

What Is A Mountain?  
*An Ethnohistory of  
Representation and Ritual at  
Pure Crystal Mountain in Tibet*

by  
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## Errata to Toni Huber, *What Is A Mountain*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| page xiii, line 20                          | <i>For "tradittional" read "traditional"</i>  |
| p.2, note 2, 1.4                            | <i>For "Søreson" read "Sørenson"</i>  |
| p.12, 2 lines up                            | <i>For "evidence, a most" read "evidence, most"</i>   |
| p.21, n.39                                  | <i>For "Berbaum" read "Bernbaum"</i>  |
| p.22, 1.20                                  | <i>For "howthese" read "how these"</i>  |
| p.23, 1.2                                   | <i>For "practicefor" read "practice for"</i>  |
| p.32, 1.18 & n.64,65                        | <i>For "Marriot" read "Marriott"</i>  |
| p.34, n.66, 2 lines up                      | <i>For "of notions" read "notions of"</i>   |
| p.49, 1.16                                  | <i>For "Grappard" read "Grapard"</i>  |
| p.70, n.27                                  | <i>For "poisoinous" read "poisonous"</i>  |
| p.76, n.45                                  | <i>For "principle" read "principal"</i>   |
| p.112, 1.20                                 | <i>For "quite" read "quiet"</i>   |
| p.113, 1.4                                  | <i>For "uses known" read "uses is known"</i>  |
| p.137, 1 line up                            | <i>For "Marriot" read "Marriott"</i>  |
| p.138, n.26                                 | <i>For "Marriot" read "Marriott"</i>  |
| p.190, n.8                                  | <i>For "Shakabpa (1988" read "Shakabpa (1984"</i>   |
| p.192, n.17                                 | <i>For " 'Phyong-rgyas;" read " 'Phyong-rgyas;"</i>   |
| p.193, n.19                                 | <i>"Karmay (1988:29)" should be omitted</i>   |
| p.199, n.33                                 | <i>For "Lamb (1966" read "Lamb (1966,</i>   |
| vol.2:310-11)"                              |   |
| p.209, 3 lines up                           | <i>For "sKhyab-mgon" read "sKyab-mgon"</i>  |
| p.242, 1.18                                 | <i>For "first since" read "first time since"</i>  |
| p.245, 1.6                                  | <i>For " "shamanic" " read " 'shamanic' "</i>   |
| p.256                                       | <i>Insert "Casssinelli, C.W. &amp; R.B. Ekvall, <i>A Tibetan Principality. The Political System of Sa sKya</i>. Ithaca, 1969."</i>  |
| after the entry of "Carrasco, P."           |   |
| p.258                                       | <i>Insert "Ekvall, R.B., <i>Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism</i>. New York, 1968."</i>  |
| after the entry of "Eck, D.L."              |   |
| p.259                                       | <i>For "Gyatsho, J." read "Gyatso, J."</i>  |
| p.261                                       | <i>Insert "Karsten, J., 'A note on the <u>ya sor</u> and the secular festivals following the <u>smon lam chen mo</u>', In <i>Contributions on Tibetan Language, History and Culture</i>, vol.1 (eds.) E. Steinkellner &amp; H. Tauscher, Wien, 1983, pp.117-149."</i>   |
| after the entry of "Karmay, S. & P. Sagant" |   |
| p.263                                       | <i>For "Marriot" read "Marriott"</i>  |
| p.263                                       | <i>Insert "Montmollin, M. de, 'bKra shis sgo mang of Bhutan: On a Specific Tradition of Shrines and its Propogation in the Museum of Ethnography in Neuchâtel (Switzerland)', In <i>Tibetan Sudies. Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989</i>, vol.2 (eds.) Ihara Shōren and Yamaguchi Zuihō, Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992, pp.605-613."</i> |
| after the entry of "Miller, L."             |   |
| p.275, 1.4                                  | <i>For "ལྷ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ" read "ལྷོ་ལྷོ"</i>  |

# Abstract

This dissertation records and analyses the Tibetan cultural discourses and social practices relating to the Himalayan peak called Dag-pa Shel-ri, or 'Pure Crystal Mountain'. The mountain and its environs constitute the borderland district of Tsa-ri in South-eastern Tibet. The area has long been of ritual importance to Tibetan-speaking peoples as a site of local mountain deity worship, Tantric practice and popular pilgrimages. This work gives the first comprehensive Western account of pre-1959 Tibetan life at Tsa-ri using an ethnohistorical method which makes extensive use of Tibetan oral and written sources.

Chapter one discusses theoretical and methodological issues concerning this research in particular, and the study of Tibetan pilgrimage rituals in general. It concludes that closer attention needs to be paid to *emic* categories of place, person and substance in research on certain types of Tibetan practices and beliefs.

Chapter two surveys the main Tibetan representational systems which contextualize Pure Crystal Mountain cosmologically and geographically, and which are used in the definition and ordering of space and place at the site.

Chapter three contains translations of oral and written 'narrative map' texts. These are discussed in terms of how Tibetans construct their historical consciousness of the area and interpret and navigate its landscape.

Chapter four introduces the mountain as an historically important site for Tibetan Tantra and gives an account of Tantric Buddhist ritual life there in the 1950s.

Chapter five describes three popular annual pilgrimages which took place on the upper slopes of the mountain during the 1950s.

Chapter six gives a detailed account of the large, twelve-yearly Tsa-ri *rong-skor* procession and the associated *klo-rdzong* ceremony based on Tibetan reports of the last two stagings of these events in 1944 and 1956.

Chapter seven analyses the historical origins and cultural and social significance of the Tsa-ri *rong-skor* procession and *klo-rdzong* ceremony in pre-1959 Tibet.

Chapter eight describes the local ecology and economy of the inhabitants of Tsa-ri district in the 1950s. It shows how representations of person and place at Tsa-ri were linked to the practice of a unique form of pre-1959 Tibetan life there.

An appendix contains Tibetan oral texts used in this study.

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## Preface

Many Tibetans, both past and present, have regarded a South-eastern Himalayan peak called Pure Crystal Mountain as one of the greatest natural power places in their environment. Over the centuries this mountain has continued to attract large numbers of visitors from all parts of the Tibetan-speaking world. Its renown was such that it became the focus for the largest known Buddhist ritual processions in the Grand Himalayan chain. Owing to the beliefs about it a unique form of Tibetan domestic life-style was practised by those who dwelt in its environs. However, apart from some short descriptions by earlier explorers and travellers, and a few very brief studies by scholars of Tibet, this place and the life-stories of those who visited it and lived there have remained virtually unknown in the West. My research aims to give a comprehensive account of Pure Crystal Mountain and the various ways Tibetan people have conceived of the place and formed a relationship with its environment. But, in so doing, my work offers more than just an ethnological description. It both elaborates, and provides an example of, a new analytical framework for the study of important aspects of Tibetan cultural life, in particular the ritual relationship between persons and places and also the common practice of pilgrimage.

As I review my endeavours and write these final words just before submitting my dissertation for examination, a line from a song by Leonard Cohen comes to mind, "I came so far for beauty, I left so much behind." I have not found beauty in my work yet, and perhaps never will, but the view it now affords me is much richer than when I started. I have left behind many earlier ideas about Tibetan life, and also ways of working to try and understand it, which now seem outmoded to me. As a scholar I welcome these changes, and in many respects I had predicted they would occur before getting deeply involved in this research. But my personal life has also been altered by this project in ways that I never anticipated, and which continue to challenge me. None of my transformations has yet reached a significant conclusion, and at this point I comfort myself (thanks to Luzia) with the maxim that process is just as important as product.

Although I have enjoyed excellent support from my institution, and from all my colleagues, family and friends while working on this dissertation, due to lack of on-going funding, and to personal pressures, I am obliged to present it here as an incomplete work in progress. I particularly regret not being able to include in it a collection of hand-drawn Tibetan maps, various oral texts, and photographic material relating to the topic. More field work needs to be undertaken to confirm and expand on aspects of both my own thinking and the Tibetan ethnohistorical materials found in the present work. I remain determined to continue this research. In the German tongue it is said "Kleine Ursachen, grosse Wirkung", and bearing this in mind I hope that what you read here will be expanded and refined for publication before too many more years pass by.

My research 'performance' benefitted from the inspiration, collaboration and assistance generously offered to me by many people around the world. They range from my intimate companions at home through to anonymous pilgrims I met on the back of Chinese army trucks as I hitch-hiked in rural Tibet. While I wish to thank them all, the entire cast is far too

large to mention. There are a few I cannot fail to acknowledge here, as I would not have gone very far without them. To Chikchar Umdze Sherab Gyatso of Darjeeling I extend my deep gratitude and admiration. Not only is Umdze-la one of the finest people I have ever met, but also his knowledge of Tsa-ri is second to none. He openly transmitted it to me without prejudice. As a researcher who is just as interested in the beliefs and views of ordinary lay Tibetans as those of lamas and clerics, I was concerned at the beginning that he was giving me the view 'from the top down'. My other work with lay informants in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet showed me that in almost all cases of thinking this I was wrong. Working together with him I learnt as much about myself as a researcher as I did about my topic.

It was surely good karma that brought Paul Harrison and me together some years ago. As a supervisor he has been like a true guru. He understood my needs perfectly, always giving me complete freedom to explore, while also showing by his good example how to proceed with care and determination. Throughout my often difficult research he worked to place the supports of the institution at my disposal when I needed them most. But of even greater value to me is the personal support and encouragement he has always given freely as a friend and colleague. I have also been very fortunate to have had Bo Sax arrive at Canterbury during the course of my work. Although our respective research areas of Buddhist Tsa-ri and Hindu Garhwal lie on opposite sides, and at opposite ends, of the Himalaya, it is remarkable that we are both dealing with a similar set of general issues in the context of two apparently different cultural milieux. My own insights have benefitted greatly from Bo's comprehensive knowledge of issues relating to both field work and theory, as has my work in general though his encouragement always given in the spirit of friendship.

I also wish to thank the following people for their inspiration, information and assistance at important points during this research: Könchog Gyaltsen, Ngawang Tenzin, Chosdrup-la, Chimed Yudron, Sonam Palgye, Tsering Dolkar, Sonam Paldron, Tenzin Wangchuk, Khenpo Puntshog Tashi, Kunzang Tengye, Singye Dorji, Alexander Macdonald, Katia Buffetrille, Ngawang Tsering, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, Christoph Cüppers, Drolma-la, Dan Martin, Geoffrey Samuel, Tashi Tsering, Norbu Dorje, Tashi Namgyal, Mathieu Ricard, H.H. Drigung Chetsang Rinpoche, Mynak Tulku, Shakya Palzang, Ngodrup, Pema-la, "A-pha", Losang Dawa, Michael Aris, Sonam Tenzin, Gordon Aston, Hugh Richardson, Martin Brauen, Heinz Zumbühl, Flip Ketch, and last, but by no means least, both the Huber and the Daellenbach families of Christchurch for their many years of unconditional support.

I dedicate this work to the memory of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, pioneer ethnographer of the Arunachal Himalaya. His kind encouragement and patient explanations given once in the highlands of Nepal inspired me to undertake this research.

Toni Huber

Christchurch, March 1993

In a time of specialization, all work in the field of cultural sciences will regard the treatment of its material as an end in itself, once the material has been defined by a specific problematic and some methodological principles have been set up. One then no longer constantly and deliberately measures the cognitive value of discrete facts and findings against ultimate value assumptions: indeed, one altogether ceases to be conscious that these facts are anchored in value assumptions. And it is a good thing that this is so. But at a certain point a different perspective enters: the meaningfulness of unreflectively applied perspectives becomes uncertain, and the way is lost in the dusk. The light of the great cultural problems moves on. Then science too prepares to change its standpoint and its conceptual apparatus and to look down from the heights of thought towards the stream of events.

(Max Weber on "Objectivity" in Social Science, 1904)

༄༅ །ཕྱི་ནང་གསང་བ་སྐྱོད་མེད་པ་ཡི།  
 གནས་མཚོག་རྒྱལ་བས་བསྐྱེད་པ་རྣམས་ལྟོ་རི་ཏུ།  
 གསང་སྐྱེད་པོ་བྱང་ཆེན་པོའི་གནས་བཤད་ནི།  
 ཆ་ཙམ་བརྗོད་ལ་མཁའ་འགྲོས་གནང་བ་སྟོལ།

(A traditional Tibetan approach to this research) SEE EPIDATA

## Chapter One

# Proposition: Geographical Space is Never Socially Neutral

It was the centre of the sky, the middle of the earth and the heart of the country. An enclosure of glaciers; the head of all rivers. High mountain, pure earth, an excellent country. A place where wise men are born heroes, where custom is perfected, where horses grow swift. (Tibetan account of the mountain site of the descent of the first divine king, Tun-huang text *circa* ninth-century)<sup>1</sup>

### *About This Research*

What is a mountain? This seemingly facile question has no obvious or simple answer. I say this not out of philosophical pedantry, but because I intend the question here as the basis for a substantial type of ethnological inquiry. The present work represents what I found out by asking this question. All styles of questioning and answering, and the questions and answers they yield, are practices generated out of particular social and historical contexts. This introductory chapter deals mainly with the processes of inquiry and interpretation as they relate to my subject matter. As for the question 'What is a mountain?', I asked it specifically of Tibetan-speaking peoples who lived in Tibet and adjacent Himalayan regions during the middle part of this century. They are all persons who resided at, visited or have knowledge of a specific mountain area referred to as Tsa-ri (see maps 1 & 2), a remote borderland district of South-eastern Tibet whose central and highest summit they call Dag-pa Shel-ri or 'Pure Crystal Mountain'.

This peak and its environs, about 140 kilometres from Lhasa, constitute one of Tibet's most famous and venerated mountain pilgrimage sites. In contrast to other important mountain power places in Tibet the area maintained a sizable settled population. This was comprised of both Tibetans and Tibetanized tribal peoples from the Subansiri river basin of highland Arunachal Pradesh immediately to the south. But prior to 1959, life at Tsa-ri was not like in other parts of Tibet. Although an apparently fertile area with good rainfall and excellent game habitat, all cultivation and all hunting was banned around the mountain. Apart from the practice of very small-scale pastoralism, there existed virtually no other food production and the inhabitants, the Tsa-ri-bas, lived in a local economy combining harvesting, craft work, begging, trading, slave-keeping and in particular some specialised forms of service labour relating to the popular pilgrimages performed there. The various ritual circuits around the mountain were very well patronized by a broad spectrum of Tibetans up until 1959, with some events drawing as many as twenty thousand pilgrims at one time. In addition, the

<sup>1</sup> Bacot, Thomas & Toussaint, *Documents de Touen-houang relatifs à l'histoire du Tibet*, p.81 quoted in Stein (1972:42).

mountain's environment has long been regarded and used by Buddhist yogins as a site *par excellence* for Tantric practice and realisation.

I asked my question about this Tibetan mountain. Although virtually unknown in other neighbouring Asian societies and in the West,<sup>2</sup> this place has been renowned among Tibetan and certain Himalayan peoples for many centuries now. Knowing this much myself, I wanted to find out why, from among the myriad peaks of the Grand Himalaya, Pure Crystal Mountain was so special, why it held such great significance in the lives and recent cultural history of these peoples.

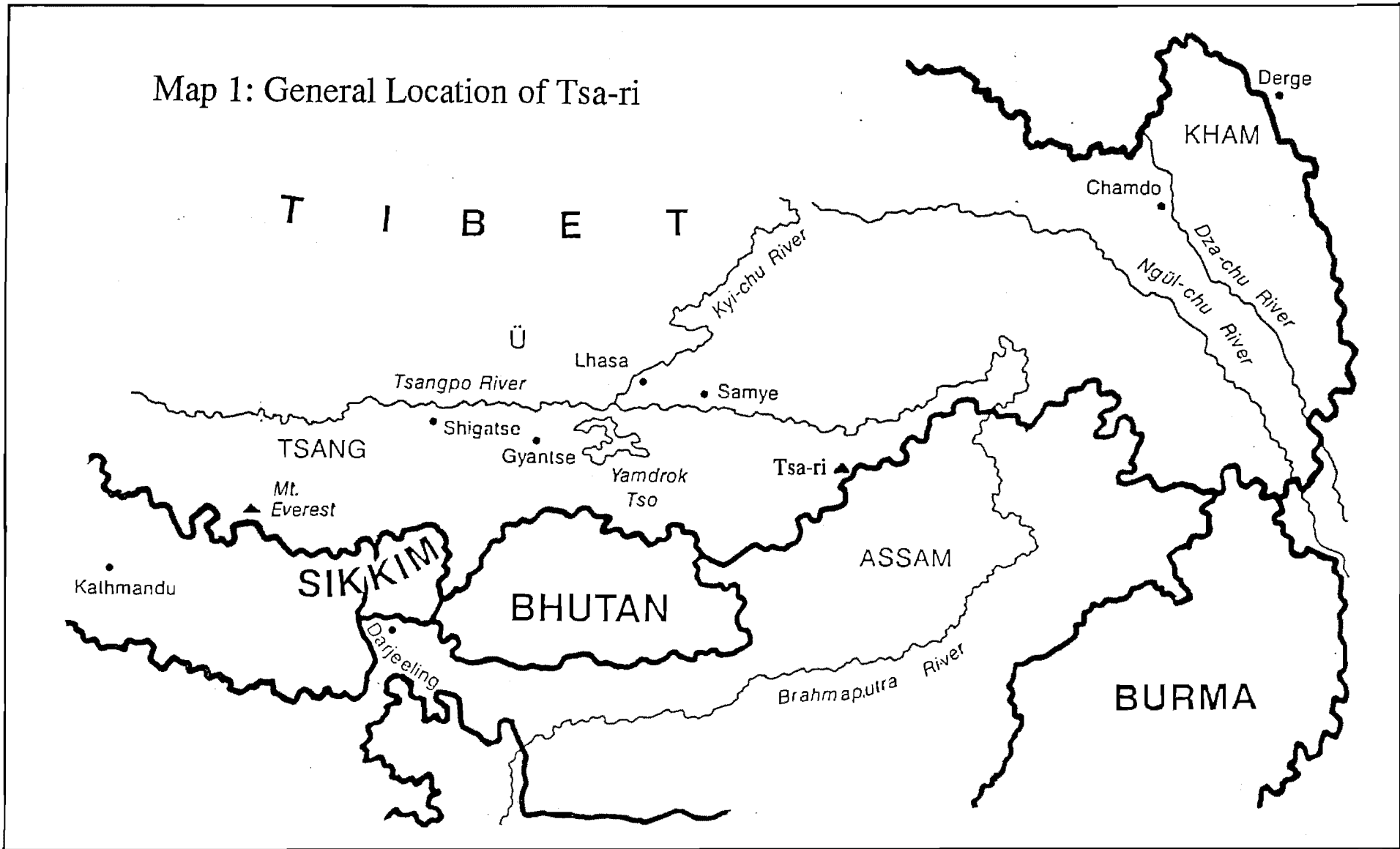
Although my informants and the sources they supplied me with provided a set of possible answers, the ways in which I asked this question, and then presented what they told me herein, are products of my own set of predispositions, concerns and strategies. These are too numerous to mention, but include specific aspects of my own personal history and the way in which it has articulated with contemporary processes for seeking 'educational capital'.<sup>3</sup> In the present context I will focus only upon the theoretical and methodological issues which motivate and give substance to my basic inquiry. One of my long-standing research interests concerns the set of conceptions of the physical world or environment held by Tibetans and Tibetan-speaking Himalayan peoples. I am interested in how they express and live out relationships with their physical world (*zhing-khams* or *gzugs-khams* in modern colloquial Tibetan) or cognized environment while both assuming and sometimes representing this set of views about it. This is a potentially vast topic, and to date I have directed my research to the study of specific portions of the physical world which Tibetans classify using the term *gnas* (pronounced *ney*) and its related compounds, particularly *gnas-chen*, *gnas-mchog* and *gnas-ri*. The area of Pure Crystal Mountain at Tsa-ri is one place so designated. Thoughtful Westerners writing about this general Tibetan category of place and/or space have translated or glossed those terms variously as 'holy place', 'sacred place or space', 'Pilgerplätzen', 'Wallfahrtsort', 'lieux-saints', 'power places', 'sacred geography', and so on. A full account of *gnas* and its interpretation follows below. However, I will briefly prefigure the points of my longer discussion here.

The Western equivalents of *gnas* listed above attempt to capture the Tibetan conception of these sites or zones as being extraordinary because they are 'consecrated' or 'empowered', and that they involve specific relationships between them and persons (and also between persons)

SEE FOOTNOTES  
<sup>2</sup> Although brief references occur in various Western language sources the best accounts of the area are found in Bailey (1957), Bailey & Moreshead (1914), Burrard (1915), Fletcher (1975), Ludlow (1938), Ward (1941) and Yutok (1990). Useful scholarly notes and minor studies relating to Tsa-ri are those of Huber (1991 & 1992), Martin (1988), Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956), Sørensen (1990) and Stein (1988).

<sup>3</sup> See Bourdieu (1987).

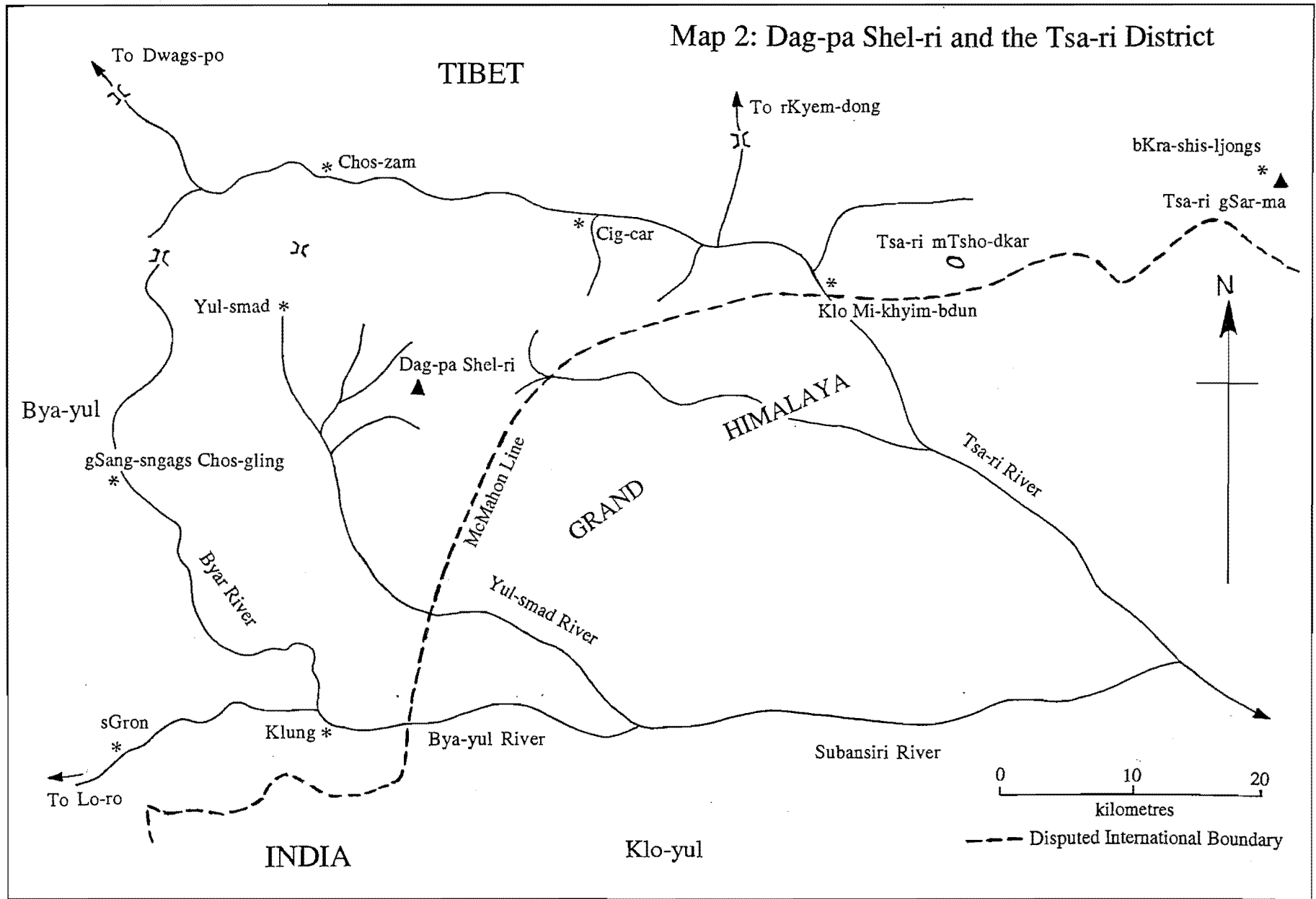
Map 1: General Location of Tsa-ri







Map 2: Dag-pa Shel-ri and the Tsa-ri District





by way of practices such as pilgrimage. It is precisely because of their extraordinary nature in the estimations of Tibetans that certain types of *gnas* and the human activities at them are worthy of research. Some *gnas* of central importance, such as Tsa-ri, attracted and brought together in both space and time very large numbers of *different* people who can be described as *sharing* a common world-view. A few years ago I wrote that "...these places are more than just putative centres of other-worldly or supramundane power. Holy places are also a focus for human power in its various manifestations; they are centres where people are required to confront and invest in prescribed ideas and beliefs..."<sup>4</sup> I would now add that because of their definitions and the ways in which people are either motivated or required to relate to them, such sites and their use have a great potential to provoke more explicit statements and representations of the Tibetan world-view and its dynamics.

