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“The First Tibetan at a Western University?”—Entanglements of Scholarship, Buddhism, and Power in Kalimpong and Beyond

Abstract This paper uses the life trajectory of a particularly well-connected, though not commonly known Tibetan scholar to investigate the complex entanglements of global interests in Tibetan culture and the Buddhist religion with their local representatives in the Eastern Himalayas. Originally from Lhasa, Rindzin Wangpo (1920–1985) became a long-term resident of Kalimpong, where, in terms of knowledge production, he acted as a crucial link between Tibet and the world beyond it, working as a research assistant to many Western scholars, but also as an assistant to Dorje Tharchin (1890–1976) whose Tibetan-language newspaper *Mélong* provided Tibetans with access to global events. I will argue that this special position also helped shape his personal life, resulting in his reconsideration of his cultural background and a new orientation as a Buddhist that can be brought to light by examining his own writings on Buddhism and Tibetan culture.

*Reverend nun, as you hold the three vows,
Most noble lady, not attached to the two
extremes of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,
Swift savior, who protects all beings from saṃsāra,
Please rest in my mind for time enduring.¹*

Introduction

These words of praise to Tārā, a popular female protective deity in Tantric Buddhism, is found in a sketchbook written in Kalimpong on February 16, 1979 by a Tibetan scholar, poet, teacher, research assistant, and Buddhist, known to most as Rindzin Wangpo (Rig 'dzin dbang po, 1920–1985).² Even by the normal standards of Kalimpong—a town that the American journalist Archibald Steele spotted as a location for a Hollywood movie due to its “zany mixture” of various ethnic groups, academics, Buddhists, as well as Himalayan and global nobility (Steele 1951, 3)—he must have been a somewhat unusual figure. At that time, Rindzin Wangpo was living in a small shrine on top of Durpin Hill, right next to a major Tibetan monastery, but religiously connected to institutions of the Theravāda tradition, which were established in Kalimpong by a network of Buddhists from Nepal, Europe, Ceylon, and Burma. These men were intimately involved with the reformist interest in Buddhism that emerged in Ceylon at the end of the nineteenth century, but they often also had close ties to Tibetan Buddhism.³ As a Tibetan, Rindzin Wangpo was one of only a few who chose ordination in the Theravāda tradition. However, as not only the poem quoted above, but also his personal connections to Tibetan and European Buddhists suggest, Rindzin Wangpo’s religious orientation was not limited to a single tradition, but combined a complex set of influences, as became possible in this particular historical context (figure 1).

In this article,⁴ Rindzin Wangpo’s life will be used to address the entanglements between different agents, their aims, and the knowledge they

1 Tib: *gang ni sdom gsum ldan pas rje btsun ma* | | *'khor 'das mtha' gnyis mi chags rab 'phags ma* | | *'gro kun 'khor ba las skyob myur sgrol mas* | | *bdag gi yid la ring du gnas par mdzod* | |. These lines are part of a larger collection of verses in praise of Tārā, found in a personal notebook of Rindzin Wangpo that he filled with poems and notes during the 1960s to 1980s. I would like to thank Jampel Kelden for providing access to this valuable document.

2 As a general convention, Tibetan words will be rendered phonetically, using the system of The Tibetan & Himalayan Library (<http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/phconverter.php>; accessed Nov. 26, 2015). Wylie transliteration will be added only on their first appearance in the text. Exceptions are made when another phonetic rendering has become established in English usage.

3 As seen, for example, in the life of Mahapragya, a Newar who engaged with Tibetan masters before he was ordained in the Theravāda tradition. After he was expelled from Nepal, he was instrumental in building up Buddhist institutions in Kalimpong in the late 1920s; see LeVine and Gellner 2005, especially, pp. 37ff.

4 I would like to acknowledge the kind help of several individuals in preparing this article: Anna Sawerthal for keeping an eye out for documents related to Rindzin Wangpo during her own research on the *Mélong* newspaper; Püntso

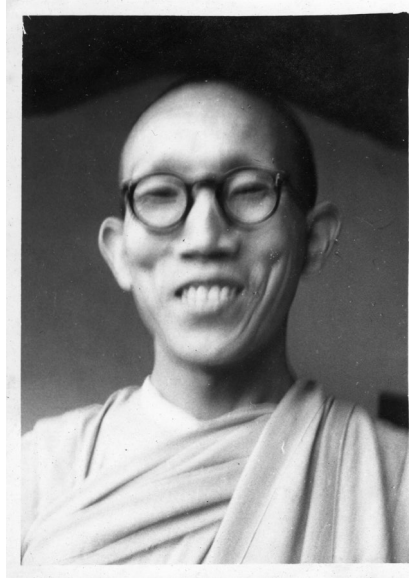


Figure 1: Portrait of Rindzin Wangpo, ordained as a Theravāda monk.

produced as their pathways intersected in Kalimpong and other locations in the middle of the twentieth century. His story, and especially his function as a research assistant to many European scholars, will, however, also introduce other aspects of knowledge production in this setting: issues of power and representation, reflections about archival practices and sources, and the larger question of which voices are commonly heard and can be made audible in historical research.⁵ In this way, the paper will not only explore Kalimpong as a “contact zone” for European and Asian agents, but will also address asymmetries of power as a crucial feature of their encounters (Pratt 2003, 6).

Given the lack of autobiographical sources and his relatively unknown status, gathering information about Rindzin Wangpo can only be accomplished in a piecemeal fashion. Nonetheless, unlike of what is the fate of many other “local assistants,” it is possible to map out his life and get a sense of his ideas and activities, not only through the scattered notes of various European academics and other enthusiasts, but also through

(Phun tshogs) of Tharpa Choling Monastery Museum; Jampel Kelden (‘Jam dpal skal Idan) of the ITBC School; Nini and Daniel of the Tharchin family, and, most importantly, Rindzin Wangpo’s family in Kalimpong, for opening their doors and supporting this research in various ways.

5 For an examination of the contingent and subjective character of colonial archives, see Ann Laura Stoler’s influential article “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance” (Stoler 2002).

publications in Tibetan—some of which he wrote himself.⁶ In the first part of this paper, I will use a plethora of sources to describe Rindzin Wangpo's life trajectory. This will then form the basis for reflections on the nature of the different voices inscribed in these sources, which are dealt with in the latter part of the article. Of these sources, an obituary by R.K. Sprigg, a linguist at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies, for whom Rindzin Wangpo worked as a research assistant from 1948 to 1950, occupies a special position because it offers many concrete details about his life.⁷ I will therefore use it to set the cornerstones of his story, while at the same time it will in and of itself become an object of investigation, along with the statements of various other individuals who were in contact with Rindzin Wangpo.

A life of encounters: from Tibet to the borderlands

Like many other details of Rindzin Wangpo's life, his origins are rather opaque. Some information suggests a Korean or Mongolian background on the paternal side.⁸ Drawing on notes made by Rindzin Wangpo himself, Sprigg spoke of a father from northern Tibet and a mother from Lhasa, as well as his upbringing in Lhasa, where he was born in 1920. He also received his schooling there, and when he was seventeen he visited Kalimpong for the first time, staying for about a year.⁹ He had relatives in the border town, as his aunt Karma Déchen (Karma bde chen) was married to a rather famous individual, Dorje Tharchin, a Tibetan from the Kinnaur region in Northwest India.¹⁰

Tharchin was born into a family of Moravian Christian converts, and both his education in missionary schools and his knowledge of Tibetan secured him positions in missionary institutions in the Eastern Himalayas. In Kalimpong, he followed his calling as a newspaper editor, producing the first newspaper in the Tibetan language with a wider distribution network, the *Mélong* (*Me long*) or *Tibet Mirror*, which was published from 1925 until 1963 and read not only in various parts of Tibet, but also by many Tibetologists around the globe. His press was one of the first institutions in India to publish a variety of books in the Tibetan language and for a Tibetan audience, among them educational and scholarly publications, such as textbooks and dictionaries. With his ambitious publication activities,

6 Compare for example the cases of local informants—who are almost invisible in any archive—in the botanical explorations in West China and Tibet investigated by Erik Mueggler (Mueggler 2011).

