born in Burtuk, East Sikkim in 1868. His father Shalngo Nimpenjo was from the Guru Tashi clan,¹¹ and his mother died young. His father remarried, and had a further five children with his new wife (Samdup 2008, 155). While little information is available about his early life, family connections led him to live in Darjeeling at the Bhutia Boarding School.

The Bhutia Boarding School represented an important part of the colonial enterprise in the Eastern Himalayas. Opening in 1874, the school was officially intended to provide Western education to sons of the local elite, with a view to training them appropriately to become interpreters for imperial representatives in the area, as well as to work in trade relations.

11 One of the Lhopo families connected to the royal family. Samdup (2008) and Winkler (1982) are the basis for this biographical sketch, along with records in the Evans-Wentz Collection at Stanford.

However, as Derek Waller has written, the school had “another, less public, function. This objective was to train a cadre of personnel for use in Tibet” (Waller 2004, 193). At this time, knowledge of Tibet was highly desirable. The late nineteenth century was the period of the “Great Game,” where different powers competed for control over the resources and trading routes of central Asia. The mysterious Tibetan plateau was closed to foreigners by order of the Qing Empire; however, Tibetan Buddhists and traders from the Himalayan region were allowed in without official documentation. The school planned to train young local men to become undercover surveyors—spies, essentially—who could gather information for the Empire without detection.

Along with such important, tangible boons, there was however another spin-off from an education at the Bhutia Boarding School (which later changed its name to Darjeeling Government High School). The school attracted many local elites, who saw the benefits of their children learning English. While it did not train many successful surveyors (Waller 2004, 194), it did lead to the development of a unique Sikkimese class of Anglophiles who became the preferred collaborators for the British government. It also became an important resource for the development of educational resources about Tibet and led to the development of a paradigm for Tibetan studies.

Kazi Dawa Samdup clearly excelled in his studies. By December 1887 he was in the employ of the British, working as an interpreter at Buxaduar near Bhutan. While there, he met an impressive local lama named The Hermit *Guru* Norbu (Slop dpon mtshams pa Nor bu, dates unknown) from Punakha. He began to study Tantra with him, and found himself so engaged with the initiations and practices he received that he seriously contemplated giving up his position to pursue a spiritual life. Kazi Dawa Samdup’s father became concerned about his son’s interest in the religious life, and in October 1894 called him back to Sikkim to assist him in managing his estates. Dawa Samdup continued to work for the British government and Tibetan governmental representatives in Darjeeling. Later, he married a Bhutanese woman and they had one son and one daughter.¹² However, his interest in his spiritual life never left him, and even as he continued his work for the government as an interpreter for all the major Anglo-Tibetan meetings of the period, he continued to engage in Buddhist pursuits. Around this time he became heavily involved with the Maha Bodhi Society, and was the secretary of the Darjeeling branch. He also wrote a number of articles for two periodicals, *The Maha Bodhi Journal* and the *United Buddhist World*.

12 Samdup (2008) and Evans-Wentz (1960, Introduction). Evans-Wentz writes erroneously that he had two sons. Kazi Dawa Samdup’s wife had apparently been married to another man when they met, and she left her husband to marry him and move to Sikkim. Alexandra David-Néel also provides a brief biography of him in David-Néel (1931, 20–21).

In Sikkim, Kazi Dawa Samdup also forged his own reputation. He had come to know King Tutop Namgyel (Mthu stobs rnam rgyal, 1860–1914) and Queen Yéshé Dölma (Ye shes sgrol ma, date unknown–1914) when he had to translate for them while they were imprisoned by the British in Kurseong and Darjeeling. The relationship they developed led him to translate their seminal historical and political text *The History of Sikkim* (*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*) into English in 1908.¹³ He was also known to Sidkeong Tulku due to the English tutoring services he was offering, and he was Sidkeong's first choice as the teacher for a new school to be opened in Gangtok for Sikkim's elite in 1906 (Copy of Letter from Sidkeong Tulku to J.C. White, 29/7/1905. Private Collection). While there is little archival information about what he made of his new position, he continued with his translation projects. In 1912, he published a translation of a prayer by the First Drukchen Chöjé Tsangppa Gyaré (Chos rje Gtsang pa rgya ras ye shes do rje, 1161–1211) in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, and in 1914 in Darjeeling he released a limited run of a translation that he had been working on for many years; a translation of the seventh chapter of the life of Milarépa (Kazi 1914).