However, this potential and the explanatory power that it can offer for an analysis of Tibetan society has not been fully recognised in the majority of Western studies of *gnas* and the ritual life associated with them. Both Tibetan clerics and Western scholars tend to explain ritual behaviour that relates persons and *gnas* together (e.g. pilgrimage) exclusively in terms of a system of Indic Buddhist metaphysical imperatives involving karma, merit, rebirth and ultimately *nirvāṇa*. Privileging Indic doctrinal explanations for what Tibetans do and say has drawn the analytical focus away from a closer investigation of the assumed *emic* categories, such as 'place', 'person' and 'substance', and the qualities assigned to them, which Tibetans work with and even make explicit in a whole range of ritual scenarios. When these presentations of deeply held assumptions do surface in the oral, written and performative traces of certain discursive moments, they alert us to the fact that while Tibetans share a culture constituted by many categories and systems, meanings are also contested and challenged in a way which relates more directly to the changing and asymmetrical contexts of their lived social experience.

I believe that the potential for significant insights into Tibetan culture and society exists in the study of *gnas* and their representation and use. In a few sections of this work I have tried to present some instances of this as they are revealed in materials relating to Tsa-ri and Pure Crystal Mountain. But perhaps, in a theoretical and methodological sense, we should first learn to walk before we can run. There are considerations about ways of conceiving of, and actually undertaking research on Tibet which dictate certain strategies, and signal the need for cautious reflection upon what has already been done. The remainder of this chapter will discuss my own research, and some of that done by others, with an aim to reviewing the difficulties and reformulating the ways in which such studies might proceed with critical vigor.

Systematic enquiries into Tibetan conceptions, attitudes and practices relating to the physical world advance slowly, and all contemporary research must be undertaken in circumstances

<sup>4</sup> See Huber (1993 forthcoming).

of increasing complexity. On the one hand this is due to problems of conducting field work among a population which has recently undergone such massive geopolitical and social upheavals. Since 1959 it has remained virtually impossible to gain permission for unrestricted research access to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and many adjacent areas. As a consequence there are only a few lengthy ethnographies of Tibetan life based on actual ethnological field work in Tibet proper,<sup>5</sup> and even some of these were heavily supplemented by later information from Tibetan exiles. Other anthropologists and Tibetologists who have provided systematic ethnographic data<sup>6</sup> have had to practice forms of what A.W. Macdonald has called 'd'étude anthropologique à distance'. That is, reconstructing pre-1959 Tibetan life from the oral accounts of refugees in exile communities, and then relating this to the existing literature. Many of the recent Tibetan studies generated 'at a distance' employ both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. Some scholars have used observations and inquiries made while visiting Tibet ostensibly as tourists. This latter 'unofficial' method of field work is not only fraught with difficulties and sometimes risks, but also in certain places, such as the Pure Crystal Mountain area itself, access by foreigners is simply not possible due to military activities and strategic sensitivity.

When I chose Tsa-ri as an area of study I too faced these restrictions and coped with them in the same ways as others have. Much of my work involves a type of ethnohistorical method reconstructing pre-1959 Tibetan life at a specific place. My main chronological focus is from the mid-1940s up to 1959, although time frames extending both before and after this contextualise the period. I collected material largely through interviews with members of the exile community resident in India, Nepal and Bhutan, with some Tibetans resident in the TAR, and with Bhutanese Buddhists resident in Bhutan. I also utilised the available indigenous and European written sources, and a wide variety of cultural artifacts. This material was supplemented ethnographically by visiting other related Tibetan sites, and observing and participating in the general class of ritual practices, usually grouped under the heading of 'pilgrimage' in the literature, that were predominant at Tsa-ri before 1959 and which have recently been re-established there. I also translated earlier Tibetan literary sources on the area which my informants utilized in various ways to give their understanding of how life was lived there in the past.

Thus, my present text is of necessity a pastiche of methods and materials, and also, I must stress, still preliminary and in process. There are both potential advantages and difficulties

<sup>5</sup> See for example Clarke (1992), Ekvall (1968) and Goldstein & Beall (1990), all of which exclusively describe pastoral nomadism.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956), Carrasco (1959), Cassinelli & Ekvall (1969), Aziz (1978), Dargyay (1982). The situation is very different regarding socially and culturally related Tibetan-speaking populations that fall outside of the pre-1959 and, for the most part, post-1959 political borders of Tibet. There now exist a large number of field-based studies concerning these groups, especially those living along the Southern and Western Tibetan borderland zones.

with such a research 'mixture'. In some respects it can provide evidence of the continuity and development of certain representational themes and styles throughout time and space. These constitute or are associated with both the more durable and the gradually changing aspects of Tibetan world-view. But at the same time an in-depth account of a specific site over time leads us away from the tendency I find in much Buddhologically and Indologically focused scholarship on Tibet to isolate and apply universals in a blanket fashion. It draws attention to changing local logics and circumstances in which the general pool of ideas and categories constituting a culture can be accepted, rejected and modified in order to facilitate and make sense of life there.

In other respects, due in part to the still preliminary nature of studies of Tibetan categories of place such as *gnas*, I think that the priority of in-depth research into specific local-historical contexts should be directed by the principle that 'big is beautiful' (to corrupt a popular maxim of Buddhist economics). I say this because my earlier work on certain Tibetan notions of place revealed a tendency to replicate, miniaturize and transfer the main systems of representation and ritual of the 'big' sites, like Tsa-ri or Kailash, into smaller local environments.<sup>7</sup> This is one major reason that dictated my choice of Tsa-ri as an area of study in spite of the problems involved.

The difficulties associated with my method of working have perhaps always existed. They have 'become' issues because of the current critical mood of social theory due to the effects of a major self-reflexive movement broadly referred to as post-modernism or post-structuralism. There has been much recent debate on the centrality of writing/text-making in the practice of ethnography, its 'fictional' character, and the many theoretical and methodological issues this raises. The ethnography of Tibet as 'anthropology at a distance' faces these issues acutely as in most cases it depends upon and generates a complex 'reconstruction of a reconstruction' or a 'representation of a representation'. This is also a feature of Western ethnography practised among other populations who, like Tibetans, have been dislocated and often live as refugees due to twentieth-century political and military power struggles. These facts, and their implications for research are seldom made explicit or discussed in Western studies of Tibetan lives. For example, one marked, but generally unacknowledged, tendency of Tibetological studies to date is that they are generated by researchers almost entirely in collaboration with educated and literate (often in English, French or German) lamas, or various ritual specialists and elite clerical and lay members of Tibetan society, past and present. Rarely have the subaltern voices of the peasant farmer, nomad woman, or landless labourer—the types of people who have and still do constitute the bulk of Tibetan society—made it into our texts, let alone been placed alongside those of the lama or aristocrat.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Huber (1992 in press).

<sup>8</sup> Things have begun to change, and for a range of examples see Aziz (1989 & 1990), Chophel (1983), Goldstein & Beall (1990), Richardson & Skorupski (1986) and Rossi (1992).

In my work on this project to date I have tried to confront and address many issues of text-making and selection, subject positions and their power dynamics, and the distinction and interplay between interpretive models and indigenous systematizations. Like many of my contemporaries I am caught in the 'tension' that, as Marcus recently suggested "...resides in the desire to [empirically] know about the world, its processes, etc., but in a different way...that allows for reflexivity and critical explorations of the ethical implications of the very use of descriptive analytical language."<sup>9</sup> Although I have attempted to work with this tension, I know my text will not pass through the mesh of certain critical sieves. Yet, in many important respects, all current reflexivity and its critiques are provisional and even 'suspect' because the context of social practices in which they themselves were produced remains largely unacknowledged and hidden. A movement towards the thorough ethnographic description of the micropractices of academia is to be strongly encouraged.<sup>10</sup> Fundamental *rites de passage*, such as the doctoral dissertation, are perhaps good places to start.

There may seem little of comfort to established scholars in some post-modern critical turns, yet the broad critiques generated by the movement are often valuable in assessing research materials. In the study of Tibetan conceptions of place and the associated rituals and practices it is well to be alerted to the humanistic metanarratives that fuelled some earlier research in the social sciences. One thinks here of the search for universals such as the *axis mundi*,<sup>11</sup> the division of 'sacred' and 'profane' and Turnerian *communitas*.<sup>12</sup> To my mind the acknowledgment of these tendencies further emphasizes the need for more detailed, site-specific studies before any comparative exercises are undertaken. But what of the specific metanarratives that have been influential in the study of Tibet, that is, in the discipline some call "Tibetology", which has recently and consciously represented itself to the world as "Tibetan Studies"?<sup>13</sup> As those who study Tibet well know, but perhaps too often take for granted, some of the most deeply rooted influences come through classical Indology and Buddhology or Buddhist Studies. Some of the assumptions and historical foundations of both of these two disciplines have recently become the subject of post-modern style critical scrutiny.<sup>14</sup> Here I would also include the literary genre of Western travel writing about High Asia, Tibet and the Himalaya,

<sup>9</sup> Marcus (1992:493).

<sup>10</sup> See for example Marcus (1992), Rabinow (1984) and Bourdieu (1987).

<sup>11</sup> Eliade's general comments on the 'sacred mountain' and the *axis mundi* (1959:38) seem to fit well with certain Tibetan conceptions of mountains as a category of place/space, and perhaps they should not be rejected too hastily in some contexts.

<sup>12</sup> Turner (1973 & 1978).

<sup>13</sup> See the preface and introductory comments in Aris & Aung San Suu Kyi (1980), Aziz & Kapstein (1985), Uebach & Panglung (1988) and Ihara & Yamaguchi (1992). One can only wonder about the sustained unity of this representation of a discipline comprised of relatively few practitioners with such a diversity of interests and styles of scholarship.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Almond (1988), Inden (1990) and Schopen (1991).

since it has been widely consumed by scholars of Tibet, and so many of their studies have depended heavily on it for material. The styles of this genre too have recently become the subject of critical reflection.<sup>15</sup> What comes through in all these studies are the processes of the Western representation of 'India', 'Buddhism' and 'Tibet' which have often reflected the influences of colonial cultural assumptions and political structures, and a partiality towards classical and elite textual (especially Sanskritic) sources and interpretations.

While I would emphasize that a sound knowledge of Indic Buddhist materials is an essential tool for the study of Tibetan culture, I also think it is clear that relying on it too heavily can create unproductive distortions. When reviewing Tibetan conceptions of *gnas* and practices related to them such as 'pilgrimage' (*gnas-skor*) below, I will try to indicate some of the limitations these disciplinary influences have had on the study of place and ritual in Tibet.

### *Representations and "Real Life"*

While the general framework offered by post-modern critiques is useful, it has the potential to be just as distorting or limiting as the 'universals' they often criticize if they are applied without due caution. In terms of their emphasis on the Western construction of difference between 'us' and the 'other', they can perhaps be misleading. In discussions of the processes of 'Orientalism' the central role of geography and the production of a place in the imaginary landscapes of Westerners has been noted.<sup>16</sup> The poetics of Western colonial representations are often cited in the construction of the 'Orient' and its native 'other'. But compare the following two statements describing the landscape at Tsa-ri, the place to be studied in this work:

Multicoloured flowers blanket the whole place. Blossoms and fruit bedeck the trees. Its meadows are like golden trays, carrying their lakes like *mandala* of turquoise. Its rivers unfold like white silken scarfs.<sup>17</sup>

And,

...acres of alpine flowers bloomed between scattered shrubs...Tapering tongues of forest licked their way up the sheltered gullies to meet the white tongues of glaciers which crept down out of the mist from invisible snow fields.<sup>18</sup>

The first was written by a Tibetan on pilgrimage to the area in 1812, and the second by a British naturalist who walked the same trails down the Tsa-ri valley in the 1930s. While the

<sup>15</sup> Bishop (1989).

<sup>16</sup> For instance as the general concern of Said (1979) and the specific concern of Bishop (1989).

<sup>17</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:488).

<sup>18</sup> Ward (1941:82).

Tibetan described the landscape as being like a "heavenly field" (*zhing-khams*) and a "miraculous scene" (*ngo-mtshar-ba'i ltad-mo*), just over one hundred years later the Englishman referred to it as a "paradise" and "a scene of almost unbelievable beauty".<sup>19</sup> Exactly the same landscape evoked quite similar styles of poetic representation from two persons whose social, historical and cultural milieux were extremely different. Yet the Westerner's narrative and phrases can be classed with what is often described as the colonial romantic or fantasy imagery of the landscape of the 'Orient'.

This is but a single example. One might also compare the impressions early Western explorers had of Arunachal tribal peoples with those of Tibetans discussed in the last three chapters of this work. Also, many Tibetan accounts of long and difficult ritual journeys around Pure Crystal Mountain I have heard could have been lifted from the pages of Western colonial travel and adventure literature describing journeys in the Himalaya and Tibet. The similar celebration of the remote, the wild, the heroic and the exotic (e.g. other places and peoples) in both types of narratives is once again striking.<sup>20</sup> I agree that acknowledgment of the vastly different contexts in which such accounts were produced and consumed is important. And while I am persuaded by the general thesis of Orientalism and the colonial invention of 'other' as object of study, curiosity and oppression, perhaps an excess of attention paid to ourselves and the construction of differences is at the expense of noting similarities between what are apparently very different worlds. My point here is that paying attention to the politics and poetics of representation is a valuable exercise, but it is seldom straightforward.

In the chapters that follow I provide a catalogue of representations, past and present, shared by a certain group of people of the landscape of a remote mountain in Tibet. To outsiders many of these notions may seem highly exotic or unbelievable (just as many Western notions about the world do to people in other cultures). We might legitimately ask if Tibetans believe any of this, and what does it have to do with real life?

Nowadays the majority of Tibetan peoples live under a Communist political culture, with a minority in exile in India and the West, and it is certain that some of these persons have developed world-views which reject part or even all of what I will present here. Indeed, I would be most surprised if that were not the case. The situation was very different before 1959. Many of my informants are people over 50 years of age, devout Buddhists who grew up in a Tibet where, judging from the available ethnohistorical evidence, a most people subscribed to most of these ideas most of the time. Among my informants, and many other

<sup>19</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:481, 488); Ward (1941: 82).

<sup>20</sup> They are not always even superficially similar. For a nicely understated article which gives competing Tibetan and Western representations of place in the Everest area in the 1920s, and the 'play' of interpretation between them, see Macdonald (1973).



T Tibetans in general, this appears still to be the case.<sup>21</sup> For many centuries prior to 1959, and even again more recently, countless thousands of people have made difficult ritual journeys to, or have gone and lived around, Pure Crystal Mountain. They have quite literally 'lived and died' on the strength of their acceptance of these representations of the place.

Nowadays the term 'representation' appears very frequently in the language of the humanities. It has, however, acquired much heavy 'baggage' since Durkheim's (*représentations collectives*) day. It is partly because of this, and also because I think it a useful term to use in the present context, that it needs to be discussed briefly. Representations have real referents in the 'concrete' physical world we live in and are a part of. But a given representation can rarely, if ever, claim to be the sole, authentic one: others are always possible, and any particular representation can usually be shown to be the result of an interested social location. Representations are socially produced in particular historical and political circumstances; they have a history, or 'genealogy', to use Foucault's term; they are generated and used to negotiate human existence; they do not have a life of their own, but they are part of life in society. In these senses representations are 'real', and that is how they can be thought of as 'social facts'.<sup>22</sup>

This is primarily how I intend the use of the word 'representation' in this study. But I should point out that it could also be used to translate the Tibetan word *rten*. The conception of *rten* is fundamental to the Tibetan understanding of most types of 'sites' which fall into the general category of *gnas*, but the status of *rten* as 'representations' needs to be carefully clarified *vis-à-vis* Western definitions of that word. For *rten* Jäschke's *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, p.213, has 'visible representation, symbol' (as images of Buddha and divine objects or beings), 'receptacle' (as shrines and *stūpa*), 'seat, abode, residence, of a deity, sanctuary'; and for the verb *rten-pa* 'that which holds, keeps up, supports'. I would add to this that *rten* are not just physical edifices, but can also be mental constructions that are 'visible' in certain contexts. In all these senses Pure Crystal Mountain and the various Tibetan representational systems which are applied to it, and which I will describe in the following chapters, are *rten*. Just as 'representations' as social facts are not mere empty symbols, neither are Tibetan *rten*. It is very significant that many Tibetans, and perhaps other Buddhists in general, believe that in certain respects *rten* are 'alive' and relate to them accordingly.<sup>23</sup> Various classes of objects, places and spaces that most Westerners would categorically represent as being

<sup>21</sup> Being a 'suspicious' Western ethnographer I searched for contradictions and disbelief. However, not once during my field work did I ever encounter any doubt or cynicism about the subject from my informants.

<sup>22</sup> Rabinow (1986).

<sup>23</sup> This is an extremely important but oft neglected point in the study of Buddhist and Tibetan ritual and belief: see for instance Schopen (1987) on Buddhist relics and *stūpa*; Tambiah (1984) on Thailand; and the comments on Tibetan religious art in Reynolds, *et al.* (1986:30-5,56-9).

lifeless or inanimate are represented by Tibetans as having a highly positive ontological value, often equal to or even surpassing the value applied by many Tibetans to certain human beings. This most often, but not always, relates to the belief that *rten* have deities or non-human beings in residence. Perhaps the difference between 'representations' in social theory and Tibetan *rten* can best be expressed by saying that while the former primarily *stand for* the referent, the latter also *support* the referent.<sup>24</sup> I will discuss below the implications that this Tibetan notion of representation has for the study of conceptions of *gnas* and their associated rituals.

If the 'reality' of being of the representations of landscape at Tsa-ri that I will describe is an *emic* fact in the world of my informants, then I would also describe it as a social fact. There is not necessarily a contradiction between these two modes of interpretation. If representations are to be treated as social products then we must ask under what conditions they were generated and reproduced, who has access to them, how that access is mediated, and how this articulates with human social relations and behaviour. In the chapters that follow I will begin developing answers to these questions. But first the analytical frameworks for doing research on Tibetan representations of place and the practices associated with them need to be reviewed.

## *Rethinking Place And Pilgrimage in Tibet*

The following discussion is intended both as a context for interpreting much of the ethnohistorical material presented in this work, and also as a critical re-orientation to studies of Tibetan pilgrimages and the sites on which they focus.

### i. Towards an Understanding of *Gnas*

In Western sources the Tibetan word *gnas* is translated most often as 'place' ('lieu', 'Platz'), and less often as 'locality' and 'site'. In one very general sense that is what it means for Tibetans when they speak and write it. But in many instances where it occurs in compounds and as a verb, sometimes written *gnas-pa* (what Goldstein terms an 'involuntary verb' in modern Tibetan), it has a much more active usage carrying the meaning 'to exist', 'to be', 'reside' or 'abide', 'to stay' or 'remain', and even 'condition [of existence]'. Although the English 'place' can carry some of these meanings, in general it is used as a spacial referent or marker, whereas the Tibetan usages carry a much stronger sense of existence, being and ontological value or status. Besides, there are many Tibetan words that could be translated as 'place' or provide a spacial referent in various contexts, such as *khag*, *go*, *grong*, *cha*, *yul*, *sa* and its various compounds, and so on, which do not carry the strong sense of 'an abiding', existence or presence of being associated with *gnas*.

<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Bo Sax for pointing out this distinction.

It is a well known feature of Tibetan culture, both pre-modern and contemporary, that the physical environment in both its animate and inanimate dimensions is believed to be occupied by a host of deities and spirit forces. They range from minor autochthons to supreme Tantric deities and Buddhas, and can exist in the world-space as a totality, by pervading all things in various ways, or reside at specific locations, being both mobile and fixed. Humans can be involved in a great variety of intentional interactions with all these beings, actions that are ritually mediated by the practices of both the 'folk religion' (*mi-chos*) and various forms of Tibetan Tantra. Unintentional interactions, most often considered negative, are also a possibility in every aspect of life. The term *gnas* and its compounds most often designates the abodes of all of these deities and spirits and their associated states of being, variously conceived. They may be in existence at, or dwell in, locations (*gnas*) in space (*nam-mkha'*), substance or matter (*rgyu*), bodily forms (*gzugs-can*), or in some cases pervade or appear in all of these simultaneously.

## ii. Relations Between Person and Place

In daily life human beings can also be said to have a *gnas*, usually their natal or home place, but they themselves can be a *gnas* for other classes of beings at the same time. The division between human beings and these other forces living in the world has never been sharp in Tibetan thinking. This has important implications for the types of relationships Tibetans usually recognise between persons and aspects of the physical world, such as places and objects, that are apparently external to, and discrete from them. There are various features of the earlier pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, and of the later folk religion, which indicate this.

In beliefs about the king in the pre-Buddhist Tibetan royal cult we find identities established between place, person and deity. According to some central myths the early kings descended from the heavens, arriving upon the earth on mountain summits. The first six kings also ascended back to heaven from the mountain summits, and hence left no corpses behind. The seventh king was killed and his body was buried in an earth mound tomb, such as those still extant at 'Phyongs-rgyas and other places in Tibet. The person of the king was assimilated to the mountain through his *sku-bla*, the ruler's personal guardian deity, which was identified with the mountain itself. The *sku-bla*, as deity and mountain, was conceived of as the support of the ruler's vital principle. The king and his *sku-bla* were reunited after death when his body was buried in the earth mound tomb, which itself was assimilated to both the king and mountain. The tombs were called 'mountain', and the names they were given related closely to those of the kings.<sup>25</sup> These ancient identifications resonate with other Tibetan ways of thinking, such as the popular notion of *bla*.

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<sup>25</sup> For details of some of these aspects see A. Macdonald (1971: esp. 298-309); and Stein (1972: 202-3).

The *bla*, the 'vitality' or 'life-power' principle (often translated as 'soul' or 'âme'), is an indigenous notion which relates to the conceptions both of person and of place. Although belief in the *bla* principle has many aspects,<sup>26</sup> what is of interest here is that the *bla* does not just reside (*bla-gnas*) within the human body or outside of it in other living organisms, such as animals (*bla-sems-can*) and trees (*bla-shing*) or objects like stones (*bla-rdo, bla-g.yu*). The *bla* of individual persons, or of family and clan units, religious sects or even the whole of society can be strongly connected with places as they reside in landscape features like lakes (*bla-mtsho*) and mountains (*bla-ri*). The *bla-gnas* concept holds that persons and places are involved in some degree of mutually determinate relationship. For example, if a family line dies out the *bla-mtsho* with which it is associated will dry up as a result; or if the earth were to be dug up at the *bla-ri* of a particular person, they would be taken ill as a consequence.<sup>27</sup>

Stein has proposed that *bla* and *lha*, the 'gods', were once compounded in Tibetan thinking. And, as in the case of *bla*, the 'go-ba'i lha' or personal protective gods (*dgra-lha, pho-lha* and *mo-lha/phug-lha*) and *yul-lha* or the 'gods of the country' not only dwell in the human body but are also found as much in the natural environment and in places of habitation, such as the house or tent.<sup>28</sup>

Samuel has summarised much of what I have just described, and proposed that a shift in conception of these relationships between place, deity and person did occur with the growth of centralized political power and literacy:

It would make sense to assume that the *bla/lha* concept originated in a set of shamanic modal states. Originally, the spirit-essence or life-force within the individual would have been constituted by this set of forces active both within the individual and in the external world, where they were associated in a typically shamanic manner with specific places, primarily the local mountains and lakes...As centralization took place, particular families and their mountain gods would have come to enjoy especially high status. The shamanic modal states gradually transformed into gods as they came to be seen as outside the individual rather than both within and outside.<sup>29</sup>

At some levels of earlier Tibetan society a separation appears to have taken place. Yet, while

<sup>26</sup> For discussions of *bla* see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:481-3); Stein (1972:226-9); Karmay (1987).

<sup>27</sup> Stein (1972:227). Karmay (1987:101) notes how the ninth-century persecution of Buddhism in Tibet was linked to the erosion of a hill on the Sino-Tibetan border which was considered a *Bod-kyi bla-ri* ('vitality-mountain of Tibet'); Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:482) describes rituals to stop the movement of important *bla-ri* in Tibet.

<sup>28</sup> Stein (1972:227-8); Tucci (1980:187-89).

<sup>29</sup> Samuel (1985:389).

noting that certain 'shamanic' practices are still current in Tibetan cultural life, Samuel further points out the 'shamanic' character of later Indian Buddhist Tantra adopted by Tibetans, in the logic of which "...the deities of the *maṇḍala* are not simply divine powers external to the individual. They can be evoked within as well as outside the individual."<sup>30</sup> Such observations are important as a basis for interpreting what happened when Indian Buddhist ideas entered into and developed in a Tibetan cultural milieu.