7 This obituary was published in the *Tibet Journal* in 1987. For bibliographical details, see Sprigg 1987.

8 See, e.g., Kirti Rinpoche 2008, 164 and 183.

9 See also Sprigg 1968, 5–6, which gives a brief summary of Rindzin Wangpo's life before he went to London.

10 Details about Tharchin's life are provided in an extensive, three-volume biography. See Fader 2002–2009.

Tharchin created a unique position for himself as an important intermediary between Tibetan politicians, aristocrats, merchants, and scholars, on the one side, and British Indian colonial officers, global academics, travelers, and other enthusiasts on the other.

For Rindzin Wangpo, his relationship with Tharchin was crucial to his personal as well as professional development. For most of his time in Kalimpong, he lived at the Tharchin Estate, where he was thought of as a member of the family. He also became one of the central figures in Tharchin's workshop and was involved in all of its processes of knowledge production, ranging from publishing a newspaper to printing Tibetan books, among them a translation of the New Testament, and compiling dictionaries.¹¹ This not only provided Rindzin Wangpo with an income, but in Tharchin he also found a mentor who was important in fostering his career. To this end, Tharchin actively used his newspaper, in which he featured several articles that introduced Rindzin Wangpo as a promising scholar to a larger Tibetan as well as a European audience—often even including a picture of him (figure 2).¹²



Figure 2: Article in the *Mélong* newspaper, introducing and promoting Rindzin Wangpo as a scholar, Oct. 1, 1953.

11 The exact division of responsibilities at Tharchin's printing press is difficult to reconstruct; however, it is clear that Rindzin Wangpo acted as a corrector and also contributed articles and drawings to the newspaper. A list of these is provided in the appendix. His involvement in the production of books and dictionaries was acknowledged by Tharchin on various occasions, see e.g., Fader 2002–2009, Vol. III, 230, 531, 606.

12 A list of these is provided in the appendix; I will discuss details of these articles below.

Last but not least, Rindzin Wangpo also benefited directly from the manifold personal connections that Tharchin was able to establish. It is quite likely that these connections were also influential in directing Rindzin Wangpo's further education, in the form of a five-year course of study under Tsatrül Rinpoché (Tsha sprul Rin po che), a famous Lhasa scholar of Tibetan grammar, which he commenced in 1943.

Tharchin got to know the grammarian during a stay in Lhasa in 1940. He then was asked to accompany Basil Gould and Hugh E. Richardson, the Political Officer at Gangtok in Sikkim and the British Trade Agent at Gyantse, respectively, in order to help them revise their trilogy of textbooks, which were designed to introduce students to the Lhasa dialect: *Tibetan Word Book*, *Tibetan Syllables*, *Tibetan Sentences*. For this purpose, Tharchin met with Ringang, one of the famous four "Rugby Boys" who had been sent to Oxford for a modern education in 1913, and also the highly respected Tsatrül Rinpoché.¹³ As indicated in R. K. Sprigg's research notes, this knowledge of the "fields of traditional Tibetan grammar and orthography" that he had gained through his studies with Tsatrül Rinpoche also made him a suitable candidate for a position at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London (Sprigg 1968, 5–7). Of more importance, however, seems to have been the simple fact that he spoke Lhasa Tibetan and, more than that, had the necessary personal connections.

Between Kalimpong and London: becoming a research assistant

Initially, SOAS approached Marco Pallis, a Greek-British adventurer, mountaineer, philosopher, and author for suggestions for a promising Tibetan scholar. Pallis had travelled in the Western and Eastern Himalayas in 1933 and 1936 and was known to have an inside knowledge of Tibetan religion and culture from his book *Peaks and Lamas* (1939)—a bestseller, which he dedicated to four of his Tibetan teachers. During his second trip in 1936 he stayed in Kalimpong to improve his Tibetan by studying with several teachers, and got to know the circles of intellectuals that were interested in Tibetan issues (Pallis 1949, 104). By this time, he also was in contact with Dorje Tharchin, with whom he developed a close and lasting friendship that continued through the following decades, during which Pallis, under his Tibetan name Thubden Tendzin, was such a frequent and long-term visitor to the Eastern Himalayas that he was considered a "Kalimpongian."¹⁴ Here he also met Geshe Wangyal, who introduced him

13 See Fader 2002–2009, Vol. III, pp. 10–11, for details on these meetings.

14 This designation was used in an article for *Time* magazine, New York, reprinted in the newspaper *Himalayan Times* in Kalimpong on Dec. 19, 1950 (*Himalayan Times* 1950). For details of the relationship between Tharchin and Pallis, see Fader 2002–2009, Vol. III, pp. 235–237.

to the intricacies of Tibetan Buddhism, and was in turn invited to England by Pallis, where he stayed for four months in 1937 and contributed to Pallis's famous first monograph, as Pallis acknowledged not only in his dedication but also in various other parts of the book.¹⁵ Wangyal was one of the first Tibetan scholars to visit Europe, and likewise one of the first Tibetans who settled in the United States. He arrived there in 1955 and soon began to lead a Buddhist temple in New Jersey, and also took up a teaching position in New York at Columbia University.¹⁶

In the meantime, Pallis had also arranged for Rindzin Wangpo to go to England. As is clear from his letters to Tharchin, the three of them must have had very close relationships with each other. Pallis not only equipped the young Tibetan scholar with a formal letter of introduction, but also showed concern about his personal situation—he mentions for example some problem “concerning that girl at Lhasa” that he helped to resolve.¹⁷ On July 28, 1948, he met with Tharchin to talk about final preparations for the departure of “our young boy Rigzin,” as he is affectionately called in Tharchin's personal diary.¹⁸ Just three months later, on November 1, Rindzin Wangpo boarded the steamer *Macharda* in Calcutta, which was to bring him to the British capital.¹⁹ It was also on that very day, and clearly with a sense of pride, that Tharchin announced the departure and career prospects of his protégé in his newspaper, wondering whether he was not the very first Tibetan to have gained a teaching position at the University of London.²⁰ What exactly his responsibilities at SOAS entailed seems to have been less clear. As detailed in Sprigg's dissertation and later also in the obituary, Rindzin Wangpo was hired as a research assistant from November 1948 through August 1949. While this job title might imply an active role in teaching or research, Rindzin Wangpo's main task was to produce “material,” that is, to speak or read Tibetan sentences as samples of the Lhasa dialect, which could then serve as the core of the linguistic and phonetic analysis that Sprigg was conducting as his doctoral research. In this function, Rindzin Wangpo's own scholarly ambitions were even seen as a possible hindrance (Sprigg 1987, 77):

15 See Pallis 1949, 4, 109, 154, 289.

16 For details on Wangyal, see Hackett 2012, most importantly, pp. 127–130, 352–358, 390–395, and also Fader 2002–2009, Vol. III, pp. 375–380. An article in the *Mélong* newspaper covers the inauguration of this temple in 1958, providing many images of the event; see *Me long*, Dec., 1958, pp. 1–2.

17 See letter Pallis to Tharchin, Jun. 14, 1948, Tharchin Archive, Columbia University, filed under “Correspondences.”

18 Taken from an unpublished personal diary of Tharchin for parts of 1948, Tharchin Estate, Kalimpong, entries on Jul. 6 and 28, 1948.

19 Indeed, a “Mr. Rigzin Wang Po” is found on the passenger list of the *Macharda*, see *UK, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878–1960*, online database, provided by: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2008; accessed on Jul. 17, 2014.

20 *Me long*, Nov. 1, 1948, p. 3; here Tharchin uses the term *slob dge*, teacher, to refer to Rindzin Wangpo's job in England.

