



TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE HIMALAYAN BORDERLANDS

Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone"

Markus Viehbeck
Editor

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Acknowledgements

This volume is the direct outcome of a conference held in Kalimpong from March 05 to March 08, 2015. Under the title *Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands: Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone,"* researchers with a variety of disciplinary backgrounds discussed important developments in the cultural history of the area with a focus on the first half of the twentieth century. But the book must also be seen within the context of larger efforts to investigate the Eastern Himalayan border region through new theoretical and conceptual approaches. One of these attempts was run from Heidelberg, as part of the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context." There, a project directed by Birgit Kellner and Markus Viehbeck, including Anna Sawerthal as a PhD student, focused on the region as an important space for "Encounters between Tibet and Western Modernity." The connection to Tibet was also addressed in a panel at the Thirteenth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Ulaanbaatar, which was organized by Markus Viehbeck in 2013. That same year, another group of researchers from the University of Toronto drew attention to the region with a workshop on "Lamas, Spies, Gentleman Scholars, and Trans-Himalayan Traders: The Meeting of Religion, Colonialism, Politics, and Economics in Twentieth-Century Kalimpong." In an attempt to tie together the different efforts in Toronto, Heidelberg, and several other places, the Eastern Himalayan Research Network (EHRN) was founded, which also allowed people to be reached beyond the limitations of individual areas of expertise. Many of the people represented in this volume are directly or indirectly connected with this network and we would like to thank above all Jayeeta Sharma for launching the initiative, but also for her theoretical and practical input in organizing the conference. On a more informal level, a much larger network of individuals emerged, driven by their common interest in the Eastern Himalayas. Listing all of these people would go beyond the scope of these brief introductory remarks, but we would like to single out and thank Isrun Engelhardt, who supported our own efforts in Heidelberg from the very start and was crucial in establishing connections between many different individuals.

An important aspect in the conception of the conference was that it should facilitate local involvement. Rather than having the conference conducted at a European University, we therefore opted to talk about Kalimpong and the Eastern Himalayas in Kalimpong itself. Naturally, this complicated practical matters considerably, and it is only with local support that the conference could be conducted smoothly. Sandip C. Jain, editor of the *Himalayan Times*, was crucial in all aspects of local organization and we cannot thank him too much for all the work he invested in the project.

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In Heidelberg, we would like to thank various people for turning the resulting manuscript into an actual book: our student assistant Dominik Wallner for standardizing the different contributions, Kim Friedlander and Malcolm Green for their meticulous work in proofreading the entire manuscript, our (anonymous) reviewers for their constructive criticism, Andrea Hacker for her advice and service as head of the Editorial Office at the Cluster, as well as the team at Heidelberg University Publishing for handling the final production of this book.

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Markus Viehbeck, for the "Heidelberg Kalimpong Project"

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Markus Viehbeck

Introduction: Cultural History as a History of Encounters— A “Contact Perspective”

Abstract This introductory essay lays out the conceptual framework for approaching the complex cultural history of the Eastern Himalayan town of Kalimpong and its neighbours as a history of encounters. Taking Mary Louise Pratt’s influential concept of a “contact zone” as a departure point, it scrutinizes current trends in the field of Transcultural Studies to develop a nuanced analytical perspective that highlights and takes in the culturally productive forces of encounters of various sorts. In particular, this approach focuses on the circulatory nature of knowledge production, and acknowledges shifting and multilateral asymmetries of power as driving forces of a vast array of strategies such as the appropriation, translation, and transformation of knowledge, but also of acts of resistance or rejection.

In so doing, it underlines the connected nature of the cultural history of the Eastern Himalayas and its relevance for global affairs in the first half of the twentieth century, and contributes to counterbalancing the region’s relative neglect in the academic research of the past decades.

Introduction

In the past couple of decades, a growing body of literature within Cultural and Post-Colonial Studies has questioned the feasibility of bounded entities of various sorts and the research paradigms that developed from such ideas. Essentialist notions of national and cultural identity in particular were increasingly seen as problematic, and were countered by an emphasis on processes of interaction and mutual entanglements. In the field of Historical Studies, such endeavours are embodied in the concept of “entangled histories,” that is, the idea that the history of regions, nation-states, ethnicities, or individuals must be understood in relation to other such entities.¹ Particularly in the context of the Himalayan region, this is also related to recent efforts in borderland studies.² Similar attempts to conceptualize common reference points of investigation in a more dynamic and processual fashion are sustained by the concept of “transculturality.” This challenges notions of culture as being based on ethnically, religiously, or nation-state based homogenous and stable entities, and instead views cultural production as transformative processes in the encounters of different regions and cultures.³ As general research directives, elements of entangled and transcultural histories have recently found a wide range of applications, in a variety of disciplines, and with regard to various objects of investigation.

In this volume, we connect up with such efforts by bringing to the forefront a region and a historical setting that were shaped in a particularly intense way by encounters between peoples who came from many different socio-cultural environments. Therefore, we will focus on the Indian town of Kalimpong, a hill station in the Eastern Himalayan region, and its history during the first half of the twentieth century, a period when the region gained increasing visibility on the stage of world history. This period is commonly depicted by employing a narrative of encounters between different ethnicities, nation-states, and larger regions, which may be taken as a historical frame for the present volume. Yet as will be shown later, it is also important to address the limitations of such a narrative by developing a more dynamic understanding of encounters.

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- 1 For a contextualization of the concept of “entangled history” in historical studies, see Kaelble (2005). An important impetus to understanding history in relational terms came from Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s influential essay on “connected histories” (Subrahmanyam 1997).
 - 2 See Van Schendel (2002) and Scott (2009) as examples of a larger trend, which also involves the notion of Zomia as an alternative to nation-state based geographical references.
 - 3 Juneja and Falser (2013, 18–21) address central aspects of transculturality, along with its different usages in recent history. Mention must be made of the book *Transcultural History: Theories, Methods, Sources* by Madeleine Herren et al. (2012), which tries to outline a transcultural research perspective for historical research.

Encounters in the Eastern Himalayas—a historical sketch

Kalimpong’s location, perched as it is between the modern nation-states of Nepal, Bhutan, and China, as well as the formerly independent kingdom of Sikkim, and Tibet, has made it a logical venue for encounters of various kinds. In 1706, Bhutan annexed the area from Sikkim, and only much later, after the British-Bhutanese war in 1865, was it absorbed into British India. Connections to Bhutan continued to be close, especially as the British gifted a piece of land to Ugyen Dorji, a trade agent and middleman in the negotiations between Bhutan and British India. His estate later became known as Bhutan House, which was an important outpost in administrative and diplomatic affairs, and which is still owned by the royal family of Bhutan.⁴

At the time of British annexation, the area was only sparsely populated, primarily by Lepcha and Bhutia communities, the former of which are commonly considered the original inhabitants of the region. In the decades that followed, these communities were joined by different ethnicities that were migrating from eastern Nepal, and which settled in the area as agriculturists.⁵ Nearby Darjeeling—whose importance for Christian Mission, international politics, trade, and Himalayan knowledge-making foreshadowed later developments in Kalimpong⁶—was fully developed as a zone for tea plantations, while Kalimpong emerged primarily as an agrarian society. The influx of population from Nepal continued, and became a major force in the negotiations about identities in the hill region that arose in the second half of the twentieth century (figure 1).⁷

In the later decades of the nineteenth century, the first Christian missionaries began to settle in Kalimpong. Like the British, they understood Kalimpong as a strategic spot, a place that was “On the Threshold of Three Closed Lands”—as pointed to by the title of a report by one of the most important Christian missionaries, Dr. Graham, the founder of the eponymous school and orphanage (Graham 1897). While it was seen as a place to venture out elsewhere, Kalimpong itself was thoroughly transformed by the missionary presence. It was just a small hamlet when William Macfarlane, the first Scottish missionary, visited the area in 1873,⁸ but soon the

4 A brief history of Bhutan House is provided by Dorji (2008). See also Emma Martin’s contribution in this volume.

5 Early settlement reports give the following figures for the entire Kalimpong area: 1865: 3,530; 1881: 12,683; 1891: 26,631; 1901: 41,511. Numbers seem to be drawn from an earlier report by C.A. Bell (1905), and then included in later Gazetteers (see O’Malley 1999, 36). For a recent discussion of early settlement, see Sarkar (2010, 89f). He deviates from the numbers in other reports for 1901.

6 A more detailed discussion of the history of Darjeeling in this context is provided in Harris *et al.* (2016).

7 Chettri 2017, Chapter 1, attempts an overview of Nepali migration in the Eastern Himalayan borderlands, and further discusses its effects on the construction of ethnic identities in the region.

8 For information on William Macfarlane and the history of the church that was built in his memory in 1891, see Subba (1991).



Figure 1: The Eastern Himalayas as a contact zone between different nation-states.

first churches, boarding schools, and hospitals were built—structures that were important for the municipal development of Kalimpong, and which have characterized it up to the present day as a centre for elite education. In addition, Christian mission transformed the population’s religious and secular outlook (figure 2). As early accounts and census data indicate, the influence of the missionaries was immense and many locals converted to Christianity (O’Malley 1999, 51f.; McGovern 1924, 21f.).

Missionary activities aside, trade must be seen as the most important factor in the early development of Kalimpong. While the region had been well connected through trans-Himalayan trading networks for centuries, the situation changed drastically with the British Younghusband Mission to Lhasa in 1903/04. Alarmed by the perceived or factual influence of the other two imperial players, Russia and China, the British ventured on a military campaign that succeeded not only in forcing Tibetans into trade agreements with British India, but also in establishing permanent trade agencies along the route to Lhasa, and thereby increased British influence in the region considerably. Kalimpong acted as a major hub along this route, which—with its connection to the global market through the port of Kolkata—not only facilitated a constant flow of goods in both directions, but also promoted a flow of general knowledge between worlds that knew very little about each other. The thriving economy led to a further increase



Figure 2: Kalimpong in the 1940s, with Macfarlane Church to the left.

in the population, drawing in a heterogeneous mix of peoples from the neighbouring countries. Trade, in particular in Tibetan wool, continued to flourish in the following decades and was only diminished by the political tensions between Tibet and China in the 1950s.⁹

Along with the economic upturn, Kalimpong was systematically developed into an urban centre. This meant that in addition to land that was occupied by agriculture, trade, and the compounds of the Christian missions, new areas were needed for further urban settlement. For this purpose, a site on the Ringkingpong ridge was chosen—the “Development Area.” By 1919, the original tenants, mainly Lepchas, Bhutias, and migrants from Nepal, were resettled to make space for a new upper class, often Bengalis, Anglo-Indians, and also Europeans who came to enjoy the moderate climate and pleasant scenery. This trend continued steadily for the next two decades. Along with the increase in population, the overall infrastructure for settlement, transport, and also administration was further developed. In 1931, Kalimpong was recognized as a town; in 1945, a municipality was established. While the British withdrawal and India’s independence in 1947 affected other hill centres considerably, this was less the case in Kalimpong, owing largely to the highly heterogeneous nature of its population.¹⁰

9 A detailed anthropological investigation of trade along the Lhasa-Kalimpong-Kolkata route is provided by Harris (2013).

10 Processes of early urban development of Kalimpong were addressed in two articles by Majumdar, in more detail in 2006, and briefly in 1993.

This mix of peoples from different backgrounds was further enhanced by the political tensions between Tibet and China. With the beginning of the Chinese occupation in the 1950s, waves of Tibetan refugees poured into India, many of whom used Kalimpong as a stopover or for more permanent settlement.¹¹ While the proximity to Tibet had attracted Europeans with a variety of interests for several decades, the actual presence of Tibetans along with other people from different borderland communities created a unique research site for scholars of Tibetan and Himalayan religion and culture. Using the opportunity to gather information as well as artefacts under these special circumstances, they produced a substantial body of scholarly knowledge that added to the earlier, more narrative accounts of Tibet and the Himalayas written by British government officials.

As tensions with China grew, Kalimpong also became a hotspot for collecting first-hand news about the political conflict—Jawaharlal Nehru even labelled it a “nest of spies” in his conversations with Zhou Enlai in 1957. At the same time, trade was seriously affected by these tensions, and, with the Sino-Indian war in 1962 and the closing of the borders, it came to an utter halt. With its main motor of economic growth gone, development in the region slowed down considerably. This also gave way to new processes on the human level. While the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by a highly dynamic coming together of peoples from different backgrounds, the period after 1962 saw a process of sedentariness and fixation, in which the formation of new identities also led to new political claims in the form of an independent state of “Gorkhaland,” deemed to be the rightful home of the hill communities. At times, negotiating these claims involved also acts of violence, particularly in the 1980s, but also in new waves of political protests in 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2017.¹²

As this brief historical sketch illustrates, the cultural history of Kalimpong and the Eastern Himalayas as a whole is not a history that can be tied to a homogeneous group of people; rather, it is significantly shaped by encounters between people of different geographical, cultural, national, or ethnic environments. While we can point to this diversity by distinguishing individuals or groups according to these contexts and the corresponding labels (“Lepcha,” “Tibetan,” “European”), this does not tell us much about the usage and relevance of such identifications in social reality.

But how then were notions of identity created and negotiated in the encounters between individuals? How was knowledge, not only of oneself and the Other, but knowledge in much more general terms formed and transformed in the interactions of people of different cultural, ethnic, or

11 For a study of Tibetan refugees and their resettlement in the Eastern Himalayas, see Subba (1990).

12 In recent years, a considerable body of literature has emerged on the negotiation of such identities, as well as on the political claims that are often summarized as the Gorkhaland Movement. For an early case study, see Subba (1992). This is also discussed in the Epilogue of the current volume, see the contribution by Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Mealor.

linguistic provenance? What forces shaped and steered these processes, both from a macro- as well as a micro-perspective? What kinds of powers were at work and how did individuals relate to and make use of them?

It is this dimension of the productive and dynamic potential of encounters that we seek to address in the current volume by probing different key areas, such as trade, media, politics, religion, scholarship, education, and human relations, using multiple methodological approaches. In order to tie these various efforts closer together and to sharpen both our understanding of the objects of investigation as well as the way we look at them, we suggest engaging more closely with the notion of “contact zone,” a concept that has gained some currency over the past two decades in the study of encounters in colonial and semi-colonial settings.

Kalimpong as a “contact zone”?

The term “contact zone” was coined by Mary Louise Pratt, a linguist who was investigating travel writing in a colonial context in South America. Since its inception in the early 1990s, Pratt’s concept has met with a broad reception in a variety of fields: Museum Studies (famously by Clifford 1997, and more recently Schorch 2013), along with Pedagogy more generally (Wolff 2002), Linguistics, Literature, History (Dirlik 1996), Gender Studies (Powers 2000, Pickles and Rutherford 2005), and Postcolonial Theory (Olson 1998), to name but a few.¹³

Thus, the range of its interpretations varies considerably: from a weak understanding as referring to a (physical) space of encounters between two or more factions, to a highly loaded normative concept that not only detects inequalities of power within encounters, but also calls for overcoming them. The possibility of using this concept in different ways may stem not only from the trajectories of the history of its reception, but also from a certain vagueness in Pratt’s original formulations, which critics of her influential work have also perceived.¹⁴ This inevitably means that any attempt to use the concept as an analytical tool will have to start by sharpening its contours and should clarify its usage in a specific context. In the following, we shall make such an attempt in order to arrive at a more nuanced view of the processes that evolved in the historical setting of Kalimpong, but also so as to point to the limitations of Pratt’s concept in this concrete instance.

In her formative texts in the early 1990s, Pratt introduced “contact zone” as a “term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and

13 Obviously, the literature cited here is not a comprehensive list in any sense, but it provides some snapshots of how the notion of “contact zone” is used in different fields. For the most part, these lie within encounters between colonizers and colonized, but other settings that involve power asymmetries as well as less loaded contexts are also analysed as contact zones.

14 See, for example, Kartunen (1995), who criticizes Pratt’s elaborations for being unnecessarily obscure.

grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (Pratt 1991, 34) and as a "space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 2003, 6). In line with this general definition, Pratt uses "contact zone" to delineate a social space in which she investigates processes of knowledge production in the encounters of people with different cultural backgrounds. As is clear from her work, this space can be rather varied—Pratt applies the concept to a colonial setting in South America and a modern, multicultural classroom situation alike. Both have a common ground, however, insofar as asymmetrical power relations can be pointed out as driving forces for the ways in which knowledge is produced in these contexts. The notion of power is not only important in analytical terms—for detecting a flow of knowledge from the superior (colonizing) metropolis to the subordinate (colonized) periphery—but is also intended as a "critique of ideology" of European imperialism which forms the basis for metropolitan practices of representation (Pratt 2003, 4). In so doing, Pratt connects with Edward Said's paradigm of "Orientalism," which saw European knowledge production about the Orient as an instrument to legitimate colonial hegemonies (Said 2001).

Asymmetries and power

Quite clearly, colonial powers were an important element in the development of the Eastern Himalayas. The region as a whole was a strategic site for securing the domain of British India against outside forces, but also for expanding its influence into neighbouring territories. Hill sites such as Kalimpong were developed primarily as a result of colonial concerns about expanding the political power of the British Empire; spreading its religious belief systems; feeding its economy through trade and agriculture; and building recreational spaces for its officials. We also have to consider that it was agents within this very system who produced crucial knowledge about the region and its population—as government officials, Christian missionaries, Western academics, adventurers, or religious seekers.

But encounters in Kalimpong did not solely occur between colonizers and colonized. Economic development drew in people from different places within the Himalayas or Asia, who had their own power relations which countered, emphasized, or simply disregarded colonial asymmetries. Furthermore, acknowledging larger asymmetries, colonial or otherwise, does not tell us much about their relevance to concrete agents. Individuals related to these asymmetries in different ways, and Kalimpong's location at the far edge or just beyond the sphere of political influence of different nation-states also made it a space for escaping such power constraints. There, people could meet not only to promote their origins, but also to

avoid or question them.¹⁵ And even within seemingly clear-cut differentiations of superior and subordinate, relationships may reveal a more intricate complexion when we investigate encounters between concrete individuals and their entangled and intimate relationships as they evolve over time. Questions of power are therefore inevitably of importance when looking at Kalimpong encounters, but they must be asked in multilateral terms and by addressing macro- as well as micro-perspectives: what are driving forces in a particular context? How do individual agents relate to these forces? How do they circumvent, use, or produce them?¹⁶

Entanglements and transculturation

For Pratt, too, agency is important in looking at how knowledge is formed and transformed in encounters. While Pratt argues from a rather rigid notion of bipolar asymmetries, she also emphasizes agency on the part of the subordinates (thereby going beyond Said). These then “cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, [but] they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (Pratt 2003, 6). To capture this aspect, she introduces the term “transculturation,” which she takes from Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz. In his analysis of the history of tobacco and sugar in Cuba, which was published in 1940, he used this term to mark transition and transmutation from one culture to another, thereby replacing the conceptual pair of acculturation and deculturation (Ortiz 1995).

For Pratt, the concept of transculturation is important for highlighting the creative processes in which knowledge is shaped in encounters. These she envisions primarily within a flow of knowledge from the (colonial) centre to the (colonized) periphery, where “colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms” (Pratt 2003, 7). In contrast to the ethnographic descriptions produced by Europeans, this mode of representation is described as “autoethnography,” and in this way is distinguished from “autochthonous” self-representations. Influence was also exerted in the opposite direction. Just as colonizers have shaped knowledge of the periphery, so was knowledge within the metropolis shaped by agents from the colonies. A contact zone thus emerges as a space where such flows of knowledge are tightly interwoven.

15 Such processes of “escaping identity” or “cultural reinvention” are common phenomena in border zones, as most recently argued by Howard Campbell (2015). Examples in Kalimpong are the formation of alternative political systems by Tibetans, and critiques of different elements of “Western Modernity” by various Europeans.

16 As Jacques Revel emphasizes with his paradigm of micro-history, the presupposition of a larger general context is problematic as it does not account for the factual multiplicity of social experience; see Revel (1995, 500f.).

In view of these close entanglements, essentialist notions of cultural attributions become problematic: Christian institutions such as churches, schools, or hospitals certainly came from a European background. But when they were established in Kalimpong, they looked and functioned differently than in Scotland. Were they then Indian, or European—or European, but Indianized? Or, when European adherents of Buddhism in Kalimpong propounded a rationalized reading of Tibetan Buddhism, was this Tibetan Buddhism or a European version of it?

As these questions illustrate, the dynamic processes in Kalimpong and other contact zones call for new conceptual frameworks, where cultural production is not tied to an enclosed group, but seen as a dynamic and creative process that in itself produces and transforms notions of cultural boundaries. This view of knowledge production is embodied by what Pratt tentatively calls a “contact perspective.” Such a perspective “emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other,” and, in this way sees them “not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” (Pratt 2003, 7). Cultural contact in this sense appears not as a clash between entities enclosed in rigid boundaries, as Pratt’s divide between colonizers and colonized might suggest, but addresses the relational aspects of encounters. A similar perspective was formulated more clearly in another trajectory of the term “transculturation.”¹⁷

Contact and transculturality

In the late 1990s, Ortiz’s term “transculturation” was taken up by the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (1999). Reformulating it as transculturality, he uses this term as a critical concept to counter the common notion of cultures as separate islands. In this sense it must also be distinguished from the related terms “multiculturality” and “interculturality,” which account for increasing mobility and contact in a globalized world, but which still view cultures principally as closed entities. Transculturality, by contrast, should grasp the inner differentiation, complexity, and hybridity that are typical features of modern societies, on the level of larger groups as well as in the lives of individuals (Welsch 1999, 196–199). In this sense, as the historian Afef Benessaïeh notes, transculturality “refers to an *embodied situation of cultural plurality* lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience” (Benessaïeh 2010, 25). It not only describes notions of identity, but can also be used to qualify knowledge in general terms, pertaining to music, literature, food, and other areas of cultural production (Benessaïeh 2010, 27). From this perspective, cultural encounters do not take place between rigidly delineated cultures, but are an intrinsic part

17 For an overview of different usages of the term transculturality in recent literature, see Benessaïeh (2010).

of how individuals and groups orient themselves in a pluralistic setting, drawing on an enlarged and complex cultural repertoire. Such processes are more visible in the era of globalization, but cultural contact must be seen as the norm rather than the exception in all historical periods. While from this perspective cultures are not seen as stable, but in flux through constant contact, this does not mean that a focus on the entangled nature of cultures should blind us to factual conflicts.

In the context of Kalimpong, cultural plurality was clearly an important feature of the social fabric. In fact, a certain sense of “cosmopolitanism” was often noted, especially by foreign visitors (figure 3).¹⁸

But how did individual agents relate to this pluralistic atmosphere? Can we claim that everyone in Kalimpong drew on different cultural repertoires in equal ways, or are not gestures of resistance and opposition equally important aspects, especially in light of the often conflicted historical situation? Cultural contact may after all take various forms: it may lead to a process of positive appropriation of new cultural knowledge and practices, but it could also evoke separatist sentiments and calls for the rectification of boundaries—what is different might come across as either an opportunity or as a threat.

This last aspect of cultural differentiation was emphasized in a recent critique of Welsch’s formulation of transculturality. As Monica Juneja and Michael Falser have pointed out, especially experiences of exchange and encounters can lead to the need to formulate cultural separation. It is thus important to view transculturality not as a fixed property of pluralist societies, but rather as a heuristic concept if we are to highlight the processes that constitute knowledge production in encounters. These processes may encompass a wide range of strategies such as appropriation, mediation, translation, and transformation of knowledge, but they could also result in resistance or rejection (Juneja and Falser 2013, 19f.).

Understood in this sense, the concept of transculturality can augment a more concise formulation of what Pratt loosely labelled a “contact perspective” by emphasising how knowledge is produced and negotiated in mutual encounters, without presupposing a monolithic body of knowledge that gets into contact in the first place. Contact, in that perspective, is not a one-time event, but a continuing process that is constitutive of all kinds of cultural knowledge. This knowledge is seen to be neither monolithic nor homogeneous, but “fractured, dialogically produced, potentially open-ended, and socially unstable” (Sengupta and Ali 2011, 6).¹⁹ It escapes

18 As an example, Archibald Steele, a journalist writing for the *Herald Tribune*, seemed genuinely impressed by the unexpected convergence of Christian missionaries, Nepali labourers, Tibetan lamas, nobility from Bhutan, Tibet, Europe, and Burma, as well as global researchers on Tibet and the Himalayas that he witnessed in Kalimpong; see his article in the *Himalayan Times*, January 14, 1951, 3–5: http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/himalayan_times [accessed June 22, 2015].

19 As Indra Sengupta and Daud Ali outline in their volume on knowledge production in colonial India, earlier studies in the tradition of Said or the subsequent Subaltern Studies Collective emphasized a strong divide between the power

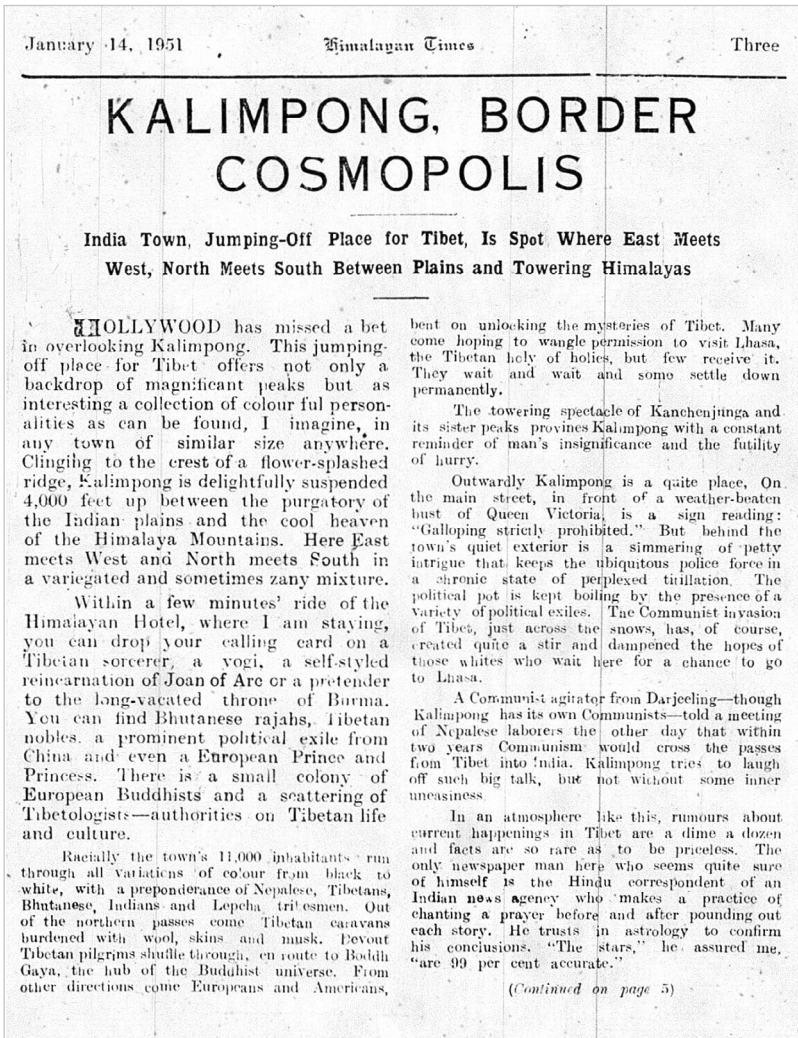


Figure 3: Kalimpong as "Border Cosmopolis"; article by Archibald Steele in the Kalimpong newspaper Himalayan Times from January 14, 1951.

delineation not only along the lines of fixed cultural boundaries, but also in terms of the rigid dichotomy of (strong) colonizers and (weak) colonized that characterizes early studies of knowledge production in a colonial setting, and which was also the point of departure for Pratt’s notion of a contact zone.

In this now “transculturally nuanced” view of a contact perspective, encounters are not seen through the lens of preconceived notions of cultural identities; instead, just how such identities are created in the encounter between people from different backgrounds becomes the focus of attention. What is “Lepcha,” or “European” is not taken as a given, but is open to question and investigation. As a consequence of this perspective, our advance into the cultural history of the region does not use notions of delineated ethnical or cultural groups as a structuring device—a practice common to many publications on the Himalayan region. Instead, the present volume focuses on phenomena that run across such preconceived notions of cultural homogeneity. In addressing key areas, such as religion, education, media, trade, politics, scholarship, and human relations, the articles will follow individual agents as well as the knowledge that is produced in their mutual entanglements across different linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries, using a plethora of local and global sources.

Contents and structure of the volume

The first of the four main sections—“Christian Mission, Educational Institutions, and Identity Formation”—revisits the early and formative phase of Kalimpong’s establishment as an urban centre, which was shaped significantly by the presence of Christian missionaries, the structures they founded, and the ways their knowledge and worldviews interacted with those encountered locally.

In her article, Jayeeta Sharma outlines the general context for the manifold missionary activities that began in the Eastern Himalayas in the second half of the nineteenth century. Focussing on the work of the Reverend John Anderson Graham, arguably the most influential missionary in Kalimpong, she shows how encounters between Christian missionaries and local interlocutors shaped the various projects around print culture, education, health, and social welfare that originated in this context. Being familiar with European Christian public media, Graham initiated several publication

of European colonizers and the colonial state apparatus, on one side, and the agency of indigenous subjects on the other. More recent historical research, by contrast, has to deal with the attempt “to move away from such ‘bifocal’ tendencies and find analytical frameworks that can enable a clearer and more historically accurate understanding of the strange entanglements of colonialism that brought indigenous and colonial groups and individuals to work together on the production of knowledge even while the colonial structure perpetrated acts of violence on and subjugated Indians” (2011, 5).

projects which not only enabled flows of information between European metropolises and the peripheries of their colonies, but which he could also use to raise awareness and money for the educational and social projects he started. Most famous among these are the St Andrew's Colonial Homes, a school and orphanage that he founded in 1900 with the explicit mission of countering British India's "poor white" problem, mixed-race children who were the offspring sired by British tea planters, civil servants, and administrators with local woman, who were commonly excluded from normal educational channels. As Sharma points out, these projects became possible through a combination of several factors: not only Graham's commitment, but also the support of local as well as international sponsors, and the considerable political freedom that missionary activity was granted by the colonial administration in what was perceived as a periphery of the Empire, but one that was effectively connected, even on a global scale.

Andrew May takes a further look at Dr Graham's efforts and offers more of a close-up view of the children's Homes he founded. Modelled on Victorian ideas of social improvement, this cottage-style orphanage brought together children from a wide range of ethnic, linguistic, and also social backgrounds. While its social prestige also attracted a Himalayan and international upper class, the Homes were primarily intended as a haven and a remedy for poor Anglo-Indian children roaming the streets of Calcutta and other urban centres. Here, these illegitimate children were to be turned into "good citizens of the Empire," and trained to look for career prospects in colonial India as well as Australasia and Canada. Drawing on official publications such as the Homes' own *Magazine*, but also private correspondence preserved in archives in Kalimpong and Edinburgh, May paints a vivid picture of Graham's take on educational, social, and racial issues, as well as on the harsh realities of what it meant to grow up as an "inmate" of his Homes.

Charisma Lepcha investigates the long-term effects of Christian missions on indigenous populations. Brought up in Kalimpong herself, she offers an insider's perspective on how encounters with Christianity gave rise to new cultural identities among the Lepchas, which emerged as a complex interplay between Lepcha legends, Biblical beliefs, Nepali narratives, and modern scientific worldviews. The history that she recovers of Bom Church, the oldest church in Kalimpong which was established in 1882, explicates the importance of local agents in this process. Under the influence of early Hindu and Lepcha converts, rather than British missionaries, conversion to Christianity seemed to have occurred more smoothly than in many other places, and not as a radical break with old customs and practices. As Sharma and May emphasized earlier, missionary success was greatly enhanced by its alliance with education and the possibilities of social mobility that the latter facilitated. However, the dominance of Christian ideas among the Lepchas also led to a sense of "cultural loss," and present-day Lepcha Christians / Christian Lepchas are seen to be struggling to find their balance between ethnic and religious identities.

The next section—“Public Spheres, Public Media, and the Creation of Public Knowledge”—brings together articles that use different media to investigate how new public knowledge was formed in the transcultural public space of Kalimpong and other Eastern Himalayan hill stations, a space that was significantly shaped by the adoption of modern media and the global flows of knowledge that they facilitated.

In her contribution on photography, Clare Harris engages more closely with Pratt’s concept of “autoethnography” in order to grasp indigenous agency in the local appropriation of colonial technology and modes of representation. Her investigation of the visual economy of Darjeeling not only addresses photography as a fundamental practice of early knowledge production regarding the Himalayas, but also questions common assumptions about its colonizing character in post-colonial research. Through detailed case studies focused on the genre of the *carte de visite*, she counters practices that split photographic production of the colonial era into images of concrete individuals on the side of the European colonizers, and anonymous exotic “ethnic types” on the side of the colonized. As her reconstruction of the social spaces behind selected images reveals, indigenous agents were not mere subjects of colonial photography. Rather, they appear as important cultural brokers in the introduction of this technology, but also as consumers and, later, benefactors of the industry that emerged around it. Through her historical contextualization of concrete images, a transcultural vision of knowledge production unfolds that acknowledges a shared space of colonizers and colonized, and with that counters processes in which indigenous agents are silenced in colonial archives.

With their contribution on the yeti, the “wild man,” Anna Sawerthal and Davide Torri open up a fruitful avenue of analysis that traces the transformation and reinterpretation of knowledge from modern popular media back to its Himalayan origins. As detailed in the historical review of the various contexts in which the “yeti-complex” unfolds, the Eastern Himalayas played a crucial role in this process by enabling the intersection of two principally different public spheres. Himalayan folk narratives, ethnic origin myths, and religious rituals constitute a collection of mostly orally transmitted knowledge in which the yeti figures as a connection between humans and animated nature. Western scientists, by contrast, sought to integrate the yeti into zoological classification schemes when they encountered stories about the mysterious creature during their attempts to map the Empire’s sphere of influence in the nineteenth century. When European academics, mountaineers, and journalists engaged more closely with indigenous knowledge in mid-twentieth century Kalimpong, this led to a new interest in the yeti in Western mass media. As Sawerthal and Torri point out, modern images of the yeti must therefore be seen as a truly transcultural product. However, using an English- and a Tibetan-language newspaper produced in Kalimpong, their analysis of local adaptations of modern mass media also reveals a continuing rift between local and global public spheres, in which modern “yeti-mania” appears as a decisively Western phenomenon.

Prem Poddar and Lisa Lindkvist Zhang address another public sphere by investigating representations of Kalimpong in Chinese communist media. Their analysis of articles from the *People's Daily*, a propaganda organ of the Chinese Communist party, reveals the changing political relations between China and India that unfolded over three distinct phases between the mid-1950s and early 1960s. While Kalimpong first entered the Chinese public sphere as an idyllic trade hub, tensions with Tibet, the Tibetan presence in Kalimpong, and India's unclear stance on the Tibet issue turned it into a centre for possible political conspiracy in the late 1950s. The Sino-Indian war in 1962 brought clarity to this ambiguity, in which Kalimpong was seen as pervaded by anti-Chinese resentments. Drawing on sources from colonial archives and untranslated Chinese material, as well as recent interviews with Chinese in Kalimpong, Poddar and Lindkvist Zhang paint a vivid picture of how international political relations play out on the ground in a concrete location. Their analysis also highlights something about Kalimpong that only seemed to be contradictory: as a place on the margins of several nations' spheres of political influence, Kalimpong could act as a barometer for reading these countries' core concerns.

The third section—"Things that Connect: Economies and Material Culture"—highlights how material objects and the political, commercial, and religious economies they are part of shaped encounters of various kinds.

Emma Martin draws on the concept of "object lessons" to investigate how knowledge was transmitted and created through the exchange of material objects. In her study of the politically highly charged encounters between the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and Charles Bell, the Political Officer in Sikkim, as representatives of Tibet and British India respectively, she identifies "gifting moments" as salient sites for accumulating knowledge. Put in this perspective, their exchanges of gifts at various meetings in Darjeeling and Kalimpong from 1910 to 1912 were not only important in political and diplomatic terms, as is commonly emphasized. Rather, a close reading reveals these moments to be micro-contact zones that enabled transcultural learning and facilitated the transmission of a complex aggregation of connoisseurial knowledge drawing from South Asian, Tibetan, and Chinese ideas of craftsmanship. By focusing on the agency of material things in these encounters, Martin considers the alternative histories of objects that were silenced by colonial archival practices. However, when their voices are heard, these objects force us to reconsider simplistic notions of colonial knowledge and power, and give way to the more personal and intimate lessons that can be learned through things.

In her article, Tina Harris revisits the "golden era" of Indo-Tibetan cross-border trade, which should be seen as a fundamental lifeline in the economic development of Kalimpong and the greater region in the first half of the twentieth century. By looking at local sources, most importantly the English newspaper *Himalayan Times* and the Tibetan *Mirror (Me long)*, and using personal information from individuals directly involved in the trading economy, she questions a common narrative according to which

trade developed in direct dependence on larger political affairs. Instead of a strictly linear progression, these sources indicate extreme fluctuations that were often caused not so much by man-made politics, but by changes in the environment, trade logistics, or transportation infrastructure. Emphasising a “more-than-human” approach, she shows how trade in the crucial period of the 1950s was affected by a series of natural disasters (most commonly landslides), the availability of pack animals, changes in road conditions, or the introduction of motorised transport. Ironically, this material perspective also allows us to see how humans were trying to cope with these problems on a local level and were not just victims of larger power politics.

Material objects and the economies associated with their production and distribution are also at the centre of the contribution by Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa. In her analysis of the sacred economies of Buddhist material culture, she shows how Kalimpong’s historical function as a contact zone for peoples from diverse backgrounds manifests itself in the present-day marketing of Buddhist goods. As we see from her case studies of the production, consecration, distribution, and consumption of products such as prayer flags, statues, and the sacred substances that make them religiously efficacious, these economies are marked by the highly dynamic confluence of members of different cultural and religious communities, as well as by the intersection of traditional craftsmanship and modern techniques of reproduction. In this way, the focus on local material culture reveals transregional, transreligious, and transnational connections in which Bihari manufacturers, Bhutanese ritual specialists, Hindu Agrawal traders, and newly converted Buddhist customers from Taiwan are part and parcel of an economy that is often simplistically associated solely with Tibetan Buddhism.

The last section—“Scholars, Power, and Knowledge Production”—deals in a more focussed way with the encounters between foreign and indigenous scholars that Kalimpong’s strategic position allowed, and the knowledge that was produced through such interactions.

Trine Brox and Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen revisit the Himalayan sojourn of Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, an old-world ethnographer, explorer, and aristocrat who spent seven years in Kalimpong in the 1950s. Building on Pratt’s conceptual framework, they investigate his activities against the backdrop of three different scalar approaches to viewing Kalimpong as a contact zone. Larger geopolitical factors were responsible for bringing peoples of different backgrounds in contact in the first place, but they also brought about a climate of suspicion, which, in the end, also turned Prince Peter into a political suspect. On the smaller scale of interpersonal relations, the convergence of Tibetan refugees, European academics, Himalayan aristocrats, and others provided a fruitful environment in which Prince Peter is seen manoeuvring to advance his ethnographic aims. Geopolitical and interpersonal challenges, Brox and Koktvedgaard Zeitzen argue, also brought about significant changes in his research

methodology, as he abandoned the old-fashioned expedition mode in favour of a localised approach to ethnographic studies. Taken together, these factors led to the accumulation of an enormous body of ethnographic knowledge and artefacts, gathered in the Eastern Himalayas, but seen as a proxy for Tibet proper.

By contrast, Markus Viehbeck focuses on the ambiguous role of indigenous scholars, not only as assistants to European academics, but also as scholars in their own right. Taking as his example the life of Rindzin Wangpo, a particularly well-connected Tibetan scholar, poet, teacher, research assistant, and Buddhist, he illustrates the intersection of global interests in Himalayan culture and religion with their local representatives in the Eastern Himalayas. Rindzin Wangpo's path from Lhasa to Kalimpong, from London to Sri Lanka opens up a micro-historical perspective through which crucial developments in the study of Tibetan language and religion, Himalayan ethnography, and the emergence of new trends in Buddhism are seen to take shape through complex personal encounters. The dynamics that unfold between larger political, economic, and intellectual trends, on the one hand, and personal interactions, on the other, question preconceived notions of a rigid dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, or European centre and Asian periphery. However, the character of the different sources that Viehbeck uses to paint a nuanced picture of these encounters also forces us to reflect on powers of representation in which the agency of indigenous scholars can be made visible only through the consideration of local material, which is often difficult to access.

Discrepancies in knowledge produced by indigenous and European scholars are also highlighted in the contribution by Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia. Taking the contrasting representations of Buddhism in the work of L. A. Waddell, a British colonial administrator, and those of Kazi Dawa Samdup, a prominent Sikkimese intellectual, as examples, he points to the subversive potential of a contact zone. Drawing on Pratt's terminology, Dawa Samdup's oeuvre is thus seen as a form of "autoethnographic expression" that counters colonial views of Tibetan Buddhism as backward and superstitious, as they were presented in Waddell's influential work *The Buddhism of Tibet*. While Dawa Samdup's translations of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and other important Buddhist texts were aimed as a corrective to European knowledge, he could only rise to this position under European influence: through the Anglophile education he received in a colonial boarding school, the positions he was given in the British colonial administration, and the knowledge that he exchanged with European scholars. As Bhutia shows through an analysis of Dawa Samdup's private correspondence, he had a unique sense of power in these encounters that allowed him to publicise his own vision of Buddhism.

While the core sections of the volume deal with phenomena in the more distant historical past, roughly the first half of the twentieth century, the last article, which acts as an epilogue, makes a connection with Kalimpong's immediate present. Focussing on the reception of Kiran Desai's

Booker prize winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Mealor show how controversies in ethnic representation emerge from Kalimpong’s migrant history and colonial past, but continue to be highly relevant in present-day politics and people’s sentiments. Placed against the backdrop of the ethno-nationalist Gorkhaland agitation, a current that was able to unify not only Indian Nepalis but also other ethnic communities with its call for an independent state in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills, Desai’s work touches upon sensitive issues in the migrant history of the Himalayan border region, in which claims to territory as well as to political and economic power are central issues in the formation and demarcation of ethnic identities. Desai allows a plethora of different voices to make their claims in the novel, thereby highlighting the marginalisation and under-representation that are obvious concerns in her work. However, as Poddar and Mealor argue, the book itself perpetuates representational asymmetries between political and cultural centres and their peripheries, as is illustrated by the differences between the novel’s laudatory reception amongst American, European, and Indian metropolitan audiences, on the one hand, and its condemnation by people and media in the hill region, on the other. Issues of power in knowledge production are thereby exposed as pertinent to colonial contexts, but they also continue to be an issue in present-day global cultural politics.

Conclusions

With its focus on encounters between people from different backgrounds, the contributions to this volume construct the history of Kalimpong as a prime example of a “contact zone.” In doing so, however, they go far beyond a mere literal interpretation of Pratt’s concept as a “place where people, things, or knowledge meet,” a (simplistic) usage of the concept found in the literature of a wide range of disciplines. Instead, the articles gathered here seek to nuance, interrogate, and substantiate this catchphrase in a more sustainable manner, drawing from different aspects of Pratt’s conceptual universe. As emphasized in most of the articles, a key point in this endeavour is the focus on the agency of individuals. Conceptualized as “middlemen,” “go-betweens,” or “cultural brokers” in anthropological research,²⁰ they are seen as taking an important role in the dynamics of various types of contact. They can also act as a link, bringing together larger-scale issues—the more general social, political, or economic developments which belong to Pratt’s emphasis on the role of larger asymmetries of power—and a micro-historical focus on people’s concrete interactions.

20 See Szasz (2001, 4–20) for a review of anthropological approaches to this concept, and Von der Höh (2013) for some recent applications in Historical Studies.

The “copresence” of these people triggers a wide spectrum of actions: using, opposing, or simply ignoring asymmetries of a larger scale. In their encounters, they are seen to adopt from, translate, modify, or oppose each other, thus creating new knowledge. This knowledge is hybrid in nature, as is emphasized in Pratt’s concept of “autoethnography,” which highlights the adoption of certain (colonial) modes of representation by the weaker (colonized) party. It is, however, also highly circular as processes of borrowing or demarcation are seen to be sustained in all directions.

Approaching knowledge production through the lens of individual encounters is only possible if a vast number of sources are analysed. Sources pertaining to many of the agents considered in this volume are scattered along global trajectories, composed in a wide range of languages, and hidden from public view on the shelves of private libraries and archives, or they are suffering from the broader effects of colonial archiving or economic decline in marginalised areas. The wealth of material presented here, often of local nature, thus also echoes Pratt’s intent to counter the marginalizing effects of colonial power relations.

The focus on individuals certainly comes with its own limitations. While it can be useful for exhibiting the dynamic features of encounters which the historical setting of Kalimpong and its neighbouring areas facilitated, the articles gathered in this volume can only provide a few glimpses into the complex cultural history of the region, and the stories of many important characters remain to be told. However, by unearthing some of these stories and by pointing out their global connections, this volume also draws attention to the importance of the Eastern Himalayan borderlands for international politics and global flows of knowledge about Himalayan religion and culture in the first half of the twentieth century, and thereby helps to counterbalance the region’s relative neglect in the academic research of the past decades.

Figures

- Fig. 1: Map created by UvA-Kaartenmakers.
Fig. 2: Courtesy of Kodak Store, Kalimpong.
Fig. 3: Courtesy of Isrun Engelhardt.

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PART I

Christian Mission,
Educational
Institutions, and
Identity Formation

Jayeeta Sharma

Kalimpong as a Transcultural Missionary Contact Zone

Abstract This article explores Kalimpong as a transformative mountain space for mixed-race children, a locality closely associated with a range of imperial missionary activity, notably through the personality and career of its famous adoptive citizen, the Rev. John Anderson Graham, the founder of the St Andrew's Colonial Homes, now known as Graham's Homes. From the 1870s, the Foreign Mission of the Church of Scotland undertook an array of activities directed at the diverse populations of the hill-station towns of Kalimpong and Darjeeling on the mountainous edges of British India and the regions of Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim, and Tibet. The chapter examines how Scottish Presbyterian associational networks around print, religion, education, social reform, and self-help enterprises helped develop Kalimpong's role as a transcultural and transnational hub that functioned as a key contact zone in the Eastern Himalayan region.

Introduction

This chapter explores Kalimpong as a dynamic contact zone for transcultural and transnational missionary interactions. It explores those historical trajectories with particular reference to the Eastern Himalayan Mission of the Church of Scotland, as well as the associational and transnational networks that emerged around this space. Since the 1870s, the Foreign Mission of the Church of Scotland had undertaken Christian preaching and local outreach around the British Indian hill-station towns of Kalimpong and Darjeeling, particularly in the areas of education and health, which had considerable local demand. In 1887, the Rev. John Anderson Graham arrived there as a representative of the Young Men's Guild of Scotland. Within a few years, he expanded into a second career as an imperial reformer who aimed to find a solution to what contemporary observers called the "poor white problem" for British India. He sought to achieve this through the St Andrew's Colonial Homes, a pedagogical and bio-political institution inspired by late Victorian cottage homes that became in essence a transcultural contact zone where subaltern children could be socialized into the colonizer's culture. As the inter-workings of empire and mission drew local interlocutors and imperial emissaries into encounters around print culture, education, health, philanthropy, and civic action, this article examines Kalimpong in its role as a transnational contact zone of the Eastern Himalayas where "peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 2003, 6–7).

Scottish and Presbyterian roots

Of Celtic parentage, John Anderson Graham was born in 1861 in London where, like many educated Scots, his father worked for the government as a customs official (Perry 2008). After his father's retirement, he spent a happy childhood "running barefoot over the moors" around Glenboig farm at Cardross, Dunbartonshire, on the family smallholding. This bucolic upbringing was crucial to the childrearing and economic philosophy that later underlay his Kalimpong Homes (Minto 1974). The Graham family belonged to the lower reaches of a British middle class that, for the most part, expected sons to supplement the household income once they had finished primary school. The exception would be a brilliant student for whom a family might be able to provide opportunities for higher education and a professional career. Social mobility through education was easier in Victorian Scotland than in other parts of Britain due to the excellence of its free primary schools (Anderson 1983). The thirteen-year-old Graham showed little talent for the classics, which would have enabled him to stay on at the parish school. But his unfashionable aptitude for figures helped

him to obtain a junior clerkship at a Glasgow law firm. Even a brief exposure to city and office life showed this prescient youth that limited schooling would give him little scope for future advancement. He decided to resume formal education at Glasgow High School by residing at the Cardross farm and commuting to save on rent. Soon this determination earned him a civil service position that would serve as a stepping-stone to law studies.

Ironically, the next fourteen years that John Graham spent in and around Edinburgh courts did not transform him into a city lawyer. Instead he became a colonial missionary and imperial social reformer. The compelling reasons lay in the social circles of the Scottish capital city where he found congenial companionship. In staunchly Presbyterian Edinburgh, the majority of middle-class leisure activities revolved around kirk circles, especially through the Young Men's Fellowship Association where Graham began to officiate as Secretary. Such instances of what Jose Harris terms the influential currents of Victorian "associational culture" brought Graham into close contact with Edinburgh's influential personalities, such as the Rev. Archibald Charteris (Harris 1994). Inspired by such examples, Graham resigned from his legal clerking job and matriculated at Edinburgh University with the eventual aim of taking holy orders. He received support and encouragement from his former parish minister, the Rev. John McMurtrie of St Bernard's Church. The latter was the editor of the Church of Scotland's influential new magazine *The Christian Life and Work* that the Rev. Charteris had established in 1879, for which he hired Graham as a clerk.¹ This position connected him to Charteris's other associational innovation, the Young Men's Guilds and Women's Guilds, whose widespread branches incorporated lay workers into kirk activities (Magnusson 1987, 58).

During this Edinburgh existence, John Graham experienced firsthand the potential of such grassroots initiatives to harness the energies of ordinary citizens in the cause of religious and reformist outreach. The *Life and Work* stint convinced him that his mentors were right when they held that the printing press was such an effective mobilization tool that the Christian apostles would have used it had they had the opportunity. After just one year, *Life and Work* acquired as many as 70,000 subscribers (Kernohan 1979, 9–13). Such associational activity gave Graham firsthand exposure to the transformative potential of what the Rev. Charteris termed "Applied Christianity," a world where devout men and women might work, worship, and socialize together (Minto 1974, 8). Such institutions, which allowed ordinary people to harness faith to secular service and civic activity, became seminal to Graham's career when he later founded the *St Andrew* and *St Andrew's Colonial Homes* magazines, and established the transnational networks of supporters and volunteers that coalesced around his Homes, alongside the local Guild branches that enrolled Himalayan converts as members.

1 The *Life and Work* magazine still exists today, in its 137th year. <http://www.lifeandwork.org/about-us/who-we-are>.

In 1885, the year that Graham joined the Divinity Hall of Edinburgh University, his mentor, the Rev. McMurtrie, became Convener of the Church of Scotland's Foreign Mission Committee. A strong enthusiast for the support of overseas missionaries, McMurtrie's new responsibilities had an immense influence on Graham, who helped him prepare magazine supplements for *Life and Work* that showcased their local and global endeavors, such as a special issue about Ceylon-based congregations (Kernohan 1979, 14). Such print and publicity initiatives inspired Scots to sustain imperial kirk activities through long-term strategies that went beyond the usual cash and clothing parish contributions to missionary boxes. One such strategy originated from James Dunlop of Hamilton, who proposed in 1885 that the Young Men's Guild should sponsor its own overseas missionary. Guild members all across the country endorsed this proposal (Manuel 1914, 30-31). In response to their offer, the Foreign Mission Committee requested that the Guilds join them in the maintenance of an existing Indian endeavor, specifically the Kalimpong division of the Eastern Himalayan Mission. The newly qualified Graham offered himself as the first candidate, receiving support from 164 Guild branches to the generous amount of £364 a year (Minto 1974, 13-14).

In 1889, Graham voyaged to the Darjeeling-Kalimpong borderlands, which lay on the frontiers of India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet, alongside his new bride, Katherine McConachie. They had met when she was a lay worker for the Edinburgh University Missionary Association, where both she and John volunteered to work with slum children of the city. Over the next half-century, the Grahams brought up a family of six at Kalimpong. They periodically returned on furlough to Edinburgh, especially when he became the first missionary elected as Moderator of the Church of Scotland, but the longest portion of their life was spent in the Himalayas. Both Grahams received the Kaiser-i-Hind medal from the Viceroy of India, John in 1905 and Katherine in 1916, in recognition of public service roles that transcended the conventional sphere of the missionary.

Shortly after his arrival at Kalimpong, alongside regular pastoral duties, John Graham initiated several printed forums that would bring his colonial subjects and metropolitan supporters into contact, if not at firsthand, at least at secondhand through missionary accounts. The first forum was a magazine on the lines of *Life and Work*, titled *St Andrew: A Quarterly Record of the Life and Work of the Church of Scotland in India and Ceylon* which showcased missionary work on those distant fields for Scottish audiences. In 1897, Graham published his first book, *On the Threshold of Three Closed Lands*, a work that vividly described his Guild-sponsored endeavors at picturesque Kalimpong (Graham 1897). The first edition of 10,000, moderately priced at six pence in Britain and eight *annas* in India, sold out, necessitating a second printing in 1905 (Perry 2008). Magazines as diverse as the *Scottish Guardian*, *The Englishman*, and *Indian Witness* praised the book, noting that the hundred or so illustrations of Himalayan scenes by missionary photographers were even more attractive than its narrative on

the true “light of Asia” (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News* 1897, 25). Such comments signaled that this book resonated with a variety of readers who thrilled to colorful travels in distant lands (Allen 2000, 92–107). Graham’s next publication, the *Missionary Expansion of the Reformed Churches*, published in 1898, received praise as a “lucid and comprehensive survey in moderate compass of missionary effort the world over” but lacked the exotic and visual ingredients of his first effort (*The Pioneer* 1898, February 8: NCC). Over the next few decades, not only Graham’s writings but his public addresses delivered on furlough tours captivated Scottish audiences at venues that ranged from Dundee, Falkirk, and Motherwell all the way to the northern isles of Shetland, where Edinburgh missionaries had journeyed a century ago to preach to remote seafaring peoples, the contact zone of an earlier, domestic era in Scottish Presbyterian history.²

Kalimpong and the “Three Closed Lands”

“On the north-eastern frontier of our Indian Empire lie three lands within which the European missionary may not preach, and it is to the confines of these—Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal—we are to go” (Graham 1897, 11). Readers of *The Three Closed Lands* could imagine Graham’s mission field through the persona of a Guild traveler who journeyed for thousands of miles via steamer, rail, and horseback until she reached distant Kalimpong, situated on top of a 4,000-foot high ridge (figure 1). The hamlet lay in the shadow of picturesque Mount Kanchenjunga, against peaks loftier and stranger than any in Scotland, but emerging as a landscape whose new urban landmarks resonated with Scottish meaning. The Guild visitor began her perambulations with the elegant prospect of a church tower that rendered an unfamiliar setting “pleasantly suggestive of some parish kirk in the home land” (Graham 1897, 24). That building was the Macfarlane Memorial Church. Graham described how at the church inauguration in 1890, the Auld Kirk flag that flew over the Himalayas was lent by a parishioner, George Watt Christison, the Scottish co-founder of the Darjeeling Tea Company. Dr. Herdman of Melrose, a former Convener of the Foreign Mission, presided over the inauguration, with the domestic church represented by a Scottish visitor, Mr. Waddell of Jedburgh, who was the clan head of another Scot stationed at Darjeeling, the Himalayan scholar and army doctor Laurence Waddell, who later acted as a cultural expert for the Younghusband mission that waged war on Tibet. Beyond the church lay the recently opened Charteris Hospital and the preaching

2 Accounts of speeches Graham delivered during his 1895–97 furlough and advertisements for meetings where he was the star speaker appeared in Scottish newspapers such as the *Falkirk Herald*, September 25, 1895; *Motherwell Times*, September 4, 1896; *Dundee Courier*, April 3, 1897; and the *Shetland Times*, April 18, 1896; accessed January 30, 2016, British Newspaper Archive (BNA); <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>.



Figure 1: Missionary carried up mountains by porters; c.1890.

house, the Scottish Universities' Mission house, and a teacher-training institute recently moved from Darjeeling to Kalimpong. Inside the majestic gothic church, the Guild traveler might attend a service in Tibetan, Nepali, or English, while she gazed upon walls whose texts declared God's love in Christ (John iii.16) in ten vernacular languages (Manuel 1914, 66–68). The photographic illustrations to *The Three Closed Lands*, reproduced from snapshots taken by fellow missionaries, provided local color through sights such as the North Indian migrant barber shaving his customers by the wayside, another migrant, the Marwari merchant at his accounts, itinerant Tibetan musicians, Nepalese farmers plowing rice-fields, and a Lepcha headman with his family.

Two decades before Graham's arrival, the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission had established its Eastern Himalayan outposts under the Rev. William Macfarlane, formerly of Drumbuie, St Andrews, and Glasgow, who arrived in India as a missionary in 1865. After a few years in Bihar, Macfarlane moved to the Darjeeling region of the Bengal Presidency when he surmised that such a frontier location would be more rewarding than his previous Gaya field, whose powerful high-caste landlords showed open hostility to his missionary work. He became acquainted with a Darjeeling planter, Captain Jorden, who had sponsored several Lepcha and Nepali students at the Gaya orphanage school, with a view to employing them as plantation clerks. By the 1860s, Darjeeling was known not just as a salubrious British-Indian hill station, the simulacrum of European temperate zones where white colonizers might recuperate away from tropical

summers, but as a promising venue for the cultivation of a globally desired beverage, tea, cultivated on largely European-owned plantations.

Captain Jorden's assurance of support from the influential planter community of Darjeeling was an important factor behind Macfarlane's relocation, given the hostility from local elites he had faced at his previous outpost (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News* 1895, 146: CSMA). But when he realized that his new congregation consisted primarily of European planters and their migrant workers from Nepal, he decided to expand into the neighboring Kalimpong locality where there resided a larger population of indigenous Rong or Lepchas. The latter seemed promising subjects for Christian conversion since they "differ(ed) from the Hindoos in having a simpler social system, free from the institutions of caste, in having no powerful priesthood, and in being far less bound by traditional religion" (*Home and Foreign Missionary Record* 1879, December 1: CSMA). However, this proselytization objective was gradually supplemented, if not overshadowed by the educational, health, and child rescue efforts, which resonated most strongly with locals because they often served as their first points of transcultural contact.

In 1863, the British colonial state first encountered Kalimpong as a tiny, inconsequential hamlet that had belonged to Bhutan when Sir Ashley Eden was sent there as its special envoy (Pemberton 1864). His diplomatic efforts failed to avert the tensions that erupted into skirmishes that pitted Bhutanese royal guards armed with matchlocks and bows against a modern military force. In the wake of the British victory, the Treaty of Sinchula awarded the British the hamlet of Kalimpong and adjacent lands. Marfarlane's colleagues described for Scottish readers a pretty, bucolic village where patches of native cultivation alternated with clumps of trees in a seemingly English vista. The Grahams' Kalimpong had expanded from that tiny frontier village with just a few huts into a bustling town where mobile people from Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, and China made daily contact with ideas, goods, and individuals that circulated from British-ruled Indian territories as they encountered the British and European missionaries, officials, and travelers who sojourned and settled there.

During his first year at the Mission, Graham supervised five local preachers whose activities extended over four stations—Kalimpong, Sitong, Mangwa, and Sunathong (*The Christian Express* 1890, January 1: NCC). By 1891, the area had 696 local Christians supported by seven catechists (*Darjeeling Mission Local Supplement*, 1891, 1: CSMA). Once a week, Graham and those catechists were a conspicuous sight as they preached to the hundreds of people who traveled to the town to patronize the Kalimpong market. After a few years, their efforts received solid support from a medical dispensary where locals who came to be healed then might stay to pray. At that lively weekly market manifestation of Kalimpong's contact zone, Graham's fictional visitor would as easily encounter Tibetan nomads selling wool as Lepcha and Nepali cultivators purveying locally grown cardamoms. She would find familiar displays of factory goods from Manchester, Birmingham, and Germany, sold by Marwari wholesalers-cum-moneylenders who themselves

purchased Himalayan staples to resell elsewhere at considerable profits. She would survey the vendors and customers who thronged shops for local country liquors distilled in peasant homes from millet and *mahua* plants. Given the strong temperance beliefs that characterized the typical Presbyterian, she would certainly shun those liquors in favor of a rival stall that brewed Tibetan butter tea, the preferred beverage for numerous traders from Tibet, Bhutan, and Sikkim, as well as the occasional Chinese traveler. Back at the church, the visitor might already have met Mrs. Korb, a wool merchant's wife who played the harmonium and conducted the boys' choir. At the market she could watch the latter's husband conducting his import business, the basis of which was the wool purchases he made from itinerant Tibetan traders selling at the Kalimpong market (Graham 1897, 34–52). For first-timers from Tibet, this was their initial contact with Europeans and the dazzling products of modernity, such as the copper dishes and other factory products that would be purchased at Kalimpong before traveling in mule panniers to elite customers at Lhasa and elsewhere.

Mission and local contact

For Graham and his colleagues, roadside preaching was a cherished strategy that appealed strongly to an older generation of missionaries as well as to domestic supporters in Scotland. However, it was becoming increasingly evident to missionary groups around the world that rather than preaching, education and health formed the best approaches for a strong local presence. This followed the distinctive Presbyterian approach to mission evolved in the rugged, isolated habitats of the Scottish Highlands, where a population with strong communal identities had received access to education through domestic missionaries and became empowered by their local leaders' participation in the country's church hierarchy (Semple 2003, 116). Cognizant of how gospel, literacy, and local support had marched hand in hand in the far reaches of their country, Scottish missionaries in the Himalayas resolved that "(while) the primary aim was to teach in the bazaars on Sundays, and villages and wherever people may hear, in the vernacular language," they would also "teach (natives) to read and write in their own language, as a valuable secondary agency" (*Home and Foreign Missionary Record*, 1872, January 1: CSMA). Those Presbyterians were not alone in this resolution. Across late nineteenth-century British India, missionaries of all denominations pragmatically began to focus on education and medicine as the best methods to make lasting contact with locals. In this, they ran counter to the beliefs of their metropolitan superiors, who still nurtured roseate views about roadside preaching as a hallowed apostolic tradition. This divergence of local missionaries from the center may be viewed as a creative response to the transculturation of their intended subjects since "subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, (but) they do determine to

varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (Pratt 1991, 6).