Recent studies treat Tibetan notions and representations of place as 'sites' where meanings were contested during the transfer of Indian Buddhism into a Tibetan environment.<sup>31</sup> In relation to certain 'ideological dramas' of this transfer process as it involved Tantra, such as the Rudra/Maheśvara-Cakrasaṃvara scenario, other studies<sup>32</sup> have drawn attention to several points relevant to the present discussion. While I discuss the Rudra/Maheśvara-Cakrasaṃvara scenario in Tibet at length in chapter two, here I will make some summary comments in advance. First, in the Tibetan narratives the outcome of such dramas is not represented as being clearcut. In their initial stages, at least, they result more in a state of equilibrium which is established provisionally between the pre-existing powers and Buddhism, rather than the complete replacement and total victory of the latter over the former. Second, the analysis of this process by Tibetan Buddhists is made in relation to particular geographical sites—the dramas are tied into actual landscapes in terms of these being the residence places (*gnas*) of the spirit-powers involved. Third, these dramas can ultimately result not just in the redistribution of spirit-powers in landscapes or places but also in bodies.

The pattern for this can also be seen in indigenous Tibetan beliefs about places, bodies and deities or vital principles mentioned above. Stein has proposed that in Tibetan thinking "...the representation of the universe, like that of the human body, was modelled on the dwelling house...the human body, the house and the local environment are so many microcosms...of equal validity."<sup>33</sup> As Samuel's comments above have already indicated, there are strong parallels here with Tantric Buddhist systems of thought, such as the *vajra-kāya* doctrine found in the Rudra/Maheśvara-Cakrasaṃvara scenario, and of this one could use Stein's

<sup>30</sup> Samuel (1985:390). Note also the earlier comments of Tucci (1980:163). Contemporary examples of the type of Tibetan shamanic and Tantric relationships to place that Samuel is discussing here are those of *dpa'-bo* with Mount Targo and Lake Dangra in Berglie (1980) and yogins with Pure Crystal Mountain in chapter four of the present work.

<sup>31</sup> Gyatso (1989) and Huber (1992 in press).

<sup>32</sup> See Macdonald (1990) who brings together important work by Stein and Iyanaga; and Huber (1993 forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> Stein (1972:204). Tibetan ideal conceptions of space as they apply to, and relate together notions of the cosmos/environment, the dwelling house and the body need to be considered here; see Stein (1972:41, 204, 210-11) and Meyer (1987:110); Corlin (1980) describes the ritual and social *maṇḍala* reflected in the cosmic symbolism of the house; see also Aziz (1985), Karmay & Sagant (1987) and Stein (1957). For related Himalayan materials see Allen (1984) and Macdonald (1980).

words to state 'the representation of the universe, like that of the human body, was modelled on the dwelling house [of the archetype deity (*yi-dam*), i.e. the *maṇḍala* palace].' In both Tibetan and Indian Buddhist Tantric representational systems the cosmos/world-system, the body and the dwelling have ontological arrangements with analogical correspondences at their various levels.

In her analysis of the myth of the 'Supine Demoness' Gyatso draws attention to the Tibetan proclivity to read features of the landscape as animated. She states "The image ranges from one of a being who inhabits a certain place...to the place itself as constituting the spirit of a deity of some sort...to the perception of the actual contours of the land as being anthropomorphic or animal-like, by virtue of which that place is thought actually to be the being so outlined."<sup>34</sup> In the present context her observations about this aspect of Tibetan notions of place are most pertinent, as she states, "Once conceived [of in this way]...Be the spirit propitiated or suppressed, the point is that the analogical, animated, projective perception remains. It is a basic feature of what R.A. Stein calls the 'nameless Tibetan religion.' But it fully pervades organised Buddhism and Bon as well."<sup>35</sup>

So for Tibetans other classes of beings do not just inhabit (*gnas*) the environment, they actually contribute to the determination of its physical appearance. The same is also true of the 'dwellings' they are thought to occupy. Just as the language of the folk religion denotes the stone cairn of the god of a mountain pass as a 'castle' (*mkhar*) or describes a mountain summit in detail as the 'grand tent' (*gur-mchog*) of the local protector goddess, so too do Tibetan Buddhists apply a great deal of architectural language to the lakes, mountains and other features which are landscape 'palaces' (*pho-brang*) of Tantric deities. Just as Tibetans negotiate human-built edifices and orient themselves in relation to them, so too must they take account of those 'edifices' imaged in the physical environment.

All the points I have just discussed are fundamental to Tibetan conceptions of *gnas*. Implicit in the understanding of *gnas* is that persons and other parts of the environment and their constituent substances and spaces can be conceived of in a variety of ways, and involved in a range of relationships and/or correspondences and identifications. While this is generally true of many cultures, it has sometimes been forgotten in the case of Tibet when Westerners study Tibetan rituals, such as pilgrimage. These ideas are supported by *both* long-standing aspects of the pre-Buddhist world-view and later Tibetan Buddhist Tantra. In all these aspects we find expressed forms of an active continuity of existence and identity between persons, places and their physical substances, and the vital powers and divine beings that are believed to inhabit the environment. The actual processes by which this unfolds will be discussed below.

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<sup>34</sup> Gyatso (1989:49).

<sup>35</sup> Gyatso (1989:50).

Before proceeding it may be well to recall here that *gnas* are not only aspects of the natural world, such as landscape features. Many of the conceptions Tibetans might apply to mountains and lakes, for instance, can also be applied to certain architectural edifices (e.g. *stūpa*), human-made objects (e.g. religious icons), and particular persons (e.g. Dalai Lamas, or Tantric yogins in particular meditative states) because they are considered to be, or to have, deities permanently or temporarily in bodily 'residence'. In many senses *gnas* are like *rten*, or are in fact treated as a sub-category of *rten*. Structures and objects become *rten* by having a deity projected onto them or invited to take up residence (*gnas*) in the consecration ceremony termed *rab-gnas*.

### iii. Putting the *Gnas* Back into *Gnas-skor*

The preceding discussion may be a somewhat tiresome recapitulation for scholars of Tibet. Most of these ideas have been circulated, discussed or published, and there is much historical and ethnographic material to support them. What is more, there are certain parallels to them described and discussed in the large body of literature on neighbouring South and East Asian societies. What does all this have to do with pilgrimage? I would venture to say that pilgrimage in its various manifestations is one of the most widespread ritual ensembles practised in the Tibetan cultural world. Its universality as a major form through which persons and places or sites are ritually related is beyond doubt. Yet, the growing body of studies and reviews of Tibetan pilgrimage practice appears not to have taken careful and systematic account of all these conceptions about *gnas*.

Tibetan pilgrimage is certainly a complex phenomenon, being motivated by various goals, employing multiple dimensions of ritual activity and directed towards a huge range of *gnas* and *rten*. There are fundamental Tibetan conceptions of what a 'pilgrimage' is which do not correspond well with the meaning of that word in English and other European languages: generally, 'a journey to a holy place'. Nor do they correspond entirely with the Sanskrit terms *pradakṣiṇā* (lit. 'moving clockwise') or *yātrā* ('journey'). A careful etymology is vital here. For 'pilgrimage' Tibetans commonly use the terms *gnas-skor* (lit. 'going around a *gnas*'), and *gnas-mjal* (lit. 'to encounter/meet a *gnas*'). These two compounds are interchangeable, and both the verbs *bskor-ba* and *mjal-ba* (an honorific form) are frequently used in oral and written descriptions of pilgrimage practice.

A Tibetan pilgrimage then is generally a *circular* journey around a *gnas* which constitutes and/or involves *encounter(s)* of some kind. As a circular journey it differs from the English 'pilgrimage'. Although the term *pradakṣiṇā* implies a 'centre' or 'place' which one must go around, explicit notions of *gnas* and *mjal* are missing from that term, and Tibetan *gnas-skor* can be performed in both directions. The cliché is 'clockwise for Buddhists, counterclockwise for Bon-po', yet in practice, at sites that are important and popular, this is not necessarily the

case. For instance, at Kong-po Bon-ri Buddhists circumambulate counterclockwise,<sup>36</sup> while at Tsa-ri Bon-po circumambulate clockwise, and all women do half a circuit in each direction. There are other exceptions.

I see no problem with translating the term *gnas* as 'place' in the context of pilgrimage as long as Tibetan understandings and assumptions about *gnas* are taken fully into account. The most important Tibetan pilgrimage 'places' are termed *gnas-chen* (sometimes *gnas-bzang* or *gnas-rtsa chen-po* in colloquial speech) and *gnas-mchog*, which could be translated as 'great place/abode' or 'principal place/abode'; and *gnas-ri* as 'mountain abode', most often of a regional deity (*yul-lha.*). Such terms can be applied to natural landscapes, urban sites (e.g. Lhasa), religious structures and icons, or the place of residence or 'seat' (*gdan-sa*) of high lamas and incarnations. According to Tibetan etymologies I have collected *gnas* in the term *gnas-skor* always carries the double meaning of the actual physical place, and of the residence or existence of deities, entities or beings believed to be powerful or significant in some way by the pilgrims who go there for an encounter (*mjal-ba*). There is much ritual evidence to suggest that the physical place and the vital principle or being that resides there are always so closely associated that they are considered and treated as identical.

That is my brief review of the fundamental *emic* conceptions of Tibetan pilgrimage. The reader will have noticed that I have hardly referred to Buddhism, nor mentioned merit, karma, rebirth, let alone 'liberation'. It seems to me that any research on Tibetan pilgrimage rituals and sites must acknowledge the continuity in, and persistence of, certain aspects of the Tibetan world-view concerning places and persons and their relationship. Perhaps we could even say that when we talk of 'Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage' what is most 'Tibetan' about it is a certain orientation to place, while what is most 'Buddhist' about it is a system of Indic metaphysical imperatives (*saṃsāra, karma, nirvāṇa*) which are fitted together with this orientation to place.<sup>37</sup> But the question of what Buddhism itself is stands in need of thorough debate, and the often monolithic interpretations of Westerners need to be compared with various *emic* classifications and with local ethnographic and historical data. Such propositions as mine need to be carefully assessed in terms of the type of distinctions that Samuel has recently proposed for Tibet as a Buddhist society, those of 'shamanic Buddhism' and 'clerical Buddhism'.<sup>38</sup> I pose this here as an issue for further critical reflection.

Other types of distinction appear to have been made already. There are now about eight published Western discussions or general overviews of 'Tibetan pilgrimage' and 'Tibetan

<sup>36</sup> Karnay (1992:531).

<sup>37</sup> Whether one could venture the same about systematized Bon in Tibet I cannot say as I have never observed or studied any Bon-po pilgrimages in detail.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel (1985). As of the time of this writing I have not yet read his book-length study of this distinction (*Civilized Shamans. Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, 1993 in press).



Buddhist pilgrimage' which vary greatly in length and detail.<sup>39</sup> They all provide interesting materials, and some are cited as standard references on the subject. The three longest of these pieces never mention the terms *gnas-skor* and *gnas-mjal* or their etymologies. Many of them emphasize the ritual primacy of *pradakṣiṇā*, using that term to describe what Tibetans do, and state that Tibetan pilgrimage derives from India or Indian Buddhism.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, the pieces written by anthropologists pay closer attention to the actual practices and language used in specific contexts. Some of the reviews begin their discussions of the important Tibetan sites of pilgrimage with those significant to Indian Buddhism before relating details of the so-called 'natural' or 'indigenous' sites in Tibet, while others orient their accounts towards local and regional Tibetan sites. Many of them mention that the motivations and rewards of pilgrimage are both Buddhist doctrinal ones, and less doctrinal 'worldly' ones.

Overall in these accounts emphasis is given to the role of Indian and Buddhist influences, yet at the same time attention is always paid to the so-called 'local', 'indigenous' and 'natural' aspects of Tibetan pilgrimage. In dealing with such a diverse and complex phenomenon most scholars seem to divide the material up into that which fits with a certain view of doctrinal Indian Buddhism on the one hand, and local Tibetan data that does not fit with it on the other.<sup>41</sup> This tendency to 'split' may partly be a result of what could be called the 'encyclopedia syndrome', of having to fit a complex subject into a small publishing space. But I think it also has to do with according explanatory priority to particular Western representations of Indic Buddhism rather than looking long and hard at what actually happens or happened on the ground in Tibet. Whatever the case, I think this analytical split in the treatment of Tibetan pilgrimage will not lead to any advances in our understanding, or in the quality of our representations. None of the accounts discussed have attempted any substantial analysis of the fundamental categories of place and person that Tibetans assume and work with as pilgrims. I propose that attention paid to these topics will be of benefit in future studies.

## *A New Approach To Research?*

### i. Problems of Distinctions and Interpretation

In line with what I have said so far, I am also proposing a review of the ways we consider the various classes of activities and practices that are commonly attendant on Tibetan pilgrimage,

<sup>39</sup> Berbaum (1987), Blondeau (1960), Dowman (1988), Ekvall (1964), Jest (1975 and also 1985), Macdonald (1985), Ngawang Dak-pa (1987), Stablein (1978). There may well be others I have not yet seen. Waddell (1895) made an early 'review' of Tibetan pilgrimage practice, but I would not include it here as it is only contemporary scholarship that concerns me.

<sup>40</sup> This also occurs in secondary sources; see for example Aziz (1987:251).

<sup>41</sup> Compare the related comments made by Martin (1992:191).

and indeed often constitute in their totality what the 'pilgrimage' actually is for Tibetans themselves. I base my comments mainly on observations and participation in over a dozen different Tibetan pilgrimages in the TAR, North India, Nepal and Bhutan during the last decade. I say this here because I think it is essential to perform Tibetan pilgrimages in order to begin to interpret them, as will become clear from my comments to follow.

The whole notion of ritual, particularly as it is applied to the acts of persons from other cultures, is continually being reviewed and debated in Western social theory. I am not about to enter that process on a theoretical level, but I would like to point out certain tendencies in the way Westerners have analyzed the practices of Tibetan pilgrims, and the implications of a possible change in emphasis. In a recent overview of 'Himalayan rituals', including Tibet, Macdonald has indicated the great variety of types of Tibetan ritual practice, made even more complex by the fact that they can also include a significant meditational component.<sup>42</sup> This statement reflects the situation of Tibetan pilgrimage practice generally: difficult to define, with many aspects, and a meditational dimension as well.

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There is no *emic* category that corresponds well to 'ritual', and no detailed classification either. Tucci has pointed out the Buddhist distinction between *cho-ga* (*vidhi*), which can only be performed by initiated persons, such as monks, and different types of *mchod-pa*, which can also be performed by lay persons.<sup>43</sup> But this division does not get us very far with pilgrimage practice as the 'rituals' he includes in both these categories, and many others besides that do not fit into them, are involved. To perhaps show how these terms and distinctions may be used by Tibetan-speaking peoples we should note here a proverb that Jest recorded some years ago, "Le pèlerinage est l'offrande religieuse du laïc", which reads in Tibetan, *gnas-skor 'jig-rten gyi cho-ga yin*.<sup>44</sup> Also, the practices related in guides and manuals for pilgrims are only superficially helpful. They mention either the most common Buddhist type, the standard textual formula always being 'prostration, offering and circumambulation' (*phyag mchod dang skor-ba byed-pa*), or acts that are very particular to a certain site being described. My rule of thumb in the field has been to note the frequency of various practices and acts on pilgrimages, and in written accounts, and group them primarily on the basis of my informants' explanations, which might vary in any particular instance. This is perhaps no less crude than imposing an *etic* scheme, although I have found that a pattern has emerged that is different in important respects from the analysis of many Westerners. Briefly, this is that while Tibetans (including lay persons, and at times clerics and lamas) may often explain things in terms of physicality and substance, Westerners look for, and see, mainly 'symbolic', 'mental' and metaphysical aspects.

<sup>42</sup> Macdonald 'Avant propos' (1987).

<sup>43</sup> Tucci (1980: chapt. 5 & 6).

<sup>44</sup> Jest (1975:353).

The same trend is confirmed by surveying the materials in published sources. For instance, one practice for which Tibetan pilgrimages are well known is circumambulation (*skor*) of a *gnas* performed by measuring out full-length body prostrations (*phyag-'tshal*). Concerning the ritual purpose of the two common components of this 'combination act', there is a clichéd Tibetan formulation which states:

Defilements (*sgrib*) of the body will be cleansed through prostration and circumambulation, defilements of speech will be cleansed through taking refuge and praying, and defilements of mind will be cleansed through praying with one-pointed devotion.<sup>45</sup>

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His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama recently made this observation about the practice of prostration circumambulation at Mount Kailash (the italics are mine):

When you walk a circular pilgrimage route, such as this one around Mount Kailash, your feet touch the earth with big spaces between them, but when you prostrate, *your whole body connects with the sacred ground* to close the circle.<sup>46</sup>

These Tibetan explanations focus on *lus-kyi-sgrib*, a form of pollution associated with substances and the physical body, and also the importance of maximum ritual contact with the empowered substance of a *gnas-chen*. The following Western interpretation of the same act is found in a recently published encyclopedia of religion, under the standard reference for 'Tibetan Pilgrimage':

...the more difficult the pilgrimage, the more merit the pilgrim acquires. Tibetans often increase the difficulty of their pilgrimages by measuring their journeys with full-body prostrations. Ascetic practices of this sort are also meant to burn away mental defilements and purify the mind for further progress along the path to enlightenment.<sup>47</sup>

The differences here speak for themselves, and this is by no means an isolated case. But Tibetans too, particularly Buddhist clerics, are often ready with 'pukkah' doctrinal explanations to justify their ritual behaviour, and a standard formula of 'chapter and verse' can sometimes be offered ('In *sūtra* X the Buddha said..., therefore we do this here.'). However, these accounts often do not tally at all with, or include much of what they actually do on pilgrimages, or how their fellow pilgrims explain things. But if they make a connection in all sincerity who am I to question the validity of it? It is certain that to the majority of Tibetans, pilgrimages,

<sup>45</sup> *Lus kyi sgrib pa sbyong phyir phyag 'tshal dang skor ba / ngag gi sgrib pa sbyong phyir skyabs 'gro dang gsol 'debs / yid kyi sgrib pa sbyong phyir rtse gcig gus pas gsol 'debs*; c.f. also Dowman (1988:6).

<sup>46</sup> The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *My Tibet* (1990:132).

<sup>47</sup> Bernbaum (1987:351). Here he is invoking the Indic model found in Hindu pilgrimage concerning the generation of ascetic 'heat' (*tapas*) by way of austerities and difficulties of performance.

whatever else they may be about, are often related to concerns about merit, rebirth, and so on. I would not deny them their interpretations, but merely point out that when it comes to certain practices the classical Indic explanations offered by 'quick draw' Buddhists are only a minority voice, and they do not fit well with the other evidence.

All this highlights a general problem of interpretation which relates back to my discussions of *gnas*, place and person, and pilgrimage above. What is 'obvious' or completely taken for granted in a culture often lacks any form of systematic expression, as Sax recently stated:

It is important to distinguish explicit formulations, which may be anything from simple statements to complex metaphysical systems, from the implicit categories and habitual practices—the world view—in terms of which they are expressed...formal statements about the world and humanity's place in it are based upon certain "commonsense" assumptions and categories that, like the categories of grammar and syntax, are neither criticized, nor reflected upon, nor explicitly formulated (at least not very often). Because people rarely feel the need to formalize such categories, they generally remain implicit and must therefore be inferred from the languages in which they are encoded, the institutions in which they are embedded, and the thoughts and actions that they have influenced.<sup>48</sup>

We lack an abundance of explicit, formal Tibetan theories about the relationships between persons and place, yet a great deal can be inferred about them through careful study and observation, or brought to articulation by the inquiries of outsiders to whom these things are not obvious. And I believe that many Western scholars and some Tibetans would all too readily fill this lacuna with the explicit and sophisticated formulations, such as Buddhism, that they already know well, in order to account for certain aspects of life whose logic is implicit.

## ii. An Alternative View: Place, Space, Bodies and Substances

In what follows I would like to draw attention to Tibetan practices and ideas that are commonly found in relation to pilgrimages, but which, although they are mentioned in some accounts, rarely, if ever, figure in the overall explanatory strategies employed by Westerners. In doing so I will be building on all that I have mentioned above about *gnas* and *gnas-skor*, and suggesting an alternative framework for interpretation.

Tibetan pilgrimage has primarily to do with persons forming certain relationships with a *gnas*, which often has a *rten* (object, building, human body, etc.) as its basis, is physically located on the earth's surface, and is assigned a particular ontological value. It is about the inherent power of certain places in relation to a given ontology, and how people can become involved with and capitalise on that. Mental and physical acts structure this relationship at

<sup>48</sup> Sax (1991:10).

various levels, which can involve types of representational synthesis and identification (by visualization/meditation), and a host of actual physical contacts, both those that are tangible and others that are believed to be sublime. Most commonly it is about a direct (and observable) physical, sensory relationship of person and place through *seeing* (in both the sense of direct encounter (*mjal*) and 'reading' and interpreting landscape, etc.), *touching* (by contacting the place), *positioning* (body in relation to place), *consuming/tasting* (by ingesting place substance), *collecting* (substances of the place), *exchanging* (place substance with personal substances/possessions), *vocalizing* (prayers addressed to the place or specific formulas), and even in some cases *listening* (for sounds produced by the place).

Perhaps more could be added here, but these are all classes of practices I have catalogued during Tibetan pilgrimages, and which are further attested in Tibetan and Western written sources. Some of these relational forms have a conscious 'mental' dimension. And although yogins as pilgrims may practise the most exclusively mental of relational forms, such as visualizations, they attend to the physical ones as much as other practitioners, and in certain instances even more so. The ritual imperative is that contacts and identifications must be made, and I am suggesting that any performance done during a Tibetan pilgrimage can be read in this way.

When observing pilgrimages certain of these physical relational forms may be easily misinterpreted, or even missed altogether. A pilgrim who appears to be just staring at a rock may be in the process of a sophisticated landscape interpretation exercise. The picking up of stones, pinches of soil or dust, the drinking of water, and other collections and consumptions of the physical environment of a *gnas* are all common relational forms. Unless they are highly routinized at a particular spot, or consistent inquiries are made about them to pilgrims, or one has prior knowledge that they will occur there, much of this level of pilgrimage, and its frequency, can go unnoticed by the 'outside' observer. However, there are numerous individual references to them in accounts of Tibet,<sup>49</sup> and instances are documented in the present work. All the same comments apply to the concern for relational exchanges, that is, the deposit of personal substances and items at a *gnas*, as opposed to regular offerings, such as butter, prayer flags, and so on. A whole range of mental relational forms are of course only revealed through testimonies, yet Tibetans will also give testimony of how a Tantric practitioner's deity yoga was so perfectly developed at a certain place that the deity of the

<sup>49</sup> For a range of examples see Buffetrille (1993 in press:56), Dowman (1988:102, 212), Johnson & Moran (1989:42, 45-6), Mumford (1989:97), Pranavananda (1983:12, 50, 127 n., 132), Waddell (1894:309-10, 320). One might also note here that the value of collected *gnas* substances is such that they are bought, sold and traded among Tibetans. I should make it clear that such substances are not classified as relics by Tibetans, although a relic itself may be the *rtan* on which a *gnas* is based. Martin has discussed classification of Tibetan relics, and makes the distinction that "...in Tibet, the emphasis of the relic cult was less on the wonder working power of relics and more on the miraculous nature of the relics in and of themselves." (1992:183). The opposite is true of *gnas* substances, which are mundane materials with 'enhanced' properties. They are believed to have the power to heal, protect and so on, hence their exchange value.

*gnas* being visualized appeared as an objective reality to others. Whatever one may think of such accounts, they reveal that the dividing line between the 'physical' and 'mental' that Westerners generally use is not always sharp for Tibetans. Again, what is perhaps more important to them is contacts and identifications rather than distinctions of this type.

I do not know of, nor have I had explained to me, a comprehensive Tibetan formulation of substance categories and properties that could be applied to persons, places, objects, and their relationship, such as the way one might find Hindus using the *guṇa* system and Indian particle theories. Yet Tibetans do make some explicit formulations about substance and body categories and properties specifically in relation to *gnas* and their visits to them. These formulations constitute an *emic* explanatory basis for most pilgrimage practice which is assumed prior to many Buddhist doctrinal explanations. They implicate and explicate both non-Buddhist Tibetan as well as Indian Buddhist precedents, and they can be invoked to explain and satisfy both Buddhist religious motivations and goals as well as ones that are entirely mundane.