Mr. Wangpo is a scholar in the written, or literary, form of Tibetan, and did not at first appreciate the need for a study of the spoken form of Tibetan. At the outset therefore he did not fully apprehend the purpose of the piece of research with which he was to be associated, and was inclined to subordinate the forms of the spoken to those of the written form of the language. Later however he took a keen interest in the relatively unstudied spoken form of Tibetan, and produced material of value. [...] His diction was clear, and the quality of his voice suitable for recording (6 Feb., 1951).

This kind of tension between him and his “informant” is also addressed explicitly in Sprigg’s acknowledgements of Rindzin Wangpo: their relationship is described as “not always easy,” tainted by diverging expectations and a lack of experience on both sides (Sprigg 1968, 725). Other contributing factors were Rindzin Wangpo’s rather unpromising arrival—he had been severely seasick on the journey and had come down with a skin disease—and his general dissatisfaction with his new situation, which could probably be seen as a kind of culture shock, and which Sprigg tried to counter by taking him to the countryside. A sense of the young scholar’s unhappiness was also noted by Arthur Hopkinson, the retiring Political Officer of Sikkim, who informed Tharchin in a personal letter about Rindzin Wangpo’s situation in London,²¹ and even a local newspaper in Canada featured his struggle with living in a modern metropolis in an article with the headline: “London’s Only Tibetan Dislikes Clouds of Smoke.”²² None of that, however, is visible in the way these events are described in the Tibetan newspaper *Mélong*: there, in October 1949, Tharchin depicts Rindzin Wangpo’s time in England as a clear success story. He lists in detail the various activities he was involved in, that is, the study of Tibetan linguistics and phonetics, and how he contributed in this way to opening up the field of modern Tibetan language studies, an area that previous research had not addressed.²³ This was, of course, the specialization which R.K. Sprigg came to be known for—through the many articles on different aspects of modern Tibetan linguistics that he published on the basis of material gathered in London, and which in 1968 led to the completion of his doctoral thesis.

Alongside his work for Sprigg, Rindzin Wangpo also kept in touch with Marco Pallis. Not only did they meet in London, but as Pallis indicated in another letter to Tharchin on June 24, 1949, he also needed the Tibetan’s help “to read over” a chapter of a book he was working on.²⁴ While he does

21 Letter Hopkinson to Tharchin, Feb. 15, 1949, Tharchin Archive, Columbia University, filed under “Correspondences.”

22 How this piece of news made its way into the local newspaper, *The Medicine Hat News*, in Alberta, Canada in August 1949 is quite a mystery; see *The Medicine Hat News* 1949.

23 *Me long*, Oct. 1, 1949, pp. 6–7.

24 Letter Pallis to Tharchin, Jun. 24, 1949, Tharchin Archive, Columbia University, filed under “Correspondences.”

not mention the title or content of the book, we can assume—especially in the light of Rindzin Wangpo's limited knowledge of English at that time—that this was part of his Tibetan-language publication: a book about the perils of modernity that Pallis was writing to warn Tibetans against changing their traditional customs, and which was published by Tharchin's Tibet Mirror Press in 1950, with the "teacher" (Tib. *dge rgan*) Rindzin Wangpo being acknowledged as a proof reader.²⁵ In its colophon and in his letter to Tharchin, Pallis also mentioned help from Yapchen Wenchel Kadzi (Yab chen dben cal ka rdzi)²⁶ in composing the treatise, and it is not clear to what extent Pallis actually wrote the text himself. In any case, authoring a book in Tibetan was considered quite a feat, and this also contributed to Pallis' fame as someone who was exceptionally close to Tibetan Buddhists, and made him stand out among Western enthusiasts of Tibet.²⁷

Turning to the Eastern Himalayas: writing Tibet in the borderlands

After ten months in London, Rindzin Wangpo departed on September 15, 1949, heading back to the Eastern Himalayas.²⁸ On board with him on the steamer *Strathaird* was R.K. Sprigg, who planned to continue his linguistic work in Kalimpong until March 1950. There, Sprigg collected further material, this time in the form of "free, or unscripted, recordings," made from real-life dialogues between Rindzin Wangpo and various interlocutors. As the list of the people involved in these conversations reveals, Sprigg's interest in Tibetan linguistics and his informant's contacts opened crucial doors, allowing him to enter the circles of other researchers, informants, intellectuals, and nobility connected with Tibetan issues.²⁹ The fact that

25 See Pallis 1950, 128b; I have used here the version of the text that Tharchin donated to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok; another version of the text is in the keeping of the Tharchin Archive, Columbia University.

26 His name is also rendered as Enche or Enchey Kazi, Rapten püntsok (Rab brtan phun tshogs); he acted as a middleman for many Europeans, such as Lama Govinda, Alexandra David-Néel, Giuseppe Tucci, and others, and was the father of the second Dromo Géshé Rinpoché (Gro mo dge bshes rin po che, Ngag dbang 'jigs med, 1937–2001), see Pallis 1960, 165.

27 This was emphasized, for instance, in the memoirs of Hisao Kimura, a Japanese man who was active as a spy in Tibet under the pseudonym Dawa Sangpo (Kimura 1990, 186–7), and by the British Buddhist Sangharakshita (Sangharakshita 1991, Chapter 9), and even in an article in *Time* magazine, which mentioned Pallis's Tibetan treatise and was reprinted in the *Himalayan Times* (1950).

28 Rigzin Wangpo is named on the passenger list of the *Strathaird*, see UK, *Outward Passenger Lists, 1890–1960*, on-line database, provided by Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2012; accessed on Jul. 17, 2014.

29 As detailed in Sprigg 1968, 672–674, the five recordings of dialogues involved the following people: members of the Tharchin family; the compositor for Tharchin's Tibetan newspaper; Jam pa Sangda (Byams pa gsang mda'), choir-master of Reting Rinpoche (Rwa sgreng Rin po che) and later informant of Tibetologist George Roerich; Penjor Püntsok (Dpal 'byor phun tshogs), a Tibetan of the noble Tsarong (Tsha rong) family, who also acted as a scribe and "servant"

Sprigg had learned some colloquial Tibetan from Rindzin Wangpo and thus could appear to have inside knowledge of Tibetan culture also helped him in this matter.³⁰ In the years to come, Sprigg built on these connections and interests. Supported by David Macdonald, the former British Trade Agent in Yatung and Gyantse, Sprigg was able to visit Gyantse in 1950, and he also married Macdonald's great-granddaughter in 1952. He expanded his linguistic interest to Lepcha and other Himalayan languages, which he pursued on various field trips in the region. In 1980, he settled in Kalimpong, where he was known as an expert on Himalayan culture, a subject on which he continued to publish frequent articles.³¹ After their period of direct collaboration in 1950, Sprigg and his former informant only met sporadically. Nevertheless, their encounter must certainly be seen as a crucial moment in each man's life. For Sprigg it opened up a career as a scholar of linguistics, and we can assume that it was out of gratitude to Rindzin Wangpo that he later wrote his obituary. Clearly, Rindzin Wangpo also benefited directly from his work with Sprigg.

As a result of this and through his time in England he made a name for himself as a research assistant and a teacher of Tibetan, who was sought by various foreigners who came to Kalimpong in the 1950s to study Tibetan culture. Most publicly, this role was promoted in yet another article on Rindzin Wangpo that appeared in the *Mélong* newspaper on March 01, 1952.³² After discussing his previous work at SOAS and with Sprigg, the article gives a detailed description of a method for teaching colloquial Tibetan. This method includes elements such as training in composition, dialogues, different styles of writing, reading and recitation skills, questions and answers, repetition of vocabulary, etc. and, thus appears not only remarkably systematic, but also modern and hence appealing to a Western audience. Such clients are explicitly addressed in the article, which emphasized that "his ten-fold teaching method was much appreciated among various Westerners."³³ As the most famous example of a student who was taught Tibetan grammar this way, the text mentions Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark.