That Sidkeong and Kazi Dawa Samdup had a strong personal relationship is evidenced by the fact that Sidkeong entrusted Dawa Samdup with some of his most important guests, as well as major translating positions for the state. In 1912, for example, he introduced Dawa Samdup to Alexandra David-Néel, and he effectively became her translator, tour guide, and fellow spiritual seeker during her time in Sikkim.¹⁴ She claims that he enjoyed his alcohol, seeing it as an extension of his spiritual practice, and it led him to be “too extraordinary for words” as a headmaster who was prone to violence in the classroom (David-Néel 1931, 23–25). David-Néel's account appears to have been an exaggeration. No other evidence has ever emerged of these brutal educational methods, and she appears to have ignored the many other duties he had to attend to in the state when he would “disappear” from his classroom; she admits however that he was an unusual and talented figure, and was “sympathetic and interesting” (David-Néel 1931, 25).

Over the next few years, Dawa Samdup's talents were regularly employed by the Plenipotentiary and he used his earnings to purchase land in Kalimpong, a convenient location between his professional bases in Sikkim and Darjeeling, his religious base in Buxaduar, and his family connections in Bhutan. On top of his school duties, which appeared to be sporadic due to the long periods he spent dispatched to other jobs, by 1914 he was engaged in a new project. Dawa Samdup was compiling a new Tibetan to English dictionary that was intended to act as a corrective to the others previously compiled by foreigners. It was also unique in its inclusion

13 India Office Library, Mss. Eur. E78. Published in Tibetan as Rnam rgyal and Sgrol ma (2003).

14 Their meeting is described in David-Néel (1931, 9).

of Bhutia (*Lho skad*) and Dzongkha terms, as well as colloquial and honorific vocabulary (Samdup 2008). He received funding for this from several sources, including the University of Calcutta. The University committed to publishing the dictionary, and stated that once the production costs were covered, all additional royalties would go to Dawa Samdup. However, given the considerable expenses involved, Dawa Samdup also applied to the British government for extra funding to supplement his income. Ideally, he wanted a permanent position in the Department of Education, as opposed to a one-time grant, so that he could live in Kalimpong and continue his work, because he was concerned about his long-term employment and income after the Tibetan Plenipotentiary left the area. Political Officer Charles Bell expressed reservations. While he had publicly lauded Kazi Dawa Samdup's erudition and thought the dictionary a great asset to the British Foreign Office, he was concerned about his potential as a worker, writing to his colleague Sir Harcourt Butler in the Foreign and Political Department that "I am not sure [...] that you would find him altogether satisfactory as an ordinary employé [sic], even if you had room for him. He lacks steadiness." He recommended instead a monthly stipend while Kazi Dawa Samdup finished the dictionary.¹⁵ Eventually, 100 rupees per month for eight months was agreed on.¹⁶

What did Bell mean by "lacking steadiness"? Was Bell acting as Waddell had in dismissing the talents of his local collaborators?¹⁷ Or were Dawa Samdup's drinking and mystical interests, as discussed by David-Néel, disrupting his work? This seems not to have been the case when it came to his next—and most famous—project: the translation that came from his meeting with W.Y. Evans-Wentz, a wealthy American with degrees in folklore from Stanford and Oxford who used his wealth to travel the world, influenced by the mysticism of Theosophy. Evans-Wentz spent five years traveling through Greece, Egypt, Ceylon, and India, before he arrived in Darjeeling. There his interest in collecting manuscripts from different spiritual traditions led him to acquire a special manuscript from a "young lama of the Kagyupa Sect of the Red Hat School attached to the Bhutia Basti Monastery" (Evans-Wentz 1960, 68) that he believed to be between one hundred and fifty and two hundred years old (Evans-Wentz 1960, 69). Fascinated with the book, he decided he wanted to study it. The local chief of police in Darjeeling, Sardar Bahadur S.W. Laden La, another Bhutia Boarding school product, provided him with an introduction to the most

15 Demi-official from C.A Bell, Esq. to the Hon'ble Sir Harcourt Butler, dated Simla, 28/6/1914. Foreign Department, 1915, General B, No. 209. India National Archives, Delhi, India.

16 Sadly, funds to pay for the dictionary ended up coming from his family, as for some reason elements of the original agreement with Calcutta University fell through. In order to meet expenses, they were forced to sell pieces of their land in the Kalimpong area.

17 For more on the complex relationship between Kazi Dawa Samdrup and Charles Bell, see Martin (2016).

qualified local he knew, the headmaster of Bhutia Boarding School in Gangtok, Kazi Dawa Samdup (Evans-Wentz 1960, 79).