Works discussing so-called Tibetan 'folk' culture catalogue a great variety of beliefs and practices concerning illness and cures, purification, agriculture, building, childbirth, magical practices (for love, revenge, etc.), weather-making, fertility, good and bad fortune, and so on. They are sometimes referred to as 'superstitions' but they should be taken seriously, at least for the fact that they assume a set of relations between persons, substances, and *gnas* and their non-human residents.<sup>50</sup> The consistently explicit mechanism for many of these relations is the concept of *sgrib* (sometimes *grib*), literally a 'shadow' or 'stain'. It is generally conceived as a form of pollution (or in some cases a class of noxious deities) which is strongly related to substances and various actions, and to deities inhabiting both the body and the external world. The conception of *sgrib* is often discussed in ethnographies of Tibetan-speaking peoples, and shown to have various implications for social relations.<sup>51</sup> What strikes me is that concerns about *sgrib* become socially manifest in the spacial ordering between persons, and between persons and *gnas*, and the ranking of persons and substances by degree of presence/absence of 'impurity' (*mi-gtsang-pa*).

In Tibetan Buddhism the term *sgrib* is also used in a more complex way to describe both gross and fine physical, verbal and mental 'defilements' associated with the three levels of the psycho-physical person, as we saw in the Tibetan quote concerning the cleansing of *sgrib* through ritual practice above. It is important to recognise that in some sophisticated Tibetan interpretations the term is used in translating concepts like the Sanskrit *dvyāvaraṇa* (*sgrib-gnyis*), or 'twin veils/defilements', yet to many other Tibetan Buddhists it simply denotes

<sup>50</sup> See for example Chopel (1983), Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956), Stein (1972), Tucci (1980).

<sup>51</sup> See for example Mumford (1989), Ortner (1978), Schicklgruber (1992); also Chopel (1983:3, passim), Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956: 307, 388-9), Tucci (1980:173, 201).

physical or social pollution as outlined above. The picture is complicated by the introduction of Buddhist ethical concerns, and the contamination caused by 'moral transgression' (*sdig*). The foundational process of Tibetan Tantric practice involves the removal of *sgrib* from the psycho-physical person in four progressive stages. Here *sgrib* is related to a form of interior ranking of the person's abilities as a practitioner, yet this can also have external implications in the way he or she may be accorded social status and relate to place and space in certain instances.

The overall picture of the role of *sgrib* in Tibetan thinking is much more complex than this. I only briefly introduce the concept here because in my research *sgrib* frequently occurred as an *emic* explanatory strategy for pilgrimage practice and person-substance-place relationships from lay persons, clerics and Tantra practitioners alike. They also, even more frequently, invoke the concept of *byin* in this context. This concept, its translation, and its meaning for Tibetans in relation to *gnas* also require discussion.

In the majority of Western sources *byin* is translated as 'blessings', as it commonly occurs in compounds such as *byin-can* ('blessed') or *byin-gyis-brlabs* ('blessing'). In the context of *gnas* and pilgrimage in the way I have described them here I prefer to use 'empowerment' (*byin-gyis-brlabs*), conceived of as a process that affects the environment, much like the fields in modern physics, and which produces the 'empowered' (*byin-can*). I will explain how this fits better with most Tibetan conceptions of the term.

We know that in the language of the pre-Buddhist royal cult the central figure, the *btsan-po* or divine king, was held to possess *byin* as a personal property or quality of his physical body. As an essential, powerful characteristic in this context *byin* is translated as 'splendour' or 'glory'.<sup>52</sup> During the early translation of Indic Buddhist concepts into Tibetan, we find in the *Mahā-vyutpatti* (early ninth century) that Tibetans used *byin-gyi-brlabs/byin-brlabs-pa* for the translation of *adhiṣṭhāna*.<sup>53</sup> The Sanskrit can be glossed by 'authority', 'power', 'residence', 'abode', 'seat', taken from *adhiṣṭhā* ( $\sqrt{\text{sthā}}$ ) 'to stand upon', 'to inhabit', 'to abide', 'to stand over', 'to govern', etc. (see Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p.22). This is not only close to the early Tibetan conception of *byin* as an aspect of divine royal power, but also to how *gnas* are later understood. I am not suggesting that Tibetan conceptions of *gnas* derive from India, but that notions of power (or 'status?') and place, and perhaps even height, are all found in the concept that Tibetans represented with *byin-gyis-brlabs*.

In Tibetan Tantra *byin-gyis-brlabs* can denote a specific relationship between a deity and practitioner. For example, in a discussion of the 'generation stage' (*bskyed-rim*) in which a deity is mentally constructed through visualization Stein states, "[The generation stage] underlies

<sup>52</sup> See A. Macdonald (1971), Richardson (1985).

<sup>53</sup> See *Mahā-vyutpatti*:1580-1584; 4264, 4305, 5591, 6364, 7591, 9054.

every ritual practice; for to have any effect a rite requires the presence of the appropriate deity, who thereby bestows a 'blessing' (*byin-rlabs*, Sanskrit *adhiṣṭhāna*)—the power of action—on the officiant."<sup>54</sup> But in general Tibetans understand it in a much broader context as a 'field of power' in place and space, and one can translate *byin-gyis-brlabs* literally as 'flooded by power', or 'suffused with power', hence 'empowerment'.<sup>55</sup> In line with what I have explained here, and also some social dimensions that I will discuss below, I justify the translation of terms like *gnas-chen* with 'power place'. At the risk of being identified as a part of the 'New Age' movement, I opt for this term as I think it best describes overall Tibetan assumptions about such sites. Here are three short statements to illustrate how contemporary Tibetan clerics and lamas represent 'empowerment' in relation to place with three slightly different points of view. Firstly, His Holiness the Dalai Lama states:

Many pilgrims visit places where highly devout spiritual masters spent time in the past. The presence of that person makes the place seem somehow blessed or charged, as if there is some kind of electricity around it. Pilgrims come to feel these mysterious vibrations and to try to see some of the same visions the devout master saw.<sup>56</sup>

A senior dGe-lugs-pa teacher told me:

All objects at power places (*gnas-chen*) have the empowerment (*byin-gyis-brlabs*) of the deities and great practitioners associated with that place. It is like [the effects of] water soaking into things, so it includes rocks, dirt, water, plants, trees; this is also called 'empowerment of *gnas* (i.e. as residence)' (*gnas-kyi byin-brlab*), for example a Heruka place (*gnas*) has Heruka's empowerment, and a Guru Rinpoche place his empowerment. So this empowerment can be collected in the form of rocks, dirt, plant parts, and so on, and due to the Tibetans' great faith in the power of these things they do collect them.<sup>57</sup>

Lastly, a Tibetan rNying-ma-pa lama from village Nepal gives an interesting statement concerning empowerment relating it to Buddhist cosmology. One should note the atemporal conception of the quality of empowerment here:

During the good age the whole earth was Chinlab. Now during the bad age [*bskal-pa btsoḡ-pa*] there is a deterioration [*nyams-pa*] of the nutritious value of the earth. Thus the fortune of humans also deteriorates. But the Buddha has

<sup>54</sup> Stein (1972:181).

<sup>55</sup> Compare Snellgrove (1987:634) "empowerment (*adhiṣṭhāna*)...*byin-gyis-brlabs-pa* = pervaded by grace".

<sup>56</sup> The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *My Tibet* (1990:140).

<sup>57</sup> Geshe Ngawang Dargyey, interview, Dunedin 1987. Throughout this work I will refer to my informants in a number of ways: either by their actual names; or by using their initials after the first occurrence if they are frequently cited; or by using pseudonyms in cases where either they or I wish to have their identities masked for particular reasons.



established sites [*gnas*] where deterioration from the good age does not occur. In Muktinath the original fire burns in water in harmony, and there the rocks and soil are as they were at the beginning of time. We collect these and bring them back so we can insert them in our Chortens [stupas] and in the soil of the fields to delay deterioration, restoring to some extent the qualities of the good age.<sup>58</sup>

These are fairly sophisticated formulations by educated Tibetans who employ various Buddhist teachings for their purpose, even though their interpretations are non-canonical.<sup>59</sup> The physical and substantial nature of empowerment is even more developed in most lay accounts, and they are also more 'impersonal'. Usually the deities and 'great masters' are not even mentioned, just the fact that certain substances are empowered and if collected can be used in a variety of ways for protection, healing, purification, restoring vitality, the fertility and health of farm animals, and so on. In general they counter the effects of *sgrib*.

For all Tibetans *sgrib* and *byin-gyis-brlabs* are fundamental aspects of a Tibetan formulation of relationships between persons, and between persons and places, especially during pilgrimage, but in other contexts as well. Generally, the two notions work together as opposites in the context of pilgrimage practice. In my account of Tsa-ri, for instance, we will see how *sgrib* as physical pollution for the lay practitioner or as complex psycho-physical defilement for the Tantrist are both cleansed by practising in the environment of a highly empowered *gnas*. Both levels of transformation can be related, albeit not exclusively, to Buddhist metaphysical goals, such as advanced rebirths, the attainment of paranormal powers (*siddhi*) and even enlightenment. But such transformations always require rituals of contact and identification to effect them.

For all types of interpreters the field of *byin* has a focus at the centre at which the *rtan* or deity of a *gnas* resides. The closer one is to this ideal centre the stronger the empowerment potential. This has consequences for the ordering of space, and in all cases centrality and relative height are given priority over periphery and relative lowness. That persons have various conditions of presence or absence of *sgrib*, and that *gnas* and other parts of the environment possess various levels of *byin* imply a gradient of ontological status of personhood and place. Social ranking and the relational ordering of persons in space are both related to this gradient in the ascribed quality, or perhaps better, 'value', of being. In the remainder of my text I will give details of how this ordering and ranking was performed and lived out around a 'natural' *gnas*, a mountain landscape conceived of in the context of a Buddhist

<sup>58</sup> Mumford (1989:97). Karma Samten, a Tibetan bKa'-brgyud-pa cleric living in New Zealand, toured the country on his arrival and collected substances from all the local *gnas* here. These were combined with *gnas* materials from Tibetan and Buddhist pilgrimage places and used to empower a *stūpa* built in the North Island, which he described as uniting the powers of the New Zealand and Tibetan environments.

<sup>59</sup> For accounts showing that similar types of ideas and related practices also existed in other Asian Buddhist contexts see Schopen (1987) and Tambiah (1984).

representational system in Tibet. The same implied ordering and ranking is found in many other instances in pre-modern Tibet. As a comparison to my account of an 'encounter with place' (*gnas-mjal-ba*) at Tsa-ri in the 1950s, here is a brief Western description of an 'encounter with person' (*zhal-mjal-ba*) in the form of a pilgrimage to the Paṅ-chen Lama (as *gnas/rten* embodying the Buddha Amitābha) at bKra-shis lHun-po in the late eighteenth century:

A vast crowd of people came to pay their respects, and to be blessed by the Lāma. He was seated under a canopy in the court of the palace. They were all ranged in a circle. First came the lay folks. Everyone according to his circumstances brought some offering...All these offerings were received by the Lāma's servants, who put a bit of silk with a knot upon it tied, or supposed to be tied, with the Lāma's own hands, about the necks of the votaries. After this they advanced up to the Lāma, who sat cross-legged upon a throne formed with seven cushions, and he touched their head with his hands, or with a tassel hung from a stick, according to their rank and character. The ceremonial is this: upon the gylong [i.e. monks with highest vows] or laymen of very high rank he lays his palm, the nuns and inferior laymen have a cloth interposed between his hand and their heads; and the lower class of people are touched as they pass by with the tassel which he holds in his hand...Such as had children on their backs were particularly solicitous that the child's head should be touched with the tassel...After the Lāma retired, many people stayed behind that they might kiss the cushions upon which he had sat.<sup>60</sup>

Similar dynamics of ordering and ranking, although often now modified and less strictly observed, still operate in the large public initiation ceremonies and pilgrim's audiences involving the Dalai Lama and other lamas which I have attended in the TAR and India. Such an account again attests to the ritual priority given to physical contacts and contiguity, which assumes much of what I have stated above. Ranking and status of person and place is not just assumed in the ordering of space in these situations, it is both implicit and explicit in various other ways as it relates to presence/absence of pollution or defilement and potential for radiation of empowerment.

The Tibetan language, like many others, has various levels of common and honorific speech, plus other markers that indicate rank and status. I will briefly discuss those I know of applied in written and spoken text to person and place specifically in the context of pilgrimage. In general there are two interrelated representations applied to persons: levels of purity/absence of pollution, and levels of facility of cognition. Most persons who visit *gnas* as pilgrims are described as falling into two main classes, that is, 'ordinary persons' (*so-skye-bo*) and 'excellent persons' or 'saints' (*skyes-bu dam-pa*). They can be ranked as to whether they are 'pure' (*dag-pa*) or 'impure beings/defiled persons' (*ma-dag-'gro/mi-gtsang-pa*) referring to the status of their *sgrib* and *sdig*. Their abilities in perception and understanding are ranked according to their level of purity (which also relates to karmic status) with the 'highest'

<sup>60</sup> Waddell (1895:321).

(*mchog-rab*, lit. 'most superior') described as those with 'pure vision' (*snang-ba dag-pa*), followed by the 'middling' (*'bring-po*) and the 'lowest' (*mtha'-ma*). Places too are ranked; just as the term *gnas* applied to a place denotes its ontological value as potentially greater than other locations, as explained above. The compounds of *gnas*, such as *gnas-chen*, etc., indicate places of very high ontological value. Those with the highest deities in residence, that is having the status of Buddhas and archetype deities (*yi-dam*), are called 'pure places' or 'pure abodes' (*gnas dag-pa*), or 'fields of purity' (*dag-zhing*), the latter term being a common synonym for the 'field' or 'world-system' of a Buddha (*sangs-rgyas kyi zhing-khams*). Such places possess the highest ontological value and purity, and radiate the maximum empowerment within their field.

At advanced levels in Tibetan Tantra these distinctions between place and person run together in a socially very significant way. The main foundational practice for archetype deity yoga involves a four-stage purification process in which all three levels of defilement (*sgrib*) of body, speech and mind, both coarse and subtle, and a fourth level of defilements collectively, are successively purified through a system of consecrations. This prepares the practitioner through empowerment to work with, and realize identification with, the deity involved in the practice. During these stages of elimination of *sgrib* the language applied to the practitioner changes from common to honorific as his or her ascribed ontological status changes. Thus for 'body' *lus* becomes *sku*, for speech *ngag* becomes *gsung*, and for mind *gid* becomes *thugs*.<sup>61</sup>

Not only does the person's status rise internally due to purity, it does so externally in various senses. When the practitioner has become fully identified with the deity in yoga then they have attained the same ontological status as that deity. In this way practitioners become the basis for a *gnas* themselves, they radiate empowerment to others and into the surrounding environment (c.f. the Dalai Lama's quote above). If the successful ability to contact and/or identify with archetype deities, Buddhas, and so on, is generally ascribed to a person in Tibetan society then they can be accorded exceptionally high rank and status. The other way this might happen is if they are recognised as an incarnation directly, as in the case of the Paṅ-chen Lama above. The social implications of this are far-reaching in the Tibetan cultural world. In at least one dimension, it is clear that proximity to high Tantric and incarnate lamas in a political system in which they acted as heads of state and occupied other positions of power implied a high social rank or status. Writers such as Petech and Goldstein have described a Tibetan government system of several centuries' standing with a ranked bureaucracy in which there was both clerical and aristocratic competition to get closer to, and gain access to, the centre, i.e., the Dalai Lama and his inner circle.<sup>62</sup> I would venture to suggest that being associated with the most highly regarded pilgrimage places in Tibet could also be used

<sup>61</sup> Tucci (1980) gives details of the process.

<sup>62</sup> Goldstein (1989), Petech (1973).

in various ways to generate the symbolic capital<sup>63</sup> required to maintain and increase social position. I will explore how this might be so in the body of my work.

There is a further dimension to all this involving morality, and although I have not discussed this with my informants in detail I think it worthy of a preliminary statement here. In Tibetan, 'purity' as *dag-pa* carries with it the senses of 'authenticity', 'rightness', 'correctness', and its compounds denote legal correctness. The Buddhas and other top-ranking deities are the highest expression of moral being, and so by extension are those persons who are recognised as incarnations or fully accomplished Tantrists; they all have high *dag-pa*. Those ordinary, impure beings who are contaminated with degrees of *sgrib* are of a low moral standing relative to this. The Buddhist notion of *sdig(pāpa)* as 'moral transgressions' is often compounded with *sgrib*, especially in clerical discourse, to explain the gradient of moral status. But I cannot say whether it is frequently envisaged as an embodied quality by many Tibetans. If *dag* and *sgrib* are relative moral indicators, and if they are embodied properties of persons, what about the moral status of the substances of those persons, and of places described as being highly *dag-pa*, and the logic of transactions between them?

Those who are familiar with ethnosociological accounts of Indian South Asia will notice that I am exploring the possibility for Tibet of an analogous model of the type of "Transactional culture" Marriot and others have proposed for Hindu India.<sup>64</sup> For example, they point out:

...a South Asian's moral qualities are thought to be altered by the changes in his [sic.] body resulting from eating certain foods, engaging in certain kinds of sexual intercourse, taking part in certain ceremonies, or falling under certain other kinds of influence. Bodily substance and code for conduct are thus thought to be not fixed but malleable, and to be not separated but mutually immanent features: the coded substance moves and changes as one thing throughout the life of each person and group. Actions enjoined by these embodied codes are thought of as transforming the substances in which they are embodied.<sup>65</sup>

This is related through Indian formulations to social ranking and interrelations. I think what is stated here is approximated in various ways by all the material I have presented above. Yet, it seems Tibetans do not have the same types of formal theories as Hindu South Asians do to explain why, for instance, contiguity is so important to them in many contexts. The situation seems to be the opposite. In general, what can be inferred from many Tibetan practices, ways of using language, and so on, which might lead us in the direction of such a model, is denied by Indic Buddhist doctrinal interpretations at various levels. Ironically it is

<sup>63</sup> See Bourdieu (1977:171-183), whose discussion of the concept entails the convertibility of forms of symbolic capital, such as prestige and renown, back into economic capital.

<sup>64</sup> Marriot (1976), Marriot & Inden (1977). See also Daniel (1984), Inden & Nicholas (1977), Sax (1990).

<sup>65</sup> Marriot & Inden (1977:228).

Buddhism that has brought morality in an explicit manner into play in relations between persons and place. The ideological 'victory' of Tibetan Buddhist 'conversion dramas', located in relation to specific landscapes/abodes (*gnas*), and which are in a sense ongoing, is also represented as a moral one over the forces of perversion. I think there are some important issues to be addressed here, but I am hesitant to continue this discussion without first doing further research.

SEE ERRATA

## *Summary Comments*

I have reviewed Tibetan conceptions concerning *gnas* as I have come to understand them through my own studies and observations and the explanations of my informants. I think this clearly shows how Tibetan notions of the activities we usually call 'pilgrimage' are intimately related to the assumption of certain categories and qualities of place and person. This fundamental *emic* relationship has been either understated or overlooked in much previous work on Tibetan pilgrimage practice. By reconsidering ideas about place and the relationship between persons and places expressed in the rituals which constitute pilgrim's practice I suggest that in certain important contexts at least, the ontological value of place and its space and substance is intimately related to the status of personhood. Forms of social organisation in geographical space are related to Tibetan assumptions about this relationship. The materials on Tsa-ri presented in this study give many examples of how conceptions of place, person and status are related and lived out in a particular Tibetan instance.

I have intentionally screened out much that is explicitly Buddhist in this presentation. I have been trying to expose and relate together a collection of long-standing Tibetan assumptions and ideas which I think are all too often glossed over or denied by non-Tantric Buddhist interpretations. In contrast to this I have specifically addressed Tibetan Tantra a number of times. There are certain important continuities between the *emic* assumptions and formulations I am interested in and aspects of Tantra as it was, and in some respects still is, practised and socially expressed in Tibetan society. In the following chapters presenting life at Tsa-ri I have not suppressed any of the Buddhist explanatory strategies of my informants. Thus, the set of ideas about places, persons and substances and their interrelationships that I have explored can be appreciated in a context which is seen as fully Buddhist from the Tibetans' own point of view.

This particular Buddhist context found at Pure Crystal Mountain reveals clearly the extension and incorporation of enduring Tibetan ideas about the world with Tantric logics and practices. Such mountains have continued to be the focus for intense contacts and identifications with the non-human order of beings. At them, and in them, the *btsan-po* and his *sku-bla* and the shamanic ladder-climbing *dpa'-bo* and their *lha*, came to be joined by the Tantric yogin and *yi-dam*. This latest divine-human *ensemble* arranged the space of the mountain as a *maṇḍala*, a gigantic psycho-cosmogram, in order to act out the sublime performance of their union.

The representation of their specialised landscape stage there as *maṇḍala* came to have far-reaching consequences for social landscapes in the Tibetan world. Before I begin a detailed account in chapter two of how this happened at Pure Crystal Mountain in Tibet, it is germane to end here with Tambiah's observation on the prevalence of *maṇḍala* as a form of 'cosmological topography' in South and East Asia:

It is possible to see Indian and Chinese precedents, Hindu and Buddhist sources, for these ideas, but one thing is clear: They could have taken root in Southeast Asia only because indigenous conditions and social practices favored their incorporation or because they represented a "literate" culture's formalization of images already experienced and emergent in local conditions.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Tambiah (1976:103); also Grapard (1982), Lansing (1991), Mus (1935) and Tucci (1970) give examples of the range of different contexts in which the *maṇḍala* was applied in South and East Asia. In a general discussion of Tibetan notions place Stein (1972:41-4) had earlier alluded to what Tambiah is suggesting here.

## Chapter Two

# A Cosmo-drama Comes Down To Earth Space, Landscape and Representation

### *Introduction*

Wheel of great bliss and perfect cognition  
Called glorious Tsā-ri, shining upon everything,  
*Maṇḍala* of gods and goddesses of the three bodies,  
Shrine of the triple world-space, I bow down to you!<sup>1</sup>

I open with this short prayer which itself forms the opening lines of an early nineteenth century Tibetan pilgrim's guide-book to Tsa-ri. To Westerners it may appear as simply another devotional verse. Yet, these four lines contain the essence of an entire complex representational system. It is a system which Tibetans have applied for centuries to a topos, a mountain, that we describe in essence as the 5735 metre peak of Takpa Shiri, lat.28°37', lon.93°15' using our own representational system.<sup>2</sup> Anyone who reads or hears this little verse is given the cues, line by line, that the place encompasses sublime human knowledge and happiness, that it is all-pervasive in its effects, and that it has two architectonic forms, the *maṇḍala* palace and the *stūpa* or shrine (*mchod-sdong*), which constitute at once an abode of many classes of beings and a hierarchized ordering of space and the physical environment.

In this chapter I will present detailed Tibetan representations of this set of essential notions used to define the categories of place and space at Tsa-ri. As indicated in the introductory chapter certain Tibetan ideas permit a high degree of ontological continuity across these divisions of physical reality. Thus, such a task also entails presenting an understanding of the category of 'substance' at the site, as it occurs in what we in the West would classify as sentient and non-sentient 'organic life', and 'inanimate materials'. At this point I will only make brief references to this ontology, and will reveal it in greater detail in other contexts later in the work.

None of the Tibetan representations I will present is exclusive to any one social group, such as highly literate Buddhist practitioners, although it is with these persons that we often find the fullest and most systematic expression of the ideas. Various 'traces' of the representational system I will describe are also found in discourses by persons from all social locations when giving accounts of their cultural understandings of social organisation and practice in the

<sup>1</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.2:170).

<sup>2</sup> See U.S. Army Map Service (1954), Series U502, map NH 46-15 Kyimdong Dzong. Scale: 1:250,000.

area. In this chapter I will rely mostly upon the explanations produced by yogins and clerics. The extended accounts they give constitute the 'big picture' of which smaller vignettes appear in the accounts of other Tibetans, often according to their own particular social positions and interests. The rest of this entire study is dedicated to describing such a system of ideas and how they have been used by Tibetans to explain or justify, to accept or reject, and to reproduce or modify aspects of their lives around the slopes of Pure Crystal Mountain. The materials for such a study are extensive and wide-ranging in nature, and include Indian Tantric Buddhist literature, indigenous Tibetan textual genres, ethnographic accounts of rituals, oral song and prayer texts, paintings, hand-drawn maps, jokes and casual conversations.

For Tibetans this system of representations, or at least the precedents from which it is fully developed, has an origin and a history. And, as is the case in any developed indigenous account, it is with them that we must begin our presentation. The narratives concerning this origin are where the story proper of Tsa-ri and its Pure Crystal Mountain are located in cosmic time. They also serve to classify and contextualise the site into various orders of spacial reference. We can identify these as the Buddhist cosmic space of the world-system, the Tibetan geographic space of the trans-Himalayan zone, and the Tibetan topographic space of the regional landscape. I will now give examples of these origin narratives and detail the set of referents they help determine.

## *Once Upon a Yuga, Down in Jambudvīpa...*

### i. Preamble

A series of talented scholars, among them anthropologists, philologists and Tibetologists such as Tucci, Stein, Iyanaga, Macdonald, and Davidson have demonstrated the importance and great popularity of the narratives on the subjugation of Rudra/Maheśvara by Vajrapāṇi/Heruka in Northern Buddhist traditions.<sup>3</sup> Working from Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese textual sources they have produced a group of historical, doctrinal, text-critical/historical and sociological analyses which consider the development, 'travels' and possible significance of these influential stories.