Related to numerous European royal families, Prince Peter adopted various roles in his life, as a diplomat and a soldier, but also as a scholar using modern anthropological methods to investigate Tibetan societies.³⁴ He studied under Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Econom-

to Sprigg; and Rani Chuni Dorji, a daughter of the Chögyel (*chos rgyal*) of Sikkim and the Queen Mother of Bhutan, who was very involved in social and intellectual matters in Kalimpong.

30 See also Sprigg's reflections on his linguistic abilities in Sprigg 1987, 78–79. There, he also mentions letters of introduction to important Tibetan personalities provided by Basil Gould.

31 Further details of his life are available in his obituary, see Plaisier 2011.

32 *Me long*, Mar. 1, 1952, p. 5.

33 Tib.: *khong gi 'khrid thabs lag len bcu par phyi rgyal mi rigs khag nas ha cang mos po byed kyi 'dug*.

34 This account of Prince Peter draws largely on Pedersen 2005; for a detailed discussion of his time in Kalimpong, see the contribution by Trine Brox and Miriam Kockvedgaard Zeitzen in this volume.

ics and, at the end of field work in Ladakh, South India, and Ceylon, visited Kalimpong for the first time in 1939. He came back in 1950, this time as a team leader of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia. Initially, the plan for the expedition was to cross the Tibetan plateau, which was however riven by the political tension between Tibet and China. Encouraged by Sprigg's recent success in travelling to Gyantse, Prince Peter requested permission to do the same, but was denied access on account of the political situation.³⁵ While the expedition was forced to come to a halt, these very circumstances provided unexpected opportunities for anthropological research. Many Tibetan refugees had left their homeland and were pouring into India under extremely difficult conditions, and hence were ideal subjects from whom to acquire information as well as material objects. As he mentioned in his expedition report, Prince Peter was thus able to obtain various kinds of anthropological information, drawn largely from interviewing and anthropometrically examining refugees who had just arrived, taking photographs and making audio recordings, but also purchasing a wealth of cultural artefacts and books. "[T]his became possible," he concluded, "when many Tibetans settled in Kalimpong in order to tide over the first onrush of Chinese troops into their country. These Tibetans have since all returned home, and it is doubtful if anything more can be acquired now under the present more settled conditions. We thus have been fortunate in being in Kalimpong exactly at the right moment." (Prince Peter 1954, 235) Prince Peter made full use of this opportunity and, with his wife Irina, decided to settle permanently in Kalimpong, which he left only in 1957, when the Indian government forced him to leave. The knowledge and materials he gained during his time in the Eastern Himalayas led to a PhD from the London School of Economics, granted in 1959 for his study of polyandry, and several other publications. None of these works offers more information on his encounter with Rindzin Wangpo, apart from a brief remark, mentioned under results of the expedition, that he learned Tibetan from three different teachers—among them a "local Tibetan printer," which might refer to Rindzin Wangpo (Prince Peter 1954, 234). This is in strong contrast to information gained from an unpublished report of the expedition, which gives details showing that Prince Peter met in fact four times a week with Rindzin Wangpo for learning Tibetan grammar, reading, and writing, at least in 1951.³⁶

Prince Peter's activities were closely related to the work of Austrian scholar René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz.³⁷ He studied anthropology and philology in Vienna and later in London. During his first stay in Kalimpong, from

35 See Prince Peter's report of the expedition, Prince Peter 1954, especially, p. 230.

36 See page 5 of the following report: *Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia: Report No. 2 of H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece, Prince of Denmark, LI.D., M.A., F.R.A.I., participant of the Expedition, for the year ending January 31st 1951*. Unpublished report. Nationalmuseet, Etnografisk: ESBA-R074. I would like to thank Trine Brox and Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen for sharing this information.

37 For information on his life, see Much 1999 and De Jong 1959.

1950 until 1953, he was initially research assistant to Joseph F. Rock and also to Prince Peter, but soon embarked on his own studies in the realm of Tibetan protective deities, a topic to which access was (and continues to be) highly restricted and only possible through members within the religious tradition. Making use of a range of local informants, Nebesky wrote one of the most profound monographs on this topic, his book *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, which also served as his habilitation thesis (1955). In his work, he was well aware of his dependence on local informants and he carefully acknowledged the contributions of Tibetan scholars. It is evident that his cooperation with his Tibetan colleagues was based on mutual respect, as indicated by a remark that he usually offered English lessons in return—in this context an unheard of gesture in relation to other scholars.³⁸

During his second stay in Kalimpong from 1956 to 1957, Nebesky-Wojkowitz enjoyed Rindzin Wangpo's assistance. The latter was of considerable help in working on sources about Tibetan ritual dances, as Nebesky acknowledged in a letter cited by Sprigg (Sprigg 1987, 81):

Due to the difficult terminology of this text, a number of learned Tibetan lamas, whom I first consulted on the various obscure passages contained in this blockprint, had to confess their ignorance in [t]his³⁹ matter. I am very glad to say, that Mr. Rigzin Wangpo, however, was able to explain to me these difficult passages, thus enabling me to complete the translation within a comparatively short time. I found in him a reliable diligent and very learned assistant, whose good knowledge of English proved most profitable for my work.' (1 Jan., 1957).

This work resulted in a monograph on *Tibetan Religious Dances*, which Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf published after Nebesky's untimely death in 1959. Unlike his earlier work, this book does not contain a detailed discussion of the contributions made by Tibetan scholars, nor is such information found in the official report of this second research trip.⁴⁰ The latter lists acquisitions of ethnographic artefacts, religious texts, photographs, films, and audio recordings as further results of research. Clearly, this is in line with similar efforts by Prince Peter and other Europeans in this setting to collect Tibetan and Himalayan culture on a large scale in order to bring it

38 In his introduction to *Oracles and Demons* he details the contribution and forms of his cooperation with Tibetans, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956a, VII–X. Among them are the scholars Dardo Rinpoché (Dar mdo rin po che), Trétong Rinpoché (Bkras mthong rin po che), and Chimé Rindzin ('Chi med rig 'dzin) as his main informants, the officials Nyima (Nyi ma) and Lozang Püntsok (Blo bzang phun tshogs), who helped mainly in matters of translation, and the oracle priest Lhakpa Döndrup (Lhag pa don grub) and the court-singer Jampa Sangdak (Byams pa gsang bdag)—also one of Sprigg's informants—who provided information on oracles and epics. A similar account is also to be found in his official research report, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1954.

39 Correction by author.

40 As he mentioned in his report, this second research stay largely continued earlier forms of cooperation, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956b.

to Europe, an activity that could only be accomplished through the help of local intermediaries and other conducive factors—in this case the Tibetans' politically insecure and economically weak circumstances.

Between scholarship and personal religion: reconsidering Buddhism

While these encounters surely helped Rindzin Wangpo earn a living, as he was apparently working in many different capacities—as a research assistant, a translator, a teacher, and an employee at Tharchin's press—another academic cooperation had profound consequences for his personal life. As was detailed in three articles in the *Mélong*, and mentioned briefly in Sprigg's obituary,⁴¹ in 1951 K.J. Perera, a scholar from Ceylon who was interested in translating Tibetan religious texts into Pāli, contacted Rindzin Wangpo. Through his intervention, Rindzin Wangpo was employed as a teacher of Tibetan at Ceylon University under the aegis of Dr. G.P. Malalasekera, who was not only the Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, but also the founder and president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. What started in February 1951 as a limited contract of six months was extended several times over, meaning that Rindzin Wangpo did not return to India before June 1953. During his two and a half years in Colombo, he not only taught Tibetan at the university, but was also active in translating various religious texts,⁴² and composing works of his own.⁴³ An explanation of a newly developed flag that was intended to represent Tibetan Buddhism at the World Fellowship of Buddhists is highlighted as part of one of Rindzin Wangpo's own works. This is especially important as it suggests that he played an active role in promoting Tibetan Buddhism in the context of the global modernist visions of Buddhism that emerged in Ceylon at the end of the nineteenth century, and of which the creation of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, founded by Malalasekera in 1950, must be seen as a crucial element. This aspect is also emphasized in the *Mélong*, which speaks of Rindzin Wangpo as starting a tradition of Tibetan translations on the island, and describes him as an example that other Tibetan scholars would later follow and hence help to spread the teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism first to Ceylon, and from there globally.⁴⁴

41 See *Me long*, Jun. 1, 1951, p. 11; Mar. 1, 1952, p. 5.; and Oct. 1, 1953, p. 8.

42 One *Me long* article (Mar. 1, 1952, p. 5) mentions the *Aryavṛkṣasūtra*, Candragomin's *Śiṣyalekha*, and a *Jātaka* (Tib. 'phags pa ljon shing gi mdo dang slob dpon tsandra go mi'i slob spring dang | dpag 'khrid yal 'dab bdun pa'i nang tshan du singgala'i yul gyi bu mo mu tig 'khri shing ma'i rtogs brjod sogs phab bsgyur).

