

---

PART III

# Things that Connect: Economies and Material Culture

---

---

Emma Martin

## **Object Lessons in Tibetan: The Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Charles Bell, and Connoisseurial Networks in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, 1910–12**

---

**Abstract** On 18 June 1912, Charles Bell, Political Officer of Sikkim, paid his final visit to the thirteenth Dalai Lama at Bhutan House in Kalimpong. The significant gifts presented that day were the culmination of a series of object exchanges between the two men during the lama's exile in British India. These gifting moments were not only characterized by the mobility of the objects in question, but by the connoisseurial and empirical knowledge regularly offered with them. Using the concept of "object lessons," this paper traces out how Bell was taught things with Tibetan objects. Furthermore, these exchanges are not only placed within the context of the Dalai Lama's exile in Darjeeling and Kalimpong between 1910 and 1912, but they highlight the potential to make alternate readings of histories and encounters if one closely follows things.

## New arrivals

*A large procession of the faithful met the Tibetan pope some distance from the city and escorted him with grand ceremony. They carried banners, incense burners, and multi-colored flags [...]. The Dalai Lama was in a magnificent yellow sedan chair, with richly caparisoned bearers [...]. The Dalai Lama and his suite were installed in Druid Hotel [...]. His bed chamber is draped throughout with yellow silk. There is an altar in the corner of the room and incense lamps burn incessantly before images of Buddha, which were especially brought here from Gartok by the Maharaja of Sikkim ("The Lama in India: Crowds Greet Him" 1910).*

As the *New York Tribune's* report on the progress of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, Tupten Gyatso (Thub bstan rgya mtsho) (1876–1933) through the narrow lanes of Darjeeling shows, objects were impossible to miss and integral for conveying a sense of something different arriving in British India. On that late February day in 1910 objects were everywhere, in the crowds, carried during the procession, and carefully arranged by the *Maharaj Kumar* or Crown Prince of Sikkim, Sidkeong Tulku (1879–1914), in the top floor hotel room prepared for the lama's arrival. Yet this influx of Dalai Lama-specific things with all their associated authenticity and singularity—so unlike the Tibetan curios bought in the bazaars of Darjeeling and Kalimpong—have in recent research been completely overshadowed by the more obvious diplomatic anxieties that this new arrival brought with him. Exiled Tibetan objects have remained silent witnesses to this unexpected encounter, but, to paraphrase the historian Lorraine Daston (Daston 2004), Tibetan objects did a great deal of talking, negotiating, and passing on of information between 1910 and 1912.

The Dalai Lama and his entourage left Lhasa in a hurry, yet a surprisingly large number of material things were gathered up and brought with them into exile.<sup>1</sup> There were *ku* (*sku*) or Buddhist statues, *trengwa* (*phreng ba*) or prayer beads, ritual vessels and implements, including everything from mounted *tōpa* (*thod pa*) or skull cups to *nézé* (*nas bzed*) or ritual bowls for barley. One might think that these things seem like obvious travelling companions for a spiritual leader going on a journey to an uncertain destination, but these ritual objects were accompanied by other seemingly less crucial things. Considered just as vital for this journey were jade figurines and snuff bottles originally from China, Burmese alabaster figures in travelling cases, cloisonné vases, and the ever-present jade cup with silver stand and cover.<sup>2</sup>

1 The lama fled Lhasa as 2,000 Chinese troops advanced on Tibet's capital, led by the soon to be new Chinese *Amban* or Resident, Zhong Ying (Ho 2008).

2 I mention these specific objects because they were given to Charles Bell between 1910 and 1912 in Darjeeling and Kalimpong and are now in public and private collections.

Despite so many objects making this journey their presence only becomes apparent much later, when they receive brief mentions in the travelogues published by colonial officers on their return to Britain or in still unpublished diaries and notebooks now available for researchers to pore over in public archives and libraries. More often than not Tibetan objects are highlighted as symbols of the perceived bonds of friendship and transcultural understanding made possible during the Dalai Lama's sojourn in the British India borderlands. Such objects were often labelled as gifts to their new owners from the Dalai Lama himself and, as a result their possession raised the owner's status, elevating (invariably) him to a position of extreme privilege. Through the ownership of Dalai Lama-related things such men became part of an exclusive club who not only knew a once inaccessible man, but had the tangible evidence to prove it. In this colonial context, once Tibetan objects arrived in Britain with their new owners they became prestigious souvenirs, but while still in British India they could be and do many other things. One little discussed role objects played was that of Tibetan tutor.

There is a considerable body of scholarship that focuses on cross-cultural knowledge production in colonial South Asia, as typified by the recent work of Mantena (2012) and Raj (2007), but this work continues to focus on textual translation with little if anything said about the roles played by material things in processes of exchange. With this paper I want to shed light on the connoisseurial work objects did during the Anglo-Tibetan encounter by highlighting the ways knowledge was produced from objects and especially gifts. Despite my interest in gifts I do not wish to analyse the practice of gift-giving here (for that see Martin forthcoming, 2015 and 2014), instead I use gifting moments as sites of knowledge accumulation. It is a very particular kind of knowledge production that I am interested in, as this is knowledge often given at the moment (or shortly after) by the giver of the gift. Object-based research developed in the fields of visual anthropology, material culture studies, and museology now has a considerable body of work on the critical role classifying and displaying objects played in knowing or controlling a culture in the colonial context. Yet, here I purposely turn away from the more commonly understood projections and imaginings that come with colonial knowledge production in relation to visual and material culture, especially as regard a visual rendering of Tibet (for that see, Bishop 1989 and Harris 2012). I will not deal with the mechanisms used by the British to transform objects like the Tibetan *cham* mask (*cham*) or *purpa* (*phur pa*)—often referred to by colonial officers as “devil dance” masks and “devil daggers”—into material markers of Tibetan culture. My focus is not on Tibet and its people reconstructed for colonial museums and imperial publications as “malign monsters,” on the one hand, or as a spiritual and isolated culture on the other. Instead my interests lie in a type of knowledge production that was both connoisseurial and empirical in nature. I am far more preoccupied with the passing on of ideas and the discussions that surrounded Tibetan things on

the ground; what I understand as *object lessons* in Tibetan history, taste and aesthetics, technology, and more broadly speaking, in ways of being, or behaving like the Other.

A productive way of approaching the relationships between objects, people and places is through the concept of “assemblage thinking” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). The political geographer Martin Müller has recently highlighted its usefulness in breaking down the metanarratives of international relations, inasmuch as this concept can “disassemble the black boxes of international politics—states and international organisations—question[ing] the *a priori* of scales and interrogat[ing] the production of knowledge and expertise and the enrolment of manifold technological devices in that process” (Müller 2015, 28). By focussing on Himalayan assemblages, I want to show the significant roles objects played in Darjeeling and Kalimpong at a time when the success or failure of diplomatic relations between Britain and Tibet hinged on a small number of personal relationships. I particularly want to privilege the types of intellectual, interpersonal, and political work objects did beyond state-level encounters and negotiations. Applying assemblage thinking to these specific sites and encounters also alerts us to the different ways in which people, brought together by unexpected circumstances, found ways of learning from one another that the global narratives of late imperialism might not anticipate. By following objects and their impacts it is possible to see in precise terms what types of object knowledge were available to a colonial officer who thought it useful to learn. My intentions are not to dismiss the colonial context within which these object lessons were given. On the contrary, although I cannot dwell on the uneven power relations present in these relationships they should be regarded as omnipresent.<sup>3</sup> My choice with this article is to highlight the highly cultured ways in which objects were understood by Tibetan elites (and others who already knew Tibetan things). What lies at the heart of this research is the following question: How were Tibetan ways of knowing and seeing objects transferred to another who did not already have the necessary cultural capital to understand them?