Ever since reading Tucci's pioneer works as an undergraduate, I too have been drawn into the study of the constellation of materials relating to these narratives. My own understanding has benefitted immensely from the erudition and labours of those mentioned above. However, after reading and re-reading their texts, with perhaps one partial exception (Macdonald 1990), I have found myself returning to the same question: if this narrative or 'mythic' scheme was, and perhaps still is, so influential and popular in Northern Buddhism, how has

<sup>3</sup> Tucci (1932, 1989), Stein (1972, 1973, 1974), Iyanaga (1985), Macdonald (1990), Davidson (1991) and one might also include Allen (1984).



it affected the real social lives of Buddhists? What actually did 'fall down to earth' as this lofty cosmo-drama unfolded, multiplied and travelled through Asian time and space? As a student of Tibetan civilization much of my own research<sup>4</sup> has been attempting to ask this question about aspects of life in a Buddhist region where indigenous versions of the story of the subjugation of Rudra/Maheśvara have probably enjoyed at least an eight or nine hundred year residence. My whole treatment of the subject here will be strictly limited to the specific application of the narrative to the site of Tsa-ri, and its representational implications.

## ii. The Story of Maheśvara's Subjugation at Tsa-ri

For Tibetans the story of the Tsa-ri area and Pure Crystal Mountain begins with important events in the history of our world-system. The spacial setting for the story is the universe itself, but more specifically our cosmic southern continent of Jambudvīpa, as it is conceived in Tantric Buddhist cosmologies which have long been known in Tibet. The events unfold in the context of cosmic time, over the countless millions of years of the four world-ages (*yuga*). It was at the beginning of the present age, the *kali-yuga*, that a cosmo-drama unfolded in which two sets of divine forces competed for hegemonic power, and the control of the world changed hands.

At that time our universe came to be dominated by the powers of an obnoxious divine couple, Bhairava (Rudra) and Kālī, also known as Maheśvara (i.e. Śiva) and Umā (Parvati) in some versions. On one level these characters represent the influences of the Indian system of Śaivism, and on another they can be read as the negative predispositions which need to be overcome by the Tantric yogin. This divine couple and their representatives were then subjugated by a pair (*yab-yum*) of Buddhist archetype deities (*yi-dam*), namely Heruka or Cakrasaṃvara, his consort Vajravārāhī and their own retinue. They not only represent the system of Buddhism, but also the yogin's own overcoming of tendencies towards defilement. The action takes place at twenty-four main sites and eight secondary sites. These places are frequently mentioned in Tantric literature as being the abodes of *dākinī* and meditation places for advanced practitioners who have entered into the *caryā* or 'action' phase (*spyod-pa la gshogs-pa*) of yoga in the Cakrasaṃvara system. Many of these sites are identifiable in the ancient religious geography of the Indian sub-continent. In the logic of the Cakrasaṃvara system, where macrocosm and microcosm are integrated, these twenty-four 'action' sites are not only represented in the geography of the external world, but also arrayed around the internal psychic body of the yogin. This point is important in certain contexts and I shall return to it later on.

What is very significant in Tibetan sources is the long-standing identification of certain of these twenty-four (or thirty-two) essentially Indic sites with a series of places in the actual

<sup>4</sup> Huber (1989,1992, & 1993 forthcoming).

landscape of Tibet and the high Himalaya. Tsa-ri, along with other locations like Ti-se (Mt. Kailash) and La-phyi, is one such place. For Tibetans the process of subjugation in this cosmo-drama established the fundamental identity and nature of these sites as great Buddhist power places or empowered landscapes.

All the Tibetan written and oral sources I know of which locate Tsa-ri in this cosmo-drama scheme do so by employing greatly abbreviated versions of the whole subjugation narrative. Here are two written examples, the first from the late sixteenth century, and the second from the early nineteenth century. Portions of both narratives are found repeated, sometimes verbatim, in contemporary oral accounts. The version by the famous 'Brug-pa polymath Padma dKar-po first sets cosmic and geographical space in order, then unfolds the main story:

According to the *Kālacakramūla-tantra*, "As for the continents [of this world-system], there are [Pūrva]videha to the east, and Jambudvīpa to the south, and Avaragodāniya to the west, and Uttarakuru to the north. As for the sub-continents in separate directions, they are located on the basis of the earth which is adjacent. Similarly, all the *kṣetra*, and other [localities], are on the *maṇḍala* of the oceans."

It states that therefore there are *pīṭha* and *upapīṭha*, *kṣetra* and *upakṣetra*, *chandoha* and *upachandoha*, *melāpaka* and *upamelāpaka*, *pīlava* and *upapīlava*, *śmaśāna* and *upaśmaśāna*. And these twelve [classes of sites] exist on the earth and extend to the limits of the outermost perimeters of the world, and the great cemeteries are in the heavenly realm. In the *Vimalaprabha* it states, "Consequently, in the *maṇḍala* of the heavens, on the far side, there exist cemeteries. And through their purity the world-system also is five hundred thousand *yojanas* [in extent]."

It states in the *Mahā-Cakrasaṃvara[-tantra]*, and also in the *mūla-tantra* itself, that those *pīṭha*, and so on, in this very Jambudvīpa, such as the famous Kāmarūpa and Jāla[n dhara], are said to be forty-eight. In the *Hevajra[-tantra]* the places explained as Jālandhara, and so on, are thirty-seven. In the *Samvara[-tantra]* those [twenty-four places] known as,

"Kulūtā and dGon-pa, and Sindhu'i-yul and Grong-khyer, gSer-gyi-gling and Saurāṣṭra, De-bzhin Khyim-gyi-lha and Yi-dwags-grong and Kha-ba'i-gnas, Kāñcī, Lampaka-yi-yul, Kāliṅka, Kosala, Triśakuni, Oṭi and Kāmarūpa, Mālava, lHa-mo-mkhar and Rā-me-dbang, Godāvārī, Arbuta, U-rgyan, Jālandhara and Pullīramala, and so on"

are [the same as] Kulūtā and Maru, Sindhu, Nagāra, Lampaka, Saurāṣṭra, Kha-ba-can, Kāñcī, Mālava, Gṛhadeva, Kalīṅka, Kosala, Pretapuri, Triśakuni, Pullīrama, Jālandhāra, Oṭi, Kāmarūpa, Devikoṭa, Rameśvara, Godāvārī, Arbuta, gSer-gling and U-rgyan. This is because they are called by various alternative names in the explanatory *tantra* [i.e. *Samvarodaya-tantra*].

This [place, Tsa-ri] is said to be the great cemetery to the south of them, according to the explanation brought forth by the Buddha in those [sources]. In the past,

shortly after the time this world-system came into existence, these places were seized by eight couples of powerful male and female *deva* and *asura*, *yakṣa* and *rākṣasa*, and *nāga* and *kinnara*. As a result they were called the sites of action (*caryā*) in the [three world-space realms of] Khecara (*mkha'-spyod*), Bhūcara (*sa-spyod*) and Underworld (*sa-'og*, i.e. Nāgaloka), and were famous as the eight great cemeteries. And at that time, as the couple of ferocious Bhairava and Kālī, also known as the god Maheśvara and the great goddess Umā who have their palace on snowy Ti-se, were regarded as the rulers of the world, those [denizens] made offerings to these two. As they were addicted to sexual intercourse, that couple could not go to these sites when invited by those [denizens]. Therefore, they bestowed on those twenty-four or thirty-two [sites] stone *liṅga* representing [Maheśvara's] head, and so forth. Those [denizens] made offerings to them also.

As a consequence the world fell into a period of establishment in the paths of evil, and conversion to unbounded suffering. So, seeing that the time had come to subjugate them, from the Akaniṣṭha heaven that Heruka whose substance is perfected experience, established there a Heruka which was a resultant emanation-body, having a blue-coloured body, four faces, twelve arms, together with a Vajravārāhī which he had himself emanated, performing a clockwise dance. As a result they appeared on the summit of Mount Meru, and the Jinās of the five lineages, after emanating a palace and a troupe of offering goddesses, presented them, thus completing the great *maṇḍala* of the assembled lineages there. After the subjugation of ferocious Bhairava and his retinue by means of the absorption of their wealth and power, at the time that the great *Samvaramūla-tantra*, the 'Ocean of Knowledge', was uttered, that one of the eight great cemeteries to the south of the *maṇḍala* was this place.<sup>5</sup>

And the version by 'Brug-chen Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba reads:

Concerning this place Tsā-ri-tra (Skt.=Cāritra), famous as the 'wheel of perfect cognition': In the past, a long time after the creation of this world-system 'Possessing the Banner of Good Qualities', all the places, countries and cemeteries were seized by *nāga* and *asura* from the underworld, *yakṣa* and *rākṣasa* from the surface of the earth, *deva* and *gandharva* from the sky, and *kinnara* and witches (*phra-men-ma*) or *mātrkā*, and so forth. Afterwards, they made offerings to Bhairava and his consort Kālī and entered into evil paths, leading others into them, and as a result the world was thrown into ruin. The Blessed One Vajradhara, the great Heruka, [came] from the Akaniṣṭha heaven with the intention of subduing them, and manifested a great *maṇḍala* on the summit of Mount Meru, and with that conquered ferocious Bhairava and his retinue by means of the absorption of their wealth and power. At the time that the great *Samvaramūla-tantra*, the 'Ocean of Knowledge', was preached, that one of the eight great cemeteries to the south of the *maṇḍala* was this place, thus it is known as Tsā-ri-tra. And in accordance with that, all sites of action in the Khecara, Bhūcara, and Underworld which had been seized by ferocious [Bhairava] and his retinue were re-empowered in their very essence as the sphere of action of *vīra* and *yoginī*, and were conquered.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:2b-4a).

<sup>6</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:2a-b).

### iii. Spacial Representations Developed From the Narratives

By equating Tsa-ri with the Indian Tantric cemetery of Cāritra (or with Devikoṭa in some sources) the Tibetan accounts link it into a complex cosmic and terrestrial network of sites.<sup>7</sup> Detailed Tibetan versions of the subjugation story divide the space of the great world-system *maṇḍala* into a three-tiered organisation around which the main sites are arrayed,<sup>8</sup> and which is referred to briefly in our accounts. The *tribhuvana* (*sa-gsum*) or 'three levels' system is an earlier Indian cosmological scheme found in the Sanskrit sources from which the Tibetans derived their narratives, and which appears to be analogous to indigenous Tibetan tripartite ordering of the phenomenal world.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of its origins, such a three-level organisation of space is completely pervasive in Tibetan thinking about the world, whether in a vast and more abstract cosmological sense or in terms of the perceivable physical environment on any scale. Its implications for the representation of Tsa-ri are multiple.

In cosmic space Tsa-ri can be visualised as lying on the southern edge of the great world-system *maṇḍala*, whose centre is Mount Meru somewhere to the north. This accords with the location of the eight great Tantric cemeteries depicted around the perimeter of the Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* (see plate 1).<sup>10</sup> The twenty-four main action sites and the cemeteries in the scheme are divided into three sets of eight, each set being located on one of the three levels of the *tribhuvana* world-system. Tibetan sources describe these as the 'eight abodes of Khecara' (*mkha' spyod kyi gnas brgyad*), 'the eight abodes of Bhūcara' (*sa spyod kyi gnas brgyad*), and 'the eight abodes of the Underworld/Nāgaloka' (*sa 'og spyod kyi gnas brgyad*). Each set is further characterised in terms of the three aspects of the enlightened being of Heruka/Cakrasaṃvara, as represented by the vanquishing emanations he manifested in those places. This entails a hierarchy from the gross material to the sublime, with the upper level Khecara abodes associated with 'mind' (*citta/thugs*), the middle Bhūcara with

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed analysis of these and other such Tibetan identifications see Huber (1992).

<sup>8</sup> See for example bsTan-'dzin Chos-kyi Blo-gros (1983:7a-10b); and the Sa-skyapa texts in Davidson (1991:205-7).

<sup>9</sup> Davidson (1991:230, n.16) has noted its origin in the *Tattvasaṃgraha*; Kvaerne (1987:499, 502) calls such a scheme pre-Buddhist; Stein (1972) describes it as a 'Buddhist symbol' (p.41), but also implies that it may be indigenous (p.202-4); the entry *sa-gsum* in *Bod rgya Tshig mdzod Chen mo*, vol.3:2911 reads: "The three [regions] above the earth (*sa-bla*), on the surface of the earth (*sa-steng*), and beneath the earth (*sa-'og*)."; see also a Tibetan explanation in Nālandā Translation Committee (1987:230). Herein I will use the Sanskrit terms and English equivalents for these three zones, as their provenance in relation to the Saṃvara *maṇḍala* at Tsa-ri is certainly Indic.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of icons of the *maṇḍala* with cemeteries are found in Pal (1984:pls. 11, 31, 34); c.f. icons of Vajravārāhī also surrounded by the cemeteries (pls.15, 16); iconographical details are given in Tucci (1989:chapt. 1), Chandra (1987:7-34) and Tsuda (1978:215-28).



Plate 1. Sixty-two deity *Cakrasamvara* *maṇḍala*.



'speech' (*vāc/gsung*), and the lower Nāgaloka or Underworld with 'body' (*kāya/sku*).<sup>11</sup> In these terms, the identifications of Tsa-ri as either the cemetery of Cāritra or the site of Devikoṭa in the Tantras have Tibetans include it in the Khecara set of abodes, as a place of Heruka's mind. This is why it is commonly spoken of by Tibetans, and referred to in their texts as 'the place of Cakrasaṃvara's mind' (*'khor lo sdom pa'i thugs kyi gnas*).

There are geographical implications arising from these notions. When asked to describe Tsa-ri as a part of Tibet, my informants invoked a well known, and perhaps antiquated,<sup>12</sup> three-fold scheme which related the site with two others in Tibetan geography. When Tsa-ri is described as the 'place of Cakrasaṃvara's mind', La-phyi is called 'the place of Cakrasaṃvara's speech', and Ti-se or Mount Kailash 'the place of Cakrasaṃvara's body'.<sup>13</sup> Tibetans not only 'think' these places in a geographical network, they practise according to it as well. Many pilgrims I have met had visited at least two of these sites, and it was their aim, often constructed in terms of a vow (*dam bca'i tshig*), to visit all three during this lifetime. Serious Tantric practitioners often did this as a matter of course.<sup>14</sup> A modern Tibetan ritual text (*circa* 1990) divides up the Tibetan world space and its peoples on this very basis:

There is a proverb which states: In the three districts of mNga'-ris up the west (*stod*), [the people] are guided by their own place (*gnas*). In the four horns of dBus and gTsang in the centre (*bar*), they are guided by their Dharma. In the six ranges of [A-]mdo and Khams down in the east (*smad*), they are guided by their lamas", and in accord with that they perform circumambulations and prostrations every time in connection with the power places (*gnas-chen*) of Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara from among the many important mountains abodes (*gnas-ri*) that exist within Tibet: In the west (*stod*) the very famous 'King of White Snows' Ti-se, place of the body of the white lion-faced [*ḍākinī*], in the centre (*bar*) the excellent La-phyi, place of the speech of the striped tiger-faced [*ḍākinī*], and in the east (*smad*) the

<sup>11</sup> Discussions of how this arrangement applies to the *maṇḍala* in iconographic and meditational terms are found in Tsuda (1978) and Chandra's preface to Kazi Dawa Samdup (1987). My interest here is purely in terms of describing Tibetan conceptions of cosmic and geographic space.

<sup>12</sup> If an early 20th century 'Bri-gung-pa text is to be believed, the scheme was designed by the 'Bri-gung sKyob-pa 'Jig-rten mGon-po in the 12th century after intensive study of the Tantras, bsTan-'dzin Chos-kyi Blo-gros, *La phyi gnas yig* (1983:17b).

<sup>13</sup> This scheme contradicts the full version of the *tribhuvana* arrangement for the subjugation narrative found in bsTan-'dzin Chos-kyi Blo-gros, *Ti se'i gnas bshad* (1983:8a-10b), as Ti-se is reckoned a *sa-spyod* site, and La-phyi a *mkha'-spyod* site. A prayer to La-phyi invokes it as: // *gnas mchog dag pa mkha' spyod la phyi gangs* //, see bsTan-'dzin Chos-kyi Blo-gros, *La phyi gnas yig* (1983:73a). Is it perhaps rather a product of 'Jig-rten mGon-po's meditative experience of *ḍākinī* from the three sites, than a derivation of *tribhuvana*?

<sup>14</sup> See for example chaps. 10, 11 and 13 of Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985); or the biography of gTsang-smyon He-ru-ka by rGod-tshang Ras-pa sNa-tshogs Rang-grol (1969:chaps. 6-12).

peerless Tsā-ri, place of the mind of the black sow-faced [*dākinī*].<sup>15</sup>

Being a cemetery, Tsa-ri is located in the upper level of the triple world-space, in the celestial 'action' (*caryā*) zone of Khecara, or mKha'-spyod (lit.= 'sky going'/active in space') in Tibetan (see plate 2). The triple division of the world-system implies a strong vertical ontological gradient from gross at the bottom to more refined or pure above. This applies equally to the quality of existence of the physical environment, and the beings and other forms of life that inhabit it. While the Underworld is populated mainly by serpent deities (*klu/nāga*), we humans, the animals and a collection of earth-bound spirits live in the Bhūcara zone. Sites in the celestial, or 'sky zone' of the world-system are described as 'Pure Abodes' (*gnas dag-pa*) in the Tibetan sources. And their inhabitants are purified beings, principally *dākinī* and other grades of enlightened sentient existence. These residents of Khecara are 'sky-goers' (*mkha'-spyod-pa/-ma*, c.f. *mkha'-gro/-ma*). Thus we find that Cakrasaṃvara's consort Vajravārāhī, main resident *dākinī* at Tsa-ri, is given the epithet mKha'-spyod dBang-mo ('Chieftainess of Khecara') by Tibetans.<sup>16</sup>

While the Khecara zone may be the abode of *dākinī*, Tibetans believe that at Tsa-ri, under the right circumstances, humans may perceive it or enter it as well. The yogin Zhabs-dkar-ba once characterised the site as "Tsa-ri-tra the glorious power place, a great Buddhafield (*zhing-khams*)...which is equal to the actual Pure Khecara when seen by those endowed with good fortune, purified perception and karma."<sup>17</sup> Tsa-ri-bas tell a story, found in various textual versions also, of a Tantric siddha named La-va-pa, who meditated near the summit of the mountain at Tsa-ri and is said to have "passed into Khecara after going on to the peak." What is important to the story-tellers is that La-va-pa entered the Khecara zone while still in a human body. A song about those who worship at Tsa-ri states: "At the time of death they will be lead to the field of Pure Khecara by *vīra* and *dākinī*."<sup>18</sup>

Here we must be careful not to build the Khecara zone at Tsa-ri into a kind of Luftschloss,

<sup>15</sup> 'Bri-gung sKyabs-mgon Che-tshang Rin-po-che (1990:3a-3b). This is a very sophisticated statement invoking old notions of Tibetan geographical space sloping down from the high (*stod*) west to the low (*smad*) east. It cleverly describes the nature of each of the three pilgrimages in terms of parochial notions of regional character. That is, in the twelve-yearly events mostly locals went to Ti-se, Central Tibetans had to make a very long journey to La-phyi (due to their faith in the Dharma), and all pilgrims, including many Easterners, had to be lead around Tsa-ri of necessity. And it details the basic Cakrasaṃvara geography of Tibet as well.

<sup>16</sup> Mathieu Ricard, Bodhnāth (personal communication, April 1992) describes Khecara specifically as the Dhūmatāla Buddhafield of Vajrayoginī (with whom Vajravārāhī is interchangeable as *jñāna-dākinī*). Dhūmatāla seems to mean 'vaporous state' or 'smoky state', c.f. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p.518.

<sup>17</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:488).

<sup>18</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:489).





Plate 2. Khecara Pure Abode (*gnas dag-pa mkha'-spyod*).



merely afloat in space. While the designation 'Khecara Pure Abode' (*gnas dag-pa mkha'-spyod*) which is so frequently applied to Tsa-ri<sup>19</sup> involves the space around and above the mountain, it also applies to the actual landscape of its uppermost slopes. Elements of this designation are coded into the different place names for the mountain's high altitude topography, such as the main summit of Pure Crystal Mountain (Dag-pa Shel-ri), the eastern peak of mKha'-spyod-ri ('Khecara Mountain'), the four high peaks collectively called Dag-pa mKha'-spyod-ri-bzhi ('the Four Pure Khecara Mountains')<sup>20</sup> and the former high point of the old *rong-skor* pilgrimage route Dag-pa Tsa-ri'i Thugs-kha ('Heart/Mind of Pure Tsa-ri'). In later chapters we will see how the intense purity of this upper landscape and the space around the mountain is taken account of in the structure of rituals, and in general Tibetan life-style at the site. We will also see that the pure beings, like the *dākinī* and others, who abide in the Khecara zone do not just fly around remotely in space, but as far as Tibetans are concerned are active on the ground of the mountain as well.

#### iv. Inner/Outer Space, Shrinking Space, and Schematic Repetition

There are further considerations of space at Tsa-ri which relate to its status as a site in the narratives of the subjugation of Maheśvara. These features are less well known to most people, being more of interest to Tantric practitioners, although I note them here because enough yogins and ordinary folk do mention them for it to be significant. I have stated above that the Cakrasaṃvara system posits the correspondence of macrocosmic and microcosmic space. This is usually represented in terms of the arrangement of all the external 'sites of action' being present in miniature in the yogin's body. If a yogin reports, "When I was practising at place X, all the twenty-four sites were present there", this is often interpreted by Western commentators as symbolic or intentional language to describe an inner psychic experience of space.<sup>21</sup> This may be so, but it is only one possible elite interpretation.

For many Tibetans, both lamas and laypersons, the whole set of action sites are considered to be physically, not merely symbolically, contained in the local environment of any one of the external locations, such as Tsa-ri. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche has said that "within any single valley one can identify the entire set of the twenty-four sacred places."<sup>22</sup> During my own field work at La-phyi and Pha-bong-kha, two places in Tibet considered to be among the twenty-four Tantric action sites, I was shown other 'versions' of the twenty-four places

<sup>19</sup> For example the most common prayer to the mountain opens with the line: "Glorious Tsa-ri-tra, Khecara Pure Abode" (*gnas dag pa mkha' spyod dpal gyi tsa ri tra*). See appendix 4.1.

<sup>20</sup> See the list in Kah-thog Si-tu's *lam yig* of his 1919 visit (1972:365, l. 1-2).

<sup>21</sup> See for example Willis (1985:315-18), Tsuda (1978:215-21).

<sup>22</sup> Ricard (1992:chapt. 13, n.1).

in the local geography by practitioners. A Tibetan guide-book to Tsa-ri states that the twenty-four are present there also, and lists sources which classify them.<sup>23</sup> One informant from Cig-car at Tsa-ri stated that they were present in that area, but have probably all but disappeared now due to the violation of the site by the occupying Chinese army since 1960.<sup>24</sup> On this phenomenon Dudjom Rinpoche maintains that existing power places such as Odiyāna, one of the twenty-four sites, can shrink in surface and even disappear from one area, when the conditions are no longer conducive to spiritual practice.<sup>25</sup>

At Tsa-ri we find the same large-scale representational themes that are established through the Maheśvara subjugation narrative being applied to the vertical and horizontal organisation of space at all levels. For example, written and oral accounts of the site image the regional geography as a gigantic ritual sceptre or *vajra* laid on its side. The western tip of this *vajra* is formed by Pure Crystal Mountain, the so-called 'ancient Tsa-ri', its spiral centre is the adjacent lake of Tsa-ri mTsho-dkar or 'White Lake', and the easternmost tip is formed by the related site of Tsa-ri gSar-ma bKra-shis-ljongs, or 'New Tsa-ri Auspicious Valley', some 70 kilometres distant along the Himalayan divide to the east (see map 2). All three are recognised as sites of the archetype deities Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī and have a three fold ranking applied to them with Pure Crystal mountain being the place of speech, White Lake the place of mind and New Tsa-ri the place of body.<sup>26</sup>

In another example, concerning the site of Cig-car (see plate 4), location of Tsa-ri's most important temple and meditation retreat centre, we find the *tribhuvana* scheme repeated in small-scale. When the Vajravārāhī temple was founded there between 1567 and 1574 by Padma dKar-po, he began construction upon receiving the prophecy of a local *ḍākinī*: "You should labour zealously because the time has arrived for the self-manifestation of a pig-faced one under the ground (*sa-'og*), the appearance of a Vārāhī active in the sky (*mkha'-la spyod-pa*) above and a Vārāhī active on the earth (*sa-spyod*) in between these!"<sup>27</sup> Correspondingly, contemporary Tibetan accounts of the site describe its appearance precisely in terms of these three divisions of the world-space.<sup>28</sup> One could even say that this three fold organisation of space is repeated again in miniature within the body of the Tantric

<sup>23</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:18a).