43 *Me long*, Oct. 1, 1953, p. 8 mentions the composition of three Tibetan works, among them the explanation of the Tibetan Buddhist flag, and also a guide to important Buddhist places in Ceylon. While the article promises that these pieces will be published in the newspaper in the future, the works could not be located in the existing issues of the *Mélong*.

44 See *Me long*, Mar. 1, 1952, p. 5, towards the end of the article.

Indeed, Rindzin Wangpo's time in Ceylon seems to mark a turning point in his life, a shift from scholarly ambitions to religious concerns of a more personal nature. This found a genuine expression in 1958 when he decided to be ordained as a monk in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. Interestingly, the opportunity to be ordained in this way was provided by yet another long-term resident of Kalimpong, commonly known as Sangharakshita. Born as Dennis Lingwood in the UK, he followed an early interest in Buddhism and studied with various Buddhist teachers of the Maha Bodhi Society in India in the late 1940s. After his full ordination in the Theravāda tradition in 1950, his teacher Jagdish Kashyap took him to Kalimpong, where he stayed for most of the following fourteen years. During this period, Sangharakshita became a crucial force in bringing different strands and concerns in Buddhism together, and he was as involved with Theravāda Buddhists from Ceylon, Burma, India, Nepal, and Europe as he was with members of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and Europeans with a more academic interest in Buddhism. These encounters also shaped his own vision of Buddhism, expressed, in the context of Kalimpong, in the publication of the Buddhist magazine *Stepping Stones*, an English-language periodical, to which many European academics also contributed, and the establishment of a branch of the Young Men's Buddhist Association, which was important for educating the local youth.⁴⁵ After he returned permanently to England in 1967, he became famous as the founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), a highly syncretistic global Buddhist organization, and as the author of numerous books about Buddhism as well as his extensive memoirs.

His memoirs give some interesting insights into interpersonal entanglements in Kalimpong, and also shed light on Rindzin Wangpo's engagement with Buddhism⁴⁶ According to Sangharakshita, he opted for a more settled life during this period, marrying a young Tibetan girl. After a daughter was born to them, his wife left him, taking the young baby with her. This event influenced Rindzin Wangpo's religious orientation and he then approached the much younger Sangharakshita to be ordained in the Theravāda tradition. It is noteworthy that he did not want to be ordained in the Tibetan monastic tradition, even though he was close to some Tibetan masters, most importantly, Dardo Rinpoché (Dar mdo rin po che, 1917–1990), one of the main teachers and informants of Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who became very important for Sangharakshita himself, and later for the Buddhist organizations he founded. Sensing his scepticism about some aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, Sangharakshita agreed to perform his ordination on July 20, 1958, whereupon Rindzin Wangpo, now under his new name Prajñāloka—or Shéráp Nangwa (Shes rab snang ba) in Tibetan—

45 For details on the formation of the Young Men's Buddhist Associations, see Bhutia 2016.

46 Rindzin Wangpo is mentioned in various publications, most extensively in Sangharakshita 2007, 57ff.

took part in the teaching and translation work that was being conducted at the Buddhist Vihāra in Kalimpong, which Sangharakshita headed. After a couple of months, however, Rindzin Wangpo's wife left the child with him, his daughter Rindzin Chödrön (Rig 'dzin chos sgron), also known as Tséring Yangkyi (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid), putting him in the difficult situation of having to combine his religious calling with paternal obligations (figure 3).

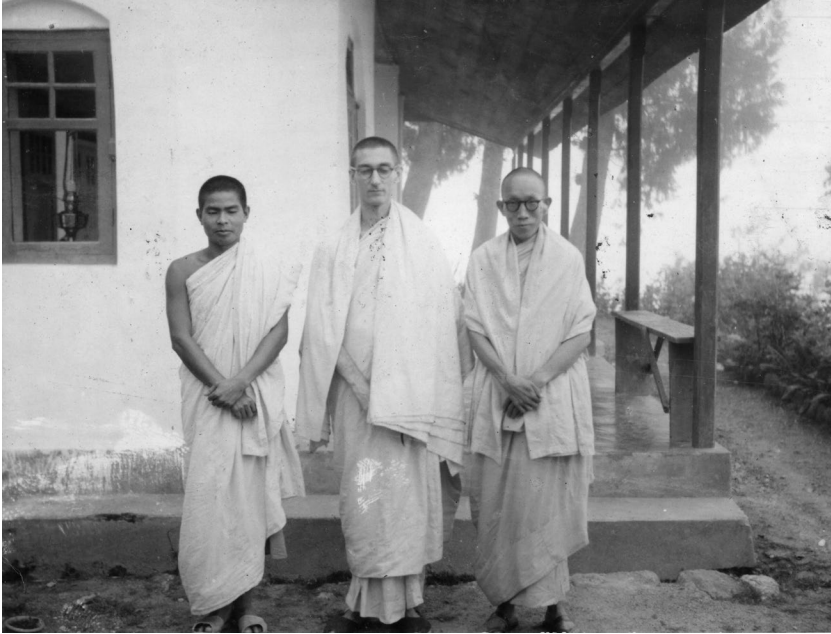


Figure 3: Rindzin Wangpo (right), briefly after his ordination through Sangharakshita (middle).

In the early 1960s, the tensions between India and China increased, culminating in the permanent closure of the border in 1962. With trade coming to a halt, the economy of the entire region was seriously affected and other forms of exchange also declined. Researchers and other enthusiasts were forced to leave or left voluntarily in the face of the troubled intellectual and economic climate, and global interest in the region continued to decrease. In very direct terms, this also affected the traces left by Rindzin Wangpo. From the 1960s until his death in 1985 we have practically no detailed reports about his activities. Members of his family, friends, and colleagues⁴⁷ remember that he continued to live with the Tharchin family,

47 I am grateful to various individuals for sharing their memories of Rindzin Wangpo: his daughter Tséring Yangkyi, his student and friend Jampel Kelden, Nini and Daniel of the Tharchin family, as well as Purbu Tséring (Phur bu tshé ring), an employee of Tharchin's press.

where he was active as a contributor, illustrator, and editor for the *Mélong* newspaper, as well as other publications of its press. He continued working as a teacher in various settings, as a private tutor of Tibetan grammar and poetry, teaching at the Tibetan school founded by Dardo Rinpoché in 1954 and also for the Indian government, and he remained active as a promoter of Buddhism.