## Object lessons

My concern over object lessons has been galvanised by the resurgence in object-led methodologies currently gathering together a body of scholars and curators who both work and think with objects, using them specifically to construct object-led histories. While this is a recent revival, the origins of the object lesson can be traced back to the late eighteenth century

---

3 For important contributions on the networks of collecting and colonial governance, see the special issues, by Bennett et al. (2014) and Cameron and McCarthy (2015).

and more precisely to the Swiss educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827). Pestalozzi's 1801 treatise on learning with objects, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, gives an account of his work with the country's poor and destitute children and emphasises his conviction in the act of learning through practice and through tangible things, rather than solely through the rigidity of the textbook.

I learned from them [...] to know the natural relation in which real knowledge stands to book knowledge. I learnt from them what a disadvantage this one-sided letter-knowledge and entire reliance on words (which are only sound and noise when there is nothing behind them) must be. I saw what a hindrance this may be to the real power of observation (*Anschauung*), and the firm conception of the objects that surround us (Pestalozzi 1894, 18–19).

Objects were to be observed, described, named, and classified, and with the interventions of a teacher increasingly complex questions could be asked of things, leading to heightened levels of understanding and perception. Pestalozzi used found, natural objects, including shells and leaves, but in later years Elizabeth Mayo developed the pedagogy, following her brother Charles's time with Pestalozzi. She introduced teachers to a range of additional man-made objects in her 1830 publication, *Lessons on Objects* with her prescribed methods involving the acute observation of utilitarian things.

Two hundred years later, this way of thinking about the everyday object has been reconceived with volumes including *Tangible Things* (Thatcher Ulrich et al. 2015) and also a very different set of *Object Lessons*, this time in the form of an online platform for essays and an accompanying book series focussing on, amongst other things, the ballpoint pen, glass, and the remote control.<sup>4</sup> In thinking about the things encountered in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, it is also possible to think of some of the objects Tibetan men gave to colonial officers as everyday objects, such as robes, tea-cups, and personal statues. It was often only in the moment that they passed from Tibetans into the hands of foreigners that they became anything but ordinary.

These processes of object-led knowledge making in the colonial context have not been quite so obvious in published and archival sources, and more often than not those moments when the colonial officer understood how to think with the things he had in his possession are poorly recorded. The ethnographic museums of Europe contain hundreds of thousands of objects collected during colonial encounters and many today are increasingly thought of and labelled as loot, trophies, curios, fieldwork specimens, and gifts due to their associations with particular collectors and events. Yet the reality is that very few are accompanied by records that

---

4 See <http://objectsofobjects.com/> Accessed 23 November 2015, and also the 2015 exhibition entitled "Object Lessons" (The Henry Moore Foundation 2015).

note the actual moment of collection and description, making histories led by *individual* objects now classified as ethnographic very difficult to reconstruct. Pieter ter Keurs makes an important point when he lays the blame for this absence on the continuing colonial legacy in the museum archiving system:

Until the 1990s museum collections were generally treated as being devoid of any collecting context. In the case of museums of ethnography this means that, at the most, the names of the collectors were known, but that no information was available on how the collector obtained the objects and how they obtained information on the cultural significance of the objects. This de-contextualisation of museum collections runs contrary to the “ideal” way of collecting (Ter Keurs 2007, 12).

Yet, despite this rather bleak assessment of colonial collecting and museum cataloguing practices, there are always exceptions to the rule.

One such exception was (later Sir) Charles Bell (1870–1945), the Political Officer of Sikkim who was placed in charge of managing the thirteenth Dalai Lama’s exile in British India (figure 1). Once the Dalai Lama set out on his journey back to Tibet in the summer of 1912, Bell embarked on the process of creating an inventory called *List of Curios* in order to make sense of an abundance of scribbled down notes that related to the considerable group of objects he now had in his possession.<sup>5</sup> *List of Curios* records the many objects Bell collected during his working life in Tibet and the Himalaya, yet this document with its rather unassuming, if somewhat archaic title was and still is much more than a simple inventory of the singular and unusual things Bell accumulated. Instead, *List of Curios* makes visible the many assemblages—the material networks and exchanges—that he was party to in this particular Himalayan contact zone. This was a list that spoke of comparative object studies, performative and iconographic instruction, connoisseurial skills, and an expert’s ability to appraise the qualities of both materials and craftsmanship. Of most significance here are the many entries in the early part of this document that relate to objects and the connoisseurial and political encounters Bell had with Tibetan men in Darjeeling and Kalimpong between 1910 and 1912. Using this exceptional document, the objects themselves, and a series of colonial archives, this essay draws out the ways in which information on the cultural significance of objects was transferred to Bell. In short, I want to show how Charles Bell was given an *object lesson* in Tibetan.

---

5 *List of Curios*, unpublished catalogue, archives of National Museums Liverpool.



Figure 1: Charles Alfred Bell; photograph taken in Calcutta, around March 1910.

## Appraising Tibetan objects

*“Mixed with the copper,” said the Dalai Lama, “both in the statue of Buddha in the ‘Head-Hand-Foot’ (Tsuk La Kang, the Tibetan name for the great Temple in Lhasa)” and in this image which I am giving you, are gold, silver, turquoises, corals, etcetera, ground up together [...]. There is no better image of Buddha in Tibet than this (Bell 1987, 125).*

On May 23, 1910, just three months after the Dalai Lama arrived in British India, the lama gave Bell the first of two Buddha Shakyamuni copper gilt statues (figure 2 and 3). In his publications Bell couched this gift, and the gift of a second Buddha Shakyamuni just a few months later, in personal and very positive terms. Bell bathed this encounter in a rosy glow, but in fact both Buddhas were given at moments of extreme political tension on the very days that Britain relayed its messages to the Dalai Lama, via Bell, that they had no intention of taking a stand on Tibet’s claims of independence from China (see Martin 2014, 122–124). On two separate occasions the lama had chosen Buddha statues, items from his personal prayer room, as gifts in a bid to win political favour. Sadly for him his personal *ku*, repurposed as diplomatic agents, had no effect on state-level politics. It is important to be aware of the political intent that accompanied these gifts, but here I want to concentrate on the scales of significance transferred by the lama to Bell.

Much later, when writing *A Portrait of the Dalai Lama*, Bell recalled: “He [Dalai Lama] gave me the first one when the party had been only three or four months in Darjeeling, and when giving it said, ‘I am having another and better image brought from Lhasa for you’” (Bell 1947, 125). These were important gifts for Bell and he recorded that: “I valued none so highly as two sculpted images of Buddha” (Bell 1947, 125). Although Bell seemed to value the two Buddhas equally, the lama clearly made value judgments about the Buddha already given and the Buddha that was about to arrive. The question then is: What constituted a “better” Buddha?