<sup>24</sup> Sherab Gyatso (SG), interview.

<sup>25</sup> Ricard (1992: Chapt.13, n.1).

<sup>26</sup> For a textual citation see for example Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:5b).

<sup>27</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:26a); and on the temple-founding Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.3:fol578 ff., 590).

<sup>28</sup> With a stone image of the goddess in the earth under the temple foundations, a bronze image of her inside on the surface, and a sublime rainbow-body image in the sky above, Sonam Palgye (SP) and SG, interviews; and c.f. the comments of Stein's informant in 1954, Stein (1988:40, n. 84).

yogin who meditates at the site according to practices of the Cakrasaṃvara system.<sup>29</sup>

Such examples are taken from many threefold divisions of space that Tibetans use at Tsa-ri. This pattern is strongly reinforced by the repetition there of another representational theme from the subjugation narratives, the architectonic form of the divine mansion of the archetype deities, the *maṇḍala* palace.

SEE ERRATA

## *Reading the Architecture of Landscape*

### i. 'Mandalization'

In the core narratives of the subjugation drama given above the world-system becomes constituted as a great *maṇḍala* palace of Cakrasaṃvara and his consort, radiating out from the summit of the cosmic mountain, Meru, with sites such as Cāritra/Tsa-ri distributed around its perimeter. The Tibetan commentators extended this idea, perhaps following implicit Tantric themes of equating the organisation of macrocosm and microcosm, and went on to represent each of the three 'activity sites' assimilated to Tibet, the mountains of Tsa-ri, Ti-se and La-phyi, as complete *maṇḍala* palaces of Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī in their own right. While Tibetans applied this representational form to these three mountains, and also to various other sites in Tibet during the course of many centuries,<sup>30</sup> it was at Tsa-ri that this 'practice of "mandalizing" geographical areas' (to borrow Grappard's phrase from Japan)<sup>31</sup> was most systematically applied to landscape and socially actualised in ritual and domestic behaviour.

Most Westerners who have seen Tibetan Buddhist *maṇḍala* will relate to them as flat, two-dimensional images such as those represented in painted scrolls (see plate 1), woodblock prints, drawings and arrangements of coloured sand. Yet for Tibetans these are just the diagrams or ground plans for what is always conceived of as a three-dimensional structure, in which the vertical orientation is the most dominant (see plate 2). The true three-dimensional form of *maṇḍala* is reproduced constantly in Tibetan cultural life. This takes place in multiple ephemeral constructions, such as ritual hand gestures, the positioning of persons in certain ceremonial and performative events, the heaped arrangement of grains and other offering substances in regular rituals or the sustained and highly detailed mental productions generated in advanced forms of Tantric meditation. More permanent constructions are

<sup>29</sup> Here I am thinking of the three level array of the twenty-four internal *nāḍī* and *pīṭha* in the meditator's psychic body; Stein (1988:40) has already suggested a similar correspondence with the three *cakra* (heart, neck and top of the head) in the body.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Blondeau (1960:226, 236-7) on Kha-ba dKar-po and Buffettrille (1993 forthcoming) on A-myes rMa-chen.

<sup>31</sup> Grappard (1982:209).

instantiated in architectural forms ranging from entire temple complexes, e.g. bSam-yas, to *stūpas* and shrines of all sizes and ritual structures fashioned from metal, clay, thread, wood or dough, and nowadays even generated with computer-assisted drafting programs and stored as electronic media. In some of these forms, particularly the architecturally elaborate buildings and visualised mental constructions, one can appreciate that in three dimensions a *maṇḍala* as a built-up palace or mansion is more than just an ornate and impressive facade. They have an even more complex interior of halls, chambers, galleries, archways, thrones, and so on, populated by a highly ordered group of divine residents. Thus, both the entire structure itself and its inhabitants constitute a specific *pantheon*, in the fullest sense of the word.

In order for non-Tibetans to begin to appreciate the process of the mandalization of landscape at a place such as Tsa-ri we must start by imagining both a sophisticated, three-dimensional exterior *and* interior. If such a vision of the landscape, or at least its possibility, is not borne constantly in mind we will miss the fuller significance that such representations have for Tibetans when they encounter Pure Crystal Mountain. We run the risk of reducing this particular way of thinking about place to the mode of two-dimensional diagrams, or the mere facade or surface of three-dimensional forms only. I have made these points here as a small caution to both analysts and readers of the Tibetan conceptions of the architecture of landscape I am about to present. However, I will return to them below as they are also invoked and debated in *emic* ideologies which determine who gains access to the various dimensions of reality that are admitted by the Tibetan world-view.

## ii. *Maṇḍala* Palace Geography and Topography

The standard guide-books for Tsa-ri state that, "Pure Crystal mountain...has an arrangement of peaks, lakes and regions with the innate nature of a *maṇḍala*",<sup>32</sup> that it is "...a great, naturally produced *maṇḍala* of Vajra Secret Mantra",<sup>33</sup> and that when circumambulating up on the mountain one is said to "...have entered into the *maṇḍala* of the Great Secret [Mantra]."<sup>34</sup> Some Tibetans describe Pure Crystal Mountain and its environs in great detail as a *maṇḍala* palace of the archetype deities Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī. The lists of deities, their qualities and their locations given in such accounts are describing the interior structure of this *maṇḍala* palace as it lies behind the covering of the mountain's exterior landscape features. Tibetan Buddhists recognise the level of reality of this interior structure as the form realm of *saṃbhoga-kāya*, the 'enjoyment body' of enlightened Buddhahood. This form realm is only accessible or conceivable for those persons practising

<sup>32</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1984, vol.4:6a).

<sup>33</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1976:18a).

<sup>34</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1976:26b).

at advanced levels of Tantric meditation, with a refinement of consciousness equivalent to the upper stages of the *bodhisattva* path.

When heard or read these esoteric accounts of landscape may seem fantastic to the uninitiated, however they are not entirely unique as they conform to the *maṇḍala* liturgies found in texts, and the painted and sculpted representations based upon them. What is unique, however, are the Tibetan interpretations of geographical space and topographical form based on the conception of the actual *maṇḍala* palace being within the mountain itself. It is mainly these interpretations which I will detail here.

The *maṇḍala* palace manifest as Pure Crystal Mountain is identical to the three-tiered cosmic *maṇḍala* palace already outlined in relation to the subjugation drama above, although it is much reduced in extent. Thus the same triple division and hierarchy applied to space, being and environment are found once again, but discussed here mainly with reference to architectural forms. The foundations (*rmang-gzhi*) of the structure, what we would term the geological root of the mountain, are laid in the Nāgaloka or Underworld deep within the ground. The palace (*pho-brang*) sits upon a gigantic lotus flower base (*pad-gdan*) rising out of the centre of an underground lake.<sup>35</sup> The structure occupies the triple world-space at all three levels:

Glorious Cāritra, the great palace which houses the divine hosts [of Cakrasaṃvara] whose manifestations are self-produced, has innumerable Khecara mansions with spontaneous, natural purity in all directions above them. In between [this and] the abode of beings in the sway of passion (*bag-lugs*), the natural palace which is the great tamer of the Underworld below, there exists a layout which is like the form of a crossed, five-pointed *vajra* of jewels and gold, or resembles a clockwise turning *svastika*.<sup>36</sup>

And as for the section which exists above the level of the ground, the mountain itself:

It is a *maṇḍala* which is made in the form of a mountain.  
This Crystal Mountain which is a superior symbol  
Is made from precious crystal substance,  
With the shape of a great *stūpa*.  
At its apex dwell the gurus and the archetype deities,  
At its middle dwell the Buddhas of the three times,  
And at its base dwell the *dharmapāla* and protectors.  
Round about it dwell *vīra* and *dākinī*;  
Its environs comprise a heavenly palace.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1976:15a).

<sup>36</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:7b-8a).

<sup>37</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1976:15b).

Deferring for later discussion the *stūpa* shape and crystal substance mentioned here, we find in these statements both vertical and horizontal referents for imaging the mountain's topography as a *maṇḍala* palace. Summarising from many oral and written sources we can briefly outline the architecture of the *maṇḍala* palace in the landscape.

Beginning at the central summit of Pure Crystal Mountain: this is the highest chamber of the palace in which Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī, and one's guru (who is equal to the archetype deities) dwell. It is equivalent to the pericarp of the lotus at the very centre of the *maṇḍala* (see plate 1). It is here inside the topmost mountain peak/palace that the *raison d'être* of this sublime architecture, the cosmic subjugation drama, continues: its archetype deity inhabitants are described as "...dancing on the corpse of ferocious Bhairava and the breast of Kālī"<sup>38</sup> in there.

The area of high altitude terrain below the summit, circumscribed by the series of high passes which lie around the mountain, has its landscape features divided horizontally into sets of four. This is based on its layout being like a *svastika* or the cross of a five-pointed ritual sceptre (*vajra*) in which the fifth point projects vertically from the centre to form the main peak. The intermediate levels of the *maṇḍala* palace, between the central pericarp chamber above and the four doors below on the four outer walls, are divided into four quadrats of different colours (see plate 1). Here the various chambers housing divine occupants, the ritual decorations, such as vases and white conch shells, and the outer petals of the pericarp are all divided into sets of four along both the cardinal axes and the intermediate points of the horizontal plane. Thus, correspondingly, we find this landscape zone contains the summits of four peaks around the centre, then further out four passes, four ravines with four rivers which flow down from the summit of Pure Crystal Mountain in the four directions and carrying water of four different colours, four caves and four stone thrones on the mountain side, and four important lakes.<sup>39</sup>

The four doors (*sgo*) on the outer walls of the palace are listed by Tibetans as: north door in the Cig-car area; east door in Parpa ravine; south door at the Jo-bo Them-pa pass of Bya-yul; west door near Dom-tshang ravine. These were the sites where humans first entered the palace landscape, when Tantric yogins 'opened the doors to the place' (*gnas-sgo phye-ba*) in times past. In this lowest zone the point of entry to the great *maṇḍala*, where one must initially encounter the guardian and protector deities, is said to be at Bod rDo-mTshan-can in the main valley of the Tsa-ri river due north of the central peak. Certain of the cemeteries which are found arranged around the palace, outside the doors, are also identified as sites in the outer environs of the mountain. The whole *maṇḍala* is enclosed by a circular girdle of

<sup>38</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:9b).

<sup>39</sup> For example, some sets of four are listed in Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:16a-17a).



*vajras* (*rdo-rje ra-ba*) laid end to end, which forms the divine threshold of the arrangement. There are places on the ground which the great girdle of *vajras* is thought to traverse, marking the boundary of the *maṇḍala*.

In addition, there are many other references to the *maṇḍala* structure and its divine occupants in Tibetan descriptions of Tsa-ri. In fact, the detail in such accounts of the place will make little sense to the hearer or reader who is not versed in the *maṇḍala* liturgy, or who is unused to imaging landscape according to such representations. All these important features of the *maṇḍala* palace precinct are found catalogued and described in Tibetan oral and written accounts. I will not reproduce all this material here, but will have occasion to refer to certain features selectively in later chapters as their interpretation dictates the pattern of much ritual and domestic life in the region.

### iii. Sublime Aquatic Architecture

We have seen above that the *maṇḍala* and *tribhuvana* systems have very closely related ordering of space. The *maṇḍala*, in addition, develops a horizontal pattern of order at the site. Just as the *tribhuvana* system is repeated at various levels to interpret the phenomenal world, so too is the process of 'mandalization'. Tsa-ri is located on the cosmic *maṇḍala*, and the mountain is a *maṇḍala*, but also on the mountain itself a group of the most important individual sites are described as *maṇḍala*. These are the alpine lakes which are found around the high summit of Pure Crystal Mountain. In the indigenous, pre-Buddhist Tibetan world-view lakes, along with mountain peaks, are the most significant type of landscape feature. They are a dwelling place of both the collective and personal 'vitality' or 'life force' (*bla*) principle, and their waters produce and provide both visionary and physical access to other dimensions of space and time. In line with these themes the Buddhist *maṇḍala* lakes on the slopes of Pure Crystal Mountain are 'permeable' zones, like windows or portals in the hard rock and earth 'walls' of the great palace, through which one can see or enter into the chambers of the divine residence.

Although the main summit is the most powerful place in the great landscape *maṇḍala* it is physically (although not meditatively) unreachable. The various *maṇḍala* lakes are all accessible, and they can be circumambulated at close quarters and ritually entered through bathing or meditation. The Tibetan guide-books catalogue these *maṇḍala* lakes, the specific deity abodes they contain and the powers they can offer the practitioner. Their depth provides the vertical dimension of the palace architecture, but their surface tension is also said to be like mirrors which reflect this divine reality. And like the rest of the high altitude environment on the mountain, they are close to, or within, the Khecara purity zone, and thus the water and other substances they contain have a high ritual status.

The most important *maṇḍala* lake is Great Palace Turquoise Lake (Pho-brang Chen-po g. Yu-mtsho) located to the south of the main summit. The term *pho-brang* ('palace') in its name refers to the *maṇḍala* palace it contains. This lake itself is described as, "Chief of all the lakes, origin place for all paranormal powers (*siddhi*), and the complete *maṇḍala* palace of Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara."<sup>40</sup> When famous yogins visit the spot they are said to "see this lake itself as the *maṇḍala* of Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara, and enter within it" (*mtsho 'di nyid dpal 'khor lo sdom pa'i dkyil 'khor du gzigs te nang du byon*). Such *maṇḍala* lakes at Tsa-ri are the initiatory sites *par excellence* in the local landscape.

Besides the lakes, mandalization is repeated on an even smaller scale at Tsa-ri. The smallest and most intimate level of its application is within the human body of the practitioner. Once again patterns for conceiving space and place are reproduced and reinforced. There is yet one more major aspect of the representational system applied to Tsa-ri to be outlined. It further amplifies all that has been detailed so far. This is the conception that the mountain has the architectural form of a *stūpa* (*mchod-rten*) or shrine (*mchod-sdong*).

#### iv. Nature's Enormous Crystal Reliquary

The conceptions of the mountain as *maṇḍala* palace and Khecara zone were developed out of the subjugation narratives relating to the *anuttarayoga-tantra* traditions in Tibet. By designating Tsa-ri/Cāritra as a cemetery they also pave the way for its landscape to be imaged as a Buddhist reliquary shrine or *stūpa*. In the liturgies and icons the Tantric cemeteries that surround the Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* are portrayed as each containing a white *stūpa*. Each cemetery also has a mountain and a tree associated with it. Tibetan commentators use all these features to argue for the identity of sites like Tsa-ri with those described in Tantric sources. Later Tibetan works recycle this Indian imagery in detail in accounts of the great cemeteries. They often mention *stūpa* which are 'self-arisen' or 'naturally produced' and made out of crystal as the central feature of such sites. The twelfth chapter of the fourteenth-century *Padma bka' thang*,<sup>41</sup> for instance, gives a detailed account of one such *stūpa* which forms the central palace of the land of Oḍiyāna. It is said to be a great abode of Heruka or Cakrasaṃvara, which reflects the status of the site of Oḍiyāna as it is mentioned in the subjugation narratives. All the same images turn up in later 'revealed' (*gter-ma*) guides to Pure Crystal Mountain of Tsa-ri, as we will see below. Once again we are dealing with a developed Indian representational scheme, reworked by Tibetans and applied in detail to their own local landscape.

Tibetan sources represent Pure Crystal Mountain as a *stūpa* or shrine in a number of ways, emphasizing different aspects of its form and meaning. It can be seen as an enormous natural

<sup>40</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1976:23a).

<sup>41</sup> See O-rgyan Gling-pa (1985).

monument to the victory of Buddhist teachings, referred to in terms of the *dharmakāya* aspect. But at the same time this monument is both identified with, and contains within itself, the *sambhoga-kāya* aspect of the archetype deities. They embody the victory of Buddhism over both cosmic negativities (the subjugation of Bhairava) and personal negativities (the cleansing of 'defilements' or *dvyāvaraṇa/sgrīb-gnyis*). For example:

The *vīra* Heruka, whose soles are coated  
By the red blood which pours from the slain Bhairava,  
Together with the *ḍākinī* [Vajravārāhī] who purifies the twin  
defilements,  
Constitutes the evil-conquering Crystal Mountain, a shrine of  
the *dharmakāya*.<sup>42</sup>

Other descriptions detail its form as manifest on three relatively different levels of reality. These are the outward (*phyi*), inward (*nang*) and esoteric (*gsang*) aspects which Tibetan Buddhists admit. For example:

Esoterically (*gsang*) [this] Snow Mountain of Pure Crystal arose naturally in the shape of a ritual vase (*bum-pa*). Thus, it has been said to be an empowered *stūpa* which is naturally produced and self-manifested.<sup>43</sup>

The ritual vase (Skt: *kalaśa*) referred to here has the esoteric meaning of representing a *maṇḍala*. In *maṇḍala* rituals practised by Tibetans one or several vases contain the deities and form the 'palace'. The vases themselves become the central initiatory structure in processes such as the *kalaśābhiṣeka*. In Tibetan the same term, *bum-pa*, is used for the dome or vase-like receptacle of the Tibetan-style *stūpa*, which houses the deities or their representations in the same arrangement as a *maṇḍala* palace.

Although its architectural details differ, the ubiquitous Buddhist reliquary shrine or *stūpa* is equal to a *maṇḍala* palace. For Tibetans the two are functionally similar as ritual structures, as they both contain either Buddhas, or the substantial and symbolic equivalents of Buddhas in the form of relics, texts or images. By virtue of this both possess a similar *ambiance* of empowerment (*byin-gyis-brlabs*). In actual structures built in Tibet the architectural forms of both are conspicuously combined to the point where the distinction between them collapses. In sculptural representations the summit or crown of the cosmic Mount Meru world-system *maṇḍala* palace is a *stūpa*,<sup>44</sup> and the top of any Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* is itself equivalent to a Mount Meru. The unity of the two representations becomes even more apparent as we are given further details of the 'outward' and 'inward' reality of the mountain:

<sup>42</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:7b).

<sup>43</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:7b).

<sup>44</sup> See for example Rhie & Thurman (1991:382), and Snellgrove (1987, vol.2: pl. 37).

Pure Crystal Mountain is a great *dharmakāya* shrine, and this itself resembles a heart-shaped snow mountain outwardly (*phyi*), [and] inwardly (*nang*) contains a great celestial palace of pure, divine hosts in the naturally produced and self-manifested form of an auspicious many-doored *stūpa*.<sup>45</sup>

And also,

It is the great edifice of an auspicious [many-doored] *stūpa*, which if seen from the outside (*phyi*) exists in the form of a three-peaked snow mountain, and if seen from the inside (*nang*) is a luminous, auspicious [many-doored] *stūpa* made out of a crystal jewel material. Its summit is established as the abode of the gods.<sup>46</sup>

The architecture of this type of *stūpa*, which Tibetans refer to as 'auspicious many-doored' (*bkra-shis sgo-mang*), is more like a *maṇḍala* palace than any other *stūpa* style used in the Tibetan world.<sup>47</sup> A 'revealed' account of the mountain credited to the Indian yogin Padmasambhava details the architecture of its *stūpa* landscape, and shows how it supports a divine residence within the three-fold ordering of vertical and horizontal space. This description from an eighteenth century *gter-ma* guide states:

According to the Guru, the size of that self-produced *stūpa* made out of crystal is thirteen *yojana*. Its lotus base (*pad-gdan*) and lion's throne (*seng-khri*) have one thousand steps (*bang-rim*), and below the dome (*bum-pa*), capital (*bre*) and Dharma wheel (*chos-'khor-lo*), it is decorated with archways and embellished with many crests. As for the parasol (*gdugs*) and ornamental spire (*gan-ji-ra*) which adorn the pinnacle (*tog*), they are a beautiful pitched tent of five types of rainbow-light cognition. In the region of the lower edifice of the self-produced *stūpa* there exists the eighty knowledge-holding siddhas' rainbow tent. At the outer levels *mātrkā* and *dākinī* gather like clouds. On the intermediate galleries the bKa'-brgyud lamas gather like light rays. On the top there are complete *maṇḍala* of the four classes of Tantra. The sun-moon [symbol] of Secret Mantra is stacked like a *lhog-khrom* [?]. On the ornamental spire there are one thousand Vajradhara Buddhas. On the parasol the ten assemblies of the visible world shine like rainbows. The Dharma wheel is an inwardly clear *maṇḍala* of beneficent and wrathful [deities]. The archways are full of complete *maṇḍala* of the Sugata. At the visible limits of the dome exists the field of Mahāsukha. All the *kṣetrapāla-dākinī* live on the capital. The upper steps are the shining palace of *dākinī*. The lower steps are the home of the seventy glorious protector deities. On the lion's throne live all the gods of wealth. On the four walls are the faces of the *dākinī* protecting the oral teachings. In the four cardinal directions dwell the door guardians, the four great kings. At the four intermediate points their [divine] workers and envoys flash like lightning. At the four corners seven [eight?] decaying human corpses

<sup>45</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1976:15a).

<sup>46</sup> gNam-lcags rTsa-gsum Gling-pa (1986:3a).

<sup>47</sup> For Tibetan paintings of this and the other seven types of *stūpa* see Rig-'dzin rDo-rje, *et al.* (1984:pls. 107-14). On the iconography of *bkra-shis sgo-mang* shrines representing the mountain palace paradise of Zangs-mdog dPal-ri see Montmollin (1992).

dwell in cemeteries. On the lotus petals the *nāga* and Lords of the Soil offer ritual cakes.<sup>48</sup>

The interior complexity of this style is elaborated upon in the traditions of other schools interested in the mountain, such as the bKa'-brgyud-pa. While visiting the Great Palace Turquoise Lake at Tsa-ri the founder of the 'Bri-gung-pa lineage, 'Jig-rten mGon-po (1143-1217), perceived the mountain as a many-doored *stūpa* housing two thousand eight hundred deities. bKa'-brgyud-pa written and oral guides to the mountain have continued to represent it according to this elaborate architectural scheme:

As for this great *dharma-kāya* shrine which is Pure Crystal Mountain, it is the heart of hearts of the place of Tsā-ri. It arose in the centre of that place, and previously the Siddhas perceived it directly as a great auspicious many-doored [*stūpa*], which they perceived as containing: the four great kings and the other seventy-two glorious protectors at the seventy-two doors to the lion's throne of the *stūpa*; in the centre of that the glorious four-armed protector and other Dharma protectors and guardians; on the four steps possessing great faces eight hundred shrines on [each?] great face; in each and every one of the two thousand six hundred doors on the steps the divine assemblies of the four classes of Tantras; in the dome the divine assembly of the *maṇḍala* of the Bhagavat Heruka Vajrasattva alias Cakrasaṃvara in *yab-yum*; on the capital and parasol Vajradhara encircled by the bKa'-brgyud *gurus*. In terms of its true state, it is said to be a great palace which is essentially a vast ocean of *maṇḍala*. But, even in terms of its external appearance, this towering and beautifully shaped snow peak clearly resembles the form of a many-doored *stūpa*.<sup>49</sup>

According to historical sources this particular *stūpa* architecture of Pure Crystal Mountain has long existed in Tibet in the form of smaller human-made 'visible representations' (*rten*). During 'Jig-rten mGon-po's lifetime multiple replicas of the Pure Crystal Mountain many-doored *stūpa* were built at 'Bri-gung-mthil monastery in Central Tibet to conform with his vision.<sup>50</sup> They are still being rebuilt during the present day.<sup>51</sup> Shown here (see plate 3) is another form of portable *rten* of Pure Crystal Mountain, as a painted-scroll image (*thang-kha*) with the architecture of an auspicious many-doored *stūpa* housing the archetype deities in its central dome.

These materials are very important. We know the representational system I am describing

<sup>48</sup> gNam-icags rTsa-gsum Gling-pa (1986:4a-b); c.f. here also the arrangement of deities given in the account of the setting up of the palace of Dag-pa mKha'-spyod at Tsa-ri in the Gesar epic, *Mon gling g.yul 'gyed* (1982:499).

<sup>49</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.2:186).

<sup>50</sup> See the accounts in Roerich (1979:601), Könchog Gyaltzen (1988:21), and also Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:9a-b, 27b).