Several smaller publications that Rindzin Wangpo authored or compiled in this period are especially informative about his work to promote Buddhism. In 1957, a Tibetan translation of the Pāli *Maṅgalasutta* appeared in the *Mélong*. In 1959, this was published as a separate booklet to which prefaces by Rindzin Wangpo and by Sangharakshita were added. Both emphasize the spiritual potential of the text for a broad audience, both monastic and lay, especially for Tibetans, to whom this text supposedly was not available in their own language. Translating this text, and other works which were announced as future projects, was hoped to spark new interest and lead to a fresh vision of the Buddhist religion (Shes rab snang ba 1959, preface). In that sense, this publication also exhibits a critical attitude towards traditional forms of Tibetan Buddhism, which is depicted as being in need of revision. This is somewhat ironic, as this very text, while it was presented as having been translated into Tibetan for the first time—from Pāli, Hindī, Nepālī, and English sources—has in fact always been part of the canonical collections of Buddhist scriptures in Tibet. As such, however, it had mainly a ritualistic and symbolic function, while the actual contents of the texts in these collections were less well known in a traditional Tibetan context. In 1970, the translation was reprinted, together with a translation of the *Vasalasutta* (Tib. *Dmangs rigs kyi mdo*), in the traditional *pécha* (*dpe cha*) format, making it more appealing to a Tibetan audience (Rig 'dzin dbang po 1970).

Concern for his fellow countrymen can also be seen in *The Five Hygienic Paths of Morality and Spirituality*, published in 1965. This collection of verse is aimed at Tibetan refugees and aims to teach them proper moral conduct as well as appropriate hygiene in their new environment. It also contains criticism of social practices associated with traditional Tibet, which are deemed inapt for the Indian context (Sherap Nangwa 1965). Rindzin Wangpo, using his ordination name Prajñāloka here, appears at his strongest as a promoter and also a reformer of Buddhism in the English-language booklet *Living Voice of Buddha*. Published by the Mani Press in Kalimpong, this consists largely of extracts from writings and speeches connected to K. Sri Dhammananda, a Sinhalese Theravāda monk who established the Buddhist Missionary Society in Kuala Lumpur. The main part of the text is a collection of quotations from famous international intellectuals, figures from Albert Einstein to Nehru, from Max Mueller to Carl Gustav Jung, which are presented as in support of a very rationalistic reading of Buddhism. This, together with the criticism of devotional and ritualistic aspects addressed in the preface, can be read as a questioning

of traditional forms of the Buddhist faith, which was also an important element in Sangharakshita's approach to Buddhism.⁴⁸

While these publications provide ample testimony to Rindzin Wangpo's engagement with Buddhism in the later phase of his life, they are almost invisible nowadays. Most of them have not been preserved on global library shelves, nor are they circulated on the local level in Kalimpong. None of them is mentioned in Sprigg's obituary, nor, at least not explicitly, in Sangharakshita's account. The articles in the Tibetan newspaper *Mélong*, while emphasizing Rindzin Wangpo's productivity, fail to report on this later period, since the newspaper ceased production in 1963 as a result of the economic decline. During this time, Buddhism had become a central element of Rindzin Wangpo's life, to the extent that this interest led to increasing tensions with the Tharchin family, which, by contrast, was very concerned with promoting Christianity. As a consequence, in the late 1970s Rindzin Wangpo moved to a small local shrine close by, by which stage his health was already seriously impaired. The Pragya Chaitya Mahā Vihār where he was staying was installed by Bhaju Ratna, a wealthy Newar merchant and devout supporter of Buddhism. When it was built in 1936, it served as the first temple for Mahapragya, one of the key figures of the Theravāda movement in Nepal, who was expelled from Nepal and arrived in Kalimpong in the late 1920s. With the foundation of the Dharmodaya Sabha, the society which united Theravāda Buddhists from Nepal, a new property was purchased, where the Dharmodaya Vihar was inaugurated as its institutional base in 1951. With that, and the general decline of interest in Buddhism in Kalimpong over the following decades, the old temple at Tirpai was increasingly neglected.⁴⁹ Rindzin Wangpo, who had close contacts to the Dharmodaya Vihar, was allowed to use it, and continued to live there under rather poor conditions until his death on February 10, 1985. As reported by friends and family, his personal belongings were distributed or burnt in a ritual conducted by Tibetan monks a year after his death. Nowadays, some of these can be unearthed in personal archives and on book shelves across Kalimpong, but many traces of him have in fact been erased (figure 4).

48 See Prajnāloka n.d.; Rindzin Wangpo clarified the book's content thus (p. 42): "In this book I adopted some sources from the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia and some Theravadin Buddhist Suttas." Effectively, the main part is extracted from "Great Personalities on Buddhism," by K. Sri Dhammananda, Kuala Lumpur, 1965, the preface is identical with the speech "How to Practise Buddhism," by Ven. M. Pannasiri.

49 I would like to thank P.B. Shakya, former secretary of the Dharmodaya Vihar in Kalimpong, for sharing his knowledge of Newar Buddhists in Kalimpong. A detailed study of the Dharmodaya Sabha and its central figures is found in LeVine and Gellner 2005.



Figure 4: Rinzin Wangpo at his last residence, the shrine Pragya Chaitya Mahā Vihār, shortly before his death.

Knowledge production in the contact zone of the Eastern Himalayas

What then can be learned from following the trajectory of this seemingly unconventional, but in this context not untypical life story? What kinds of questions may be prompted by these glimpses into the complex entanglements of such key figures?

Following the intricate traces of individual agents certainly leads to a reconsideration of common assumptions about the global production of knowledge about Tibet, and the development of modern forms of Buddhism. As we see from encounters between European adventurers, scholars, and religious seekers, as well a whole host of Tibetan or Himalayan scholars, teachers, informants, suppliers of artefacts, and others with whom they interacted, the crucial narratives about Tibet which developed at that time were not exclusively determined by European enquiries, nor by realities in Tibet. Rather, they emerged as a complex interplay of various individuals who met in a space in between, at the fringes of the British colonial and Tibetan worlds. In such a setting, larger asymmetries of power, as emphasized by Pratt, certainly played a role. Tibet was never colonized by European powers in any strict sense. Nevertheless, the British had considerable influence, especially along the trade route from Kalimpong to Lhasa, beginning with the forced trade agreements in 1904. When this influence receded with Indian independence in 1947, Chinese forces were quick to fill the emerging power vacuum and created a situation in which many Tibetans, as refugees seeking protection in India, found themselves not only in a politically insecure but also economically weak position. In addition, we see a broader conviction operating, one that is typical of colonial encounters, and British India was certainly no exception in this regard, namely the idea that representatives of European colonial powers were, in a general sense, superior to their Asian interlocutors. As members of modern societies, they were associated not only with technological, but also social and intellectual advances. Quite clearly, such larger asymmetries also explain the relative ease with which individuals like Marco Pallis, R.K. Sprigg, Prince Peter, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, and also Sangharakshita could acquire a high standing in Kalimpong, where they were accepted as towering authorities on Tibetan and Himalayan culture.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, and this is well illustrated in their relationships with Rindzin Wangpo, as a single but not untypical case, every one of them had his own, individual story. Pallis's esteem for Tibetans as protectors of spiritual teachings that had been lost in modern societies seems to have engendered the great respect and personal attention he showed towards

50 This becomes evident if we look for example at how these personalities are depicted in local media, such as the Kalimpong newspaper *Himalayan Times* or the Tibetan *Mélong*.

his Tibetan interlocutors. Sprigg and Prince Peter, by contrast, were mainly interested in engaging with Tibetans as mere providers of information or source material, as demonstrated by their more distant or even negligent treatment of their local counterparts in their publications. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, perhaps due to his personality and character, was rather careful in acknowledging Tibetan sources, and his writings radiate a feeling of his esteem for his collaborators. Sangharakshita, driven by his own vision of Buddhism, offered both criticism as well as admiration for the local representatives of various Buddhist traditions he engaged with.

As these examples indicate, a micro-historical analysis of concrete encounters will certainly give more nuance to preconceived notions of knowledge flows in colonial or semi-colonial settings. In such a context, new knowledge emerges in a complex interplay between individual agents, and cannot be characterized in terms of a clear-cut dichotomy along the lines of colonizer vs. colonized or European centre vs. Asian periphery. Despite the complex nature of their encounters, a more rigid asymmetry can be observed regarding the visibility and representation of individual agents and the knowledge they created.