On the day Bell was given the second statue (29 July 1910) the lama was accompanied by a man Bell referred to as “Lame Kempo” (Lamen Khenpo), personal name, Jampa Thubwang (1863–1922), Tibet’s future Head of Monasteries and the Chief Physician / Astrologer to the Dalai Lama. As Bell recorded in *List of Curios*, the two men used this second gift to provide insights into why this Buddha was better than the first:

The Dalai Lama and Lame Kem-po say it was made in Western India, being of copper gilt (*ser-sang*) while those made in Eastern India, they say, are made of white metal (*li*) and inferior. The Dalai Lama says that this image of Gautama Buddha is better than the one he gave me in May 1910 and that there is no better Buddha than this in Tibet. It is, he says, of the same quality as the large Buddha in the Chö-kang



Figure 2 and 3: left, Buddha Shakyamuni, Tibet/Nepal, fourteenth century; right, Buddha Shakyamuni, fifteenth century, Tibet/Nepal

in Lhasa, which is supposed to have been modelled with Gautama himself as the model and like this one given to me, was made of gold, silver and precious stones i.e. turquoise, corals etc. ground up together. This kind of manufacture is known as “Dze-kyima.”<sup>6</sup>

The two Tibetans involved in this object lesson emphasised the importance of the Buddha as a singular object, in terms of its style, materiality, history, and provenance. It is also obvious from this that the highest echelons of Lhasa’s religious societies did not simply understand the statue as the embodiment of the Buddha, but something that could also be assessed on its artistic merits.

As they gauged the Buddha, the men employed technical language used in Tibetan manuals of connoisseurship dating from the sixteenth century, which guide the reader in how to appraise and describe Tibet’s material world. These manuals include chapters on arms and armour, silk fabrics, cups, sacred texts and, of most use in this case, religious statues.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *List of Curios*, No. 70.

<sup>7</sup> For example, *Jig rten lugs kyi bstan bcos las dpyad don gsal ba’i sgron me* written by Bya pa ‘jam dbyangs bkra shis rnam rgyal in 1524, and discussed (in terms of arms and armoury) by LaRocca (2006). Also see Rechung (1990) for an overview of the qualities and dating of *li dmar*, *dzi khyim[a]* and *gser zangs* metal statues, and also Von Schroeder (2008) for listings of significant Tibetan works on metallurgy and the creation of Buddhist statues.

Such manuals establish how to categorize a statue using three complementary methods—the materiality (*rgyu*), the stylistic varieties (*rigs*), and the principle features of the image (*ngo bo*). As the men appraised the Buddha figure for Bell they used these principles to guide them. Using a popular method of comparative analysis, they certified the *rigs* and *ngo bo* and, in conjunction with their analytical skills, settled on specific pieces of terminology, including “Dze-kyima” (*Dzhai kshim*), which shows that the men were also assessing the statue as regard its *rgyu*.<sup>8</sup>

When the lama told Bell “there are no better Buddhas than this one in Tibet,” he and Lamden Khenpo had based their reasoning on the statue’s stylistic similarities to what is arguably the most sacred statue of the Buddha in Tibet, the Jowo Shakyamuni housed in the Jokhang in Lhasa. This was a narrative often used by the Tibetan men Bell met in Darjeeling, which reveals a process of comparative analysis using a datable sculptural masterpiece.<sup>9</sup> What makes this practice so Tibetan, or more precisely, Lhasa-specific is the use of Jowo Shakyamuni as the exemplar piece of sculpture that all others should be compared to. One could only use these types of connoisseurial skills if one had been to Lhasa, and furthermore had studied the Jowo Shakyamuni not only as a religious object, but as an object with artistic and connoisseurial value. The men also connected Bell’s Buddha to the Jowo Shakyamuni through its materiality and the identification of its metal composition as *Dzhai kshim* (a borrowed Sanskrit term for a specific type of bell metal).<sup>10</sup> This is a metal noted in the manuals for its composition, as it is made from several precious stones and metals and has the ability to shine like a rainbow when placed in the shade<sup>11</sup>—a quality according to the texts that is only found in Tibetan statues of Songtsän Gampo’s period—an attribute commonly given to the Jowo Shakyamuni.<sup>12</sup>

The Dalai Lama not only gave Bell a statue that day, but he and Lamden Khenpo also gave Bell a complex mix of empirical, textual and connoisseurial knowledge and accompanying practices explaining, through comparisons to other *ku*, why this particular Buddha Shakyamuni was so special.<sup>13</sup> But this encounter doesn’t explain why the men offered Bell such detailed connoisseurial information. Bell was someone who had yet to visit Lhasa

---

8 See Von Schroeder (2008, 18–19) for a discussion on Tibetan and Foreign classification systems using stylistic markers.

9 This technique was also encouraged in the manuals, see Rechung (1990, 58) for discussions on the comparative techniques (which often use the Jowo Shakyamuni) featured in the manuals.

10 See *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1993, 2333).

11 See Rechung (1990, 58).

12 Songtsän Gampo (d.649) was the first of the three Dharma rulers of Tibet. What are arguably the two most sacred statues of Buddha Shakyamuni in Tibet, Jowo Shakyamuni and Jowo Mikyo Dorje, were brought to the country in the trousseaus of his two wives, a princess from China and a princess from Nepal.

13 I freely acknowledge that we hear this information from Tibetan men, second-hand, filtered through Bell’s writings. In Gayatri Spivak’s words, Bell might be understood to have “ventriloquized” the men. Despite these shortcomings, *List of Curios* offers rare and unusual insights into the process of knowledge exchange.

and had not yet gained access to the connoisseurial manuals owned by cultured men from Tibetan worlds.<sup>14</sup> There was also a further hurdle in that Bell had only rudimentary abilities when it came to reading Tibetan.

It is entirely feasible to connect these connoisseurial offerings to long-held Tibetan gifting cultures. Patricia Berger, for example, reveals how sophisticated ways of knowing objects, coupled with the recognizing and relaying of provenance, enhanced the significance of gift exchanges between the sixth Panchen Lama and the Qing Emperor, Qianlong in 1780 (Berger 2003, 184–185). However, in solely privileging this historical practice, it denies the personal practices that Bell initiated in Darjeeling. Bell was already collecting Tibetan things well before he received his first gifts from the Dalai Lama in 1910. He had bought curios from traders, received gifts with provenance from the ninth Panchen Lama in Shigatse in 1906, and by 1910 he had an established network of Himalayan and Tibetan intellectuals and aristocrats who acquired elite objects for him (see Martin 2014). In some cases, he was given information about the things he acquired, which alerted him to the fact that objects did not merely represent, but also had the potential to disclose Tibetan political, familial, and historical networks. As a result Bell sought out information, a practice he increasingly relied on once Lhasa's cultured elites were exiled in the hill station.

This developing practice becomes clear in a diary entry made by Bell on 18 May, a week before he received the first Buddha Shakyamuni. On that day Bell made a visit to Hillside, the lama's Darjeeling residence in exile. He had company, Sir Walter J. Buchanan, the Inspector-General of Prisons for Bengal, and the Indian Civil Service officer Lewis Sydney Steward O'Malley (1874–1941), who both had a short audience with the Dalai Lama. Bell also took the opportunity to bring a selection of the *ku* already in his collection for their own private audience with the three *lönchen* or Chief Ministers who worked in the makeshift offices below the Dalai Lama's quarters. Bell was seeking out their opinions on the *ku*'s quality. The men graded Bell's *ku* from best to worst, justifying their answers in connoisseurial terms similar to those used by the Dalai Lama and Lamden Khenpo, thus providing Bell with new, empirically-based methods for appraising his collection. Bell had purposely looked for this information, he had not waited for it to be offered to him, thus alerting the Tibetans to the fact that he wanted to know what he should, and potentially could, know about Tibetan objects.