These Scottish missionaries in the Eastern Himalayas rapidly became aware of how desperately modern educational investment was needed. Across those sparsely populated mountain environs, there was little infrastructure for formal schooling, other than the monastic knowledge provided to future Buddhist lamas (Dewan 1991, 65–66). After the Woods Dispatch of 1854 made it incumbent upon British authorities in India to provide facilities for primary schooling, a government school was established at Darjeeling in 1856. A decade after its foundation, the school struggled with only thirty-six pupils on its rolls, the sons of East India Company native *sepoy* soldiers and a few traders’ sons, the only locals who could afford fees that ranged from one to four *annas* a month. Eventually, the school bifurcated into two institutions with differing objectives and constituencies. One was a Bhutia Boarding School that educated select Tibetan-speaking boys in surveying and other skills useful for the imperial state. The other was a *Zilla* (district) school for the type of Anglo-vernacular education (English and Hindi) that had become the norm in British India’s establishment, named the Darjeeling High School (Dewan 1991, 84–96).

Across the hill-station spaces of Kalimpong, Kurseong, and Darjeeling, European missionary educational forays were multipronged in character. They included an abortive English Baptist venture to educate Lepcha male converts, as well as expensive boarding schools such as Loreto Convent and St Paul’s School that attracted domiciled European boys and girls sent to escape the tropical plains. In contrast to such elite institutions that resembled British public schools, the Scottish Presbyterians confined their schooling efforts to more subaltern groups. This focus was undoubtedly connected to the colonial state entrusting the region’s primary schools to the supervision of the Rev. Macfarlane (Hunter 1874, 194). This state policy to farm out primary education was not unusual for such peripheral regions, where the colonial state saved on money and personnel when it devolved its civil responsibilities to non-state actors such as planters and missionaries. The Scottish Presbyterian missionaries who had benefited from the excellent state education system of their homeland displayed a considerable commitment to educating the subaltern locals with whom they came in contact. Their connections with the locality’s European population, especially the planters, was helpful in this regard. Aside from the public funds the state granted them toward primary education, the Mission successfully obtained stipends to the extent of Rs 60 a month from the managers of nine plantations, the majority of whom were Scotsmen, to fund fifty-five schools in thirty-eight villages around tea tracts (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1898, 48: CSMA).

In the Kalimpong area, the first primary school, named the Church of Scotland Mission School, was established in 1873. Three years later, another school was started at the Lepcha-dominated village of Sitong, under the charge of a local teacher-convert named Dyongshi. By 1889, Kalimpong’s



Figure 2 (left): Rev. William Macfarlane and Darjeeling converts, c.1870s. From top left to bottom right: William Macfarlane, Kartik Singh, Rev. Dyongshi Sada, Suhkam Limboo.

Figure 3 (right): Rev. Gangaprasad Pradhan in his robes as the first Himalayan ordained clergyman, c.1900s.

rural parishes had nine schools, with 274 students on the rolls, only ninety-one of whom were Christians, with a handful of girls among them. Several schools were open in the evenings so that students could attend after working in the fields (Dewan 1991, 108–112). Most village teachers were Christians. They received stipends of Rs 7–8 pm to teach basic subjects from Hindi (or Urdu in Roman script) primers, making themselves understood to students using colloquial Bengali, Nepali, or Lepcha (Hunter 1874, 194).

Finding a critical mass of teachers for these schools would have been impossible without the contribution of the Darjeeling Normal School where, from the earliest days, Macfarlane presciently trained local boys as teachers and catechists (figure 2). The Normal School was conducted on Bell-Lancastrian lines, that era’s predominant schooling model where a single teacher managed numerous students of disparate ages and abilities, assisted by older pupil-teachers who taught the younger ones. The Normal School enrolled around thirty students a year from the Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepali communities. The government’s provision of scholarships was an additional facility that allowed students such as Gangaprasad Pradhan, Sukhman Limbu, and Dyongshi to access Macfarlane’s training and leave behind humble laboring and peasant livelihoods to become gainfully employed teachers, catechists, and translators (figure 3). This became a new type of urban-centered mobility in the contact zone that

effectively demonstrated to other locals the potential gains from missionary encounter and educational effort. The Rev. and Miss Macfarlane retained sole charge of teacher training until the arrival of two more missionaries, Archibald Turnbull and W.S. Sutherland, enabled the Mission to branch out, particularly into the preparation of vernacular texts in collaboration with local converts, and the provision of better educational facilities.

After 1886, when the Scottish Universities Mission offered additional support of some 2,000 pounds, the Normal School moved to Kalimpong to function as the revamped Scottish Universities Mission Institute (SUMI), a teacher-training institute with an attached school. The former attracted students from far and wide, and SUMI graduates formed the core of the personnel who staffed the region's educational institutions, which catered to non-elite locals. The best-known of them was to be an itinerant Tibetan Christian from the Western Himalayas, Gergan Tharchin, today one of the most researched subjects among scholars of transnational cultural encounters (The Tharchin Collection: Columbia University Library). Tharchin graduated from SUMI to a job as a Tibetan instructor, but when he became a Mission press employee it was his inspirational contact with Graham's world of print that impelled him to publish the world's first Tibetan newspaper. From 1925, this was his labor of love, a transcultural duty to his adopted motherland of Tibet undertaken on an obsolete printing machine that was his employer's gift.

Another set of Mission interventions sought to promote female education and provide training in vocational, marketable skills and crafts. Missionary inspiration came from the Scottish parishes, where the former had had their own upbringing, and where subaltern women (and men) had received much better opportunities for basic schooling than was possible in prosperous neighboring England. Partly, this project gained strength from gendered expectations that the future wives and mothers who made up local congregations required re-forming, especially as potential help-meets for Mission-trained young men. At the urging of Miss Macfarlane, who had started a Zenana section for the Mission, a girls' school was established at Darjeeling in 1873, with twenty-four girls enrolled as boarders and day scholars. There were eighty-four girls on the 1897 rolls, of whom thirty-one were boarders. Despite a government grant-in-aid of Rs 50 a month, the school's fees were fairly high, between Rs 2-10 a month. In a few cases families paid them, but the majority of students who hailed from modest backgrounds were funded through contributions from Scottish parishes. Newsletter articles reported on these female students for the benefit of such sponsors: "They do their own cooking and housework, wear their own dress (with a uniform colour at school) and eat in their own way. Four have to be on duty for a week at a time on one of the five duties—morning or afternoon cooking, tidying and keeping in order schoolrooms, dormitories, and teachers rooms" (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1897, 38-41; CSMA). Instruction was carried out in Hindi, Bengali, and English and they studied geography, grammar, and arithmetic.



Figure 4: Girls' School and Industries Hostel, Kalimpong, c.1900s.

One difference from other schools lay in the fact that prizes for these female students were awarded solely for prowess in knitting, sewing, conduct, and cooking, a clear elevation of gendered domestic skills over literacy and numeracy. It is hard to speculate what portion of such graduates employed these skills for careers outside the household, since missionary records chose to stress only that they made ideal helpmeets for male teachers and catechists of the region. In 1890, Katharine Graham started a small girls school at the Kalimpong Mission compound that later became the Kalimpong Girls School (figure 4). At the outset, she was assisted by a Miss Higginson sent from the Church of Scotland's Calcutta branch, along with a youthful Bengali Christian woman teacher, Buddhimaya. By 1889, as the school expanded to thirty-one girls, Christians and Hindus, the Women's Guild added a trained teacher from Scotland, Miss Lily Waugh, to head a boarding wing (Dewan 1991, 119).

Another missionary intervention took the form of vocational, skills-based training at the Mission Lace School, where Katharine Graham enlisted European teachers to teach lace-making techniques to local women. Once lace-making classes took off, the Mission offered training to men and women in other income-generating handicrafts such as carpentry, Tibetan-rug and handbag weaving, block-printing, and embroidery. These classes laid the foundation for the Kalimpong Arts and Crafts Centre, whose products were showcased at Sales of Work that took place in Calcutta, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bombay, and London. In 1911, these lace-makers received gratifying attention when newspapers reported

that a distinguished Scottish aristocrat, the Marchioness of Tullibardine, gifted a Brussels lace handkerchief they made to Queen Mary (*The Times of India*, February 20, 1911). The Grahams' networking connections garnered for this vocational program a level of success that eluded the usual small enterprise, and circulated its handcrafted products far and wide. In 1931, thousands of Scottish people read an Edinburgh minister's eloquent account of a sunset over Mount Kanchenjunga, Graham's blowing of a Tibetan trumpet, and Kalimpong lace being made to adorn the robes worn at the Moderator's installation (*The Scotsman*, March 2, 1931). An even larger audience yearned after such lace when newspapers reported that John Graham, the new Moderator, so delighted Queen Alexandra with his gift of a lace tablecloth when he called at the royal residence of Balmoral in the Highlands that she placed several more orders (*The Scotsman*, September 21, 1931).

Beyond Scotland, metropolitan consumers who sought a more exotic product than lace could purchase Himalayan-styled artisanal goods from Kalimpong at the famed Liberty store on Regent Street, London that specialized in Oriental-style home décor (Fleming 2004, 246). Kalimpong Arts and Crafts products attracted the attention of connoisseurs such as Harry Peach, whose Dryad Handicrafts was the largest supplier for the interwar Anglo-American world. At showrooms in Leicester and London, his Dryad firm held missionary exhibitions that displayed hand-woven clothing and other crafts from Kalimpong (The Arts and Crafts Story/Dryad Handicrafts). Whether at Sales of Work or high-street showrooms, this was a recurring variety of transcultural encounter that revolved around an emergent global consumer's imperium where ordinary people used such products of empire in their homes as an everyday form of connection with distant worlds (Hoganson 2007). Sadly, changing fashions and inaccessible raw materials led to the demise of the lace craft, but the textiles and woodwork that the Kalimpong Arts and Crafts pioneered are still found in European museums and local shops, as past and present testimony to the material dimensions of the contact zone as it operated between local artisans and missionary patrons (figure 5).

Health provisioning was a critical aspect of the Scottish missionaries' activities that gained strength as it tapped metropolitan and imperial networks of philanthropy and biomedical expertise. Alex McKay considers Western medical technologies a powerful "tool" (he uses Daniel Headrick's classic term) for missionaries to gain a strong footing in Himalayan society, which developed alongside a British imperial presence expanding into those borderlands (McKay 2007, 21). From the 1870s onward, medicine became a key conversion strategy as the advent of bacteriology-based treatments rendered the Western healer's efficacy far more potent than those of her indigenous rivals, which was not always the case for earlier generations of missionaries (Arnold 1985, Fitzgerald 2001). During the early years of the Mission, Macfarlane's health services during the cholera epidemic of 1876 brought him into close contact with Kalimpong locals



Figure 5: Lace class, Kalimpong Arts and Crafts, undated.

who previously were so mistrustful that they would not let him through the door. Rosemary Fitzgerald mentions the “double cure,” the twofold healing of the body and the soul, as a popular concept among late nineteenth-century missionaries. Only seven medical missionaries were located in India during 1858, but this figure climbed to twenty-eight in 1882, 140 in 1885, and escalated further in the early twentieth century (Fitzgerald 1997).

Shortly after her arrival at Kalimpong, Katharine Graham started a small dispensary on the mission grounds, staffed by a local nurse and medical auxiliary. Before this, local patients had to travel all the way to Darjeeling to attend its already overburdened Victoria Memorial Dispensary or Lewis Sanatorium. After missionary print publications featured the Kalimpong medical facility as a worthy cause to support, the Women’s Guild took on the task of upgrading the dispensary to a twenty-five-bed hospital, named after the Rev. Charteris. The Bengal government agreed to bear half the building costs (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1894, Letter from Rev. Charteris: CSMA). Guild branches eagerly raised ten pounds a year to fund hospital beds that would be named after their Scottish sponsors. The planter George Christison laid the hospital’s foundation stone just a few years after his presence at the Macfarlane Church inauguration, another affirmation of the close ties between the Mission and the planter community. The hospital awaited the arrival of Dr. Charles Frederic Ponder, another Darjeeling tea planter who had forsaken his prior occupation and enrolled at Edinburgh’s medical school in order to fulfill the Mission’s requirement for a European health professional. On Dr. Ponder’s arrival, the Rev. Charteris dispatched a public address to the missionary newsletter

where he discoursed on the nurturing links between Kalimpong and Scotland, embodied in the person of the Rev. Graham, who represented the Young Men's Guild, and Dr. Ponder, the new representative of the Women's Guild (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1893, 26: CSMA). Unlike schools, there existed indigenous healing options, but the powerful attraction of Western biomedicine meant that in a single month, Dr. Ponder and his sister, Nurse Ponder, treated 1,588 patients at the dispensary even before the hospital formally opened (Manuel 1914, 134–137). The Ponders started pharmacy classes to train local boys as compounders, and later nursing classes that enrolled local girls and the Homes' female students (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1894, 11: CSMA). As with teacher training and vocational skills, locals took advantage of such opportunities to contact and acquire "useful" modernity (McKay 2007, 40). Despite the limited nature of such opportunities, they proved crucial to social mobility, given the daunting challenges that subaltern and non-elites groups from such borderlands faced if they even managed to aspire to seeking out better education and training in cities such as Calcutta. Neither missionary education nor Western biomedicine directly produced mass conversions on the large scale that missionaries would have preferred, but they were crucial to local acceptance and mobility patterns. Advertisements posted in Scottish newspapers such as the *Aberdeen Journal* and *The Scotsman* to recruit teachers and nurses for SUMI and the Charteris hospital continued well into the twentieth century. A mix of political and cultural circumstances gradually ushered in a transition from imperial to local personnel (except at the highest ranks), many of the latter being familial descendants of early Mission graduates.

Philanthropy augmented the scope of this biomedical enterprise as colonial, imperial, and diasporic networks from India, Scotland, Canada, and Australia connected, through legacies, sponsorships, and at times, activism, to the contact zone of Kalimpong, where compatriots labored. A notable legacy was that of the late Miss Charlotte Anderson of Woodside, Fife, who left money in her will to the Kalimpong Medical Mission (*Dundee Courier*, February 12, 1907: BNA). After the Ponders retired, the Edinburgh medicos Dr. William Roy Macdonald and nurse Jeanie Campbell found themselves treating Kalimpong patients in hospital beds marked with the names of Scottish localities, such as Pollokshields, Plesance, Perth, Wippen et al., that had sponsored those beds. The first hospital compounder, Dingbu, owed his education to a sponsorship from the St Stephen's Guild of Edinburgh, and then his salary to one from the Young Men's Guild of Calcutta. At SUMI, a "new special supporter," the Sunday School of St Andrew's Church, Montreal, funded the schooling of a Darjeeling local, Samsun (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1897, 30: CSMA). Its minister, the Rev. J. Edgar Hill, a Scottish migrant from Dundee, connected his Montreal congregation with the Young Men's and Women's Guilds of Scotland, whose actions inspired Canadian brethren to assist Himalayan men, women, and children in institutions such as SUMI, and later, the Homes (Anon. 1882,

175). A new connection with South Australia began in 1911 in the person of the hospital's first woman doctor, Dr. Laura Fowler Hope, a graduate of the University of Adelaide (Hope Correspondence). Such far-flung networks became crucial to Kalimpong as a transcultural contact zone.

An uncrowned king of Kalimpong

The missionary dominance of Kalimpong's social spaces was particularly marked in comparison to Darjeeling, the summer capital of Bengal and a tea industry hub where British official and planter landmarks, such as the Bengal Governor's summer residence and the Planter's Club, were more prominent than its manses. William McGovern, a flamboyant American traveler on his way to Tibet in disguise and allegedly the inspiration for the filmic Indiana Jones, remarked that "The senior missionaries form the local aristocracy, overawing even the British-Indian officials; and Dr. Graham, the head of the mission, is the uncrowned king of Kalimpong, the arbiter and dispenser of justice even to those not inside the Christian fold" (McGovern 1924, 21–22). In *The Three Closed Lands*, Graham dispatched his fictional Guild visitor to visit the Daling estate manager and Lepcha Buddhist chief Tenduk and his Bhutia wife. Raja Tenduk, the reader was informed, was a powerful landowner recently honored for his services to the British state vis-à-vis Bhutan (Graham 1897, 49–50). The polite tone of this encounter with a local chief was an ecumenical gesture rare in the genre of missionary writing, a sign of Graham's evolving eclecticism, which became most visible in his civic activities in the locality.

John Graham's towering stature in the contact zone might seem to stem from his missionary rank and charismatic personality, but in reality, owed much to his transcultural alliances with non-European and non-Christian neighbors. One such ally was the cloth merchant, banker, and contractor Ramchandra Mintri, whose father and uncle arrived in the Himalayas during the 1850s as migrant traders from Churu in Rajasthan (personal communication, Benu Mintri, March 2013). Mintri's conservative Marwari community usually restricted charitable activities to religious and caste kin, but a mutually beneficial association with Graham allowed both to transcend sectarian ties. This association started with a local campaign to endow a Victoria Memorial, where Graham supplemented Mintri's generous monetary contribution with humble one-anna contributions solicited from ordinary citizens (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900, 200: CSMA). The Memorial took the form of the late Queen-Empress Victoria's bust placed within a fountain enclosure carved and painted by Sikkim lamas in Tibetan and Newar-inspired motifs designed by the Calcutta School of Art Principal Ernest Havell, a vocal champion of local artisanal crafts. At the inauguration of the Memorial by Sir John Woodburn, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, he and Graham departed from standard protocol when they made their ceremonial remarks in Hindustani, a

deferential gesture toward the local citizens and the vernacular civic spirit which made the Memorial possible (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1902, 359: CSMA). Mintri had already funded a Coronation dispensary near the Kalimpong Bazaar at a cost of Rs 2,500 that acted as a field extension of the Charteris hospital (Manuel 1914, 148). Later, he donated a water system to the Homes. Another Memorial donor, Raja Gongzim Ugyen Dorji, Bhutan's representative at Kalimpong and a major landowner, became a financial benefactor of the hospital and the Homes and instrumental in creating a long-standing relationship for Graham with Bhutanese noble families (Dorji 2008; Tashi 2015). Until recently, the latter sent their sons to the Homes, an intriguing choice given its subaltern character compared to the prestige of other European-style public schools in India.

In 1890, the Kalimpong Mela was held for the first time as a popular annual event that would continue for many decades, and later lend its name to the post-colonial town's public grounds. It originated in former farm boy Graham's awareness of the need to showcase the improvement possibilities for small cultivators, crofters in his Scottish parlance. Unlike the Darjeeling area, where plantation interests reigned supreme, the land rights of small cultivators received legal protection around Kalimpong when the British government prohibited plantation tea cultivation. Meant to showcase and encourage indigenous crofters' achievements, the Mela expanded into a massive agri-horticultural show whose highlights included a Tibetan mule and Bhutia pony fair, a children's Bible school, sports competitions, handicraft and music events, and agricultural and animal husbandry prizes. Hundreds of people flocked to it every December (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1899, 109: CSMA). Three years after the Mela started, Julien Adrian Hiliare Louis, a Polish Catholic traveler to the Himalayas and a Royal Geographical Society member, marveled at the tremendous bustle as participants prepared to compete for prizes in myriad categories, from the best Himalayan costume, to cattle, cloth, cheese, or tea, and to learn about up-to-date silk-reeling equipment, agricultural implements, and sugarcane cultivation. Louis found it noteworthy that Graham translated the District Commissioner's inaugural speech from English into the Nepali vernacular, increasingly the local lingua franca (Louis 1894, 48–50).

The wide scope of Graham's civic activities and his alliances with local elites does not imply that he lost sight of enduring Mission ambitions to penetrate the three closed lands and win over Himalayan converts over those vast territories from its Kalimpong base. Graham was thrilled when his parish members decided to dispatch a Kalimpong Mission into Bhutan, seeking to create their own contact zone there. On the model of the Scottish Guilds that sent Graham to Kalimpong, those local congregations voted to pay Rs 12–18 a month to support their Bhutan missionary, a considerable commitment for peasant households (*The Christian Express*, June 1, 1891, 87, and August 1, 1892, 124: NCC). Sukhman, a Normal School graduate, volunteered to lead the Bhutan contingent, which meant that

he relinquished a comfortable catechist salary of Rs 30 a month for a bare subsistence. His untimely death temporarily derailed this plan, but Bhutan did become Kalimpong's thirteenth parish (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1895, 1: CSMA).

For the moment, the other closed lands, Nepal and Tibet, remained alluringly elusive. Graham and his colleagues, beholden to official patronage, respected the British government's sensitivity to the Tibetan state's fear of Christianity, but evinced sympathy for the flamboyant missionary maverick Annie Taylor who made several well-publicized attempts to enter and preach in Tibet. Interestingly, in the same Scottish Presbyterian missionary newsletter that described her exploits, the Revs. Sutherland and Macara wrote how they were briefly imprisoned in Tibet. On their vacation, they had traveled from Kalimpong into Sikkim, Nepal, and Bhutan. Deliberately or otherwise—it remained unclear—they intruded into that portion of Tibet “that comes down like a wedge between Sikkim and Bhutan” and successfully ventured as far as the trading post of Yatung, where Chinese soldiers intercepted them and escorted them back into India (*The Christian Express*, October 1, 1894, 154–155: NCC). This adventure seems inspired as much by high spirits and a thirst for borderland exploration as by the crusading zeal that Annie Taylor epitomized, but its publication shows the expansive tenor of missionary dreams that they shared on this occasion with readers, even as they perforce adhered to colonial regulations. While mystical Tibet remained a major target for gathering heathen souls, the Mission newsletter testified triumphantly that Nepali converts voluntarily journeyed back to their homeland to spread the Word (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1893, 22: CSMA).

In 1914, another book appeared about the Guild mission to the Himalayas, *The Gladdening River*. The author was Rev. D.G. Manuel, a distinguished clerical historian who wrote it to mark the Foreign Mission's semi-jubilee year (*Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, 1913, October 7: BNA). Describing the Guild mission as a “river whose streams made glad,” his book arose from research conducted during Manuel's Kalimpong visits in 1905 and 1914, the *Life and Work* magazine archives, and lengthy conversations with Graham. Both books, *The Three Closed Lands* and *The Gladdening River*, opened with lengthy forewords from Governors of Bengal—Sir Charles Alfred Elliott in the first, Baron Carmichael of Skirling in the second. These prestigious pedigrees were indicative, firstly, of the solid approbation that this frontier missionary venture enjoyed from Victorian Britain's official establishment, and secondly, of an expanding network of elite and middle-class British and colonial supporters, over and beyond older core audiences linked to clerical networks. There were other reasons, too, why Graham's ventures, especially his new enterprise at Kalimpong, earned such support from official opinion. Termed by Manuel the “Great Overflow,” Graham's ambitious project of the St Andrew's Colonial Homes, where he intended to school “poor white” children in Scottish Christian virtues, was a timely solution to a pressing social problem that afflicted British India.

The poor whites of empire

When British India's public forums highlighted the particular social problem of so-called "poor whites," the reportage was along on the lines of this *Times of India* article which dramatically bemoaned: "One of the cruellest sights in Calcutta is the blue eyed tawny haired child, clad in dirty dhoti or tattered breeks, begging in Hindustani around the bazaar or other public places" (*The Times of India*, March 4, 1910). In such a fashion, English-language newspapers and government bodies expressed concern about the "poor white" problem, and the increasing incidence of pauperism among domiciled Europeans and Eurasians (Andrews 2005; Arnold 1979, 1983; Hubel 2004; Mizutani 2011). Privately, there was much shaking of heads among imperial social reformers, missionaries, administrators, and educationists over the fate of mixed-race children in India, the unacknowledged but numerous offspring of British tea planters, civil servants, army personnel, and businessmen who had entered into (usually illicit) liaisons with "native" women. Late Victorian moral scruples about inter-racial sexualities meant that those children were denied the normal educational channels for domiciled Europeans. Mixed-race children were a constant reminder of racial miscegenation and a mockery of the frail morality of the ruling race. Ostracized by respectable Indians and British, most mixed-race children ended up as "poor whites" on city streets. Newspapers and commentators portrayed this as an acute problem that threatened existing social and racial hierarchies.

Official and non-official responses took two forms, punitive and reformative. Punitive state measures included laws such as the European Vagrancy Act XXI of 1869 to prevent "destitute persons of European extraction" wandering throughout India (Theobald 1870, 336–338). Reforming measures targeted specific categories of "poor whites" for rescue, typically children and young people, as they created commissions to investigate the problem and suggest educational and employment solutions (Anon. 1892). One such solution took the form of the St Andrew's Colonial Homes, where the pure air of the temperate Himalayas would assist in schooling "poor white" children into a useful workforce instead of their feared degeneration into the ranks of the urban proletariat.

In 1900, the Mission newsletter announced the establishment of such a children's home at Kalimpong, where Eurasian and European children would be suitably trained for emigration to British colonies (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900, 67: CSMA). Readers were told of "the sad condition of many children among the poor white and Eurasian population of India, through poverty and unfavorable social surroundings" (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900, 118: CSMA). True to his belief in the power of print, Graham released the first issue of the biannual *St Andrew's Colonial Homes Magazine*, where he photographed the first children along with their new matron, a missionary widow named Margaret Cattrell-Jones. In the same issue, a tea planter, a Calcutta

merchant, and a barrister, a respectable galaxy of middle-class opinion in British India, wrote approvingly of this. Graham expressed his confidence that in future, the Homes would be entirely supported by friends in India, even as he launched publicity efforts to reach audiences beyond its shores. (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900, 20: CSMA). By the second issue, Graham announced that the Homes magazine already had 10,000 subscribers (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900, 261: CSMA).

From the late nineteenth century onward, British reformers discredited the grim Dickensian orphanage and workhouse model in favor of cottage homes (Webb 1902). Graham implemented such a modern child-rescue solution on a hundred acres of land granted by the Bengal government, atop the picturesque Deolo hill that overlooked Kalimpong. His inspirations came from England, where Thomas Barnardo established cottages at Ilford, as well as from Scotland, where William Quarrier ran his orphan homes on the outskirts of Glasgow (Murdoch 2006; Magnusson 2006). Following their examples, Graham placed child recruits in quasi-family cottages in the charge of a housemother and an aunty assistant, where they were to receive training in useful trades, domestic skills, and Christian piety. The objective was to provide a basic general and industrial education. Once the children reached a certain age, boys would be trained as farm workers, girls as housekeepers and children's nurses.

The Victorian ideas of social improvement, as well as of industrial and spiritual uplift that had characterized Graham's own Scottish upbringing were translated and transmuted into his new Himalayan enterprise. In contrast to India, where upper-class locals were criticized for their aversion to manual labor and British colonizers for over-reliance on their servants, the white settler colonies seemed best for the sturdy self-reliance that Graham wished to inculcate. A much vaunted absence of domestic servants at the Homes cottages meant that the children had to perform all chores, from cleaning to cooking, something unheard of in any European-style institution or even in a middle-class Indian household (*The Times of India*, February 5, 1908). Philanthropic and church networks mobilized a constant supply of employees from Britain and its white settler colonies to staff the Homes. This was necessary since Eurasians and domiciled Europeans were not deemed acceptable (until the decolonization era). Graham issued regular advertisements in newspapers such as the *Aberdeen Journal*, the *Dundee Courier*, the *Scotsman*, and even the *Times of India* to hire teachers and housemothers willing to travel to the Homes and work on either a stipendiary or voluntary basis. The first housemother had worked for Barnardo at Ilford, while another had done a stint at the Edinburgh children's hospital, the first of many Scottish volunteers who supplemented the ranks of the paid recruits (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900, 189: CSMA). In one year, the children's numbers rose from two to twenty-four under Mrs. Cattrell-Jones and her assistants, the cottage housemothers

and aunties.³ Admirers compared “the practical training and the thorough grounding in discipline given at the Homes with the unpractical training, purely literary, and the utter lack of discipline in British Board schools and Indian government institutions” (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1901, 178: CSMA).

Since the 1860s, metropolitan reformers sought to rescue British slum children through repatriation to labor-short Dominions, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Langfield 2004). Graham expressed his hope that his English idol, Dr. Barnardo would assist in helping the Homes children migrate to the colonies, since he and Quarrier had been engaged in such activities for a while (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900, 141–2: CSMA).⁴ However, in the case of slum children from London and Glasgow, the whiteness of their blood was not in question. Unlike Quarrier and Barnardo, who dealt with the human consequences of industrial capitalism and urban poverty in the metropolis, Graham sought to rescue children “in (whose) veins there runs blood that calls for a higher end but ending up as jetsam and flotsam of Indian cities [...] credited with the vices of both races and the virtues of neither” (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News* 1902, 322: CSMA). Graham hoped that on the Australian outback or the Canadian prairie, where there was insufficient European labor, these Himalayan borderlands children might acquire value after receiving suitable training. Graham’s child recruits were not yet truly white, in deportment or character, or even appearance, but they could be schooled into “whiteness” and “Britishness” by an exclusively British staff who would train them in basic literacy as well as in useful trades. The Colonial part of the Homes name denoted a hopeful destination, as well as the values of self-sufficiency and independence that Graham hoped to inculcate (figure 6).

Throughout the nineteenth century, colonial entrepreneurs with connections to India and Australia advocated sending poor whites from one colony to the other, to the benefit of both. Starting in 1828, Charles Prinsep, who was from an influential colonial family with myriad business and official dealings in Eastern India that branched into Western Australia, lobbied the Governor-General, Sir William Bentinck, to adopt such a policy, and continued to do so for several decades. During the 1830s, the East India Company government decided against this, partly due to opposition from British fathers, and its own conviction that those children still had a place in India. Rural Australian landowners had asked for Indian indentured labor, but city residents staunchly opposed this. Weighty opposition to Indian emigration came from British policymakers such as Sir James Stephen, the head of the Colonial Office, who regarded the colonies as

3 “St Andrew’s Colonial Homes.” *Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1901, 178; Eastern Himalayan Mission Papers, Reel 26.

4 “St Andrew’s Colonial Homes.” *Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1900: 141–2, Eastern Himalayan Mission Papers, Reel 26.



Figure 6: Rev. John Anderson Graham with staff, children and teachers from the Homes and Mission, c.1930s.

an asylum for England's surplus numbers. Despite setbacks, Prinsep continued to lobby for Indian labor immigration (Allbrook 2002). Old India hands such as Sir Edward Coventry Braddon, the Agent-General for Tasmania, joined him in advocating Australia as the ideal retirement locale for Anglo-Indians (British men working in India), particularly as their children would do well there (Braddon 1892–93). However, while colonial landowners campaigned for policies that might bring certain categories of British Indian migrants to the Antipodes, provincial legislatures began to enact exclusion laws whose objective was to reserve Australia for European migrants.

Australia's provincial laws culminated in 1901 with the infamous Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act. Between 1901 and 1973 immigration to Australia became governed by the White Australia policy, which prevented non-Europeans from entering Australia for residence except under special circumstances. Nonetheless, taking inspiration from another British colony, Natal, the Act was not absolute in its racial definition. Rather, it granted absolute discretion for immigration officials to deny entry to migrants deemed undesirable through instruments such as the Dictation Test (Jupp 1995). In the era of White Australia, such racialized regimes faced a policy dilemma—either they continued to be grossly under-populated in terms of Northern European settlers or they relaxed their definitions of whiteness on a case by case basis. Marilyn Lake examines how in the new global histories of race of the late nineteenth century, the “temperate zone” was reconceptualized, defensively so, as

white man's country. The British colonies of America, Australia, and South Africa were portrayed in historico-geographical terms as an extension of Europe, albeit one where the white race was besieged. Lake argues that White Australian immigration policies were conceived in the context of and in response to such global histories, rather than domestic concerns in isolation. Following global debates in the United States, South America, and elsewhere over white men under siege by non-white races, Australia's federal fathers arrived at a transnational identification of whiteness and sought to safeguard it (Lake 2004). In the light of such newly transnational conceptions, it seemed to Graham and his supporters that the lighter-skinned members of British India's "poor whites" might very well earn a place within the strictures of the White Australia policy, if they were suitably identified and trained at a young age. Thanks to the discretion offered to immigration officials to apply the Dictation Test, those Homes children whose physiognomy and demeanor successfully conformed to the ideas of whiteness, were able to enter the country as sought-after laboring migrants. We know from recent research and public history initiatives that many such cases slipped through the net of racialized immigration policies.

Kim and his Kalimpong kin

In 1901, Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* came to the public eye with a bang through its serial publication in *McClure's Magazine*, followed by the book edition by Macmillan & Company. Kipling's *Kim* received glowing reviews all over the English-speaking world in print forums as diverse as the *British Medical Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *The Journal of Education*, *The Australasian*, *The Argus*, *The Camperdown Chronicle*, and *The Sewanee Review*. Just one year after the novel's publication, John Graham adroitly linked his Homes' children to this worldwide bestseller with the evocative phrase "Kim and his kin" that he devised for publicity materials (*Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News* 1902, 322-324: CSMA). He used the phrase to refer to the mixed-race children he had assembled in Kalimpong for the first time in the Mission newsletter of 1902, where he appealed for readers to support the new Homes. Such an evocation of the fictional Kim's real-life kin was repeatedly resurrected in print and on the radio, all the way from India to Britain to the United States to New Zealand. That unforgettable phrase effectively connected the Kalimpong Homes to the global audience who had thrilled to the orphan's "fascinating story of India" (*New York Times*, September 28, 1901). Aware of Kipling's insistence that Kim was unimpeachably white in his heredity, at least some readers understood enough of the novel's imperial setting to recognize that his soldier father might well have begotten children on other, non-white mothers, as did the fathers of many children whom Graham sought to rescue at the Homes. Ironically, Graham's own employer, the Foreign

Mission of the Church of Scotland, long remained ambivalent toward the Homes' children and what they represented. While established pillars of the Presbyterian religious establishment such as the Young Men's Guild and the Edinburgh cleric Archibald Charteris quickly pledged support for Graham's new institution, the Church of Scotland's official establishment pursued a policy of public silence on it. Influential lay supporters of the Foreign Mission such as the Glasgow businessman James Paterson warned Graham that he should not let the Homes' claims interfere with his special obligation to advance the task of proselytization. Graham's biographer, James Minto, declared that such attitudes stemmed out of a combination of pious embarrassment about illicit sex and misgivings about the Homes' financial viability (Minto 1974, 56–59). Bernard Brooks, later the first Anglo-Indian to become Homes Principal, wrote that Graham fruitlessly pleaded for three years for the Foreign Mission authorities to lend its name to the Homes (Brooks 2014, 21). In all likelihood, in addition to moralistic qualms about British India's "poor waifs," the Foreign Mission feared the diversion of resources from the conversion and outreach toward local, native populations that to its mind formed the key components of missionary activity.

Certainly, the case might be made that the Homes did cause a diversion of funds from other Mission activities, given the thousands of pounds and rupees that Graham managed to raise in the name of Kim's kin. Shortly after the foundation of the Homes, a committee started work in Britain, chaired by Sir William Muir, the Chancellor of Edinburgh University, that aimed to raise a thousand pounds toward this "admirable object" (*The Pioneer*, Nov 4, 1901: BNA). Church workers organized annual Sales of Work in different British and Indian cities, to benefit the official missionary charities. From the 1910s, many of those Sales instead targeted funds to support the St Andrew's Colonial Homes and its associated organizations at Kalimpong. For instance, in August 1911, a Sale of Work was held at a Dundee church to support the Monzievard and Strowan bed at the Kalimpong hospital (*Dundee Courier*, August 31, 1911: BNA). That same year, a public meeting was held to promote the Kalimpong Homes, whose speakers included the Homes' principal, James Simpson, and a staff member who was visiting Scotland on leave, Miss Campbell (*Belshill Speaker*, October 13, 1911: BNA). Beginning in 1914, annual meetings were held for supporters and subscribers to the Homes, initially at Edinburgh and Glasgow, then at London, and eventually further afield. It is possible that a fair proportion of such philanthropic funds that reached the Homes might have originated from people who were not regular donors to other missionary causes.

Graham never failed to remind imperial audiences that the Kims at his Homes were victims who bore the burden of parental sins, not their own, and deserved sympathy and assistance from the wider reaches of the British Empire. For instance, numerous children at the Homes hailed from poor Anglo-Indian families living in Calcutta, but a substantial

majority arrived from the plantations of Assam and Darjeeling, the illicit offspring of white planter men and the laboring women, the managers and workers for the “empire’s gardens” that produced one of Britain’s key global commodities (Sharma 2011). Those “tea garden children” became less prominent as the years went by, both in Homes enrollments and in the institution’s public image. There is a fair amount of truth to the local lore that Graham’s urge to found the Homes lay less in the urge to ameliorate the lives of mixed-race slum children and more in the blue-eyed children he glimpsed in the workers’ quarters of tea plantations on visits to white neighbors and planter friends in the Eastern Himalayas. While large numbers of Assam, Darjeeling, and Dooars’ planters openly avowed their stalwart support of the Homes, personal familial contact with the children’s pasts was seldom acknowledged for fear of scandal. The Homes was remembered in a number of wills, such as that of David Waddell Lyle, a retired Assam planter, the residue of whose estate was bequeathed to the Homes (*The Scotsman*, April 22, 1919). But it remained unclear whether he had a familial connection that inspired the legacy, or whether such a legacy arose from a general philanthropic instinct to support a cause dear to the planter’s heart.

Personal connections among Raj personnel to the Homes were shrouded in secrecy, not only due to the illicit nature of the Indian liaisons that birthed many of its children, but due to the secret fathers’ connections to legitimate kin across Britain. We can speculate that since public announcements only mentioned that the Homes served needy children of European descent, supporters who lacked direct knowledge of British India’s sexual and social mores, may not have realized that it housed large numbers of illegitimate children. Indeed, recent works of scholarship that have relied on particular archives in Britain took these children at face value as the poor Anglo-Indian children that the majority of the public statements declared them to be (Mizutani 2011). The term “poor Anglo-Indians” did describe a majority of the Homes children, but for many of them, their pasts, presents, and futures were more complex than that, as we are gradually coming to understand. Recent insights into the complicated “tense and tender ties” that connected the Homes to plantation liaisons and, subsequently, to imperial networks of migration, have arisen through the unconventional channels of oral histories and family accounts that have emerged into the public realm as past prejudices and active participants die away (McCabe 2014, May 2013, Sharma 2016). Well into the twenty-first century, Kalimpong sees an annual wave of global visitors, as the descendants of Homes children journey there from the former reaches of the British Empire to excavate and recover their personal histories of the contact zone.

Figures

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Andrew J. May

Our Miniature Heaven: Forming Identities at Dr Graham's Homes

Abstract In 1908 Katherine Graham, wife of the Reverend Dr John Anderson Graham, wrote to her own children about the recent arrival of three girls who spoke Khasi with only a few words of English and Bengali, describing them as “quite different to the people here,” but “an interesting addition” to the St Andrew’s Colonial Homes at Kalimpong. “There is a great conglomeration of races and languages in the lace hostel at present,” she noted. “A friend here calls it our miniature heaven.”¹ Heaven or hell are, of course, relative terms. This discussion will consider the foundational and complex role of Dr Graham as a cultural and political broker and intermediary, who at the same time both reinforced and unsettled British ideas of race, education, morality and colonialism. Pratt’s notion of contact zones, around which this volume coalesces (Pratt 1992), might lead us to inquire not simply into the literal and symbolic spaces between vastly different cultures and belief systems, but also between competing and transforming senses of what it meant to be British, Christian, white and modern.

1 K. Graham, 22 September 1908, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 9.

Since the 1990s, a transnational historiography has been turning its attention to issues of the mixed-race progeny of the colonial encounter. Christopher Hawes's *Poor Relations* (1996) and Ann Laura Stoler's work on the Indische in the Dutch East Indies were early explorations of colonialism and mixed-race identity production. More recently, Damon Jeremia Salesa has explored the way in which mixed-race relationships could be constructed positively, as a strategy of improvement rather than a troublesome burden. "Race crossing" in the nineteenth century, argues Salesa (2011, 1), was considered something of a "serious and recurrent problem," though its meanings have varied significantly from one place to the next. Warwick Anderson (2002, 244), exploring whiteness as a fluid category in scientific discourse, examined colonial anxieties around racial degeneration and the manner in which "settlement and nationality would have a biological foundation." Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds (2008) have also historicised exclusionist racial policies in Australasia, North America and South Africa, while Satoshi Mizutani's important contribution (2011) has examined the concomitant meanings of whiteness in the domiciled community of British India. Mizutani has observed that, along with slum clearance, housing reform, and more stringent measures surrounding charitable relief, programs of collective removal and migration were instigated by British officials "as the most radical method of tackling the Eurasian question" (Mizutani 2011, 137). A chapter of Mizutani's book focuses appropriately on St Andrew's Colonial Homes in Kalimpong and the manner in which Graham's solution to the Eurasian problem was embedded in and drew legitimacy from much broader historical ideologies of child removal and rescue.

In her study of Anglo-Indian women's imaginative geographies, Alison Blunt notes that "Although metaphorical references to hybridity abound, material histories and geographies of mixed descent remain largely absent from postcolonial theorizing and diaspora studies" (Blunt 2005, 11). Remnant archives of Dr Graham's Homes might, therefore, reveal some of the paradoxes and contradictions of the children's lives as mixed-race imperial subjects. The ideological paternalism of a colonial orphanage can never be unhitched from the undeniably traumatic and harsh realities of child removal. Dr Graham's Homes and the discourses within which it was framed and constructed—through official publications as well as in private correspondence—also played a role in challenging the racial boundaries of the global colour line that were hardening in settler colonies like Australia. It is in the remnant archive of the early decades of the Homes—in the *Saint Andrew's Colonial Homes Magazine* as well as in the Homes archives in Kalimpong and in Edinburgh—that fleeting glimpses can be caught of these transforming notions of transcultural encounter.

Under the auspices of the Church of Scotland, the Reverend John Anderson Graham (1861–1942), together with his wife Katherine (Kate), had leased some land from the government on Deolo Hill to the east of Kalimpong where they established a non-sectarian orphanage to accommodate

Eurasian (now “Anglo-Indian”) children.² A preliminary appeal was circulated amongst Graham’s friends in February 1900, and a Board of Management formed in May. An application for the grant of land at Kalimpong was submitted to the government in August, and the first cottage opened on 24 September 1900. Early appeal literature characterised the poor white and Eurasian children as “nearly as degraded as the heathen”:

There the inmates, irrespective of creed, will receive a sound elementary English education, and such an industrial training in agriculture and various handicrafts as will equip them for earning an honest livelihood, and render them more likely to become good citizens of the Empire.³

Kalimpong’s location at altitude had practical as well as symbolic resonance for Graham: the locale was contiguous with the large agricultural populations working across the headquarters of significant government estates in the Eastern Himalayas; like other hill-station sanatoria, it had a healthy disposition 700 feet or so above the village, itself 4,000 feet above sea level; and it was nestled above the conceits of European vice in a zone whose rarefied air lent some kind of spiritual energy to the enterprise. As R.A. Fleming noted more overtly in his Christian hagiography of Graham, climbers who stopped by Kalimpong on their way to Mount Everest saw in Graham someone “who has lifted up his eyes unto the hills whiter and holier still—and climbed them, and spoken with God upon their summit; descending again with a message of love, and freight of untold blessing, to the teeming multitudes below” (Fleming 1931, 90). The mountains always had a strange and ineluctable purchase on imagination, reinforcing the symbolic power of the place. The vista of Kanchenjunga from the Homes was an enduring leitmotif in the memories and recollections of old Homes girls and boys (known in the Homes community as OGBs). “I wonder,” mused former Homes boy Larry in Bristol in 1949, “will God have mountains in heaven?”⁴

This sense of a clarified and hermetic social locus was significant, but Graham was also alert to the sensibilities of paying parents who would not wish their children to rub shoulders with more underprivileged inmates or, as the magazine-as-prospectus indicated, “be allowed to mix with those who might injure their manners or morals.”⁵ In some respects, however, this was a pragmatic response at the inception of an institution that was seeking to attract a broad and diverse clientele. Graham’s ideological incli-

2 For Graham’s early account, see Graham 1897, Chapter XIV.

3 Appeal on Behalf of St Andrew’s Colonial Homes, Kalimpong and Nimbong, Glasgow, October 1900. Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 15, Packet 1, Miscellaneous papers, 1857, 1880–1925.

4 Larry J., Bristol to James Purdie, Kalimpong, 1 August 1949, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 13, Packet 2.

5 *Saint Andrew’s Colonial Homes Magazine*, February 1901, 3.

nation was more eclectic and blurry at the edges; it was no slip of the pen that the first edition of the *Magazine*, just as it set a welcoming agenda for mixed-race children, sought also to open a space for discussion of “every shade of thought.”⁶

Graham modelled his concept of the Homes on William Quarrier’s Orphan Homes of Scotland, which had been opened in 1876 and which Graham had visited in the 1890s. Graham was greatly influenced by the philosophies of applied Christianity espoused by the Reverend Professor W. Charteris in Scotland (Magnusson 2006, Minto 1974, Mainwaring 2000), and the origins of his Homes lay in the earlier work of Scottish missionary William Macfarlane of Darjeeling, who established an outpost of his mission there in the 1870s (Semple 2003, 125; Fleming 1931, 14f.). From the outset, the professed object of Dr Graham’s Homes was to “plead the cause of those Indian children in whose veins runs British blood,” and the *Magazine* became a critical mouthpiece of Graham’s remedial agenda.

To fitly educate and to provide suitable openings for the Eurasian and poor European children is one of India’s most pressing problems. It is intended at St. Andrew’s Colonial Homes to attempt a solution of the problem by giving such a course of training to suitable children as will fit them for emigration to the Colonies, or, failing that, will make them more robust for work in India.⁷

A skilled networker, Graham installed himself as “Honorary Superintendent” and was expert at applying moral pressure in order to glean broad scale official support from the highest quarters for an enterprise that was “the despair of Indian administrators, and the reproach of British Christianity” (Gordon 1912, 343). Sir John Woodburn, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, was the inaugural Honorary President of the Board of Management,⁸ which was presided over by J.A. Bourdillon (Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal) and which counted as Honorary Vice-Presidents Sir Charles A. Elliott (late Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal), the Very Reverend Professor Charteris of Edinburgh, Sir William Muir (late Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Provinces), Sir Allan Arthur (Calcutta merchant and administrator, erstwhile President of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce), James Buckingham (author of *Tea-Garden Coolies in Assam*, manager of the Amgoorie Tea Estate, and one-time member of the Indian Imperial Legislative Council), and Calcutta High Court barrister L.P. Pugh. Other members of the Board included planters from tea estates in the Dooars and Darjeeling, Kalimpong merchants, and ministers of religion from Darjeeling, the Dooars and Kurseong (figure 1).

6 *Saint Andrew’s Colonial Homes Magazine*, February 1901, 2.

7 *Saint Andrew’s Colonial Homes Magazine*, February 1901, 3.

8 Woodburn, according to Jessie Robertson, was initially “much opposed” to Graham’s scheme. Jessie Robertson to her mother, no date [November 1900], Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 9.



Figure 1: "Cutting the School site—Kinchinjunga in the back-ground."

The first Homes cottage for twenty children had been a hired bungalow, and the foundation stone of the inaugural cottage (named Woodburn after the Lieutenant-Governor) was laid in November 1900. Subsequent cottages and other elements of the campus were thereafter named after key benefactors (including Elliott Cottage, opened 1902; Bourdillon School, opened in 1903; and Campbell Cottage, named after Dr J.A. Campbell M.P. of Stracathro). Strachan Cottage was inaugurated in 1904 by Sir Robert Laidlaw of Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co., who had extensive interests in tea and rubber, and who on his death left money to the Homes.⁹ As Cindy L. Perry cogently observes, Graham "functioned as a virtual intermediary" for the British government in its negotiations with neighbouring Bhutan (Perry 2004). The Homes patroness, Her Majesty Queen Mary, was later succeeded in that role in 1955 by Countess Mountbatten of Burma. Graham himself received the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal of the First Class from His Majesty the King-Emperor of India (1903), the Companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire at the coronation durbar of George V (1911), and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (1928), as well as of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (1936).

Jessie Robertson was the sister of a Dooars tea planter and had come to work at the Homes in 1900. For Robertson, the enterprise was something of an adventure. On the morning of 1 November, she observed a hundred "coolies" labouring to level the site for Woodburn Cottage. "Most of them," she noted, "had most ridiculous little [kodalies] little better than toys. I took one out of a man's hand when Mr G's back was turned & had a shot [...] the coolies laughed libre to split to see me howking away [...] not a bit

9 *The West Australian*, 21 January 1916, 5.

hard work.”¹⁰ A few days later she was anticipating with some excitement the arrival of the first two girls, and the Homes register notes the arrival of fifteen-year-old Eurasian Mabel Clarke on 12 November.

By the end of 1906 there were 187 children in residence. Dr Graham was soon known as “Daddy Graham” to his charges, and while symbolically representing the paternal authority of the state, the Homes were practically modelled on ideal conceptions of family life through domestic organisation structured around a cottage system.¹¹ The Homes complex was rather like a self-sufficient village housing 305 children at the time of its tenth anniversary in 1910, and over 600 residents by the mid-1920s, when it featured a chapel, infirmary and school, together with an experimental farm, gymnasium, and industrial training workshops. The Homes children themselves (boys as well as girls), along with the lady workers, comprised the domestic labour force in the operation, and there was a deliberate policy of not having any native servants. Aside from an assertion of “Protestant principles,” religious training was non-denominational. A “housemother” was in charge of each of the cottages housing twenty-six children, and housemothers were generally recruited from Britain, Australia, and later from the United States. The ideal housemother, in the view of Jessie Robertson, was “a ‘purpose like’ woman. [...] So many lassies wd like to go thinking more of the ‘romance’ than of the stern reality.”¹² Graham thus gathered around him a number of staff with previous institutional experience. James Purdie arrived at Kalimpong in 1908 following a career working in prisons in Glasgow, and new worker Miss Pyle who arrived in 1908 had been working at Quarrier’s Homes. Housemother Miss Hunter, the daughter of an Aberdeenshire farmer, was recruited from Barnardo’s Girls Village Home at Ilford in Essex. Miss Hunter had been in charge of Myrtle, the first cottage dating from 1876, and in her application for employment at Dr Grahams gave a description of the daily routine of life there, where she was “mother” to sixteen children (figure 2).¹³

The Homes *Magazine* commenced publication just five months after operations began, and its pages betray the middle-class Evangelical tropes of charity, rescue, and paternalism. In the February 1901 issue of the *Magazine*, G.W. Christison, late of Tukvar, Darjeeling, gave a view on the philanthropic scheme “From a Tea Planter’s and Agriculturalist’s Standpoint.” Having spent over two decades in the region, Christison’s vision splendid of the potential of Kalimpong as “a model Native Colony” under the benign influence of British occupation fell well short of his expectations in terms of its industrial and agricultural capacity. Board of Management member

10 Jessie Robertson, Kalimpong 1 November 1900 to [her brother] George, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 9.

11 See also Jacobs 2009, 281.

12 Jessie Robertson, Edinburgh to the Rev. Graham, 30 May 1901, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box. 9.

13 M. Hunter to Miss Robertson, 22 April 1901, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box. 9.



Figure 2: Lace Class, Kalimpong, postcard dated 1908.

L.P. Pugh, former President of the Imperial Anglo-Indian Association, was more directly sanguine about the Anglo-Indian Problem in “A Barrister’s Stand-Point”; whatever the cause of the obdurate problem of mixed-raced offspring, Pugh advanced, “a better day has dawned,” and the Homes promised to be a practical solution to a wicked problem that had been an intractable concern for government. Other Christian commentators were more direct in attributing moral blame as the cause of mixed-race offspring—“It was always a blunder; it was usually a sin” (Fleming 1931, 34)—though Mainwaring notes that the young British planters of the era were rarely rebuked for their sexual liaisons, indeed perhaps even “unofficially encouraged” by their companies (Mainwaring 2000, 5).

By 1903, the inauguration of the Homes and the reception of the first children on 25 September 1900 was celebrated as “Foundation Day,” and article headlines and image captions in the *Magazine* quickly constructed an institutional tradition based around domestic ideology: “Our First Temporary Home,” “The Beginnings of our family,” “Our Increasing Family.” The opening page of the original intake register—housed in a Museum at the Homes in Kalimpong when I first visited in 2004—records the names of domiciled European children Gwenllian, Llewellyn, Glyn and Margaret Cattell-Jones as the first admissions on 24 September 1900, alongside eight-year-old James Roxburgh Lees (Scottish father, Bengali mother) and seven-year-old James Brown (English father, Indian mother).¹⁴ The Cattell-Jones’s mother Jean, daughter of Welsh missionaries, became the

14 Lees was killed during World War I, when his ship, the *Dido*, was blown up in the Humber.

housemother of the first cottage, Kiernander Cottage, named after John Zachariah Kiernander (1710–1799), the first Protestant missionary in Bengal. Lees and Brown were the very first mixed race children to enter the Homes. By 1902 other children had already been received in the Homes from Chittagong, Quetta, Calcutta, Bombay, Darjeeling, Dibrugarh, Cachar, Ghaziabad, the Dooars and Bangalore, with others expected from Sylhet, Central Provinces, Madras, Secunderabad and the Punjab. Fees in 1903 were Rs. 20 per month, and while parents or guardians were expected to bear the cost of their child's support, the Board of Management could apply a subsidy in the case of distress. Some children came to the Homes with little or no familial connection whatsoever; not only outcasts from tea estates liaisons, but a European Jewish foundling from the streets of Calcutta, and a white child of unknown parentage who had been left after the death of his "coolie" guardian. The Homes received some support by way of government grants and fees, but in 1906 needed Rs. 30,000 in public subscriptions in order to maintain its services.

That Kalimpong was "British" was self-evident to the intended audience of the Homes *Magazine*; Kalimpong "became British" by virtue of the circumstances of the Bhutan War, and extracts from David Field Rennie's *Bhotan and the Story of the Dooar War* (1866) were extracted in the journal (figure 3). Kalimpong village was, moreover, constructed in the pages of the *Magazine* as something of a hybrid space. While the hilltop Church and iron-roofed shops "suggest the Occident rather than the Orient," the bazaar as a centre of trade and exchange, with its daily throng of 5,000 denizens, represented a place of diverse and interwoven cultures. Here the Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim could all be encountered; teashops catered to travellers from China, Bhutan, Tibet or Sikkim; Nepali and Gurkha traders and tradesmen hawked their wares; the Lepcha rubbed shoulders with the Marwari merchant from the Bombay Presidency; and Muslims from the plains sat with their hill wives. And in the midst of it all, a bust of the late Queen Victoria, carved by Tibetan Lamas.¹⁵

The classic tropes of Victorian-era child rescue and environmental determinism were vividly reproduced in the *Magazine*. An article on Quarrier's Homes in 1902 even included side-by-side genre pieces of before and after rescue: "As received" children, barefoot and dressed in rags, the "And After" version appropriately scrubbed and clothed. As a particular proponent of child removal, it seems paradoxical that Graham himself appears in his private correspondence to be a devoted family man. Graham was often away from his wife and five children, fund-raising or visiting tea plantations across the region (figure 4). Writing to his children David, Jack, Peggie, Isobel and Bunty from the Phaskowa in the Dooars in 1898, he writes "daddy is wearying to see you. I wish you had been with me yesterday on the elephant, such a big one it is. [...] It took me over deep rivers and

15 *Saint Andrew's Colonial Homes Magazine*, January 1902, 33–38.



Figure 3: "How Kalimpong became British."

through great forests."¹⁶ Graham's wife Kate wrote most affectionately to "My own darling Ian" and "My own love"; whenever he was absent, she felt his absence keenly: "storm on Tuesday night and then at 4.30, there was a sharp shock of earthquake (these things always happen when you are away!)"¹⁷ Jessie Robertson, writing to her own "dear Motherie," expressed the deep bond between mother and child: "I got your letter with doyley enclosed yesterday. I nearly grat [wept] when I saw the doyley & read of your having wrought it with your own hands."¹⁸

Protection, to be sure, as the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples so aptly noted, is "the leading edge of domination" (1996, Chapter 1, 7). While in many respects the emotional experiences of colonised and coloniser are incomparable, they are nevertheless at times strangely imbricated as well as analogous; absence and the recombinant formulations of family and identity were in the DNA of both. As already noted, one of the foundational objectives of the Homes was to train boys and girls

16 Graham to his children, 12 February 1898, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 1, Packet 3.

17 Kate Graham, Kalimpong to Ian Graham, 17 July 1902, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 3, Packet 2.

18 Jessie Robertson to her mother, 4 November 1900, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 9.



Figure 4: "Our increasing family" (detail). Left, Alice Jones (daughter of Welsh missionary the Rev. Thomas Jones 2); right-centre, her sister and first house-mother at Dr Graham's, Jean Margaret Cattell-Jones.

in agricultural and domestic service in order that they might find useful prospects in Australasia and Canada. In the first issue of the *Magazine* in February 1901, a correspondent ("A Scottish Planter" who can be identified as Richard Davison) argued the benefits of "An Overseas Eurasia," perhaps in northwest Australia, where mixed-race children might enjoy life "free from the incubus of mere race prejudice." In the following years the *Magazine* reported regularly on the possibilities, for example, of Queensland as a field for emigration; on the success of one of the boys in finding farm work in British East Africa; and growing requests for boys and girls to be sent to New Zealand.

In 1906, Sir Allan Arthur unsuccessfully sought to gain admission for Eurasian children to Australia. On the suggestion of the Reverend James Ponder, Presbyterian Minister at Waitahuna who had Indian connections, Graham sent the first batch of Homes children (Leonard and Sydney Williams) to New Zealand in 1907, and Graham sent children there on an annual basis, interrupted only during the war years and the depression.

Partly to recover his health, Graham undertook a trip to Australasia in 1909, visiting four Homes boys now working on a dairy farm in Otago and on a station in Hawkes Bay District. In Australia, however, where he observed a huge continent with the capacity to accommodate many more than its current population, the racially exclusive White Australia Policy struck Graham as the result of “ignorance and misunderstanding.”¹⁹ The largest contingent to date of Homes children (six boys and six girls) was farewelled to New Zealand in October 1912, but in the same year the Minister for External Affairs of the Commonwealth of Australia confirmed the country’s exclusionist policies: “The practice generally followed is to admit children of English Fathers and Eurasian Mothers without restriction and to prohibit the admission of half-castes, *i.e.* children of English Fathers and Indian Mothers.”²⁰ Needless to say, the children bound for New Zealand were not allowed onshore at some of the Australian ports *en route*.

In 1931, Graham addressed a meeting at Chatham House on “The Eurasian problem in India,” and in 1934 lectured at the Royal Society of Arts in London on “The education of the Anglo-Indian child.” In 1937, the septuagenarian Dr Graham again visited Australia and New Zealand as part of a broader itinerary that also took in Canada and the United States, meeting up with former Homes children, preaching, delivering radio broadcasts, and petitioning politicians and other opinion makers on the Anglo-Indian question. In Australia, in particular, he railed against the Immigration Restriction Act, which still barred non-whites, and in interviews with Attorney-General Robert Menzies and Minister of the Interior Thomas Paterson, Graham argued against the selfishness of the White Australia Policy and pleaded for a relaxation of the colour bar.

I recalled my interviews of 1909 with W. Groom (then Minister of External Affairs) & his secretary & of their opinion that if the Eurasians applying for admission had over 50% of European blood, they might if suitable, be admitted, & then of a subsequent enquiry we made some years later & were told that the percentage had been raised to 75. Mr Menzies added:—it is now 100%!²¹

Graham cautioned the Australian government to avoid giving offence to their imperial brethren, and in so doing opened a window onto his increasingly pan-religious and pan-ethnic worldview:

[...] it would weaken the power of her example to others for, notwithstanding all our faults, we were the biggest federation the world has ever seen of creeds & races & civilisations, and it could

19 “Australia and New Zealand: Notes and Impressions,” *Saint Andrew’s Colonial Homes Magazine*, October 1909.

20 *Saint Andrew’s Colonial Homes Magazine*, October 1912, 60.

21 Diary “Pour les intimes” of visit to Australia, New Zealand and Canada 1937, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 7.

perhaps put back the federation of the world, which we all yearned for, for ages to come.

He had a better reception in New Zealand, where of course he had sent OGBs for nearly three decades. In a Radio Broadcast in Wellington, Graham thanked New Zealand for accepting 119 boys and girls from the Homes over that period. Here too Graham's vision of a racially diverse and interconnected world found full expression. Though idealising the reality of interracial relationships between Maori and Pakeha, Graham saw them as "full brothers and sisters," indeed blood relations descended from common ancestors. In this vision, "Maoris are blood relations too with those Tibetans who live on the roof of the world, and among whom we at Kalimpong are in daily contact."²² In this formulation, in which "India and Tibet then rejoice that the Maoris and Indians and Tibetans are one," Kalimpong was inscribed at the centre of a global contact zone.

Finally, in New York, he sensed the possibilities of a modernist international order. Despite its "hustle & jangle," America to Graham had the potential to lead the world in the exemplification of education, technology, architecture, and above all, in inclusive racial citizenship:

There are at the [heart] of the unrest many great souls & clear thinkers who do lead the world—notwithstanding the racketeers & tall talkers of whom daily papers give particulars. One can only wonder there are not more of them when we remember the multitudes of races & civilisations included in its citizenship—a multitude which has never before been brought together under one political unit.

By the end of his life, Graham was unequivocal on the subject of "Mixed Races" and what he saw as the "social sickness" of colour prejudice. Miscegenation and hybridity he took to be a strength rather than a weakness:

There is no such thing as a pure race, and each of the races adds an element of its own, got from its varied environment. India has absorbed many different bloods and cultures in the past and it has been made the richer by them. So has Britain. Each has its own gifts and is responsible for their exercise.²³

Graham's idealism for a colour-blind world was belied by the actualities of the lives of many OGBs as they made their way in post-Independence India, and in their particular struggles for identity papers in the wake of the British Nationality Act of 1948. The archives reveal a stream of

22 Dr Graham, Wellington Broadcast, "The Call of India," 4 July 1937, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 8, Packet 2.

23 Dr Graham, Typescript history, no date [c. 1940], Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 15, Packet 1, Miscellaneous papers.

correspondence addressed to James Purdie, administrator at the Kalimpong Homes, requesting certifications in order to emigrate to Australia or to otherwise put an emphasis on their European rather than Indian parentage. In the general absence of their manifold voices in the archives, it is well to hear them speak.

My old Granny told us before she died some years back that both our grand fathers were Englishman [sic] & that my father's mother was a domiciled European, but not knowing where they were born is a great handicap. So will you please let me know how to go about filling in these passport forms or better still please give me a letter of recommendation stating that I am of European origin & a Kalimpong girl with a good record (as I hope I earned one when in school).²⁴

I shall be most grateful if you can give me a letter to the Australian Trade Commissioner, in Calcutta just stating that I was left an orphan and that my father was an English Tea Planter, & my mother an Indian lady. This question & answer will vitally affect the Emigration Papers for my daughter whom I am sending to Australia. [...] All I have to prove is my European parentage.²⁵

I know my father was a Scotsman but could you possible put my mother down as an Anglo-Indian instead of an Indian. This will be a great help to me & I'm sure you will understand.²⁶

As a child I was brought up in the Nepalese language. I am wondering whether my dear mother was herself a national of that and, and if this could be established, could I apply for and claim Nepalese citizenship if I so desired?²⁷

If I can get my fathers Birth Certificate, like many have done, I may be able to "WANGLE" a British Passport. How do you like a British Pass-port in one pocket, an Indian Pass-port in another and a Burma pass-port in the watch-pocket.???²⁸

They only want to know and satisfy that our fathers were British. After all it's no fault of ours what sins our parents committed and yet we have to face the world and suffer nasty remarks.²⁹

24 Barbara E., Jamshedpur, 4 August 1948, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 13, Packet 2, Letters to James Purdie, Cargill, Dr Graham's Homes, Kalimpong 1942-9.