Power and practices of representation in a contact zone

With their research on Tibet and the Himalayas, essentially all of the European scholars working from Kalimpong and other places in the Eastern Himalayas made an international name for themselves. The knowledge they produced as authorities on Himalayan culture is retained in monographs brought out by well-known publishers and articles in respected journals, and hence preserved in a way that ensures long-term storage as well as the global accessibility of this knowledge.

Clearly, the situation is different for their local interlocutors. While many of these achieved considerable fame and were themselves prolific writers, neither the people themselves nor the knowledge they produced attained the same status as their European counterparts. This of course has to do with the larger economic and political asymmetries already mentioned, but also with differences in the production and dissemination of knowledge. In the more stratified and religiously oriented Tibetan societies, information about encounters between European individuals and their Tibetan interlocutors, mostly learned people, but not among those at the highest level of religious institutions, was hardly ever recorded. An effect of this is that one is often forced to resort to works by Europeans for information on the lives of the individuals who served as informants for European academics.⁵¹ This of course means

51 A good case in point are the autobiographies of three informants of the Dutch Tibetologist Johan van Manen, which he asked them to write down and thus made them accessible (Richardus 1998).

that Europeans had a dominant position in how their informants were depicted. Again, the case of Rindzin Wangpo is a good example and gives a detailed illustration of the matter.

When Sprigg started to work with Rindzin Wangpo in 1949 he did ask him to write down his autobiography (Sprigg 1968, 676f.). This text, however, was never made accessible on its own; only excerpts from it are found at the beginning of Sprigg's PhD thesis. There, they are connected with a specific purpose: they are not provided to introduce his informant on his own merits, but to clarify the material he provided, that is, to demonstrate that the language Rindzin Wangpo spoke could indeed be considered an example of Lhasa Tibetan.⁵² These excerpts then, along with other documents that highlighted Rindzin Wangpo's qualifications as a suitable informant, provided the basis for the obituary that Sprigg wrote in 1987. While this is certainly the most informative and most easily accessible source on Rindzin Wangpo's life, it depicts him in a specific light: mainly in terms of his connections with global academics, to whose work he contributed in a rather passive way. It neither highlights his own ambitions as an expert on the Tibetan language and on Tibetan poetics, nor does it stress his Buddhist activities, which seem to have been his major concern in the latter part of his life. It does not mention a single one of his publications, which is an otherwise common practice in obituary writing. All in all, it seems, Rindzin Wangpo remains the informant that Sprigg wanted him to be for his PhD work.

The picture is significantly different if we turn to the *Mélong* newspaper, a medium in which traditional Tibetan and European publishing practices intersect, and which includes several articles about Rindzin Wangpo in Tibetan. While his relations to European researchers are also stressed there, he is depicted in a much more active light. The *Mélong* speaks of him as a teacher whose expertise and skill were sought after by his European students. Clearly, the editor Tharchin used these articles to further his relative's career, but also to underline the importance of Tibetan scholars in more general terms. The *Mélong* also served as a medium for publishing some of Rindzin Wangpo's first writings and, most likely, would have continued to do so, were it not discontinued in 1963. For this reason it could not do full justice to the Buddhist activities that Rindzin Wangpo was involved in later in his life, and which can only be made visible by investigating his later production, as illustrated in this essay.

52 Evidently Sprigg and another scholar discussed this, see Sprigg 1968, 5–7. It seems that the material Sprigg recorded also contained dialogues in which Rindzin Wangpo reflects about his role as informant (Sprigg 1968, 672–674). None of that, however, is preserved in itself. The dialogues were dissected in individual sentences, which are scattered over the analytical part of the study.

Conclusion: the many faces of Rindzin Wangpo

By considering a broad spectrum of sources—commonly accessible monographs and journal articles in English; Tibetan newspaper articles, which have only recently and partially been made available in public archives; pamphlets and booklets in Tibetan and English, some of which exist only as single copies in private libraries; a host of personal documents, scattered over public as well as private archives; and, further, the memories of various individuals—I have tried to paint a nuanced picture of the encounters for which the life of Rindzin Wangpo serves as a model. Moreover, I would like to think that I have also contributed to creating a more balanced image of him as a person. As highlighted in his obituary, his relationships with global academics certainly triggered crucial developments in his life. In his interactions with them, however, Rindzin Wangpo cannot be limited to a mere passive role, the one commonly associated with local informants. Rather, these encounters also gave Rindzin Wangpo an opportunity to actively shape his life in professional as well as personal terms. That these manifold meetings with individuals of varied concerns and backgrounds had a profound impact on him as a person can be seen in a unique personal document.

In 1979, Kirti Rinpoche was instructed to gather information about Gendün Chöpel (Dge 'dun chos 'phel, 1905–1951), another, albeit rather famous Tibetan who was involved with European academics in the first half of the twentieth century. Among the personal memories, which he brought together and published later as a book, there is also a chapter by Rindzin Wangpo, who had known Gendün Chöpel very well in Kalimpong and Lhasa in the 1940s.⁵³ When Rindzin Wangpo received his copy of the book, he signed it on November 13, 1983. In order to designate this book as his own, Rindzin Wangpo used three different signatures (figure 5), thereby providing a striking testimony to the different roles he acquired in his exchanges with others and actively attributed to himself.

“G. Rig.,” short for Gégen (Tib. *dge rgan*) or “teacher” Rindzin Wangpo, is the name by which he was known to many academics, for whom he acted as a language teacher, informant, or translator. This is also the signature that is found most commonly appended to his contributions to the *Mélong* newspaper.

“Prajñāloka” is the name he received when he was ordained in the Theravāda tradition by Sangharakshita. With this name he found an identity within the transcultural Buddhist network, which he encountered in Tibet, England, Kalimpong, and Ceylon. He used this name mainly for his Buddhist publications, sometimes also in its Tibetan translation Shérab Nangwa (Shes rab snang ba).

53 I would like to thank Püntsock of Tharpa Choling Monastery Museum, who spotted this publication amongst other personal books that were given to the monastery. For details see Kirti Sprul sku 1983; later, this was also translated into English (Kirti Rinpoche 2013).