As we are thinking about Mary Louise Pratt's contact zones throughout this volume, this might be a good moment to pause and reflect on Bell's absorption and use of Tibetan knowledge. Contrary to Pratt's processes of transculturation, in which "subordinated or marginal groups

---

14 Bell acquired two works on the arts of Tibet from Barmiok Jedrung Karma Palden Chögyal (1871–1942) (Bell referred to him as Barmiok Lama) sometime around 1912–1913. He donated the volumes *Rin po chhe bzo-yi las kyi bsgrub pai rgyud dañ ja dañ dar gos chhen dañ rta rgyud thsugs bzañ nan gyi rtag pa* and *bZo ris kha śas kyi pa kra lag len ma yod pa* (spelling according to the original), to the British Museum in 1933; they are now in the British Library, see Barnett (1933, 12).

select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt 2008, 7), here there is a counter-flow. Rather than thinking of Bell's lessons as a counter-transculturation it is instead perhaps more useful to think about this as an act of "transculturality," as defined by Bennesaieh. She says, "the concept of transculturality is different from transculturation, multiculturalism and interculturality. It captures more adequately the sense of movement and the complex mixedness of cultures in close contact, and better describes the *embodied situation of cultural plurality* lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience" (Bennesaieh 2010, 16).

Buddha figures like those Bell received have become an instantly recognizable signifier of Tibet as a Buddhist land. As a result, such statues (especially those in museum collections) are often stripped of their layers of historical significance. Living amongst Tibetan things and knowing something of the many different ways they could be put to work, that *embodied situation* spoken of by Bennesaieh allowed Bell's *ku* to be far more complicated than the essentialised (usually religious) representations offered in museum displays. The two Buddha Shakyamuni given to Bell may have been outwardly religious in both appearance and practice, yet in the highly political moment of their gifting they were decidedly flexible in their meaning, a characteristic that typified the complicated nature of Tibetan things gifted to Bell in this particular contact zone. The Buddhas also reveal a moment of knowledge transfer, from a Tibetan man to a British man. We see that new knowledge and the creation of new hybrid things emerged in the practice of colonial officers too, and not just in the practices of those who were colonised, or in this case constrained by colonialism. Another gift that we will now turn to further reveals the multiplicity of object lessons given to Bell, and importantly, what he chose to make of them.

## Tibetan shrines for Chinese jades

The Dalai Lama had a renowned collection of Chinese jades. British officers who made it to Lhasa in the twentieth century often commented on the rooms of Chinese cloisonné, porcelain, and jades in the private apartments of the Dalai Lama; typical were the recollections of Margaret Williamson, who had accompanied her Political Officer husband Frederick Williamson to Lhasa in 1935 and had toured the late lama's private collections. She remembered that "In a small rest-house the Dalai Lama kept his collection of exquisite jade carvings and cloisonné brought back with him from his exile in China" (Williamson 1987, 123). Bell had seen the same rooms in 1920 during an eleven-month diplomatic mission to Lhasa, and from his description he seems to have been in a position to assess and judge the quality of the objects on display with something akin to a Tibetan's



Figure 4: “Yunnan” jade figure of qilin, Qianlong Dynasty (1711–1799), China; collected 22 June 1910, Darjeeling.

connoisseurial eye.<sup>15</sup> During Bell’s visit the Dalai Lama continued his object lessons. In what can be read as an extension of their discussions between 1910 and 1912, the lama gave Bell a small but select group of gifts during their final meeting in Lhasa on 16 October 1921. In offering them, he said “I do not wish to give you a great number of things which would be useless to you, but rather to give you a few things that are really good” (Bell 1987, 380). A large percentage of these “good” things were jades.<sup>16</sup> Bell’s ability to appreciate firstly, quality over quantity, and secondly, things not outwardly Tibetan, originated in Darjeeling. A decade earlier, following the gift of a jade, Bell sought out a series of object lessons that garnered a very particular response from the British officer.

The source of these connoisseurial enquiries into jade was a Chinese figurine of a *qilin*, a mythical hybrid beast, and its cub gifted to Bell by the Dalai Lama on 22 June 1910 (figure 4). During most of June the (sometimes tense) conversations between the two men, as recorded in Bell’s diaries, focused on the fragile state of the Qing empire, its army, and the lama’s difficult relationship with China. Concluding a further thread in these conversations—the lama’s relationship with the Panchen Lama—Bell recorded, “The D.[alai] L.[ama] gave me [...] an old + handsome jade ornament given

15 “In both of these rooms are magnificent specimens of porcelain, jade, cloisonne, and pictures on silk, mostly given to him by the Manchu Emperor or the Manchu Government [...]. High up on a stand at his back is a porcelain figure of the mythical lion of Tibet, with his foot on a ball. On his left side a delicately-traced cabinet of lacquer, and at the foot of this, a large vase of Chinese porcelain” (Bell 1987, 268).

16 *List of Curios*, Nos. A91 to A98.

to the 8<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and kept in the D.[alai] L.[ama]'s private apartments in the Potala since then" (Bell 1910–1915a). As seen in other gifting encounters, the lama made sure the provenance of his gift was handed over with the thing itself, but on this occasion the lama did not offer a materially-based assessment of the figure. Instead, Bell had to seek out others, both for connoisseurial instruction and also in order to understand the comparative value on the gift he had been given.

By recording the names of those he called upon for opinions Bell reveals to us a network of new and well-established contacts. He also gives us an insight into the transcultural dynamism that typified borderland hill stations at the time. Bell had been stationed in Darjeeling since 1901 and by 1910 he knew the hill station's curio dealers and traders well. He acquired all kinds of things from them, including several of his early object acquisitions and, less obvious, some of his early spoken Tibetan. It should be no surprise then that he sought out a dealer to discuss the *qilin*. This contact is of considerable interest, as it was not a Tibetan dealer Bell approached, but a man known to him as "Fuk Singh Chinaman" who was based in Darjeeling's bazaar. Fuk Singh, if we unpick Bell's transliteration attempts, was likely Chinese (possibly Hsing/Xing), but I believe Bell's use of the word "Chinaman" was not intended to denote the man's ethnicity, but his profession. Fuk Singh was part of an extensive network of traders and dealers who specialised in Oriental art and objects. The art historian Natasha Eaton provides the first glimpse into the term Chinaman from an eighteenth-century London perspective (Eaton 2013, 31–33). In this site-specific context Chinamen owned exotic/curio shops filled with East India Company monopoly goods, which she suggests they had exclusive access to. These men were just as likely to be Armenian or Persian as they were Chinese, and in Darjeeling, a nexus for trans-Himalayan trade routes, Chinamen like Fuk Singh were buying and selling in a dynamic and well-developed curio market. In considering Bell's approach, he should also be understood as a Chinaman who knew about buying, selling, and valuing jade. The appraisal of the figurine, recorded by Bell, is sadly cursory at best. Fuk Singh identified the figure as a *qilin* and offered Bell a few words on the mythology surrounding the creature, but crucially he did alert Bell to the notion that jade could be classified, telling Bell that the *qilin* was made of white jade or *pe yü* (*baiyü*).<sup>17</sup>

By September that year Bell had acquired one or two more pieces of jade,<sup>18</sup> which gave him the opportunity to approach Shatra (Bshad sgra), personal name Paljor Dorje, (Dpal 'byor rdo rje) (1860–1919) one of the *lönchen* of Tibet who Bell had previously turned to for appraisals of the

---

17 *List of Curios*, No. 69, "these animals, which he [Fuk Singh] calls Ki-ling used to live in Peking. Now they live underground. They can fly though wingless. The ornament is made of white jade, called pe jül."