25 Helen E., Calcutta, no date [c.1949], Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 13, Packet 2, Letters to James Purdie, Cargill, Dr Graham's Homes, Kalimpong 1942-9.

26 A.S., 3 July 1951, Middlesex to James Purdie, Kalimpong, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 14, Packet 2.

27 Allan S., Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 14, Packet 1, Letters to James Purdie, Cargill, Dr Graham's Homes, Kalimpong 1950

28 Tom C., 2 March 1950, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 14, Packet 1.

29 Eliza and Dick F., Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 14, Packet 1, Letters to James Purdie, Cargill, Dr Graham's Homes, Kalimpong 1950.

Basil A., writing to Purdie from Bombay in 1949 in thanks for his sending baptismal and other personal certificates, quoted from the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* to encapsulate the feelings of many OGBs about their lack of control over their destiny in the new landscape of imperial citizenship: "But helpless pieces of the game He plays / Upon this chequer-board of nights and days."³⁰ Others were more brutally sanguine; in 1947 Donald K. saw his mixed-blood legacy as "a mistake from the start":

[...] it would have been far better if I had been killed at birth than to have been brought up to suffer a life spell of mental torture [...]. We cannot claim anything legally, wherever we go, dirty and callous remarks are directed against us [...]. The passage in the Bible which says that the "Sins of the father shall be visited on their children" probably clears their conscience of any outrage they may have committed against us.³¹

Kate Graham took a particular shine to Droptimon, Hendrimai and Elisibon—the three girls who had arrived from the Khasi Hills in September 1908. Knowing no Hindi, they would join Graham's wife for evening prayers in the quietude of her room: "I just love having them there. Hendrimai seems to have a wonderful gift of prayer. They are all such dear lassies."³² Through the work of Dr Graham, and the diaspora of OGBs, Kalimpong existed as a contact zone on local, regional, and transnational scales. The legacies of institutional child removal have been deeply traumatic for generations of subjected peoples, but utilising very fragmentary archival sources, I have sought to narrate a more complex understanding of the meanings and spaces of contact and entanglement in the shape of Dr Graham's social project.

Figures

Fig. 1: *Saint Andrew's Colonial Homes Magazine* 1902.

Fig. 2: Author's possession.

Fig. 3: *Saint Andrew's Colonial Homes Magazine* 1903.

Fig. 4: *Saint Andrew's Colonial Homes Magazine* 1901.

30 Basil A., 8 July 1949, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 13, Packet 2.

31 Donald K., 10 October 1947, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 13, Packet 2.

32 K. Graham to Roddie, Kalimpong, 15 October 1908, Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6039, Box 9.

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Charisma K. Lepcha

The Scottish Mission in Kalimpong and the Changing Dynamics of Lepcha Society

Abstract “The Lepchas seem to be the most hopeful people for us in the hills,” wrote Rev. William Macfarlane of the Church of Scotland in his end of year report to his superiors. Compared to the Bhutias and the Nepalis, he found that the indigenous Lepchas were the most responsive to the Gospel. Macfarlane’s arrival and the establishment of the Scottish Mission initiated missionary work in Kalimpong. This was the beginning of the Lepchas’ cultural contact with the colonial power; these interactions set in motion the major socio-cultural changes that the Lepchas underwent after accepting Christianity. It has been argued that Christianity promoted “cultural dynamism” among Lepchas, but it is important to note that Christianity also divorced them from many traditional practices. Their newfound religion facilitated their reception of new ideas and new practices. These were easily accepted and often imitated without fully understanding the consequences. Accepting these new ideas resulted in the creation of a new identity.

Introduction

"When a Lepcha becomes a Christian, he becomes a saab."

In Lepcha circles this is an oft-repeated joke, which speaks of an indigenous population's cultural contact with people who introduced a new religion and helped set in motion the concomitant cultural changes that led to the formation of a new Lepcha identity. Christianity offered indigenous populations a "modern identity" (Bal 2000, 155) and equipped them with education and a link to the Western world. Missionaries introduced Lepchas to a new religion, which exposed them to a different worldview and divorced them from their traditional beliefs, because accepting Christianity initiated changes in lifestyle and also in attitudes toward things ranging from marriage to food. Their newly found religion paved the way for the reception of new ideas that people seemed ready to accept and often imitated without really understanding what the consequences might be. Reflecting on this problem, Arthur Foning, a Lepcha Christian himself, writes:

Forgetting our own age-old customs and ways of life, the beginnings of which are lost in antiquity, now among our Christian kinsmen there is a definite trend to display with pride, like the proverbial peacock, the plumes of Western culture in almost everything that is displayable. Moving outside more often than not, suit, hat and tie proclaim that the person is a Christian convert (Foning 1987, 294).

While the wave of imitation that hit Christian converts had some negative consequences, it cannot be denied that along with Christianity came education. This proved to be the most powerful agent in facilitating the change and dynamism that transformed the tribe. Education empowered their way of thinking, triggered social mobility, and allowed them to hope they could attain a better lifestyle. Adopting Christianity and embracing education from early on "gave them status and position" (Thakur 1988, 98) in society. Lepcha students grew up to become teachers, church leaders, and civil servants, occupying a respectable position in society. Armed with the benefits of modern education, it is likely that they considered themselves superior and looked down on their non-Christian neighbours. It is this "exclusivist" (Longkumer 2010, 85) tendency among Christians, the tendency to believe that Christianity is the one true religion, that separated them from the larger community. Interestingly, the openness of Lepcha society is also held responsible for the easy acceptance of the newfound religion as they aped, adopted, and gradually adapted Christian culture.

For most Lepchas of Kalimpong today, Christian culture is all they have ever known. We can find fourth- and fifth-generation Christian Lepchas whose forefathers gave up the traditional practices and ways of life, leaving the current generation devoid of their culture's knowledge and wisdom. Their upbringing in the church environment and schooling in

Christian educational institutions exposed them to stories from the Bible, but ignored the rich oral history of their legendary past. Often, these educated young people migrate to urban centres for further education and job opportunities, which distances them even more from traditional ways of life. Unless their grandparents or parents tell these fifth-generation Lepcha Christians about Lepcha history, they have little to claim to the knowledge of their own culture. Their cultural framework is built on Lepcha legends, biblical beliefs, Nepali narratives, and scientific worldviews, and comes from their interactions with the elderly, the church, their neighbours, and the educational system. This cultural framework has become a dynamic mixture of elements; it uses the dominant Nepali language in order to negotiate the dilemmas of identity and integrate their Lepcha and Christian identities. Lepcha Christians are themselves aware of this predicament; as Peter Karthak, a fifth-generation Christian Lepcha author writes: "Christian Lepchas did not care for their own Lepcha ethos because they were happy within their Christian ghettos. They would have to pay dearly for their unworldly dowdiness once the British left Darjeeling" (Karthak 2009, 9).

In this essay, I examine the Lepchas' cultural contact with Christianity, which began with the advent of the religion in the region. To do so, I shall focus on the role of Scottish missionaries in establishing the church and school in my ancestral village of Middle Bom Busty. I will also look at how the native oral tradition of conversion developed, and the cultural changes that have taken place since the arrival of Christianity among the Lepchas of Kalimpong. Finally, I shall analyse Christian Lepcha identity and what it means to be a Lepcha and a Christian or both, and I will ask whether religious identity took precedence over ethnic identity. That is, are people Christian Lepchas or Lepcha Christians?

Cultural contact and its complexities

Missionary work in Kalimpong started in earnest in the nineteenth century when the Reverend William Macfarlane arrived in Kalimpong in 1870. An important feature of this cultural contact was the very close relationship between education, the effort to make converts, and local responses to the advent of Christianity. That is, the missionaries emphasized education as a necessary prerequisite for further missionising. Therefore, they started schools and a teacher training institute and trained Lepcha catechists who went out and established churches and schools, including the church and school in Bom Busty. This section will examine the work of the missionaries and their Lepcha catechists, and the complexities of their flock's responses to this work, which are evident in the ways in which they made sense of conversion. These complexities included some capacity to integrate Christianity into local life without completely discarding all traditional practices, but also the changes wrought by cultural contact and a developing awareness of the transformation that the advent of Christianity set in motion.

The advent of Christianity: the missionaries, the Church, and conversion

Over there is a place for planting another branch of the mission to operate chiefly among the Lepchas, I reach a spot at the place called Kalimpong, about four miles from the Teesta, that will do admirably for a mission station. There are many Lepcha villages in the neighbourhood, and we could from there visit all the countries round about, as well as cross the Teesta river to visit the Lepcha country on the other side—William Macfarlane (Perry 1997).

After visiting the Lepchas of Kalimpong in 1870, Reverend William Macfarlane of the Church of Scotland “desired” (Perry 1997, 41) to move to Kalimpong even though he began his missionary work in Darjeeling in June 1870. Compared to the Bhutias and the Nepalis, he found Lepchas were the most responsive to the Gospel, and wrote in the end of year report to his mission, “The Lepchas seem to be the most hopeful people for us in the hills” (Perry 1997, 42). Although Macfarlane was the first missionary to enter Kalimpong, Christianity had already made its mark among Lepchas when Reverend William Start, a former Church of England clergyman who became an independent Baptist missionary, went to Darjeeling in 1841 and decided to establish a self-supporting mission. Although his missionary work was not very successful, he became interested in the local Lepcha language and started a school for Lepchas in Tukvar (Dewan 1991, 81). Having learned Lepcha, he went on to translate a few books of the Bible from English to Lepcha and published them at his own expense. His interest in their mother tongue aided in translating the Bible into their language and nurturing the tribe’s identity. The first book of the Bible that William Start translated was the Gospel according to Matthew, which he finished in 1845. This was followed by a translation of Genesis and part of Exodus into Lepcha (Sprigg 2005, 53). These were published in 1849. That same year the Gospel according to John¹ was also printed along with a revised version of Matthew. The Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta printed the translations. These were the first books to be published in the Lepcha language with the help of modern technology, i.e. the movable printing press. Linguist R. K. Sprigg sees these publications as a linguistic feat and a source of pride for Lepchas: “Lepchas everywhere will be able to take pride in the distinction of having had their language in print for (more than) 150 years; and Christian Lepchas, in particular, will have the added satisfaction of knowing that it was some Books of The Bible that were the first to be printed in Lepcha” (Sprigg 2005, 53).

These contributions to bringing the books of the Bible to the Lepchas in their native language laid a foundation that helped other missions to

1 A copy of the Gospel according to John, which was reprinted in 1872 is available at the Carey Library and Research Centre, Serampore.

spread Christianity among the Lepchas in Kalimpong. In 1841, the Reverend J. C. Page, a British-educated Anglo-Indian, was appointed as a missionary in India by the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), which was very keen on evangelizing the local people. A Lepcha convert is reported to have assisted him with his missionary work. But Page soon retired and there was no one to carry on the work, because the BMS ended their missionary work in Darjeeling.

Macfarlane's arrival and the founding of the Scottish Mission in Darjeeling paved the way for the first missionary work in neighbouring Kalimpong. Macfarlane was known as a "zealous" (Perry 1997, 32) preacher who set ambitious goals, hoping that a mission in the Darjeeling hills would become "a mission to the great independent states of Nepaul, Sikkim, and Bhootan" (Perry 1997, 33). Thus, Kalimpong became a strategic location for training "native catechists and missionaries" (Neylan 1994, 48) who would be able to enter the closed lands of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan for religious exchange. These countries were closed to foreigners and British missionaries would not be allowed to enter them. Thus the hills were a contact zone "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt 1991, 34). Lepchas were trained to teach Christianity not just to their people but to their neighbours too. Under the influence of these missionaries, several young Lepchas were motivated "to go beyond Darjeeling-Kalimpong" to evangelize (Perry 1997, 60). Indeed, "Lepcha missionaries" went to Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, carrying the Gospel as it was taught by the Scottish missionaries, with an emphasis on education, which the missionaries thought was an essential prerequisite for their missionary work: "If they cannot read, of what use will it be to send Bibles and tracts among them? We therefore think that it is the duty of the missionaries, in subordination to the great work of preaching, to do their utmost to establish such schools wherever they can be set up" (Perry 1997, 73).

Soon after arriving in Kalimpong Macfarlane started a school to train local teachers. With the growing importance of the Nepali language and an increasing Nepali population in the hills, even the Lepchas and Bhutias were beginning to learn and speak Nepali. By 1873, there were twenty-five primary schools throughout Darjeeling (Perry 1997, 40) where the Gospels and the school went hand in hand. The establishment of schools alongside churches was seen as a mixed blessing, because education exposed the natives to a wide new world of knowledge and ideas while the church meant the acceptance of a new religion and beliefs that often were at odds with the traditional ways of life: "The church and the school have gone together in the hill region of Darjeeling district ever since the advent of the missionaries, who had chosen the pen rather than the sword in proselytizing and in disseminating education" (Dewan 1991, 40).

Indeed, the school and the church likewise started simultaneously in late nineteenth century in Bom Busty. The church-school has been the

starting point for almost every educated professional from Bom Busty. It started as a night school and soon became a regular six-day educational centre, while the seventh day brought everybody to church. At the time of its inception, the church hall had a thatch roof and Bom Church is actually the oldest church of Kalimpong. It is seven years older than the landmark Macfarlane church of Kalimpong.

The person responsible for introducing Christianity to Bom Busty Lepchas was Sukhman Limbu, a Hindu convert from Darjeeling who was one of Macfarlane's first three catechists. Macfarlane's other two catechists, Namthak Rongong and Dyongshi Sada, were both Lepcha converts. But it was a Limbu convert who helped start the Bom Church in 1882. The fact that native missionaries had been trained to preach and teach was one of the main reasons why the Lepcha population of Kalimpong readily accepted Christianity. Under Sukhman Limbu's leadership, four of the first five converts in Bom Busty were Lepchas. Unfortunately, Sukhman Limbu died of the dysentery that gripped the hills, but his brother Mekbar Singh Limbu took charge of church affairs for the next thirty-nine years (1884–1923). Mekbar Singh married the daughter of a Lepcha *bongthing* (male shaman) who was on her way to becoming a *mun* (female shaman). British religious authorities might have disapproved of his marriage but we notice that the rules of Christianity were not as rigid among the Christians of Bom Busty. It is important to note that British missionaries were not directly involved with missionary work in Bom Busty, so people there did not completely sever ties with old customs and practices.

Bom Self-Supporting Church

For many years after the church in Bom Busty was established, the majority of church leaders were not Lepchas. Teaching and preaching the Bible might have been conducted in Nepali, which the Lepcha congregation did not necessarily completely understand. One can see the shifting language dynamics, because religious knowledge production in Bom Busty was being done in a foreign language. One pastor is remembered to have preached in both English and Nepali, but otherwise Nepali—the emerging *lingua franca* of the region—took over in church matters, too. Church leaders were required to submit their mission reports in Nepali and the service was usually conducted in that language. In this context, one can question whether people understood and accepted Christianity fully, because majority of the villagers did not really understand Nepali since Lepcha was the spoken language at home and in the village. But going to church on Sundays had become a routine task as they obediently followed the leaders and attended church. Soon they were singing hymns in Nepali and learning verses of the Bible in Nepali too. Nepali had become the language of the church and though the majority of church members were Lepchas, they adopted the Nepali tongue on Sundays.

At that time, the church readily accommodated itself to the lifestyle of the people. During the sowing season, the congregation would spend Sunday mornings in the field and only attend church in the evening. They had their own times and ways of doing things. Bom Church is also famous for an incident in which a church service ended abruptly because of an airplane hovering in the sky. People recall that a service was going on but the noise of the aircraft outside prompted the preacher to stop his sermon as he urged everyone "let us all go out and watch the plane now," (field-work, 2010) and he ended the service. Christmas usually meant archery, cockfights, mini marathon races, plenty to eat, and a hefty intake of the local *ci* (millet beer). Elders recall a time when carollers sang in front of a pigsty because they were heavily intoxicated with *ci*. Likewise, funerals meant an ox or goat was slaughtered and the villagers were fed before the corpse was taken care of. This continued the traditional way of honouring the dead, because Lepchas traditionally slaughtered an ox at the time of someone's death.

Christianity and education were fortunately moving along parallel paths as the church encouraged young people to pursue higher education. There are individuals today who remember their pastor writing notes of reference to a Lepcha *kaiiya* (Marwari shopkeepers who were fluent in the Lepcha language) to borrow money for their college education. The changing demographics now included Marwari traders; the Lepchas were on the receiving end in this encounter between themselves and businessmen who had migrated to these hills when Kalimpong became a commercial space. The amount that had been borrowed would be returned after they received their tribal stipend. This allowed many young people of their generation to complete graduate and post-graduate studies and apply for government jobs. The church school became the first school attended by almost all of the professionals from Bom Busty. In a 2010 report submitted by a church elder to the governing body, Bom Church recorded forty-one graduates and twenty-six post-graduate Lepchas, out of whom fifty-one were government employees and the others were in the private and self-employed sectors. In educating the citizens of Bom Busty, the church became an important avenue of social mobility because its citizens achieved positions of influence and respect both inside and outside of their own community (Caplan 1980, 667).

Education provided young people with better employment opportunities, but it also paved way for a new generation of convinced Christians to take over the church leadership. Gone were the days when drinking *ci* for Christmas was an accepted feature of the holiday celebrations. Today's Bom Christians claim to be Christians with strong conviction. They have studied the Bible and know what it means to be a Christian. They seem more assured of their faith and, as Christians, they have their own set of dos and don'ts. An "internal conversion" (Geertz 2000) has taken place. This internal conversion is very similar to Gellner's (2005) characterization of the acceptance of a modern interpretation of Buddhism among the

Newars: a radical change of perspective takes place after which someone who has undergone an internal conversion now views his or her former life as morally wrong.

Interestingly, Bom Church is not exclusively a Lepcha domain, but it is the only church in the area to hold services in both the Lepcha language and Nepali. On January 3, 2010, a few Lepcha members of Bom Church started to gather for the Lepcha service at 10:00am before the Sunday service at 11:00am. They sang Lepcha choruses, prayed, and listened to the sermon in Lepcha. While the service was open to anyone who might be interested, the members of Bom Church were the only ones who attended and the service has continued since. This recent development in the history of Lepcha Christians resonates very much with the contribution of Christianity through education and the awareness about their cultural identity that education eventually created.

Conversion

The Lepcha process of conversion was multi-causal and influenced by both internal and external factors. One of the main reasons why people chose to convert was the idea of *Rum* (God), who could deliver them from the evil *mungs* (spirits). In a society where household *mungs* ran rampant and could cause sickness and death by fighting among themselves, deliverance from malevolent spirits and the promise of eternal life was good news. While we do not hear of conversions motivated by direct material gains, there could have been an indirect “economic motivation” (Yoko 2004, 262) for those who found Christianity to be less expensive than their traditional religion or Buddhism. Christianity also offered the possibility of an altered lifestyle through education, a particular set of moral values, and a “Protestant ethic” (Weber 1958) that in the long run proved attractive and fulfilling. Interestingly, the stories of Lepcha Christian converts were unlike those we hear across the Indian nation-state. Lepcha converts to Christianity were neither cast out nor persecuted, and Christian Lepchas did not necessarily sever ties with their neighbours, kinsmen, and other members of the community. They remained very much a part of the wider community, although their Sundays were occupied with church activities.

Anthropologist Andrew Buckser has pointed out that “Conversion to a religion is an irreducibly social act; one does not merely join a faith, but one enters into a set of new relationships with members of a religious community. Conversion, therefore, changes not only the individual, but also the groups that must assimilate or give up the convert” (Buckser 2003, 69). For Bom Busty Lepchas, conversion was more of a community affair than an individual matter as families converted around the same time and there was not much resistance or opposition to conversion. In cases of individual conversion, there were instances of the rest of the family converting in due time. Conversions also occurred during or after marriage if one of the

spouses was a non-Christian. Conversion in Bom Busty started almost a century ago and today most Christian Lepchas are the descendants of the first converts of the village. There are not that many new Lepcha converts today, because grandfathers or great-grandfathers converted to Christianity, creating generations of Christian Lepchas to follow their path. Today, most Lepchas here are fourth- or fifth-generation Christians who are not aware of the reasons why their ancestors became Christians. However, people in Bom Busty also recount an incident that triggered many conversions. It was the death of Sethang Chemjong, (the son of Mekbar Singh Limbu and his Lepcha wife) and the unbelievable story of how this man rose from the dead. This story has a folklore-ish appeal to the Bom population, and one of the oldest women in the village narrated this story with such gusto it was as if she herself had died and returned from heaven. Her grandfather, who was at the wake when the deceased returned to life, told her the story that follows.

The man who died and came back to life

Sethang Chemjong died around 2:00pm in the afternoon and came back to life at 8:00am on the following morning. Known as a tall fellow who almost had to stoop, everybody called him Hungrayo. As he reached the door of death, it was dark and he found it very difficult to enter. The only thing he could hear himself say was "I am a Christian" as the door opened and he went inside. There seemed to be a lot of commotion and he boarded a train that had stopped nearby. Interestingly, the train was not going anywhere. It was just going around and around on the same track, making stops every now and then for passengers to get off. So he got off too, but since there was nowhere to go, he got back on the train and it went on, round and round for eighteen years (which according to him was equivalent to one night on earth).

As he looked around, he saw a *lama* spinning his prayer wheels and he said, "O *lama*, do you know the way?" to which the *lama* replied, "I myself have not been able to find the way and I have been roaming around for the last eighteen years." Then Sethang stepped out of the train and came to a dangerously steep slope where only the eerie wind could be felt. Then he again said, "I am a Christian." But a man came and pushed him from behind and he thought, "Oho! I am dead now," but he landed on a very dusty road. As he looked up, he saw *sadhus*, *jhakris* and *lamas* running around and they all seemed to despise him because he was a Christian. He then went a little further and found a desert-like area, but as he waited, the group that mocked him was swept up, not by water or fire, but they disappeared in front of his eyes.

He managed however to cross the sandy desert and was walking uphill when he met people like Dr. Graham, his own grandfather, and his father—and he recalled that his father was a little on the selfish side. They

were all going downhill, but he was climbing up. It was a small path and as he ascended, he found Ram seated on a deerskin and asked, "They treat you as God in the world, but why are you sitting here?" Ram replied, "The world didn't know and mistook me for God while I was only teaching them the good things so now I have to sit here till his second coming." Sethang then said, "Where is Laxman then?" and Ram pointed to Laxman, who was also sitting on a deerskin nearby. He looked around and found all the gods of the earth wandering around.

Suddenly he got really hungry and started looking for something to eat, and found a cottage. Without knowing why, he was punished for some misdeed on earth and was turned into a cat, which was distressing because how could he get to heaven now? But as he looked into the cottage from the window, he saw some curd, went inside, and ate it all. The next day he also went to eat the curd, but the owner of the cottage found him and beat him to death. He was thrown out—interestingly, he died as a cat but was reincarnated as a man. But his punishment had not ended, so he now became the hard root of a bamboo. Since the dried parts of a bamboo root are good for firewood, some travellers used the root to make a fire and it turned into scattered embers, but it soon reassembled and he became a man again.

However, saying "Christian" was like a medicine when such trials came. He walked further on and met a naked giant who was roasting and eating humans from a huge pot. The giant held a bow and arrow and was carrying a baby on its back. It then aimed an arrow at Sethang who said, "I am a Christian," and the giant with his huge arms shook his fist at Sethang and said, "You shall return again." Sethang proceeded further, only to come in contact with a huge black figure on a horse who wanted to slice him into two with a sword. But Sethang used his remedy, "I am a Christian," and he was spared.

He then found himself following a straight road with heavenly scents, and reached a garden where fruits from all twelve seasons were growing and had ripened. From there he saw a city and went towards it, but he ran into an angel on the platform, who asked him, "Where are you going?" Sethang replied, "I want to go to heaven." "Have you had communion?" asked the angel "No, I have not," replied Sethang, to which the angel said, "Then you cannot enter heaven." Sethang was surprised, so the two of them wrestled for a while, and Sethang was feeling a little low when they heard a voice say, "Maanoheem," at which the angel let him loose; he got to his knees and said, "Yes Lord." "What are you doing there?" God asked. "This man has not had communion but wants to come to heaven," replied the angel. Then God said, "If he didn't deserve to come to heaven, would he have gotten this far? It is all your fault. You are now transferred!"

On hearing that, the angel stood up, flapped its wings, which were as huge as could be, covering the whole earth, and flew away. Sethang went off to the east and climbed the stairs and found a library that was supposed to contain the book of life, but he could not find it. There was however the book of *karma*. Then he climbed further up and searched more

but with little success, so he felt depressed and went back down. He was wondering what to do next when he found God standing on a pulpit. As soon as he saw God, he bowed down and God said, "Your time is not over yet, you have to return to Earth and do some more work."

Then Sethang told God that he wanted to see the nail wounds on his palm from when he died on the cross. God showed him the scars and as Sethang tried to touch them it was as if they were an illusion because he could not touch them. Then God said, "You have to return to Earth, be my witness and save souls for heaven. You must go back." So he agreed and as he walked down the stairs, he found himself sneezing out loud, which woke him from under the white sheets that had covered him since his death. At that time, there were two women beside his body who ran out of the room as the men returned who had gone to the bathroom, and one of the men said, "Oh, you have risen from the dead?" and he said, "Yes, bring a piece of paper and a pencil and close the door." Then he related his story, one which has now been told and retold in Bom and its neighbouring surroundings about the man who died and came back to life.

This narrative is quite popular in the village and everyone has heard one version of the story or another. While it tells us about the kind of Christianity that was pervasive in the village, it also reveals the importance of native oral traditions of conversion for understanding the "historical impact and the continuing legacy of Christianity" (Neylan 1994, 7). Sparing the details, which were told fervently by one of the oldest living persons in the village, it is commonly understood that Sethang did not get to enter heaven because he had not yet taken communion. Since then, taking communion to get to heaven has become an important doctrine in the church in Bom. Until recently, church leaders would visit dying members in hospital and give the ailing person communion before they breathed their last, expecting that this was the dying person's ticket to heaven, regardless of the life they had led while on Earth. It showed the changing beliefs of a people who did not believe in heaven or hell after death. Lepchas believe their souls are supposed to return to their clan peaks when they die, but Christianity gave the soul a new destination and the promise of eternal life. It can be argued that Sethang's story made more of an impact because his uncle was the missionary who brought Christianity to Bom Busty, and his father was also a pastor who had married a Lepcha wife (the daughter of a *bongthing*). So the congregation took heed of his words, considering them almost equal to the word of God. People remember that members of his family were themselves humbled in many ways and even people who did not go to church became sincere and God-fearing.

Interestingly, this oral tradition of conversion story speaks of the prevailing cross-cultural connections and the power plays of the colonial narrative. If we analyse the incident, we find the emphasis is on the superiority of the Christianity that the Scottish missionaries introduced. Sethang's statement that, "I am a Christian" invokes the Christian identity, which apparently even proved to be a "medicine" when he was in trouble with

the giant and the dark man on a horse. It thus became important to identify oneself as a Christian. Secondly, meeting a lost *lama* and the sudden disappearance of godly men like the *sadhus* (Hindu ascetics) and *jhakris* (witch doctors) from other religions suggests the negligible role of leaders from other religions in the Christian cosmology. Likewise, Sethang's conversation with Ram as he waited for the second coming of Jesus, and his pointing to the misunderstanding of thinking of him as God undermines the God-status Ram held on Earth.

Another interesting aspect of this narrative is the concept of reincarnation, because Sethang takes on different forms of life for some misdeed on Earth before becoming a man once again. The belief in rebirth after death is very much a Buddhist tradition, as is the idea of *karma*, which shows up when he starts looking for the book of *karma*. Such details in this narrative are a typical case of Pratt's contact zone in which historically different people and cultures clash and negotiate their beliefs in order to affirm their existence. This story might seem like just another story to outsiders, but the fact that everybody in Bom Busty knows it and has even related it to friends and relatives outside the village means it had and continues to have a certain significance. At one point, the woman narrating the story says that the angel had to be transferred, so we see that there is room for the modern jargon of "job transfers" in the story of angels and gods.

Cultural changes brought about by Christianity

In addition to the cultural contact set in motion by the encounter with European missionaries, conversion is also a "cultural passage" (Austin-Broos 2003, 2). Going through this cultural passage, people change direction, turn away from old practices and align themselves with new institutions, new rules, and new social expectations. Conversion requires that priorities be reoriented and the convert "negotiates a place in the world" (Austin-Broos 2003, 2). The discussion that follows will examine various social institutions that were both in conflict and experienced continuity as Lepcha communities went through the cultural passage of conversion. It will look at the changes that took place and examine how those changes are currently understood in the community.

FAMILY

Families in Bom Busty are relatively small and nuclear in nature. An average family consists of a father, a mother, and two children. Most fathers have government jobs either in Kalimpong town or in nearby villages, while the mothers stay at home and look after the house. After completing twelfth grade, most children leave Kalimpong for further studies or employment. Extended families usually consist of a surviving grandparent (mostly grandmothers who live with their children) and the families of

siblings living together. In order to avoid conflict between brothers, especially after they are married, the eldest son usually moves out of the parents' home and builds another house on nearby ancestral land, while the younger son stays with the parents. In cases of conflict, they usually ignore each other to avoid confrontations. The people live in modern houses and there are no traditional Lepcha houses in the village.

MARRIAGE

The church is an important place for young people to meet potential marriage partners and get married. However, the church is not an exclusively Lepcha domain, so intermarriage between Lepcha and non-Lepcha neighbours is a common practice in Bom Busty. Christian Lepchas have no ethnic reservations when it comes to finding spouses, as long as their wife or husband is Christian. Often when a Lepcha brings home a non-Lepcha wife, it is likely that the new bride will introduce her culture and lifestyle to her new family, thus diluting a Lepcha family's ethnic boundaries. Lepchas are well aware that intermarriage is responsible for the decline of Lepcha culture, but there is no stopping the trend as love marriages are more popular than arranged marriages today. "Of course we wish for Lepcha-Lepcha marriages, but we don't have any restrictions today," said an elderly gentleman. But Christian Lepchas are cautious and adhere to rules about clan differences, avoiding marriage to members of the same clan. In some cases, arranged marriages take place and the traditional practice of a *peebu* (middleman) is still used as the main interlocutor between the bride's family and the groom's. In a Christian Lepcha marriage, extensive traditional rules are discarded, although those that are not in conflict with Christianity are chosen and practiced on a selective basis. Instead of the wedding gown and the suit, brides can also be seen wearing the *gada* (traditional female dress) in white and grooms sometimes mix a modern suit with the *dumpra* (traditional male dress). Marriage often becomes the only time when families from far and near, both Christian and non-Christian, come together and get to know each other.

KINSHIP

Lepchas still follow the clan system, although the practice of parallel descent ceased to exist after the acceptance of Christianity. Christianity complicated the traditional practice since the wife took the husband's last name after marriage, and the daughter was unable to take her mother's last name because her mother had already changed her last name to her father's clan name. This practice has been criticized as it disrupts the clan system and ignores the Lepcha tradition of each spouse having an equal share in passing on the family lineage. However, there are cases in which both the son and the daughter take their mother's clan name in the absence of their father. For example, this happened during

the Indo-Chinese war when Chinese men married Lepcha women but left their wives behind with the children. The children of these unions took their mother's clan name and faithfully observed the clan rules. Even now, these families are strict about not marrying within the clan, although technically the children of those Chinese-Lepcha marriages never belonged to that particular clan. Indeed, clan endogamy is still taboo, and they strictly adhere to the rules. In that way, kinship ties have remained unchanged, although the terminology is slowly being replaced by Nepali kinship terms. For example, *daju* for elder brother is used in place of *anum*, or *mama* for uncle in place of *azyong*.

LANGUAGE

There was a time when Lepcha was the official language of the region. In 1835, when the Deed of Grant of Darjeeling was given to the British by the Rajah of Sikkim, this document was written in Lepcha. But eventually the Lepcha language became "unfashionable" (Foning 1987, 160) and contact with the growing Nepali population meant that Nepali soon took over as the *lingua franca* of the region. There was a linguistic shift from the native tongue to the dominant language because Lepchas were mocked when they could not pronounce Nepali words correctly. "There was a feeling of shame that we weren't speaking the right way," said a Bom resident who remembers his classmates and teachers making fun of him speaking Nepali.

In the beginning, it was difficult for Lepcha students to speak one language at home and another at school, but they made a conscious effort to master the Nepali language and today almost all Lepchas in Bom Busty speak Nepali. They are fluent in Nepali and can (and do) read and write in Nepali, rather than in Lepcha, which is a result of the education system where instruction is often given in Nepali (unless they go to English language schools). Most parents have realized that Lepcha has ceased to be spoken, even at home, while their children have taken Nepali as their spoken and written language at school and in the village. The use of the Lepcha language has thus become limited to a few words at the dinner table or in conversation when there is a visitor. Otherwise, everyday conversation takes place in Nepali. But different Lepcha organizations are working to promote fluency in and use of the Lepcha language and Bom Busty hosted the tenth-anniversary celebrations for the Lepcha Conversation Course (LCC) in January 2012. The LCC is a mobile language program started by like-minded Lepcha individuals, which is held annually in different Lepcha villages. Bom Busty also hosted the fifth LCC, which gave birth to regular Lepcha classes in Bom School for Lepcha students. Following the tenth-anniversary celebrations, the Lepcha language class has also been opened to villagers and other language enthusiasts. Since the class was a later addition to the school syllabus, a few Lepcha families from the village contribute in order to pay the teacher's salary.

FOOD

The Lepchas of Bom Busty remember when food was gathered from the bountiful forests. There was a time when the village residents would harvest dry paddy, which was not far from their houses. Men and women would go to particular spots where the women would start gathering fruit and plants while the men would weave the cane mats that were used to carry the food that was gathered. Maize and millet were other popular crops amongst the Lepchas. If there was excess food, they would dig holes and store it in layers, with the grains placed at the bottom. This would be their granary, a storehouse that could be used when they needed more food.

While different kinds of yams and sweet potatoes were readily available in the forest, fishing in the Relli River usually yielded a good catch. The fish would then be cooked inside a length of bamboo and shared with everyone present. Today, young people visit the Relli River for riverside picnics. Although there are some young men from the village who still fish, most meat and fish products are readily available at the market. One of the important changes in dietary habits is a reduction in the intake of *ci*, the Lepcha alcoholic beverage, which is usually made of millet, and which plays an essential part in all the rites of passage in Lepcha life. Contact with Christianity meant a divorce from *ci* because of its alcoholic nature. A line was drawn between those who consumed it and those who did not, with Christian Lepchas in the latter category. Although the Christian Lepchas of Bom Busty have fond memories of drinking *ci* on various occasions, it has become a religious boundary marker today. An interesting food influence is the custom of making *sel roti*, a round Nepali rice donut which is prepared during Hindu festivals. Christian Lepchas have picked up this custom and now they prepare it at Christmas. Sometimes *sel roti* is also served during weddings.

DRESS

Up until about fifty years ago, *dumpra* and *gada* was the dress code for most residents in the village. There was a time when thorns from orange trees were used as safety pins to hold female attire together. Today, traditional attire is only worn on special occasions. The recent trend among men has been to coordinate a tailored suit and a *dumpra*, transforming the traditional attire into a modern, contemporary look as a direct result of cultural contact. Women are also seen wearing their *gadas* to church on Sundays, especially during the winter. Political developments in the Darjeeling hills, when the leader of the Gorkhaland movement demanded that everyone wear traditional Nepali dress, could be credited with starting the trend to (re)embrace traditional dress: Lepchas rejected the imposition of traditional Nepali attire, and vowed to wear their own traditional garments instead. Since their cultural identity, which was connected with what they wore, was threatened, this demand was a wake-up call for the Lepchas. Now there was even more reason to wear traditional clothing.

Christian Lepcha identity

Becoming Christian is not a simple process of replacing an old set of local practices with a new set of universal practices, nor is the local Christianity to be understood as some kind of quasi-Christianity as a result of the transformations and compromises that have occurred in the adoption process (Yoko 2004, 291).

The construction of Christian Lepcha identity means combining a Christian identity and a Lepcha identity. Each has its own separate space. But what makes someone a Christian? What are the boundaries that separate a Christian Lepcha from a non-Christian Lepcha? In order to examine Christian identity, it is first important to understand what it means to be a Christian. In this essay, I look at “being Christian as a social rather than intellectual or spiritual phenomena” (Bal 2000, 132). Christianity has its own universal ideals and rituals but there is no single, overarching “Christian identity,” because Christian identities are also contextualized through time and space.

“A Christian identity does not mean that all Christians share a common set of beliefs and values” (Tanner 1997, 124). Despite Christianity’s invocation of universality, not all Christians everywhere believe in the same things. Historically, to be a Christian meant to be a follower of Christ, but things are not so easy and simple. Many layers of practices and beliefs make up a Christian identity today. There are no “sharp cultural boundaries that give Christians (as a whole) group specificity” (Stamps 2009, 1). This is likewise true of the Lepchas of Bom Busty. There are Bom Lepchas who belong to Catholic and Protestant denominations and hold to different doctrines, but they are known to others simply as Christians. It is interesting that in the area, the Middle Bom Busty Lepchas are assumed to be Christians. True enough, if you are a Lepcha from Middle Bom Busty, it is quite likely that you might be a Christian. With only two Buddhist households in the village and most of the Buddhist population living in Lower Bom Busty, Lepchas of Middle Bom Busty are Christians by default. But what separates Christian Lepchas from their Buddhist counterparts across the field or Christian Lepchas from Christian non-Lepchas?

Identity markers

In accordance with what the Bible teaches, Christian Lepchas reject the polytheistic array of many gods and devils in the Lepcha cosmology by following the one true God who created them and promised them eternal life. They believe in the Bible as the word of God and are associated with the local Bom Church (or another church), attending it for Sunday services and other church activities throughout the year. Affiliation with a church officially indicates that an individual is a Christian and it can be

cited as a way to identify oneself as a Christian when asked for his or her religion in the government census or at places of employment. Members are expected to participate in church activities and the church is expected to look after its members by baptising and dedicating babies, marrying couples, and burying the dead. Traditionally, a Lepcha *bongthing* would be required for these rites of passage, but when almost the entire Lepcha population of the village has embraced Christianity, the traditional Lepcha practices are omitted and the rites of passage become tasks for the church. A Christian Lepcha does not believe in *mun* and *bongthings* and stays away from the various *rum faats* (festivals) that take place in neighbouring Lepcha houses. Instead, Lepcha homes host the various cottage meetings and prayers that are part of Christian tradition.

Members are expected to get married in church, and monogamy is the order of the day. For weddings, Lepcha members are now making an extra effort to amalgamate both Lepcha and Christian traditions in their attire and rituals. While the church wedding is still conducted according to Christian tradition, certain Lepcha rituals like the bridal price and using the services of a *peebu* have been observed. Certain gifts like *ci* are replaced by milk, clearly indicating that this is a Christian Lepcha marriage. Alcohol is strictly prohibited in church, although there are instances of its consumption in a few homes during the after-party.

When a child is born, the parents, grandparents, or friends of the baby's parents name the child and there is no special day for this occasion. Growing children are sent to Sunday school to learn Bible stories; most of them also start their educational careers in the Bom School itself, their "natal denomination" (Caplan 1980, 656), before transferring to other mission institutions or government schools. Education has been one of the impressive markers of Christian Lepcha identity in Bom Busty. Even when Christianity first came to the village, education went hand in hand with religion to create an environment that encouraged people to study, and the trend continues today. Because of easy access to education through the church, Christian Lepchas have always been well educated and exposed to the world, but they have ignored and missed out on knowledge of Lepcha culture. In that way, Christianity failed to contextualize its cultural package for the Lepchas. For a very long time, it failed to "find Jesus in Lepcha culture" (Limboo 2009) because although the two identities were moving in the same direction, in favour of progress, they were on different sides of the road. There was no amalgamation of Lepcha culture and Christianity because Christianity overtook the traditional culture, creating a significant boundary between those inside and those outside the faith (Farhadian 2003).

Comparing narratives

“Rongs (Lepchas) are much closer to the biblical tradition.”

This is something Christian Lepcha pastors/ preachers can be heard preaching to a Lepcha congregation. Today, Lepcha Christians draw parallels between Lepcha myths and Bible stories, starting with parallels between Lepcha myths and the description in Genesis of what happened before the world was created, when “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Lepchas also believe that in the beginning, “the world was all water, and there were no living creatures” (Stocks 1975, 32). The presence of water since the beginning of the existence of this planet is a recurring feature of many tribal tales and scientific speculations, and is one of many similarities between Lepcha narratives and those in the Bible.

The Creation Story: in Lepcha mythology, the creator god *Itbumu* is believed to have created the heavens and the earth before she picked up some fresh snow from Mt. Kanchenjunga and created *Fudongthing*, the first man on earth. But the creator was not satisfied and decided to give him a companion by taking a bit of ‘*a-yong*, which is literally translated as “marrow” (Doma 2010, 2) from *Fudongthing*'s bones, and from that she created *Nazongnyu*, his sister. They were blessed with supernatural powers and instructed to live separately. *Fudongthing* was supposed to live on top of a mountain named *Nareng Nangsheng Chyu*, and *Nazongnyu* was to live in a lake below the mountain called *Naho-Nahar Daa*. But they could not stay away from each other and started meeting in between the mountain and the lake. Soon they gave birth to their first child but they threw it away. This continued until the birth of their seventh child, when what they were doing was finally discovered. *Itbumu* was disappointed in *Fudongthing* and *Nazongnyu* for disobeying her orders. She cursed them and banished them from her presence. “You will leave immediately and live in the foothills of Kongchen Kongchlo as ordinary humans and suffer for your sins” (Doma 2010, 4). This narrative is very similar to the creation story in the Bible where God created Adam from the dust of the ground and took one of his ribs to create Eve to be a helper for him. Unlike *Fudongthing* and *Nazongnyu*'s living arrangements, Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, but were instructed not to eat from the tree of life. Unfortunately, they could not restrain themselves and they were also banished from the garden as God cursed them both for disobeying his orders.

The Flood Story: the flood story is the story of *Rongnyoo* and *Rangeet*, two rivers of Sikkim. They were lovers who planned to meet at Pesok and travel towards the plains. They each had a bird and a snake to guide them. But the girl, *Rongnyoo*, guided by the snake, arrived before the boy and that upset his male ego. When he reached the meeting place, he asked her *Thee-satha?*, which means “when did you arrive?” (The name of the river has been anglicised to Teesta and has remained so ever since.) Because

Rangeet was ashamed of arriving later, instead of travelling on he decided to return to his place of origin. When the river flowed backwards it caused a turbulence as the waters rose and flooded the land. During the time of the flood, Lepchas were believed to have sought refuge in Mt. Tendong and were saved from drowning. Likewise, the biblical flood occurred when the earth was full of evil and God wanted to destroy it. But in Noah he found a righteous man and wanted to save him and his family, along with other living creatures of this earth. So he told him to build a wooden ark and when it flooded, those inside the boat were saved. In both cases, we see a select group of people saved from drowning when the earth was flooded with water.

The tower of Babel: the Bible talks about a time when everyone spoke the same language and said, "Come let us build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches heaven" (Genesis 11:4). But God was not pleased with the developments so he confused their language and they could not work on building the tower together. In the Lepcha myth, the people were tortured by *lasso mung pano* (the king of evil spirits) and wanted to communicate with God in heaven about their problem. So they created a stairway of earthen pots to reach heaven. Soon they were piling up pot after pot to get there. But a miscommunication between those at the top and those at the bottom caused the earthen pot tower to be smashed and come crashing down. Here too, we see similar aspirations among the Lepcha people and the people of the Bible to reach heaven, which remained unfulfilled in both cases as a result of language problems.

In all three narratives, the stories and their themes are so similar that we wonder if one was inspired by the other through some contact with the other culture. But these stories have existed in isolation from each other and in all three cases there is no question of the authenticity of each culture's story. However, the similarities between Lepcha mythology and biblical stories have an added advantage for today's Christian Lepchas, who are increasingly interested in both affirming their Christian faith and becoming more grounded in Lepcha culture. Limboo (2009) compares the "peace loving, generous, sincere, faithful, hospitable, self-giving and self-sacrificing nature" of the Lepchas to the Christian concept of agape (Limboo 2009). And since there are many parallels between biblical stories and Lepcha myths, Christian Lepchas can now embrace the history of the traditional culture they once ignored. But can "an ethnic *cum* religious identification" (Yoko 2004, 285) exist for today's Lepchas? The above narratives are examples of how Christian identity and Lepcha identity could possibly co-exist and produce a shared identity.

Christian Lepcha vs. Lepcha Christian

"I personally feel that it is best for us simple people to adopt Christianity" (Foning 1987, 295).

In this shared identity, it is very likely that one side might become dominant and the other dormant in certain contexts. The question of whether the religious identity takes precedence over the ethnic identity *vis-à-vis* the Christian Lepcha vs. the Lepcha Christian will always be there, because there was a time when the "exclusivist attitude" (Longkumer 2010, 85) of Christianity prevented Lepchas from continuing many of their long held cultural practices. Christian Lepchas were blamed for ignoring Lepcha culture, forgetting the Lepcha language, and considering themselves too "advanced" to interact with their Buddhist counterparts. On the other hand, Buddhist Lepchas managed to syncretize Lepcha culture with Buddhism and maintain traditional practices. As a result, Christian Lepchas have not always felt secure about their ethnic identity because Buddhist Lepchas often questioned their loyalty and involvement in Lepcha cultural affairs. Today, Christian Lepchas have come to realize that their religious identity has not been sufficient to serve as their ethnic identity. They are now making a conscious effort to acknowledge and reaffirm their ethnic identity, and Christian Lepchas of Bom Busty are actively participating in community affairs both within and outside their religious spheres. An educated Christian elite who is outspoken and prominent in projecting its Lepcha Christian identity, referring to Bible verses like "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage" (Psalms 33: 12), has also emerged. Now Lepcha Christians cite the Bible on behalf of their community, surer of both their religious and cultural identities. There is an acceptance of Christianity's ignorance of the traditional culture and they are willing to connect with traditional Lepcha culture and create avenues for affirming their Lepcha identities to meet the demands of ethnic politics today. Being largely involved in church affairs, there was a time when Christian Lepchas' Christian identity overshadowed their Lepcha identity, but Christian Lepchas today seem positive about their role in the preservation and promotion of both their identities. When asked around the village if they were Lepcha Christians or Christian Lepchas, the wordplay was only a distraction as everyone agreed, "We are Lepchas first."

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PART II

Public Spheres,
Public Media, and
the Creation of
Public Knowledge

Clare Harris

Photography in the “Contact Zone”: Identifying Copresence and Agency in the Studios of Darjeeling

Abstract Among the many novel cultural technologies that the British introduced to the Himalayas in the second half of the nineteenth century was photography. Although initially deployed as a crucial instrument for use within colonial documentation projects, by the 1880s the camera had become more closely aligned with tourism and the other “pleasures of Imperialism” that could be enjoyed by Europeans in the hill stations of the Himalayas. With its views of the high peaks and its diverse community, Darjeeling became a prime location for the production and consumption of photographs framed according to outsiders’ criteria of landscape and ethnic type genres. Examining the creation and circulation of such images within the visual economy of Darjeeling allows us to overturn some of the assumptions of previous scholarship on colonial-era photography in which a severe power imbalance between the colonialists and the colonised has been emphasised. Instead, this essay suggests that within the social spaces of photography in the contact zones of the Himalayas, it may be possible to detect important signs of indigenous agency and transcultural interaction.

Introduction

In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992, 1), Mary Louise Pratt described the “contact zone” as a terrain often characterised by “asymmetrical relations of power,” but she also sought to emphasise the dynamics of copresence and the interactions that could occur within it between coloniser and colonised. Borrowing the term “transculturation” from anthropology, Pratt highlighted the potential for subordinate or marginal groups to “select and invent from the materials transmitted to them by the dominant or metropolitan culture” (Pratt 1992, 7). This process could then lead to the production of “auto-ethnographies” in which colonial subjects undertook “to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms.” Since Pratt’s study was based on the analysis of literature, her approach has been avidly adopted by literary scholars, historians, and others whose primary source material is textual, but her call to arms has also been heard by some of the leading figures in cultural and museum anthropology, most notably by James Clifford.¹ His reformulation of the concept of the contact zone as a tactic for overturning power imbalances in ethnographic museums, has led a number of such institutions worldwide to reconfigure themselves and collaborate with source communities in a more reciprocal and ethical manner. It has also had an impact on the archival procedures that are conducted behind the scenes in museums, as curators and academics have begun to re-examine the copious quantities of objects and documents amassed in the heyday of colonial collecting to reveal alternative histories and acknowledge the role of indigenous agents in their production. This was one of the agendas that informed the Tibetan Visual History project conducted at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford between 2006 and 2008. During the process of conducting meticulous research on more than 6000 photographs of Tibet taken between 1920 and 1950, we identified the Sikkimese orderly, Rapden Lepcha, as the author of many of the photographs of Tibet that had previously been assigned to his employer, the senior British colonial civil servant and Tibetologist, Charles Bell.² Projects of this sort attempt to overturn the silencing effect of colonial archival processes and to highlight the transcultural instead. A similar aspiration underpins the research presented here, in which I discuss photographic material that currently is largely stored in museums. However, rather than just interrogating the archives, I have also used some of their contents to reconstruct the social spaces in which photographs came into being and circulated in British hill stations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By examining photographs that were created and consumed both by colonials and members of the

1 See the chapter on contact zones in Clifford 1997.

2 This project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the United Kingdom, led to the creation of The Tibet Album website. Six thousand historic photographs and further information on Rabden Lepcha can be seen there: <http://Tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk>.

indigenous communities of those places, I seek to demonstrate that the contact zones of the Himalayas need not only be seen as domains of utterly unequal power relations. Of course, in matters of land, labour, property ownership, and many other aspects of the political and social relations that pertained between these groups in this period, there was great inequality, but this only makes the interactions that occurred in the "visual economy" (Poole 1997) of one particular hill station all the more remarkable.

Darjeeling: a hub of cosmopolitan copresence

The Himalayan town of Darjeeling, in West Bengal, is highly amenable to this line of enquiry since in addition to being a vitally important centre for trade, colonial administration and tourism, it was also a major locus of photographic activity from the 1880s onwards. The combination of these factors meant that from the time of its creation as a sanatorium, cantonment, and pleasure zone in the mid-nineteenth century, Darjeeling was to become a place of brief, as well as protracted, encounters between a wide range of different communities. The presence of Europeans (mainly British), indigenous peoples of the hills (such as the Lepcha and Bhutia), Nepalese labourers, businessmen from other regions of India, and Tibetan traders and monks, meant that it was one of the most ethnically diverse, even cosmopolitan, conurbations of British India.

That diversity was undoubtedly part of the hill station's appeal to European visitors, as is evidenced by the many photographs of its "indigenous" residents that are now stored in museums and private collections around the world. A "Greetings from Darjeeling" postcard printed at the turn of the twentieth century encapsulates the extent to which it had become renowned as a site for collecting sights (figure 1). The tourist was drawn there in order to experience the exceptional features of its natural environs at first hand and to observe its non-European inhabitants at close quarters. Both categories of visual consumption were appreciated by virtue of their marked difference from their equivalents in the plains. After 1881, when the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was completed, attention to such distinctions had already been carefully framed by the view from a steam train as it wended its way laboriously through the foothills. During a journey of many hours, passengers could peruse photographically illustrated guidebooks with commentaries that alerted them to the variations of flora, fauna, and human interest that could be observed from its windows. The traveller had therefore already cultivated a particular kind of regard for the Himalayan environment and its occupants before he or she even reached their final destination. On arrival in Darjeeling, the touristic requirement for a souvenir of those subjects was increasingly met by a large number of photographic businesses, including branches of some of the major firms of the day, such as Johnston and Hoffmann, who had their headquarters in Calcutta. In fact, the proliferation of studios in Darjeeling between 1880 and 1947 suggests

a strong correlation between the demand for photographic reproductions and the desire amongst consumers to possess a record of contact with the appealing otherness of Imperial Darjeeling, a desire that was met by the mass reproduction of photographic prints within its burgeoning visual economy. Once the postcard format was introduced in the late 1890s, the consumer was presented with readily affordable copies of scenic views and depictions of “ethnic types” that could be inserted in an album to document their stay. When posted to friends and family with a short missive on the verso, such cards advertised the delights of the town and enticed others to go there. In these ways the print culture of Darjeeling blossomed alongside its tourist trade, and photography augmented the appeal of the hill station via the national and international networks in which it circulated.³ Ultimately, the more Darjeeling was construed as a place of contact and difference, the more the production of photographs intensified.



Figure 1: Unknown studio (probably Johnston and Hoffmann), Greetings from Darjeeling, postcard, Darjeeling or Calcutta, printed around 1900.

In catering to consumer demand, Darjeeling photographers produced images that fell into two main genres. One of those ultimately derived from anthropological modes of seeing and recording that had been initiated in the 1860s under the auspices of the British administration. The most extensive exercise of this sort was *The People of India* project directed by John Forbes Watson and John William Kaye at the request of the Governor

3 The scale of the circulation of postcards can be gauged from the *Imperial Gazetteer* of 1908 which states that more than 270 million postcards had been safely distributed by the Indian postal service in that year alone.

General of India Lord Canning, between 1868 and 1875.⁴ By documenting the inhabitants of the subcontinent according to ethnicity, religion, caste, and employment, photographers created the visual equivalent of a census and a vast archive of purported "types" that could be classified and compared by colonial administrators and ethnologists. Unsurprisingly, given Darjeeling's proximity to some of the highest peaks of the Himalayas, the other genre that gained great popularity was landscape photography, but it arose more from the domain of fine art than the social sciences.⁵ The depiction of the beauties of nature had been a well-established topic for European artists from the eighteenth century onwards, and owning a landscape painting became a key marker of symbolic capital for members of the aristocracy and the aspirational bourgeoisie. In the nineteenth century, the invention of photography democratised this form of imagery, making it more affordable and accessible to less elite classes, including those in the middle and upper echelons of the British colonial service in India. It was this market that was served most ably by professional photographers such as Samuel Bourne, who famously left Nottingham in 1863 to seek his fortune in the subcontinent and made it very successfully by establishing the photographic firm Bourne and Shepherd at another hill station, Shimla, and creating a series of prize-winning pictures of the Himalayas.

In the extensive coverage of his career, Samuel Bourne is usually celebrated as a pioneer who applied the stylistic vocabulary of the English picturesque to the mountains of north India and privileged the spectacle of untouched wilderness.⁶ However, during the time of his photographic outings from Shimla in the 1860s, the hills and valleys of the Himalayas were already in the process of being remodelled according to British tastes and needs, with the construction of schools, churches, roads, bridges, and railway lines, and the planting of trees and cash crops (especially tea) that would make the British feel at home in their South Asian surroundings. Of course, that project was entirely dependent on the labour and collaboration (or rather coercion) of those who had lived in the region for many generations. Though largely powerless in political and economic terms, and often undocumented in the historical record, in photography it is the very workers who made this project possible who are the focus of attention. The professional photographers of Darjeeling generated innumerable prints depicting those whose toil supported the lifestyles of the colonialists in their homes and businesses, and who created the products they loved to consume. Frequently repeated subjects included the "coolie" (or porter), the tea carrier, the rickshaw puller, the gardener, the cook, the milkman, the orchid seller, the weaver, and even the curio seller (figure 2). Both

4 For a detailed study of the genesis of *The People of India* project see Falconer 2002.

5 Himalayan landscape photography (in its popular form) also has its roots in the topographical survey movement that flourished in India the mid-to-late nineteenth century. I elaborate on this in Harris 2016.

6 For more critical studies from among that literature see Sampson 2002 and Chaudhary 2012.



Figure 2: Bourne and Shepherd, "A Hill Coolie Girl," hand-coloured postcard, Darjeeling, 1890s.

photographers and their clients appear to have revelled in the portrayal of the "types" who reduced the white man's burdens so that he could concentrate on the "pleasures of Imperialism" (Said 1993). As Saloni Mathur (2007) has pointed out in her discussion of another favourite trope of hill station print culture, the white woman carried aloft in a dandy by local men, the "natives" are literally the bearers of European civilisation embodied, in this instance, in female form (figure 3). Imagery of this sort readily confirms a fundamental complaint articulated in post-colonial scholarship on nineteenth century photography in British India: that it reifies the supremacy of the colonial in contradistinction to subordinated "others" and it celebrates unequal power relations visually.

However, it is important to point out that Darjeeling photographers did not just pander to their clients' liking for studies of mountain ranges or exotic ethnic types. Much of their activity was devoted to the production of portraits for Europeans who were either long-term residents of the town, visitors "up for the season," or short-term holiday-makers. For all these



Figure 3: Thomas Paar, "Dandy," postcard, Darjeeling, 1890s.

groups, the social scene in Darjeeling appears to have been hectic. Parties, plays, pageants, and sporting events had to be attended. Dinner jackets, ball gowns, and fancy dress had to be acquired for, as Dane Kennedy has put it, "illusion was essential" to the operation of Raj-era hill stations (Kennedy 1996, 8) (figure 4). They were places for seeing and being seen within the giddy whirl of Anglo-Indian social encounters. In this environment, a flattering index of an individual's appearance was of crucial importance in fostering friendships, forging professional bonds, and prompting romantic alliances.

Fortunately, the version of the photographic print known as the *carte de visite* had become readily available in Darjeeling from 1880 onwards. It literally provided a calling card that made the visage of the visitor manifest: a "certificate of presence" (Barthes 1981, 80) that could also be augmented by their signature and a message (figure 5).⁷ For women of the "fishing fleet" who travelled to Darjeeling to engage in the marriage market, such cards had the particular benefit of displaying the desirability of their wares to potential suitors.⁸ Given that there were around half a dozen permanent studios operating in Darjeeling by the close of the nineteenth century (along with a good number of itinerant photographers

7 Every bungalow and villa in Darjeeling had a post box where potential visitors could hand-deliver their calling cards and make an appointment with their occupants.

8 The "fishing fleet" refers to the young women who flocked to India from Britain in search of husbands and whose presence was much desired in the second half of the nineteenth century, when ideas of preserving racial purity among the British were prevalent.



Figure 4: Johnston and Hoffmann, studio portrait of a British couple in fancy dress, cabinet card, Darjeeling, inscribed 1894.

from the plains who set up shop temporarily for the season), it seems that a portrait sitting in one of those establishments had by that time become an essential component of any sojourn in the hills. Accordingly, photographic businesses of this period flourished as much from the income engendered by portraits of colonials at play, as it did from those of the colonised at work.

The social stratigraphy of photography

However, in existing publications on photography and empire in India, those two parties are usually presented separately, either in glossy tomes that reek of "colonialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 1989) or in the works of anthropologists and post-colonial studies scholars. In the former, the reproduction of historic photographs tends to eulogize the opulent lifestyles of the colonial *saab* and *memsaab*, while in the latter, that world



Figure 5: Fred Ahrlé, portrait of a young British woman, signed Ethel Buchanan, carte de visite, Darjeeling or Calcutta, inscribed 1895.

is justly derided as a prodigious producer and voracious consumer of photographic ethno-exotica. Similarly, the first focuses on portraits of individuals of European heritage and the second on anonymous indigenous "types" and the cultural environment they inhabit. Much could be said about how disciplinary parameters (in populist colonial history versus those of anthropology, for example) have been instrumental in creating this chasm and the degree to which the contents of ex-Imperial archives have determined the outcomes of research, but this is not the place to pursue the subject. In short, for a variety of intellectual and ideological reasons, the two worlds of colonial and non-colonial (or indigenous) photography have been viewed retrospectively as sharply bisected spheres of manufacture and reception. But just how accurate is this characterisation? What happens if we attempt to reconstruct the social spaces in which photographs originated rather than merely studying the objects that have been extracted from them and preserved ever since in discrete archival and academic domains?

In one of the few essays to pay analytical attention to photography during the colonial period in the Himalayas, the distinguished visual anthropologist David MacDougall suggested in *Photo Hierarchicus* (1992) that not only were the two communities (“native” and “non-native”) separated, but that they were also vertically stratified according to topography and ethnicity, with those who were white quite literally occupying the higher ground.⁹ He noted that the locations of studios were distributed along topographical fault lines, with those designed to serve a European (i.e. mainly British) clientele positioned on the upper ridge of the town, while those for non-European clients were situated lower down the hillside in the “native bazaar,” an area generally deemed to be off-limits for colonialists. This concurs with the accounts of historians of Imperial India who have stated that the public spaces of hill stations were socially demarcated in various subtle and not so subtle ways. For example, at Shimla, the Mall was closed to local people at various times of the day and for key dates in the Imperial calendar.¹⁰ As E.M. Collingham’s *Imperial Bodies* (2001) reveals, a form of apartheid was in operation across the private and public domains of British India, in which the movements of certain kinds of people were carefully orchestrated and the very existence of those deemed particularly undesirable were rendered invisible, if at all possible.

However, my research indicates that the social stratigraphy of photography in Darjeeling was not as rigid as it may have been in Mussoorie or Shimla, and that (at least in its upper levels) there was a degree of mobility. The doors to photographic establishments, even if owned and managed by members of the white elite, were not always closed to non-Europeans. I will even go so far as to suggest that those spaces were sometimes shared and that certain local patrons should be seen as key agents in the production of photography. They were not just subjects of the Imperial camera but, in their work as logisticians, translators, technicians, and facilitators, became “culture brokers” and key intermediaries who provided access to their community for colonial photographers and influenced the manner in which the latter operated.¹¹ A few of those late nineteenth century innovators also became photographers themselves. Paying attention to these previously unacknowledged figures offers an important corrective to the notion that photography was always an imposed, alien technology that remained solely in the control of the politically dominant community.

9 Although he does not cite it, MacDougall’s title is evidently a play on that of Louis Dumont’s famous 1966 study of caste in India, *Homo Hierarchicus*.

10 Kanwar (2003) provides further detail on such matters.

11 The term “culture broker” (or “cultural broker”) has been used by anthropologists since the 1960s when paying attention to the role of individuals who mediate between their own community and outsiders. Such individuals are often multi-lingual, highly knowledgeable, and in possession of considerable cultural capital. They are also often at the forefront of initiating change at a local level and in generating new forms of interaction beyond it.