<sup>51</sup> Könchog Gyaltzen (1988:36).

here has had a long 'public' life in the form of oral and written guide-book, eulogy and prayer texts. But it has also long been available for visual consumption in Tibet in material forms, some of which are portable (e.g. plate 3). Although the differences between *maṇḍala* palaces and *bkra-shis sgo-mang* (and for that matter representations of Buddhafields) are often only subtle, the fact that these public forms are of the *stūpa* and not explicitly of the *maṇḍala* is significant. There may well be esoteric restrictions on the public display or reproduction of the Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala*, but be that as it may, there are other more 'down to earth' explanations possible here. An elderly southern Tibetan once described Pure Crystal Mountain to me as a huge crystal *stūpa*, and when I asked if he understood it as a *maṇḍala*, he replied:

Of course we [lay people] know about *maṇḍala*, but the lamas know everything [about them]. Well, if you go to Tsa-ri and see the mountain in front of you, it just looks like it's a big *stūpa* of white crystal (*shel dkar chen*)!<sup>52</sup>

Such a statement is not isolated, nor does it merely reflect contemporary sentiment about how Tibetans regard mountains. A Tibetan layman who visited the mountain in 1794 recorded in his biography, "From the summit of the sGrol-ma pass I met with (*mjal*) the snow mountain of Dag-pa-shri, palace of Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara, that resembles (*lta bu*) a mountain (*sa 'dzin*) of crystal."<sup>53</sup> General references to the geography of Tibet found in earlier Tibetan literature use descriptive phrases like "mountains which resemble *stūpas* of spotless crystal."<sup>54</sup> Talking and thinking of mountains as *stūpas* has had a certain currency in the Tibetan world. In general it could be said that *stūpas*, like mountains, are everywhere in the traditional Tibetan world-space. They are the most common and accessible religious edifices in the Tibetan environment (or used to be in political Tibet before the Cultural Revolution): they are literally 'on every street corner' and most journeys in public space involve circumambulating one sooner or later. Journeys to mountains represented as *stūpa*, as we shall see, also involve the same fundamental ritual performances. And, in the case of Tsa-ri, this can also be said of the rituals performed at a mountain represented as a *maṇḍala*.

Several scholars have noted long-standing Tibetan beliefs about the powerful geomantic and physical effects that the location of *rten*, such as images, temples and *stūpa*, can have on the environment.<sup>55</sup> Their placement for the purpose of subjugation of non-Buddhist spirit forces, and their auspicious and empowering effects on the substance of the landscape are common

<sup>52</sup> ND, interview.

<sup>53</sup> bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1042-3).

<sup>54</sup> 'Dzam gling rgyas bshad (early 19th cent.) in Wylie (1962:2) *dri ma med pa shel gyi mchod rten lta bu'i gangs ri*; c.f. also the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* (12th cent.) as quoted in Gyatso (1989:38); the *Mi la'i mgur 'bum* (late 15th cent.) in Ru-pa'i rGyan-can (1989:416) *gangs dkar ti se skad pa de...gangs shel gyi mchod rten 'dra'o skad*; also Ti-se (Mt. Kailash) is said to be "a snow mountain outwardly resembling a *stūpa* of crystal" when seen by heretics (*mu-stegs-byed*) in bsTan-'dzin Chos-kyi Blo-gros (1983:70b).

<sup>55</sup> Gyatso (1989), and her essay in Reynolds, *et al.* (1986:32-3); Aris (1979).



Plate 3. Dag-pa Shel-ri as a *bkra-shis sgo-mang stūpa* being visited by pilgrims. View from the south-east, showing Cig-car retreat centre at base of *stūpa*, and Tsa-ri river to the right.





themes in Tibetan narrative and ritual discourse. The mandalization of landscape at Tsa-ri in the Tibetan accounts of the subjugation of Maheśvara, and the mountain's representation as a *stūpa* are these same themes being played out again. This time no actual physical construction has taken place, yet the resultant mentally constructed 'edifice' is many thousands of times larger than anything humans could possibly build. The remainder of this study will show that although these 'monuments' are not physically built at the site by people, they are continually being socially, and in some cases, meditatively reconstructed or reconstituted at Tsa-ri through the performance of a wide range of rituals.

#### v. Recapitulation

To summarise briefly, and at the risk of labouring the point, I must reiterate a point that we as Westerners, habituated in dualistic forms of 'thinking' the world, might easily miss, or misconceive. The organisation of space at Tsa-ri in its representations as a Khecara field, a *maṇḍala* and a gigantic *stūpa* is based on notions of continuity for Tibetans. The fixed and dualistic dichotomy of 'sacred and profane' space found in so much Western thinking and writing is an inappropriate model in this context. In the literature one often reads that pilgrimage sites or 'sacred' places are a 'bridge to the other side', a link between heaven and earth, between humans and divinity, the two separate dimensions of reality, the sacred and profane. While all these notions may at least be partially true of Tsa-ri (e.g. there are certain 'thresholds'), they lead us away from the basic Tibetan understanding that 'the other side' is actually present right here, that 'heaven and earth' interpenetrate on the mountain, and that divine and other non-human beings live with, and even within, us. There is a continuity of being between the environmental qualities and inhabitants of the Khecara, Bhūcara and Underworld. This grading together can be, and does become, a phenomenal reality. Experience, and the quality of the environment, change for Tibetans as they ascend or descend through it.

In this chapter we have seen how Tibetans cosmologically and geographically locate Pure Crystal Mountain as a *maṇḍala* palace in various forms by way of an interrelated system of representations. But, what happens when human beings actually visit the place? Chapter three will now deal with the Tibetan history of the initial human encounters with this special landscape, and the ways in which later Tibetans who visited the mountain set about navigating and interpreting it.



## Chapter Three

# History and Prayer As Map

## Opening the Doors to Pure Crystal Mountain Palace

### *Introduction*

If they abandon the oral guide to Tsa-ri,  
The pilgrims are liable to turn into sightseers.  
Without the eulogies of the Tsa-ri pilgrimage circuit,  
They just gossip about the theft of the monastery's yak.<sup>1</sup>

As this local proverb reminds us, it is important for pilgrims to have certain forms of explanation and glorification of a site in order for them to meaningfully interpret it, and remain focused upon its virtues during their ritual journeys. In fact, the notion of pilgrimage in the Tibetan understanding would be meaningless without such forms. In my own research I have always considered materials such as guides and eulogies to be just as important for an understanding of Tibetan attitudes and rituals concerning places and landscapes as the ethnographic observations and participation of field work. I think this not only because Tibetan culture is highly literate in both oral and written modes, but also because my experiences while in the field continue to show that oral and written texts of all sorts are constantly in play when it comes to relating to place and landscape. Elsewhere I have analyzed the relationship between certain texts and landscapes and shown that both the style and the politics of representation need to be considered in the Tibetan context.<sup>2</sup> These analytical concerns continue to direct my work.

In this chapter I will present two pieces of material: one, from a guide-book, is written and old, but continually being recycled; the other, a prayer or eulogy, is oral and of unknown age, although it remains in use today. They are excellent representatives of two important forms which are constantly invoked in Tibetan ritual relationships between persons and places. Although short, both texts contain a large amount of specific 'local' information about Tsa-ri. For these reasons alone they are worthy of inclusion in translation here. However, my main purpose for including them at this point is to discuss their style of presentation of the site and some of the implications that has for the interpretation of landscape and the ritual relationship with place at Tsa-ri. Following on from the previous chapter, these materials show how the conception of landscape and organisation of space in the form of divine residence, as *maṅḍala* or *stūpa*, are more than just 'cosmically' determined. For Tibetans they are also historically

<sup>1</sup> *Bod kyi gtam dpe phyogs bsgribs* (1990:264); also entry under *tsa-ri* in *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.2:2183. This proverb is also revealing as it shows that distinctions such as those between 'pilgrims' and 'tourists' at a site are not just an analytical concern of anthropologists but an *emic* one as well.

<sup>2</sup> Huber (1989,1991,1992 in press, 1993 forthcoming).

constituted and reproduced by the activities of particular human beings at the site. As a prelude to understanding all ritual and domestic life around the mountain these materials begin to show the extent to which the representations of landscape at Tsa-ri are recognised 'on the ground' by Tibetans.

## *History and Prayer as Map*

### i. Rethinking Maps

In the last few decades a large Western literature has developed on the concept of 'map'. Our notion of map has been extended from the paper maps of classical Western cartography, which represent the earth's surface, to include cognitive and social maps, the complex electronic maps of computer systems, and mathematical maps for navigating the multiple dimensions of hyperspace. Like many other cultures, including our own, Tibetans have used a variety of mapping systems for navigating their 'world-space' (*zhing-khams*).

There have long been graphic painted maps in Tibet, closer to what we usually think of as maps. These can be called *zhing-bkod/zhing-gi bkod-pa*, ('map', or lit. 'arrangement of a region/field'), and they most often represent Buddhafields, *maṇḍala* and other cosmograms, and the paradisiacal landscapes of alternative realities, such as the 'hidden land' of Shambhala or Padmasambhava's Glorious Copper Coloured Mountain. Actual Tibetan landscapes came to be represented in this style of 'map' when the Buddhafields which Tibetans recognised on earth, such as the Potala palace and its environs or great mountain power places, were portrayed. The places important in the lives of great saints also appeared as the background landscapes of their portraits. This style of representing landscape only became fully developed quite recently (post-eighteenth century) in the history of Tibetan art and owes much to the influences of Chinese landscape painting. But in virtually all cases these works are not maps which Tibetans could use to negotiate their own countryside, although their representation inspired a certain way of relating to the landscape as Buddhafield, *maṇḍala*, power place, etc. Also, as objects they did not have a mundane status, but were considered as *rten*, representations of the Buddha and his reality to be used as supports for meditation, considered as *mithong-grol* (being able to 'liberate by sight' of them) and worshipped and treated with respect for the empowerment with which they were charged.<sup>3</sup>

We have a few more recent (nineteenth-twentieth century) examples of maps usually called *sa-khra* ('map', or lit.= 'variegated countryside'), with *khra* here signifying a blending together of many colours of various landscape features; it can also mean 'register, index' or 'a framed

<sup>3</sup> For example, following the standard prayer to Tsa-ri forming the inscription on the rear of the *thang-kha* in my plate 3 it states, "If this [image] is seen or [prayer] heard by any sentient beings they will become liberated from misfortunes [and] bad rebirths (*durgati*)!"; see appendix 4.3 for the full text.

window' in other compounds. As this etymology suggests these 'maps' resemble the style of Western cartography a little more and do not appear to have a particular ritual status, although they retain a unique Tibetan system of projection and spacial reference.<sup>4</sup> Even more recently we find Tibetan maps heavily influenced by exposure to Western-style cartography and world-view.<sup>5</sup>

While the history of Tibetan cartography is interesting, my point here is that maps in the way we think of them, as portable graphic representations, have not had a long history in Tibet, were often accorded special status, and were rare. Instead most Tibetans have relied heavily on oral and written textual 'maps' or 'guides' to navigate and interpret particular physical landscapes. These forms are much more intensive and immediate ways of relating to landscapes and places, as they can simultaneously invoke history, myth, cosmology, theories of substance, place and person, social relations, and much more, besides just geography and topography. They are carriers of multiple systems of representation.

Textual maps come in many forms, and it is undesirable to define a genre for which there is no *emic* equivalent. My task is somewhat easier here as I am only interested in those forms which describe landscapes of the greatest significance for Tibetans themselves, such as power places like Tsa-ri. Power places, whether as human-made complexes or natural landscape features, have several types of text devoted to them. There are 'guides' of widely differing lengths and styles (*dkar-chag*, *gnas-yig*, *gnas-bshad*, *lam-yig*), 'eulogies' (*gnas-bstod*, *bsngags-brjod*) and 'prayers' or 'petitions' (*gsol-'debs*). The limited Western notion of 'text' as written or printed book must be greatly expanded, or even abandoned, when working in this context. All these forms are interchangeably oral and written in whole or part, and many are versified specifically for oral mnemonic purposes. In pre-1959 Tibet many people, such as lay persons with no written literacy, could hear, memorize and recite these types of texts accurately without ever having contact with a written or printed version. With few exceptions they are non-exclusive, public forms. When considering them as 'maps', as I am about to do, we could call these fluid forms 'narrative maps' or 'oral/textual maps' with a translation of what Tibetans call *gnas-kyi lo-rgyus* ('narratives of place') and *gnas-bshad* ('oral explanations of place') in mind.

## ii. Good Stories Travel Far

I am about to offer a sixteenth-century text which many Westerners will no doubt read and

<sup>4</sup> Huber (1992), Aziz (1978).

<sup>5</sup> Stoddard (1988:469) ventures that dGe-'dun Chos-'phel was probably the first Tibetan to produce a modern map of the globe in 1937. Editions of his well-known pilgrimage guide-book to Buddhist sites in India come with an interesting Tibetan map representing the Indian road and rail system linking these places, for which see the reproduction and comments in Stablein (1978:10-12).

use as a 'medieval' history of Tsa-ri and the religious institutions that gathered around it. I want to show that for Tibetans it is far more than that: certain narratives we might call 'history' are also sophisticated textual maps which can enjoy long periods of currency in a variety of written, oral or even performative expressions.

This first text can be classed as a 'narrative of place' (*gnas-kyi lo-rgyus*), and forms the fourth and longest chapter of a written guide to Tsa-ri. Its author, Padma dKar-po (1527-92),<sup>6</sup> has been renowned in the Tibetan world since his own day, earning the title of 'polymath' (*kun-mkhyen*) for his vast and often inspired scholarship.

Although there are earlier surviving guides, more detailed guides, and still shorter guides to Tsa-ri, Padma dKar-po's text, particularly the chapter translated here, became and remained the seminal work on the mountain. Portions of it are used in many different contexts relating to Tsa-ri. For example, parts of the text can be found as the performance narrative for a 'cham still danced in Bhutan,<sup>7</sup> quoted in biography,<sup>8</sup> employed extensively to construct other later oral and written guides,<sup>9</sup> recycled in prayers and eulogies,<sup>10</sup> and slipped into contemporary speech when people talk of Tsa-ri.<sup>11</sup> Why? Surely in part because of Padma dKar-po's great prestige in certain circles, but mainly because his text 'works'- the polymath was a good storyteller, and good stories travel far. To construct it he wove together a whole series of short pieces, at times inspiring, dramatic and entertaining (there is little sex, but lots of magic and violence), yet also always informative; quite simply the work is consumable and memorable. But for the Tibetan hearers/readers who might or do go to Tsa-ri we have here more than just a good story.

<sup>6</sup> Despite an often peculiar and colloquial style, Padma dKar-po was a gifted author. His little guide to Tsa-ri, written around 1570, is a classic example of the later 'synthetic' style of longer guide-books. It is a pastiche of prayer, polemic, cosmology, esoteric ritual instruction, Tantric Buddhist geography, anecdote, narrative history, and more, some from his own hand but much of it 'cut and pasted' from earlier sources. For mnemonic and stylistic reasons he has also woven two texts together to form the work: the longer *Legs-bshad* or 'Elegant Sayings' has his short, condensed verse *Gnas-bstod* or 'Place Eulogy' interspersed throughout, creating an irregular 'skeleton'.

<sup>7</sup> See ff.23b-24a in my translation for his narrative of gTsang-pa rGya-ras's victory over the evil frog of Tsa-ri, the subject of a 'cham called *chos-gzhas* performed in Bhutanese annual festivals. See Nag-'phel, 'Brug gzhung 'cham yig, under heading: *chos gzhas zhes pa'i 'cham gyis 'byung khungs...*; *mChod gzhas kyi gdangs dbyangs tshig dang 'brel ba* (n.d.); and the brief notes by Aris (1980:46).

<sup>8</sup> See for example bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1037-40).

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985,vol.4:15-73; 1985,vol.2:169-194); for an oral example, Slob-dpon bSod-nams bZang-po (c.1982).

<sup>10</sup> See for example *Gnas chen tsā ri tra'i gsol 'debs* (c.1975).

<sup>11</sup> When doing field work on Tsa-ri in 1991 and 1992 I already knew the Tibetan text well from translating it, some of it I remembered by heart. I was able to recognise, initially to my surprise, that my informants often lapsed into quotes from the text when telling stories and giving explanations.

### iii. Instructions For Reading a Tibetan Narrative Map

Reading the narrative carefully we see that it functions on many related levels at once for the pilgrim. I will discuss but a few here. It is general knowledge that the mountain is a special type of place, one that is 'self-produced' (*rang-'byung*) and 'spontaneous' (*lhun-gyi-grub*), and thus possessing an innate, natural power or 'empowerment' (*byin-gyis-brlabs*) from which it gains its high status. The central theme of the narrative is about this power of place, the power of certain human and non-human beings and the different exchanges that occur between them. We read how the great, natural *maṇḍala* palace is ritually accessed, its landscape doors 'opened', and its powers obtained in the form of various types of *siddhi*, realizations and prophecies, and cleansing of defilement by a line-up of some of Tibet's most important yogins and lamas. But even for many of these Tantric superheroes the task is extremely challenging as the place itself is so powerful: any disrespect or doubt (e.g. sGam-po-pa, La-va-pa's disciple and Tsong-kha-pa) creates instant problems, ritual impropriety (e.g. gNyo, 'Gar and Chos) leads to failures, human jealousy (e.g. 'Brug-pa and Tshal-pa yogins) results in natural disasters, and so on. The message to humans is clear: this place is supercharged with power, handle it with care!

We find that the place is not an anonymous powerhouse: it is inhabited by all manner of non-human beings whose individual powers humans must either subdue and convert or pay great respect to, depending upon their ranking in the *maṇḍala* palace hierarchy. We learn that nothing about the mountain's environment can be taken for granted, such as the local weather, lakes, animal life, even minerals, herbs or water. Although it is inherently powerful, the mountain also continues to accumulate even more status by having such a prestigious cast of saintly persons associated with it.<sup>12</sup> Power in various forms is exchanged. For Tibetans this is not just a symbolic exchange but a substantial one, as empowerment is transferred from enlightened bodies to spots in the physical environment. This subtle transformation is not the only change in the landscape registered in the narrative. 'Imprinting' of one kind or other is occurring constantly as the events become physically incorporated as landscape features, or existing features are stamped with marks or shaped, and a whole collection of significant toponyms are generated. These first human actions also establish the ritual dimensions of the whole empowered landscape. Everything that happens in the narrative becomes ritually significant for later human visitors to the mountain, often by way of imitation, as we will see in the following chapters.

All of this 'reading' creates a sophisticated map of the very landscape that Tibetan visitors and residents at the mountain travel over and directly encounter. It is a map which offers dimensions

<sup>12</sup> At the same time of course Padma dKar-po is continually transferring status to members of his own 'Brug-pa lineage at the expense of the figures from the dGe-lugs-pa, 'Bri-gung-pa, Tshal-pa, Shug-gseb-pa and others, who make mistakes, fail, precipitate calamities and can be downright nasty by comparison.

of both space and time, of both gross visible and sublime unseen substances, powers and life forms, and all this is related to actual named sites and routes around the mountain at the same time. It is a rich map indeed, and becomes even more so when we understand that all it contains is further elaborated upon by other written, oral and performative narratives. The pilgrim who visits the mountain with this map can potentially live out all that it presents: she will face the same powers, walk the same routes, perform the same rituals and perhaps have the same meditational and initiatory experiences.

If this narrative is a 'history', it is one of powerful places and powerful beings and the interrelationship of their powers over time. If it is a 'map', it is a complex spacio-temporal coordinate system indicating all dimensions of that power, and how and where one can ritually interface with it in a positive manner.

iv. Padma dKar-po's Narrative Map of Tsa-ri<sup>13</sup>

*The Miraculous Appearance of the Power Place  
Cāritra, the so-called  
'Elegant Sayings of Pad[ma] dKar[-po]'*

Chapter Four:  
How the Doors to the Place were Opened

[18a...] At the time of the early diffusion of the [Buddha's] Doctrine to the land of Tibet the ritual formula-holder (*mantradhara*) and accomplished one (*siddha*) Padma[sambhava] came through the southern door, the Jo-bo Them-pa pass of Byar.<sup>14</sup> He performed meditation for an interval of seven years, seven months and seven days in the Zil-chen gSang-ba'i-phug (Cave of Secret Great Brilliance). He systematised a whole vision of this powerful place [in his meditation]. [18b] He concealed innumerable, profound Dharma treasures there, and shortly after that Vimalamitra arrived there by way of his magical powers. After dwelling in

<sup>13</sup> I have used two versions in my translation: ff.18a-29a of *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang pad dkar legs bshad*, published in *Collected Works (gSun-'bum) of Kun-mkhyen Padma-dkar-po*, vol.4. Darjeeling, Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1973, ff.207-74; and pp.42-77 of a booklet edition entitled *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang pad dkar legs bshad*, The Guide Book of Holi (sic.) Place Charitra. Darjeeling, Lama Sherab Gyatso, 1982. Other versions exist in Bhutan, but I have been unable to consult them. Where possible I have translated technical terms, the relevant Tibetan and Sanskrit equivalents being given in brackets after the first occurrence only. To reveal the descriptive toponymy of important local place names I have given an English gloss in brackets after the first occurrence. I have not applied this translation policy to other Tibetan extracts given in this work, and it is done here specifically to make a long text easier to read, particularly for those unfamiliar with Tibetan and Buddhist literature. Folio numbers are given for the 1973 edition.

<sup>14</sup> This is the district of Byar-po or Bya-yul to the west of Tsa-ri, an important region for the 'Brug-pa school since the time of Padma dKar-po. According to SG the pass is to the south of gSang-sngags Chos-gling, and is the abode of the *Bya yul-lha* deity *Pho-lha mGon-po Dar-rgyas*.



the palace [of Cakrasaṃvara] he taught the Dharma to the non-humans (*mi-ma-yin*). Then, there was one known as meditation master (*ācārya*) La-va-pa,<sup>15</sup> and from among the many so-called this La-va-pa was the one from the east [of India], who was a teacher (*guru*) of the Lord Atiśa. And because his disciple named Bhu-su-ku<sup>16</sup> told him he wanted to go to the actual abode of Saṃvara in Oḍiyāṇa, he said, "There is a place that has greater power than Oḍiyāṇa, in the barbarous border-country to the north [of Bengal], go there!" He went but he did not see it. He came back and [La-va-pa] said, "I will help you", and they set out from the eastern door and came through the Parpa ravine. At first they went to Cig-car (Sudden [Realization]), and then to the Ma-chen La-va-phug (La-va[-pa's] Cook Cave).<sup>17</sup> Then, when they stayed in the rDo-rje-phug (Diamond Cave) on the side of mKha'-spyod-ri (Khecara Mountain) [La-va-pa said to Bhu-su-ku], "You go down below, there are dancing virgins, so bring me the one in the middle!" After seizing an incense bowl, he recited the ritual formula (*mantra*) of *The Pure Nature of Reality*, and went. Thus, he met with the twenty-one virgins living there. After leading off the one in the middle, he left. A minute passed, and then his concentration lapsed for an instant, the virgin was gone, and he found a radish in his hand. Thinking that the virgin had turned into the radish he questioned the meditation master, who said, "Wash the radish", [19a] and, "Having washed it, split it and cook it [into a broth]". As [Bhu-su-ku] said, "It is cooked", he told him, "Bring a full bowl to me too. You yourself drink it as well!" He handed the meditation master a full bowl. But, thinking it was human flesh, he himself was unable to drink it. He swilled it around and threw it out to a dog that was there, and it followed after them. As a result, later the meditation master and the dog both went to the summit of mKha'-spyod mountain where they departed to the mKha'-spyod [Pure Abode]. [Bhu-su-ku] was left behind and so, uttering lamentations, he pleaded with the meditation master. Because of this the meditation master came back, and peeling aside the skin from his body, he bestowed on him a [vision of] a self-manifested sixty-two deity Saṃvara [*maṇḍala*] assembly. Thus, he returned to India, and his impediments ceased. It was prophesied that he would obtain the mundane paranormal powers (*siddhi*). The meditation master himself disappeared into a rainbow light. The meditation master was offered the paranormal powers by a sky-goer (*mkha'-'gro-ma*) called La-ghi. So, accordingly, it is not right to have doubts about anything in this place. Also, when the great Tsong-kha-pa went on pilgrimage [here], having thought it improper for a cleric to drink beer he did not partake, and as a result a pain like bamboo-splinters in his feet nearly killed him. Nothing others could do for him was to any avail. Thinking it was like a retribution for his having discursive thoughts with regard to beer in that power place, he consumed some consecrated substances and because of that he recovered. This is as it appears in his own biography.<sup>18</sup> After that [19b] his disciple [Bhu-su-ku] returned, and as a result, later obtained the mundane paranormal powers. His name was [Prajñā]rakṣita. He was one of the one hundred and eight

<sup>15</sup> C.f. Tib. Lwa-wa-pa, La-ba-pa, and Skt. Kambala, Kambalapa, see Templeman (1983:33-6, n.126); Dowman (1985:179-85).

<sup>16</sup> See Dowman (1985:222-28); but c.f. 'Kusulu', Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:xxix, 202, 230).

<sup>17</sup> C.f. the 'Ca-ri-rma-chen' in Kaschewsky (1971:1 Teil, 131).

<sup>18</sup> On this incident see Kaschewsky (1971:1 Teil, 131).

teachers of the Master Lotsāva Mar-pa,<sup>19</sup> and some of the precepts of his school are found in the lineage from Phag[-mo] Gru[-pa].<sup>20</sup> After a prayer to [La-va-pa] by the gNyo-ston, the great Bra-'or-pa Chos-'bar Grags-pa,<sup>21</sup> who was a personal pupil of the Master Ras-chung-pa, that skin of his body was brought to gNyal by the Master [La-va-pa's] magical powers, to the village of sNang-khrar.<sup>22</sup> At present it is said to be found in the heart of the *stūpa* of Bra-'or. And when Atīśa travelled to Tibet, because he made a request to the meditation master La-va-pa to show him the *maṇḍala*, [La-va-pa] explained the directions to him saying, "Go to that spot in the barbarous border-country to the north [of Bengal] where there exists a meditation place." Although the Lord [Atīśa] did not go there in person, from the summit of the pass of gSang-phu,<sup>23</sup> after seeing the Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* of Lūhipā<sup>24</sup> in this place, he composed a eulogy.