18 Bell had recently bought a jade snuff bottle from a Tibetan monk official called Shöpa Lobtruk, who had decided to sell it as the Dalai Lama had issued a decree banning smoking and this ban included the taking of snuff. *List of Curios*, No.72.

*ku* during his visits to Hillside. He, according to Bell, was “considered by the Tibetan gentry a great authority on jade” (Bell 1910–1912, 35). Like Fuk Singh, Shatra used specific Chinese terms to classify the jades placed before him. Shatra confirmed that the *qilin* was made from *baiyü*, but using a snuff bottle Bell had recently acquired Shatra also made a comparative study of the pieces. He offered Bell ways of classifying and valuing jade rather than a connoisseur’s opinion on the carvings. Perhaps disappointingly for Bell, Shatra valued the snuff bottle over the gift of the Dalai Lama in terms of the quality of the jade. Shatra pointed out to Bell the differences in the colouring of the two jades, preferring what Bell calls the darker jade “*ho tsü*” of the snuff bottle, which Shatra noted was of greater value due to its rarity. Then, Shatra offered Bell a piece of embodied connoisseurial practice, showing him how to differentiate between the better grades of “*ho tsü*” jade by placing it on a red or white cloth in order to see if it threw a favourable yellow shadow.<sup>19</sup> The connoisseurial knowledge shown by Shatra had a dynamism to it that reflected the trading, gifting and exchange cultures Tibetans participated in. Bell was learning how to appreciate objects important to Tibet’s elite society, but these objects were not necessarily Tibetan in style or manufacture, nor in the terminology that defined their connoisseurial qualities.<sup>20</sup>

His particular response to this new exposure to Chinese jade reflected in a material way the blurred identities assumed by exiled objects. In reaction to the jades, Bell commissioned a new mode of display for his embryonic collection<sup>21</sup> and in doing so he emphasised the “Tibetaness” of his Chinese objects. Bell commissioned a Tibetan *chöshom* (*mchod gshom*) or domestic shrine for the Chinese jades (figure 5), with the encouragement of the Dalai Lama.<sup>22</sup> Although the conversations that led to this commission went unrecorded, the shrine and those involved in its making were noted down: “made for above [jades] by the chief carpenter (*um-dze*) of the Dalai Lama in Darjeeling and painted by a Tibetan painter living in Jore Bungalow.”<sup>23</sup> The *chöshom* was constructed by the Dalai Lama’s chief carpenter whom Bell recorded as an anonymous “*um-dze*.” Although his given name is missing, the carpenter’s presence in the archival record attests to objects made in exile for the Dalai Lama and the inclusion of craftspeople in the exiled party. The temporary nature of his residency

---

19 Beyond the scope of this essay, Sidkeong Tulku’s Chinese tutor also offered Bell a confident and knowledgeable appraisal of jades and porcelain at the Sikkim Residency, Gangtok in 1913.

20 Bell also asks a Colonel Harris to comment on the 300 Indian Rupee valuation he gave the *qilin*. Although it is unknown what skills and knowledge Harris had to do this, he corrected Bell and suggested a 200 Indian Rupee valuation (Bell 1908–1912).

21 Bell records, “jade figures” in entry No. 69, but only one jade was later recorded, discussed, and valued, and is therefore visible in the archive.

22 The *chöshom* and the jades are tied together in *List of Curios*, numbered 69 and 69a respectively.

23 *List of Curios*, No. 69a.



Figure 5: *chöshom* (*mchod gshom*), made by chief carpenter of Dalai Lama, Darjeeling, 1910

did not mean that the lama was going to be content with repurposed hotel furniture for long, and instead the lama (through his carpenter) Tibetanised his domestic spaces with new things, as can be seen in a formal portrait taken at Hillside in July/August 1910 (figure 6).<sup>24</sup> The commissioning process also alerts us to a Tibetan presence already established in Darjeeling by 1910. Whereas the Dalai Lama's carpenter had designed and built the *chöshom*, its painting was entrusted to another anonymous craftsman, a Tibetan painter in Jore Bungalow. This small enclave was just a few stops down the Toy Train line from Darjeeling and close to Ghoom or Ghum, which was home to the well-known Tibetan Buddhist monastery established by the Mongolian scholar Lama Sherab Gyatso (c.1817–1820 until after 1902), someone who had worked closely with colonial officers. The choice of painter may then point to Bell's pre-existing connections and the types of Tibet-focussed object knowledge that was available to Bell prior to the lama's exile.

The Tibetan *chöshom*, rough in its production, made by a craftsman exiled from his workshop and materials, but exquisite in its painting by a Tibetan with established practices in Darjeeling district, was very different in style to its local Sikkim counterparts. It played its part in creating what Bell understood to be a typical Tibetan setting for jade objects, which was possibly inspired by the lama's own display methods. Bell had accepted the hybrid nature of Tibetan aristocratic collecting, displaying Chinese things in Tibetan structures. These were not imagined spaces, but instead were created from an empirically-based knowledge of Tibetan elite culture that readily incorporated Chinese objects into its systems of aesthetic values. This was not the remote Tibet of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial writings, isolated and distinct from other places and cultures, but a Tibet from which and to which objects and people freely flowed over vast distances.

There is now little left in Darjeeling in the way of material evidence that can attest to the Dalai Lama's exile there. The dynamism discussed here has ensured that those objects that came into exile, or those like the *chöshom* that were made there, have long since moved on. But another *chöshom* made for the lama in the neighbouring frontier town of Kalimpong still retains its place. Not only does it maintain a tangible link between the Dalai Lama, Kalimpong, and the royal family of Bhutan, but it also forms the backdrop to a very dramatic object lesson given prior to the lama's return to Tibet.

---

24 It is possible to date this photograph to sometime before 18 August 1910. A photograph taken on the same day, if not at the same moment but from a different angle, was also framed and gifted to Bell by "Chensal" Namgang (later Dasang Damdul Tsarong). The inscription notes the gift was given on the eighth day of the sixth month of the Tibetan year Iron Dog. See: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/collections/ethnology/asia/tibet/item-441375.aspx>.