The studio of Thomas Paar

A postcard created in Darjeeling around 1906 provides a valuable starting point from which to pursue this discussion (figure 6). Not only is it a visual document that enables us to situate the practice of studio photography in the heart of a colonial hill station, but it is also an object of that practice, for this view of Thomas Paar's studio in Chowrasta was produced to advertise his services.¹² On the verso he printed this message: "The largest and finest collection of Darjeeling views, types, postcards, souvenir albums, in all styles and sizes" and boasted "One of the finest equipped studios in the East. Excellence of work well known all over India and Europe." The recto



Figure 6: Thomas Paar, the studio of Thomas Paar in Chowrasta, Darjeeling, advertising postcard created by Paar shortly after his new studio was completed in 1906.

reveals further important information. The building emblazoned with Paar's name has clearly been designed with photography in mind: large windows penetrate the front and side walls, a wide balcony protrudes from the rear, and the whole structure is orientated towards the west to maximise the chance for sunlight to fill the interior spaces and illuminate Paar's subjects. Beneath a sign directing customers "to the studio," three Europeans in pith helmets appear to peruse a selection of his merchandise on a noticeboard. Nearby, some porters and a rickshaw puller wait for

12 Very little is known about the life and career of Thomas Paar. There is even some uncertainty about whether his first name was Thomas or Theodor, but since the majority of my sources list him as Thomas I have done the same. I will publish further results from my research on Paar in a chapter of a forthcoming monograph on the history of photography in the Himalayas.



Figure 7: Thomas Paar, The Woodlands Hotel, Darjeeling, multi-view advertising postcard, created sometime between 1899 and 1905.

business. A lone figure on the balcony gazes back towards Paar as he captures an image of his fine premises. Perhaps he is an assistant observing his employer in action?

Paar's studio could not have been in a more prime location. Since the foundation of the hill station, Chowrasta had been the epicentre of sociality, commerce, and Imperial spectacle in Darjeeling. The main thoroughfare (the Mall) passed through it, a bandstand and fountain adorned it, and its open space functioned as the venue for large gatherings of people and the observance of significant events, such as the visit of a dignitary from the plains. As Paar's postcard reveals, by the early twentieth century, the Darjeeling outpost of the famed Calcutta emporium Francis, Harrison, Hathaway and Co. had been installed there and Moore's Darjeeling Tea-shop was next door. Out of shot, but still in close proximity, were the principle hotels, clubs, and restaurants that catered to British customers. In fact, it is likely that cards like this one were deposited in high-end hotels precisely in order to entice holidaymakers to visit Paar's studio. He also photographed at least one of those institutions, as is demonstrated by a multi-view card created for the Woodlands Hotel, which trumpets the qualities of an establishment "under European management," "magnificently situated" for views of the snows, and conveniently close to the railway station (figure 7). From this refined and commodious vantage point and surrounded by other Europeans, the Woodlands apparently attracted a superior class of clients, including (as the card informs us) the Viceroy

of India, Lord Curzon.¹³ A symbiotic relationship therefore seems to have flourished between photographers and the owners of other enterprises servicing the tourist trade, reminding us once again that photography was itself a decidedly commercial undertaking.

There can be little doubt that the prominent position of Paar's studio in Chowrasta augmented the reputation of its proprietor and made it easily accessible to Europeans in search of a fine quality portrait.¹⁴ It was located at the uppermost level of the social stratigraphy of Darjeeling with only Observatory Hill, a site of sanctity to Buddhists and Hindus and a major tourist attraction by the late nineteenth century, at a higher elevation. I have begun to map the locations of studios in Darjeeling between 1870 and 1947, but although this project is currently incomplete, in general terms MacDougall's vertical hierarchy seems to hold true at least until the 1920s, when Newari and Indian photographers began to take over businesses that had been set up by British entrepreneurs. However, although European photographers were usually situated in the upper reaches of the town and local photographers at a lower level, further consideration of Paar's studio indicates that we should not presume that those who entered it were only elite Europeans. This can be demonstrated by assembling the products of his workspace and thereby re-populating it with portraits of his clients, for they have literally left their *carte de visite* in museums and libraries, as well as in family collections and other more private domains to this day. These objects allow us to begin to document the "types" of people who frequented his studio and to reconstruct the performances they delivered in front of his camera. Most unusually, we can even identify some of them by name.

The prints that survive from the Paar studio today record a surprisingly diverse clientele. They include portraits of a bandsman from the 2nd Battalion of the Black Watch by the name of Johnnie Lawson, a young white woman called Emilie, a Maharajah (probably from the plains), two smartly dressed Indian boys (perhaps students at one of the prestigious private schools of Darjeeling), the Rev. G.P. Pradhan, the Nepalese pastor of a local church, and Thutob Namgyal, the 9th *choegyal* (king) of Sikkim (figure 8).¹⁵ From just this small sample we can deduce that Paar's customers were drawn from a broad range of ethnicities and that senior members of the local community were among them. We can also imagine that wealthy Indian visitors to Darjeeling, such as maharajahs and their offspring, might take the opportunity to be portrayed by a photographer who could boast of an international

13 Since Nathaniel Curzon was Viceroy of India between 1899 and 1905 this card can be dated to that period.

14 The area around Chowrasta had been the site of some of the earliest photographic studios in Darjeeling, such as those of John Doyle and Robert Philips in the 1870s and 1880s.

15 There is also an important portrait of the thirteenth Dalai Lama that has been published in print and postcard format under the name of Thomas Paar. It was undoubtedly taken at some point during the Dalai Lama's exile in India between 1910 and 1913 and possibly in Kalimpong, rather than in Paar's Darjeeling studio; see Harris 2016.



Figure 8: Thomas Paar, framed and signed portrait of Thutob Namgyal, the 9th *choegyal* of Sikkim, from the personal collection of Sir Charles Bell, Darjeeling, 1890s.

reputation and “an unrivalled success with children.”¹⁶ But frankly none of this information would be available to us if we based our analysis solely on artefacts curated by museums and archives founded in the colonial period. Very few Paar portraits of Europeans or elite members of Indian society have been deposited in such institutions, whereas innumerable depictions of representatives of the Bhutia, Tibetan, Lepcha, and Nepalese communities of Darjeeling are available for the researcher to uncover. This undoubtedly reflects the simple facts that Paar went into mass production of “type” photography in order to meet the demand from his customers, and that later, those same images became highly sought after by institutional collectors. On the other hand, there was little need to reproduce Johnnie Lawson’s portrait more than a few times, since only his family and friends would have

16 From the frontispiece to an album of views of Darjeeling published by Paar in about 1910, in my collection.



Figure 9: unknown studio, "Tibetan Mendicant," hand-coloured postcard, Darjeeling, 1890s.

treasured and preserved it. As a result, the photographic record of British individuals who lived and died in Raj-era India is now mainly curated by their relatives, or by military and provincial museums in Britain. Meanwhile the prodigious replication of the ethnic type genre by the likes of Thomas Paar has ensured that it is enshrined en masse in the larger, ex-Imperial archives, such as at the Royal Geographical Society, the British Library, or the Royal Anthropological Institute. One of the most troubling effects of this multiplication is the anonymization that accompanies it. The names of the non-Europeans who entered a studio such as that run by Paar are rarely recorded, leaving images of their bodies to simply connote collectivities and communities with labels such as "Bhutia beggar," "Nepaly Mother," "Tibetan Lama," "Coolies," "Bhutia Lady," "Tibetan Mendicant," and so on (figure 9). However, in what follows, I present some rare instances where it has been possible to reverse the silencing of archival processes and to assert the transcultural features of the "visual economy" of Darjeeling.

Identifying the “type”

When more than a century has passed since their creation, it is usually extremely difficult to insert individual identities back into the outputs of the anonymizing machine that was colonial print culture in India in the late nineteenth century. For this reason, the examples I present here are highly significant. They refer to the three most ubiquitous stereotypes purveyed by Darjeeling photographers: the Buddhist monk or lama (used to signify Tibetan Buddhism more generally), the Bhutia layman (used to signify Himalayan masculinity of the non-monastic variety), and the Tibetan woman (used to signify the allure of Himalayan females). Each of these subjects was enacted visually by clients of Thomas Paar.

THE MONK OR LAMA: SHERAB GYATSO

If visitors from the plains of India initially travelled to Darjeeling to gaze upon the awesome grandeur of the Himalayas, they also came to observe difference in terms of ethnicity and religion, and of one religion in particular: Tibetan Buddhism. Even though Tibet was inaccessible and could only be imagined beyond the mountain ranges, at least Darjeeling offered the pleasing prospect of encountering followers of its religion at close quarters. Since the fantasy of Tibet and the reality of Tibetan Buddhism were key factors in determining the desirability of Darjeeling as a tourist destination, it is no surprise that there are numerous depictions of Tibetan monks, replete with the accoutrements of their religious practice, in museum collections. Among them, one individual features more often than any other. With his pointed beard and hooded gown, this distinctive figure stands out in the many postcards, guides, travel narratives, and even advertising materials he appeared in, to the extent that he seems to have become the poster-boy for Tibetan Buddhism in the hill station between 1890 and 1910. (He can be seen in the Woodlands Hotel postcard for example.) But of course in all these iterations his true identity has been omitted and he is merely captioned as “a Tibetan at prayer,” “a Lama,” or a “Himalayan,” or “Buddhist” monk. It was through a stroke of good fortune that I discovered an original print from Thomas Paar’s studio in an archive and was then able to establish who this man actually was. The print in the collection of the University of Pennsylvania’s Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology is inscribed with just three words: “Mongol Lama, Sherab” (figure 10). Further research has revealed that his full name was Sherab Gyatso and that he had been the head of a Geluk monastery at Ghoom on the outskirts of Darjeeling. Since he had arrived in India via Tibet from Mongolia he became known in English-speaking circles in Darjeeling as the “Mongol Lama.” While in Tibet, he is said to have served as tutor to the eighth Panchen Lama at Tashilhunpo monastery and to have been a noted astrologer and translator. We know that he had moved to India by 1875 because he founded the Yiga Choeling Monastery at Ghoom in



Figure 10: Thomas Paar, "Mongol Lama, She-rab," albumen print, Darjeeling, 1890s

that year and presided over it until 1905.¹⁷ At least one author, a colonial administrator of a later period, has suggested that the establishment was designed for "political meetings," though he does not elaborate on their nature.¹⁸ Clearly Sherab had an illustrious career as a religious leader, but publications by Tibetologists indicate that he also had close connections with the British Indian government and its intelligence services. They state that he was a teacher in the Bhutia Boarding School, an establishment where young Tibetans and Sikkimese were trained to act as "interpreters, geographers and explorers" who might one day be useful if Tibet were "ever opened to the British."¹⁹ He certainly assisted his friend, the Bengali Sarat Chandra Das, when he sought to publish the results of two clandestine missions to Tibet on behalf of the British government, a collaboration

17 1905 is given as the date when Sherab Gyatso left Ghoom. See "Yiga Choeling Monastery, Ghoom," accessed August 26, 2016, <http://yiga.choeling.com>. Various years have been given for the foundation of Ghoom monastery but E. C. Dozey's date of 1875 is the most likely. See below.

18 E. C. Dozey (2012 [1922], 83).

19 Sir Alfred Croft, Director of Public Instruction in Bengal in the 1870s and 1880s, cited in Waller 1990, 193. Also see Mackay 2011.

that exemplifies the close relationship between information gathering, photography and British Imperial ambitions in relation to that country. In the 1890s, Sherab helped Das with the illustrations for his book *Journey To Lhasa and Central Tibet* by posing as a Tibetan in several scenes that were staged for Das's camera in Darjeeling. For example, he appears as a "black hat dancer" in one illustration and as a worshipper in a "Tibetan Temple" in another.²⁰ At around the same time, Sherab also had his portrait taken in Paar's studio. The photographer then put his image to work and repeatedly reused it in the contexts described above.

But what might Sherab's motivation for visiting the studio have been? When discussing the participation of "native" people in performances for the camera or at fairs and museums in America in the nineteenth century, James Clifford proposed that "People lent themselves to the projects of explorers and entrepreneurs for a range of reasons, including fear, economic need, curiosity, a desire for adventure, a quest for power" (Clifford 1997, 198). Of course it is impossible to retrospectively reconstruct the intentionality behind a historic portrait from the subject's point of view, but when entering Paar's studio, several considerations are likely to have influenced this senior Buddhist monk. He may well have been curious and he very probably received remuneration for sitting for the purposes of "type" photography. But he may also have embraced the opportunity to create images that would distribute his personhood among his followers and augment his aura and authority, as the thirteenth Dalai Lama would later do when he entered the visual economy of Darjeeling during his exile in India between 1910 and 1913.²¹ Like many of the Europeans who stood in the same studio space, perhaps Sherab simply wanted to own a good likeness of himself to circulate as a calling card within his social networks (which included British colonial officials), and to participate as an equal in the photographic exchange system of Darjeeling. However, once photographed by Paar in a commercial situation, he also rescinded control over how his image would subsequently be sold to others, well beyond his immediate circle, and reproduced over time. Even so, we could argue that Sherab Gyatso retained some agency in the making of a potent icon of Tibetan Buddhism that continues to have purchase today. He is currently immortalized at the monastery he founded in Ghoom in a clay statue and a painting, both designed by local artists in Tibetan style but derived from Paar's photographic portrait. There he is remembered and reindigenised according to his stature as a Tibetan Buddhist adept and leader, rather than as a character typecast by the replicatory regime of colonial photography.

20 The book was eventually published in London in 1902 by John Murray. For a longer discussion of this staging of Tibet in India, see Harris 2012.

21 I discussed the creation of the first photographic portrait of a Dalai Lama (the thirteenth) in Harris 1999 and have returned to the subject of how senior religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism used photography for their own ends in Harris 2016.

THE BHUTIA LAYMAN: SONAM WANGFEL LADEN LA

If Sherab Gyatso was apparently a willing subject of the colonial camera, Sonam Wangfel Laden La was that and much more. As a young man of Sikkimese/Tibetan heritage, he contributed to a number of photographic projects under the direction of Thomas Paar in which he regularly performed the role of a Tibetan or "Bhutia."²² Among the postcards and prints I have studied, he can be identified acting as "a layman receiving a blessing" in a Buddhist temple or appearing to preside over a "divinity dance" by Tibetan monks (figure 11).²³ (Laden La is the figure standing side-on to the camera at the end of the back row.) That scene was recorded outside the Tibetan



Figure 11: Thomas Paar, "Divinity Dance" at the Bhutia Busty monastery, albumen print, Darjeeling, 1890s.

Buddhist monastery at the Bhutia Busty in Darjeeling, at around the same time that the sightseeing itinerary of the 1896 *Guide to Darjeeling* directed visitors there to observe "absurd and grotesque lama dances" (1896, 40). Should they be reluctant to do so, the guide's author advised that photographs, some of which were "worthy of the best collections" could instead

22 Laden La was born in 1879. To judge by the surviving portraits taken by Paar, he seems to have made his first appearances for the camera at around the age of twenty.

23 I have been able to make these identifications by consulting the biography of Laden La published by Nicholas and Deki Rhodes (2006) and examining other portraits of him that are either in public archives or the possession of his family.

be acquired in the centre of the town. (1896, 41). As we have heard, Thomas Paar clearly sought to service the tourists' passion for prints and he evidently needed to venture out of his studio on occasion to record the phenomena they might have witnessed. But in order to capture an image of the monks in their full *cham* (masked dance) attire, the services of an intermediary were required. Laden La was the culture broker who made that possible. His presence in this print alludes to the fact that he was not simply a photogenic prop for Paar's pictures, but was also instrumental in arranging them.

Due to the elevated status of his family in Darjeeling and his command of English, Laden La had been selected at a young age to participate in various British activities in his hometown. He was educated at the Bhutia Boarding School (where he knew Sherab Gyatso) and later at an English medium college in Calcutta. By the age of twenty-five, his aptitude for government employ led to his appointment as the personal assistant to Colonel E. H. C. Walsh, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling district, and soon Laden La was involved in frontier intelligence work and the formation of a network of informants in his neighbourhood from whom he could gather intelligence. He later entered the Imperial police force and became a key figure in Anglo-Tibetan diplomacy, acting as the principal local facilitator and intermediary for the thirteenth Dalai Lama during his stay in India between 1910 and 1913. Ultimately Laden La's skills and long service were rewarded with the highest accolade that could be bestowed by the Raj to an Indian: the title of Rai Bahadur.²⁴ But he was not merely a dutiful servant of the Empire. Laden La was also a founder member of the Hillmen's Association that lobbied for Darjeeling to gain autonomy from the rest of Bengal, and the head of the *Gompa* (Monastery) Association in the region. Such roles no doubt augmented his capacity to act as a negotiator in Thomas Paar's photographic interactions with Tibetans and other followers of Buddhism in and around Darjeeling. Without Laden La's connections in Buddhist monasteries, it seems unlikely that the colonial photographer would have been able to depict them. In fact, in the notes Paar wrote to accompany a print of *The Divinity Dance*, he describes Laden La as a *munshi*, the Persian term used across the Raj administration to denote a secretary of South Asian heritage or a person respected for their linguistic skills. In inserting himself into that image, Laden La demonstrated that he was not only fluent in the many tongues spoken in Darjeeling, but that he was also proficient in the language of photography and its representational power. We also know that by the first decade of the twentieth century he had begun to use a camera himself, and when he travelled over the Himalayas in the 1920s, he became one of the first Tibetans to photograph the country of his forefathers. Laden La therefore went above and beyond the capacity for "colonial subjects to represent themselves in ways that *engage with the colonizer's own terms*" (Pratt 1992, 7).

24 Information in this brief biographical sketch is largely derived from Rhodes 2006.

THE TIBETAN WOMAN: ANI CHOKYI

Of the numerous voyeuristic representations of Himalayan women that were fabricated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—ranging from the “coolie” with her load to the “comely” girls of the Darjeeling bazaar—Paar’s studio was responsible for some of the most glamorous but, regrettably, the names and life stories of his sitters are, for the most part, lost to us. For example, a depiction of a young woman with the composure and dress of a noblewoman posing beside the rich brocade drapes of his studio is merely captioned: “Bhutia girl” (figure 12). Other prints preserved in albums created by Paar’s customers give a similarly ravishing impres-



Figure 12: Thomas Paar, “Bhutia Girl,” albumen print, Darjeeling, 1890s.

sion of Himalayan femininity and hint that both they and the photographer were capable of appreciating the beauty of his non-European clients. Perhaps it was for this reason that a senior woman in Darjeeling society visited the studio in Chowrasta in around 1900 to have a series of portraits taken. A half-length and full-length portrait (probably taken at the same session) still exist in various archival contexts, the latter of which presents

an image of a confident Tibetan matriarch (figure 13). Standing before a painted rose arbour with grass at her feet and clad in full Tibetan dress, for those accustomed to type photography this figure might at first appear to be out of place. However, she can be construed as entirely at home in such an English garden setting (however simulated), for this is Ani Chokyi, the head of a prominent Tibetan-Sikkimese family, the owner of a number of businesses (including a brewery), and one of the richest women in Darjeeling. She and other members of her family (such as her adopted son Laden



Figure 13: Thomas Paar, full-length studio portrait of Ani Chokyi, albumen print, Darjeeling, 1890s.

La) were highly Anglophile. Such families spoke the English language, ate English-style food, decorated their homes in the English manner, and filled their gardens with English varieties of plants. Since Paar had a large range of different props and backdrops in his studio, his clients were able to select whichever they found most appropriate for the performance of self they chose to enact there. So rather than interpreting this photograph as an example of a European aesthetic imposed on a subaltern subject, we might deem it to be a document of Ani Chokyi's proud self-fashioning and a reflection of the hybridity of lifestyles in a colonial contact zone.

Ani Chokyi was clearly a woman of substance in her own right, but she was also the wife of one of the most experienced *pundits* in the employ

of the British government, Ugyen Gyatso. He is best known for accompanying Sarat Chandra Das on his secret journeys to Lhasa and for creating the first map of the Yamdrok Tso, a major lake in Tibet, in 1883. What is less well known is that Ani Chokyi accompanied Ugyen during the many months of a gruelling expedition that was designed to fill a void



Figure 14: Thomas Paar, "Tibetan Lady" (Ani Chokyi), hand-coloured postcard, Darjeeling, printed around 1900.

in the colonial cartographic record of the country that lay beyond British India's northern border. She was therefore a woman of determination and accomplishment with good reasons for wanting to be immortalised by Paar's camera. With her strong head for business, Ani Chokyi was also probably only too aware that her image might be used to signify ethnicity, gender, and religion if the photographer were to convert it into a postcard. This Paar did and sold it to Darjeeling visitors under the title *Tibetan Lady* (figure 14).

The transcultural photograph

Though small in number, these case studies reveal that a transcultural mode of engagement with photography was in operation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Darjeeling. Certain individuals adapted the technology of the coloniser to suit their own purposes and crafted the visual equivalents of Pratt's "auto-ethnography." In Chris Pinney's discussion of a nineteenth-century photograph of a group of Sudanese men, he detects the transcultural in bodily demeanour and facial expressions, in which the subjects appear to register signs of disinterest and even resistance to the colonial camera (Pinney 2013, 35–37). Similar expressions of disdain can also be found in the visual records of Imperial India, including the Himalayan type postcards of the sort described in this essay. But by paying close attention to the specifics of the social contexts in which photographs came into being and their afterlives in circulation, collection and display, it may be possible to uncover other modes of interaction with the colonial camera in which, rather than being rejected, it was actually embraced. When studying the visual economy of Darjeeling it seems to me that "colonised" people articulated their relationships with family, friends, and other figures in their social networks in a manner not entirely dissimilar to that of the "colonials." Photographs taken by the likes of Thomas Paar could be used in indigenous contexts to forge social bonds, to augment prestige, to articulate religious authority, to evince beauty, and much else besides.

I was alerted to the pertinence of this notion, past and present, when I had the privilege of being introduced to the owner of the Windamere Hotel and its collection of photographs. Although the Windamere is now the most up-market hotel in Darjeeling, it was, and to some extent remains, a home. When I met Sherab Wangfel Tenduf La there in 2014, we toured the premises looking at the many prints that adorn its walls. For him they were family photographs, rather than decorations triggering colonial nostalgia in the minds of the hotel's customers. This was especially evident when we approached a large head-and-shoulders portrait of a Tibetan woman in the reception room where guests assemble to take high tea (in the English style, of course). Sherab paused and explained, with some emotion, that this was his great-grandmother Ani Chokyi. He confirmed this by pointing out that the mount framing the print had been inscribed with the words: "Rai Bahadurani Chokyi, our loving mother" in the handwriting of his great uncle, Sonam Wangfel Laden La. The image that Paar had reduced to "type" and sold as "Tibetan Lady" was in its rightful place and continuing to function (as its subject had probably intended) as an index of a beloved individual.

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Figures

- Fig. 1–5, 7, 9, 14: Author's collection.
 Fig. 6: Courtesy of David Churchill.
 Fig. 8: Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool.
 Fig. 10–13: Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

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Anna Sawerthal and Davide Torri

Imagining the Wild Man: Yeti Sightings in Folktales and Newspapers of the Darjeeling and Kalimpong Hills

Abstract This article aims to explore the entanglements of folktales, travel accounts, and newspaper reports involving sightings, encounters, and rumors about the existence of a legendary creature inhabiting the snowy peaks and forested slopes of the Himalayan range. Since time immemorial, the yeti complex has been part of the folklore and belief systems of diverse Himalayan communities. With the advent of colonial explorers and administrators, the notion of a mysterious creature started to haunt the imagination of the Western public at large when reports about its existence started to appear and were then widely circulated. From village rituals, myths, fables, and stories to the accounts of scholars and travelers, from the pages of local newspapers to global media, the yeti complex has proved to be a very resilient and constantly fascinating mytheme that is able to pervade different discourses, knowledge systems, religious beliefs, folklore, and pop culture.

Preamble

It was a misty early morning when I reached the house of the old Lepcha *bongthing* or ritual specialist of the village of Tingvong.¹ The old man was sitting near the fire in a small hut outside the main house. He was tending the fire and boiling water to make tea, while receiving villagers who were asking for a blessing, or healing, or relief from pain. An hour or two passed as he attended to the two or three people who visited him. The sun slowly rose, dissipating the thick mists covering the forested slopes of Dzongu.

In the midst of casual conversation, since he was in the mood to tell good stories, I asked him about the yeti. Many years before, while doing research on Lepcha shamans, I encountered this topic twice: once in a book by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who wrote that the Lepcha were famous hunters with many stories about yeti encounters, and on a second occasion while doing an interview to record an origin myth. The Lepchas' creation myth says that before the first humans were born, two progenitors gave birth to seven illegitimate sons and abandoned them in the forest. The seven brothers became *mungs*, demon-like beings who were intent on taking revenge on later-born human offspring. When I asked for the names of these seven demons, my informant was able to provide only three. Quite puzzled, I kept asking him for the names of the others until, visibly annoyed, he replied: "Listen, you Westerners keep talking about the yeti all the time, but you know nothing. At least I know three of them." The *mung* is, in fact, described and understood as a mountain demon, but that was the first time in my research that these beings were directly connected to the broader concept of a mysterious being living up into the mountains, the yeti, or the "abominable snowman."

The *bongthing* told me that in the old days there were many more *jhampey mung* roaming in the woods of Sikkim. Nowadays, only few are left. "I still remember my first meeting with the *jhampey mung*," he continued,

I was up in the mountains with an old *bongthing* and we were on a hunting trip. When night fell we found shelter in a cave and we went to sleep. After a while, we were awakened by some scary noises and screams, and then we heard the whistling of the *jhampey mung*. There was also the sound of rolling boulders and trees being uprooted. I was so scared, but my companion prepared an offering on a banana leaf tray: some rice, some meat, some *chi*, simple things. Then he went towards the entrance of the cave and left the offerings there. The noise ceased and we finally went back to sleep. The next morning the clearing outside the cave was untouched: no uprooted trees, no displaced boulders. My friend told me that you have to worship the *jhampey mung* because he is the lord of the forest animals and the hunters. That day we caught a deer because he was happy with us.

1 Preamble by Davide Torri.

Introduction

The yeti, a creature of myth, an elusive and unknown primate of the high Himalayas and even a pop icon, emerges from the encounter of local religious beliefs, rumors, and modern media culture. The aims of this paper are to bring together at least some of the threads and strands which, woven together, created the modern mythology, the popular image, and the unsolved mystery that still roams, haunts, and stalks the solitary peaks, glaciers, and high forests of the Himalayas. For several reasons Kalimpong became one of the centers where this mythology was produced—a mythology in the construction of which Lepcha villagers from Sikkim, Tibetan monks, British Imperial officers, naturalists and zoologists, mountaineers and journalists were entangled.

It is no coincidence, then, that most sightings and myths have been collected from the Eastern Himalayan region. The region around Sikkim, between Nepal and Bhutan served as one of Western modernists' main access points to the Himalayas and the land beyond, Tibet. By the late nineteenth century, missionaries had settled in the Darjeeling hills and the whole area became a focal point for the British Raj administration. After the violent Younghusband expedition of 1903–1904 (Allen 2004), the small town of Kalimpong, situated along the newly created trade route, steadily grew in importance. In Kalimpong, various amenities of modern life, spread through colonial encounters, were available. The town quickly developed into a popular place for people with different kinds of interests and duties: British officials, Tibetan trade agents, Western trade agents, Bhutanese, and Nepalese merchants. Western missionaries and Tibetologists gained access to Tibet from Kalimpong. Mountaineers also chose Darjeeling and Kalimpong as convenient starting points for their attempts on the 8,000 meter-plus peaks.

In this regard, Kalimpong and the neighboring areas epitomize the concept of the contact zone as formulated by Pratt, an area characterized by “the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt 2003, 7). This particular situation gave rise to a pattern of interaction between multiple and radically diverse narratives and discursive formations which interacted and intermingled with one another. As such, the yeti complex is the effect of a polyglossia in which local folklore meets global newspapers, where local religious specialists meet global intellectuals, and the resulting dialogue is then shared with an even larger audience. Moreover, even if this dialogue entails “copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” (*ibid.* 7), it cannot escape the asymmetrical power relations between the different aforementioned voices and especially the representations and knowledge systems involved here (Asad 1975; Said 1989).

In colonizing India, but also in exploring the Himalayan region, one important task for Western teams of experts was geographical surveying,

during which Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, was "discovered." The main access route to Mount Everest went through Kalimpong and Sikkim. "Conquering" these mountains by reaching their summits became a new, modern hobby. Others wanted to study the flora and fauna of the Himalayas—at that time an important area of research for Western academics. Although claims of scientific neutrality were made, efforts to map, catalogue, take censuses of and study the flora, fauna, and even the people of the Indian subcontinent were in themselves an essential part of the practice of domination: controlling or taming the natural landscape of India was the mirror image of Western control of the political sphere of the subcontinent (Torri 2013).

It was in and as a result of this special situation, i.e., a mix of political, geographical, scientific, and mountaineering-related interests, that the yeti came into being. There were many local myths, narratives, and legends about the existence of a huge creature living on high, around the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. Building on those myths, narratives, and legends, Western modernists re-embedded them in quite different frameworks and interpreted them in their own ways.

Wild things: an introduction to the yeti complex

Wild, uncontrollable landscapes have always inspired fear in the lonely traveler, pilgrim, or hunter: mountain passes, deep forests, and jungles were in fact seen as dangerous places, where wild, non-human beings, ghosts, spirits, and deities were roaming, lurking, and stalking their prey. The ethnography of the Himalayas, which by now is quite rich, has also shown that to a certain degree beliefs cohere across a wide area, which certainly includes the Tibetan plateau and the southern slopes of the Himalayas. Such consistency stretches across cultural boundaries with similar patterns of appropriation: at its apotropaic level, the various expressions of religiosity (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) seem to be concerned with mundane afflictions and diseases, and their main supernatural agents (Ferrari 2011). The folklore related to the various yeti-like beings of the Himalayas, as we will see, can highlight some aspects of this worldview (or these worldviews), in which human beings not only share the environment with a host of non-humans, but are also embedded in a relational framework that ultimately depends on the actions and reactions of all its actors: the villagers thought meeting a yeti-like creature was an uncanny, ominous event foretelling good fortune or misfortune, or even illness and death.

Ideas and beliefs about wild, hominoid beings inhabiting untamed landscapes are in no way exclusive to the Himalayas (see Forth 2007 and 2008): from ancient Near Eastern sources (Moblely 1997) to European folklore (Bernheimer 1952; Bartra 1994), from the Iranian plateau (Marazzi 1974) to the Russian and Mongolian steppe and then down to the Chinese forests (Meldrum and Guoxing 2012) we have innumerable accounts of sightings,

rumors, legends, and folktales focusing on the “wild man.” A specific, persisting set of traits and features could be assigned to the being variously known in the Himalayas as *yeti*, *jangli admi*, *chu mung*, *sogpa*, *migo*, and by other names. First of all, the English word “yeti” seems to be derived from the Sherpa expression *yeh the*, which may be a derivation from the Tibetan *g.ya' dred*² (Snellgrove 1957, 214). The expression seems to define a bear-like being (*dred*) that inhabits the higher Himalayas, and in Sherpa folklore at least three different types of this bear-like being are identified: 1) *drema* or *telma* (Tib. *dred mar*); 2) *chuti* (Tib. *phyugs dred*),³ and 3) *miti* (Tib. *mi dred*) (Oppitz 1968, 138–139).

It is certainly a fact that all along the Himalayas people are able to differentiate among diverse kinds of yeti-like beings in terms of at least two broad categories: a big being and a smaller one. Although both the small being and the large one have hairy bodies, the small one is a reddish or yellowish brown while the big one is dark brown, gray, or black. Such beings are often said to emit a characteristic sound that is almost like a whistle. Humans almost invariably encounter these beings in forested areas or snowy fields, although some reports claim they can raid cultivated fields, destroy crops, or attack cattle. In some of the accounts gathered by anthropologists (e.g. Oppitz 1968), they are also known to prey on humans. In addition to these zoological traits, in many folktales and local accounts the yeti also has inverted footprints, can kidnap human beings in order to mate with them, and usually imitates human behavior. According to many informants there is also a certain degree of overlap with the forest deity held responsible for kidnapping and initiating shamans: the *ban jhankri*, “the forest shaman,” is often described as a small, furry being with reversed feet who is known to act as a teacher for future shamans, imparting to them specific knowledge about the spirit world and how to deal with it (Peters 2004).

Early Western sources

The fundamental ambiguity of the yeti lies in the realms of perception and the approach taken. Ape or ghost? Bear or deity? If we look carefully, we find that traits characteristic of these beings were already present in the earliest Western sources. In his paper “On the Mammalia of Nepal,” while recording the absence of apes in the high Himalayas, Brian H. Hodgson reports in a footnote that:

My shooters were once alarmed, in the Kachár, by the apparition of a “wild man,” possibly an ourang, but I doubt their accuracy. They mistook the creature for a cacodemon or rakshasa, and fled from it

2 In this paper, we use the extended Wylie transliteration system for Tibetan.

3 In the transliteration system of Oppitz given as *pyugs dred*.

instead of shooting it. It moved, they said, erectly: was covered with long, dark hair, and had no tail (Hodgson 1832, 339).

This is probably the oldest record in Western sources of the presence (?) of a furry, hominoid being roaming the ridges and high valleys of the Himalayan range, soon to become famous as the abominable snowman. Hodgson's report highlights the great divide between local and Western/modernist interpretations, prevalent apparently since the very beginning of scientific interest in the yeti. While for Hodgson the "wild man" might be an ape, for the local hunters it is a supernatural being (*rakhasa*), a claim pertaining to that sphere of belief in which folklore, mythology, and reality merge into a unified dimension: not an animal, not a human being, possibly a lesser deity, perhaps a local spirit, surely a creature of the wilds.

The same features of the Hodgson report also appear in a later document, a letter read during the April 27, 1915 meeting of the Zoological Society of London and preserved in the Society's proceedings. Mr. Henry J. Elwes read aloud an extract from a letter he received from Mr. J. R. P. Gent, Forest Officer of the Darjeeling Division, "on the possible existence of a large ape, unknown to science, in Sikkim":

I have discovered the existence of another animal but cannot make out what it is, a big monkey or ape perhaps—if there were any apes in India. It is a beast of very high elevations and only gets down to Phalut in the cold weather. It is covered with longish hair, face also hairy, the ordinary yellowish brown colour of the Bengal monkey. Stands about 4 feet high and goes about on the ground chiefly, though I think it can also climb. The peculiar feature is that its tracks are about eighteen inches or two feet long and the toes point in the opposite direction to that in which the animal is moving. [...] He is known as the *jangli admi* or *sogpa*. One was worrying a lot of coolies working in the forest below Phalut in December, they were very frightened and would not go into work. [...] An old *choukidar* of Phalut told me he had frequently seen them in the snow there, and confirmed the description of the tracks (Elwes 1915, 294).

It is worth noting that this document also reports two indigenous expressions used to indicate the being, *jangli admi* (Nep. forest-man) and *sogpa* (Tib. ?).⁴ Chronologically, between these two reports we find the famous Major Waddell episode, which involved sightings of large footprints at a high altitude in northeastern Sikkim. When the people accompanying him identified the footprints as those made by a yeti, Waddell became very curious and did some research on the topic, soon reaching the conclusion that, despite widespread belief, all the evidence he was able to gather

4 The term was reported by many informants and seems to be used mainly by minorities in eastern Nepal.

actually relied on rumors, and that the “hairy wild men are evidently the great yellow snow bears (*Ursus isabellinus*)” (Waddell 1900, 223).

In 1936, British journalist Henry Newman seems instead to have placed the yeti entirely in the religious sphere:

In 1936 a new kind of ghost or spirit appeared in India and caused the greatest excitement in the country. This spirit was eighteen feet or more high, and it left footprints several feet long which cut into the earth two or three inches. This giant was first seen in Sikkim. He then came down the hill to Jalpaiguri; next, he wandered all over Northern Bengal; and when I last heard of him he had been even seen in Cochin, still leaving enormous footprints. It was said that those who saw him died on the spot. And yet he was not an evil spirit; he was a good spirit; so good indeed that the sight of him was too much for the ordinary sinner; but if his presence was to be avoided, the footprints were very useful things to see. The sight of them cured all maladies. In fact, even a sketch of the footprints healed the sick. I doubt not that in due course the places where the footprints are alleged to exist will have shrines built over them (Newman 1937, 159–160).

His view is probably more in line with emic perspectives than any other Western sources are, and he even highlights the effects of the yeti’s alleged presence in daily ritual healing practices. Newman is further credited with coining the expression “abominable snowman” in 1921. This term was widely used in later media coverage of the yeti.⁵

Yeti encounters in local knowledge systems and beliefs

Long before the yeti made its appearance in the published memoirs, reports, and travelogues of British officers, naturalists, and journalists, it was a well-known figure in the myths, legends, folklore, and folktales of several communities living in the Himalayas. In this essay, for practical reasons, we are dealing with a limited set of sources: those related to the area on which we are focused (Kalimpong and the wider Darjeeling hills area, Sikkim, and Bhutan).

5 After the 1921 Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition, Newman was able to interview participants in Darjeeling. Due to his mistranslation of indigenous words, he ended up creating the most popular definition for the being that supposedly inhabits the higher Himalayas. No doubt the word “abominable” helped fire the imagination of Western readers: “The name ‘abominable snowman’ came into use when the *Times* journalist Henry Newman gave it as the translation of the name meteh-kangmi, as sent back by Colonel Howard-Bury in his account of the expedition’s experience on the pass” (Jackson 1999, 71).

Lepcha folklore

The link between the yeti and a similar figure that appeared among the Lepchas was noted by Nebesky-Wojkowitz in 1957:

The most curious figure in the Lepcha pantheon is Chu Mung, the "Glacier Spirit," an apelike creature. This is no other than the mysterious Yeti, or "Snowman," of the Sherpas and Tibetans. The Lepchas worship the Glacier Spirit as the god of hunting and lord of all forest beasts. Appropriate offerings have to be made to him before and after the chase, and many Lepcha hunters claim to have met the Glacier Spirit during expeditions on the edge of the moraine fields (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1957, 136).

As a member of the Third Danish Expedition in Central Asia, Danish anthropologist Halfdan Siiger had the opportunity to make an extensive study of the Lepcha or Rong communities of Kalimpong and Dzongu (Siiger 1956 and 1967). In 1978, he published a remarkable paper titled "The 'Abominable Snowman': Himalayan religion and folklore from the Lepchas of Sikkim," in which he compared his findings with those that had already emerged in Nebesky-Wojkowitz's work (1956a, 1956b, and 1957). According to Siiger, what is known at large as the yeti or by a variety of other expressions identified by Nebesky-Wojkowitz, including *mi rgod*, *gangs mi*, *mi chen po*, *mi bon po*, or *mi shon po* (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956b, 344 and 1957, 155), corresponds to the being known to the Lepchas as *chu mung* or *lho mung* (Siiger 1978, 424). Despite the fact that in Lepcha mythology the *mung* are considered dangerous and demonic creatures (whereas the *rum* belong to a more benevolent class of deities), we are told by Siiger that the *chu mung* is simultaneously also the *dju thing*, the lord (Lep. *thing*) of the hunt (Lep. *dju*), and as such venerated as *pong rum*, the god of hunters. In a series of tales collected by Siiger, it seems that the definitive behavioral shift from hunting deity to dangerous supernatural being attributed to the *chu mung* was ascribed to the behavior of Lepcha hunters: with the decline in hunting activities and the rise in alternative forms of their economy, rituals for the *pong rum* were also neglected. For these reasons, Siiger states, hunters venture into the forest knowing that they suddenly might meet the enraged lord of the animals, who is ready to retaliate. Recurring features of their tales include being pursued, pelted with stones and boulders, having trees fall on them, and shivering and shaking in terror upon hearing the eerie whistle of the *mung* (Siiger 1978, 427), as M. Lepcha was told during a recent interview with a *bongthing*:

It's up there. [...] If you come across a female one, you are lucky. A male could kill you! Seeing a female Jhampey Mung means that you will never return empty handed from your hunt. They whistle and that's how you know it's them. They could be this tall [suggests

a height of around 3.5 feet with his hand] and have red hair. They have red hair and look like us. [...] They are appeased by an offering of ginger, dried bird and fish. The males can be violent and throw big stones around your shed. You hear a whistle near you and in a moment you start hearing whistles from all the mountains around you. They are the mountain deities and we must appease them. They are our Great Spirit Guides in the mountains (Lepcha 2013).

Bhutanese folklore

A character that frequently appears in Bhutanese folklore is the *migoi* (from Tibetan *mi rgod*), a magical creature of the wilds that is simultaneously a supernatural being and a bogeyman invoked to scare children. It shares several of the characteristics already attributed to the yeti-like being in the Eastern Himalayas and has some additional traits: it can become invisible at will, its blood has magic qualities, and can be used to create talismans, amulets, and magic weapons (Choden 1997).

In Bhutanese sources two different kinds of yeti-like beings are also found: the *mechume*, also known as *mirgola*, which was usually described as a small, hominoid, ape-like being with long arms and brownish or reddish hair who inhabits the deep, forested slopes of the Himalayas, and the *migoi* or *gredpo*, who usually stalks the high pastures where the herders bring their yaks. The *migoi* is described as a huge being with reddish-brown or grayish-black hair (Choden 1997, ix-x). In certain tales the *migoi* is said to have a hollow back. This detail is quite interesting since, like the description of the reversed feet reported in other contexts, it seems to point toward the world of the dead: in India and Nepal, reversed feet and a hollow back are features commonly associated with very aggressive and dangerous ghosts. In Bhutanese folklore, the being also possesses some magical items: the *dipshing*, a kind of charm in the form of a juniper twig, which gives the holder the power to become invisible at will, and the *sem phatsa*, a small satchel without which the *migoi* becomes helpless and loses all its powers (Choden 1997, x).

Sikkimese folklore

Among the Lhopo villagers of Tingchim, as reported by Balicki in her book documenting the religious life of Tingchim, the yeti is equated with the spirits of mountain passes, the *latsen*:

The *latsen* is one of the most important and versatile class of supernatural being in Tingchim. [...] the *latsen* are usually heard or smelled rather than seen. They are well-known for helping practitioners with logistics during the isolation of their meditation retreats by

presenting firewood and meat at their doorstep, and may be protectors of women in the village. Although helpful, the *latsen* are also thought to be at the root of many cases of illness in the village (Balicki 2008, 105).

Moreover, Sikkim is considered to be a “hidden land” (Tib. *sbas yul*), a secret and sacred place, blessed by Guru Padmasambhava and filled with relics, treasures, and medicinal herbs. In a text explaining the wondrous nature of the environment and the auspicious qualities of the landscape, it is said that:

Whenever the mountains, rocky hills, lakes and small streams of such a sacred land are polluted, its native guardian spirits and local deities will become agitated. When mdZod Inga becomes agitated, there will be harm from a tiger. When it is Thang lha, there will be harm from the yeti (*mi rgod*). When bdud becomes restless, there will be harm from a wild bear. The nagas will send harm by a poisonous snake, btsan will cause harm through a wolf or a wild dog. In short, whenever the native guardian spirits and local deities are not honoured, rain will not come on time human and animal diseases will occur as well as internal unrest, causing all kinds of hardship and suffering (Dokhampa 2003, 85).

Sherpa folklore

The origin of the word yeti should be ascribed to the Sherpas who used the term before it became known around the world. In 1997, Sherpa and Peirce published an account of one encounter between the informant’s father and a yeti. The story is worth quoting at length since it retains all the freshness and immediacy of spoken language:

At that time, my father went to cut grass on a hill. From Orsho, you walk down, down, down—and cross the river from Thamo. Then up the hill and go to cut the grass. He had a basket—a big basket—and he took some kind of sharp hook that they have for cutting grass. It was then the middle of the day. Then he smelled a very, very bad smell—VERY bad smell. He sniffed again, and this time, it’s a very bad smell. And he’s walking up the mountain and looking and he’s saying, “What is going on here?” He is just looking everywhere, and then he sees the yeti. The yeti is going up then. And then he came down. But my father saw him first. The yeti was sitting on a rock. He was quite close from here to down there—you see that small tree? That much far, I think. Yetis aren’t so big. They are about the size of seven-year-old people. But yetis are VERY strong. I have never seen one. My father has told me about them. This one is sitting on a rock up on the mountain. He isn’t walking, just sitting there on the rock.

My father saw him before he saw my father. If the yeti had seen my father first, my father wouldn't have been able to walk. The yeti can make people so they can't walk. Then he eats them. But this time my father saw the yeti FIRST. He didn't bother about picking up his basket or his robe or that hook—the sharp hook. He just started running, running, running (Sherpa and Peirce 1997, 42).

By now, the reader will be able to discern some of the distinctive traits that appear in this account and show a certain continuity with the previous material. The encounter is a dangerous one, since the being has some power: if he sees you first, you cannot move, and then he will eat you. The yeti is also smelled before actually being seen.

In his book about the Sherpa of Khumbu Himal, Oppitz describes at least three different kinds of yeti: 1) *drema* or *telma* (Tib. *dred mar*); *chuti* (Tib. *phyugs dred*); and 3) *miti* (Tib. *mi dred*). According to the oral material he gathered, the *drema* or *telma* has red, gray, or black fur; about the same size as monkeys, they seem to live in groups. Seeing them is considered a bad omen, and their cries are a sure sign of disaster: their call is reputed to bring misfortune, disease, or a death in the family (Oppitz 1968, 138). The *chuti* are described as bear-sized creatures covered in black, gray, or dark red hair. They usually walk on all fours and prey on cattle: they are known as killers of sheep, goats, and yaks (Oppitz 1968, 138). The *miti* seems to be the size of a man with a reddish or light blond fur, a pointed head, and hair falling over its face. It walks upright, and is known to kidnap humans (Oppitz 1968, 139).

From folklore to newspapers

A few days before Christmas 1951, Prince Peter of Greece sent a letter to the *Calcutta Statesman* (Izzard 1955, 198–201; Kirtley 1963, 318). He described some peculiar events that took place in a village close to Jalap La, in Sikkim. Having noticed that a yeti was frequently coming to drink water from their trough, the villagers filled it with *chang*—the local rice beer—instead of water. They were thus able to capture the drunken being and, after firmly tying it up, they headed down south, intending to bring it to Kalimpong to exhibit it. But their plans changed abruptly when the yeti, sober again, was able to break the ropes and escape along the way. According to Prince Peter, the being was a monkey, and it might have provided some clues that would help answer puzzling questions posed by the famous and mysterious footprints found and photographed by Shipton during his 1951 Everest Expedition.

Kalimpong newspapers: *Himalayan Times* and *Melong*

With time, Kalimpong, already a trading hub,⁶ also became a local media center. Picking up on the strong tradition of newspaper (and book) production in Western Bengal (Offredi 1971 and 1992; Schneider 2005; Stark 2007), and encouraged by the significant number of Europeans who had settled in the pleasant climate of the Eastern Himalayas, modern newspapers in various languages were published in Kalimpong.⁷ Many printing presses for different scripts were available in Kalimpong and in the nearby town of Darjeeling. Because these are easily accessible sources, two newspapers, the *Himalayan Times* (hereafter HT; 1947–1963) and the *Yul phyogs so so'i gсар 'gyur me long* (hereafter: *Melong*; 1925–1963), will be the basis of the following analysis.

The founder and editor of the *Himalayan Times* was Suresh Chandra Jain (1911–1956). The newspaper was written in English and published weekly from 1947 on. Issues consisted of between eight and twenty pages. Its first eight issues contained an average of twelve pages, and in its final eight years it consisted of an average of eight pages. The circulation fluctuated between 1300 and 2000 copies and it was circulated throughout the district of Darjeeling, although most of the copies were of course sold were in Kalimpong.⁸ It belonged to the tradition of the English-language press of West Bengal in terms of both content and format. It contained both news and feature articles, including an appreciable number of (semi-) scientific essays. Many of its guest authors were renowned Western scholars who spent time in Kalimpong in order to study Himalayan cultures, such as the aforementioned Austrian anthropologist René Nebesky-Wojkowitz, the British Tibetologist George Patterson, and the British official and Tibetophile Hugh Richardson, or scholars from the subcontinent who had studied in the West. The paper's target audience was native English speakers and non-native speakers with an excellent command of the language. A British-style modernism went with the language. In general the paper reiterated "Western" modernist narratives that were disseminated through flows of information controlled by the British⁹ or spread by the above-mentioned foreign scholars.

6 On products traded in Kalimpong, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956. On the trade route between Kalimpong and Lhasa, see Harris 2013. On the role of Marwari merchants in Kalimpong, see also Majumder 2005.

7 A comprehensive overview of newspapers and journals produced in Kalimpong has yet to be compiled, but some titles are: *Ādarśa* (Nepali), *Chandrika* (Nepali), *Himalayan Times* (English), *The Young Lepcha* (Lepcha), or *Yul phyogs so so'i gсар 'gyur me long* (Tibetan). For a general overview of Tibetan-language newspapers, see Erhard 2015 or Zla ba tshe ring 2009.

8 Information on the editor and circulation figures were provided by Sandip Jain, the editor's grandson, who publishes a continuation of the *Himalayan Times* today in Kalimpong.

9 A global telegraphic network had been set up by the British Empire: See Wenzhuemer 2010 and Kaul 2006.

Reiterations of colonial jargon and knowledge can be found in the second newspaper, the *Melong*, but to a much lesser degree. Translating the news and essays into Tibetan entailed a considerable transformation of their contents. The paper's full title can be translated as "A Mirror of News from Various Regions [of the World]." The *Melong* was addressed to an audience living outside British-controlled areas, and was stylistically adapted to what the editor and the authors considered Tibetan needs. While it was distributed worldwide, the main target audience was people in central Tibet. Its circulation numbers varied from one hundred to up to almost two thousand copies, while on average five hundred copies were distributed. In Lhasa, the newspaper found an illustrious circle of elite readers from the Dalai Lama downwards.¹⁰

The *Melong* was the first newspaper produced by somebody who considered himself Tibetan, Dorje Tharchin (1890–1976), also known as Tharchin Babu.¹¹ He learned about newspapers through his Christian upbringing at the Moravian mission, which produced the first Tibetan-language newspaper. His newspaper was thus modeled along the lines of contemporary newspapers in Europe, but Tharchin made some changes in order to adapt the paper to a local context.¹²

As the history of both newspapers shows, at first glance newspapers were colonial products which deliberately used a modern model. Sometimes, however, the producers of these newspapers deviated from the model and reinterpreted form and content quite a lot. Building on Pratt, one could describe these local newspapers as "auto-ethnographies," i.e., textual products emerging from and through the power asymmetries of contact zones, which respond to the colonizer's input in ways that deviate from the metropolitan model: "If ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), auto-ethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts. [...] They] involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms" (Pratt 1991, 35). As we shall see, both papers reinforced what Westerners imagined about the yeti. However, there was a stark imbalance between the *Himalayan Times'* coverage and the *Melong's*: twenty-three articles about the yeti in the former and only two in the latter.¹³

10 For details on the production history of the *Melong*, see Sawerthal 2011, 76ff.

11 Tharchin was born in Khunu, at the border to Tibet, and thus he was Indian in terms of citizenship. For details on his life, see Fader 2002–2009.

12 For more about the *Melong*, see e.g. Engelhardt 2011 and 2012, Hackett 2008, or Sawerthal 2011.

13 For a list of articles we studied, see the tables in the appendix. Methodologically speaking, the selection of articles is different in each newspaper. The contents of the HT are available through a complete, searchable digital archive (OCR), while the *Melong* is only available in image-data or hard copy comprising more than 2500 pages. Therefore, it was easy to search for keywords such as "yeti" or

The yeti was hyped in the Western mass media (and beyond) in the first half of the 1950s. Even before that, stories about the yeti occasionally appeared in Western newspapers. However, the first successful ascent of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953, made by Edmund Hillary and Tenzin Norgay, climbing under the British flag, awed climbers and a global public and filled them with pride—but also created a vacuum. The legends and stories about a yeti circulating in the area and discussed by some Westerners proved to be fitting material to fill it. The way this unfolded can be followed in the HT.

The yeti in the *Himalayan Times*

Before 1953 the yeti was only mentioned twice in the HT. The yeti's first appearance in the newspaper was in April 1951, when the HT reported on the Dalai Lama's interactions with locals on his trip to the Sikkimese border ("Dalai Lama meets People on Mountain Walk"). He visited the main monastery of the region, the Dungkar Monastery of the late Dromo Geshe Rinpoche (*Gro mo dge bshes rin po che*):

The Dalai Lama has still to visit a special cave where Geshe Rinpoche once meditated and where Chumbi valley people believe that the Nigyur¹⁴ or Snowman fed the Geshe Rinpoche (HT April 29, 1951, 5).

This account anchors the yeti, as it was later called, in a local cosmography in which there is no clear-cut line between what is real or unreal in terms of the standards of modern (Western) natural sciences. Here a very accomplished master of Buddhism encounters the yeti while meditating. However, the Snowman is not at center stage, but is mentioned only in passing. The newspaper story has some resonance with Tibetan literature, in which there are several examples of encounters between ascetics and snowmen. Milarepa even described them as his companions during his life of austerity in the mountains, if we accept that the expression he uses (*mi dred*) does not refer to an actual bear, but to the hybrid creature we are examining here.¹⁵ Stories about a friendly yeti that supports the practice of

"snowman" in the HT, but not in the *Melong*. I [Anna Sawerthal] have studied the *Melong* for over four years, going through the whole run of the newspaper many times. The two instances in which the yeti was the subject of articles were found independently of knowledge of the articles about the yeti in the HT. However, in order to counteract the methodological imbalance, I specifically looked for occurrences of the "yeti" (*i ti* or *gangs mi* or *mi rgod*) in all issues of the *Melong* published simultaneously with the discussion of the yeti in the HT.

14 We cannot trace the term "Nigyur" to a meaningful Tibetan term.

15 Hoffman (1950, 96) translates the three animals that Milarepa said were his companions as simply "ape," "monkey," and "bear." In 1972, intervening in yeti-mania, Austrian mountaineer Aufschneiter supported this view and explained yeti sightings by the habit of the *ursus isabellinus* "of rising from time to time to an upright position standing to scan the surroundings" (Aufschneiter 1972, 116).

hermits appear also in the life stories of the seventeenth-century Sherpa Lama Sangwa Dorje (Capper 2012, 79; Wangmo 2008, 124).

A later article (February 1952, "Abominable Snowman") has a different context. Nebesky-Wojkowitz analyzes the legends scientifically: What is the origin of these legends? What is the truth behind them? He tries to trace mountaineer Eric Shipton's discovery of strange footprints (in 1951) to the creature's possible origins:

My Tibetan informants claim that the "snowman" of European mountaineers is probably identical with an animal which is known to the Tibetans, living in the Indo-Tibetan borderland, under the name Mi go (spelled *mi rgod* in Tibetan) (HT February 3, 1952, 2).

In a sober tone he presents his collected findings, which are based on the words of his Tibetan informant:¹⁶

The Mi go when standing erect, is about 7-8 feet tall. He is strong-bodied, covered with dark-brown hair, with an egg-shaped head and a red-brown monkey face, which is hairless, except for long streaks of hair on the sides. Outside the forest, the Mi go walks on the hind legs, slightly bent forward, in a peculiar slow trot. [...] The Mi go is said to be rather longlived, some of the Tibetan informants even claiming, that he might live up to two hundred years (HT February 3, 1952, 2).

Nebesky-Wojkowitz addresses the yeti's double existence in both its real and its fabulous dimensions: "Apart from accounts of encounters with a Mi go, to which a certain amount of truth can be accredited, the Mi go is as well the [sic] centre of many more or less fantastic narratives." The Lepchas are said to "worship him as the 'spirit of the hunt,' and regard him as the master and protector of all animals, who live in the mountain-forests" (HT February 3, 1952, 6). After discussing etymological details about different terms used for the creature (such as Tibetan *gangs mi*, *mi rgod*, or Lepcha *chu mung*), he mentions that the creature is said to abduct human beings:

Numerous legends are told also about the "man-bear", who is believed to carry off sometimes a man or woman, keeping his victim in an unaccessible [sic] cave, the prisoner being mostly able to escape only after many years of captivity (HT February 3, 1952, 6).

16 It is worth noting that this type of approach, which is objectively closer to emic perspectives, could be identified with what Pratt defines as "anti-conquest" (Pratt 2007, 7), i.e. the dispassionate and pretentiously neutral gaze of the specialist, which nonetheless confirms Western epistemological hegemony.

He marks these clearly as local myths and narratives. In the same issue of HT, though, an anonymous author picks up on the legends and produces what in modern terms is known as scandalous, emotional news with a headline of "'Snowman' Monster Wandering in Himalayas? Tibetan Warns Everest Explorers." The article recounts the warnings of various Tibetan lamas that mountaineers should not go to Everest, because a race of wild men is said to live there:

[They] have their feet turned backward to enable them to climb easily. Their hair is so long that when they go downhill it falls over their eyes. They eat yaks, the buffaloes of Tibet – AND MEN (HT February 3, 1952, 7, capitalization in original).

And, in a dramatic *crescendo* of scary details, the article concludes:

So strongly do they believe in the hairy monster that flounders along the icy wilderness of the highest mountains in the world that the Tibetans recount, round their smoky yak-dung fires, the detailed legends of the life of the Abominable Snowman. They say the female is larger and more savage than the male. In hushed, lilting voices, they tell how the Snow-woman woos her mate and kills him if he refuses. And sometimes she kills him if he does not refuse. That is the legend of the Tibetan peasants (HT February 3, 1952, 9).

While Nebesky-Wojkowitz was careful to differentiate between legends and real encounters, trying to locate possible explanations for yeti legends in human interactions with the natural world, this article embraces local rumors and tales that are grounded in particular cosmological and folkloric ideas, embedding them in the format of a modern newspaper: "What evidence is there that the monster exists?" and "What was the truth to their warnings?" (HT February 3, 1952, 7). In 1953, the British newspaper the *Daily Mail* sent the first yeti-expedition to the Eastern Himalayas, equipped with scientists and technicians to investigate the case scientifically but in ways a general newspaper audience could understand: Is there a Snow monster in the Himalayas?¹⁷ In short, a modern news story was born.

17 Reported in HT December 13, 1953: "'Abominable snowman.' The Daily Mail London, announced on December 3 that it was sending an expedition into the snowy wastes of Everest to try to track down the 'Abominable Snowman.' The Daily Mail said the attempt to solve 'the great mystery of the Himalayas' would be carried out by a team of leading explorers, scientists and technicians."

Additional legends and descriptions

In the following years, the HT reported on what the yeti might look like, and on the legends and stories of encounters with the creature that were circulating. One after the other, various Western expeditions arrived in the region to find the yeti. At the same time, many travelers who came for other reasons commented on the yeti, which attests to the fact that as the years went by the yeti became an ever more popular and urgent topic. In a long article about "The Sherpas" that appeared in 1954, Welsh author Showell Styles described them as staunch and enduring. "One thing alone daunts them," Styles asserted, "the suspected presence of a yeti, or Abominable Snowman":

The only time I saw Da Norbu and Kami look dismayed was when we came upon a trail of those huge and mysterious footprints crossing a snowslope at 14,000 feet. I don't think they slept that night for it is well known that the yeti can drag a man from his tent without waking him, and then bite off his head. Does the Abominable Snowman exist? Any Sherpa will answer "Yes"! (HT January 6, 1957, 10).

In February 1959, a certain Brijesh K. Verma wrote an extensive article (HT February 8 1959 and HT February 15 1959) in which he explained details about the yeti and, trying to prove its existence, gave various accounts of yeti sightings. The article is a reprint from the English-language *Sunday Standard*.¹⁸ Verma informed the readers that, "the skins and skulls of yetis are used by some Tibetan monks in certain religious ceremonies. The remains of yetis in their possession might have been examined by some Russian or Chinese scientists, but no scientific report is available." He added additional details: "Several snowmen have been reported to be killed by the Chinese, three by border guards on the Mongolian frontier during war, and one by some Gujars of Gaomerg, but no reliable description of the corpse is available anywhere."

Trying to understand what the yeti really was, Verma discusses the physiognomy of apes and humans in great detail: "Perhaps the snowman that exists even today is the same type of creature but at present we can form nothing better than a rough picture of this 'man' based on the existing reports about him." Even though there is no picture available and the sightings he recounts mention "dim light," the article gives a clear account of the being's looks, behavior, and tastes: "He communicates by means of unintelligible shrill squeaks." It is described as either gray, black, or white-haired. A female yeti reportedly once carried off a man, kept him for several years, and had children with him. "When somehow he returned to his village, she again came to take him off." In another narrative, a woman

18 This paper was founded in 1936 in Bombay by N. J. Hamilton (<https://wearethebest.wordpress.com/tag/the-sunday-standard>, accessed November 5, 2015).

was kidnapped, and villagers had to kill the yeti. In Cambodia, a “creature 9 ft. high, accompanied by a woman nearly 7 ft. high” was seen. Tenzin Norgay’s father is also said to have seen the snowman. There is only one reason why no explorer has seen the snowman: “In saving himself from the clutches of explorers he behaves as a very cunning fellow” (HT February 8, 1959, 6–8 and February 15, 1959, 6–7).

Thus forewarned, explorers adjusted their activities to the yeti’s apparent trademarks. As an article that appeared on September 27, 1959 reported about Peter Byrne and the members of his expedition:

They would not carry any tents, but sleep in yak huts and caves for purposes of camouflage. They would wear special white clothes which would be imperceptible in the snow. These precautions are necessary to induce the yeti, a shy animal, to reveal itself (HT September 27, 1959, 7).

Interest from foreigners

Even though the HT was a local newspaper, news about the yeti and the interest it generated transcended the local dimension: out of twenty-two articles, ten clearly came from foreign news sources. Three were written by educated, Western authors, and many of the rest might also have come from foreign sources. For example, a report from Geneva reprinted in the HT in December 1955 states: “Abominable Snowman in the Alps too? Huge foot prints, similar to those found in the Himalaya have been discovered in the Swiss Alps, as well” (HT December 25, 1955, 3). Most reports were written by foreign travelers in the region, Western-educated scientists, or London correspondent Roy Choudhari.¹⁹ The search for the yeti was apparently a hot topic in London, while not necessarily in the Himalayas. Some of Choudhari’s reports bring to light global political entanglements that played out around the yeti. On May 12, 1957 he wrote:

Russia’s accusation of American espionage in Nepal-Tibetan border in the guise of snowman expeditions in the Himalayas has come as a surprise to us all. [...] The Russian government newspaper “*Izvestia*”²⁰ presumably was alluding to the Expedition led by Tom Slick of Texas sponsored by the San Antonio Zoological Society to try to determine whether the “abominable snowman” of the Himalayas is an ape or a man, or possibly a myth (HT May 12, 1957, 5).

19 See HT April 26, 1956, May 12, 1957, October 25 1959, July 10, 1960, August 15, 1960, August 21, 1960, October 16, 1960, November 13, 1960, and December 11, 1960. Choudhari’s name is spelled in several different ways in the HT.