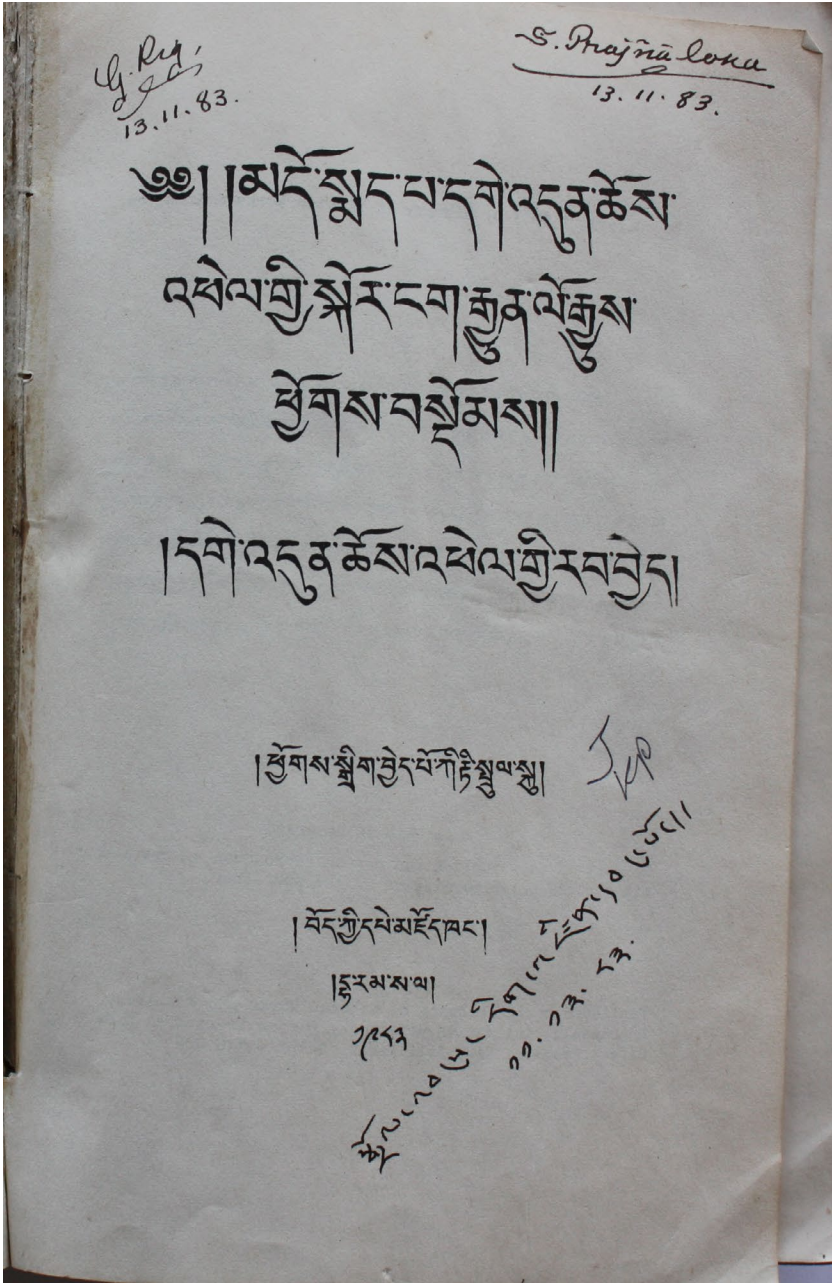


Figure 5: Rindzin Wangpo's author's copy of a book on memories of Gendün Chöpel, marked with three different signatures.

At the bottom of the page is a third signature, written in cursive Tibetan script: “Drölbang Rindzin Wangpo” (Sgrol ‘bangs Rig ‘dzin dbang po). Drölbang could be translated literally as servant (Tib. *‘bangs*) to Tāra (Tib. *sgrol ma*), the female Tantric deity whom Rindzin Wangpo evoked in the poem of praise quoted at the beginning of this paper. It is this signature that he used most often in his poetic works, designating himself as an expert in the Tibetan poetic tradition. Only few of these works, however, survive in published form, while others—due to larger political and economic developments, but also as a result of personal circumstances—remained unpublished or vanished altogether.⁵⁴

Appendix 1: preliminary list of Rindzin Wangpo’s writings

BOOKS AND BOOKLETS⁵⁵

- Shes rab snang ba. 1959. *Bkra shis pa’i mdo*. Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press (Tibetan translation of the *Maṅgalasutta* from Pāli, Hindi, Nepālī, and English sources, booklet, 15 pages, with Tibetan preface by author and English preface by Sangharakshita).
- Sherap Nangwa. 1965. *The Five Hygienic Paths of Morality and Spirituality – Gtsang sbrar spyod pa’i lam Inga*. Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press (booklet in Tibetan, verses with preface in prose, 40 pages, printed & published by G. Tharchin, January 28, 1965).
- Prajnāloka. n.d. *Living Voice of Buddha*. Kalimpong: Mani Press (booklet in English, VIII plus 64 pages; main part, pp. 15–41, consists of extractions from “Great Personalities on Buddhism,” written by K. Sri Dhammananda, Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1965; pp. 1–2 are identical with a speech by Ven. M. Pannasiri, “How to Practise Buddhism”).
- Rig ‘dzin dbang po. 1970. *Bkra shis pa’i mdo*. Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press (Tibetan translation of both *Maṅgalasutta* and *Vasalasutta*; Tibetan *dpe cha* format, 7 folios, printed at Tibet Mirror Press, Mai 21, 1970).
- Rig ‘dzin dbang po. 1983. “*Phyi lo 1979 lor ka sbug tu bzugs pa dge slong rig ‘dzin dbang po lags la mdo smad pa mkhas dbang dge ‘dun chos ‘phel lags kyi skor dpe mdzod las byed kirti sprul sku nas dir ba zhus par dris lan gsung pa kreb ‘khor nas phab bshus gsham gsal.*” In *Dge ‘dun chos ‘phel gyi rab byed*, by Kirti Sprul sku 1983, 64–76. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives (collected stories about Gendün Chöpel, to which Rindzin Wangpo contributed in 1979).

54 Jampel Kelden, a friend and student of Rindzin Wangpo, who has preserved the notebook of poems quoted earlier, mentioned the existence of several smaller items of poetry as well as a book-length collection. These, however, seem to have disappeared by now.

55 It seems likely that more publications appeared, in particular in the *Mélong* newspaper. I am grateful to Anna Sawerthal for spotting these publications during her work on the newspaper.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE *MÉLONG* NEWSPAPER

a) Poems

— *Me long*, Feb. 1, 1954, p. 2: abecedarian poem

b) Translations

— *Me long*, Dec. 1, 1957, p. 7: Tibetan translation of the *Mangalasutta* (Tib. *Bkra shis pa'i mdo*)

— *Me long*, Mar. 1963, p. 3 and June 1963, p. 2–3: Tibetan translation of the *Uragasutta* (Tib. *Brang 'gro'i mdo*), from Pāli, English, and Hindī sources

c) Illustrations (samples)

— *Me long*, Sep. 22, 1954, p. 9: illustration of three monkeys

— *Me long*, Aug. 1, 1957, p. 3: illustration of different Tibetan ethnic groups

— *Me long*, Jul./ Aug. 1959, p. 14 (also Dec. 1962, p. 3): illustrations of the conflict between India and China

— *Me long*, Sept./ Oct. 1959, p. 10: illustration of the conflicts between India and China

— *Me long*, Sept./ Oct. 1959, p. 12: illustration of political conflicts related to Ladakh

— *Me long*, Jan. 1960, p. 10: illustration of Mao and his imperialist ambitions

— *Me long*, Dec. 1962, p. 8: illustration of Mao

Appendix 2: sources

LIST OF ARTICLES ON RINDZIN WANGPO IN THE *MÉLONG* NEWSPAPER

— *Me long*, Nov. 1, 1948, p.3

— *Me long*, Oct. 1, 1949, p. 6–7

— *Me long*, Jun. 1, 1951, p. 11

— *Me long*, Mar. 1, 1952, p. 5

— *Me long*, Oct. 1, 1953, p. 8

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

— The Tharchin Collection: diverse material acquired from the Tharchin family, held at C.V. Starr East Asian Library, Columbia University; this includes an online archive of many issues of the *Mélong* newspaper: http://library.columbia.edu/locations/eastasian/special_collections/tibetan-rare-books---special-collections/tharchin.html; accessed on Sep. 22, 2017.

— The Clear Vision Trust: archival collection of diverse material related to Sangharakshita: <http://www.clear-vision.org>; accessed on Sep. 22, 2017.

— Himalayan Times: digital archive at Heidelberg University, providing access to existing newspaper issues: http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/himalayan_times; accessed on Sep. 22, 2017.

- Ancestry.com Operations Inc.: provides access to online databases for retrieving historical documents: <http://www.ancestry.com/>; accessed on Jul. 17, 2014.
- Further personal collections belonging to various individuals listed as interview partners were used.

INTERVIEW PARTNERS

Interviews were conducted in an informal way on several occasions in Feb.–Mar. 2013, Sep. 2014, and Feb. 2015.

- Tséring Yangkyi (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid), daughter of Rindzin Wangpo
- Jampel Kelden ('Jam dpal skal Idan) of the ITBC School, friend and student of Rindzin Wangpo
- Nini and Daniel Tharchin, members of the Tharchin family
- Püntok (Phun tshogs) of Tharpa Choling Monastery Museum
- Purbu Tséring (Phur bu tshe ring), a former worker for Tharchin's press
- P.B. Shakya, former secretary of the Dharmodaya Vihar

Figures

Fig. 1, 3, 4: Image acquired from The Clear Vision Trust.

Fig. 2: Image kindly provided by Paul Hackett.

Fig. 5: Photo by the author.

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