Figure 6: Formal portrait of thirteenth Dalai Lama, taken by Charles Bell / Rabden Lepcha, September 1910, Darjeeling; frame by (chief) carpenter of Dalai Lama; painted by Tsotra Namgyal

## Bhutan House—a contact zone within a contact zone

*Raja Kazi Ugyen welcomed the Dalai Lama with great and pure respect. At a distance of two miles from his residence and the people's town he constructed a beautiful palace with all signs of splendour. The Raja himself and his attendants were attired in Bhutanese style and very elegantly welcomed the Dalai Lama and his entourage with great pompous music (Tsarong n.d., 6–7).<sup>25</sup>*

This was not the first time that Raja Ugyen Dorji (1855–1916)—the Bhutanese *vakil* (agent), a critical mediator in the diplomatic and economic relationship between the British and Bhutanese—had made sure the Dalai Lama arrived in style. As the lama set out for Kalimpong from Pedong on 24 February 1910 he was perched upon a gift of an elaborately caparisoned mule sent by Ugyen Dorji, as witnessed by three of his Kalimpong welcoming party—the daughters of the Scottish missionary, Dr. John Graham.<sup>26</sup> Before the lama made that grand entrance into Darjeeling in 1910 he spent several nights in Kalimpong, as a guest of Ugyen Dorji at his personal residence. This was an unplanned halt (the British had only expected him to stay for one night), but diplomatically it was an important intervention by Ugyen Dorji as it went some way to rebuilding diplomatic ties between the two neighbours.<sup>27</sup> In the same year as the lama's short stay, the British government conferred the highest available title of Raja on Ugyen Dorji for his part in both the 1903–4 Mission to Tibet negotiations and the signing of the Punakha treaty in January 1910. This imperial honour was accompanied by a gift of extensive lands in Kalimpong on which he built Bhutan House (Sinha 2001, 173). With its gabled roof, verandah, and rounded bay windows, the facade still has the air of a British colonial residency, but on its completion it became an important hub for Bhutanese diplomatic and trading affairs. It also seems that Ugyen Dorji commissioned Bhutan House with a return visit by the Dalai Lama in mind.

The Dalai Lama's contact with Ugyen Dorji continued after he moved on to Darjeeling in February 1910. The Raja regularly offered gifts and

---

25 This extract from the biography of the thirteenth Dalai Lama is taken from a pamphlet produced by George Tsarong for the Royal Great Grandmother of Bhutan (see bibliography). I extend my great appreciation and deep thanks to Her Majesty, Kesang Choeden Wangchuk, for providing me with a copy of this self-published pamphlet and for her efforts in providing me with what information she has on Bhutan House and the Dalai Lama's stay.

26 "Starting early, the girls rode three miles beyond the town, and were in time to see His Holiness and party arrive. He rode a fine mule sent by Raja Ugyen, the Agent of the Bhutanese government. The animal was so covered in trappings that the Dalai Lama almost seemed to be seated Buddhawise on top of it" (Bell 1987, 100).

27 The Bhutanese, including Ugyen Wangchuk (1862–1926), the recently crowned first Maharaja of Bhutan, and Ugyen Dorji, had shown their pro-British leanings during the Younghusband-led Mission to Tibet between 1903–4, much to the consternation of the Tibetans. Both men had been involved in trying to open negotiations with Tibetan officials on behalf of the British at Khamba Dzong.

assistance to the lama and his entourage throughout his exile, and one has to wonder if Ugyen Dorji also knew of the financial strain the lama's stay was placing on the British coffers.<sup>28</sup> By the beginning of 1912, with no concrete offer of diplomatic support from the British, with sickness rife amongst the Tibetans,<sup>29</sup> and with fighting and political instability still prevalent in Lhasa, the Dalai Lama was keen to make his intentions to return home clear. Almost two years to the day since his arrival, the Dalai Lama left Darjeeling arriving in Kalimpong on 15 February 1912. He chose not to return to Tibet immediately, but instead on accepting the invitation of Ugyen Dorji (seemingly arranged by Bell) he made an extended stay at the just completed Bhutan House.<sup>30</sup> With the Dalai Lama's relocation, our ability to imagine the Raja's new residency as a contact zone within a contact zone becomes very real.

Hillside, the lama's home in Darjeeling, had been chosen by the British for its isolation, both to shield the lama from the mass of devotees who descended on Darjeeling and also from more problematic visitors, including diplomatic agents from Russia and China. The British had been somewhat alarmed by the Dalai Lama's change in practice on his arrival in Darjeeling, with English-speaking newspapers reporting that "The Dalai Lama to-day arrayed as monk and bare-headed went through the bazaar" ("Reception at the Hotel" 1910, 9). In part, due to the Mission to Tibet, the British had become used to the notion that the lama lived a secluded life and fled from interaction with those he did not know. They hoped to manage the lama's arrival to their own advantage and wanted to maintain this idea of isolation by choosing Hillside which "was in a wood away from the beaten tracks; neither Indians nor foreigners were sufficiently interested to seek him out" (Bell 1987, 113). This changed considerably once the lama arrived at Bhutan House.

More than two thousand people sought the lama's blessings in the month after his arrival in Kalimpong. Reception tents were pitched in the gardens and a deluge of devotees arrived on mass from across the Himalaya. The lama's biography or *namthar* (*rnam thar*) records the arrival of prime ministers from the trans-Himalayan region and the conducting of extensive offerings led by Sidkeong Tulku, and amongst those singled out as receiving blessings was Bell's confidential clerk, Achuk Tsering (1877–1920) (Tsarong n.d., 9). Not everyone came simply for blessings of course, and with the arrival of the lama Bhutan House suddenly became a focus for intellectual, military, and diplomatic encounters and conversations, not to mention the occasional hope for espionage. Amongst others, the lama's

---

28 The British were spending in excess of 21,000 Indian rupees a month on the lama's stay in Darjeeling. To put this into context, Bell's monthly salary was around 1,200 Indian rupees (NAI 1911, Nos. 324–329 Part B).

29 See Foreign Office (1921) for references to several Tibetan men who died in Darjeeling.

30 In a confidential telegram Bell notes, "I am therefore arranging for the accommodation of the Dalai Lama and his high officials at Kalimpong and for the transfer of his police guard from Darjeeling to Kalimpong" (IOR/L/PS/11/7, P 709/1912 Tibet: movements of Dalai Lama).

brother and other high officials arrived from Lhasa to discuss the military situation there, as did the “Chief Secretary” of the ninth Panchen Lama, who came in the hope of repairing the now tense relationship between the courts of the two lamas. Despite a ban on all foreigners, British officers Captain James Leslie Rose Weir (1883–1950) and army escort Lieutenant Turner gained an audience as they returned from their postings in Gyantse. Such a blanket ban was also never going to deter the French explorer and early Tibetologist Alexandra David Neel (1868–1969). She duly gained an audience via Sonam Wangfel Laden La (1876–1936), the Imperial Police Officer responsible for the Dalai Lama’s security during his exile and, incidentally, one of the men who had commented on the first Buddha Shakyamuni given to Bell (Rhodes 2006, 23). Nor was it a barrier for a veteran of covert exploration, the Japanese monk Ekai Kawaguchi (1866–1945) who also gained an audience. Surveying the lama’s sudden accessibility, Bell also nervously noted that “I am well aware of the increased number of Chinese in Kalimpong” (IOR/L/PS/11/7, P 709/1912 Tibet: movements of Dalai Lama). Bhutan House had in a matter of days developed a critical mass; it had become a centre for Tibet-related contact, with the Dalai Lama at its nucleus. Even those who could not gain access were drawn into the town’s gravitational pull. This temporary situation demonstrates just how quickly contact zones can form (and consequently collapse) and the unique nature of such places when certain assemblages come together.

Bell was not part of the throng that flocked to Bhutan House for the lama’s teachings, but he did gain several audiences both to continue his conversations on political matters and to receive further object lessons. This essay concludes then with a parting lesson at Bhutan House that would have been instantly recognizable to both Pestalozzi and Mayo.