20 *Izvestia* was one of the most widely read newspapers in the Soviet Union from 1917 to its dissolution in 1991.

In the new Cold War climate, and amidst the Sino-Tibetan conflict, Kalimpong came to be known during the 1950s as a “nest of spies” (as was reported on many occasions in both the HT and the *Melong*). Tom Slick was indeed cooperating with the CIA (Coleman 2002, 180ff.), even though it is impossible to say what his connections were with the yeti expeditions. Choudhari reported similar accusations about Sir Edmund Hillary on October 16, 1960. Global politics surfaced in the local media, and yeti expeditions became part of a renewed *great game* (Kipling 1901; Hopkirk 1982 and 1990), as the intricacies of diplomacy and espionage in this part of the world were termed. About half a year later, in June 1957, “New Rules for Yeti Expeditions” were printed, drafted by the Nepalese government and specifically aimed at the Slick expedition. With yeti-mania on the rise, the Nepalese government tried to gain control over yeti sightings: Those leading yeti expeditions were made to pay even higher fees than those paid by the Everest expeditions. Moreover, everything found in connection with the yeti, body parts or photos, had to be handed over to the government. The yeti hunt was thus not only a convenient source of income for the Nepalese government but also a strategic one: it was an effort to gain control over the flow of information going into and out of the country, information that was disseminated in the mass media as well as information that was relevant for intelligence agencies.

Ironically, no further evidence of the yeti had been found yet. This changed in 1960, when Sir Edmund Hillary could finally present Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, then King of Nepal, with what was presumed to be the yeti’s scalp, which he found in a monastery in Khumbu. The HT wrote:

Sir Edmund Hillary, obeying special Royal command, showed the yeti scalp he has borrowed from Khumjung to King Mahendra this evening in the intimate Audience Chamber of his Narainhitti Palace. [...] The King showed more than a passing interest in this most extraordinary object ever put before a king (HT December 11, 1960, 1).

Not long afterward, Hillary openly doubted the yeti’s existence. While the search was still going on, local actors in the Himalayas mostly ignored it or, if they engaged with it, they often did so in a satirical tone. In September 1957, in an article criticizing the dilapidated state of a neglected village in the Kalimpong district, an author named “Moosa,” wrote that only a missionary would willingly go there, intent on conversion:

And, now that Mt. Everest has been conquered missionaries will probably be there trying to find and convert the Abominable Snowman (HT September 29, 1957, 7).

The last news item about the yeti in the HT was in S. C. Chatterjee’s April 1962 account of his trip to Bhutan:

My greatest thrill having to do with animals came later in the chief monastery where I saw a skin of the abominal [sic] snowman. As a royal guest I asked the pelts [sic] as a present, and the monk who knew nothing of the Western expedition for the mysterious yeti readily acceded to my request. I showed the skin last year to an authority in the British Museum and was identified as that of a blue bear (HT April 8 1962, 6).

The possibility of encountering the yeti was “the greatest thrill” for the traveler. The monk, on the other hand, did not even know anything about the yeti quest. Likewise, many locals who supplied material for the story of the yeti, whether as tales or objects, did not care much about taking the search any further. The question of whether the yeti truly existed according to scientific standards did not arise for most of them as it did for foreigners.

The yeti in the *Melong*

This lack of local interest is also reflected in the Tibetan newspaper *Melong*, where news about the yeti only appears twice, and then only in relation to reports on foreign expeditions searching for the yeti. On the other hand, the quest for Everest and its interpretations by Westerners were extensively reported on in the *Melong*.²¹ In contrast to many newspapers in the West, the focus of attention was not on Sir Edmund Hillary, but on the Sherpa Tenzin Norgay who was made into a National Tibetan hero. At first glance, it is surprising that only two articles deal with the search for the yeti and that both articles more or less reiterate mainstream news coverage. Nonetheless, it is relevant to have a look at these news items, which are fully translated for the first time here. The first article was published in the January 1954 issue and it covers the aforementioned first yeti expedition, the one carried out by the *Daily Mail* (1953) at the beginning of yeti mania:

Snow man (*gangs kyi mi*)

In the high snow mountains [of] the Himalayan Range, there probably exists a snow man (*gangs kyi mi*). Before, snow mountain climbers saw [his/its] foot prints. Therefore, soon, a group from Europe will come through Nepal in order to search for the snow man. [Who knows] whether the snow man (*gangs mi*) exists or not. In any case, legend [has it] that there is a white snow lioness (*seng dkar mo*) in the high snow mountains of Tibet.²²

21 From 1929 on, at least thirty-eight articles on this topic can be found.

22 *Melong* 21-10-3: “*gangs kyi mi/_hi ma la ya'i ri brgyud gangs ri mtho por gangs kyi mi yod tshod/_sngon du gangs ri la 'dzegs mkhan rnams kyis rkang rjes mthong ba red/_der brten ring min yo rob nas cho khag gcig bal yul brgyud gangs mi 'tshol ched*”

While maintaining an air of doubt, the author made one creative interpolation to suggest a possible connection to Tibetan legends (*gtam rgyud*). In terms of the existence of mythical beings, it draws attention to another being that is roaming the snowy mountains, the white snow lioness. The second article appeared in the November/December 1960 issue and presented the same report that appeared in the corresponding issue of the HT (December 1960).

The scalp of the Yeti or Snow Man

The Sherpa Mr. Tenzin and Mr. Hillary, nowadays Sir Hillary, who climbed the top of the highest mountain of the world, called Jomolangma,²³ in 1954, recently went through Nepal to discover a creature called yeti (*i ti*) which is supposed to exist amidst the snow mountains. And even though they did not find such a creature, they saw somebody who said that in one monastery there is a skull of the yeti (*i ti*). In order to confirm this using the methods of modern science the monastery gave [the skull] as a temporary loan, so that American, British, and French scholars can analyze [the skull]. It arrived via airplane in the Nepalese capital. There, the skull was held in the hands of the Nepali king, the Indian ambassador, who is the former Political Officer of Sikkim, Mr. Harishar Dayal, and their wives and they looked at and inspected it. That is the news.²⁴

Unlike the way he appears in the pages of the HT, Tenzin Norgay is mentioned here before Hillary, and appears to be the main agent in giving the scalp to the king. Apart from this, this article enables us to compare some of the terminology related to the snowman: here, the term yeti is used next to "*gangs mi*." The Tibetan terms used in both articles are thus, in the first case, "*gangs kyi mi*" (i.e. literally corresponding to the English word "snow man") and in the second case, a transcription into Tibetan of the Nepali word "i ti" (in English yeti). The Tibetan term often said to be the Tibetan correspondent of yeti, "*mi rgod*" (wild man), is never used.

phebs kyi yod 'dug/_gangs mi yod med rung bod kyi gangs ri mtho por gangs seng dkar mo yod pa'i gtam brgyud ni yod do//."

23 *Jo mo glang ma* is the Tibetan term for Mount Everest.

24 Melong 27-3-supplement 1&2: "*ye ti zhes pa'am gangs mi'i thod pa:-_sngon spyi lo 1954 nang 'dzam gling nang gi gangs ri mtho shos jo mo glang mo zhes pa'i rtser 'dzegs mkhan shar pa sku zhabs bstan 'dzin dang sku zhabs he li ri deng /_sar he li ri mtshan du brjod pa mchog nye sngon bal yul brgyud gangs ri'i khrod du sems can i Ti zhes pa zhid yod tshod 'dug pa de bzhin gsar 'tshol du phebs 'dug kyang de lta bu'i sems can ni brnyed mi 'dug kyang /_dgon zhig gi nang i Ti ka pa li yin zhes pa zhid gzigs 'dug pa de bzhin deng skabs kyi shes rig gis nyams chod pa'i ched du dgon pa de nas snga g.yar zhus te a mi ri ka dang in ji pha ran se ljongs su yod pa'i mkhas pa rnams kyi nyams zhib gnang rgyu bcas gnam gru'i thog gtong thabs bcas bal yul rgyal gsar 'byor 'dug cing ka pa li de gor rgyal dang rgya gar gzhung gi sku tshab sngon du 'bras spyi gnang ba dpal ldan mi rje ha ri shwar dA yal lha lcam lhan rgyas mchog gis kyang phyag tu bsnams te gzigs zhib gnang 'dug pa'i gnas tshul//."*

Quantitatively, the *Melong* shows considerable disinterest in the yeti. As important as the thrill of the yeti was for many Western agents, many actors of the Himalayan locality did not care much about taking their legends further. The *Melong* addressed an audience which its editor saw as an independent nation, especially during the years following India's independence and Tibet's struggle to hold its ground against Chinese dominion. Rather than indulging in the truth of the yeti's existence, for the *Melong*, the yeti complex was a welcome occasion to intensify an image of Tibet as a bounded entity. In the first case, Tibetan explanations for the yeti are offered, in the second case, the national hero Tenzin Norgay is put center stage. Whether and how the yeti might or might not "exist" in the mountains is of very little interest to the nationalist editor of the *Melong*.

Conclusions

In this article we have examined a wide range of sources of many different types including some rare material that has received little attention thus far. We have put these sources in dialogue with each other in order to reveal the ways in which they mutually resonate, and to shed light on the web of interconnections that constitutes what we call the yeti complex. This complex is characterized by multiple narratives, which overlap, and explain and interpret each other.

An integral part of local folklore since time immemorial, the yeti appeared in Western sources in zoological or naturalistic commentaries written by imperial observers, scientists, and military men during the first half of the nineteenth century. Part of the imperial endeavor was, after all, the taxonomic description of the new colonial domain in all its aspects (flora, fauna, minerals, the landscape, human beings). To know is in fact symbolically a prelude to and a requirement for control: hence the importance of mapping the land and acknowledging what lay therein. A mysterious wild being was therefore also perceived as a possible threat: in the imperial epistemology, there is no room for a blank space. Because of this, the yeti had to be assessed, decoded, and naturalized: hominoid or primate, monkey or bear, its place in the system had to be clarified. As a result, the first reports are, in their essence, strictly zoological. We may consider these the set of "scientific" narratives about a mysterious being believed to inhabit the high Himalayas and its forests.

Folk beliefs, tales, and other local, predominantly orally transmitted beliefs about the yeti, and a host of other entities thought to live on land they shared with human communities, are the background—or, one might say, the underpinnings—of the scientific narratives. For the villagers, creatures of folklore like the yeti were never discussed as such: some people claimed to have met them, and they lived on in stories and tales. The villagers did not necessarily consider the yeti and yeti-like creatures to be animals. Instead, they belonged to those entities, variously named, that had

to be taken into account when traveling or hunting, when sacrificing or performing rituals. Through their relationships with these beings, illness and health, misfortune and good fortune, infertility and fertility could be averted or granted, inflicted or negotiated. This set of narratives and the set of scientific narratives were never really integrated into a common discourse. Although many of the explorers and officers who produced scientific narratives included in their reports at least some hints of the supernatural explanations offered by their coolies, workers, and porters, they did not consider these to be more than the chatter of the superstitious, colonized folk.

Such an approach started to change in the twentieth century, when a new generation of social scientists, anthropologists among them, started to look into cultural discourses and symbolic systems. Papers written by Nebesky-Wojkowitz and Siiger make good use of folkloric materials to shed light on the exaggerated, at times misguided scientific craze for finding a new animal species in the Himalayas. Nonetheless, this scientific craze continued through the 1950s and 1960s, in part as a result of renewed interest in the Himalayas after the 1953 Hillary-Norgay expedition. In particular, a growing, Western-oriented mass media energetically pumped up the story of the yeti by sending expeditions to the Himalayas to search for it and then reporting extensively on what ensued. The local Kalimpongian media picked up on this trend to varying degrees, depending on their particular target audiences.

A creature of folklore or a mythological being, a creepy hominoid stalking the mountaineers, a bogeyman to frighten children when they misbehave, the missing link between human and non-human animals, a journalistic scoop, the yeti has been represented in newspapers, books, films, and comics, on stamps and paintings, reported upon in villages and metropolises, whispered about in mountains and talked over in conferences. As Oppitz pointed out: "The Yeti is alive, but one will never see him. One can feel him, but one will never grasp him." (Oppitz 1968, 141, original in German). This multiplicity of perspectives—none of which can claim to be definitive—underscores once again the being's proverbial elusiveness. The yeti emerges from the mists of rumors and thrives at the intersections between diverse discourses about its true nature. In this sense, we could say, the contemporary yeti complex is a transcultural product, created by the blurring of boundaries between different ontological realms (natural/supernatural), languages, geographical and empirical dimensions, histories and perceptions.

Online Databases

HT *Himalayan Times*, Kalimpong: Suresh Candra Jain, 1947–1963 [Gaps], Electronic reproduction, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Libraries, http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/himalayan_times, accessed November 15, 2015.

Melong *Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*, Kalimpong: Gergan Tharchin, 1925–1963[Gaps], electronic reproduction. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Libraries, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_6981643_000/index.html, accessed November 15 2015.

Articles studied in the HT

Date	Page	Headline	Source (author and/or place)	Comment
April 29, 1951	5	Dalai Lama Meets People on Mountain Walks		
February 3, 1952	2,6,9	“Abominable Snowman”	René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz	
February 3, 1952	7,9	“Snowman” Monster Wandering in Himalayas? Tibetan Warns Everest Explorers		
December 13, 1953	3	“Abominable Snowman”		also in <i>Melong</i>
December 25, 1955	3	Abominable Snowman in the Alps too?	Geneva	
August 26, 1956	5	Our London Letter	B.B. Roy Choudhuri, London	
January 6, 1957	8,10	The Sherpa—The Greatest ‘Little Man’ in the World	Showell Styles	
May 12, 1957	5	London Newsletter	B.B. Ray Chaudhuri, London	
June 9, 1957	11	New Rules for Yeti Expeditions: Bitter Criticism of Nepal Premier	Kathmandu	
September 29, 1957	6,7	The Story of a Village	“Moosa”	

Date	Page	Headline	Source (author and/or place)	Comment
February 8, 1959	6-8	The Yeti: Man or Animal	Brijesh K. Verma	
February 15, 1959	6,7	The Yeti: Man or Animal II	Brijesh K. Verma	
August 2, 1959	1	Search for the Yeti	Kathmandu	
September 27, 1959	7	Fresh Efforts to find Yeti. Plan to Attempt Everest Dropped	Darjeeling	
October 25, 1959	5	Genetic Experts at Gangtok	Gangtok	
July 10, 1960	2	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
August 15, 1960	8	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
August 21, 1960	9	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
October 16, 1960	2	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
November 13, 1960	5	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
December 11, 1960	4	Hillary Shows Yeti Scalp to King	Kathmandu	also in <i>Melong</i>
October 15, 1961	5,6,8	Darjeeling and its Surroundings	Dr. S.C. Chatterjee	
April 8, 1962	5-7	My Journey to Bhutan	Dr. S.C. Chatterjee	

Articles studied in the Melong

Date and Issue ("volume-number")	Page	Headline	Source (author and/or place)
Jan 1954 (issue 21-10)	3	The Snowman (<i>gangs kyi mi</i>)	not specified
Nov/Dec 1960 (issue 27-3)	supplement 1,2	The Scalp of the "Yeti" or "Snowman" (<i>ye ti zhes pa'am gangs mi'i thod pa</i>)	not specified

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Prem Poddar and Lisa Lindkvist Zhang

Kalimpong: The China Connection

Abstract Historically identifiable contact between Kalimpong and incoming Chinese migrants occurred, at the latest, in the early twentieth century. This essay makes reference to some of the interfaces and events involved, but chiefly focuses on the three phases in which Kalimpong emerged in the Chinese communist consciousness, especially the period between the mid-1950s and the early 1960s. The representations of Kalimpong in the Chinese language *Renmin Ribao* (hereafter *People's Daily*) of this time clearly embody the anxieties, fears, and suspicions that the Chinese government harboured about the foment and ferment of socio-political encounters with their locus in "Galunbao" (噶伦堡 or Kashag ministers' fortress). From a town hosting the Chinese trade agency and an "idyllic" (or *tianyuan* 田园) place where the Dalai Lama and the townspeople met, to its transformation into a "nest of spies" (a term used by both Nehru and Zhou Enlai) where "Indian expansionists," "American and British imperialists," and "Tibetan rebels" rubbed conspiratorial shoulders, Kalimpong was finally represented after 1962 as the place where Indian authorities were in cahoots with the Kuomintang, and put the local Chinese through the wringer. Using colonial archives, untranslated Chinese material, and secondary published sources together with recent interviews and field notes, the essay analyses these narratives, marked as they are by an ambivalence about the place's vernacularly cosmopolitan character. The hill station also emerges as a barometer and metonymic stand-in for the problematic relationship between China and India.

[...] so far as Kalimpong is concerned [...] a complicated game of chess [is being played here] by various nationalities (Nehru, 2nd of April 1959).

[...] what the map cuts up, the story cuts across (de Certeau).

A sense of politics does not generally unzip easily as an unequivocally observable analytic category with significances and meanings that are, of necessity, revealed and concealed. The aim of this paper is nevertheless to analyse, as clearly as possible, the *People's Daily's* representations of the border town of Kalimpong¹ in the 1950s and 1960s. Kalimpong came to play a pivotal role in the border politics of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Republic of India (ROI) for three reasons: (i) Historically a British trade post since the mid-nineteenth century, Kalimpong was favourably located on the Lhasa-Kolkata trade route—the same route used by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the early 1950s to transport supplies from China to Tibet² after the Battle of Chamdo. (ii) A sizeable Tibetan population lived in Kalimpong, especially after the PLA invaded the Kham region, when refugees started to stream into Kalimpong. This Tibetan population included residents, traders, refugees, and most importantly for this paper, influential members of the *Kashag* (or the Tibetan Governing Council). (iii) A diasporic Chinese population lived in Kalimpong, many of whom later were interned in Deoli after the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Drawing on archival material from the *People's Daily*, fieldwork notes along with interviews conducted over a period of three weeks, and many published primary and secondary sources, we shall attempt to show how Kalimpong functioned as a metonymic ambit in which ROI-PRC relations were to be played out in the 1950s and the 1960s.

Akin to *Pravda's* status in the Soviet Union at its height, *People's Daily*, as an official organ of the Chinese Communist party directly controlled by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee (Wu 1994, 195), provided direct (and sometimes oblique) information on the policies and viewpoints of the government. Even though Deng Tuo (a well-known poet and intellectual) was its editor-in-chief during much of the time in question here, the newspaper, it is believed, was effectively controlled by Mao's

1 Besides 噶伦堡, also spelt 卡林邦 and 卡林蓬 in present day usage. See for example the entry in the Chinese Wikipedia (Wikipedia 2015). This is in itself interesting since the older rendering 噶伦堡 or "Galunbao" literally means "Kashag ministers' fortress" ("噶伦" signifies a member of the Kashag/Tibetan Government according to the *Hanyu Da Cidian* (汉语大词典) and 堡 denotes a fortress-like construction). 卡林邦 and 卡林蓬 are probably transliterations of the English name Kalimpong as they read "Kalinbang" and "Kalinpeng" in pinyin. None of the Chinese documents that we have read use 卡林邦 or 卡林蓬 to denote Kalimpong, but a quick Baidu search verifies that the names are in use, especially by tourist websites.

2 Whenever we refer to Tibet, we are mainly making reference to political Tibet or the Dalai Lama's state, and not ethnographic Tibet signifying the stateless braid of ethnic Tibetan localities.

personal secretary Hu Qiaomu. The paper's commentaries included here clearly represent the fears and anxieties of the Chinese government, especially in relation to Tibetan insurgency and suspicions about the postcolonial Indian establishment's possible sympathy and support for the Dalai Lama. Although India publicly denied it, it is not a wild conjecture that *Jenkhentsisum*, the main Tibetan émigré opposition group in Kalimpong, was secretly being assisted by India.

The appearance of the name of "Kalimpong" in headlines in the *People's Daily* spans the period from March 1955 to August 1963. These articles can loosely be grouped into three different themes that correspond to the historic unravelling of the Sino-Indian relationship, with its fulcrum in the idea and territory of Tibet. (i) 1955–57: Kalimpong as a nondescript, idyllic (田园) mountain town; (ii) 1959: Kalimpong as a "nest of spies"³ and command centre for Tibetan rebels; (iii) 1963: Kalimpong as a place that is hostile towards the Chinese.

Interfaces and entanglements: a conceptual detour

Between the 1900s and early 1960s, this interstitial space "[o]n the threshold of three closed lands" (Graham 1897) can best be summed up as a restless junction where cultures collided and coalesced, giving Kalimpong an air of being "vernacularly cosmopolitan" (Bhabha 1996, 191–207)⁴ or a "[b]order cosmopolis" (Steele 1951). Significantly—even though we use these terms rather loosely—culture, history, and politics exist here as "supplements," "adding only to replace, or insinuating themselves in place of the original, only then to become the original that in turn becomes written over and replaced again" (Dirks 2015, 74–75). The discursive evidence we employ in this essay bears out Pratt's transcultural "contact perspective," underlining "how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other" such that "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices" (Pratt 2003, 7) are foregrounded, despite what states, governments, and media outlets might project. These projections are a function of cartographic anxieties that relate to separatist sentiments and normalized national and ethnic boundaries. Movements—separatist and unifying—appear to be common elements of Prattian contact processes, pointing to a circulatory notion of cognisance production: individuals constitute their identities in their encounters with others who, in turn, do the same thing, setting up an economy of perceptual reticulation. History has borne out the fact that the hybridised Kalimpong border has invited, to cite Friedman

3 It is difficult to ascertain when the term was first used, but it was routinely recycled to invoke the shenanigans occurring in an otherwise restive and quiet place.

4 The term is Homi Bhabha's. He deploys it to point to a multi-ethnic ethics as a counterweight to the Eurocentric claims vested in notions of a classic, Kantian cosmopolitanism.

writing in a different context, “transgression, dissolution, reconciliation, and mixing” (Friedman 1998, 17), even as we know that every representation of the Kalimpong world (or any other place for that matter)—poised between the spatial, social, and historical—is ultimately a negotiation between description and interpretive invention.⁵ What role can the town and the enmeshed demographic history of its environs be assigned—in narratives such as Kimura’s descriptive *Japanese Agent in Tibet* and Desai’s inventive *The Inheritance of Loss* (see Epilogue in this volume; also Poddar and Meador, forthcoming)—in the emergence of the complex, even cosmopolitan (albeit troubled), nature of Kalimpong’s “culture” today?⁶ Arguably Kalimpong did appear to travellers, colonialists, and adventurers as a transit space in its early history; ideas of place and belonging as the products of fixity and locality are nevertheless challenged, not necessarily uniquely, by Auge’s notion of “non-places,” where people communicate only through signs and images, and where exchanges are framed by rules that are not defined by the people participating in them (Auge 1995, 42; 78).⁷ The multi-sensory sociality of Kalimpong is, by contrast, clearly visible in most of the relevant writings.

These writings can be found in accounts ranging from that of the British settlement officer Bell written in 1905, to that of Italian Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci in 1948, or to Sangarakashita, the British yellow-robed monk who walked through the streets, among the Tibetan red-robed monks in 1950 and reported: “The part of it [Kalimpong] which was regarded as being the social élite and which included members of the Bhutanese and Sikkimese ruling families, Tibetan aristocrats, and Indian Government officers, as well as a sprinkling of European and American research scholars, explorers, and journalists [... made it a] cosmopolitan little town” (Sangharakshita 1991, 29–30). “[T]he Harbor of Tibet” and “the largest emporium of northern Bengal” were amongst other epithets earned by the town (Fader 2002, 258–259).⁸ The conviviality (although it was somewhat more elitist than described in Bell’s more grounded, apparently classless idiom) of 1950s Kalimpong is captured in a romanticised tone here:

5 For a detailed theoretical articulation of this, see Poddar (1998).

6 We can also add Bell’s survey report (1905) and Foning’s tract on indigeneity (1987) to the list.

7 The idea of a “non-place” is not to be confused with the GNLf maverick leader Ghising’s employment of the diversionary tactic of “no man’s land” (and “ceded land”) in the late 1980s to stoke political fires. Marked as it is by anxious belonging, Kalimpong today must not be cast in terms of a naïve, atomistic ideal of affective place attachment. The eco-feminist philosopher Val Plumwood argues for a critical reading of place that makes visible the relationships between “sacrificial and shadow places” (2008, 140).

8 In the words of George Patterson, the controversial reporter ensconced in the hill station during most of the 1950s: “On a market day there may be seen Nepalese, Bengalis, Sikkimese, Bhutanese, Lepchas, Chinese, Mongolians, Tibetans, Mohammedians, Marwaris and other Indian nationals, not to mention the great variety of Europeans who are annually drawn to this charming Himalayan town” (1960, 72).

The thirteenth Dalai Lama had found asylum there. So had relatives of the deposed King Theebaw of Burma. Elderly Afghan princesses who had fled Kabul with King Amanullah could still be seen in the weekly market. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark and his wife, Princess Irene, were said to be studying Himalayan flora until their residence permits were abruptly cancelled. Sir Tashi's prince evoked memories of the court of St Petersburg. A neglected villa was pointed out as having once been Rabindarath Tagore's home. In another house had lived the Russian painter Svetoslav Roerich and his Bengali actress wife, Devika Rani. Some residents had known Denis Conan Doyle, son of the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Buddhists, Christian missionaries, writers and retired military officers from Europe and America graced the social circle (Datta-Ray 2013, 141–142).

In these accounts the Chinese are mentioned only in relation to Tibet, and clearly Kalimpong resists being narrated in geopolitically, let alone culturally, monolithic terms. With no proper passport controls in place, citizens (of various states), refugees, people of multi-ethnic origins and undetermined status, all (or, until the late 1940s, all who resided in or were in transit through the town) made up what today is called “superdiversity” (Vertovec 2007).⁹ Kalimpong became inscribed as a space “predicated upon the existence of plurality”; a multifaceted, magnetic matrix yet also subject to spawning the kinds of geopolitical and geo-cultural forces it in turn inscribes (as the rest of the essay shows); this suggests that a productive way to imagine this space might be in terms as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey 2005, 9).

1955–57: Kalimpong as a nondescript yet idyllic mountain town

Two critical problems of an economic nature arose in Tibet as a direct result of the PRC's invasion in 1950: the PLA's presence in the region had brought about an acute food shortage and led to inflation in food prices (Scott 2009, 45–47; Garver 2001, 51),¹⁰ and an American trade embargo on communist countries was applied to the Tibetan wool export business,

9 The metastasis of empires into nation-states, from British India to independent India and from Qing China, say, to communist China, clearly demanded demarcated boundaries rather than blurred borders, thus obstructing the nomadic and “Zomic” mobility that obtained in some of these stateless tracts. British India as well as political Tibet of course controlled, if they did not actually bar, foreigners. It is not until the 1940s that the British started to register and demand identity papers from “Chinese” who entered India via Tibet (SAWB, IB 1939b, 51).

10 Both the PLA and the poorest Tibetans suffered immensely from the food shortage and transportation difficulties. Within six months after the PLA advance force entered Lhasa they were in danger of starving.

which significantly hampered the economy.¹¹ The PRC's short-term solution for these two problems was (i) to open up Tibet more to its neighbouring countries (Dai 2013, 24–27),¹² and (ii) to increase the transportation of goods between inner Tibet and China. By importing more grain to Tibet from China and elsewhere, the immediate food shortage could be staved off (Dai 2013, 24–27); and by buying the leftover Tibetan wool which was intended for the United States, the PRC could fill the economic gap that had been created in the market (Goldstein 2007, 259–260).

In the early 1950s the quickest route between inner Tibet and China was via the port of Kolkata (Garver 2001, 85).¹³ The lack of proper roads and the rugged terrain between China and Tibet made the overland journey far slower than the one via sea to India. After the PLA's invasion of Tibet, goods were increasingly brought by ship from China to Kolkata and then taken on by train to Siliguri. From Siliguri they would reach Lhasa via either the Kalimpong-Lhasa caravan route through the Jelep La pass, or along the Gangtok-Lhasa route over the Nathu La pass.¹⁴ As a response to this crisis, the PRC managed in 1952 to work out a system to transport rice from China to Tibet with Kalimpong as its transfer point (Goldstein 2007, 259–260).

It is also in this context that Kalimpong entered the public political *imaginaire* of the PRC.¹⁵ The first time Kalimpong is mentioned in a headline in the *People's Daily* is in March 1955. The notice on the first page briefly states that according to the 1954 "Agreement on trade and intercourse between Tibet region of China and India," a Chinese trade agency was founded on March 25 in Kalimpong (*People's Daily* 1955, 1).¹⁶ Although Kalimpong only appears here as the nondescript host town for the trade

11 Tibet's main source of income was from exporting wool and the United States was the main buyer. "In 1951 an estimated 1,600,000 pounds of wool was piled up in Kalimpong against the season's normal anticipated import of 8,000,000 pounds. Out of this, nearly 2,000,000 pounds will not arrive from Kham in Eastern Tibet, which is now under control of Chinese Communists" (*New York Times* January 22, 1951, cited in Harris 2013, 38–9).

12 Historically, Tibet relied on its neighbouring states, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim etc., for imports of staple foods. According to one Chinese source, in the 1950s, the Indian government imposed trade restrictions on Tibet and warned the other neighbouring countries not to trade with Tibet, which made the situation in Tibet even more perilous.

13 This changed in 1956 with the completion of several roads leading to inner Tibet from Qinghai and western Sichuan.

14 "Jelep-La" translates roughly as "easy pass," as old residents in Kalimpong nostalgic about the town's trade history like to repeat. Jelep-La is an all-weather and all-season pass, while the more treacherous Nathu-La can only be traversed during the warmer months.

15 It goes without saying that covert operations of the Chinese intelligence services run by the Tibetan-Mongolian Affairs Commission, Transport Department, and Defence Department, including mysterious murders in Kalimpong in the 1930s–40s, were not altogether unknown (Kimura 1990).

16 Unless otherwise stated, translations from the Chinese are our own.

agency,¹⁷ establishing the agency in Kalimpong was of tremendous importance for the PRC, Tibet, and India.

Negotiations for the “Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet region of China and India,” better known in India as the Panchsheel Treaty, started on December 31, 1953 in Beijing and continued for four months. One of the reasons the negotiations dragged on was that China wanted to match the Indian trade agencies in Gartok, Gyantse, and Yadong with Chinese ones in Shimla, Almora, and Kalimpong. India refused to let the Chinese have trade agencies in Shimla and Almora—two strategically important hill stations. Instead China had to be content with trade agencies in New Delhi and Kolkata, where they could be monitored more easily (Rowland 1967, 118; United Nations 1958, 72).¹⁸ In the end, deviating from the original proposition, China was only allowed to take over the already existing Tibetan trade agency in Kalimpong. This Tibetan Kalimpong agency had been set up in 1950 by Shakabpa, the finance minister in the *Kashag*, and was headed by Lobsang Tsewang and Surkhang Depön who had been sent by Lhasa. The new representative for the Chinese agency was Yamphel Pangda, who arrived in Kalimpong in January 1955 (Goldstein 2013, 156 n. 36). Yamphel Pangda came from the famous Pangda family, one of the three Tibetan families that had a monopoly on the wool trade. The family’s ties ran deep in Kalimpong: Nyigyal Pangda (Yamphel’s father) set up a trade empire and had already used Kalimpong as a trading post (See McGranahan 2002; Meilang 2005, 50). The Chinese chose Yamphel in order to appease the Tibetan opposition, as he had “virtually a monopoly over Indo-Tibetan trade” (Shakya 1999, 120).¹⁹

The 1953 takeover was not without controversy; the Tibetans were not consulted about the agreement and were caught unawares when the deal was announced in April. B. N. Mullik, chief of Indian Intelligence, paid a visit to Kalimpong, which by then had already become a meeting ground for Tibetan refugees and dissident voices. Upon hearing about the agreement they were “shocked and anguished,” according to Mullik. The Tibetans in Kalimpong suggested that the already existing Tibetan trade agency in Kalimpong should remain separate from the Chinese one, and that the Tibetan agency should only represent the Dalai Lama. This suggestion was not surprisingly turned down (Shakya 1999, 119–120).

After the 1955 notice, the *People’s Daily* remained silent about Kalimpong until 1957, when it was mentioned again in three short articles concerning the Dalai Lama’s visit to the town. The articles from 1957 employed language free of any negativity about the Dalai Lama’s visit to Kalimpong

17 Although the trade agency is called “agency” in official documents, locals in Kalimpong referred to it as the trade mission.

18 Not to mention the fact that, except for the trade and transportation benefits which China gained (India did not gain any, rather they lost the old colonial British trade benefits they had inherited), this was the first international agreement that recognised Tibet as legally a part of China.

19 Yamphel was also the richest Tibetan at the time (McGranahan 2010, 144).

and describe the hill station as a “small mountain town in the northern part of West Bengal with a population of 20,000. The perennial snow-capped peak of the Himalaya’s offshoot, Kanchenjunga, is just to the north of Kalimpong” (*People’s Daily* 1957a, 1). The articles describe how warmly the Dalai Lama was received by the people of Kalimpong, his religious activities (such as expounding sutras to more than ten thousand people), his meetings with important people such as Sherpa Tenzing and Prince Peter of Greece,²⁰ and the fact that he delayed his departure for Tibet because some prominent locals wanted him to stay longer for festivities (*People’s Daily* 1957a, 1; 1957b, 1; 1957c, 1).

One paragraph of particular interest is an account of the Dalai Lama attending the Chinese Trade Agency’s welcome reception for him. Among the attendees were “local Indian officers, the local Chinese-Indian Friendship Association, Bhutan’s Queen as well as representatives of overseas Chinese.” During the event (as also happened elsewhere), the Dalai Lama is said to have “inquired of the Trade Agency about its work; he also encouraged the agency’s Tibetan staff to work and study well” (*People’s Daily* 1957b, 1). Although quite brief, this depiction of the Dalai Lama projects the image of a good Chinese leader who encourages his subjects to work hard. The presence of the Chinese-Indian friendship association and the representatives of overseas Chinese suggests that the event should be read as intended to strengthen India-China ties and as blessed by the Dalai Lama.

The political backdrop was anything but cordial, despite the presupposition that ROI and PRC friendship was then at its zenith; when Zhou Enlai visited New Delhi in November 1956, Nehru made a speech at a banquet in his honour where he unequivocally declared “He will see for himself the affection that the people have for him and his country. Wherever he goes, he will hear the slogan which is becoming more and more popular Hindi-Chini bhai bhai” (Nehru 2005, 523).²¹

During the autumn of 1956, the Dalai Lama visited India on the pretext of attending the celebrations to mark the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha’s birth; but according to his elder brother, Gyalo Thondup,²² the real purpose of the trip was for the Dalai Lama to seek political asylum in India (Thondup and Thurston 2015, 157–160). When Zhou Enlai visited India on December 31, Nehru and Zhou had extensive talks, some of them taking

20 There is no mention of his affiliation to Denmark. He was of course Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, who saw himself as a scholar of Tibetan culture and polyandry.

21 Hindi-Chini bhai bhai translates as “India and China are brothers” and was a slogan used in the mid-1950s to portray ROI-PRC relations.

22 “Thondup, an elder brother of the Dalai Lama, is one of the most important figures in the history of the Tibetan diaspora. For many years, Thondup was the go-to Tibetan interlocutor for foreign governments and China” (Shakya 2015, 176). It is also commonly held that he worked for the CIA, which was particularly active in the region in its earlier guise as the Office of Strategic Services. Recruscent of this is his recent (2015) autobiography *The Noodlemaker of Kalimpong*.

place in the early hours. The topics which resurfaced again and again during these conversations were the question of Tibet, the Dalai Lama's visit to India, and in particular—Zhou's most pressing concern—whether or not the Lama should visit Kalimpong.

The reason why Zhou was so worried about the Dalai Lama visiting Kalimpong lay in the prevailing Chinese sense that it was "bound to be some trouble." The PRC government had advised the Dalai Lama not to visit Kalimpong because it harboured Tibetan "backward elements"²³ along with the troublemakers/rebels from Lhasa intimately connected with people in Kalimpong, not to mention Indian officials hostile towards China who routinely referred to Tibet as a "separate country." Nehru told Zhou Enlai that he did not know anything about the Dalai Lama going to Kalimpong, and was surprised to hear (not without equivocation) that there were so many Tibetans there. Nehru, however, conceded that he had heard in the past that Kalimpong was "a nest of spies and the spies are probably more than the population" (Nehru 2005, 137).

By then Kalimpong had, in other words, already become the focus of attention for the PRC, and this had been brought to the attention of the ROI. Later that day, Zhou Enlai also met with the Dalai Lama in New Delhi and tried to dissuade him from going to Kalimpong by reporting the conversation he had earlier with Nehru. He emphasized that there might be people in Kalimpong who did not want him to return to Tibet and might try to persuade him to stay in India. The Dalai Lama replied that he did not know yet whether he would visit, and that some of his ministers were still deliberating and hesitant about the matter (*Party Literature* 1994, 37–38). In the end the Dalai Lama decided to go, and he wrote briefly in his autobiography about the event: "I decided I ought to go, in spite of Chou En-lai's advice. It was not entirely a political matter. I had a spiritual duty to visit my countrymen, on which Chou En-lai could certainly not advise me" (Dalai Lama XIV 1962, 153–154). Although the *People's Daily* portrays the Dalai Lama's visit as a harmonious endeavour (albeit a hectic one), his stay was nothing of the sort. The Dalai Lama met both of his brothers and other self-exiled members of the Tibetan government. At the age of twenty-four, the Dalai Lama had to decide what the right action would be for Tibet, and he was delayed from leaving Kalimpong (Duff 2015, 113). According to Thondup, Nehru broke his promise to grant the Dalai Lama political asylum, which made it more or less impossible for the Dalai Lama to stay in India (Thondup and Thurston 2015, 164–165). However, there was yet another plan to prevent the Dalai Lama from leaving the subcontinent whilst he was in Kalimpong. This involved a simultaneous attack on the Chinese in Lhasa and Yadong; the upheaval, it was thought, would make it impossible for the Lama to return to Tibet. But this plan also fell through and in the end the Dalai Lama ended up returning to his native land (Goldstein 2013, 433, 436).

23 Such as his two elder brothers, Gyalo Thondup and Thubten Jigme Norbu.

1959: Kalimpong as a “nest of spies”

By 1959 the tone of the discussion in the *People's Daily's* narrative had changed radically; instead of the Dalai Lama's encouraging words to young Tibetans to study hard under Kanchenjunga's snow-capped peaks, Kalimpong had become a “spy centre” with a “stinking reputation” (*People's Daily* 1959a, 4). This is not only due to the fact that “suspicious foreigners,” “English and American imperialists,” and “Indian expansionists” were staying and scheming in Kalimpong, but also because these people were liaising with the Tibetan rebels whose “command centre,” incidentally, is also the borderland hill station (*People's Daily* 1959f, 4).

The two first articles about Kalimpong that appeared in the *People's Daily* in 1959 were derived from Indian media outlets. One was a translation of an article that had been published in an Indian magazine, and the other a summary of what several Indian newspapers and magazines had written about Kalimpong (*People's Daily* 1959b, 5; 1959c, 5). These two articles lend credibility to those written later by the Chinese communists aiming to expose the “true situation” in Kalimpong. Amongst these later Chinese articles, the most unabashed Chinese account of the “true situation” in Kalimpong is undoubtedly the piece “The Kalimpong We Saw.” Written by three Tibetans who lived in Kalimpong for some time and later returned to China, the article provides a highly unflattering portrayal of Kalimpong as a crossroads where people with harmful intentions towards China congregate and conspire. The article starts in the following manner:

Recently, after the Chinese PLA victoriously suppressed the Tibetan armed rebellion, some Indian expansionists started to shout for Tibetan “independence,” thus publicly interfering with China's internal politics. They have ignored a great deal of well meaning advice from the PRC; allowing the armed rebels, in the end, to use their territory to carry out evil activities to divide China (*People's Daily* 1959f, 4).

Two things are particularly worth noting here: first, the positive language used by the Chinese-Tibetans, “Chinese PLA *victoriously* suppressed the Tibetan armed rebellion” and “PRC's *well meaning* advice;” second, the conspiratorial equation of the Indians with the Tibetan armed rebellion is clearly spelled out in the claim that “Indian expansionists started to shout for Tibetan ‘independence’ [...] *to use their [Indian] territory* to carry out evil activities to divide China.”

The article goes on to declare: “The evil activities of Indian expansionists are obvious to everyone. For example, Kalimpong is at the centre of activities by the Tibetan armed rebels. But they deny it by all means. They are, however, wasting their efforts” (*People's Daily* 1959f, 4). The spirit and tenor of the passage quoted above is clear: India, the hypocrite, is secretly helping the Tibetans whilst denying it publicly to the Chinese; they cannot of course fool the Chinese. The rest of the article follows more or less in

the same splenetic vein. Kalimpong thus becomes an exemplar that illuminates the playing out of India-China politics on a transnational scale.

The changed perception of Prince Peter in the article is also worth noting.²⁴ Whilst in 1957 he was a prince who simply receives mention as a dignitary met by the Dalai Lama, in this article a portrait is painted in very different colours:

In the past there was a Greek prince who lived in Kalimpong and his name was Peter. This person is extremely interested in China's Tibet question and he is so devoted [to it] that he has made it his "occupation." He often goes to the China-India border to survey the terrain and take photographs. He is in close contact with some English and American imperialists who come and go frequently. He is not managing any business in India, but is living rather well. He has a villa in Kalimpong with the best view and he also owns ten or more cars. From this kind of ostentatious living, these kinds of "professional" activities, it is not hard to see who it is that is backing him (*People's Daily* 1959f, 4).

This change in the depiction of Prince Peter runs parallel to the shift in the representation of Kalimpong. Just as Peter transforms from a mere prince to a rich, decadent friend of the imperialists and an enemy of China,²⁵ Kalimpong likewise morphs from a mountain town with picture-postcard scenery to a town in which the world's evil forces gather to conspire against China in the neighbouring outskirts of the Himalayas.

But what drove all these evil people to Kalimpong? In the case of the postcolonial Indian expansionists, at least, the Chinese answer is as clear as Gandhi's image on the rupee notes: money. India's businessmen are swindling Tibetan workers and making huge profits by selling Tibetan wool for high prices: "The Tibetan worker's blood and sweat is thus sucked up into these people's pockets. Kalimpong is the big Indian capitalist's stronghold to feed on the Tibetans' blood and sweat" (*People's Daily* 1959f, 4).

In fact, the article argues that the enterprise of "speculative business" created the town of Kalimpong in the first place: "We know that not long ago, Kalimpong was just a remote mountain village with only sixteen households, but due to the development of speculative business, this town very quickly came to possess a population of some ten thousand" (*People's*

24 Peter visited Kalimpong in 1938 and was back after WWII in the mid-1950s. Under pressure from the Chinese, in 1956, he and his wife were served with an eviction notice for engaging in "undesirable activities." Lord Mountbatten is said to have interceded on his behalf, and Nehru allowed them to stay on for six more months, until early 1957. It is quite apparent that the expulsion was the result of a direct intervention by Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier; see Pedersen 2004-2005.

25 Interestingly, this is not dissimilar to the picture (which is not always unambiguous) painted by contemporary Chinese dissidents of Big Bucks and their intimate connection to the Party. Qiu Xiaolong's novels are particularly scathing in their depiction of the hypocrisy of a political culture and the government's advocacy of entrepreneurship for increased national progress.

Daily 1959f, 4). The implication is that it is no surprise, given that Kalimpong was founded on murky speculative business, that the city would attract “shady” and “rotten” people like the “Indian expansionists.” A narrative of class struggle in these articles draws a sharp distinction between the Tibetan rebel and the Tibetan worker. Whilst the poor Tibetan worker is exploited by the ruthless Indian expansionists, the Tibetan rebel (often an aristocrat) is seen working together with the Indian expansionists and the imperial forces of America and Britain in order to divide revolutionary China (*People’s Daily* 1959f, 4).

Another article reports that the Tibetan Buddhist Association pledge, which was published by the Tibet Mirror Press in Kalimpong, is a document that encourages “treasonous” activities against the “motherland,” and “incites” the people to take part in anti-Chinese activities by pledging that the Tibetans involved would “rather live one day under Buddhism and die; we [...] are unwilling to live under faithless rule well-clothed and fed for a hundred years” (*People’s Daily* 1959e, 3).²⁶

A theme that runs through all these articles is the Kalimpong Tibetans’ collusion with the Kuomintang (KMT).²⁷ Many of the articles allege that the Tibetans requested the KMT to help them in their fight against the Chinese. But perhaps the strongest “proof” that Kalimpong features as the command centre for the Tibetan rebels in the Chinese narrative is the testimony claiming that Kalimpong people (in particular Shakapba²⁸) were involved in the “kidnapping of the Dalai Lama” from Lhasa. The Chinese claim that they found two cipher telegram manuscripts which describe how Shakapba liaised with rebels in Lhasa so that they could “kidnap” the Lama (*People’s Daily* 1959d, 3).²⁹

The political situation became significantly worse after Zhou Enlai’s visits to India in 1956 and 1957: tensions between the nations were rising due to growing discontent and unrest among the Tibetans, and the Indian public was applying domestic pressure and questioning the Indian government’s meekness in its handling of the Tibet question. Border disputes were resurfacing more frequently as both the territories around the Niti Pass and the Shipki Pass remained unresolved; and in the summer of 1957 the PRC completed a road between Sinkiang and Tibet that crossed

26 无神 can be translated as “godless” or “faithless.”

27 In this essay we have used pinyin for most Chinese names; we have, however, chosen to use the Wade-Giles Romanizations in certain instances where they have remained the most prevalent, as in Kuomintang instead of Guomindang and Chiang Kai-shek instead of Jiang Jieshi.

28 Shakapba was Tibet’s Finance Minister in the *Kashag* who later authored *Tibet: A Political History* and *Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs*, (*One hundred thousand moons*). Having been one of the chief negotiators with the Chinese until the PRC entered Tibet in 1951, Shakapba decided to go into exile in India where, from 1959 until 1966, he was the principal representative of the fourteenth Dalai Lama in New Delhi. It is well known that he organised the Tibetan resistance together with the Dalai Lama’s two older brothers, Gyalo Thondup and Thubten Jigme Norbu.

29 Although the cipher telegrams do not state that they are going to “kidnap” the Dalai Lama, the article infers that this must be the case.

Indian territory. Nehru and Zhou Enlai were supposed to meet in April or May 1958, but the meeting was repeatedly postponed until being deferred indefinitely (*China Report* 1976, 63).

It is quite clear that Kalimpong had been on the PRC's watch list as a troublesome place since Zhou Enlai's visits in 1956 and 1957. In July 1958 the Chinese Foreign Office lodged a formal complaint to the Indian authorities. A background note in *China Report* summarised the charges adduced by the PRC and their consequences:

Kalimpong was used as a centre of "subversive activities" by Tibetan reactionaries, by Americans, by the Chiang Kai-shek clique and local special agents, and with "the hideous object of damaging China-India friendship." The Indian reply denied some of the charges and said others had been investigated and steps taken to remove the friction.

From this time onwards, the tone of the official, but secret, correspondence between the two Governments developed through a series of charges and counter-charges to a bitter crescendo (*China Report* 1976, 63).

It was however only after the 1959 Tibetan Uprising on March 10 that the PRC began to accuse India publicly of "colluding" with the Tibetan rebels. Because Kalimpong was seen as the command centre for the rebels by the PRC, the rhetorical battle between ROI and PRC came to be focused on the degree to which Kalimpong and its inhabitants played a role in hostile activities by the PRC and the 1959 Tibetan Uprising.

Given the town's strategic location in the borderlands and the array of people who frequented Kalimpong, even as the Great Game drew to a close, it comes as no surprise that in 1957, given to rhetorical flourishes, Nehru held that there were more spies in Kalimpong than the town's population.³⁰ Nor was it strange that the Tibetan dissidents had also organised themselves against both Chinese and Tibetan communists in the strategically located hill station, and that the PRC had gotten wind of these "subversive activities."³¹

30 British-Indian intelligence reported that Kalimpong had an "extensive spy-network" by 1946 (SAWB, IB 1946, 4). We will probably never know about all the spies who operated in Kalimpong, but arguably the two most famous who appeared in Kalimpong were Gergan Dorje Tharchin, the editor of the *Tibet Mirror*, and Hisao Kimura, the "Japanese agent who disguised himself as a Mongolian pilgrim [... and] was recruited by the British Intelligence to gather information on the Chinese in Eastern Tibet" (Kimura 1990, book jacket). Tharchin had settled in Kalimpong and started his newspaper; with that he became of interest to the British, and also the Chinese, who tried to buy him.

31 In fact, this was not the first time Kalimpong had been used as a base for dissident Tibetans. In 1939 Rapga Pangda wrote the "Concise Agreement of Tibet Improvement Party, Kalimpong," which stated that the Tibet Improvement Party (also known as the Tibet Progressive Party) (which Rapga had founded) would follow Sun Yatsen's "Three Principles of the People" and not the Kashag (Ga Zang 2013, 22–23). Tibetan communist criticism of feudal theocracy in Tibet was not scarce either, and even a novel like Davidson's *The Rose of Tibet* (1962) revisits this.

Much later Zhou Enlai told the British newspaper *Sunday Times* that Nehru had been machinating with the Dalai and Panchen Lamas since 1956 with “big-power backing” and instigating the Tibetans to rebel (Maxwell 1971).³² When Nehru spoke to the Lok Sabha on March 30 and April 2, 1959, he summarised the PRC charges as following: (i) Kalimpong was being used as a command centre for Tibetan rebels; (ii) subversive leaflets and pamphlets agitating against the PRC had been issued from Kalimpong; (iii) the Tibetans in Kalimpong were colluding with the United States and the Kuomintang; (iv) there were associations, such as the Buddhist Association, based in Kalimpong, that were hostile to the PRC; (v) the Tibet Mirror Press³³ located in Kalimpong routinely expressed reactionary and hostile views about the PRC government; (vi) agents and saboteurs who were smuggling arms were dispatched from Kalimpong to Tibet; (vii) certain individuals in Kalimpong were responsible for the Tibetan uprising.

Nehru responded to the charges by stating that Kalimpong was not a command centre for Tibetan rebels, and that the notion that people in Kalimpong had headed a rebellion which had spread slowly in the Tibetan region over a period of three years was absurd; the people who had issued the undesirable leaflets had been warned, and the editor of the Tibet Mirror Press had also been warned, but no legal action could be taken against the magazine on the grounds that it was “anti-government”; the organisations which the Chinese had pointed out as hostile did not exist; the people who were suspected of carrying out suspicious activities and colluding with the KMT and the United States had been warned, and lastly, there was no evidence of even a single case of agents and armed saboteurs being sent to Tibet from Kalimpong (*Lok Sabha Debates Second Series, Vol. XXVIII* 1959, 8461–8468).

1963: Kalimpong as a place hostile to the Chinese

The *People's Daily's* representations of Kalimpong underwent a drastic transmutation between 1959 and 1963. After the Sino-Indian war in 1962, the question of Tibet was put on the back burner; instead the PRC charged the Indian authorities with acting in conjunction with the KMT to illegally intern and force Chinese people in India to leave the country.

The stories about Kalimpong during this period were centred around KMT's “seizure of the Kalimpong Chinese Primary School (噶伦堡中华小学),”

32 Dispelling this view in the changing scenario of Sino-Soviet relations and India's leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement, Khrushchev was later to record that Mao was the real cause of trouble with India “because of some sick fantasy” (Khrushchev 1974, 306–311).

33 The *Tibet Mirror* (Tibetan in Wylie transcription: *Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*) is the English name of a Tibetan-language newspaper that was published in Kalimpong, India, from 1925 to 1962 and circulated in Tibet. Its originator was Gergan Tharchin, who was at the same time its journalist, editor and manager. See also footnote 30.

highlighting this as an instance of collusion between the Indian authorities and the KMT. This narrative is perhaps best illustrated by a remark by Liang Zizhi (梁子质) (the former chairman of the board of the school) which was cited from an interview held after his return to China from Kalimpong:

Liang Zizhi says: under United States' instigation, the Indian government and the Chiang clique colluded together against China—this is already a public secret. Even though the Indian government evasively covers up these secret and sordid things, in reality the facts are there. That India and Chiang have formed a partnership to seize Kalimpong's Chinese school is precisely one of these concrete instances (*People's Daily* 1963a, 2).

The word "seize(d)" or "seizure" in relation to the Kalimpong Chinese school is frequently used, as are the terms "legitimate powers," "rights," and "genuine claim" that the Chinese had to the school.³⁴ According to the *People's Daily*, the KMT had illegally taken over the school with the help of the Indian authorities. It is also implied that the Tibetans and the KMT were still working together since the Chinese were asked to leave the school and instead join the Tibetan refugee school registered by the KMT (*People's Daily* 1963a, 2).

Another thread that runs through the 1963 articles is the assertion that the Indian authorities conspired with the reactionary KMT, and as a result of "threats" and "sinful activities" aimed at harming overseas Chinese, the Chinese were "forced" to leave: "Does this not abundantly reveal that India's concerned authorities collude with Chiang clique members, forming partnerships to carry out the criminal acts of persecuting overseas Chinese, and wrecking the overseas Chinese cultural and educational enterprise?" (*People's Daily* 1963a, 2). Another article gives a more detailed description of the treatment meted out to the Chinese at the school:

But since 1960 the Chinese school has unceasingly met up against the Indian authorities' scheming persecutions. The Indian side has successively ordered the chairman of the board of the school, Mr. Liang Zizhi, vice chairman Mr. Zhang Naiqian (张乃騫), and Mr. Ma Jiakui (马家奎) to leave India. Following an unjustifiable imprisonment, the headmaster of the school, Mr. Chang Xiufeng (常秀峰) and his wife, received extremely inhumane treatment and were forced to leave India. During this period, parents of the school's students were frequently intimidated and were forbidden to send their children to school to study (*People's Daily* 1963b, 4).

34 China was at this stage already beginning to use the vocabulary of international law to claim property and rights outside the sovereign borders of its state. See Cohen and Leng 1972, 283.

Kalimpong has had a Chinese settlement since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. A biography of Church of Scotland missionary Dr. John Anderson Graham tells us that there “were a few Chinese carpenters in town” in 1906 (Minto 1974, 95); the Roman Catholic Church in Kalimpong recorded the birth of a Chinese-Lepcha with the name Gratia Elizabeth in 1910 and her baptism in 1934 in Kalimpong (Douinel 1922–1946, no. 183), and the oldest (still legible) gravestone in the Chinese cemetery in Kalimpong dates back to 1918.

It was not until the Second Sino-Japanese war, which erupted in 1937, that the Chinese community started to grow significantly; by 1944 the group constituted the second largest foreign community in India (SAWB, IB 1939a, 542). Many Chinese from China as well as from Myanmar fled to Kalimpong during the war years, and as a response to the influx of refugees, and particularly to the lack of education available to their children, three well-established Chinese traders who lived in Kalimpong at the time, Ma Zhucai (马铸材), Zhang Xiangcheng (张相诚), and Liang Zizhi (interviewed in the article cited above), decided to raise funds in order to establish a school for the Chinese children in Kalimpong (Ma 2006, 35–36). The KMT sent money and two teachers from China to help set up the school,³⁵ which was successfully established in 1941³⁶ as a branch of the Meiguang Private Primary School in Calcutta (Zhang and Sen 2013, 218).

The KMT created the first coherent policy for overseas Chinese in 1927, and Zhuang Guotu writes that between 1931 and 1948 the Nationalist government “promulgated scores of laws and regulations dealing with overseas Chinese education, investment, migrations, and overseas Chinese voluntary associations, and diplomatic representatives in the management of *huaqiao* educations affairs” (Zhuang 2013, 35). It is noteworthy that education was the only section which also had diplomatic representatives, and that “uppermost on the government’s agenda by 1937 was education, a matter covered by the largest (at least 16) of regulations governing *huaqiao*” (Zhuang 2013, 35).

Since Chinese overseas schools became spaces for long-distance nationalism and patriotism, after the end of the Second Sino-Japanese war many of these educational institutions turned into arenas for KMT and CCP struggles as the civil war continued to rage on the mainland. The Kalimpong Chinese school was no exception; in addition to the conflicts between the KMT and the CCP, the school also became entangled with the question of Tibet. In July 1951, when Zhang Jingwu (张经武) came to Kalimpong in order to visit the Dalai Lama, who was then on the other side of the

35 This is according to one of our informants, but is also suggested in interviews with Chinese residents in Kalimpong, who are predominantly Hakka and emigrated via Kolkata. Details cannot be revealed in order to respect the identity of “S.”

36 Although the plaque at the entrance to the building where the Kalimpong primary school used to be dates the school’s establishment as January 1942, most other sources we have come across, including newspaper articles, cite 1941 as the year of the school’s foundation.

Chumbi Valley in Yadong, a reception was held for the communist general in the Kalimpong Chinese school, which had by then become a “communist school” instead of the nationalist school it had been in previous years—or at least on that particular day, the red five-starred flag fluttered from the roof (Fader 2009, 300–301).

There were many speakers at this reception, and the last final speech on the programme was by Gergan Dorje Tharchin who pronounced:

In Tibetan we have a proverb which says that everything is changing. For example, there is happiness and then there is sorrow. Everything turns like a wheel. This it seems is quite true, even today. Just the other day [and here the speaker pointed at the wall] there were different kinds of pictures on this wall, but now Chiang Kai-Shek’s picture has disappeared and Mao’s has taken its place. Tibet for centuries has been an independent country. The Chinese claim that it was under China. This state of affairs will not last permanently. It too will change. The Chinese will have to give up their claim to Tibet. Tibet will once again enjoy its original freedom and independence, free of all Chinese control (Fader 2009, 300–301).

As the *People’s Daily* pointed out in 1963, the Kalimpong Chinese school finally returned to the KMT’s hands—most likely due to the Indian government’s decision to shut down PRC-funded schools after the war (Zhang and Sen 2013, 224). This showcases the PRC’s struggles vis-à-vis the KMT on overseas territory during the Cold War.

The last (elaborate) *People’s Daily*³⁷ article in August 1963 describes how the Indian government used “foul tricks” in its attempt to stop “mixed-blood” family members of the Chinese who lived in Kalimpong from returning to China. Whereas previous articles about the school stated that the Chinese were forced to leave, this by contrast reports that the Indian authorities are “thwarting” the attempts of mixed-blood people to leave India. The article describes the inhumane treatment inflicted by the Indian authorities on a group of people of “mixed-blood:”

But, the Indian government carried out all sorts of dirty tricks to hinder them from going to China. On the afternoon of May 21, the Kalimpong Immigration Bureau official suddenly sought out them and the other eight or nine overseas Chinese in distress; harshly

37 It is not so much content as placement that defines the role of this newspaper. It becomes clear that a subject is rising or falling in importance when the coverage of a particular geographical area waxes or wanes. Kalimpong no longer posed any threat and therefore it was no longer especially visible or prominent in the official media. The town’s geostrategic positioning facilitated Kalimpong’s visibility to economic and political power for at least half a century until the 1960s; whether it was perhaps a region under covert surveillance long after that, due to its significant edge effects, remains an open question.

and severely he said to them: "Which of you want to go to China? When do you want to go? You have to scram tomorrow morning at six o'clock!" Following this he gave each person a form which had printed on it: "I voluntarily decline to go to China" etc., stipulating that if they did not leave on the next morning, they had to put their fingerprint on the form. Everyone was very shocked. No one wanted to put their fingerprints on the form; they wanted to desperately plead with and object to the Indian official, making it clear that they wanted to follow their husbands to China, but that they needed time to pack their luggage, to manage money matters and to figure out whether their dear ones had already left the concentration camp³⁸ and returned to China. But the Indian official said, harshly and unreasonably: "Either you go tomorrow, or you put your fingerprint on the decline-to-go-to-China form; if there is anyone who doesn't put their print on it, the police will come tomorrow morning and put their entire family in a car and expel them." The distressed overseas Chinese family dependants were so frightened by this time they all started to cry; under coercion they had no other choice but to print their fingerprints [on the form] (*People's Daily* 1963c, 2).³⁹

After the Sino-Indian war in 1962, following the proclamation of a national emergency on October 26, President Radhakrishnan issued the Defence of India Ordinance. On October 30 he also promulgated the Foreigners Law (Application and Amendment) Ordinance. In practice the order led to an authorized restriction "on movement, deprivation of certain basic rights of Indian citizenship, and arrest followed by either internment in camps or detention in prison" and the Foreigners Law was made applicable to "any person not of Indian origin who was at birth a citizen or subject of any country at war with, or committing external aggression against, India." The Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, which was invoked by the Indian government on January 14, 1963, "prohibited all Chinese nationals and all persons of Chinese origin from entering or remaining in designated restricted areas (the state of Assam and some districts of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab) without a permit, even if they were Indian citizens and residents of those areas" (Cohen and Leng 1972, 273-274).

2,165 people of Chinese origin were arrested and transported to the internment camp in Deoli, Rajasthan in 1962; 900 of these were Indian citizens (Banerjee 2007, 443).⁴⁰ A number of elderly people who could not

38 The "concentration camp" in this article is the camp in Deoli where many Chinese from Kalimpong were interned after the 1962 war.

39 This article was written by *People's Daily* journalist Gu Fan.

40 Deoli was an internment camp built by the British to intern Indians. Yin Marsh in her autobiography has written about how she ended up in Bungalow 2 at Deoli, the same bungalow that Nehru, the man who had given permission to intern the Chinese, had been given when he was interned by the British (Marsh 2012, Chapter 23).

endure the trauma died during the train ride to Deoli (Li 2011, 10–11). Together with 730 dependants, 1,665 Chinese internees were repatriated in 1963, and the last group of people was released from Deoli in 1967 (Banerjee 2007, 447–448). China and the Chinese emerged in Indian public discourse as people who engaged in “deceit” and “double talk,” and had their “hands full of blood” etc. (Banerjee 2007, 447–448).

Most people of Chinese descent who experienced 1962 and with whom we spoke in Kalimpong (December 2015) still vividly remember the time—in some cases, the traumatic memories linger on. One interlocutor reported that for some time after 1962, Tibetans would spit outside their family’s shoe shop; another recalls his father peeking out of the curtains in the middle of the night to see if the police were coming to take them away; a third resident remembers how he was scared that his parents would suddenly be taken; a fourth, how a classmate abruptly stopped showing up at school; a fifth, how the family sold off all their belongings and packed their bags in case they were escorted from their home; a sixth, how his father denied being Chinese when the police came to interrogate him.