After arriving in Gangtok, and having received a welcome and permission to stay with the new king, Tashi Namgyel (Bkra shis rnam rgyal, 1893–1963), Evans-Wentz went to meet Dawa Samdup on May 5, 1919. He agreed to help him read the text, and they started on July 23, 1919.¹⁸ What followed during the few months they spent together discussing the text is largely unknown (Winkler 1982, 38). When the product of their meetings, Kazi Dawa Samdup's *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, along with his translation, was eventually published, Evans-Wentz wrote that he had suppressed his own views in the preparation of the text and acted "simply as a mouthpiece of a Tibetan sage, of whom I was a recognized disciple" (Evans-Wentz 1960, xix). In the introduction, he also based his scholarly legitimacy on the fact that he had been a close disciple of Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup for many months (Evans-Wentz 1960, 79).

Donald S. Lopez Jr.'s insightful analysis of the presentation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* clearly demonstrates that Evans-Wentz went beyond simply being a "mouthpiece" in his creation of a complex interpretive framework that brought together Theosophy, Orientalism, spiritualism, and a wide variety of other ideas, which in turn inspired many other reinventions of the text (Lopez 1998; Lopez 2011). However, it does not appear that Kazi Dawa Samdup considered Evans-Wentz a close disciple, or even someone whose presence greatly affected his daily life. In the 1980s, at the request of Evans-Wentz's biographer Ken Winkler, Dawa Samdup's son T.T. Samdup looked for mentions of Evans-Wentz in Kazi Dawa Samdup's diary. He found very few, aside from four entries in greater detail (on June 30, September 12, October 19, and November 19), as well as on the days they initially met, and a comment that Evans-Wentz had helped him by supervising an English exam (T.T. Samdup letter to Ken Winkler, 8/9/1980. Evans-Wentz Collection, Stanford University Special Collection). The one noteworthy entry that provides more information about their interpersonal relations is from November 19, where Dawa Samdup wrote:

At night Mr. E.W. came and wanted the 'Naro-druk-khor (*Nā ro chos drug*) or Trul-khor (*'Khrul 'khor*).¹⁹ I told him that it could not be given without a formal offering. He called it mercenary spirit. I told him that if he expected the most precious secrets for nothing, or could be had for the asking he was mistaken—and no proper test of a person's being in earnest about it or merely curious, could not get (T.T. Samdup letter to Ken Winkler, 8/9/1980. Evans-Wentz Collection, Stanford University Special Collection).

18 Notes from these diaries were taken by T.T. Samdup, Dawa Samdup's son, and provided to Ken Winkler in the 1980s. Letter from T.T. Samdup to Ken Winkler (8/9/1980). Letters they exchanged are now kept in the Evans-Wentz Collection, Stanford University Special Collections.

19 Explanations in parentheses were added by the author.

Such a response to Evans-Wentz's request upsets the common image of Dawa Samdup. Before he met Evans-Wentz, in 1916–1918 he also acted as a paid translator for Sir John Woodroffe (1865–1936), the British judge, Orientalist, and part-time Tantric practitioner. The result was a translated and edited edition of a *sādhana* related to Cakrasaṃvara released in 1919 (incorrectly titled) as *Shrīchakrasambhāra tantra: a Buddhist Tantra* (Kazi 1919). While working on the project, Woodroffe's biographer Kathleen Taylor noted that Dawa Samdup was apparently not treated as a collaborator in the same way Woodroffe's Bengali colleagues were; instead "Woodroffe simply employed him to work on the manuscripts he had acquired." As a result, she found in their correspondence "an arrogant, sometimes bullying tone" and evidence that Woodroffe often demanded information from Dawa Samdup, criticizing him when he could not supply what Woodroffe wanted. Taylor has interpreted this as evidence that Dawa Samdup represented "the older model of the pandit-collaborator or 'informant' working for the orientalist," which led Woodroffe to assume a dominant role (Taylor 2001, 210). However, Dawa Samdup's abrupt and firm answer to Evans-Wentz does not correspond to this depiction of him. In fact, it shows him holding a unique sense of power and agency in these relationships, even if this power was manifested in different ways. It also suggests that he had learnt from his experience with Woodroffe and decided not to replicate the same imbalance of power in his dealings with Evans-Wentz. It is ultimately this power—earned through experiential as well as scholarly knowledge, and a pragmatic awareness that he was irreplaceable—that allowed Dawa Samdup to publicize his own form of Tibetan Buddhism; one that countered Waddell's criticisms.²⁰

Underlying Dawa Samdup's decisions as a scholar and translator was his ongoing practice of meditation and ritual. It was this first-hand experience that led Dawa Samdup to choose the texts he did, as well as to set out the terms of his relationships with foreigners. While Dawa Samdup's translations of the *Cakrasaṃvarasādhana* and the *Bardo Tödröl* were created at the demand of foreign Orientalists, he also had his own agenda. The texts he translated on his own reveal his commitment to his lineage and religious practice. While the dictionary was evidently produced partly for pragmatic reasons, it is also noteworthy that as a linguistic project it facilitated intercultural communication and understanding. In this way, it is one of many projects in which Dawa Samdup appropriated "the idioms of the conqueror" in the creation of a transculturated text that represented the interactions of a contact zone and local agents' ability to create products that could serve both imperial and local audiences (Pratt 1992, 9). Another project to which he was especially dedicated was the production