## Tibetan robes and object lessons

*The day of departure was drawing near; presents had to be given by both sides, especially by the departing guests [...] the Dalai Lama walked about the room, picking the things up to show them to me (Bell 1987, 146).*

When Bell went to call on the lama for the last time at Bhutan House, the room he entered must have been filled with things. The photographs of the rooms the lama occupied reveal modest-sized domestic spaces (Dorji 2008, 9–33), which on 18 June 1912 would have been overtaken by the large group of objects selected as departing gifts for Bell. On that day he was greeted not only by the lama, but also by a man who Bell had become well acquainted with in Darjeeling: Lamden Khenpo. If we recall the material and stylistic lesson offered by both men in June 1910, when the lama gave Bell a Buddha Shakyamuni statue, it is possible to predict something of what was to come in Bhutan House.

The twelve gifts offered that day reinforce the narratives of object mobility and repurposing that had become obvious in Darjeeling. Objects with a close connection to the lama, and especially those that had once been used for other things, made regular appearances in *List of Curios* as gifts between 1910 and 1912. At Bhutan House, we see the lama, ready for his return, shedding unnecessary objects, typified by the gifting of a cauldron for making tea (although the lama still alerts Bell to the cauldron's blended metal composition and therefore its potential for an object lesson). There were also objects that may have once been much needed gifts for someone in exile, such as butter lamps, pony bells, prayer beads, and *purpa*. These objects had been deemed useful in exile, but as the lama prepared to leave they became either redundant or less of a necessity. Exile and both the physical and intellectual shifts that continually happened changed an object's significance and its immediate value.

This group of gifts was not just a series of castoffs. Several were complex assemblages in that they were made up of several inter-connected pieces and their collective practical and historical meanings had to be spelled out to Bell piece by piece. Amongst the things scattered across the floor was a spectacular set of armour for a horse and soldier sent for from Lhasa. The Dalai Lama told Bell: "it is very old 200 or 300 years old and that people have lost the art of making it so well nowadays" (Bell 1987, 146).<sup>31</sup> While the information passed on with the armour is not as detailed as that in other exchanges, it is still possible to glean from this that the lama knew how to date the craftsmanship found in secular objects, in this case the suits of armour. Furthermore, he was well aware that its quality could not be replicated in the early twentieth century.

On this day it was not enough for Bell's teachers to simply offer connoisseurial insights, there was also an interesting change in practice. Bell explains that when the gifts were offered, the lama "stood up and picked up one thing after another to explain it" (Bell 1910–1915b). This is the first time we see the lama both animated and animating the objects he gave Bell. Rising from his chair or throne, breaking protocol, he performed the objects he was offering. This was particularly true of a gift that Bell would have seen time and again in the Tibetan monasteries and streets of Darjeeling and Kalimpong: the clothing and accoutrements of a *gétsülpa* (*dge tshul ba*) or novice monk (figure 7).<sup>32</sup> This was also a repurposed gift—it had been worn—but on this occasion Bell does not record (perhaps because he was not told) who the clothing and utensils belonged to. Instead, the focus is firmly fixed on how a Tibetan negotiates such clothing, how the clothing was assembled and what were the important considerations to keep in mind whilst doing so. In explaining this gift, the lama and the khenpo

---

31 The armour is now in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, accession number, IM30 1933. It is described with an image in LaRocca (2006, 97–100).

32 The clothing and accoutrements are now in the British Museum, accession numbers, 1933,0508.77–85.



Figure 7: Clothes and accoutrements of *gêtsülpa*; gift of the Dalai Lama on 18 June 1912, Kalimpong

formed a double act employing a style of object lesson that was rich in empirical practice and full of performance.

As the lama walked around picking up the individual items, the khenpo put on each piece of cloth that made up the monk's clothing over his own clothes, giving precise details as to what he was doing and why. It is worth quoting at length the lesson that unfolded:

The abbot doctor was careful to tell me that the long skirt, dark maroon in colour, should always be put on over the head out of respect for the Buddha. There were patches on it in imitation of the patched robe worn by the Buddha himself, as he begged his food on earth. Hat and boots, everything was complete, including the small bottle for holy water encased in its covering of red cloth, with an iron spoon by which it was hung from the waistband, and the begging bowl of iron covered with red and yellow cloth (Bell 1987, 146).

This was a lesson with multiple impacts. The khenpo not only showed Bell how to differentiate between the similar pieces of maroon coloured cloth the lama handed to him, but he taught Bell the deft art of folding, draping, and applying them to the body. There was also instruction on why the patchwork robe took the form that it did and the use of each of the accompanying implements and how they should be placed on the body. In this lesson, the Tibetan men wanted to teach Bell how to do everyday things—in simplest terms, to get dressed—in Tibetan ways. Moreover, it was not enough to pass on the empirical knowledge of how to do this, but the

intellectual practice of why was just as important. Bell was given precise reasons for the actions that accompanied each piece of cloth. In the case of the waist wrap, he was shown that this must be passed over the head rather than stepping into it—which might have been more intuitive—giving Bell an insight into how Buddhism infused even the most rudimentary of tasks. These insights into Tibetan ways of knowing can be read as an acknowledgement of Bell's continued engagement with Tibetan gifts. The Tibetan approach to this exchange reflected not only the many moments of material contact between a colonial officer and a Tibetan lama, but also the Tibetans' accumulated observations of how an(other) reacts to one's own material culture and how one might choose to acknowledge and respond to that.

As this paper draws to a close, it is useful to return to Ter Keurs and the silencing of objects and their latent alternate histories. The objects featured here are still known to the author. These are objects that can still be turned in the light, placed against a red cloth, or checked for wear and tear as previous owners had done. The robes, for example, are now in the British Museum. At the time of writing, the British Museum's Collection Online database features individual records for each of the separate parts of the robe and its accompanying utensils, although each individual catalogue entry still includes a number of question marks. What exactly is it? Where exactly was it made? Furthermore, the site of acquisition is wrongly recorded and is noted as Tibet, while potential research subjects simply state Buddhism. There is no mention of the object lesson that accompanied the robes or the political and diplomatic conditions that made its acquisition possible. By highlighting this absence I am not pointing the finger of blame at the British Museum (who received a copy of *List of Curios* from Bell in 1933), but I want to acknowledge the silenced potential of Europe's ethnographic collections. They are not only significant for the cultural representations they offer, but for the connoisseurial, historical and often highly political encounters they made possible.

## A lesson learnt

Objects, especially Tibetan ones, mattered in Himalayan hill stations. Here, I have presented them as active participants in the dynamic transcultural networks at play in Darjeeling and Kalimpong in the early twentieth century. Their presence in these hill stations provides the basis for wider discussions on why they were there, what connections and events they make visible, and in what context they facilitated contact between disparate and highly mobile groups of people. It is also clear that it was not just people who were mobile. Objects were dynamic, both physically, in the journeys they made, and intellectually, in the repurposing they underwent as they moved into the hands of others. The archives I have used show they were set in motion and asked to matter in new and unanticipated ways.

It has until recently been enough to use images of objects as mere illustrations in the rethinking of complex historical ideas, but using an object's materiality, its significance as a material body, provides new perspectives. Objects can make us ask different kinds of questions and they certainly allow us to talk and think in different ways. They do this by demanding we pay close attention to their materiality, which in turn can result in close readings of history and encounters. From experience, they make one read the colonial archive with an eye always alert to their presence and the particular types of work they did.