Ming Tung Hsieh has written powerfully about what happened when the police came to his home in Kalimpong to take them to the police station. The exchange (in his own English) deserves to be quoted in full:

I took the papers from his hands and tried to read what was in the order, in an irritating tone, father told me in Chinese that they “wanted to take the full family, not only me and your mother” which shook him badly as we were not expecting this, as he never thought his whole family including the young children would be arrested also. I turned around and glared at the diminutive inspector and demanded to know from him in Nepali “why do you want to arrest us children?” “My youngest sister and brother were hardly 8 to 10 years old, they did not deserve to be arrested, they had committed no crime against anyone and they have to go to school” the inspector replied in a very apologetic voice, in his native Nepali tongue to me. “Kancha (young brother), we know everything, some of which may not be proper, but we are just doing our job and only following order,” pointing at the written order in my hand. I read the paper order which was in English again to find that indeed we four children names were in the arrest order issued by one Superintendent of Police Chatarjee, he further suggested that in a disgusting situation like this it would be better for all of us to preserve our calmness and health to out-last this bad period, and he would co-operate with us as much as possible, was he not trained by the police to sweet talk their victims like Hitler’s police and SS troops did to their Jewish victims a couple of decades earlier? (Hsieh 2012, 227)

Conclusions

These snapshots of Kalimpong in the *People's Daily* give us a means of understanding ROI-PRC relations in the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s. It is our argument that the hill station served both as a barometer and metonymic stand-in for the troubled relationship between the two states.

When Kalimpong first appeared in the *People's Daily* during the height of the professed Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai camaraderie in the mid-1950s, the public discourse this generated was that, despite the gathering storms overhead, China-India relations were moving hand in hand, and that a brotherhood had developed between the two nations. This is reflected in representations in which the town is described by the Chinese as *tianyuan* (田园, literally "field and garden"), connoting an "idyllic but rather nondescript" place. In other words, during this phase of the relationship the town itself was rendered as non-threatening, perhaps even as a metaphor for the sunny relations between the two polities.

Towards the end of the 1950s, when relations broke down between the two states with the 1959 Tibetan Uprising and the Dalai Lama's escape and exile to India, perceptions of Kalimpong in the Chinese media metamorphosed into a vision of the town as a veritable den of spies and command centre for Tibetan rebellions. The question of whether subversive activities against the PRC were or were not being plotted or carried out in Kalimpong was naturally of great importance to both governments. However, our interest has been in examining how Kalimpong became an analogue for the (il)legitimacy of the uprising; if hostile activities were indeed planned in Kalimpong, this simultaneously signalled that the uprising was indeed illegitimate and that the Indian government should have taken firm action against these unlawful activities involving double-dealing individuals. The PRC's subtext here is congruent with its standpoint that India had no right to give refuge to the Dalai Lama since his "kidnapping" was a result of insurrectionary actions. The Indian government's denial of the charges implied tacit approval of what was happening in the small, cosmopolitan hub.

In the 1960s, Kalimpong was presented as a town hostile towards and devoid of any Chinese. The maltreatment that individuals of Chinese ancestry suffered as a result of "collusion between the Indian authorities and the KMT," should be read here as an extrapolation from the events of 1962; Kalimpong was seen as expunging innocent and well-meaning Chinese from its borders. Additionally, if individuals who were not Chinese but "dependent" rather on the Chinese wanted to leave for China, the Indian authorities were seen as hell-bent on ensuring that their lives were made a misery. Anything related to China seems to have been cursed by the Indians, according to the *People's Daily's* narratives; this seems partly in keeping with piecemeal records and ethnographic hearsay. Hostility against the PRC issuing from Kalimpong—as narrated in the *People's Daily's* articles from 1959—underwent a transformation in 1963 as it became an

animosity directed against any individual residing in India who happened to have a Chinese connection.

More work is needed in order to fill in the gaps between the snapshots we have presented in this chapter. Some issues leave one perplexed; at the time of writing, many archives have yet to be declassified. It must be recognised that archival labour cannot just be extractive; archival production is after all itself an act of governance which testifies to the state's epistemic power—where fact, fiction and story are all marshalled in the service of bureaucratic conventions of recording, and hence recall (Stoler 2009).

We must recognise that we do not really know what exactly happened, or what precisely was meant when Beijing addressed Kalimpong at that specific point in time. What does appear from the archives is the openness or, if you like, the emptiness of the untranslatable journey from the intended object to its mode of intention. To read motivated meanings and deliberative intentions in the cipher of meaning is itself to beckon and hopefully exorcise the hovering spectre of dogmatism in prevailing power, be it Chinese or Indian.

However, we would argue that a convincing reading can be obtained, not necessarily against the grain, by demonstrating how the *People's Daily's* representations of Kalimpong produced a microcosm through which we can decipher ROI and PRC relations in the 1950s and first half of the 1960s. Cultural and, to an even greater extent, political encounters demand careful historical elaboration, especially when they are yoked to unresolved and still intractable geopolitical borders and the ideas about suzerainty (as opposed to sovereignty) that China has deployed to lay territorial claims on Tibet and other disputed regions around the LoC. The narrative we have produced in this essay is part of this matrix. We suggested earlier that politics as well as history can be read as “supplements.” Supplementarity explains why no synthesis in writing can ever be anything more than provisional. Whether “the supplement supplements [...] adds only to replace [...] represents and makes an image [...] its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness” (Derrida 2016, 157). The supplement ultimately is both accretion and substitution (ibid., 217) and the analytical gist of our endeavour is to suggest that the supplement is not a representor more than a presence, a writing (or the staging of an argument) more than a place (Kalimpong). It comes before all such modalities.

Kalimpong's space must be recognised—to adopt Lefebvrian terminology—as multiplicitous, never finished, never closed. A vernacularly cosmopolitan town, it is constructed through the “specificity of [its discursive] interaction with other places [Beijing, Lhasa, or New Delhi] rather than by [simple] counterposition to them” (Massey 1994, 121). Perched on one of the fringes of India's north-easternmost borders, it cannot be easily written off as peripheral or marginal or even just a “shadow place,” especially when its spectre haunts those narratives we have explored which are

threaded into the larger body-politics of at least two nations.⁴¹ Its locus as a space of transgressive potential is borne out in our analysis in that it gestures to the potentially equivocal “simultaneity of stories-so-far,” a small story in the Great Game.

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41 See footnote 7 above. To fast forward to the current matrix of politics in the area, Kalimpong is better seen now as a functional fulcrum for Gorkha ethnonationalism which relies on the articulation of a singularised affectively charged homeland. See also the Epilogue to this volume.

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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.¹ 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.²

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.³ 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.⁴ 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://objectsubjectsobjects.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.⁵ *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.”⁶

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.⁷

⁶ *List of Curios*, No. 70.

⁷ 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*.⁸

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.⁹ 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).¹⁰ 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 shade¹¹—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.¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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 8th 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 material-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*).¹⁷

By September that year Bell had acquired one or two more pieces of jade,¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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 collection²¹ 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.²² 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.”²³ 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).²⁴ 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).²⁵

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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ By the beginning of 1912, with no concrete offer of diplomatic support from the British, with sickness rife amongst the Tibetans,²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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).³¹ 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).³² 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.

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Tina Harris

Wool, Toothbrushes, and Beards: Kalimpong and the “Golden Era” of Cross-Border Trade

Abstract In the first issues of the *Himalayan Times*, a locally produced newspaper, Kalimpong is described as having a high potential for development, due to the caravans of wool making their way from Tibet through Kalimpong and on to India, the US, and beyond. In the years to follow, the Kalimpong trading scene became a well-known locus for the sharing of geopolitical knowledge and the forging of new economic networks from far-flung locations. From a mule staging ground to a retail hub for commodities such as Santa Claus beards, this paper argues that an examination of the changes in mid-twentieth century Kalimpong-based trade is a good starting point from which to investigate larger scale geopolitical shifts and the restructuring of social and economic inequalities in the Himalayas.

Introduction

During its run from 1947 to 1963, the first few pages of the Kalimpong-based newspaper *Himalayan Times* nearly always featured articles concerning the political and economic state of the small town nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas. In one of the first available issues from December 25, 1949, the editorial stated the following:

It is true that Kalimpong is a locked place and that it has very difficult access to rail heads and has no transport facilities but it has high industrial potential [...]. [It was] unplanned and unintegrated which twin defects never allowed the locality to flourish. [...] since August 1947, however, conditions have vitally changed [...]. With the present supply of raw wool from Tibet which till now has been feeding the U.S.A. carpet factories and some factories in India, there is no reason why Kalimpong cannot be developed into an area buzzing with cottage industries (*Himalayan Times*, December 25, 1949, 4).¹

These sorts of articles demonstrate how Suresh Chandra Jain, the newspaper's main editor—as well as his staff members—were acutely aware of Kalimpong's peculiar geopolitical vantage point in the border areas of north-east India, Tibet, and Bhutan at the beginning of the tumultuous second half of the twentieth century. Although the narrative of the twentieth-century economic boom brought in by the wool trade with Tibet has been referred to by many traders and local inhabitants as the golden era of Kalimpong's existence, it was more often extreme fluctuations that characterised local economic and material life in the town—such as prosperity followed by sudden loss, or the rapid growth of cross-border transportation infrastructure paired with border closures. These ups and downs have received far less acknowledgement. Transnational trade through Kalimpong was precarious, risky, and profoundly affected by immediate and material changes to the landscape, as I wish to demonstrate in the following pages.

Kalimpong's reputation as a hill town for missionaries and educators, a centre for Buddhist knowledge, the Nepali diaspora, a “nest of spies” during the 1950s, and as the main staging ground for Tibetan wool bound for North America and India, remains at the forefront of much of the historical and anthropological literature on this region of the Himalayas (see for example Cammann 1970; Hackett 2012; Huber and Blackburn 2012; McGranahan 2010; McKay 1997; Shakya 1999; Subba 2008; and van Spengen 2000). But in addition to emphasising the importance of Kalimpong as an entrepot for the Tibet trade, narratives of economic life expose much more than a

1 “Cottage Industry,” *Himalayan Times*, December 25, 1949, 4. http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/himalayan_times; accessed October 28, 2015. Many thanks to Markus Viehbeck, Sandip Jain, and Heidelberg University for making the *Himalayan Times* accessible online.

straightforward continuous growth in wealth, followed by a linear decline after Chinese troops arrived in Tibetan-speaking areas in the 1950s. People's everyday lives in Kalimpong were greatly affected by a range of significant political, economic, and environmental events between 1949–1962 which led to uneven fluctuations in the value and availability of goods.

In the case of Kalimpong, the entry of China into Tibet was not the only event that led to changes in the economic and social landscape along the cross-border trade route: a combination of landslides, the availability of pack animals, improvements to road infrastructure, and changes in vehicular transport were more immediate, material factors that significantly affected economic life in the town. These ups and downs were also marked by serious efforts by those in the town—but not as victims of economic decline—to maintain Kalimpong as a Himalayan economic hub despite infighting, geopolitical tensions, changes in transport and technology, and even natural disasters beyond their control. Taking as its basis articles on trade in the *Himalayan Times* and the *Tibet Mirror* (Tibetan, *yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*), and supplemented by oral narratives from Tibetan, Marwari, and Tibetan Muslim traders who were involved in the Kalimpong-Lhasa trade and interviewed between 2005–2006, this essay is thus a short narrative of trade during the turbulent—though prosperous, for some—years of 1949–1963.² Ultimately, I hope to expose a material and more-than-human history of the Kalimpong-based trade in the twentieth century. By more than-human I refer here to an approach that forces us to look beyond the landscape as a neutral or static backdrop to activities that happen on or with it (Braun 2005; Ingold 1993, 152). This kind of contemporary history of Kalimpong should thus incorporate not only the turbulent socio-political transformation of the Himalayan region, but also events that are not centred on humans—such as landslides and even the availability of mules as pack animals—in shaping its future.

Geopolitical, economic, and environmental fluctuations in trade

The history of trade through Kalimpong—in particular the Lhasa-Kalimpong wool trade in the twentieth century—has been documented by several historians, and captured in old video footage, fictional accounts, and important oral histories from Tibetan, Marwari, Newar, Tibetan Muslim and several other groups of traders in Lhasa and Kalimpong (see for example Dhondrup 2000; Hilker 2005; Tuladhar 2004). The specific route between Lhasa and Kalimpong, forced open by the British entry into the Chumbi Valley in 1904 is often illustrated by harrowing stories and images of mule

2 The *Tibet Mirror* is available online from Columbia University: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_6981643_000/; accessed October 28, 2015.



Figure 1: Advertisement for language classes in Kalimpong, December 1952.

caravans and their muleteers braving blizzards in Phari, or porters lugging bundles of musk and boxes of imported commodities along the bustling 10th Mile in Kalimpong. Wool, one of the most ubiquitous commodities in Kalimpong during the twentieth century, was piled in bales onto mules and yak in Tibet, making the month-long (give or take, depending on time of year and road conditions) journey over the Himalayas to Kalimpong. Animal skins, silver coins, jaggery, yak tails, and medicinal herbs also travelled the route, while clothing, pens, household items, and electrical appliances headed in the opposite direction up from the port of Calcutta by rail and mule caravans to Kalimpong, the staging ground for mules travelling up to Tibet (Harris 2013; van Spengen 2013).

Kalimpong's geographical, social, and economic position as a contact zone provided the stage for the "spatial and temporal co-presence of people whose geographic and historical trajectories now intersect," such as Marwari and Newar traders, Chinese shopkeepers, the Tibetan elite, and British missionaries (Pratt 2003, 7). This co-presence is marked strikingly by advertisements in the town's English- and Tibetan-language newspapers during this era, for instance in the *Himalayan Times* and the *Tibet Mirror*. Take for example a 1952 announcement from the Kalimpong Youth for Christ, inviting locals to attend a talk by medical missionary Dr. Joe Church from Rwanda and his "African Christian Colleague," or an advertisement for language classes in Tibetan, Chinese, Hindi, and Bengali (figure 1). There were also articles reporting on global infrastructure expansion, such as the news that the Dutch airline KLM was increasing its routes in Europe, and that it had been transporting baby elephants, pythons, tigers, and bears from Calcutta to Milan (*Himalayan Times*, May 18, 1952, 10; December 7, 1952, 7; March 29, 1953, 3; May 3, 1953, 4).³ In the *Tibet Mirror*, similar advertisements—for European-made pens, electrical items of

3 "Kalimpong Youth For Christ," May 18, 1952, 10; "Language Classes," December 7, 1952, 7; "KLM's World-Wide Network," March 29, 1953, 3; "KLM's Flying Ark," May 3, 1953, 4.

all kinds, but also wool carders, and butter churns—give an indication of the diverse groups and dissimilar backgrounds of traders, missionaries, teachers, nobles, and local inhabitants who comprised the far-flung networks that converged in this region during the twentieth century. But as outlined in the introduction to this volume, Mary Louise Pratt’s term “contact” zone refers not only to the co-presence of groups that embody large scale asymmetries of power, such as those between coloniser and colonised. The term also opens up space for more flexible relations of power from a more micro-level perspective, such as between local Tibetan and Indian trading syndicates. I would add that global trade, although mostly affected by political relations between India, Tibet, and China, were equally subject to local developments that affected the flows of people, goods and ideas through Kalimpong, and that these developments were not necessarily always human-centred. One such example is the susceptibility of the eastern Himalayas to landslides and flooding, as I will describe below.

In addition to advertisements, lists of commodity prices were featured in most issues of the *Tibet Mirror* (figure 2). The graph in Figure 2 is a very rough rendering of the ups and downs of the costs of Tibetan black and white yak tails, just one of the many commodities that were brought from Lhasa to Kalimpong in mule caravans (Harris 2014).⁴ While black yak tails

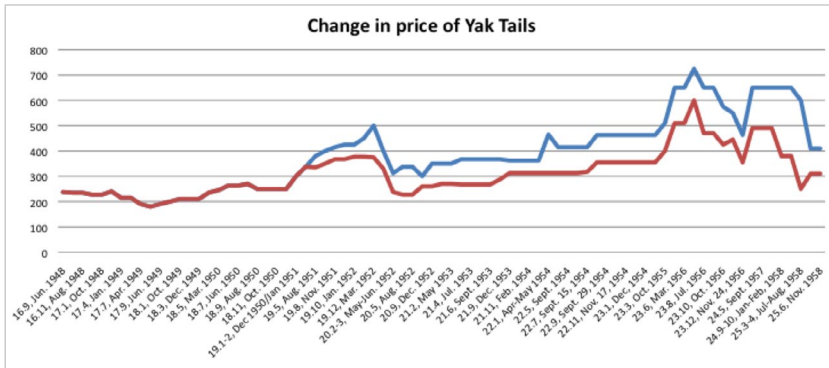


Figure 2: Fluctuations in yak tail prices (in Rupees), 1948–1958.

were used as flywhisks and ritual implements in Tibet and South Asia, white yak tails were coveted in North America for their sturdy, waterproof hair for making Santa Claus beards, as the figure of Santa Claus became increasingly popular in American shopping malls during the consumer boom of the post-war 1950s. Taking this graph with a grain of salt—it is important to note that several issues of the newspaper are missing and that the figures provided are sometimes inconsistent—it is possible to see that the economic lives of the yak tails were subject to many of the

4 Many thanks to Nazly Dehganiazar for the graph and for help in preparing data based on the commodity listings in the *Tibet Mirror*.

same changes that affected the wool trade. Such vacillations in availability and price are significant; a closer look at archival and oral sources shows that these fluctuations were not based simply on supply and demand, and severely impacted the life of the town.

As an example, one might take a look at the small dip that the graph depicts towards the end of 1950. During the summer months of 1950, severe flooding and subsequent landslides had washed out many parts of the Darjeeling Himalayas. Along the Lhasa-Kalimpong trade route, Yatung in Tibet had become inundated with water and its inhabitants had been evacuated, and all road traffic was suspended between Kalimpong and Siliguri. The Darjeeling Railway had been severely damaged by landslides, with the warning that it might never function again. The nearby Ropeway over the Teesta River, which was used to bring goods—mostly bales of wool—from Durpin to the railhead at Siliguri, snapped. Because the roads and transport networks were such a lifeline for the sustainability of the transnational economic connection between Kalimpong and Tibet, an article in the *Himalayan Times* suggested repairing the local infrastructure immediately after the disasters, lest delicate relations with Tibet continue to be exacerbated:

Our present relation with the Government of Tibet is rather delicate and the Tista Valley road along with the D. H. Railway is the main trade route to Tibet. What would happen to the entire wool trade of Tibet if heavy bails [sic] of wool do not move from Kalimpong for months together? The entire economy of Tibet will be subjected to very severe tests and we are sure the Government of India would not like at the present moment that Tibet should face any economic upheaval (*Himalayan Times*, June 25, 1950, 4).⁵

The inextricable economic links between Kalimpong and Tibet are clear here; when a landslide disrupts the smooth transportation of commodities along the roads from Kalimpong, repercussions are felt in Lhasa, and vice versa. Although histories of the tumultuous twentieth century in the Himalayan region are often set against political tensions at the national level, it is here that more immediate problems, such as environmental disasters and the resulting breakdown of infrastructure, come to the fore. Two recent pieces in *Political Geography* have called for more creativity in thinking about geopolitics by paying attention to “the capacity of nonhumans (along with humans) to both facilitate and contest inscriptions of space” (Depledge 2015, 91; Grundy-Warr et al. 2015). In other words, it can be useful to think of the fluctuations in the Lhasa-Kalimpong trade through a more-than-human approach to geopolitics (Braun 2005). Here, physical and environmental processes such as landslides, the availability of pack animals such as mules and yak, and objects on the landscape such

5 “Wool Trade Threatened With Dislocation,” June 25, 1950, 4.

as collapsed bridges, should all be considered as agents in influencing major changes in larger-scale geopolitical histories of the region.

Of course, increasing tensions between nation-states seriously impacted the economy and livelihoods of the inhabitants of Kalimpong. But rather than see these tensions as global tensions that impacted the local life of Kalimpong in a top-down manner, traders in the town themselves were profoundly linked to and contributed to large-scale global politics. These contributions, however, were complex in the sense that traders all had stakes in the transnational trade through the town, but “the range and kind of stakes varied widely” (Pratt 1991, 39). For instance, the Export Ban on Wool transpired immediately after the landslides of 1950 and the subsequent failure of road and rail infrastructure in the hill area. The Export Ban on Wool was a directive from the Indian Government that was announced after the United States embargo against products from (newly-communist) China. As Tibet was considered part of China, all products from Tibet were considered Chinese and therefore subject to the ban. This brought a sense of panic amongst the traders of Kalimpong who profited from selling Tibetan wool abroad. An article in September of 1950 stated that:

The wool tangle at Kalimpong remains unsolved. The warehouses have limited stocks of Wool, mostly baled and ready for shipping, but there is the export ban, [and] the ropeway still fails to function though assurances on this point are many. Parties blame each other for machiavellian manoeuvres and the Government think they have acted wisely and to the best of their knowledge. Now we hear that the Railway line connecting the Rilli ropeway station and Riyang has been removed thus creating further difficulties of carriage. Confusion couldn't be worse confounded than in this instance (*Himalayan Times*, September 17, 1950, 6).⁶

The confusion could not have been worse indeed. The Export Ban would be applied to all Tibetan wool and yak tails that were not already in India by December 17, 1950 (*Himalayan Times*, April 20, 1952, 6).⁷ At this point, 50,000 maunds of wool already lay dormant in the godowns (warehouses) of Kalimpong.⁸ Furthermore, the corresponding dip in Figure 2 during spring of 1952 reflects that “the prices at the time of the [Export Ban] announcement had fallen from 120 cents to 50 cents per lb. (cost and freight paid) [...] further tightening of regulation has resulted in the American announcement that all other wool ([...] without any Tibet interest) must be shipped by March 1, 1952 [and] that all Bills of Landing must reach U.S. by March 1” (*Himalayan Times*, April 20, 1952, 8).⁹ For the traders at this time, frantically

6 Spy Glass, “Durpin to Deolo,” September 17, 1950, 6.

7 Suresh Chandra Jain, “Crisis in Wool Trade in Kalimpong,” April 20, 1952, 6.

8 A maund is a bulk weight of approximately 40-80 kg.

9 “Crisis in Wool Trade in Kalimpong,” April 20, 1952, 8.

trying to get rid of the wool revealed the global dimension of the wool trade; merchants began to argue with purchasers about the “real” national origin of the wool in order to dispose of their wares as quickly as possible. For some, it was not Chinese but Indian wool; for others, it belonged to both India and the US, having already been purchased by buyers in the United States. For still others, it was Bhutanese wool, since Tibetan sheep had mixed with sheep on the borders of Bhutan. With traders and buyers placing a nationality on sheep, the sheep themselves became entangled in the traders’ economic and geopolitical decision-making—yet another kind of more-than-human dimension to the Kalimpong trade.

Now that wool from Tibet/China/Bhutan/India—wherever it was “originally” from— could no longer be exported to the United States, those involved in the wool trade in Kalimpong needed to search for new markets. The biggest trading families—Pangdatsang, Sadhustang, and Reting—were the ones who faced the greatest losses and who most needed to take their chances if they were to survive and remain monopolies in Kalimpong, but where could the wool go now?

Representatives of the three principal Tibetan Wool Merchants, Messrs. Pangda Tshang, Sadu Tshang and Rading La-brag and the Secretary of the Tibet Traders’ Association Kalimpong has left for Calcutta to see the Chinese Counsel there in connection with wool trade. They have gone with samples of Tibet Wool and are expected to finalise some big deal for sale of their large holdings with the Communist Block of Wool Traders in Russia and China (*Himalayan Times*, March 16, 1952, 5).¹⁰

Reports in late March 1952 were hopeful: apparently, a number of inquiries for purchasing Tibetan wool had come in from Japan, Germany, and Russia, with Russia being the most promising buyer. After a lengthy silence from Russia, the representatives of the three main trading families were able to get the Chinese government to purchase 80,000 maunds of wool towards the end of May 1952. Out of this, stocks held by 114 Tibetan traders “including the large business houses of Pandatsang, Sandutsang, and Retting, amounted to about 60,000 maunds. A further balance of 20,000 maunds were lying at Phari trade mart and at places between Lhasa and Phari” (*Himalayan Times*, June 1, 1952, 11).¹¹ The fact that the Tibetan traders were able to secure these deals threw the larger Kalimpong trading community into a frenzy.

10 “Tibetan Traders’ Delegation Leaves for Calcutta,” March 16, 1952, 5.

11 “Wool Details Sent to Lhasa,” June 1, 1952, 11.

Unequal prosperity

The president of the Kalimpong Chamber of Commerce, Sri Rameswar Agrawal, gave an anniversary address in Kalimpong's Town Hall on June 24, 1952, where he stated angrily that, "Indian merchants at Kalimpong kept Tibet well supplied with the best of food and clothing which Tibetans seem to have forgotten to-day when they are negotiating independent wool deals with their new Chinese masters in total disregard of the wool that were purchased from them and are now lying in the godowns of Indian traders at Kalimpong" (*Himalayan Times*, June 29, 1952, 8).¹² This anger was clearly directed at the wealthy and elite Tibetan trading families who went directly to the Indian government to allow them to trade between Tibet and China through "Indian soil and ports without their being required to pay any customs, import or export duties" (*Himalayan Times*, June 29, 1952, 8).¹³ Furious at this introduction of monopolistic trade, Agrawal addressed the crowd of mostly Marwari traders. It is here that we have an example of the divisions in trade and profit marked by class and ethnicity in the town; the three main trading families dictating the geographical direction of the wool trade, during a small window in the history of trade through Kalimpong.

While the three Tibetan trading families were struggling to hold on to their longstanding legacy of trade in the cross-border region, different classes of traders—the muleteers and porters responsible for bringing the caravans back and forth to Kalimpong—began to reap profits. For instance, in July 1952, against the backdrop of a severe strain felt by Tibetans in Tibet, when food was scarce and prices were soaring, the Chinese government provided interest-free loans to businesses that were importing food from India (Shakya 1999, 135). China needed to bring a thousand tonnes of rice to Tibet, which had to go through India because of the lack of internal roads in China. The loads of rice were sent to Siliguri, then up to Gangtok. It was noted that "all available mules are being reserved for carrying these rice bags to different parts of Tibet which has created a flutter amongst private merchants who feel great difficulty in finding mules to carry their goods to Tibet either from Kalimpong or from Gangtok. The muleteers however are reported to be happy as the Chinese are paying them well for the services of their mules" (*Himalayan Times*, July 13, 1952, 2).¹⁴ Transport wages to various locations in Tibet also skyrocketed, where a single *bdal gla* (Tib., "one mule load" or two maunds) from Kalimpong to Lhasa rose from thirty-five Rupees to 200 Rupees in the course of a few days (*Himalayan Times*, July 27, 1952, 5).¹⁵ Porters' wages had surged to the extent that people who had previously not been porters became "attracted to the profession" and porters from Yatung, Bhutan, and Eastern Nepal began to flock to Kalimpong

12 "Kalimpong Chamber of Commerce 26th Anniversary Meeting," June 29, 1952, 8.

13 Ibid.

14 "In Tibet To-Day: Control Order Promulgated," July 13, 1952, 2.

15 "Gleaning From Tibet," July 27, 1952, 5.

for work. Other commodities were fetching higher prices as well; while “the wage for the distance of 40 miles paid for Chinese rice is Rs. 35/- per mule, for other merchandise it is as high as Rs. 58/- per mule and Rs. 28/- per porter” (*Himalayan Times*, October 5, 1952, 5).¹⁶

Viewing the trade through immediate, material circumstances such as lack of access to mules, it is possible to see this as a peculiar moment in Kalimpong’s history of trade where the economic power of the long-standing Tibetan trade families began to diminish, and the smaller traders began to reap the economic benefits of the transnational trade. A further example is for instance the 1953 reports from traders in Kalimpong of hundreds of camels that were said to have been plying between Phari and Yatung to replace the mules that had been transporting wool. Apparently, overwork and malnutrition during the previous trade season meant that a lot of mules had died; in addition, many mules were also being used by Chinese troops for road-building and other pack animals were in great demand. Yak too were also hard to obtain for transport as they were reportedly being used for Tibetan road builders and Chinese troops (*Himalayan Times*, November 22, 1953, 3).¹⁷ Once again, a more-than-human story such as the availability of pack animals can be seen as another important material component of geo-political and geo-economic change in the region.

In October 1954, the market for commodities in Tibet began to soar as a result of the increasing demands of Chinese troops in Lhasa and the surrounding areas. In Kalimpong, a note of hope lingered in the air; India had signed a trade pact with China, trade through Kalimpong to Tibet was on course to resume, and Agrawal made optimistic declarations to the Kalimpong Chamber of Commerce that “there is every reason to believe that this upward trend will continue in the near future” (*Himalayan Times*, October 17, 1954, 9).¹⁸ The *Losar* (Tibetan New Year) celebrations in Kalimpong in 1955 were reported to be held with “great enthusiasm,” precisely because of the increase in demand for commodities from India for the rapidly growing, Chinese-run city of Lhasa. Around this time, the Trade Agency of the People’s Republic of China in India was opened at Kalimpong, with Lobzang Yampel Pangdatsang as the first Trade Agent. Further hopes were also raised by the possibility of Kalimpong-based traders working in collaboration with those in Lhasa, with the aim of maintaining the long-standing trade links and networks between Tibet and Kalimpong.

Increases in profits for smaller traders, muleteers, and porters also went hand-in-hand with the rise in ownership of personal automobiles and the completion of fully motorable roads along the trade route in 1955 and 1956. Features and articles in both the *Tibet Mirror* and the *Himalayan Times* began to be accompanied by a notable increase in advertisements

16 “Heavy Demand of Porters at Gangtok,” October 5, 1952, 5.

17 “Chinese Camels in Tibet,” November 22, 1953, 3.

18 “India Signs Trade Pact With China, Concessions on Transit to Tibet,” October 17, 1954, 9.

for jeeps and cars, specifically models by Ford and Studebaker. Indeed, many items that were in serious demand in Tibet reflected the increase of rapid infrastructure building of roads: tyres, inner tubes, and equipment for yak and horse carts, for example. In addition, the increase in the availability and movement of commodities through Kalimpong led to fierce competition between different brands of the same coveted product. One popular Indian item that was sought-after in Lhasa was toothbrushes. Aryan Toothbrushes was one brand that prided itself on finding markets in Tibet and beyond, and found itself in heated competition with the Brite toothbrush company (figure 3):

M/S Bright Bros of Bombay are once again in the market with their famous 'Brite' Tooth Brushes, capturing the fancy of the Chinese and the Tibetan merchants. Reports reveal that their Export Agents at Kalimpong are overwhelmed with orders for *Brite Tooth Brushes*. They are also offering nice presents with every case of their tooth brushes (*Himalayan Times*, January 22, 1956, 3).¹⁹

Both companies took out ads in Tibetan, English, and Chinese, and railed against each other in notices in the *Himalayan Times* in order to remind consumers to “beware of imitations.” Indeed, by summer 1956 the town of Kalimpong was going through a revival in trade; imports of Tibetan wool into Kalimpong reported an increase of about 4,000 maunds nearly every week. But this renewed trading activity was short-lived; a rapid slump soon followed, which I will outline in more detail further below.

Transportation and technology

One of the most common narratives found in both of the Kalimpong-based newspapers was the building of roads along the trade route. Thousands of Chinese troops were deployed to build roads in Tibet, and paired with the Government of India's five-year programme for road-building, the expectation of a shorter journey—and indeed, one that could accommodate cars instead of mules—across the Himalayas was palpable amongst traders in the town. By the end of 1951, repairs to the roads from Gangtok to Nathu-la, Jelep-la, and Lachen were well underway. While mule, yak, and porter transportation was until this point the main way of getting goods up over the Himalayas, by the summer of 1952 there was a great hullabaloo about the road from Yatung to Gyantse being prepared for a fully motorable journey, and traders were beginning to feel the anticipation fanned by this coming change.

Around 1954, automobiles and trucks began to be more common along the trade routes between Kalimpong and Lhasa, thanks to improvements

19 “Beware of Imitations,” January 22, 1956, 3.

Two *Himalayan Times* April 22, 1956

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Figure 3: Brite Toothbrush advertisement in Tibetan, Chinese, and English, April 1956.

in the roads. A report from Kalimpong in the summer of 1954 noted that new vehicles—including bicycles, cycle rickshaws, and tongas (horse-drawn carriages)—had travelled through Kalimpong to Tibet. Cars, novel to Tibetans, were “mostly owned by either rich landlords and traders or by Chinese officials and government offices” (*Himalayan Times*, June 27, 1954, 3).²⁰ During this period, the Dalai Lama’s new car, a gift from the Chinese government, had just arrived in Calcutta, while the Panchen Lama’s car had

20 “Vehicular Traffic in Tibet,” June 27, 1954, 3.

already been delivered. Even mule transport had dramatically changed as a result of road improvements; mules that had previously been used as pack animals were now drawing “rubber wheeled cart[s], one of which is already plying between the upper and the lower Chumbi valley covering a distance of about five miles in one hour” (*Himalayan Times*, June 27, 1954, 3).²¹ Towards the end of August 1955, the number of vehicles brought from Kalimpong to Lhasa had increased to approximately 6,000 bicycles and 100 motorcycles, and a breathless report from a trader noted that the journey from Yatung to Lhasa was to be slashed from twenty to twenty-five days by mule caravan to only three days by automobile (*Himalayan Times*, September 4, 1955, 3)!²²

These massive cuts in transport time and material transformations in technology along the newly repaired roads thus amounted to significant alterations in traders’ experiences of time and space; the feeling of a “shrinking of space,” well documented by Wolfgang Schivelbusch in his cultural history of the introduction of the railroad (Schivelbusch 1986). By the beginning of 1956, the consignments from Kalimpong to Lhasa no longer consisted of just four or five cars per journey. For instance, thirteen jeeps with trailers and a truck were brought by one Sri Onkar Mull Mintri of Messrs. Mintry Transport, Kalimpong for export to Tibet, one of the biggest consignments thus far. As was common in the mid-1950s, the vehicles—too large to traverse the narrow mountain roads at their highest—were disassembled in Kalimpong “to be packed into loads of reasonable weight and size so that these may be conveniently carried on mules and porters up to Phari” (*Himalayan Times*, January 29, 1956, 5).²³ This is thus another moment where porters and mules were in great demand, right before the roads became fully accessible over the mountain passes and the porters and mules were quickly made redundant. This happened soon after the end of 1956.

Disorganisation and decline

This season of Indo Tibet trade has been one of the worst it can be said without any hesitation. There are many reasons for this. The most important cause of this position is due to huge accumulation of goods in Tibet which are still lying undisposed. The postponement of the development plan in Tibet by the Chinese authorities can also be ascribed as one of the reasons. The quantity of Tibetan Wool which came to India was comparatively low than past few years. Although the political office at Gangtok has always been trying to help the Indian interest, the entrance of some unscrupulous

21 Ibid.

22 “Nathula-Phari Motorable Road,” September 4, 1955, 3.

23 “Jeeps for Tibet,” January 29, 1956, 5.

businessmen and their dishonest practices have been responsible for losing good will of Tibetan traders. Due to this year's bad season already four or five concerns have been closed down and many are contemplating to do so. If the present position continues, there will be threat of a big unemployment. Traders have no uniform policy and at Kalimpong alone there are half a dozen Trade bodies (*Himalayan Times*, February 16, 1958, 4).²⁴

These frustrations began a few years previously, where editorials on the Indo-Tibetan trade bemoaned the fact that it was controlled by "a number of government officials of different departments with very little or at times no co-relation amongst them raising such intricate problems as defy all understanding and solution" (*Himalayan Times*, June 27, 1954, 4).²⁵ This included administrative positions such as the Political Officer in Sikkim, Sikkim State Officials, the Tibet Liaison Officer, the Land Customs Officials, the Enforcement Police, and the Frontier Check Post Staff. The distress amongst traders was that they needed to "pass through all these hurdles before any business materialises" (*Himalayan Times*, June 27, 1954, 4).²⁶

But in addition to the red tape and bureaucratic headaches, perhaps one of the main reasons that led to this frustration within the trading community was the changing times. Transformations in transport and technology, as well as the creation of new trade networks in China, meant that old methods of trade were no longer sustainable. Several members of the main Tibetan trading families had left or were being accused of spying for the Chinese. The stagnancy of economic life in the town once again prompted serious concerns that Kalimpong was almost totally dependent on the Tibet trade. A very telling editorial in the *Himalayan Times* notes that "Our traders have not thought about the changing condition in Tibet, they are still thinking that the age old system of trade would go on for ever. Things have changed on both sides and the traders shall have to realise it. The situation won't improve only by multiplying daily new trade bodies and by talking about past; time has changed and they shall have to march according to it" (*Himalayan Times*, June 15, 1958, 4).²⁷ Like the editorial from 1949 presented at the beginning of this paper, there was always the acute awareness that Kalimpong would not always be able to rest on the back of the wool trade, but that new opportunities had to be recognised and correctly implemented.

A real sense of dread was beginning to become noticeable in Kalimpong towards the end of 1958; there were no new jobs for young people. This was compounded by another rapid decline of morale in the spring of 1959 as the Dalai Lama left for India. More restrictions on traders—including an

24 "Indo Tibet Trade," February 16, 1958, 4.

25 "Indo Tibet Trade," June 27, 1954, 4.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

export duty that was reintroduced on yak tails, wool, musk, and carpets—was coupled with an announcement that China would take action against anyone not purchasing from Chinese stores; this forced many Indian traders to shut down their businesses in Tibet, particularly in Yatung. When the 1954 Sino-Indian Trade Agreement expired at the end of 1959, it was not renewed, and as a result, “Indian merchants in Tibet are now confronted with the inevitable conclusion that the Indo-Tibetan trade is dead” (*Himalayan Times*, July 24, 1960, 3).²⁸ Tensions came to a head in Kalimpong in 1960 when Chinese traders were asked to leave Kalimpong because they were considered to be “dangerous elements,” and by late August 1962, the only Indian merchant left in Yatung returned to Kalimpong, marking the end of the network of traders who spent their lives shuttling between Lhasa and Kalimpong (*Himalayan Times*, September 4, 1960, 1).²⁹ Soon afterwards, the first breach of the border leading to the Sino-Indian War essentially closed off all mountain passes between Tibet and India, bringing to a close all interaction across the border for nearly half a century to come.

Conclusions: end of an era

In the very last issue of the *Himalayan Times* in 1963, the farewell editorial read as follows:

[...] the only English Weekly from North Bengal, “The Himalayan Times” is yet another victim of the complete stoppage of Indo-Tibet trade, and the consequent results ensuing therefrom such as fewer subscribers, fewer advertisements, and a general decrease in sales. As if these difficulties were not enough to contend with, there is also the present shortage of newsprint and the enhanced cost of production (*Himalayan Times*, February 17, 1963, 4).³⁰

While it may be easy to label the failing businesses and unemployed inhabitants of early 1960s Kalimpong as the “victims” of the decline of the Tibet trade, it was in fact well known that the golden era could not last forever. Even David MacDonald, the former British Trade Agent in Yatung and Gyantse, pressed the warning bell in 1952:

[...] the red-light flashes for Kalimpong. Should the caravans from Tibet fail to come down here in their usual numbers, what of the entire 10th mile area where shops are stocked to the ceilings with merchandise to catch the eye of the Tibetan trader? Apart from large business houses engaged in the wool trade of which the profits may

28 “Indo Tibetan Trade Deadlock,” July 24, 1960, 3.

29 “More Chinese Told to Leave Kalimpong,” September 4, 1960, 1.

30 “Farewell,” February 17, 1963, 4.

or may not remain in Kalimpong, what of the many inns catering for muleteers and Tibetan traders, and the local people who supply fodder and grain for thousands of mules, and the hundreds of workers with their dependents engaged in the wool-godowns in sorting and bailing Tibet wool? If Kalimpong is to flourish economically, Indo-Tibet trade must be sound (*Himalayan Times*, April 27, 1952, 2).³¹

After the devastating landslides and the destruction to local infrastructure in 1950, there was a grave understanding that Kalimpong's severance from Tibet would sound the death knell to its important economic, social, and geopolitical position in the Himalayas; "here we have only one type of trade—the trade with Tibet in absence of which Kalimpong has no importance from business point of view—which is a serious problem for the trading community of the locality to consider" (*Himalayan Times*, December 2, 1951, 2).³² The understanding that Kalimpong must have a life of its own and that it should not be defined solely by its links with Tibet was underscored by numerous articles, books, and suggestions for setting up local cooperatives or introducing other products as alternatives to the wool trade. The *Himalayan Times* and the *Tibet Mirror* featured supplements that drew attention to "industrial possibilities" in the town, including harnessing water power in the region and increased facilities for tourism, so that its total dependence on the Tibet trade could be eased. In the 1960s, B.C. Roy (the Chief Minister of West Bengal) suggested, in his great distress at the impending stoppage of Indo-Tibetan trade, that small cooperatives should be set up in Kalimpong to improve horticulture and sericulture (*Himalayan Times*, May 29, 1960, 1).³³ Several of these cooperatives were indeed successful; cheese and milk manufacturing dairies were set up, such that Kalimpong became famous for its lollipops and cheese, and some former traders moved into the horticulture or tourism industries (*Himalayan Times*, June 12, 1960, 1).³⁴

It is unsurprising perhaps that these twentieth-century steps toward revitalisation continue to be echoed through the sentiments of several Kalimpong residents and former traders in the 2000s, reflecting the resilience of a town acutely aware of its position and potential and not as a mere victim of border closure and the decline of trade, as portrayed in many sweeping accounts of the region. Residents mentioned the great potential for a revitalised economy of consumer products and produce such as oranges and ginger that could set Kalimpong apart from the outdated "tea, timber, and tourism" slogans of nearby towns such as Darjeeling and Gangtok (if only there was more support from the central government) (Harris 2013, 98–99). But the precariousness of Kalimpong's

31 David I. MacDonald, "Kalimpong," April 27, 1952, 2.

32 "Industrial Kalimpong," December 2, 1951, 2.

33 "Dr. Roy Disturbed Due to Stoppage of Indo Tibet Trade," May 29, 1960, 1.

34 "Cheese Manufacture at Kalimpong," June 12, 1960, 1.

position in the hills is a continued concern; residents worry about the environmental repercussions of increased roadwork, dams, and the inevitable failure of infrastructure during every monsoon season. It is precisely these kinds of immediate, everyday dealings with more-than-human material life—oranges, dairy cooperatives, monsoons, rivers, and roads—that have characterised the contemporary history of Kalimpong, and it is by paying closer attention to these mundane aspects of material life that we can continue to follow the dynamic, fluctuating life of the town and its transnational connections.

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Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa

Sacred Economies of Kalimpong: The Eastern Himalayas in the Global Production and Circulation of Buddhist Material Culture

Abstract The eastern Himalayan region has long been associated with its commodities, including tea, timber, flowers, and tourism. However, as these commodities have ebbed and flowed with broader socio-political changes, one form of economy has remained constant: Kalimpong's sacred economies, based around its institutions and production and trade of sacred objects. This article will sketch out the contours of the materiality of Kalimpong's Buddhist material culture by outlining the processes of production and distribution attached to religious objects produced and procured in Kalimpong. The communities who participate in these networks of circulation and consumption are far from homogeneous, as manufacturers, merchants, and consumers are not always Buddhist; and Buddhists have eclectic tastes that are not always based on concepts of authenticity. Instead, ritual transformation is the key element that determines the function and value of an object, and new technologies that facilitate mass production and dissemination do not inevitably lead to the disappearance of the sacred. These key themes are highlighted through the study of the interaction between Buddhism, trade, and material consumption in this local setting, which is made possible by Kalimpong's key historical position as a center for cultural and economic exchange between empires and nations.

Introduction

A central element of the global spread of Tibetan Buddhism has been the commodification of Tibetan Buddhist material culture. In many ways, this “stuff” has transcended popular knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, as scholars have noted the way prayer flags, rosaries, and incense have been circulated in settings and spaces far beyond their originally intended audiences.¹ The connection between the dissemination of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhist material culture has historically been close, as even from the time of the Silk Road objects such as art works and ritual implements facilitated the spread of Buddhist ideas and the interaction with neighboring cultures (Foltz 1999). The potentials of material culture as a conduit for attaining Buddhist soteriological goals is actually not incongruous, given the historical role of efficacious relics and images in the Buddhist tradition.² However, what is more unusual is the removal of this material culture from its original context. As knowledge of Tibet developed around the world through British imperial incursion into the Himalayas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, culminating in the Younghusband Expedition of 1904 and then beyond, objects were a central part of that knowledge. Clare Harris and Emma Martin have demonstrated how imperial and popular interest in Tibet led to the development of a collector community around Tibetan and Himalayan material culture, and how decontextualization has been a central trend in the development of these collections for colonial authorities, museums, and private collectors (C. Harris 2012, Martin 2014). The relationship between decontextualization and commodification is often assumed to be a natural, historical development that somehow undermines the authenticity of Tibetan Buddhist objects, rendering them mundane. David Morgan has recently argued that “the relations between sacred and ‘profane’ or non-religious economies can be volatile when the latter threatens to absorb the former,” and that when sacred and mundane economies “are made to overlap and complete” the result is “the evisceration of the sacred when the profit of commerce rivals the reward system of the indigenous community” (Morgan 2015, 390).

This essay will suggest an alternative pathway for understanding these processes, and that the inevitable result of the presence of two economies is not always evisceration, but instead can lead to technological innovation and new forms of religious expression and promulgation. I will explore this by looking back at sites of production and dissemination of Buddhist objects in order to explore the construction of efficacy around these forms of Tibetan Buddhist material culture, and look specifically at the site of Kalimpong as a center for the production and distribution of this material

1 For more on the popularization and commodification of Tibetan Buddhism, see Lopez 1998, Brauen 2004, Bishop 1993, Condon 2007, Joffe 2015 and Bentor 1993.

2 Studies of material culture in Buddhism include Schopen 1998, Strong 2004, and Tarocco 2011.

culture. Rather than suggest that these objects start off as efficacious and somehow are rendered mundane through their circulation through different consumer channels, or that mass production somehow makes them less efficacious, here I will follow assertions made by Arjun Appadurai and other scholars of material culture that spiritual authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, and that ultimately, objects become powerful based on the attitude of the people they interact with and their social life, rather than inherent attributes (Appadurai 1986). Tina Harris has recently demonstrated how Tibetan ritual scarves (*kha btags*) can only be understood through their social relationships, as “the meaning a scarf as at its consumption stage [when it is taken up by Buddhists] can be very different from its meaning during production,” which is often by non-Buddhists (T. Harris 2007, 189). I intend to follow up her work by tracing the production of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist objects such as prayer flags (*rlung rta*), statues (*sku*), and incense (*spos*), and considering along the way how these objects are created both socially as well as materially. However, rather than focus as she did on how these objects function as mediators of socio-cultural and religious meaning in a globalized setting, here I switch scales and consider the local by focusing on a center of production for Tibetan Buddhist objects, the eastern Himalayan town of Kalimpong, as an example of the influence of space and place on creating material culture. Kalimpong has historically functioned as an important contact zone between empires and thus as a key hub for trans-Himalayan trade. I will demonstrate how the different stages of Buddhist material production and dissemination in Kalimpong can contribute to our understanding of the processes around the creation of material efficacy, especially given Kalimpong’s particular geographical, historical and cultural position in the broader Himalayas.

Kalimpong as a center of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist material culture

Kalimpong is an especially salient site for the exploration of these topics due to its transcultural environment. In her classic work of postcolonial literary criticism, *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt discusses how certain spaces facilitate cross-cultural encounter and engagement through their position as contact zones where “peoples [who have been] geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict,” and thereby develop new tools such as language to negotiate the practicalities of encounter (Pratt 1992, 6–7). Positioned at a key point in the foothills between the Indian plains and the Himalayan states of Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, Kalimpong was a vivid example of such a contact zone, where Himalayan peoples met representatives of the British and Chinese empires and trade acted as an instigator for contact. Kalimpong’s insertion into global networks of commerce

did not come suddenly or as a rupture in the longer history of the area. The town had long functioned as a trade market for Himalayan communities to exchange commodities. In the nineteenth century, Kalimpong's importance increased as its proximity to the British leisure capital of Darjeeling and to the accessible cross-Himalayan passes of Nathu-la and Jelep-la led to its unprecedented exposure. It grew considerably in size and influence after 1904, when the Anglo-Tibetan Treaty signed between British imperial representative Younghusband and the Tibetan Government in Lhasa led to the opening of several trade markets to facilitate the circulation of British goods and Tibetan and Himalayan commodities into broader imperial trade networks. Kalimpong was especially known for its wool trade, but also as a center for the exchange of other Tibet-sourced items, such as furs, salt, musk, and borax, with global commodities brought through the routes of empire.³

Apart from circulating objects, these routes also circulated forms of cultural and ideological expression that was spread by scholars and intellectuals scholars and intellectuals who traveled along with or as traders. Religious propagation and trade have often operated in close conjunction in world history (Trivellato, Halevi and Antunes 2014),⁴ and the Himalayas were no exception. Markets were often situated close to, or even inside, Buddhist monasteries and temples, and traders often acted as important patrons and also as teachers and practitioners of different Buddhist institutions (van Spengen 2000, Hilker 2005, Wangmo 2005). Kalimpong and its close neighbor, Darjeeling, were both home to multiple Buddhist institutions, and despite the growth over time of a Christian missionary presence in the eastern Himalayas, these Buddhist institutions remained as important centers for the multiple ethnic groups in the region that practiced Buddhism, including the Lepcha, Bhutia, Bhutanese, Tibetans, Newari, Tamang, Gurung, and Rai, as well as many others (Bell 1905). The towns became part of broader pilgrimage circuits, especially as Bodh Gaya and other sites associated with the historical Buddha re-emerged as pilgrimage centers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Huber 2008).

A common practice among pilgrims in the broader Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist world was the collection of objects on their travels to either take home to add to their household shrines, or to donate as a source of merit to institutions along the way. These objects constituted examples of "supports" (*rten*) in Tibetan Buddhism that act as material signifiers of Buddhist ideology and are therefore "tangible supports that facilitate the practice of Tibetan Buddhism" (C. Harris 2012, 18). Europeans in Kalimpong, including British representatives, were attracted to Buddhist objects as representations of their developing interests in Tibetan and Himalayan

3 For more on Kalimpong's centrality as a trade center connecting Asia with the world, see Arora 2008 and T. Harris 2013.

4 See Turner and Turner 1978, 20 for more on connections between commerce and pilgrimage.

culture, rather than for their soteriological purpose (C. Harris 2012). To respond to this new European demand, several merchants in Kalimpong started to deal in religious art and objects, which fostered the type of intersections Pratt has argued are at the center of what she has termed a contact zone by bringing together “subjects previously separated by geography and history [...that through interaction become] co-present,” with material culture acting as the point she refers to where these groups “now intersect” (Pratt 1992, 8).

Initially, traders sourced their religious items from centers elsewhere, such as the Kathmandu Valley, where Newar artisans were specialists in metalwork statues and ritual implements. Over time, it became more financially feasible for Newar merchants to relocate their workshops to Kalimpong, either for a season or permanently, and this led to the opening of other production centers for sought-after items (Hilker 2005). Tibetan traders began to move down to Kalimpong following the deteriorating political situation with China in the 1940s, and also established production centers for incense and other items such as noodles.⁵

Trade for some of the commodities that had been sought after in Kalimpong, such as wool, was heavily impacted by changes in international politics in the 1950s, the Cold War, and the Sino-Indian War of 1962. However, these production centers remained in business, along with many other producers and merchants of popular forms of material culture, including ritual offering scarves, prayer flags, silk brocade *thangkha* frames, ritual implement covers and shrine decorations, monastic clothing, and books. Many of these latter items are not produced or imported by Buddhists at all, but instead by members of other communities, especially Indian Marwaris and Biharis who moved to Kalimpong in the late nineteenth century in search of new economic opportunities (Bell 1905, Majumder 2005). These communities have been highly astute in their development of new business ventures related to religion, especially in response to gaps in the market following the closing of the Tibetan border and following the development of new technologies.

The participation of non-Buddhist communities in the production and dissemination of Buddhist material culture and in Kalimpong trade has been noted already by Harris (T. Harris 2007 and 2013, 14). Here, Kalimpong’s unique transcultural environment has contributed to an especially lively, varied trade over the past century marked by an inter-religious cooperation and collaboration that challenges assumptions about the unidirectional flow of commodification. In this way, the makers and distributors of these objects contributed to the transcultural environment of Kalimpong by interacting with the demands of their market and context through invention and selection “from materials submitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.” Pratt argues that this was a far from passive process and granted

5 Thondup and Thurston 2015 recounts the establishment of a popular noodle production business.

local actors flexibility and the power to “talk back” to empire (Pratt 1992, 7). In Kalimpong, local producers of religious items responded directly to local and global consumers by using new technologies to manufacture older products, and they continue to do so, not least by creating new products or changing existing ones. Another clear instance of this occurs when ritual transformation is incorporated into the production process by merchants, thus adding uniquely local elements to the global manufacture and trade in Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist objects and illustrating the complex construction of transculturality in a local setting. In order to demonstrate these processes, I will now outline case studies highlighting the circumstances around the production and distribution of Buddhist material goods in present day Kalimpong, with a consideration of the historical development and dynamism of these production processes.

PRODUCTION

A conspicuous element of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist culture in the hills of the eastern Himalayas are prayer flags. These take the form of long strips of cotton that are covered in images of horses (their Tibetan name *rlung rta* literally means “wind horse”), deities, Tibetan-language prayers, and *mantra*, and are mounted on long pieces of bamboo; or they may be smaller pieces of cloth that are attached to strings and tied to trees, or the fronts of buildings, or are even strung up inside car windows. Prayer flags represent an important element of Buddhist material culture in that they are automated prayer accumulators and distributors; the original purchaser of the flags accumulates merit for themselves by mounting them, but also assists others because the prayer flags carry blessings through the wind, and they therefore are believed to represent the interconnectedness of all beings. The colors they come in—most commonly red, blue, green, yellow, and white—represent the elements (Karmay 1998). Historically, the images printed on prayer flags were printed with woodblocks⁶ on cheap cloth that would naturally degrade over time. This was convenient because they were intended to be hoisted on high in hard to reach places and thus if they naturally degraded over time they did not need to be taken down again. They were put in high places in order to carry prayers on the wind more effectively at the time of New Year (*lo gsar*), or for individual ceremonies for health or prosperity.

In the eastern Himalayas, prayer flags were produced at home or in monasteries. Cotton and wood blocks were brought at the market in Kalimpong. The wood blocks were first carved by artisans and subsequently sold on to other village markets. They were then circulated around villages and within families. Ink was produced from black soil (*sa nag*), which was ground together with burned rice into a powder. The powder was made

6 Woodblock printing in the Tibetan language dates from at least the twelfth century, see Schaeffer 2009, 9.

into a paste with water, and painted onto the wood block, which was then pressed onto the cotton. Printing needed at least two people to manipulate the wood block. The flags were then mounted on long pieces of local bamboo. Printing one hundred and eight flags for ceremonies could take up to a week of work, and if people did not have the labor or resources, they could give offerings to their local monastery and the ritual practitioners could make flags for them (Bhutia 2015).

In the 1960s, new technologies emerged that would make prayer flag production faster and less labor intensive. Block printing needed time and specialized skills, and final prints were not always clear, especially as blocks deteriorated with age. A financially viable and easy alternative emerged with the increased popularity of screen-printing, which developed around this time from being an artistic practice into a commercial enterprise. Screen-printing employs stencils and ink for quickly reproducing images with fine borders and detail on a mass level, and from the 1960s onwards mechanized screen-printing made production even easier (Lengwiler 2013). In India, these technologies were introduced for producing women's *saris* in Calcutta (Kolkata) and Bombay (Mumbai). In Kalimpong, Mr. Anjani Kumar, an enterprising Bihari merchant based in Kalimpong saw the speed and detail that screen-printing could achieve. Noticing a market for conveniently available prayer flags among local Buddhists, in 1975 he ordered stencils to be made from woodblock prints and employed local women to produce prayer flags and ritual scarves on a grand scale and had them marketed by his business Zambhala Traders. His production workshop is still operating, and is located in a multi-storied, concrete building along Ninth Mile. Today, the shop front of Zambhala Traders is filled with prayer flags of multiple sizes, as well as other local products such as ritual scarves. The printing workshop takes up two levels upstairs and employs between fifteen to twenty workers. The prayer flags the workshop produces include assorted images, such as longer flags of Tara (*Sgrol ma*) images and prayers and shorter pieces of cloth for wind horses. The ritual scarves are more varied in appearance, as in recent years Mr. Kumar has started to produce custom-made ritual scarves for tourism companies in Bhutan (figure 1).

The terrace at the top of the building is where the women work printing the fabric. On the level below there are two rooms: one with large spindle for rolling the long strips of fabric into bales after they are printed; and a second where Mr. Kumar and several men sort and tie up bundles of flags and scarves for sale and transport to other stores in Kalimpong and the nearby areas of North Bengal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. The women on the terrace work in teams of two or three spreading out long rolls of fabric, holding the stencil in place on the fabric, and applying the ink to the stencil before lifting it away, leaving a clear black image. The location on the terrace was chosen so as to use natural sunlight and dry the fabric more quickly; it can take several hours, and the rolls need to be stretched out so that the acrylic ink does not stick the fabric together. The women come from nearby areas of Kalimpong and represent a number of different ethnic and



Figure 1: Screen-printing prayer flags.

caste communities. Mr. Kumar notes that they are experts in producing prints quickly and can do up to forty long prayer flags for bamboo poles a day, even while keeping an eye on their young children who play on the terrace around their mothers. The workshop closes on rainy days and during the monsoon, as there is nowhere else with enough space for drying the long rolls. Defective prints lie scattered about on the terrace and downstairs in the bundling room. An automated screen printer lies broken in the corner. Mr. Kumar says finding the parts to fix it proved difficult in the hills, and so he went back to the manual system. His venture is highly successful, to the extent that he plans to retire and has left the company to his son, Suroj. Suroj is uncertain about the future of the venture, stating that new mass-printed flags from China are edging out the market, and that the time-consuming and messy nature of production leads him to wonder about its future practicality. Despite these issues, the Kumar family has a strong reputation in the Buddhist community in Kalimpong and beyond. Although he is not Buddhist, several Taiwanese patrons started to refer to Mr. Kumar as “Lama” due to the merit they felt he had acquired through his work. After over forty years in business, Mr. Kumar’s own interests have also turned to religion, as he intends to move to a site associated with Tantric geomancy in Assam after he retires (Kumar 2015). This workshop serves as a demonstration of a practical form of transculturality on the ground in Kalimpong, because members of different communities interact in the production and consumption of items produced there. Additionally,

the technologies used in the workshop, which have been adapted to the varying demands of the market over time, also illustrate the dynamism of this religious market, with new technologies such as screen-printing being eagerly accepted, and in fact preferred to traditional modes of woodblock printing as a result of its practicality.

A notable feature of the Zambhala workshop is the presence of tattered and torn prayer flags lying on the ground and underfoot. Buddhists have strong beliefs in the power of printed words and images (Schaeffer 2009), and avoid stepping on or casting away objects featuring pictures of deities and prayers, and prefer to ritually burn them. The attitude of the producers of the prayer flags demonstrates that at the point of production, these are pieces of printed cloth that are to be marketed. How do they become conveyers of prayer, then? What leads to this change in value? The change in the prayer flags from printed cloth lying in bales to powerful prayers entails a transformation of status that is more complex than simply their purchase by a Buddhist who believes in their efficacy.

TRANSFORMATION

This transformation is brought about through a ritual process known as consecration (*rab gnas*), where ritual practitioners visualize and then invite Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to infuse themselves and objects with their blessings (*byin rlabs*) in a vivid invocation of the central Buddhist tenant of non-duality (Bentor 1996, xix). The presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is then sealed into objects, which may be statues, stupas, or temples, making them indivisible and capable of producing and transmitting the original blessings of the same deities (Tulku and Perrott 1985, 37). The idea of a space or object acting as a home to a ritually invoked deity is part of broader South Asian ritual traditions. Closely related is the idea of visiting a shrine as an act of *darśana*, whereby a worshipper visits an image of a deity with the belief that the image contains the actual deity, and by visitation devotees are seeing the deity and the deity in turn sees them (Eck 1998, 3). Buddhist supports (*rten*) have similar ideas attached to them, such that through consecration the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to be present in the object or image. Consecration is what transforms prayer flags from strips of cloth on the floor of a print shop to sacred objects capable of communicating prayers.

In the case of other types of sacred objects on sale in Kalimpong, another step is necessary to prepare an object for ritual transformation. This step is the insertion of sacred substances, such as relics, *mantras*, and medicinal herbs, into the objects. These substances are known as *zung* (*gzung*, Bentor 1996, xxi), and their preparation involves a specialized skill set that includes not only practical knowledge of how to make and prepare *zung*, but also ritual knowledge. Objects are often manufactured with this requirement in mind; for example, statues are made with hollow gaps in them to allow for the insertion of *zung*, and the back of *thangkha* and other

artworks are printed with sacred syllables to give life to their represented deity. When Buddhists purchase or donate an object for a shrine, it is crucial to have *zung* prepared and the object consecrated before it can be installed for purposes of propitiation. At times, stores and manufacturers will have *zung* prepared and added directly to objects before their sale; alternatively, purchasers will take the responsibility themselves, though in both instances, the consecration takes place after the sale and is the responsibility of the new owner.⁷

Obtaining *zung* is not straightforward. While some lamas and ritual specialists who perform consecration ceremonies may keep *zung* on hand, the preparation of *zung* is considered a specialized skill. As mentioned earlier, Kalimpong is a meeting place for many Himalayan Buddhist communities. Its position as a manufacturing hub (discussed above) and trade center (discussed below) means lower prices for sought-after religious goods. While historically people could have procured *zung* after purchasing their goods from their home religious institution, as a result of current demand, in contemporary Kalimpong several *zung* specialists are resident in the town who are approached by manufacturers, merchants, and new owners to make *zung* for their ritual objects. The best-known local *zung* master at present is Lama Jamyang (Bla ma 'jam dbyangs), who lives in the neighborhood of Thongsa Gompa, the Bhutanese monastery that is believed to be the oldest in the area, dating to the seventeenth century. Lama Jamyang, who is now in his eighties, speaks flawless Central Tibetan, as well as several other languages, and is a *ngakpa* (*sngags pa*, Tantric practitioner) who originally moved from Bumthang (Bum thang) in Bhutan to Kalimpong in around 1965. He came especially to study under the famed Tibetan lama Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdral Yeshe Dorje (Bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje, 1904–1987), who settled in Kalimpong after he fled Tibet following the Chinese takeover. Many students of the Nyingma tradition flocked to Kalimpong during this period so as to study under this widely regarded teacher. Lama Jamyang originally lived at Madupala, where Dudjom Rinpoche had been given land, and it was there that he began to study the art of preparing *zung*. As Yael Bentor has noted, there is a close relationship in Tibetan Buddhist educational systems between ritual expertise and meditation (Bentor 1996, xviii–xix). While staying at Madupala, he not only studied meditation but also learnt about Buddhist art and painting, and how to prepare the different elements of *zung*.