20 Unfortunately, the correspondence and diaries we have from Dawa Samdup contain no direct mention of specific instances in which he was responding to Waddell. However, his general body of work and decision to translate certain genres and texts can be seen as a response to Waddell's negative representations of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism.

of a translation of the life of Milarépa, a respected Tibetan saint and yogi. An initial translation, as mentioned earlier, was produced in Darjeeling in 1914. Taylor notes he had also tried to get other Western contacts, including Woodroffe, to publish it (Taylor 2001, 210). However, ultimately it was Dawa Samdup's work with Evans-Wentz that led to the publication of his full translation, even if it was long after his death (Kazi 1928).

An example of his own interpretation of mystical Buddhism can be found in a diary note that he wrote in 1894, one that Evans-Wentz copied for his records. The document, titled "Dawa Samdrup's Faith," outlines twenty-three elements of his understanding of Buddhism. Parts of the work give a fascinating insight in the autoethnographic experiment Dawa Samdup was attempting in creating English-language terminology for Tibetan mystical truths. For example, he calls *samsāra* "the laws of nature," and refers to Dzokchen (rdzogs chen) as "the Perfect Whole." He had a vision for his life:

Should I lose this present opportunity it may never come again for ages. Hence I must try to acquire wisdom and guide my actions accordingly, so that at my death the balance of my good actions may outweigh my evil ones and thus give me a chance of retaking human shape and continuing to completion my study [sic] of the *Dharma*.

I regard the One Mind, the spiritual portion of the Universe, as the reigning or ruling power of this world; it is the Life, Intelligence and Wisdom ever present around me and thrilling [sic] within me. The material portion of the Universe forms the corporal aspect of the One Mind, the Real ("Dawa Samdrup's Faith," Evans-Wentz Collection, Stanford University Special Collections).

Here we see a representation of Dawa Samdup's mystic outlook and his motivation, conveyed through an early effort at cross-cultural translation.

While Dawa Samdup was not an overtly anti-colonial activist, his assertion of identity and authenticity countered scholarly accounts such as Waddell's. His ideals were based on affiliations that went far beyond the parochial present and the binary of colonizer vs. colonized. Instead, Dawa Samdup conceived of relationships in traditional terms, including those of lineage and teacher and disciples. His interactions with colonial scholars and Western Buddhists were complex, but by no means straightforward in their hierarchy. They provided him with an opportunity to reassert his agency in interpersonal circumstances, as did his choice of translations. He was also pragmatic though, and in some ways a hybrid in that he employed modern technologies for printing and dissemination so as to grant access to his translations. Through these translations he facilitated an insight into Tibetan Buddhism that had never previously been possible, and thereby conceived of new relationships and affiliations beyond the political present.

These creative responses and assertions of agency contributed to a unique body of work that eventually landed him the long-term position

he had hoped for as lecturer in Tibetan at the University of Calcutta in the metropolitan center of Calcutta. However, tragically he did not survive even a year, dying on March 22, 1922 as a result of the change of climate he experienced living in Calcutta. His family base remained Kalimpong, which along with Darjeeling had functioned as a crucial place of rest and a contact zone for him between different cultures and his worlds of bureaucracy and scholarship.

Conclusions

Darjeeling and Kalimpong were important sites of cultural and economic exchange and transmission. They were also surprisingly important nodes in the dissemination of modern forms of global Buddhism. Two classic works that were central to the creation of awareness about Tibetan Buddhism, L.A. Waddell's *The Buddhism of Tibet*, and W.Y. Evans-Wentz's edited version of Kazi Dawa Samdup's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, were both produced in these environments and nearby in Sikkim. However, the scholars who produced these works were very different in their motivations. The work of Kazi Dawa Samdup demonstrates the presence of autoethnographic expression in Kalimpong and Darjeeling as a way for local agents to insert their own voices into global representations of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism. His legacy has continued as a key figure who bridged cultures and created a deeper awareness of the complexity of Himalayan religion and culture on the ground.

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- National Archives of India, Delhi, India.
- National Archives of India, Calcutta, India.
- Sikkim State Archive, Gangtok, India.
- W.Y. Evans-Wentz Collection, Special Collections Library, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, United States.
- The diaries of Kazi Dawa Samdup, private collections, Kalimpong and Sikkim, India.

Figures

Fig. 1: Photo from private collection, Kalimpong, India.

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