In this paper, my lessons, mediated by Bell, reflect on how he continually learnt about the potential of things during the lama's exile. It is clear that he connected with the Tibetans he met through the objects he was given, and through those he commissioned in response. These ways of knowing were certainly important for colonial governance; when the British, and especially Bell, behaved in Tibetanised ways their actions had a positive impact on diplomatic relations. But did this particular colonial officer understand these object lessons as something exclusively driven by the need to govern? To provide a little insight it is worth noting that Bell did not understand these practices as something he thought worthy of sharing with an audience. When he briefly wrote about his object lesson with the Buddha Shakyamuni in a still unpublished memoir of his time in government, several years after retirement, he stopped himself before he could expand on the subject. He said: "But here I am dealing with things personal and domestic" (IOR, Mss Eur. F80/217. Book VI Recollections. Chapter 10, p.6). It is then possible to understand the lessons Bell was given not wholly as a professional practice, one purely tied to the building of colonial knowledge and power, but as the embodied experiences of someone living in spaces defined by cultural pluralities. By recording these lessons in *List of Curios*, Bell makes his choices visible to us, his personal production of object-centred knowledge was not guided wholly by the colonial government he worked for, it was also important on a personal and domestic level to ask some of central Tibet's most gifted and cultured individuals what he should know in order to be more Tibetan in his actions and his thinking.

## Figures

Fig. 1–4, 6: Courtesy of private collection.

Fig. 5: Charles Bell Collection, National Museums Liverpool, 50.31.7. Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool.

Fig. 7: Charles Bell Collection, British Museum, 1933,0508.77-85. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

## References

- Barnett, L D. 1933. "A Tibetan Collection of Books and Manuscripts." *The British Museum Quarterly* 8 (July): 12–13.
- Bell, Charles Alfred. 1912a. "Sikkim and General Notebook." Unpublished manuscript (1908–1912), unpaginated, private collection.
- . 1912b. "Tibet Random Notes Vol. I." Unpublished manuscript (1910–1912), private collection.
- . 1915a. "Diary Vol. IV." Unpublished manuscript (1910–1915), unpaginated, private collection.
- . 1915b. "Diary Vol. V." Unpublished manuscript (1910–1915), unpaginated, private collection.
- . 1987 [1946]. *Portrait of a Dalai Lama: The Life and Times of the Great Thirteenth*. London: Wisdom Publications.
- Benessaïeh, Afef, ed. 2010. *Amériques Transculturales / Transcultural Americas*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.
- Bennett, Tony et al., eds. 2014. *History and Anthropology*. 25 (1). Special Issue: Anthropology, Collecting and Colonial Governmentalities.
- Berger, Patricia. 2003. *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Bishop, Peter. 1989. *The Myth of Shangri-la*. London: Athlone Press.
- Cameron, Fiona and Conal McCarthy, eds. 2015. *Museum and Society*. 13 (1) (extra). Special Issue: Museum, Field, Colony: collecting, displaying and governing people and things.
- Chiefs and Leading Families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1920.
- Daston, Lorraine, ed. 2004. *Things That Talk*. New York: Zone Books.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1986. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dorji, Khandu-Om. 2008. "A Brief History of Bhutan House in Kalimpong." *Journal of Bhutan Studies* 19 (Winter): 9–33.
- Eaton, Natasha. 2013. *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India 1765–1860*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Harris, Claire E. 2012. *The Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics and the Representation of Tibet*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Ho, Dahpon David. 2008. "The Men Who Would Not Be Amban and the One Who Would: Four Frontline Officials and Qing Tibet Policy, 1905–1911." *Modern China* 34 (2): 210–46.
- India Office Records [IOR], Political and Secret Annual Files [L/PS/11]. Nos.7 P 709/1912.
- India Office Records [IOR], Private Papers [Mss Eur] Charles Bell Collection [F80]. No.217 Book VI Recollections.
- LaRocca, Donald. 2006. *Warriors of the Himalaya: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Mantena, Rama Sundari. 2012. *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India: Anti-quarianism and Philology*. London: PalgraveMacmillan.

- Martin, Emma. 2014. "Charles Bell's Collection of 'Curios': negotiating Tibetan material culture on the Anglo-Tibetan borderlands (1900–1945)." PhD diss., SOAS, University of London.
- . 2015. "Fit for a King? The Significance of a Gift Exchange between the 13th Dalai Lama and King George V." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25 (1): 71–98.
- . Forthcoming. "Objects of Diplomacy: Archival Encounters with Anglo-Tibetan Gift Exchange." In *Objects and Frontiers*, edited by Manjeet Baruah and Lipokmar Dzuwichu. New Delhi: BlackSwan Orient.
- Mayo, Elizabeth. 1830. *Lessons on objects as given in a Pestalozzian school at Cheam, Surrey*. London: R.B. Seeley & W. Burnside.
- Müller, Martin. 2015. "Assemblages and Actor-networks: Rethinking Socio-material Power, Politics and Space." *Geography Compass* 9 (1): 27–41.
- National Archives of India [NAI], Foreign Department, Establishment May, 1911. Nos. 324–329 Part B.
- Pestalozzi, John Heinrich. 1894. *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*. Syracuse: Swann Sonnenschein & Co.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 2008. *Imperial Eyes*. London: Routledge.
- "Reception at the Hotel." *The Times of India*, 4 March 1910: 9. Accessed 23 November 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/231250620/9C773A20A8E486APQ/10?accountid=12253>.
- Raj, Kapil. 2007. *Reloating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe 1650-1900*. London: PalgraveMacmillan.
- Rechung, Jampal Kunzang. 1990. "The Buddhist Paintings and Iconography According to Tibetan Sources." *Bulletin of Tibetology* 26 (1–3): 55–63.
- Rhodes, Nicholas and Deki Rhodes. 2006. *A Man of the Frontier: S.W. Laden La*. Kolkata: Mira Bose.
- Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. 1967. *Tibet: A Political History*. New York: Potala Publications.
- Sinha, A. C. 2001. *Himalayan Kingdom Bhutan: Tradition, Transition and Transformation*. Delhi: Indus Publishing Company.
- Ter Keurs, Pieter. 2007. "Introduction: Theory and Practice of Colonial Collecting." In *Colonial Collections Revisited*, edited by Pieter Ter Keurs, 1–15. Leiden: CNWS Publications.
- Thatcher Ulrich, Laurel, Sarah Ann Carter, Ivan Gaskell, Sara Schechner, and Samantha van Gerbig. 2015. *Tangible Things: Making History through Objects*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Henry Moore Foundation, Leeds. 2015. "Object Lessons." Accessed 23 November 2015. <http://www.henry-moore.org/hmf/press/press-releases/henry-moore-institute-leeds/2015/object-lessons>.
- "The Lama in India: Crowds Greet Him." *New York Tribune*, 2 March 1910. Accessed 23 November 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/572352133/pageviewPDF/F59C47E39344472PQ/7?accountid=12253>.
- Tsarong, George, trans. N.D. *His Holiness the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Thubten Gyamtsho's Stay in Mingyur Ngonpar Gawai Phodang in Kalimpong: An Extract from the Biography of His Holiness the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama*. Unpublished pamphlet.

EMMA MARTIN

- Von Schroeder, Ulrich. 2008. *108 Buddhist Statues in Tibet*. Chicago: Serindia.
- Williamson, Margaret D. 1987. *Memoirs of a Political Officer's Wife in Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan*. London: Wisdom Publications.
- Zhang, Yisun. 1993. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.