There are several different parts in the process of creating Lama Jamyang's *zung*. The inclusion of mantras, *dhāraṇī*, and prayers are important, and Lama Jamyang originally used to write these out in black ink on long strips of white paper which he would then paint with saffron and water

7 The tradition of *zung* preparation and consecration is an ancient one; see Bentor 1996 for a discussion of potential histories of *zung* and its development. According to my interviews, Kalimpong merchants have arranged for local ritual specialists to prepare *zung* for as long as there have been specialty stores selling these items.

and either roll into small, tightly-spun wheels, or fold into squares. These prayers are directed to different deities, depending on the statue and, at times, the motivation of the patron. Along with these prayers, he would also draw out different diagrams featuring deities and astrological figures, which were then folded and bound together with red, yellow, and green string. These pieces of paper could be quite large (up to 60 cm x 60 cm), but could be folded into very small bundles. Medicinal pills of varying sizes, known as *rilbu* (*ril bu*) or *mani rilbu* (*mani ril bu*) that are believed to be able to transmit *chinlap* (usually translated as “blessings”) are also included in *zung*. Making these pills is a very time-consuming process, involving grinding up herbs and precious substances, mixing them, and using cloth or machines to work them into balls.⁸ These pills have often already been consecrated and undergone different empowerment ceremonies (*dbang*) performed by respected ritual masters, and are associated with good health and longevity (hence Barbara Gerke’s reference to them as “long-life pills” or Jürgen C. Aschoff and Tashi Yanphel Tashigang’s term “jewel pills” in Gerke 2011, 233 and Aschoff and Tashigang 2004.) Other items may also be added to *zung*, including relics from powerful masters, precious substances (especially turquoise and coral, and at times gold and silver), as well as uncooked rice, jewelry, and coins. After the preparation of internal parts of the *zung*, the item to be consecrated sometimes needs further external preparation. This is particularly true of statues. Lama Jamyang is also responsible for painting faces on to the statue along with other elements including hair, jewelry, and clothing. This is understood as part of the consecration process, so it is not done at the time of production. The eyes are especially important, as it is believed that once they are painted in, the deity may take residence in the statue. For this reason, after Lama Jamyang has completed the *zung* preparation, he ties cotton wool on to the face of the statue to act as a blindfold, only to be undone by the consecrating master.

Lama Jamyang’s *zung* preparation has been developed from a long lineage of specialists. However, the introduction of new technologies over time has made the entire process faster and easier. This is especially so for prayers, which Lama Jamyang used to have to written out in painstaking detail. This was very challenging when it came to smaller statues and objects, for which he would have to make small (under 5 cm) tall rolls of prayers on which he would write as many prayers as he could fit. Now, with photocopying, he can easily replicate prayers and mantras, altering their size and gluing them together. Tibetan word processing programs have also meant that he no longer has to write out the prayers himself. He now also uses enamel paints (developed for model enthusiasts) instead of older, homemade paint, which was time-consuming and expensive to make on account of the precious stones that had to be ground up to produce the desired color (figure 2).

8 For more on the process of making these pills, see Saxer 2013, 59–94.



Figure 2: Photocopied *mantra* for preparation of *zung* with statues that have already had *zung* inserted into the base.

Lama Jamyang's workshop is situated on the first floor of his home, directly beneath a large shrine room, so patrons can easily bring in larger statues for *zung* preparation. There is a constant demand for his work, so he and his son now work together to prepare rolls of prayers in advance, which are stored in old Centerfruit Chewing Gum containers. The shelves of the workshop are stacked with enamel paint in a dazzling variety of colors, and jars of small jewels that are glued onto the crowns and headbands of statues. Tools are scattered around the room. On one wall of the workshop is a shelf groaning under the weight of finished orders, ranging from small, simple household statues of Guru Rinpoche, the Buddha and Avalokiteśvara, to large, elaborate versions of Jambhala ('Dzam bha la), the popular God of Wealth. People will often drop off the statues and return several days later to collect them; but sometimes Lama Jamyang will take care of statues for months before patrons collect them from further afield. Lama Jamyang sees his work as a natural extension of his meditation practice, and rarely takes a break apart from occasional pilgrimages. He is happy to know that his son will continue these traditions, as machine-made *zung*, he says, are simply not the same as those made by hand (Jamyang 2015). Texts on consecration often outline the ideal characteristics of the presiding practitioner, emphasizing that apart from ritual and meditative expertise, the preparer should be "stable, calm and wise" (Tulku and Prescott 1985, 35). Lama Jamyang does indeed have these characteristics. However,

his experience is also important for what it illustrates about the dynamism of the ritual elements of Buddhist material culture production. His move to Kalimpong and initial study of sacred arts were precipitated by new cycles of Buddhist migration into the area, and specifically, political events that led Tibetan teachers like Dudjom Rinpoche to settle in Kalimpong. This led to new opportunities for skill acquisition, but also heightened demand for these skills. Additionally, new technologies have led his work to expand beyond Kalimpong's local setting as his ritually prepared objects are sold through global chains of Buddhist commerce by stores in Kalimpong with trans-Himalayan and international customers.

DISTRIBUTION

Once religious objects have been prepared for consecration, they are taken to ritual specialists for the ceremony. As mentioned above, patrons will either take the responsibility of having the objects filled with *zung* themselves, or buy them ready to be consecrated. Many storeowners in Kalimpong have close connections with specialists such as Lama Jamyang as a result of the well-established traditions around buying sacred articles. The oldest store that stocks religious objects in Kalimpong is Norlha, located at Tenth Mile on Rishi Road. Housed in the front of one of the old stores that remain scattered throughout Kalimpong's market, Norlha's history dates back to the early twentieth century, when an enterprising Agrawal trader from Haryana arrived to take part in the opening of Kalimpong for trade. The store moved to its current location in the 1950s (Agrawal 2015). Initially, Norlha stocked specialties brought from surrounding areas to trade with muleteers from Tibet. However, over time the managers started to pick up religious items from manufacturers based throughout the Himalayas, noting the demand from trading families for specialized goods. Eastern Tibetan traders, for example, wanted the finest Newar-produced statues from the Kathmandu Valley, while local Bhutanese and Sikkimese residents of Kalimpong needed a place to purchase wood block prints for prayer flag manufacturing in their villages. Norlha stocked it all, and today continues to have a huge variety of different religious goods, including statues, *thangkhas*, and ritual items (including bells, drums, cymbals, and monastic horns). The current managing family includes, Mr. Sandip Agrawal, who is the descendant of the original managers and procures goods for his store directly from the manufacturers, who are based throughout Kalimpong and further afield in South Asia, China, and Hong Kong. He keeps different versions of the same items from different parts of the Himalayas as they often vary in quality, so customers may choose between different items based according to their budget. Customers come from as far away as Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh to procure items from Norlha because of the wide range of choices (Agrawal 2015). Many nearby areas, such as Sikkim and Bhutan, rely on Norlha to provide bulk goods for local stores and monasteries (figure 3).



Figure 3: The front of Norlha Store, Tenth Mile, Kalimpong.

The store has always stocked a variety of mundane objects, too, including tea and in the past wool, and today steaming pots for making *momo* (*mog mog*). The rationale for such eclectic products comes from the desire to position Norlha as a one-stop shop for traders with limited time. Norlha continues to be popular for this reason with Tibetan traders who transport goods over Nathu-la Pass, which has been opened intermittently since 2006.⁹ *Momo* steamers are a popular mundane item, along with other religious objects. These are among the few items that are allowed to be exported from India through the Pass. The list of allowable items is currently very short, containing only twenty-nine objects that are mostly food products and utensils. However, clothes, herbal products, and copper articles are included, which may be interpreted liberally to encompass religious objects. From China, the list is even more restrictive, only containing fifteen different items that are mostly animal products, including historical favorites such as wool, yak hair and tails, and also borax (Sikkim Industries, 2). However, the Chinese list also includes raw silk, which is widely sought after for high quality ritual scarves, throne covers, and ritual garments. The manager also recently established a website for Norlha which will enable his objects to travel even further afield (Norlha website, 2015).

While these objects may be obtained more easily through the Internet, this new development will continue older trends in Kalimpong of religious objects passing into the hands of non-Buddhists. While the owners of Norlha are Hindu, they have longstanding ties and networks of trust with Buddhists that lead them to be respected locally. They offer services such as arranging for *zung* and consecration, and are careful in their presentation of religious materials so as not to contravene Buddhist beliefs; for instance, no goods are stored on the floor. However, historically the store has attracted tourists and collectors, and while tourism in Kalimpong

9 T. Harris 2013 provides an overview of the circumstances around this re-opening.

is still low key after the disruption that resulted from the end of trade in the 1960s and the Gorkha agitation in the 1980s (Subba 1992 and Lama 1996), its gradual resurgence has meant that once again, collectors dare to travel to Kalimpong. Norlha is some distance away from the main bazaar, and Mr. Agrawal says that tourists form a minority in his customer base. For those who do venture down Rishi Road, Norlha also stocks items for tourists, as well as for “intermediate audiences.” In her important article on tourist *thangkhas* and the commodification of Tibetan Buddhist material culture in Kathmandu, Yael Bentor identified this audience as being made up of two groups, who are neither “internal” to the tradition nor “external,” that is, complete outsiders. The first group in the intermediate audience consists of Buddhists from other parts of Asia. The second is made up of “non-Tibetans who have in varying degrees adopted the Tibetan style of Buddhism, along with some attendant aspects of Tibetan culture” (Bentor 1993, 113). Kalimpong is a popular site to visit for these groups as it is on the way to other major Buddhist centers and is the residence of famous international teachers in Sikkim and Bhutan. It is also home to several of these centers, most notably the monastery at Durpin Dara, Zangdrok Palri (Zangs mdog dpal ri), established by Dudjom Rinpoche in the 1960s.

For the external audience described by Bentor, there are a number of shops in the bazaar that sell mass produced items, as well as more touristy items, such as postcards and velvet paintings of tea plantations and the mountains. These stores are often more affordable than Norlha as they stock mass-produced items sourced from Kathmandu and China. Among the more popular items are plastic prayer wheels (*ma ni*), both manual and solar-powered. The latter are used in vehicles, and have become popular in the hills among Buddhist and non-Buddhist vehicle owners alike. This popularity has led Norlha to stock some of these items. Their spread and their acceptance by multiple consumer communities for their novelty value and convenience demonstrates the blurring between “authentic” items for internal audiences and cheap souvenirs for external audiences. The distribution of these goods through traditional networks, such as those participated in by Norlha, as well as through souvenir and gift shops, also disrupts straightforward categorization of sacred or profane networks of commerce. Additionally, while the situation outlined here is contemporary, Kalimpong has a long history of these forms of transaction, as demonstrated by its influential position in trans-Himalayan trade networks and as a hub for global collectors of the Himalayas from at least the late nineteenth century (Harris 2012; Martin 2014). Ultimately, consumers of sacred items in Kalimpong continue to determine the sanctity of an object as users of these objects, rather than some inherent value derived from locations of production or distribution.

Conclusions

The eastern Himalayas have long been a region associated with commodities and trade. Darjeeling is synonymous with tea, even for consumers around the world who cannot locate it on a map; Sikkim has for at least a century been the world's leading producer of large cardamom, a key cooking spice; and the flowers that colored the valleys and gorges of the area are now found all around the world in the market for exotic plant species. With the decline in trade after the 1960s, Kalimpong and the region appeared likewise to have declined. However, other economies have continued to flourish. While Tina Harris noted that local entrepreneurs stressed the potential for items such as noodles, ginger, and oranges (T. Harris 2013, 98), Kalimpong has another economic base that has long been strong but is often overlooked. The sacred economies of Kalimpong may apparently be best represented by the diversity of religious institutions in its winding streets and the abundance of local festivals. But Kalimpong's trade networks have also been historically enriched by smaller, more transportable forms of sacred economy in the form of the Buddhist material culture that has been produced and distributed through networks in Kalimpong from the late nineteenth century to the present. Prayer flags, incense, and astrological charts are all produced in Kalimpong; other items, such as statues and ritual implements, are procured there in bulk for distribution further afield. The communities that participate in these networks of circulation and consumption have historically been examples of transculturality as they have been far from homogeneous, since manufacturers, merchants, and consumers have not always been Buddhist; and Buddhists have eclectic tastes that have not always been based around concepts of authenticity. Instead, ritual transformation is the key element that has influenced the function and value of an object. This paper has been a snapshot of how this sacred economy appears at this particular point in time; but through patterns of migration, trade, and interaction that have shaped Kalimpong's demography, this economy has also changed, and with the emergence of new technologies of production and dissemination, this economy is far from static. The circulation of sacred economies in the location of Kalimpong demonstrates the eminently negotiable and adaptable nature of religious efficacy in material form, and the way that contact zones contribute to these adaptations and negotiations.

Figures

Fig. 1, 2: Photo by author, Kalimpong, India, July 2015.

Fig. 3: Photo by author, Kalimpong, India, July 2016.

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; accessed August 13, 2016: (http://library.columbia.edu/locations/eastasian/special_collections/tibetan-rare-books---special-collections/tharchin.html).

Interview partners

Informal interviews were conducted in July and August, 2015.

- Mr. Sandip Agrawal, owner and manager of Norlha Store, Kalimpong.
- Dr. Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia, scholar of Sikkimese Buddhism.
- Mr. Anjani Kumar and Mr. Saroj Kumar, owners and managers of Zambhala Traders, Kalimpong.
- Lama Jamyang, ritual specialist and artist, Kalimpong.

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PART IV

Scholars, Power, and Knowledge Production

Trine Brox and Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen

Prince Peter's Seven Years in Kalimpong: Collecting in a Contact Zone

Abstract The main protagonist of this paper is H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark (1908–1980), an old-world ethnographer and explorer who went to Kalimpong in the 1950s, first as a member and later as the leader of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia. The expedition's aims were to explore and document empty spots on the map and to rescue the remnants of local cultures in Upper Asia. With the developing crisis in Tibet, however, Prince Peter was stranded in Kalimpong, waiting in vain for permission to enter Tibet. Yet unfavourable political circumstances turned into great opportunities for the expedition as the advance of the People's Liberation Army into Tibet led to a stream of refugees into Kalimpong: "We had been denied entry into Tibet, but Tibet had come to us." In this article, we explore Prince Peter's seven years in Kalimpong and how he navigated this particularly intense contact zone, negotiating difficult political, personal, and professional circumstances.

Introducing Prince Peter in Kalimpong

H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark was an old-world ethnographer and explorer who embodied the intellectual aristocrat who travelled in style to exotic places to study the local flora, fauna, and folk.¹ His mother's vast fortune supported Prince Peter and enabled him to dedicate his life to his travels and the pursuit of adventure on his own professional—and personal—terms. Yet this description fails to do justice to the thirst for knowledge and the quest to make scientific discoveries that drove him to travel to the far reaches of the world. In 1950, his travels took him to the north-east Indian Himalayan town of Kalimpong—"the little frontier town at the very gate of central Tibet" (Prince Peter 1963, 581). He arrived there in 1950 as part of, and later as the leader of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia. He was aiming for Tibet, but ended up staying in Kalimpong for seven years.² During those years, based in Kalimpong, Prince Peter not only became entangled in intense and sometimes conflictual political and personal relations with society there, but he also faced tremendous *professional* challenges because the expedition was stranded in this Himalayan town and unable to follow its intended trajectory into Upper Asia.

Prince Peter's unanticipated Kalimpong adventure nonetheless stands out from other ethnographic work done amongst Tibetans because of the variety and amount of material that he was able to collect during his stay there from January 1950 to February 1957. He acquired a rich collection of artefacts and books, photographs and moving images, sound recordings, and ethnographic information, as well as an astoundingly large body of physical anthropology data. He published several articles based on the data from the expedition, covering topics ranging from fraternal polyandry to anthropometrical studies, as well as investigations of Tibetan oracles, aristocrats, Muslims, and many others. Our preliminary inquiry reveals that between 1935 and 1980, Prince Peter published six books and over sixty articles, many of them for the general public. He also produced sixteen anthropological films. Almost half of

1 In this article we describe the results of a preliminary investigation conducted in 2014 into Prince Peter's seven years in Kalimpong. In March 2015 we presented these findings in our paper "The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia—7 Years in Kalimpong" at the conference *Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands: Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone."* We would like to thank the convenors for inviting us to this inspiring event, and we are grateful to the Asian Dynamics Initiative at the University of Copenhagen for financing our participation in the conference and travel to Kalimpong. Thanks are also due to the Eastern Himalaya Research Network and the other participants at the conference, both the lecturers and the audience, whose positive and constructive responses to our paper are much appreciated.

2 Prince Peter also led the Danish Scientific Mission to Afghanistan (the Henning Haslund-Christensen Memorial Expedition) in 1953–54, in which several other Danish scientists participated (Prince Peter 1954b).

his work was published in the 1950s, professionally his most productive decade.³

Prince Peter's Kalimpong years were not only his most productive professionally, but also his most intense, personally and politically. For Prince Peter, and the many other explorers, ethnographers, and adventurers who lived in or travelled through the town, Kalimpong came to constitute a complex contact zone—one of those “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination” (Pratt 1992, 4). Contact zones are, from Marie Louise Pratt's perspective, fluid places and spaces of exchange and connectivity, spaces shaped by European expeditions into non-European worlds (Pratt 1992). Therefore, the concept of a contact zone is a useful tool for framing and understanding the many encounters and exchanges between the local and the global, the national and the transnational, and between identity and diversity, that took place during Prince Peter's sojourn in Kalimpong—a sojourn which in many and varied ways embodies the West's encounter with “the rest.”

Thus, Prince Peter's stationary expedition work obtaining permits, collecting artefacts, and interacting with interlocutors in Kalimpong could be understood as activities that took place within a complex contact zone. This paper represents a first attempt at exploring the ways in which Prince Peter's scientific pursuits became entangled with political and personal dramas in this multi-layered contact zone, where people from a variety of socio-cultural and ethnic-linguistic backgrounds moved in and out, oscillating between placement and displacement. We will investigate Kalimpong as a fluid and dynamic place containing various spaces of exchange and connectivity in which Prince Peter interacted with interlocutors, and will explore the transcultural knowledge spaces that emerge from their encounters. For analytical purposes, and to do justice to Prince Peter's many entanglements, we have conceptually subdivided Kalimpong into a geopolitical, an interpersonal, and an ethnographic contact zone. How Prince Peter navigated these multiple and complex contact zones, constantly negotiating difficult political, personal, and professional circumstances in a stream of social and cultural encounters and scientific challenges is one of the focal points of this paper.

Our second focal point is Prince Peter's initially reluctant abandonment of the expedition mode in favour of a more contemporary way of doing ethnographic fieldwork, that is, intense study in particular spaces.

3 Prince Peter's scholarly work had the greatest impact within Tibetan Studies in general and polyandry in particular, but he recognised the importance of a comparative social anthropology. Within that discipline, however, his research and writing gave him only a marginal position, apart from, perhaps, the role he played in introducing anthropology to Greece. He gave numerous lectures at, among other institutions, the University of Athens and the Anthropological Society in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He never obtained an academic position in Greece, and his monograph *The Science of Anthropology* did not receive good reviews (Agelopoulos 2013).

Operating within the old fashioned expedition mode, Prince Peter had been determined to travel to far-off places to penetrate new and unexplored worlds in order to document the many facets of the exotic and unknown civilizations he expected to encounter. He was part of a team composed of anthropologists, archaeologists, geographers, botanists, meteorologists, and religious studies scholars—scholars whose expertise, the result of their different scientific methods, was considered necessary to map out in their entirety the various constituents of a civilization. The team of Danish explorers was supposed to pass through Kalimpong, yet rather than being the intended gateway to Tibet, the town came to constitute a particular space in which Prince Peter conducted intense studies of Tibetans and their culture. As time passed and the expedition continued to be denied entry to Tibet, the other members of the expedition left one by one, and Prince Peter came to represent the expedition single-handedly, carrying the flag of the Explorers' Club, both metaphorically and literally, as the expedition's sole remaining participant.

In Kalimpong, Prince Peter attempted to salvage both tangible Tibetan cultural heritage, on commission from the Danish National Museum, and intangible cultural heritage, documenting particular Tibetan lifeways such as polyandry for posterity (Koktvedgaard Zeitzen 2008; Prince Peter 1963). Prince Peter's stay in Kalimpong foreshadowed contemporary anthropological fieldwork, where ethnographers work with people where they are when the fieldwork is being done, rather than where they are considered to have originated from. In 1950s Kalimpong, where both Prince Peter and his Tibetan interlocutors were embroiled in personal struggles of various kinds, the narrative identity they created was dynamic—and displaced. However, Prince Peter's goal was not to understand contemporary Tibetan lifeways in Kalimpong but rather, to collect and document Tibetan heritage as it was practiced where, in his view, it had originally belonged, that is, in Tibet proper. He filters his Tibetan interlocutors' accounts and artefacts through his own acquired anthropological narratives about Tibet, and, using this filter, extracted those elements he thought embodied authentic Tibetan cultural lifeways. By exploring Prince Peter's work in Kalimpong as taking place within a complex and contested contact zone, this paper attempts to take some initial steps in exploring his production of ethnographic knowledge and its entanglement with his Tibetan interlocutors and their own bodies of knowledge.

H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark

H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark was born in Paris in 1908. He was the son of Prince Georg of Greece and Denmark, brother to the Greek king. His mother was the famous psychiatrist Marie Bonaparte, who came from the immensely wealthy Blanc family of France, whose fortune derived from the Monte Carlo Casino. She became a psychiatrist after becoming a



Figure 1: Irina taking a rest on her way to Ladakh with Prince Peter in 1938; their pre-war Himalayan journey is described in Prince Peter's book *Chevauchée tibétaines*, Fernand Nathan, Paris 1958.

patient and later a close friend of Sigmund Freud; she is well-known for paying the ransom that enabled him to leave German-occupied Austria in 1938. Prince Peter's maternal grandfather was Prince Roland Napoléon Bonaparte, grandson of Emperor Napoleon's brother Lucien, and a famous botanist and explorer in his own right. He was a member of the 1886 French scientific expedition to northern Norway, where he photographed and took anthropometric measurements of indigenous Sami people (Bonaparte 1886).

Prince Peter led a life of luxury and enjoyed the high social status befitting his royal birth, yet when he married the twice-divorced Russian socialite Irina Alexandrovna Ovtchinnikova (b. 1904 in Saint Petersburg, d. 1990 in Paris) in Madras in 1939, his fortunes took an abrupt turn. His family did not approve of the marriage, and he was banished from the royal inner circles in Greece and Denmark. Distant places might have seemed even more attractive to the prince after his familial *déroute*, and his wife remained his loyal and intrepid companion during all his subsequent travels. Prince Peter's mother also remained devoted to her son, albeit at a distance, and continued to pay his personal expenses and finance his professional endeavours even after his rift with the royal families.

In 1937–39, Prince Peter undertook his first anthropological expedition to South Asia (figure 1). Together with his wife, Prince Peter carried out fieldwork among polyandrous groups in Ladakh, the Himalayas, and on the Malabar Coast. He had been broadly educated, studying first in Paris at the Sorbonne, where he became Docteur en Droit in 1934 with a thesis on Danish cooperatives. In 1935, he began post-graduate studies in

anthropology at the London School of Economics under the supervision of Bronislaw Malinowski. One of the founding fathers of modern anthropology, Malinowski pioneered ethnographic fieldwork as the hallmark of anthropological methodology. Malinowski may thus have inspired and encouraged Prince Peter to do intense, long-term fieldwork.

Prince Peter's travels were interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, during which he was stationed in Egypt as a captain in the Greek Army. He resumed his anthropological explorations in 1946 with an expedition to Afghanistan, and moved on to join the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia in 1948. It was part of Denmark's participation in the race between nations to explore what Prince Peter called "little-known parts of the world" (Prince Peter 1954, 229). The overarching goal of the expedition was to explore *terra incognita* in Upper Asia. It had two objectives: firstly to explore and document Upper Asia, which was considered a blank spot on the map, and secondly to rescue the remnants of local cultures, which were assumed to be soon lost to the world. The expedition team under the prince's leadership was to head for Sikkim in the south, work its way to Lhasa and over the Tibetan Plateau to Alaša in Inner Mongolia, and from there into the territory of the "Yellow Uigurs" (Prince Peter 1954, 229).

Prince Peter arrived in Kalimpong in January 1950, intent on documenting Tibet, its people, and its culture, all of which were considered under threat from the encroaching modern world, which gave the expedition a sense of urgency.⁴ Tibet was perceived as an inaccessible, empty space on the map between India and China, yet to be discovered and documented by cartographers and ethnographers, a forbidden and isolated place that had to be forced open to reveal its secrets (Bishop 1989). In his book *Trespassers on the Roof of the World: The Race for Lhasa*, Peter Hopkirk articulates such a vision of Tibet, circulating at the time of Prince Peter's expedition: "Until the Chinese invasion, their spartan way of life had hardly changed since the Middle Ages. [...] Like Shangri-La, the 'lost' valley of James Hilton's *Lost Horizons*, Tibet was a land where time stood still and people had not yet lost their innocence. It was this, perhaps above all else, which made it so alluring to trespassers from the West" (Hopkirk 1982, 7).⁵ Prince Peter summed up the Western—and masculine—ethos of their expedition: "The people of Tibet are still practically unknown. From an anthropological and ethnological point of view, the country is virgin ground" (Prince Peter 1952, 281).

4 He had been to Kalimpong once before, in December 1938, doing research on polyandry (Prince Peter 1963).

5 In James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, a plane crash in the Himalayas brought four Americans and Europeans to the utopian monastery of Shangri-La run by "the high lama," a Catholic missionary from Belgium. Shangri-La was a storehouse of European high culture and wisdom rescued from war and destruction, and hidden away in the Himalayas. Shangri-La had an enchanting effect on those who found the place and it was a remedy for materialism, spiritual decay, and old age. The idea of Tibet as synonymous with Shangri-La has since become part of Western popular culture.

Prince Peter was unable to enter Tibet because of the tense political situation, and the advancement of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into Tibet in November 1950 left him stranded in Kalimpong. Yet the fruitless, seven-year wait for permission to enter Tibet nevertheless turned out to be Prince Peter's most productive phase professionally, as the PLA's presence in Tibet triggered a stream of Tibetan refugees into Kalimpong, creating a supply of potential interlocutors for his anthropological research (figure 2). He was, however, facing political, personal, and scientific challenges in this complex contact zone. From his exchange of letters with the Indian government and West Bengali authorities it is clear that they had little understanding of the scientific work he was doing. The Indian authorities grew increasingly concerned about him and his activities, in part because they suspected that his Russian wife was a spy. Eventually, Prince Peter and Irina were evicted from their house, and in February 1957 they left Kalimpong.

Spending seven years in Kalimpong and gaining first hand experience of Cold War politics and Communist China's advance into Tibet, which pushed Tibetans into exile, Prince Peter became deeply engaged in the Tibetan cause. As President of the Nordic Council for Tibetan Assistance, he was instrumental in helping Tibetans go to Scandinavia in the 1960s. In 1960, he helped arrange for twenty Tibetans aged eleven to sixteen to be educated in Denmark (Brox and Koktvedgaard Zeitzen 2016). His time in Kalimpong also fundamentally influenced his future academic trajectory. After returning to Europe, Prince Peter submitted his PhD dissertation on polyandry, based on his fieldwork in the Himalayas and southern India, to the London School of Economics. He received his PhD in 1959, and his seminal work on polyandry was published in 1963. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Copenhagen in 1960, yet he never held an appointment at a university in Denmark or elsewhere. Nevertheless, he continued to travel and lecture at universities, explorers' clubs, and various venues, and to publish on Tibetan matters for both an academic audience and the general readership. Prince Peter was finally allowed to enter Tibet in 1979—in post-Mao China, when Deng Xiaoping's reforms opened the Tibetan plateau for Chinese business, immigration and tourism, and socio-economic reforms were intended to raise Tibet from the ruins of the Cultural Revolution. Prince Peter died a year later in London.

Kalimpong as a geopolitical contact zone

Kalimpong extends along a mountain ridge at a height of 1,300 meters in the Himalayan foothills of northern West Bengal, at the endpoint of a land corridor leading to Tibet. As the southern terminus of a commodity pathway starting at the Tibetan capital Lhasa and crossing over the Jelep mountain pass into India, it was the most important hill station in the region when Prince Peter stayed there. It had become the new economic capital of the region after the British Younghusband military expedition in



Figure 2: The photo bears the inscription "With compliments from Lakhmishand Kaluram. Kalimpong. 14/8/54" on the back; someone else has added that Prince Peter is standing next to the wife of a Tibetan Official.

1903–4 forced entry into Tibet and opened a trade route between Lhasa and Calcutta. Goods coming from Tibet through Kalimpong could thus be transported to the commercial port of Calcutta, and shipped onward to Europe and America (Hackett ND; Harris 2008, 2013). As a globally connected centre of Indo-Tibetan trade, Kalimpong attracted people from all over, making the town a classic example of a contact zone fuelled by a complex web of cultural, ethnic, caste, religious, and linguistic encounters. It was, in the words of Prince Peter's fellow scholar and friend René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (figure 3), the "city of the seven new years," because here "practically all peoples living in the Himalayas and adjacent territo-



Figure 3: On their way to Gangtok. The three men are photographed outside the Himalayan Hotel in Kalimpong May 2, 1951. Next to Prince Peter is his friend and colleague René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz.

ries" congregated and each group celebrated its new year according to its own calendar (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956b, 55, 66). The multitude of festivals testified to the cultural diversity of Kalimpong. Here, Tibetan, Marwari, Newari, and Kashmiri traders as well as Chinese merchants joined the many indigenous ethnic peoples and non-native groups coming and going to and from Kalimpong. Among them were Buddhist masters and their entourages, elite Tibetan politicians and nobility, royalty in exile, indigenous Lepchas, spies of the great powers, colonial holiday-goers, Scottish missionaries, European Tibetologists and ethnographers, and, following the PLA's advancement into Tibet in 1950, an increasing number of Chinese and Tibetan refugees.

Kalimpong thus not only constituted a cultural juncture, it was also a frontier, a borderland, and a political edge. Wedged between Sikkim, Bhutan,

Nepal, and Tibet, regional and national interests often converged and at times clashed in Kalimpong. In effect, it represented a Tibet *in absentia*, a player as well as a pawn in “the Great Game,” in which China, Russia, and Great Britain fought to gain a foothold in High Asia (Hopkirk 1990). Prince Peter stayed there at the height of the Cold War, when the agents of a newly independent India and competing empires congregated in Kalimpong, transforming it into a political gossip factory, and, in the words of Chinese President Mao Zedong, “a centre of espionage, primarily American and British” (quoted in Shakya 1999, 158). Indian President Nehru was indeed concerned about the number of potential spies, and he was under increasing pressure internally and externally as a result of the tense political situation. At a parliament hearing in the Lower House, *Lok Sabha*, he said about Kalimpong:

Kalimpong, Sir, has been often described as a nest of spies, spies of innumerable nationalities, not one, spies, spies from Asia, spies from Europe, spies from America, spies of Communists, spies of anti-Communists, red spies, white spies, blue spies, pink spies and so on. [...] This has been going on for the last few years so there is no doubt that so far as Kalimpong is concerned there has been a deal of espionage and counter-espionage and a complicated game of chess by various nationalities and various members of spies and counter-spies there. No doubt a person with the ability to write fiction of this kind will find Kalimpong an interesting place for some novel of that type (Nehru 1959, 18–19).

Political intrigues, gossip, and accusations about espionage circulated in Kalimpong, and were related in books written by Western visitors to Kalimpong—some of whom did indeed report back to foreign agencies about their neighbours and friends (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956b; Patterson 1990; Sangharakshita 1997). It became infamous as a “nest of spies” (Patterson 1960, 71), a place with a highly volatile atmosphere in which suspicion and mistrust were widespread and had concrete consequences. Newly arrived residents and visitors were often seen as potential threats because of their possible ulterior motives for being in town. This atmosphere of suspicion engulfed Prince Peter as well as his wife Irina and his close friend Georg Nikolaivitch Roerich who, as Russian nationals, were both suspected of being Communist stooges. Another friend, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama’s elder brother, was suspected of being an agent of the Chinese Nationalists (Patterson 1990, 137). He later helped the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) work with a Tibetan émigré group gathering in Kalimpong to spearhead the Tibetan resistance and an anti-China campaign, creating a resistance network and planning a long-term guerrilla war (Shakya 1999; Knaus 1999; 2012).⁶ Kalimpong had become an important gathering

6 In his own memoir, Gyalo Thondup branded himself “the noodle-maker of Kalimpong” (2015).

place for Tibetan resistance directed towards Communist China, as well as a place of refuge for Tibetans fleeing Chinese expansion in Tibet as the PLA further advanced into Tibet and threatened India at its borders.

Kalimpong grew to be so important that for many Tibetans it became synonymous with all of India. For others, it was a Tibetan place (figure 4). According to Prince Peter, the town had a large ex-pat community of 3,500 Tibetan residents, including nobility, traders, and Tibetan Christians (Prince Peter 1963, 582). It also housed the famous Tibetan-language newspaper, the *Tibet Mirror* (*yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur gyi me long*), which Dorje Tharchin had been publishing since 1925, and which circulated among the



Figure 4: Gopal Studio in Kalimpong published many photographs from the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's Kalimpong reception in 1956, and Prince Peter collected several of these. This picture captures contact zone encounters within a single frame.

elite in Tibet for almost forty years (Hackett ND; McGranahan 2010, 69ff). Being a Tibetan place also meant that European and American Tibetologists, anthropologists, political officers, trade officers, and explorers stayed in Kalimpong, either as a necessary stopover before proceeding to Tibet or as a replacement for a stay in Tibet. Famous Tibetophiles like Alexandra David-Néel, Georg Nikolaivitch Roerich, and René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz went there. Some rented or bought homes and settled in Kalimpong. Others stayed at the Himalayan Hotel, from which important information, gossip, and misinformation about Tibet was circulated (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956b; Sangharakshita 1997).

Thus, at the height of the Cold War, an increasing number of visitors came to Kalimpong because it was the second-best thing to being in Tibet

proper. Scottish missionary George Patterson remarked that numerous unidentifiable, questionable individuals came to Kalimpong at the height of the tension, when Kalimpong was “the most strategic town on the Chinese Communist route to Calcutta, and became a Communist constituency at this most critical period of Indo-Tibetan crisis” (Patterson 1990, 132). He observed how newspaper fantasies were fabricated because reporters, barred by obstructive Tibetan officials, were unable to enter Tibet. Instead they sought their information among Tibetan travelers in Kalimpong’s bazaars and among the foreigners who gathered at the Himalayan Hotel. They wired home reports about Tibet, which were partly from people’s imaginations and partly products of the Kalimpong rumor mill. Patterson called it “imaginative reporting.” Patterson himself reported to a foreign power, not in order to support any anti-Communist movement, but out of his “pro-God and pro-Tibet” convictions (Patterson 1960; 1990, 124).

The tense political situation produced severe obstacles, forcing Prince Peter to give up his original research design. He had arrived in Kalimpong in January 1950 and met the remnants of the first team of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia; the prince was a member of the second team. He intended to stay in Kalimpong primarily to arrange a permit for the expedition to enter Tibet. However, his repeated requests for a travel permit were looked upon with suspicion, since he and his expedition members were seen “as intruders with possibly suspicious ulterior motives” (Prince Peter 1963, 581). He abandoned the original goal of traversing the Tibetan plateau to reach Alaša in Inner Mongolia and the territory of the “Yellow Uigurs” (Prince Peter 1954, 229), and instead found what he believed to be a more pragmatic solution, namely crossing the Indo-Tibetan border and following the traditional trade route to its northern terminus in Gyantse. According to Prince Peter’s account, neither the Political Officer in Sikkim nor “the Tibetans” wanted to take responsibility for Prince Peter’s scientific expedition, each of them responding to his request by referring him to the other (Prince Peter 1953b, 8–9).⁷ Prince Peter lamented that “in truly Oriental manner, they abstained from being either affirmative or negative” (Prince Peter 1963, 582) until August, when he was told to “kindly postpone my voyage” (Prince Peter 1954, 231).

When the PLA invaded eastern Tibet in October 1950, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, faced with the threat that the PLA would proceed to Lhasa, moved in December to Dromo, a small town near the Indo-Tibetan border (Shakya 1999, 51). In a last effort to obtain permission to enter Tibet, Prince Peter flexed his royal connections and got his cousin, King Paul of Greece, to provide him with a greeting that he could present to the Dalai Lama (Prince Peter 1953b, 10; 1954, 232). Prince Peter was not allowed, however, to present the introductory letter and the Greek king’s photograph to the Dalai

7 When Prince Peter writes “the Tibetans” in his account, he probably means the Tibetan Foreign Bureau in Lhasa and his contact Tsepon Shakabpa, who was the highest-ranking Tibetan official in Kalimpong.

Lama. These had the opposite effect on the Tibetans who—perhaps fearing a potential Chinese reaction—sealed Prince Peter's fate, for he now found himself permanently stranded in Kalimpong, unable to enter Tibet: "We thus lost a last opportunity to visit the land before the Chinese military occupation in December of the same year" (Prince Peter 1952, 283). The final incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China (PRC) the following year, and the Chinese military presence all along the Indian border from Kashmir to Assam heightened tensions in the region: "it makes everyone on the border feel jittery, and, as usual, scientists are suspected of having deeper motives for being in those regions than is in fact the case" (Prince Peter 1953b, 10). Prince Peter's expedition was thus forced to come to an end in Kalimpong, and he summed up his experience of the situation succinctly:

[I] have come to learn that international politics are the real obstacle to scientific research in these areas. The height of the Himalayan Barrier, the barrenness of the Tibetan high plateau, and the difficulties of supply and transport pale into insignificance when compared with this, the main impediment (Prince Peter 1954, 232).

Kalimpong as an interpersonal contact zone

Kalimpong was a cosmopolitan borderland *en route* to Tibet, Prince Peter's ultimate destination which had been rendered unachievable by the PLA's progression into Tibet. Instead, Kalimpong became a figurative route into Tibet for him: The many Tibetans pouring into town, along with the already existing community of Tibetan residents, became a huge potential pool of interlocutors. In addition, Kalimpong was a favourite seasonal refuge for Tibetans fleeing the cold Tibetan winters—a "Riviera for Tibet" (Prince Peter 1953a, 6). According to Prince Peter, the annual Tibetan traffic to or through Kalimpong amounted to as many as 15,000 Tibetans (Prince Peter 1953b, 9). He was thus able to get direct access to many Tibetans who otherwise would be unapproachable or difficult to meet during travels in Tibet proper. Moreover, the Dalai Lama and his government's relocation to Dromo in December 1950 caused panic among Tibetan elites and prompted many of them to flee Tibet and move to Kalimpong (Harner 1954; Shakya 1999, 51). This multiplied Prince Peter's pool of potential interlocutors greatly: "a wave of Tibetan temporary refugees to Kalimpong, people generally of means, who decided to weather the storm on the Indian side of the frontier and see which way events would develop" (Prince Peter 1963, 582). It also increased Prince Peter's pool of potential artefacts because the ruling elite who sent their families and their valuables across the border into safety were later willing to sell their belongings to him (Prince Peter 1953a, 10–11).

Tibetans arrived in large numbers in Kalimpong, where they bought or rented property to such an extent that the Development Area in

Kalimpong “looked like a suburb of Lhasa” (Patterson 1990, 104). Tibetan officials and their families, Tibetan traders and pilgrims, as well as the few European residents of Tibet all fled to Kalimpong (figure 5). The Dalai Lama’s mother arrived there with his six siblings, and Prince Peter befriended the elder brother of the Dalai Lama, Gyalo Thondup (Knaus 2012, 309 n.18). The famous Austrian mountaineer Heinrich Harrer came to Kalimpong after seven years in Tibet (Harrer 1954), as did the White Russian engineer Niedbylov, the English radio operator Reginald Fox, a Torgut Mongol prince with his family and retinue, twenty-three Russian Old Believers, and a steady “stream of refugees” (Prince Peter 1954, 232). They came to a cosmopolitan Kalimpong that included residents like the exiled prince and princess of the fallen Burmese royal family and the sister of the Sikkimese king, Chuni Wangmo, who was married to a Bhutanese prince (Shah 2012).

Prince Peter dealt with both destitute travellers and representatives of the Tibetan upper class, who met the prince as fellow aristocrats. His close friend Georg Nikolaivitch Roerich, a Tibet scholar and son of the Russian painter Nicholas Roerich, was instrumental in arranging meetings with prominent Tibetans, found good language teachers for Prince Peter so he could learn Tibetan, and helped him obtain ethnographical artefacts and books for his collection. Tibet scholar René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz was likewise Prince Peter’s close ally in the field, dedicating his monumental work *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (1956a) to Prince Peter. Another traveller visiting Kalimpong at the time, James Cameron, wrote in his autobiography that the odd and endearing Kalimpong “had become a rendezvous for what was probably the most impressive collection of human eccentrics in Asia.” The people whom he met at the Himalayan Hotel were almost surrealist: “wizards and sorcerers, Tibetan aristocrats, angry exiles from China, remote sprigs from the forgotten European nobility, Indian yogi, Bhutani politicians, professional anthropologists, linguists, students, pilgrims, miracle-workers and innocent bystanders, all milling around with curious axes to grind and trying either to get into Tibet, or to get out” (Cameron 1967, 204–205). *Time* reported on December 4, 1950:

Tibet is only 30 miles away. For that reason, Kalimpong has collected over the years a number of mystical characters who arrived via Jelep-la pass from Tibet, and another bunch who would give their last rupee to travel the other way. Foreign cultists, scholars, artists, adventurers and missionaries plod Kalimpong’s streets, panting to explore Tibet and its particular brand of Buddhism, but lacking permission to get in. [...] Last year anthropologist Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark breezed into Kalimpong with his wife to study a unique form of Tibetan polyandry called za-sum-pa, the sharing of wives between fathers and sons, and (occasionally) between uncles and nephews. Tibet would not admit the prince and princess (*Time* 1950).



Figure 5: Picture given to Prince Peter by Heinrich Harrer in Kalimpong, showing Tibetan official with child.

Despite his failure to enter Tibet, Prince Peter was nonetheless thrilled about the opportunities that Kalimpong offered. In 1954, he reported to the Royal Asiatic Society:

All this made the place we had perforce settled in a most interesting and lively one. [...] Apart from the excitement of meeting all these strange and fascinating people, there were enormous possibilities of work. Very soon we had got down to interviewing them, purchasing clothes and valuables from them which we dispatched to the National Museum in Copenhagen and, after the Indian Government has made registration of all Tibetans with the police compulsory, measuring and describing them in order the better to find out what their physical racial characteristics were. We had been denied entry into Tibet, but Tibet had come to us, and under circumstances of stress which made it perhaps easier for us to obtain the results we wanted than if we had been working in the country under settled conditions (Prince Peter 1954, 231–2).

In terms of doing research, what had initially seemed like a disaster because of the expedition's failure to enter Tibet, soon proved to grant unparalleled access to Tibetans from all walks of life and all regions of the country. This diversity is illustrated by the datasheets of the 5,000 individuals who came to Kalimpong from Tibet who Prince Peter measured anthropometrically. Of the 5,000 surveyed, 4,924 were Tibetans—4,411 males and 513 females, perhaps reflecting the gender composition of the general Tibetan refugee and trader population in Kalimpong, as opposed to that of the more settled Tibetan population. The people he measured came from all three Tibetan regions (Tib.: *chol kha gsum*), Utsang, Kham, and Amdo (figure 6). Prince Peter categorized his material according to these three indigenous categories, which in his view constituted Tibet, that is: taken together the three cohorts represented Tibet.⁸

Prince Peter settled in Kalimpong with his wife and, building on his productive professional relations, he started to establish equally productive interpersonal relations within Kalimpong society. Initially, the couple rented the house Tashiding from Jigme Palden Dorji, Bhutan's future first Prime Minister, but later they bought the house Krishnalok. Both houses were situated in Ringkingpong, literally and metaphorically high above the rest of the town because Kalimpong is located along a ridge stretching from one mountain top, Ringkingpong, to the other mountain top, Deolo. Here, they lived in relative wealth and abundance compared to the rest of Kalimpong's residents. According to Patterson, Kalimpong was at the time divided into five areas: firstly, the Development Area in Ringkingpong occupied by European residents and Tibetan elites who lived in European-style

8 For more details on Prince Peter's anthropometric studies, see Brox and Koktvedgaard Zeitzen 2017.



Figure 6: One of the portraits accompanying the thousands of anthropometric measurements that Prince Peter collected in Kalimpong.

houses with gardens, an area which had been developed during the end of the colonial period and was physically elevated above the rest of the town; secondly, the Deolo hills to the north with Dr. Graham's Homes for Anglo-Indian children; thirdly, the Eleventh Mile with Tibetan caravanserais; fourthly, the bazaar where townspeople conducted local trade; and finally the Tenth Mile, with its busy Tibetan and Chinese commercial area and international trade, the red light district, and the Topkhana (shelter for the destitute) where most Tibetans lived (Patterson 1960, 72, cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956b, 75).

However, the good times—both professionally and personally—did not last. For several years Kalimpong was a strategic site where Prince Peter could conveniently collect Tibetan artefacts, accounts, and anthropometrical data, and he worked tirelessly at maintaining his social and scientific relations in order to secure the expedition's success, despite its failure to enter Tibet. In his reports back to his Danish sponsors, he regularly complained about the difficult circumstances under which he was working, which included the regular rejection of his applications to enter the Sikkimese and Nepalese Himalayas. Further difficulties arose as Prince Peter became increasingly estranged from some of the Tibetan contacts and friendships that he had built in Kalimpong since arriving there in 1950 (Prince Peter 1954, 233). From his correspondence with Indian and Tibetan contacts and authorities it is also clear that there was

little support for his scientific work in Kalimpong. The Indian government and the West Bengali authorities grew increasingly concerned about his activities because of his royal biography, their speculations about the true motives behind his expedition, and suspicions that his Russian wife was a spy; talks and interviews that he gave, in which he spoke out against the government of the PRC and Nehru's passive stance on Tibet, also raised their concern. According to Prince Peter, the Indian authorities were trying, under pressure from the Chinese, to halt his work and obstruct his contact with Tibetans (Prince Peter and 1966, 8). A rumour spread by the Communist press in India did not help his case. This rumour claimed that Prince Peter was not measuring Tibetans to gain anthropometrical statistics about Tibetans, but to further a political agenda: to turn them into imperialist agents operating in Tibet with the aim of creating "a new Hungary" (Prince Peter 1966, 8).

Prince Peter felt that the Indian press and the Indian government were harassing him. The perceived harassment culminated in 1956 when Prince Peter and Irina's residency permits were withdrawn and they were evicted from their home, Krishnalok. According to Prince Peter, the Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai was directly responsible for the eviction. After being granted a few months' reprieve to allow Irina to recuperate from a severe bout of pneumonia, Prince Peter and Irina finally left Kalimpong in February 1957, never to return.

Kalimpong as an ethnographic contact zone

Ethnographic challenges were soon to add to the geopolitical and interpersonal challenges Prince Peter faced in Kalimpong. The longer he remained in Kalimpong, the clearer it became that he would have to abandon the expedition mode in favour of localised ethnographic studies. Prince Peter's journey thus mirrored the trajectory that had led his mentor Bronislaw Malinowski to pioneer ethnographic fieldwork as an anthropological method. As a Polish national, Malinowski was initially stranded in the Trobriand Islands due to the outbreak of the First World War. He wrote in his diary: "September 1st began a new epoch in my life: an expedition all on my own to the tropics" (Malinowski 1989 [1967], 3). Malinowski spent several years on the islands, learning the local language and pioneering participant observation. Similarly, Prince Peter was stranded in Kalimpong for seven years, never able to enter Tibet, but acquired a deep local knowledge and a command of Tibetan in order to talk to his interlocutors. Prince Peter was not immobilized but instead "stranded" in Kalimpong in the sense that the expedition was unable to proceed into Tibet as planned. During their seven years there, Prince Peter and Irina did go on vacations and other expeditions, as well as back to Denmark in October 1952, to exhibit the artefacts that Prince Peter had collected in Kalimpong at the Danish National Museum (figure 7). They also conducted a lecture tour



Figure 7: Prince Peter (with Halfdan Siiger) at the National Museum in 1952, where some of the Tibetan artefacts that he collected were exhibited; he is getting ready for a presentation to the press.

showcasing his films about Kalimpong's "indigenous peoples and wonderful landscapes" (Prince Peter 1953a, 12).

Prince Peter's unplanned and unanticipated long stay in Kalimpong not only forced him to abandon the mobile expedition approach to ethnographic collecting, it also significantly foreshadowed contemporary anthropological fieldwork approaches, in which ethnographers work with people where they are when the fieldwork is being conducted, rather than where they are considered to originally belong (Malkki 1992). Yet Prince Peter wanted to document the customs of Tibetans as "originally" practiced in Tibet: "It was, of course, not the same as studying the people in their own, national environment, but it was the closest I could get, and not unsatisfactory at that" (Prince Peter 1963, 582).

One of the objects of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia was indeed to explore *terra incognita* and rescue the remnants of local cultures perceived to be under threat from the encroaching, modernizing world. That is, Prince Peter intended to and did in fact engage in rescue anthropology, documenting still extant traditional cultures to preserve records of these for future generations. As part of the Tibetan rescue efforts, Prince Peter resumed his ethnographic research on polyandry—a marriage form in which one woman is married to several men—which had been interrupted by the Second World War (Prince Peter 1954, 232). Tibet was at the time, and still is, home to the largest polyandrous communities in the world. Tibetans typically practice fraternal polyandry where brothers or classificatory brothers become husbands to a common wife. Other forms include the polyandry of fathers and sons who have a wife in common, a unique phenomenon not found anywhere else in the world. Prince Peter was fascinated by the fact that every form of marriage appeared to be permissible in Tibet—polyandry, polygyny, monogamy, group marriage, as well as combinations of these, often within the same family—reflecting the cultural diversity of the area (Koktvedgaard Zeitzen 2008; Prince Peter 1963). It gave him an even greater impetus to explore and salvage manifestations of this cultural diversity.

Prince Peter's interest in polyandry and his desire to "rescue" it for posterity might have been fuelled by the widespread notion in (and outside) the West that modernity would make the "traditional" practices of polygamy disappear (Koktvedgaard Zeitzen 2008). Prince Peter even went so far as to call polyandry a "recessive cultural trait," arguing that polyandry was fragile because it was a product of very special economic and social circumstances and could easily be destroyed when societies in which it was practiced came in contact with non-polyandrous societies (Prince Peter 1963, 570). From this perspective, polyandrous Tibetans exposed to monogamous peoples were seen as in danger of abandoning or being forced to abandon their age-old marriage customs (figure 8).

However, Prince Peter's anthropological rescue paradigm was not based solely on concerns about particular Tibetan customs. Rather, it



Figure 8: Tibetan polyandrous extended family, photographed by Prince Peter in Kalimpong, 1956. Tibetan polyandrous marriages, where a woman is married to several men, can be combined with polygynous marriages, where a man is married to several women.

was grounded in long-held assumptions about cultural decay. For centuries, many people in the West have assumed that peoples in non-Western societies would end up becoming just like them with the onslaught of modernity, that traditional indigenous cultures would collapse in unequal struggles with superior Western culture and global capitalism. Anthropologists have challenged but also perpetuated such pervasive ideas about cultural decay.⁹ Marshall Sahlins (1999; 2005) argues that anthropologists have always suffered from a certain type of cultural nostalgia, seeking out pure indigenous Others, untouched by the corrupt, capitalist West. He asserts that anthropologists often assume that these Others must necessarily face cultural decay or even cultural death through contact with the West—a contact which, ironically, often was initiated by the anthropologist himself. The problem with this mindset is, according to Sahlins, that anthropologists are no longer studying what they find in the field, but rather are addressing it through the prism of an ideologically inspired project about “rescuing” indigenous peoples and their cultures from (and for) the West. Thus, contemporary anthropologists have not come much farther than their founding fathers over one hundred years ago, when Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski saw it as their duty to rescue what they could of old traditional cultures heading toward extinction. Sahlins goes as far as to call this missionary work.

9 See Thomas 1991; 1994.

Prince Peter's essentialised vision of a spatially anchored Tibet, and the urge to keep it in temporal and developmental stasis, clashes with contemporary anthropological views of cultures as dynamic and fluid. There is no cultural core as such to be rescued, as cultures develop continuously and can never be catalogued in their entirety (Hastrup 2004). Sahlins' critique can indeed be levelled at Prince Peter and his research in Kalimpong. Prince Peter was a student of Malinowski and had been schooled in rescue anthropology as a paradigm, and he himself saw his expedition as a rescue mission.¹⁰ His journey into and sojourn in Kalimpong thus, in various ways, embodies the West's meeting with the non-West.

In anthropology, the postmodern and postcolonial critique has helped focus scholarly attention on assumptions about other peoples that underlie the discipline and its theories. Discourse has become a prism through which to understand ethnographic narratives, how they are shaped by the ethnographers' subjective selves in their interactions with their interlocutors, their field sites, their conventions for cultural narrative (Abu-Lughod 1991; 1993). It suggests that we may approach Prince Peter's ethnographic accounts about polyandrous Tibetans as narratives representing his subjective stories about how polyandry may have been practiced in Tibet. He constantly had to negotiate access to and rely on the narratives of Tibetans who had settled or were displaced in Kalimpong. Prince Peter neither explored nor reflected on the representativeness of their accounts, just as there is little reflection in his accounts on the effect of displacement on his interlocutors' narratives. One might argue, however, that his interlocutors' narratives are just that, narratives, and they would not necessarily be more authentic or accurate if delivered in the interlocutors' self-professed point of origin, or less so if delivered in another place.¹¹

We may thus gain new insights into Prince Peter's ethnographic accounts by understanding his interactions with his interlocutors and collaborators in Kalimpong as taking place within a contact zone. Contact zones are, from Pratt's perspective, spaces shaped by European expeditions into non-European worlds, yet they are also transformative spaces, where differences in power relations between ethnographer and interlocutors could be overcome and new relations could be negotiated (Pratt 1992). Looking at the conflictual social and political climate in the 1950s Kalimpong contact zone, where both Prince Peter and his Tibetan interlocutors were embroiled in personal struggles of different kinds, we may question the extent of the reciprocity: Prince Peter had to rely on his interlocutors' bodies of knowledge in order to understand how they looked at and made sense of their polyandrous world. Yet he filters their stories through the cultural assumptions regarding polyandry that formed part of his own acquired anthropological narratives. And from this filter he had to extract those elements which he thought embodied the original Tibetan polyandrous customs practiced in a

10 See for instance Prince Peter 1952; 1953a–b; 1954; 1966.

11 See Fergusson & Gupta 1997; Marcus 1995.

different time and place. He did not address the questions about the many ways in which his interlocutors' words might relate to their actual worlds, the ones in Kalimpong in which they were living or were displaced. His primary purpose was not to understand what was happening in Kalimpong during his sojourn there, but rather to rescue what had been practiced and situated in Tibet proper and was about to disappear. In Sahlins's words (Sahlins 1999), it was missionary work.

Prince Peter, a classic old world-ethnographer and explorer, complete with a colonial lifestyle and an expeditionary approach to the field, epitomized the quintessential, privileged European traveller in foreign, unexplored, and exotic parts of the world. His expedition and ethnographic work thus becomes more than an actual exploration of empty spaces, it involves travel as imaginary constructions of other peoples and places (C. Harris 2012). Expedition writing as a form of travel writing is, as Pratt suggests, shaped by certain narrative contexts and conventions, where factual accounts may be mixed with more speculative representations of otherness and other peoples based on the writer's own cultural or academic assumptions (Pratt 1992). The prince's exploration of polyandry in Kalimpong could thus, from Pratt's perspective, be understood as a Eurocentric exploration of an exotic marriage system, which in turn reinforced European cultural assumptions about a particular kind of marriage as normal and natural.

Upon leaving Kalimpong, Prince Peter travelled extensively in Europe and the US giving leisure talks about exotic Tibetan customs at explorers' clubs. At the Royal Central Asian Society in London, he was introduced by its chairman, Lord Birdwood, as an anthropologist—a discipline that Birdwood understood as "concerned with bones, stones and queer stories about savages."¹² Prince Peter did not just relate queer stories about savages, however, he also delivered political messages about a people that he had come to cherish and wanted to help. Perhaps this was Eurocentric, but it was driven by a humanistic and genuine interest in and empathy for Tibet and the plight of its peoples and cultures under Communist Chinese rule.

Concluding remarks on Prince Peter in Kalimpong

Prince Peter's work in Kalimpong in the 1950s took place in a particularly complex contact zone in which he had to negotiate difficult personal, political, and professional circumstances in his encounters and exchanges with the great variety of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups moving in and out of the town. Yet it was also a very productive contact zone, where he was able to assemble vast amounts of material and immaterial data through his prolonged and intense interactions with local interlocutors. As the town developed into an important ethnographic contact zone through the arrival of thousands of displaced Tibetans fleeing the Chinese advances

12 The lecture was given on February 25, 1959 (Prince Peter 1959, 251).

into Tibet, his seven years in Kalimpong turned out to be the most productive phase in Prince Peter's professional life. Here he was able to pursue his expedition's aims of documenting and rescuing Tibetan culture, albeit in a stationary mode—Tibet came to him rather than him going to Tibet.

Prince Peter had the financial means to pursue his research interests on his own personal and professional terms. Yet in Kalimpong, he had to navigate this complex contact zone carefully in order to obtain permission to work there and to meet interlocutors and collaborators from whom he could collect accounts and artefacts so as to document immaterial and material Tibetan culture. As a contested contact zone, Kalimpong also constituted a transformative space where differences in power relations between Prince Peter, as ethnographer, and his Tibetan interlocutors and local collaborators could be overcome and new relations negotiated. In order to disentangle the networks of knowledge that emerge from Prince Peter's many encounters and exchanges as he engaged with a great variety of differently placed peoples, we subdivided the multi-layered contact zone into three different sub-zones, which we have labelled the geopolitical, the interpersonal, and the ethnographic contact zones. In those sub-zones, Prince Peter's encounters and exchanges cannot necessarily be understood as the archetypal Western penetration of social spaces and cultural places previously inhabited by the non-Western Other. That is, they were not necessarily encounters between the superior civilizer from the centre and the inferior indigene on the periphery. Prince Peter did not have the upper hand in every encounter, despite being male, white, wealthy, and royal. Like everyone else navigating this complex contact zone, Prince Peter had to assume different positions at different times, and he often struggled personally and professionally to get access to and work with potential interlocutors and collaborators.

Prince Peter's encounters and exchanges with Tibetan and Indian authorities were particularly complex, as Kalimpong developed into a Tibetan place and a significant ethnographic contact zone for him, whereas the authorities often considered it a nest of spies. In Kalimpong, Prince Peter's scientific pursuits became entangled with the political drama and the social tragedy resulting from the PLA presence in Tibet. The town became a transformative space for him, as it further developed into a conflictual *geo-political* contact zone as well as a challenging *inter-personal* contact zone for the prince and his wife. Stranded in Kalimpong, Prince Peter attempted to combine his two reasons for being in the region, namely to lead the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia in order to rescue the remnants of local cultures, and to continue his fieldwork and research on polyandry. However, the prince wanted to collect and document Tibetan heritage as it was practiced in the place where he believed it originally belonged, anchored in place in Tibet. He was less interested in understanding contemporary Tibetan lifeways in Kalimpong, and seems not to have reflected on the representativeness of his Tibetan accounts, collected outside of Tibet, or the effect of displacement on those accounts.

Prince Peter's unreflective approach is in line with Pratt's assertion that the whole idea of discovery and exploration in such projects as the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia was fundamentally Eurocentric, since what Europeans discovered was always already known by local peoples. Yet discoveries were ascribed to the European travellers as if what they had discovered had not existed beforehand (Pratt 1992). Prince Peter's exploration of polyandry in Kalimpong might possibly be viewed as one such Eurocentric exploration, seeking to map out an exotic marriage system at odds with European notions of propriety and morality. Through his ethnographic account, polyandry was presented as a rare and divergent marriage form, the ultimate exotic custom to be rescued from oblivion. As a scientific explorer and expedition leader, Prince Peter could relate and display exotic customs like polyandry in non-threatening ways on the basis of the perceived good intentions of his endeavours. Accounts of polyandry could tantalize but not threaten curious Europeans because these accounts were taken out of their context and inserted into a new context, the ethnographic account, where Europeans could ascribe meaning to them. Yet they were also literally out of context, based on accounts from displaced peoples in a contested contact zone.

Our preliminary exploration of Prince Peter's ethnographic research therefore raises a number of questions about his work with his Tibetan interlocutors in Kalimpong. We view the cultural accounts collected by Prince Peter, whether they are of Tibetan polyandrous family structures or oracle trances, as produced in the cultural encounters and exchanges with interlocutors that took place in the transformative spaces within the geopolitical, interpersonal, and ethnographic contact zones. His interlocutors emerge as co-producers of his ethnographic knowledge and accounts, which leads us to ask how Prince Peter's representations of Tibetan Others were shaped by these Others, and how these Tibetan Others' representations of themselves and their polyandry were shaped by the way they represented themselves to a European explorer like Prince Peter.

Pratt links such queries to the notion of transculturation, a contact zone phenomenon referring to the dynamic, mutual influences on forms of representation and cultural practices flowing between colony and metropolis, or periphery and centre (Pratt 1992). Transculturation was first used as a corrective to notions of acculturation or deculturation. These notions describe the transfer of culture from metropolitan centres to peripheral colonies, which is often assumed to result in the destruction of local cultures—and the emergence of rescue anthropology (Sahlins 1999; 2005). In contemporary ethnography, transculturation may be used to understand how marginal groups choose, invent, or incorporate elements based on materials and resources transmitted to them from dominant groups.¹³ Whether Prince Peter's work in Kalimpong can be interpreted in the light of transculturation in a contact zone or, as he assumed, in terms of decul-

13 See Thomas 1991; 1994; 2000.

uration, is an interesting question that we intend to explore further.¹⁴ Here it suffices to say that his ground-breaking study of polyandry helped produce and maintain European perceptions about themselves and their world by opening vistas into unknown and uncharted marital forms and sexualities. As all good travel writing does, it helped shape a European sense of difference from exotic non-Western cultures, which were to be explored, described, and mapped. Prince Peter's research was not merely advanced travel writing, however. He left behind rich collections of ethnographic accounts and artefacts, and a legacy of intrepid exploration and a tenacious will to learn.

Figures

Fig. 1–8: Ethnographic Collection, National Museum.

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14 In our research project *Prince Peter and the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia*, we have focused on Prince Peter's ethnographic knowledge production during the seven years he spent in Kalimpong. The objective of the project is to do an *ethnography of collecting* in the Tibetan works, words, and worlds of Prince Peter in order to trace the biographies of both him and his Tibetan interlocutors, as well as the biographies of the Tibetan artefacts, accounts, and anthropometrical data he collected in order to advance our understanding of cultural heritage in the Himalayas. See also Koktvedgaard Zeitzen and Brox (2016).

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Markus Viehbeck

“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

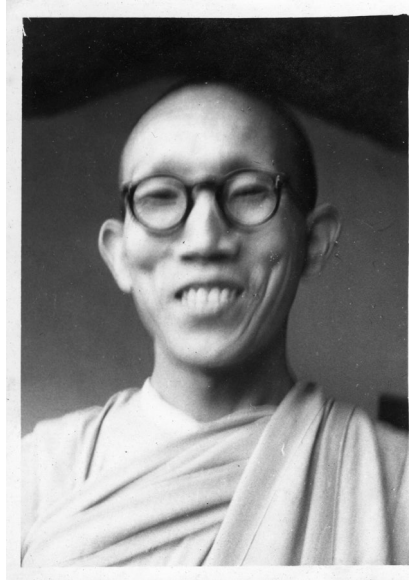


Figure 1: Portrait of Rindzin Wangpo, ordained as a Theravāda monk.

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 Püntso (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 'khrīd 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 Buddhism.⁴⁶ 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).

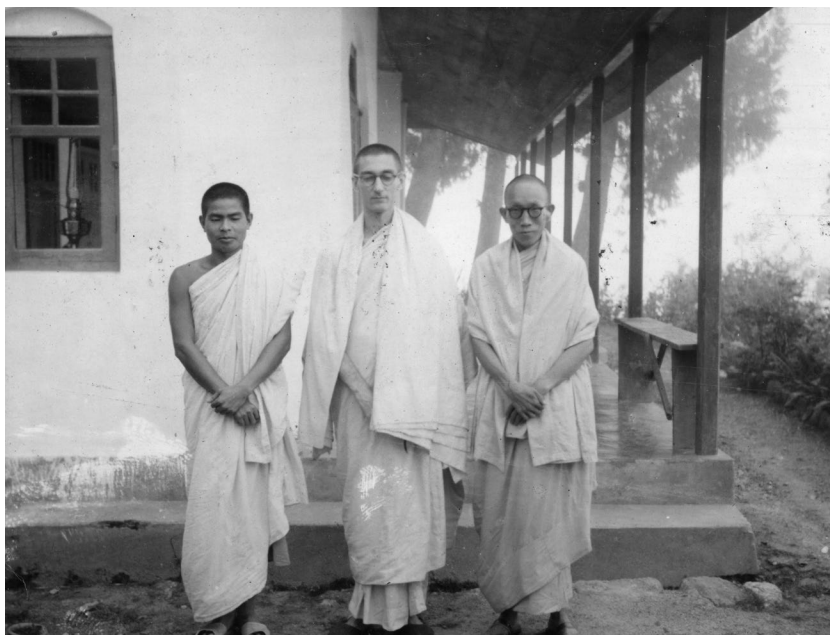


Figure 3: Rindzin Wangpo (right), briefly after his ordination through Sangharakshita (middle).

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).

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

L.A. Waddell was a representative of the British administration in Darjeeling, originally serving as the Principal Medical Officer of the Darjeeling District in 1888. He was already a keen philologist, and used his post as an opportunity to further develop his academic credentials in Asian languages, as well as to study religions and philosophies that were popular in Europe.⁷ However, his initial overtures to local Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist authorities in the area were not received with enthusiasm. This led Waddell to make a unique decision to facilitate his research himself. He writes: “realizing the rigid secrecy maintained by the Lamas in regard to their seemingly chaotic rites and symbolism, I felt compelled to purchase a Lamaist temple with its fittings; and prevailed on the officiating priests to explain to me in full detail the symbolism and the rites as they proceeded” (Waddell 1895, viii).⁸

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

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

7 Preston (2009) outlines Waddell’s life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Figure 1: Kazi Dawa Samdup, exact date unknown.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19 Explanations in parentheses were added by the author.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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- Sikkim State Archive, Gangtok, India.
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- The diaries of Kazi Dawa Samdup, private collections, Kalimpong and Sikkim, India.

Figures

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

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Epilogue

Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Mealar

Kalimpong as Fiction or Ethnography? Gorkha/Nepali Sensitivities in the Himalayas

Abstract Whether produced as an ethnographic account or a fictional narrative, Kalimpong is ultimately subject to the problematics of representation. It is, after all, at the interstices of history, ethnography, literature, and the scientific discourses employed in the service of governmentality, that we find the production of subjectivities, catalogued communities, and an emergent politics of resistance. This essay is an attempt to look at the difficulties in reading/writing this place in the optic of the two traditions of imaginative literature and ethnography, and of a monstration recounted through the prism of a particular novel. Inseparable from this is the terminological difficulty inherent in forging Nepali or Gorkha identity. This is evident in the production of rather unwieldy devices indicative of some distance from the historical homeland of Nepal in the form of lexicons such as Indian-Nepali, नेपालु भारतीय (Nepamul Bharatiya), भारतीय-गोर्खाली (Bharatiya-Gorkhali) or भर्गोली (Bhargoli). Gorkhaness has increasingly become synonymous with Indian Nepaliness, but only invests in degrees of differential commonalities with Nepaleseness and diasporic Nepaleseness. While this counters the irredentism of a Greater Nepal thesis, it cannot completely exorcise the seductive spectres of ethnic absolutism for diasporic subjects. Rather than just looking at the work of “Nepali” writers who narrate Gorkha subjectivity as it attempts to relocate itself within the matrix of the Indian nation, riddled as it is by ethno-nationalist demands, including the continuing cry for a Gorkhaland, this essay instead focuses on the question of reading/writing (itself a practice) in Kiran Desai’s Booker winning *The Inheritance of Loss*, a novel which, penned by a dialogically cosmopolitan writer, became notorious for its narration of a post-1980s Kalimpong in flux.

For any fraternity—and therefore for a we-subject in the process of being constituted—to demonstrate is to manifest itself. The being of the “we” is displayed, but also exhausted, in the demonstration. There is great dialectical trust in this monstration. This is because the “we” is ultimately nothing but the set of its demonstrations. In this sense, the real of the “we”, which is the real as such, is accessible to each and every one in and by the demonstration. To the question: “What is there that is real?”, the century responds: “Demonstrating.” What does not demonstrate is not (Badiou 2007, 107–108).

*For a moment their conversation was drowned out by the sounds of a procession in the street. “What are they saying?” asked Noni. “They’re shouting something in Nepali.”
They watched from the window as a group of boys went by with signs.
“Must be the Gorkha lot again.”
“But what are they saying?”
“It’s not as if it’s being said for anyone to understand.
It’s just noise, tamasha,” said Lola (Desai 2006, 200–201).*

Introduction: inheritance of loss-gain

Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss* [TIOL], which won the Man Booker Prize in 2006, reportedly¹ sparked a furore in the Kalimpong-Darjeeling hills—a mainly Nepali-speaking part of the world—unbeknownst to many of the book’s metropolitan readers. The long history of expropriation in this region, from the heady days of colonialism when the British lorded it over the hill stations to post-independent, “home-grown” Orientalism (Poddar and Subba 1992) and more recent territorial claims, illustrates how deeply questions of material entitlement are embroiled in issues of language and identity.

Desai’s novel charts the ethno-nationalist Gorkhaland agitation in the hills, specifically events in Kalimpong in the mid-1980s, which sought to carve out a separate state from Bengal. “Gorkha” is a self-descriptive term (its spelling marks a difference from the British rendering “Gurkha”) that refers to Indian Nepalis rather than Nepalese, i.e. citizens of Nepal (Subba 1992). Reports had it that Gorkha ethno-nationalists were enraged by

1 *The Guardian* made a meal out of some rumours that a book-burning was in the offing. When contacted by a hopeful scribe from *The Guardian*, Anmole Prasad (see later), a local citizen, tells us he was unsuccessful in disabusing him of his already acquired notion that natives were up in arms over the portrayal. The story had caught on and went viral, infecting news channels around the world, no doubt to the delight of Desai’s publishers, faced as they were with the rather onerous task of peddling a piece of literature.

Desai's representation of Gorkhas, and book burnings were threatened, thus profitably adding Desai's novel to a growing list of artistic works that have prompted violent expressions of political outrage: the Rushdie Affair, the murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, the Danish cartoon crisis, the hullabaloo around Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. In the Darjeeling hills, it was not the question of religion however that attracted the ire of Gorkha ethno-nationalists, but what was seen as Desai's unflattering portrayal of the Gorkha community by the expanding tribe of those who read the book after the story broke. While *TJOL* is critical of the Gorkhaland agitation, of ahistorical claims that the region belongs solely to Gorkhas, and the disavowal of violence directed toward other minorities during the agitation, it also criticises—though, we argue, not entirely successfully—their disenfranchisement and prejudicial treatment in its depiction of this ethnically mixed, vernacularly cosmopolitan (to adopt Homi Bhabha's phraseology) borderland, both liminal and permeable.² It is a contact zone wherein conflict, conjunction and constant flow, or "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference [...] the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 1994, 2).³

That the Desai Affair transpired after the novel won the Booker illustrates not only the power of such an accolade, but testifies to the changing role of the global media in rousing sleepy little towns (although Kalimpong cannot be said not to bustle now) in the Himalayas. The novel itself engages with global concerns—its wide geographical sweep is achieved through marrying the region's local political concerns to the plight of illegals in New York, and the way in which it delves into colonial history as it narrates the rise of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) attests to the power of its interventionist mode. In this essay, we discuss the reception of Desai's novel in Kalimpong, India, Nepal and among metropolitan audiences, and draw out certain ironies at play in the novel's reception (not least in its winning the Booker) and the novel itself, seen in the context of this region's history. Here Roland Barthes's disclaimer in *Empire of Signs*, is worth recounting: "I can [...] though in no way claiming to represent or to analyze reality itself

2 The concepts of borders, boundaries, and borderlands are extremely rich and loaded. But it bears interpositional that the GNLF's prime schismatic and supremo, Ghising, was to deploy the diversionary tactic of "no man's land" (and "ceded land") in the late 1980s to feed political fires.

3 For a more elaborate reading of this dynamic in relation to the town, see the chapter by Prem Poddar and Lisa Zhang entitled "Kalimpong: The China Connection" in this volume. History, ethnography, fiction: narratives produced by these forms determine the sense of politics in a particular place. The idea of supplementarity explains why no synthesis in writing can be anything more than provisional. Whether "the supplement supplements [...] adds only to replace [...] represents and makes an image [...] its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness" (Derrida 1996, 144). The supplement ultimately is both accretion and substitution (200), and the analytical attempt here is to advance that the supplement is not a representor more than a presence, a writing (or the staging of an argument) more than a place (Kalimpong).

(these being the major gestures of Western discourse)—isolate somewhere in the world (faraway) a certain number of features (a term employed in linguistics), and out of these features deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call: Japan” (Barthes 1982, 3).

Ethnie and *andolan*

The Kalimpong-Darjeeling region came under East India Company jurisdiction as a result of treaties and settlements brought about by wars fought against Nepal and Bhutan. In the British national imaginary, the Gorkhas enjoyed a privileged status among the south Asian “martial race” soldiers (see Streets 2004; Caplan 1991; Mozumdar 1963), and were recruited from prisoners of war even as the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814–16 was going badly for the British.⁴ They were deployed for the colonisation and consolidation of early nineteenth-century Assam, in the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–26, in Afghanistan in 1919, in the theatres of World War I and II, (and more recently in the Falklands, Afghanistan and Iraq).

The swathe of territory dividing eastern Nepal from British India, Sikkim, and Bhutan can be conceptualised as having largely indeterminate and fuzzy boundaries. Boundary lines “waxed or waned according to the military strength and vigour of the ruling dynasty [...and] followed from the history of western diplomacy and drew their meaning from maps and lines drawn on maps” (Stiller 1973, 220–221). The history of migration and settlement in this region—which is questioned by those who subscribe to the thesis that Gorkhas are autochthonous—cannot, however, be denied.⁵

The setting up of hill stations and tea gardens (see Hopkirk 1990) is the other colonial vector central to the formation of a Gorkha community in the Darjeeling area. The immigration of Nepalese was encouraged by the colonial state, which required labour for infrastructure-building in its hill stations as well as its economy of tea gardens and cinchona plantations in Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong.⁶ Though nothing like the moment of classic capitalism produced by the movement of Indian indentured labour

4 Eden Vansittart, a recruiting officer, is reported as observing that “without a strong hand they [the Gurkhas] would very soon deteriorate and become slovenly” (in Caplan 1991, 573).

5 It is difficult to assess the validity of the report by Dr. Campbell, Superintendent of Darjeeling, who raises “not more than hundred souls in 1839 to about 10,000 in 1849, chiefly by immigration from the neighbouring states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan” (in O’ Malley 1989, 22). Campbell is the man who brought China tea seeds from Kumaun and pioneered the growing of tea in Darjeeling.

6 Kalimpong is not quite a Plumwoodian “shadow place” of extraction in the same sense as Darjeeling, hill station and supplier of choice tea. Because of its geo-strategic positioning in the Indo-Tibetan trade, Kalimpong became, after all, visible, albeit for a short period, to the magnets of economic and political power. Plumwood, meditating on the politics of dwelling, critiques the singularised, special “set-apart home” that presumes access to an affectively charged homeland, which in effect is really a privilege of the powerful (2008, 144).

to the Caribbean during this time (see Mishra 1996), an old diaspora of plantation labour did take form. The production of colonial knowledge about Darjeeling was inevitably followed by the reconstitution of fuzzy identities into an enumerated community (see Kaviraj 1997). The 1860s are marked by an upsurge in the production and circulation of gazetteers, manuals, and ethnographies. Subjecthood was conferred as the colonial state sought legitimation by creating a public sphere, though the notion of a civil society was rather limited (see Chatterjee 1995, 237). Moreover, colonial legitimation was secured through the archival gaze and techniques of ethnological governmentality: "Following these alarming events [the 1857 Rebellion] the problem of populations became not just a challenge of liberal governance [...] but an imperial mandate, shot through with anxieties about the surety of both colonial knowledge and colonial power. Such were the contingent origins of ethnological governmentality on the sub-continent" (Middleton 2015, 66). By the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century there had emerged a sizeable middle class in Kalimpong-Darjeeling (Chalmers 2003).

The two specific sectors that were stressed by the reform movements of this time are general education, and the improvement of Nepali language and literature (Onta 1996). In consonance with other movements in colonial India, civil society was uneven, monopolised by elites, and paternalistic in its pedagogical objective. Civil society organisations in the region contributed actively to the forging of a new self-identity that relied on notions of kinship (or *jati*); a standardised Nepali language as a vehicle for uniting different groups seen as constituting the Gorkha *jati* became key.⁷ Not unsurprisingly, a deterritorialised Gorkha subjectivity ambivalently flitting between the double vision of "homeland" and "hostland"—constituting the two poles of a diasporic public sphere—became the topos of literature produced in the Kalimpong-Darjeeling hills. Migration, unsurprisingly, has thus been a central concern from Lain Singh Bangdel's novel मुलुक देखि बाहिर (*Outside One's Home*) (1947), all the way to Asit Rai's नया क्षितिज को खोज (*Search for a New Horizon*) (1981) and beyond.⁸

7 The Darjeeling writer I.B. Rai's continuing fear of possible divisions is well brought out in his पहाड़ र खोलाहरू ("Hills and Streams") article: "When will the Nepali race ever get anywhere when it has to walk the main street taking everything along with it? The path of the sub-race is our only short one, a way of quick progress. For how long will we wait together, with the future of the race our only aim?" (Rai 1993, translated in Poddar and Prasad 2009, 182–183) The Nepali *ethnie* or nation thus comes to be considered as a community of genealogical descent, with its own native history, vernacular language and culture, and popular mobilization: "golden *sayapatri*," "*gundruk*," "*timur*," "*chimphing*," "*Dasain*," "*Tihar*," "a racehood that has lasted 3000 years." One cannot fail to read the "origin house" (*moalghar*) that stands on the ridge in पहाड़ र खोलाहरू, as an emblem or metaphor for nation. Its residents are a unified people, a *jati* (translated as "race") whose origins are lost in the primordial past, held together by what Anderson calls "a deep horizontal comradeship" even as it is riven by the inequities of "sub-race" or caste. See also footnote 9.

8 The pioneering writer Agam Singh Giri (1928–71) must be mentioned. Giri anticipates many of Rai's concerns and is subject to a similar vacillation in terms of

In multi-ethnic postcolonial India, Gorkha identity is best seen as articulated in terms of an ethno-symbolic matrix of nationalism that underlines pre-modern ethnic identity and community in reading the modernity of its *ethnie*.⁹ Gorkhas are paradoxically “Janus-faced,” to use a term of Tom Nairn’s (1981, 71–72), in looking atavistically at the primordial past of the *jati* and at the same time desiring progressively to fulfil the requirements of modern citizenship and nationhood while the subject attempts to shed its perceived ambivalence towards colonialism.

One of the legacies left by the British after exiting India in 1947 was large numbers of Nepalese settlers in Northeast India, pushed out of Nepal by poverty and a repressive Rana-ruled regime, and attracted by opportunities in the Gurkha regiments, tea plantations, forests and urban centres, with the additional prospect of land grants, lucrative farming and greater security. High caste Nepalese moved as herdsmen to the marginal forestlands in Northeast India and quickly established themselves as farmers and dairymen. Late nineteenth century Kalimpong saw the survey—and consequent settlement by Nepali farmers—of the Kalimpong Khas Mahal, a productive tract of water-rich agricultural lands situated in a great southern-facing bowl over the Tista and Relli valley. One after-effect of the deployment of Gorkha soldiers in imperial trouble-spots, including wars of rebellion within India, was the perception that Nepalis in India were antagonistic to a free India. Ambivalence towards past “collaborators” was inevitable among the “Aryan” establishment; this was reinforced by a cartographic anxiety and a general attitude in New Delhi and Calcutta towards what were considered peripheral and recalcitrant borders peopled by “Mongoloids.”¹⁰ A discourse of development under Nehruvian central planning sought to assimilate these peoples, with uneven results.

a politics of belonging and unbelonging to land and hill, nation and community. In I.B. Rai’s seminal story *हामीजस्तै मैनाकी आमा* (“Maina’s Mother is Just Like Us”), a folk song by Giri about the Gorkhas of Kalimpong-Darjeeling is tellingly deployed: “Her eyes watch a leaf wafting down, making her wait for her own existence. She goes far across the brown ridges of the fields. On a piece of rising ground, luxuriant grass is growing. From the end of a garden she walks steeply uphill, moving from terrace to terrace....

Why then did you come here?

Why then did you come here?

Why then did you come here?

Why then did you come here?”

(in Poddar and Prasad 2009, 83).

9 A Nepali book that struggles to narrate the problematic of dislocated memory is the historian Kumar Pradhan’s *पहिलो पहर* (*First Watch*), Darjeeling: Shyam Prakashan, 1982.

10 The sandwiching of “Tribal” groups between the upper-caste *bahuns* and *chhetris* and the lower caste *matwali jaatharu* “the drinking lot” in the Gorkha social formation has taken on a distinct political dimension lately as these groups recognise the benefits of being officially declared Scheduled Tribes and have become the ready subjects of Development Boards recently installed by the current West Bengal Government under Mamta Bannerjee. These ethnic Development Boards, recognised through an executive fiat by the West Bengal Government as an alternative conduit for delivering funds, are the latest tinkering in a long

The Indo-Nepalese Treaty of Friendship of 1950 stipulated an open border whereby Indians and Nepalese were permitted to travel, work and settle unrestrictedly. Transient migrant labour thus blurred the boundary between migrant Nepalese (i.e. citizens of Nepal) and Indian Nepalis (or Gorkhas) already domiciled in pre-Independence India. This is similarly the case with *madeshe*¹¹ Bihari Indians and Indian Nepalese in Nepal. It gave rise to issues relating to dual citizenships and entitlements and notions of loyalty, especially with Kathmandu viewed as a socio-cultural centre. Political parties, vested interest groups and some sections of the media have made use of this to intensify ethnic/national rhetoric. The official recognition of Nepali in 1992 as one of the Indian state languages assuaged some of the strong feelings that had begun to develop in the 1970s, when there was also a series of ethnic expulsions of Nepalis from the Northeastern states, the merger of Chhogyal's Sikkim with India (1975), and the rise of a simmering ethno-nationalist movement that would later be monopolised by the GNLF in Darjeeling. The flight of *Lhotshampas* (Nepali refugees) from Bhutan in the late 1980s via India to refugee camps in Nepal was another impetus (see Hutt 2003).

Cultural and ethnic hybridity has characterised the borderland geography of the Darjeeling hills at least since the recorded early nineteenth century. Of importance here is the Jelep La pass near Kalimpong, through which much of the Indo-Tibetan trade was carried out until the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959 (if we were to date it as such, when the Dalai Lama fled), or 1962 (when the border closed down after the Sino-Indian war). A small location in the Great Game, Kalimpong was also, in Nehru's phrase, a "nest of spies." Representations of the area in ethnographic writings and travel accounts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflect its complicated history and cosmopolitan character, whilst reiterating discourses of

line of experiments in governance. "These semi-autonomous boards would allow these [...] tribal communities to safeguard their cultural, economic and social welfare [...]. Per the logics of counter-insurgency, these tribal development boards would further divide the Gorkhas and undercut the movement for Gorkhaland" (Middleton 2015, 215). While this provides a dividing wedge in the idea of a unified Gorkha identity, it also has other implications: Ghising, for instance, was to milk this towards the end of his chairmanship of the DGHC and GNLF rule. One scholar writes: "An analysis of the ways in which the classificatory arrangement by which the state identifies and designates communities as tribes has become a politically provocative and productive tool to divide the hill communities" (Sarkar 2014). See also footnote 5. Focusing on an anthropology of the ethno-contemporary and writing about the pursuit of a tribal status in the 1990s and 2000s, Middleton has also directed his analysis to the government anthropologists administering these claims. Putting on spectacles of sacrifice, blood-drinking, and exorcism as proofs of primitiveness and backwardness are read as the strategies of Darjeeling communities to return the gaze of academic paradigms onto the state, thus leaving the government anthropologists struggling for ethnographic truth (Middleton 2015). This arises from the postcolonial recognition that anthropological practice itself is tribal.

11 *Madeshe* is a Nepali descriptor with negative overtones referring to people from the plains—minorities in the hills historically engaged in trade, artisanship, and menial labour; some are also office workers and professionals.

exoticism. Interestingly, Satyajit Ray's Bengali film, *Kanchenjunga* (1962), draws on colonial discourse to perpetuate the vision of the Darjeeling hill station (and this could be applied equally to Kalimpong) as a resort for the enjoyment of Europeans and wealthy plainsmen. Offsetting this romantic vision is the impoverishment of the region, albeit not unconnected to huge demographic changes (as presented in Kalimpong writer Bhagirat Rawat's ethno-nationalist, not entirely unromanticised, Nepali novel बास सलकी रहे छ (*The House is on Fire*) (1981) resulting from an intense exploitation of natural resources.¹²

This was fertile ground for articulating (not least in the entire corpus of Nepali literature¹³) an *ethnie* akin to the ethno-symbolic account of nationalism (see Smith 1986). Regional political parties like the Gorkha League, Pranta Parishad, and later the GNLF tapped into the discontent among the ethnic majority in the hills. The GNLF *andolan* (or movement) was by far the most visible and successful in mobilising people on identitarian lines in the 1980s. As a solution to the grievances of the Gorkhas, Subash Ghising negotiated, after a period of arbitrary violence, an autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in lieu of the earlier demand for a separate province of Gorkhaland (see Ganguly 2005; Subba 1992).

Whilst Desai's novel focuses its criticism on the ethnic absolutism and violence of the GNLF-led separatist uprising, the situation in the hills is extremely complicated, involving histories of Bengali chauvinism and colonial hill-station hedonism, Lepcha indigeneity (see Foning 1987),¹⁴ Tibetan refugee exoticism, putative *madeshi*-ness; geo-strategic gaming (with China's looming presence), the claimed Bhutanese ownership of the region, class and caste inequities, and new forms of injustice and exploitation carried through the structures of postcolonial globalisation (for Indians at home and abroad)—and all provide the background to the story narrated in *TIOL*.

12 The dominant narrative about 1986–88 *andolan* years couched in terms of grievances against the Bengal government, which gives rise to political confrontation, can be seen as foreshadowed in *Baas Salki Rahe Chha* (*The House is on Fire*). This offers a “historical” account of the life and times of the Kalimpong barrister Ari Bahadur Gurung (one of the two Gorkha members of the Constituent Assembly) along with the rise of the Gorkha League, which canvassed for more hill autonomy.

13 Agam Singh Giri (अगम सिंह गिरी), a pioneering poet who must be instanced here yet again, is seen as best representing the Gorkha people in Nepali literature. His span of writings from याद (*Remembrance*), आत्मा व्यथा (*Anguish*), आशु (*Tears*), जीवन गीत (*Life's Songs*), युद्ध र योद्धा (*War and Warrior*), and जलेको प्रतिविम्ब र रोएको प्रतिध्वनी (*Burning Images and Weeping Echoes*) articulate concerns central to the ethnic/national group, especially in the hills. See also footnote 7 and 8.

14 The Lepchas in Kalimpong are considered to be quite aware politically, culturally, and also linguistically when compared to their brethren in Sikkim, and the idea of a *mayel-lyang* (or paradisaal home) has gained increasing currency lately.

Surveying the reception

The Booker judges praised *TIOL* as “a magnificent novel of humane breadth and wisdom, comic tenderness and powerful political acuteness” (BBC News). Chairwoman Hermione Lee commended the book for its originality and humanity: “The remarkable thing about Kiran Desai is that she is aware of her Anglo-Indian inheritance—of Naipaul and Narayan and Rushdie—but she does something pioneering. She seems to jump on from those traditions and create something which is absolutely of its own. The book is movingly strong in its humanity and I think that in the end is why it won” (ibid.). The chairman of the previous year’s judges commented, “Desai’s novel registers the multicultural reverberations of the new millennium with the sensitive instrumentality of fiction, as Jhabvala and Rushdie did previous eras [...]. It is a globalised novel for a globalised world” (Sutherland in Ezard 2006). Amitava Kumar praised *TIOL*’s portrayal of contemporary globalisation for its subaltern concerns: “It is not a multicultural text-book; instead, it is marked by invention and joy. In fact, [it] can be put among the handful of representations of our moment—call it globalization, postmodernity, or contemporary conditions—from the viewpoint of its victims” (Kumar 2006). Pankaj Mishra, writing in the *New York Times*, hailed the novel along similar lines, declaring it “lit by a moral intelligence at once fierce and tender,” though marking its difference from the optimism of Smith, Kunzru, and Rushdie; “Kiran Desai’s extraordinary new novel manages to explore, with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. Despite being set in the mid-1980s, it seems the best kind of post-9/11 novel” (Mishra 2006).

The reception was very different in other locales. Local Kalimpong critics did not treat the book simply as fiction. In *The Guardian*, prominent lawyer Anmole Prasad¹⁵ is reported as complaining that the novel “is a one-sided account that tells you about [Desai’s own] fears about Kalimpong. The central character Sai is obviously a self-portrait and you can feel her estrangement from this dark, ominous place where Nepalese are just transient interlopers in the landscape” (in Ramesh 2006). This links Desai’s own position to that of the Anglicised Indian characters of her novel, and simultaneously responds to the discriminatory view that Gorkhas are migrants not deserving special rights. Prasad is also cited in an article in *The Telegraph* from Calcutta: “There is a tendency to show the people in Kalimpong as being faceless and Desai’s book suffers from the same infirmity [...]. It is insensitive and one-dimensional and provides a cardboard image of Kalimpong and its people” (in Bhattacharya 2006). The same

15 He is also the co-editor and a translator in *Gorkhas Imagined: I.B. Rai in Translation*, Prem Poddar and Anmole Prasad (eds.) Gangtok: Mukti Prakashan, 2009. We take the opportunity here to thank him for providing comments on a version of this essay.

article reports a soaring demand for *TIOL* in a Kalimpong bookstore after it won the Booker, and cites another critic, Prafulla Rao, a retired Indian Air Force wing commander, who complains, "She says, in her book, that people were too scared to acknowledge the non-Nepalese in the streets of Kalimpong at the peak of the Gorkhaland agitation. But this is completely wrong," and Gorkhaland was "not a communal but a political movement and those killed in the violence at the time were all Nepalese" (ibid.). A different take on matters is also presented: "It was not a very friendly place for outsiders during those days of agitation. There was an undercurrent of tension as outsiders were often perceived to be CPM agents and watched," says local social activist Samsher Ali (ibid.). The point is also made that "in today's Kalimpong, plagued by a plethora of civic and social problems, few have time or money for such books 'apart from a handful of intellectuals,' as [now disgraced] Municipal Chairman Kumai, a GNLFF leader, put it."

The writer D. B. Gurung launched one of the most vociferous attacks on Desai's novel in a review in *The Kathmandu Post*. *TIOL*, he argued, is "the result of living a bastardized life inside and out of India that Desai seems unable to acclimatize herself either in the Western milieu or of her home" (Gurung 2006). In Gurung's view, Desai "spills her black anger over everything 'Nepali' through her fictionalized characters. No, the book cannot be passed off as fiction, as it is set in real Kalimpong town, and is based on real history (highly exaggerated though) with amply close resemblances to its inhabitants and real names and descriptions of the places. This is a travelogue in every respect" (ibid.).¹⁶ He complains about the portrayal of Kalimpong's Nepali inhabitants as "crook, dupe, cheat and lesser humans" (in particular the cook and Biju) and, conflating Desai's voice with that of her characters, argues that through their dialogues she "spews venom. [...] browbeating the Nepalis" (ibid.). He also criticises what he sees as the novel's sacrilegious treatment of religious symbols, and its description of Kanchenjunga as "glowing a last brazen pornographic pink" (ibid.). Admonishing the "wise crackpots" of the Booker Committee, Gurung declares, "This book is a slander and a brazen attack on the 'Nepali community' and their dignity!" (ibid.) While vernacular Nepali dailies and magazines like *Sunchari* and *Himalaya Darpan* from the region picked up the refrain

16 The reader, especially in this case, is always already in a state of consuming the text; it is the source of integration of a particular kind of meaning for him. He occupies the "very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of, the unity of [...Desai's] text is not [in] its origin, it is in its destination" (Barthes 1977, 6). Going beyond the conventional tropes of ethnographic composition, any anthropologist or novelist worth their salt is self-consciously aware of the textual and rhetorical character of writing. Like ethnography, the form of the novel is interwoven by authorial registers; the temporality and practice of reading codifies clumps of "incorrigible assertion" (Geertz 1988, 5) and crochets them back to the author-function, where "incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction" (Foucault 1991, 111). The credibility of these assertions in the reader's mind can conflate Barthes's "multiple writing" to a coherent singularity (1977, 147). See also footnote 17.

of condemnation on the basis of the novel's perceived misrepresentation of the people and the place, Bengali media outlets from Kolkata, such as *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and *Desh*, recycled chauvinist notions of the inhabitants in the hills as immigrants. There was not much to choose by way of subtle readings of a largely ambivalent narrative of a troubled region.

In a letter to the *New York Times*, an American cultural anthropologist in Darjeeling complained about the use of a citation from Desai's novel in an article on tourism. *TIOL*, she argued, cannot be used "to describe reality," and "Gorkhas [...] critique Desai's novel because it paints them as vengeful and xenophobic. Reducing the agitation to ethnic conflict plays down the problem: resources flow down but money does not come up from Calcutta. Gorkhas are responding to post-colonial exploitation, calling for land, jobs, education and facilities not available in Darjeeling" (Besky 2008). One blogger wondered, "Is Desai's insensitive treatment of the Gorkhas of Kalimpong a reflection of her own self-loathing created by a life in this milieu?" and "When the work becomes the West's main source on this region and that period in history, so much so that the New York Times quotes the book to explain current events, we have a problem" (Benedetto 2008).

Writing from Germany, Satis Shroff, a diasporic Nepali critic, also complained about *TIOL*'s representation of Gorkhas: "Nepalis work under miserable conditions in India as darwans, chowkidars, cheap security personnel and the Indians have the same arrogance as the British colonialists. The judge, Lola and Noni are stereotypes, but such people do exist. It's not all fantasy" (Shroff 2007). He continues, "Her portrait of the Nepalis in Darjeeling is rather biased, but what can one expect from a thirty-six year old Indian woman who has been pampered in India, England and the USA? Her knowledge of Kalimpong and Darjeeling sounds theoretical and her characters don't speak Nepali. She lets them speak Hindi, because she herself didn't bother to learn Nepali during her stay in Kalimpong" (ibid.). He calls Desai "a supercilious brown-memsahib [...] in her attitude towards Gorkhalis and the downtrodden of her own country," and argues that with *TIOL*'s lack of "successful intercultural dialogues" and empathy for the Gorkhas, Desai has "only stirred a hornet's nest" (ibid.).

In response to the outcry, Desai's publishers emphasised the fictive nature of the book: "Desai's publishers, Penguin, say such comments are just 'individuals' opinions,' and that far from being fearful of the response in Kalimpong Desai plans to visit the area. 'We see the book as pure fiction and these views are not an issue for us or Ms Desai,' said Hemali Sodhi, head of marketing for Penguin in India" (in Ramesh 2006). But Desai's aunt, now deceased, who lived and worked as a doctor in Kalimpong, was quoted as saying she had not "told people here about my niece, or the book, or that she won an award. The book contains many insensitive things" (ibid.).

If Kiran Desai visited Kalimpong after winning the Booker, it must have been anonymously. Desai has explained her interest in writing *TIOL* as having its roots in personal history. One blogger reports an interview he conducted with Desai: "I spent parts of my childhood there [...] and I wanted

to capture what it means to grow up in such a fascinating environment, with such wonderfully disparate people [...] but at that age I had no real understanding of the issues involved. I was concerned only with my own world. [...] I wanted to depict how we never really try to understand what life is like for other people" (Singh 2006. One wonders whether in writing *TIOI* she may have inadvertently succeeded in demonstrating this). Desai is also cited in an article in the *International Herald Tribune* on the issue of the agitation: "They didn't have political and economic power [...]. It suddenly skidded into violence.' The Nepalese immigrant story, she said, parallels that of Biju in America, and of immigrant groups everywhere" (Smith 2006). We argue that the ease with which such parallels are made in *TIOI* is highly problematic.

There are, then, legitimate complaints against the reception of the book—particularly that *TIOI* is being read in the West as presenting a factual history of the region and its inhabitants—and more dubious complaints against the book itself in which the opinions of the characters are read as those of the author. However, in considering *TIOI*'s reception it is important to note that many of the places, events, and even people it depicts are real; a fact that will inevitably raise questions about Desai's own position, especially when she has acknowledged that the novel draws on her own family history. The house Cho Oyu is based on Desai's mother's house (although many journalists conflate this with her aunt's) in Kalimpong. Mon Ami also exists, as does, for example, the MetalBox guesthouse on Ringkingpong Road, and Apollo (the "Deaf" being a literary appendage) Tailors. The characters of Father Booty, the Afghan princesses, and Pradhan are based on names though not necessarily real persons. It might therefore indeed be reasonable to read the novel as an attempted ethnography of sorts—and this approach to reading is precisely what opens it up to the criticism that it lacks realism and authenticity.¹⁷ At the same time, though, such criticism reads representation in a traditional anthropological sense, and is rooted in a historicism (to borrow from Benjamin's critique of Ranke) that demands Kalimpong be portrayed "the way it really was" (Benjamin 1992, 245–255).

17 Textual strategy, whether in organising a novel or an ethnography, is inspired by "rhetorical accomplishment" (Geertz 1988, 26). "Being There' authorially, palpably on the page, is in any case as difficult a trick to bring off as 'being there' personally" (ibid., 24). This is no less a demand from the "Olympianism of the unauthorial physicist and the sovereign consciousness of the hyperauthorial novelist" (ibid., 10). "[T]he whole point of 'evoking' rather than 'representing' is that it frees ethnography from mimesis and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric" (Tyler 1986, 136). "[E]xcept as empty invocations," concepts such as "knowledge," "material," "facts," and ultimately "ethnography as true knowledge" "have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writing of ethnographies" (ibid., 136). See also Clifford (1986).

Textual strategies

There is an irony at play in the enraged reception of *TIOL* and the issues with which the novel itself engages: the disenfranchisement of minorities and migrants. This shares some similarities with the Rushdie Affair; *The Satanic Verses* was after all precisely an attack on fundamentalisms. But where Rushdie's novel interrogated truth in its religious aspect, *TIOL* takes the truth of Gorkha ethno-nationalism as one of its critical foci. Described as "fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority" (*TIOL* 9), Gorkhas are portrayed as a marginalised group in a nationally marginalised locale; under-represented and disenfranchised in the nation in which they live. Whilst *TIOL* is attacked for its strategies of representation, it is precisely the issue of under-representation that concerns the novel—the plight of the impoverished underclass, of minorities forgotten in the Gorkha liberation struggle, and of (illegal) immigrants in the metropolitan centres of the past (England) and present (America). In attacking discourses of discrimination (ethnic nationalisms, caste and class prejudices, colonialist and derived racisms), *TIOL* strategically vocalises through its characters the myriad of prejudices directed from various groups against their various Others. Gorkhas feature as both propagators and recipients of discriminatory discourses. Prejudice is the inheritance of all groups, and there appears to be no remit to the region's long history of territorial struggles, "despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders" (*ibid.*, 9).

The novel opens with a scene of a raid by GNLFF youths on the house of the retired judge. There is a pathos about these boys that tempers their menace; members of "an impoverished movement with a ragtag army" (*TIOL* 4) coming up to the house "embarrassed" (*ibid.*). Prejudices are voiced as news of the theft travels around town, and, at the ironically named house Mon Ami, Lola and Noni are in a state of alarm. Paranoid Lola feels no less secure at the thought of their Nepali watchman, a retired soldier called Budhoo (his name means "idiot"), though "[i]n fact, Budhoo had been a comforting presence for the two sisters" (*TIOL* 44). But if Gorkhas are presumed to be thieves in the prevailing discriminatory discourse, so are other unfortunate groups, such as those represented by the cook (the eternal, unnamed servant).

Discriminatory views of Gorkhas are presented through different voices; the cook is surprised that Gyan is to be Sai's mathematics tutor: "I thought he would be Bengali. [...] Nepalīs make good soldiers, coolies, but they are not so bright at their studies. Not their fault, poor things" (*TIOL* 73). Sai is teased by both Uncle Potty and the Swiss dairyst/missionary Father Booty for her attraction to Gyan, in a way that revives old discourses: "Goodness. Those Nepali boys, high cheek-bones, arm muscles, broad shoulders. Men who can *do* things, Sai, cut down trees, build fences, carry heavy boxes . . . *mmm mmm*" (*TIOL* 143). Sometimes such prejudices are shown to assume a shared identity between Indian-Nepalis and Nepalese citizens:

Lola: "It's an issue of a porous border is what. You can't tell one from the other, Indian Nepali from Nepali Nepali. And then, *baba*, the way these Neps multiply."

Mrs. Sen: "Like Muslims." (*TIOL* 129)

Thus, population explosion (a favourite metaphor of anti-immigration discourse) is rehearsed through the voices of these characters—slipping from an attack on one national minority (Gorkhas) to another (Muslims); this conversation turns into an attack on the special tribal rights enjoyed by the vanishing minority of the Lepchas. The appearance of the speaker's name before each utterance is a reminder that such discourses are never objective or true.

In response to Noni's partial recognition of the Gorkha cause, Lola responds, "All kinds of atrocities will go on—then they can skip merrily over the border to hide in Nepal. Very convenient" (*TIOL* 127). Lola's imagination, with its fears of a "porous border," replicates Kipling's hill station where Shimla looms as an ambiguous geopolitical space and the romantic idyll of the hills is haunted by suspicion of the nomadic racial other:¹⁸ "In her mind she pictured their watchman, Budhoo, with her BBC radio and her silver cake knife, living it up in Kathmandu along with various other Kanchas and Kanchis with their respective loot" (*ibid.*). The argument between the sisters continues:

"But you have to take it from their point of view," said Noni. "First the Neps were thrown out of Assam and then Meghalaya, then there's the king of Bhutan growling against—"

"Illegal immigration," said Lola. She reached for a cream horn. "*Naughty* girl," she said to herself, her voice replete with gloating.

"Obviously, the Nepalis are worried," said Noni. "They've been here, most of them, several generations. Why shouldn't Nepali be taught in schools?"

"Because on that basis they can start statehood demands. Separatist movement here, separatist movement there, terrorists, guerrillas, insurgents, rebels, agitators, instigators, and they all learn from one another, of course—the Neps have been encouraged by the Sikhs and their Khalistan, by ULFA, NEFA, PLA; Jharkhand, Bodoland, Gorkhaland; Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Kashmir, Punjab, Assam"

[...]

Lola: "You saw that letter they sent to the queen of England? Gorbachev and Reagan? Apartheid, genocide, looking after Pakistan, forgetting us, colonial subjugation, vivisected Nepal... When did Darjeeling and Kalimpong belong to Nepal? Darjeeling, in fact, was annexed from Sikkim and Kalimpong from Bhutan."

18 See Kipling 1889. For Kipling's Shangri La, cf. Richards 1993.

Noni: "Very unskilled at drawing borders, those bloody Brits."
 Mrs. Sen, diving right into the conversation: "No practice, na, water all around them, ha ha." (*TIOL* 128–129)

Though the comment on illegal immigration is ironically presented through the voice of the novel's most unreliable narrator, it nevertheless implicitly forges a link that remains unproblematised between the diasporic history of the region and the politics of contemporary migration from third to first worlds. While representing Kalimpong and its surrounding area as a real locale, the novel never properly engages in the history of the conflict there, though it readily translates issues into a global setting. Different voices produce sometimes monologically converging, sometimes polyphonic/heteroglossic accounts of events. In the passage above, the argument begins reasonably and the general history about Kalimpong is correct, but the comment on Nepali not being taught in schools is not (see Sonntag 2002, 165–178). These Anglicised Bengalis with their deep nostalgia for imperial culture suffer from a cartographic anxiety of a fissiparous nation and function as a marker of continuity between colonial and home-grown Orientalism. While *TIOL* highlights the issue of the unwillingness of local inhabitants like these to hear the claims and demands of the Gorkhas, the novel itself fails to regard its own implicit call to heed such voices.¹⁹ Moreover, the conflation of different histories of separatist violence evidenced in this passage remains unchallenged. Sai, for example, bemoans the state of the country "coming apart at the seams: police unearthing militants in Assam, Nagaland, and Mizoram; Punjab on fire with Indira Gandhi dead and gone in October of last year; and those Sikhs with their Kanga, Kachha, etc., still wishing to add a sixth K, Khalistan, their own country in which to live with the other five Ks" (*TIOL* 108).

The novel's criticism of the GNLF focuses on issues of violence and injustice inherent in the call for "Gorkhaland for Gorkhas." It addresses a politics of coercion (the forceful enlisting of the local community to support the movement (*TIOL* 192–193)), and a disavowal of Kalimpong's cosmopolitan reality. But it also questions the truth of the patriotism laying the ground for the insurgency and, more generally, whether the passions of friendship and enmity that underpin violence can ever be true. Participating in one demonstration, Gyan experiences it like a scene out of a documentary film: "the men were behaving as if they were being featured in a documentary of war, and Gyan could not help but look on the scene already from the angle of nostalgia, the position of a revolutionary. But then he was pulled out of the feeling, by the ancient and usual scene, the worried shopkeepers watching from their monsoon-stained grottos" (*TIOL* 157).

19 If Desai's paternal Gujarati grandfather was the inspiration for the character of Judge Jemubhai (see e.g. Smith 2006; Tonkin 2006; Ramesh 2006), Desai's other characters in the novel display an uncanny alignment with the dominant Bengali position against Gorkha separatist demands, leaving one wondering whether these then were inspired by the maternal side of her celebrated cosmopolitan ancestry.

This underscores the necessity of distinguishing between representation and the real (see Badiou 2007, 109). Gyan has a flash of *realpolitik* recognition: "The patriotism was false, he suddenly felt as he marched; it was surely just frustration—the leaders harnessing the natural irritations and disdain of adolescence for cynical ends; for their own hope in attaining the same power as government officials held now, the same ability to award local businessmen deals in exchange for bribes, for the ability to give jobs to their relatives, places to their children in schools, cooking gas connections. . . ." (*TIOL* 157).

Gyan is, in fact, the only Gorkha character featured in any detail in the novel (the cook hails from Uttar Pradesh and is not Nepali, as suggested by one critic). When Gyan, whose name means "knowledge," is accidentally caught in a demonstration for a Gorkha homeland, the inflamed passion of the crowd ignites in him a vicious hatred: "Fired by alcohol, he finally submitted to the compelling pull of history and found his pulse leaping to something that felt entirely authentic" (*TIOL* 160). It is implied that a false narrative of victimhood underlies this emotion, as he finds that, "[f] or a moment all the different pretences he had indulged in, the shames he had suffered, the future that wouldn't accept him—all these things joined together to form a single truth" (*ibid.*). As the rage of Gyan and his friends blazes, the tragedy of such anger wedded to ethno-nationalist fervour is described in more universal terms:

The men sat unbedding their rage, learning, as everyone does in this country, at one time or another, that old hatreds are endlessly retrievable.

And when they had disinterred it, they found the hate pure, purer than it could ever have been before, because the grief of the past was gone. Just the fury remained, distilled, liberating. It was theirs by birthright, it could take them so high, it was a drug (*TIOL* 161).

Gyan's mounting passion for purity resonates with both old and new forms of racism; Biju, angered by his treatment in New York, is also seen to succumb to the temptations of ethno-nationalist purity. In this way, the novel addresses the tragedy of the inescapable violence that emerges out of hatred, fabricated untruth or ignorance. Along these lines, the Gandhian strategy of non-violent resistance as a means to reveal the truth of injustice is also an attempt to contradict any obfuscation of truth by violence, discursive or otherwise. Badiou writes,

[...] there are only multiple procedures of truth, multiple creative sequences, and nothing to arrange a continuity between them. Fraternity itself is a discontinuous passion. In truth, there only exist "moments" of fraternity. The protocols of representational legitimization attempt to render continuous what is not, to give disparate sequences a single name, such as the "great proletarian leader", or

the “great founder of artistic modernity”—names that are actually borrowed from fictional objectivities.

Doubtless the epic tale in which the century revelled had its dark underside: it also required false heroes (Badiou 2007, 109).

In *TIOI* it is suggested that Ghising and Pradhan were, in this sense, “false heroes,” as Lola’s meeting with Pradhan indicates, though a difference between the two leaders is established. Pradhan

looked like a bandit teddy bear, with a great beard and a bandana around his head, gold earrings. Lola didn’t know much about him, merely that he had been called the “maverick of Kalimpong” in the newspapers, renegade, fiery, unpredictable, a rebel, not a negotiator, who ran his wing of the GNLFF like a king his kingdom, a robber his band. He was wilder, people said, and angrier than Ghising, the leader of the Darjeeling wing, who was the better politician and whose men were now occupying the Gymkhana Club. Ghising’s résumé had appeared in the last *Indian Express* to get through the roadblocks: “Born on Manju tea estate; education, Singbuli tea estate; Ex-army Eighth Gorkha Rifles, action in Nagaland; actor in plays; author of prose works and poems [fifty-two books—could it be?]; bantamweight boxer; union man” (*TIOI* 242, square brackets in original).

When Lola complains to Pradhan about the appropriation of their land by GNLFF supporters, he declares “I am the raja of Kalimpong” and suggests she become his fifth queen (*TIOI* 244).

Another irony concerning the novel’s reception is that *TIOI* investigates literature’s potential (as well as writings in ethnography, history, etc.) to supply knowledge or obfuscate truth. Sai recognises her ignorance of the history of the region’s indigenous peoples on reading *My Vanishing Tribe* (*TIOI* 199). There is also reference to the processes of canonisation; the judge’s collection of leather-bound *National Geographics* and the Gymkhana library’s collection of newspapers serving the English-speaking community (*TIOI* 198). Along with books by James Herriot, Gerald Durrell (who grew up as a boy in the region) and on Paddington Bear, is *The Indian Gentleman’s Guide to Etiquette*, which advises Indians to “identify yourself with the race to which you belong,” and arouses a sudden rage in Sai reminiscent of Gyan’s: “A rush of anger surprised her. It was unwise to read old books; the fury they ignited wasn’t old; it was new. If she couldn’t get the pompous fart himself, she wanted to search out the descendants of H. Hardless and stab the life out of them” (*TIOI* 199). When the judge cajoles Gyan (calling him Charlie) into reciting a poem: “‘Tagore?’ he answered uncertainly, sure that was safe and respectable. [...] ‘Where the head is held high, Where knowledge is free, Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls. . . . Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let me

and my country awake.' Every schoolchild in India knew at least this" (*TIO*L 109). This recitation is ironic on several levels; Gyan's own knowledge is not free (both in terms of his blinkered ethno-nationalist rage and his identity as a disenfranchised Gorkha) as he recites this prayerful plea by the canonised Bengali poet who propounds Indian nationalism.

The library in the Darjeeling Gymkhana Club (later symbolically taken over by the GNLF) houses, it seems, only English-language materials:

Of course they had *The Far Pavilions* and *The Raj Quartet*—but Lola, Noni, Sai, and Father Booty were unanimous in the opinion that they didn't like English writers writing about India; it turned the stomach; delirium and fever somehow went with temples and snakes and perverse romance, spilled blood, and miscarriage; it didn't correspond to the truth. English writers writing of England was what was nice: P.G. Wodehouse, Agatha Christie, countryside England where they remarked on the crocuses being early that year and best of all, the manor house novels. Reading them you felt as if you were watching those movies in the air-conditioned British council in Calcutta where Lola and Noni had often been taken as girls, the liquid violin music swimming you up the driveway; the door of the manor opening and a butler coming out with an umbrella, for, of course, it was always raining (*TIO*L 198–199).

There is an exoticism implicitly enjoyed by these readers who, whilst rejecting colonialist representations of India, miss the irony of their taste for Englishness. The sisters' ignorance is grounded in their perception of the locale in latter-day Orientalist terms. Noni recognises their error: "The real place had evaded them. The two of them had been fools feeling they were doing something exciting just by occupying this picturesque cottage, by seducing themselves with those old travel books in the library [...] Exotic to whom? It was the center for the sisters, but they had never treated it as such" (*TIO*L 247). Noni's choice of literature reflects her comparative interest in political matters: "a sad account of police brutality during the Naxalite movement by Mahashveta Devi, translated by Spivak who, she had recently read with interest in the *Indian Express*, was made cutting edge by a sari and combat boots wardrobe," and "a book by Amit Chaudhuri that contained a description of electricity failure in Calcutta that caused people across India to soften with communal nostalgia for power shortage" (*TIO*L 218). But the seeming subaltern focus of these books is commuted through western eyes and the English language. Sai's shock on seeing the poverty of Gyan's home, her reluctant recognition of the cook's poverty contemptuously "exposed" (*TIO*L 18) by the police who search his hut, is a true sighting of the subaltern perspective, not at a safe distance, but immediate to her own life.

At the end of the novel a more optimistic future is glimpsed as truth re-enters in the view of Kanchenjunga, which has shed its glow of "brazen

pornographic pink" (*TIOL* 223). Pink is a colour of shame, embarrassment or humiliation, of the lies and collusions leading to dispossession and violence: the judge's pink and white powder puff symbolises the shame of colonial servitude; the American green card is, "not even green. It roasted heavily, clumsily, pinkishly on [Biju's] brain day and night" (*TIOL* 190); a "pink, synthetic made-in-Taiwan" (*TIOL* 11) umbrella is left on Cho Oyu's veranda by the "[a]lways bad luck" police (*TIOL* 10); that the army, now "becoming a true Indian army" amid "rumors of increasing vegetarianism" paints its buildings "bridal pink" (*TIOL* 195), refers to the exclusionary politics of Hindu nationalism. But as Biju returns, entirely possessionless, to his father's embrace, "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent. All you needed to do was to reach out and pluck it" (*TIOL* 324). This must be read in the context of the volume of paintings by Roerich at Mon Ami (*TIOL* 44), Ray's *Kanchenjunga*, and the historical representation of the Himalayan peaks in general (Slemon 1998, 51). Exactly how this final vision of Kanchenjunga might translate into hope for the wider community of the Darjeeling hills is hard to see. In his review, Mishra comments on *TIOL*'s "unrelentingly bitter view," despite its humour:

But then, as Orhan Pamuk wrote soon after 9/11, people in the West are "scarcely aware of this overwhelming feeling of humiliation that is experienced by most of the world's population," which "neither magical realistic novels that endow poverty and foolishness with charm nor the exoticism of popular travel literature manages to fathom." This is the invisible emotional reality Desai uncovers as she describes the lives of people fated to experience modern life as a continuous affront to their notions of order, dignity and justice (Mishra 2006).

In the context of the inequities of contemporary globalisation and the returning spectre of ethno-nationalisms, it appears that only loss is finally illuminated as truth.

Questions of judgement and truth; Himalayan and metropolitan imaginings

It has been said that on Booker night, literary London is gripped by a "huge annual orgasm" (Saunders cited in *Booker* 30, 1998, 51). The prize propels a vast global marketing machine which lubricates the sale of certain cultural products, even as many of these products criticize the structures of such flows. Writers with postcolonial links today feature prominently in short-lists and among nominees. Though this indicates an engagement with themes of empire, one must be careful not to ascribe too much in the way of political import to this—nostalgia for imperial loss may also lurk within streams of current taste and literary trends.

One can hardly talk about aesthetic judgement without referring to Kant's *Critique of Judgement*.²⁰ Its stress on originality and the exemplary character of artistic production also provides the philosophical basis for judging prizes. *TIOI* does fall into a particular line as far as the history of the award goes—Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Roy's *The God of Small Things* belong to a distinct group of novels that thematise migrancy, identity, and globalisation—though the judges were keen to emphasise its originality.²¹ Rejecting neo-Kantian vocabulary as well as undifferentiated African criteria, Chidi Amuta argues that the normalisation of Western criteria in aesthetic judgement has persisted and that an aesthetic cognisant of heterogeneous literary production, reception, and evaluation is required (Amuta 1989). This, however, does not necessarily derail the Western literary imagination as the arbiter of taste. In *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire*, Luke Strongman points out that we continue to use the same criteria for judging works that have swum into the horizon of the West, and that it is necessary to move beyond the paradigms that privilege the authority of the centre (Strongman 2002). Moreover, it is ironic that the Booker represents an authoritative judgement issued by the estate of Booker McConnell, which was involved in an imperial system of exploitation in Guyanese slaves and indentured labourers in sugar estates. It was with reference to this history that John Berger's famous acceptance speech, on winning the Booker prize in 1972, challenged the moral foundation of the award.²²

Following Pierre Bourdieu, whose notion of cultural capital contradicts the idea of disinterested universal models of judgement, one can argue that consecrated judges on prize-awarding committees serve ruling interests by recycling accepted tastes. Abiding by established conventions and decorum, they are priests anointing the chosen. The cultural preferences of the subaltern are naturally de-prioritised and excluded. The aesthetic values of the Bengali elite, a group which took over the colonial houses of the Kalimpong hillsides, resonate in many ways with metropolitan values. It is out of this history and Desai's perceived position that some of the local criticism of Desai's book can be seen to emanate.

As an ostensible critique of the excesses of globalisation, *TIOI* can be read as favouring a more liberal humane order in which labour is treated fairly, and in which the narrative of colonialism is interrupted by one of inclusive globalisation and justice for minorities, illegals and other migrants, as

20 While Kant's imperial cosmopolitanism has something to do with his formative relationship with the multicultural city of Königsberg, and even though the town of Kalimpong has historically lent itself to a differential, dialogic and polyvalent cosmopolitan vibrancy, this is, sadly, something paradoxically receding in its glocal moment. A vernacular *Kalimpongische Tischgesellschaft* (with many a च्या दोकान (tea-house), cafe, bar, चौतारी (stop or street corner) in the format of a wide, inclusive and argumentative Habermasian public sphere remains under threat.

21 Other Bookered imperial guilt and loss novels include Paul Scott's *Staying On* (1979) and J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973).

22 Postcolonial value served for consumption in a commercial system—and the role of the Booker—is an argument also made by Huggan (2001, 6–8).

well as the working classes. But in presenting its (liberal humanist) criticism of inequity and injustice it indulges in universalising tendencies. Whilst on one level it overturns the margin/centre dichotomy, the contrasting locales of the novel are conflated rather than held apart in productive, contrapuntal juxtaposition. The illegals of New York, for example, scurrying unseen about the city's kitchens, hiding from the authorities, and exploited by all, are figures of what Giorgio Agamben terms *homo sacer* (Agamben 1998). But an equivalence cannot but be unproblematically made between this vast population (and those queuing at embassies) and the expulsion of kindly Father Booty, who finds himself paperless in Kalimpong, though he too is exiled and faces dispossession. Interestingly, Sai's anger places blame for what she sees as the sacrifice of Booty, squarely on Gyan and "people like him" (*TIOL* 223). Nor can the history of the region's territorial upheavals be conflated with the situation of Biju and others in New York. The lack of historical specificity in the text compacts this problem. This is not a matter of accuracy, so much, as the way in which histories are presented all too briefly and through a forum of conflicting voices, which clash postmodernistically with all their various positions and prejudices. Such brevity gives a meagre sense of the complexity of issues and the depth of discrimination faced by certain ethnic groups and castes. It makes things easily consumable for the reader and does not hold with the novel's putatively implicit claim of realistically portraying a certain India (and one which overturns the exoticism of old imperialist narratives). The conflict in the Darjeeling hills becomes merely another narrative of the violence seen to tear apart the country, thus reflecting the cartographic anxieties of its central characters.

Ironically, then, the Gorkha voice is to a large degree lost or unheard. Whilst *TIOL* problematises precisely this deafness it might well—despite the strength of its criticism of the same discourses—seem a little closer to anthropological exercises of colonialist representation than is acknowledged by metropolitan audiences (though not due to all the reasons argued by enraged critics). *TIOL* can be read in one sense as an attempted ethnography of Kalimpong, with its portrayal of real locations, events, and even persons. But arguments about a wanting accuracy of description are superficial, easily repudiated by pointing to the fictive nature of the work, and serve to reinforce faith in notions of ethnographic truth and anthropological certainty inherited from colonial scientific discourses. While accusations of Desai being an unknowing outsider are merely the other side of the coin from the charge of being a native informant, this does not mean that Desai's position should remain unquestioned: Does Desai serve as an interlocutor between colonial subjects and knowledge? There are always pitfalls associated with vacillating between the privileges of global citizenship and claims to knowing a locality.

There is a case to be made that what are judged as successful postcolonial literature(s) and theory, with their overriding focus on migrancy, has clouded the subaltern perspective. Neil Lazarus, for example, has argued

that there has been a forgetting of Marxism within this field (Lazarus 1999, 13–14). The conflation of themes of migrancy, displacement, and hybridity in recent postcolonial literature—at least in many of the prize-winning books—might be considered symptomatic of this. There is a tendency by which a universalising liberal humanist rubric takes precedence over differences and historical specificities. Many celebrated texts indulge in such formulaic fantasies along a postcolonial trajectory (Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Smith's *White Teeth*, Ali's *Brick Lane*), and many adopt a style of humour that arguably makes issues more easily digestible for metropolitan audiences. Such lists can be seen to establish a kind of continuity where, to return to Badiou on the “protocols of representational legitimization,” “In truth, there only exist ‘moments’ of fraternity.” In the canonisation of cultural products from within the rubric of the postcolonial, in the celebration and forging of a global “we” (the inclusivist strategy of liberal humanism), what gets deprioritised, all too easily, is the voice of the subaltern. What the bourgeoisie hears, when it listens, from a prized commodity is underlined by two even more recent celebrations. Despite (or paradoxically because of) its Dickensianism, *Slumdog Millionaire* succeeded at the awards precisely on account of the exaggerated feel-good factor (read: ideological numbness) it offers, where hope itself is commodified in a setting of appalling poverty. It has been argued that another Booker winner from the sub-continent, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, relies for its false verisimilitude on a non-existent quirky English that, in its attempt to articulate the small-town, Maithili or Bhojpuri-speaking Bihari subjectivity of its protagonist in a gritty globalised India, albeit one punctuated by black comedy, also remains appealingly exotic (Subhramanyam 2008).

The judgement and representation of aesthetic artefacts in metropolitan cultures, and their enshrinement through the procedures of canonisation, not only occludes their local nuances but serves to assert an ideological continuity stretching from earlier regimes of knowledge production. That local responses may, albeit unwittingly, corroborate such structures is testimony to their continued influence. Moreover, the ironies we have identified at play in the reception of Desai's novel and the novel itself, which can be and has been read as an ethnography of sorts, exposes the falsity of equivalence (i.e., a novel is a novel is a novel) upon which global capitalist cultures depend. Although this equivalence is usually established in money (as a sign of global equivalence), it is clear that aesthetic forms of semiosis and thus “meaning making” resist the hegemonic western assumptions—also inscribed in the universalising liberal humanist rhetoric of prize-giving bodies—concerning a global culture of easy cultural equivalence and exchange.

The issues we have addressed in this essay foreground the importance of revisiting questions of truth, representation and violence in the context of both global capitalist culture and, in general, in the formation of political collectivities. If Kalimpong invites us to “monstrate” and reflect, it is crucial to recall Badiou's articulation that “for a we-subject in the process of being

constituted—to demonstrate is to manifest itself. The being of the ‘we’ is displayed, but also exhausted, in the demonstration. There is great dialectical trust in this monstration. This is because the ‘we’ is ultimately nothing but the set of its demonstrations. In this sense, the real of the ‘we,’ which is the real as such, is accessible to each and every one in and by the demonstration” (Badiou 2007, 107–108). We have argued that Desai’s novel seeks to raise our awareness of issues of representative legitimacy whilst itself producing a problematic representation (or re-constitution of the we-subject) of the Gorkha movement. In the light of the arguments above, the discrepancy of *TJOL*’s reception in the local and metropolitan cultures unfolds ironically, and somewhat inevitably, as yet another violent inscription to be read alongside its own troubled narrative of truth and politics.

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HEIDELBERG STUDIES ON TRANSCULTURALITY

This collaborative study investigates the hill station of Kalimpong and the larger Eastern Himalayan borderlands as a paradigmatic case of a “contact zone.” In the colonial and early post-colonial era, this space enabled a variety of encounters: between (British) India, Tibet, and China, but also Nepal and Bhutan; between Christian mission and Himalayan religions; between global flows of money and information and local markets and practices. Using a plethora of local and global historical sources, the contributing essays follow the pathways of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and investigate the new forms of knowledge and practice that resulted from their encounters and their shifting power relations. The volume provides not only a nuanced historiography of Kalimpong and its adjacent areas, but also a conceptual model for studying transcultural processes in borderland spaces and their colonial and post-colonial dynamics.