The Dharma King (*dharmarāja*) Zla-'od gZhon-nu, who was extolled as the eradicator of the disease of moral and cognitive obscurations, and also known as Dwags-po lHa-rje in the three worlds, was prophesied by the Blessed One himself to be like a Jina himself in the Jina's teaching as, "The bhikṣu-doctor in the later diffusion [of Buddhism to Tibet]".<sup>25</sup> After many days on the Dharma-throne of Zangs-lung, [20a] the mountain which symbolises the power place sGam-po,<sup>26</sup> that [great teacher gave the following discourse],

SEE ERRATA

In this place yonder where the sun is refracted into the rosy clouds, mists and rainbows of the south-east there is directly manifest the divine assembly of Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara, the great palace which is spontaneously arisen, the one called Tsa-ri rTswa-gong Parbata (Tsa-ri Superior Herb Mountain).<sup>27</sup> It is a place for making offerings of meat and beer to Vajravārāhī, where all the paranormal powers are realised as desired by those with the [appropriate] karma and fortune,

<sup>19</sup> See Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:202).

<sup>20</sup> The 'lineage' here refers to the eight sub-schools of the bKa'-brgyud-pa that originated from Phag-mo Gru-pa rDo-rje rGyal-po (1110-1170) and his disciples.

<sup>21</sup> The gNyo-ston of gNyal (a region of lHo-kha just to the west of Bya-yul) is listed as one of Ras-chung-pa's disciples in Roerich (1979:273); his name (Bra>Gra) suggests he came from Gra-'or, the site of one of the gNyal *sde-drug* of later fame, see Petech (1973:41-2, n.13).

<sup>22</sup> This is Ngang-skyal, also one of the gNyal *sde-drug*, see Petech (1973:41-2, n.13).

<sup>23</sup> On Atīśa and gSang-phu see Wylie (1962:148, n.305).

<sup>24</sup> Or Lūipa/Lū-yi-pa, see Templeman (1983:8ff) and Dowman (1985:33-8), whose liturgy for realising the Saṃvara *maṇḍala*, which became popular in Tibet, is being referred to here.

<sup>25</sup> On this prophecy see Lhalungpa (1986:119-20).

<sup>26</sup> This is Dwags-la sGam-po, the district just north of Tsa-ri, see Ferrari (1958:121, n.204); Wylie (1962:94).

<sup>27</sup> The 'superior herb' here is probably *Klu-bdud rDo-rje*, on which I will have more to say in the following chapter. The *parbata* here gives a transliteration of Sanskrit *parvata*, 'mountain'. In 1973 edition we find *parpa-ta*, which is a species of poisonous insect. The same orthography is found elsewhere in the text (f.16b) in a local place name, *parpa-rong*. Also *par-pa-ta* is a species of medicinal herb, which may be significant here given the rest of the name.

and where those without fortune are destroyed by the worldly sky-goers who rejoice in flesh and blood. The entry path of the noxious demons is frequented by such things as tigers and leopards, savage bears, wildmen (*mi-rgod*), trailāṭaka [horse-flies] and tryambuka [flies].<sup>28</sup> The ground in all directions is covered by inconceivable varieties of flowers. There is an incessant stream of fragrant incense. It has a place which continuously emits harmonious music.

Because the time had arrived to open the door of that place, [Dwags-po lHa-rje] pointed his finger at it and asked [his disciples], "Which of you is able to do it?" And because it was a fierce place seven boils erupted on his finger. Then the following day he stuck it out straight, and even though he asked for three [more] days no one came forth who was able to do it. A day later when he looked directly at sKye-bo Ye-shes rDo-rje,<sup>29</sup> that great ascetic sKye[-bo] thought, "What? Is my precious teacher talking to me?" [20b], and then asked, "Can I have permission to go [and open it]?" Consequently, [Dwags-po lHa-rje] was very willing, and as a result the eleven, sKye-bo Ye-shes rDo-rje the master and his [ten] disciples, first went up through the Gru-ma valley.<sup>30</sup> When they did so the path was obstructed by the protective deity Gri-gug-can.<sup>31</sup> That is, after midday mist and cloud closed in and they lost their way. Sometimes [the protector] rolled around like a langur monkey, at others he rang out like a bell, and sometimes poked just like a ritual sceptre (*vajra*) and leaped into the air. They presented a ritual cake (*gtor-ma*) to him. Because they implored him, "Don't come here! Go elsewhere", that protector disappeared into a rock. Even now, on that rock's surface there is a distinct body [imprint].

They arrived in La-bar-rgyal. After seeking lodgings with a nun there they rested. They asked her, "Is there a spot where people can get through farther on from this valley? What is the valley like? Have you been there?" So the woman replied, "I have never been there. I have no knowledge of the valley which you mention. However, I have a daughter who has gone to give a circular feast offering (*gaṇacakra*) at Cāritra. She goes to all the festivals. She left already yesterday. You yourselves go too, meet her on the way and ask her."

After that, sKye-bo [Ye-shes rDo-rje] the master and his disciples proceeded. At the foot of the pass they heard the daughter's distant, whispering song, and having realised that she was a sky-goer, [21a] they gave a circular feast offering. After questioning her they crossed the pass and came to the small white cave of Bod-[klung] (Tibet Mid-valley). Mist and cloud closed in. Innumerable demonic

<sup>28</sup> Or 'hornets'? See Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, p.259; *Mahāvīyutpatti*:4861, 4862. Note the Tibetan spelling is wrong.

<sup>29</sup> Ye-shes rDo-rje was the ordination name of Bya 'Chad-kha-pa (1101-1175), a disciple of Ras-chung-pa, Shar-ba-pa and sGam-po-pa who came from Lo-ro just to the west of Tsa-ri. He was also known as sKye-po Ye-rdor, see Roerich (1979:273-6, 462), and is not to be confused with gTsang-pa rGya-ras Ye-shes rDo-rje (1161-1211) who enters the text a little further on.

<sup>30</sup> Or Gru-lung (also Grum and Gru-ma-lung in other sources) in which the 'Trulung Chu' flows north into the Tsangpo river, was the site of the sKu-rabs rNam-rgyal rDzong which administered the Tsa-ri district for the Lhasa authorities.

<sup>31</sup> On this deity see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:34).

apparitions appeared. [Ye-shes rDo-rje] dispatched his disciples to another cave. Because he himself remained there [meditating] in the demon-conquering concentration (*samādhi*) for seven days the omens and magical deceptions abated of their own accord. There, in Bod-klung, smoke rose in the day, and fire blazed at night. Because they went there the [sky-goers of the five families] appeared: the Buddha sky-goer in a space matrix-triangle (*dharmodaya*), the Vajra sky-goer in a stone matrix-triangle, the Ratna sky-goer in an earth matrix-triangle, the Padma sky-goer in a water matrix-triangle and the Karma sky-goer in a wood matrix-triangle. In particular, labia of white alchemical rock (*cong-zhi*)<sup>32</sup> appeared in the stone matrix-triangle or vulva (*yoni*). The following morning the sky-goer Seng-ge'i-gDong-can and her three sisters appeared to them in person and said,

sKye-bo [Ye-shes rDo-rje] and company don't sleep, get up! Get up and act like you were taking refuge! Get up and meditate like you would on the arising of thoughts.

If you don't shed your human life like [old] skin and hair,  
There is a danger your aggregates (*skandha*) will hang [on you] like  
an animal pelt.

If you don't sever your attachments like a rotten rope,  
There is a danger your propensities will pursue you like a separated  
foal.

If you don't cast off your worldly desires like phlegm,  
[21b] There is a danger your thirst will increase as when drinking  
salt water.

If you don't defend your vows like a 'life-castle' (*srog-mkhar*),  
There is a danger your afflictive emotions will overwhelm you like  
an army.

Having said that, [they continued]:

Yogins, your perseverance is great. [But] because you have no regard for life and limb, and wear these garments [like clerics do], neither will you realise the wishes of your lama, nor delight the mother-goddesses (*ma-mo*) and sky-goers, open the door to the place of Tsa-ri, see the divine faces which appear within or attain the supreme and the mundane paranormal powers. Therefore, if you wish to open the door to the place of Tsa-ri, come at about this time next year, having put a rain hat on your head, rain boots on your feet and a walking stick<sup>33</sup> in your hand! While constantly carrying an unceasing stream of incense smoke and the twin requisites of means and wisdom, come in singing non-stop from the peaks of the three mountains! Come in dancing non-stop from the junction of the three valleys! Offer an unceasing stream of libations and ritual cakes, and pray fiercely. If you do that now, we too will help you to open the door to that place!

<sup>32</sup> A type of white medicinal stone used in alchemical preparations, on which see the entries in *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.1:735-6.

<sup>33</sup> *Chu-ber* which is local Tsa-ri dialect for 'a stick for jumping creeks', SG interview.

Having said that, they were absorbed into that stone vulva. After that, the [master and his disciples] all went back. About a year later, acting in accordance with the teachings which were imparted to him, [Ye-shes rDo-rje] went there. He petitioned his gracious root-lama (*mūlaguru*) [sGam-po-pa] seated upon the sun-moon throne on the crown of his head [22a],<sup>34</sup>

Lead the way to open what was commanded.  
Reveal the divine faces which manifest within.  
Empower the self-liberated, luminous mind.

I pray that inner and outer impediments do not arise,  
And that I be granted the supreme and mundane paranormal powers.  
I petition the Bod rDo-mtshan-can (Sexed Rocks of Tibet),  
And beseech the bDud-mgon Nag-po.<sup>35</sup>

Through his petitioning with [the words "Lead the way to open] what was commanded", etc., he saw into the western door of the girdle of ritual sceptres [encircling the *maṇḍala*]. After that, he passed through Dom-tshang (Bear's Den) and Ka-lā [Dung-mtsho] (Conch-shell Conduit Lake). At first, he came upon the 'Od-'bar-mtsho (Blazing Light Lake). Thinking he had encountered the g.Yu-mtsho (Turquoise Lake)<sup>36</sup> he returned, but the Lord Zla-'od gZhon-nu said, "It is not the g.Yu-mtsho, search still further." The second time, he performed a left-handed circumambulation. He came upon the Pho-brang sKyog-mo[-mtsho](Ladle Lake Palace).<sup>37</sup> Having thought this was the g.Yu-mtsho he returned, but it was not the g.Yu-mtsho and he continued on. The third time, because he performed a right-handed circumambulation, he saw the Pho-brang g.Yu-mtsho (Turquoise Lake Palace). He met directly with the internally manifest divine hosts of Dag-pa Shel-ri (Pure Crystal Mountain) and retinue. Because he was given some *gling-chen*<sup>38</sup> by the two field-protector (*zhing-skyong*) sky-goer sisters, he obtained the mundane paranormal powers, beginning with the power of levitation. He consolidated his understanding of Mahāmudrā. After taking hold of the *gling[-chen]* in his right hand and a walking stick in his left he performed a dance, and having sung,

This supreme place, glorious Tsa-ri,  
Is not wandered by all and sundry [22b].  
I have abandoned worldly activities,  
I have self-luminosity of mind itself.

<sup>34</sup> According to KG the following prayer was sung by Tsa-ri-bas when they passed around a large brass bowl of beer at certain local festivals.

<sup>35</sup> On the black bDud-mgon see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:25, 29).

<sup>36</sup> This site (=Pho-brang Chen-po g.Yu-mtsho) is the main empowered lake at Tsa-ri, south of Dag-pa Shel-ri peak. See the description in Bailey (1957:208).

<sup>37</sup> Also called "Sindhura'i-rgya-mtsho of sKyog-mo" by Tibetans as it contains the empowered ritual substance known as *sindūra*, a type of minium or red lead; see the following chapter.

<sup>38</sup> Tsa-ri-bas describe this as a tall species of herb resembling a wild onion, on which see my next chapter.

It's a place to fling down life and limb.  
 It's a place to remove hindrances whose causes are outer and inner.  
 It's a place to make an analysis of cyclic existence (*samsāra*).  
 It's a place to weigh ascetics [and their accomplishment] the balance.

It's a place for thoroughly understanding the mind.  
 It's a place to preserve the clear light with the mind.  
 It's a place to receive the two levels of paranormal powers.

This supreme place, glorious Tsa-ri,  
 Is not some minor monastery up behind a village.  
 This *gling-chen*, which is a paranormal power[-producing] substance,  
 Is not the spittle for smashing demons and demonesses.

The clerical siblings of this assembled Vajra[yāna] family,  
 Are not [the type of] ascetics who roam around the marketplace.

He made those words resonate in his mind. Because he struck his walking stick on a rock, it went in as if being pushed into mud. Even nowadays the imprint of that is still found there.

One generation after that the sKyob-pa 'Jig-rten gSum-gyi mGon-po<sup>39</sup> established his eastern seat of Dwags-lha sGam-po. From the summit of Ri-bo Shānti (Tranquillity Mountain) he saw directly all the characteristics of the outer, inner and secret places of Tsa-ri, and with that he dispatched his three best disciples, gNyo-chen-po rGyal-ba lHa-nang-pa, 'Gar-dam-pa and dPal-chen Chos-yes.<sup>40</sup> They went, passing through the Gru-ma valley of Dwags-po. Because they followed the tracks left by three white grouse, they found the Gong-mo-la (White Grouse Pass). They went to Bod-kha-sum (Three Openings of Tibet).<sup>41</sup> And [at the same time], when gTsang-pa rGya-ras [23a] was sitting in meditation at Jo-mo Kha-rag,<sup>42</sup> the following morning the sky-goer Seng-ge'i gDong-pa-can appeared to him on three different occasions and prophesied, "rGya-ras-pa, because the time has come to open the door to the place of Tsa-ri, go there!" He thought, 'Is this really necessary?', and as a result, during his stay at that same [place], at about sunrise on the mountain peak of Kha-rag, the great accomplished one

<sup>39</sup> This is 'Bri-gung-pa Rin-chen-dpal (1143-1217) who was a leading figure in the establishment of the three main Tibetan sites of Saṃvara tantrism; Ti-se, Tsa-ri and La-phyi, see Huber (1992 in press, 1993 forthcoming).

<sup>40</sup> These are gNyo lHa-nang-pa (1164-1224) the founder of the lHa-pa school of the bKa'-brgyud-pa; 'Gar-dam-pa Chos-sdings-pa (b.1180); and Chos-dpal-chen Chos-yes, also known as Ngor-rje Ras-pa, see Roerich (1979:601-4).

<sup>41</sup> So called as here three routes crossing high passes leading to the west, north and east all meet. Pilgrim access for Bya-yul, gNyal, and southern Tibet was via the Char-la (16,600') to the west, for Dwags-po and Central Tibet was via the Gong-mo-la (17,500') to the north, and for Kong-po and rKyem-gdong and eastern areas was via the 'Bi-'bi-la (15,700) to the east; see the photo in Fletcher (1975:99, pl. 26).

<sup>42</sup> This peak, near sNye-mo on the gTsang-dBus border, was an important meditation and retreat site, esp. for the Tshal-pa bKa'-brgyud; see Tshal-pa Kun-dga' rDo-rje (1981:138), Dowman (1985:117, 330).

(*mahāsiddha*) Gling-ras-pa<sup>43</sup> appeared in a dwelling tent of five kinds of rainbows and [said]:

rGya-ras my son, hurry your meditation without delay!  
In the *maṇḍala* which is manifested as Tsa-ri,  
There is the sky-goer's rDo'i-snying-phug (Stone Heart Cave).

There is *gling-chen* which bestows paranormal powers when eaten.  
There is the empowerment of the mother-goddesses and sky-goers.  
The Buddha that requires no cultivation is in that place.

And the apparition disappeared on the instant of giving that advice. After that took place, he announced his intention of going to Tsa-ri. Gradually he went as far as 'Bri-gung. His companions returned each to their own provinces. By means of his own understanding of his teacher's yoga he held his breath for one [meditation] session, and in that way he got to Bod-kha-gsum on that very day, and met with gNyos, 'Gar and Chos. They asked him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am rGya-ras the big-eyed one, disciple of Gling-ras the big-bellied one." So they asked, "Well, where are you going at present?" Thus he said, "I am going to open the door to the place of Tsa-ri." [23b] So they replied, "As we need the substances which are the means and wisdom materials for a circular feast offering there, we have to travel together with many servants, otherwise we can't go." However, he perceived that the means and wisdom substances are meat and beer, and said, "You do it that way yourselves! That is not the way I see it!"

As they went on their way together a small young boy appeared riding on a horse which had lumps of gold and turquoise decorating it. Because they went in accordance with his request, "Lamas, you go up through here, since there is nothing other than one hermit there", ever since it has been called the Rib-pa-la (Hermit Pass).<sup>44</sup>

This was the north-west door. From there they went below mKha'-lding-brag (Garuḍa Crag). They halted there, and because gNyos arrived saying over and over, "This resting place of our friend rGya-ras is pleasant" [rGya-ras] offered, "If it pleases you keep it yourself, friend!" Again, they descended together. When they came to the sBal-pa g.Yu-mtsho (Frog Turquoise Lake), the path was blocked by a terrible frog as strong as a yak, and it would not let them pass. When gNyos, while meditating in concentration, 'Gar-dam-pa, through meditating on the generation-stage of Vajrabhairava and dPal-chen Chos-yes, by placing ritual cakes, were all thinking, 'Oh! Be pacified', the Dharma Lord (*dharmasvāmin*) rGya-ras leapt onto its back without hesitation, and because of that gNyos-chen-po [24a] responded,

Brave friend, don't do that! Not only will the life and limb of our

<sup>43</sup> Gling-ras-pa Padma rDo-rje (1128-88) was a disciple of Phag-mo Gru-pa and the teacher of gTsang-pa rGya-ras himself. He is sometimes mentioned as the founder of the 'Brug-pa school, but this was really the work of his famous disciple.

<sup>44</sup> Here read *rib-pa=ri-pa*. This is the Rip-la of Western maps, located at the north-western end of the Dag-pa Shel-ri massif. It is the last pass crossed on the *gzhung-skor* and *rong-skor* circuits by pilgrims from northern and eastern homelands.

honoured friend be devoured by this malicious underworld demon (*klu*), but it will also do harm to following generations.

To this the Lord rGya-ras replied,

Whether long or short my life span is fifty-one [years, come what may]. In the future a spring will emerge from beneath this threshold. At that time, my followers will migrate from this place and may have to take some action, otherwise nothing will happen.

After saying that he trampled that frog violently and in consequence it was turned into a boulder and stayed that way. Many extremely clear footprints appeared on it. The magical deceptions abated. After that, when they went to Yul-smad (Lower Country), one hundred thousand sky-goers who were made from wisdom and karma appeared in ranked assembly. When they had taken up their seats there, after 'Gar-darn-pa arrived he said, "This resting place of our friend is pleasant," so [rGya-ras] offered, "If it pleases you keep it yourself, noble friend!"<sup>45</sup> After that, descending from the sKyobs-chen-la (Great Assistance Pass) the Dharma Lord rGya-ras arrived in Cig-car, and at that time the path was blocked by the non-humans manifesting as a multitude of vulvas. Then, having made his penis suitable for the deed he inserted it into them, and as a result they turned into rock and the imprint of them stood out clearly. He found the rDo'i-snying cave. There he bound the field-protector sky-goer rDo-rje g.Yu'i-sgron-ma<sup>46</sup> by oath. [24b] To that she responded, "I will be your Dharma-protector (*dharmapāla*)." And because he said, "A female Dharma-protector is no use to me," she promised, "Although I am of no use to the master himself, in the future your descendents will occupy this place and at that time I would be happy just to look after the yaks."<sup>47</sup> That great goddess acted as his Tantric consort (*karma-mudrā*). The field-protector Seng-ge'i gDong-pa-can [also] promised to do all he commanded. After that he descended. When he sat in a seat which had magically self-manifested, the directional guardian (*dikpāla*) Yamarāja came before him in the pleasing form of an eight year old boy, received ordination and took the name Cig-car dMar-po.<sup>48</sup> He left by way of the same pass as before, and as a consequence [the three 'Bri-gung-pa's] met him on the summit of the Sha-skam-la (Dried Meat Pass). Because they requested, "Today, friend rGya-ras, you must prepare an offering!",

SEE ERRATA <sup>45</sup> Yul-smad, including most western areas, became the principle centre of 'Bri-gung-pa religious activities and administration at Tsa-ri, and these little dialogues are supposed to show how their acquisition was due to the benevolence of the 'Brug-pa saint.

<sup>46</sup> An important goddess of the bsTan-ma bcu-gnyis class. On her iconography and role at Tsa-ri see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:190-91, 222).

<sup>47</sup> According to SG this refers to 'Gro-mgon bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan's later opening, and the special yak belonging to him. Also, Bailey (1957:205) recalls a tradition noted at Cig-car by Kintup as to why the area was important, "...the goddess Drölma used to pasture cattle at Kandrotang on the banks of a mountain lake."

<sup>48</sup> Often *dge-bsnyen* = *upāsaka*, although according to Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:222), this deity is a member of the dGe-bsnyen class of ancient mountain gods whose specific abode is Tsa-ri. The similarities with the origin of the Bhutanese god who was the guardian deity of the 'Brug-pa in Bhutan should be noted, as we find that Kun-dga' Seng-ge subjugated the "...dGe-bsnyen Chen-po Jag-pa Me-len and turned him into the 'protector' Srog-bdag gShan-pa dMar-po"; see Aris (1979:176).



he promised, "I will do that." Therefore, after he had held his breath for one [meditation] session as before, he went, and thus saw the field-protector's nomad tent. As a result of his begging there, butter and cheese inconceivable in extent appeared. The friends arrived and gave an extensive circular feast offering. Because the leftovers were heaped up in that place, it is called dKar-rdog-thang (White Heap Plateau), that is, nowadays it is a great heap [25a] which turned into and remained as *dkar-gong*.<sup>49</sup>

They proceeded as far as Zhig-mo Khrag-khriḡ (Billion Fragments). After that, darkness fell at noon and with the appearance of a billion stars the three—gNyos, 'Gar and Chos—delayed their departure. After the Dharma Lord rGya-ras said,

Here there is *gling-chen* which bestows paranormal powers when eaten.

Here there is the empowerment of the mother-goddesses and sky-goers.

It's a place for weighing ascetics in the balance.

It's a place to gauge the measure of a monk.

It's a place for the journey of me, the yogin rGya-ras.

He departed without hesitation. He penetrated to the dMar-nag Rakta (Blackish-red Blood). The face of the goddess Ekajaṭī, together with her retinue, was revealed. [She said], "Because you have received the [Tantric] vows, there's no doubt that we are equals." When the vow-holding lineage of 'Brug-pa disciples arrive here a single, clear, hot sun which dries cotton garments will very surely appear. And because one can know of the vicissitudes of the 'Brug-pa's teachings through the rising and falling of that lake it is called the 'Brug-pa'i Bla-mtsho ('Brug-pa's Vitality Lake). After that he arrived at Pho-brang [g.Yu-mtsho] (Turquoise Lake Palace). [In his meditation] he directly encountered an internally manifested divine assembly. It was prophesied by the Blessed One Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara that in this happy aeon he would become [the Buddha] Sangs-rgyas Mos-pa, and by the Blessed Lady Vārāhī, the Vajra Queen, that his teachings would spread as far as a vulture can fly in eighteen days.<sup>50</sup> There, in the Dharma Lord's own highest cave [25b] he prophesied the future arrival of rGyal-ba rGod-tshang-pa, saying, "A disciple of mine who has reached the tenth [*bodhisattva*] stage will come." After that rGya-ras travelled along a precipitous path, and because he dwelt in front of the lake of *sindūra*<sup>51</sup> a sky-goer brought water along a diamond conduit and offered it to him. Then the perfect cognition sky-goer (*ye-shes kyi mkha'-'gro-ma*) [Vajravārāhī] emerged from that lake of *sindūra* like a bursting bubble. Because she offered him eye-shades which were woven out of her own hair, after that the name rGya-ras Mig-ra-phug (rGya-ras Eye-shades Cave) was applied to that great cave.

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<sup>49</sup> The narrative suggests *dkar* in *dkar-rdog-thang* could also be read as *khar* (the colloquial usage for 'dairy products'), thus 'Dairy Food Pieces Plateau'? Tsa-ri-bas say that pilgrims collect a white mineral substance here called *dkar-gong*, a kind of white clay or stone which is used medicinally; see both Tibetan and Chinese entries in *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.1:53.

<sup>50</sup> On this well known statement see Roerich (1979:669).

<sup>51</sup> What we would call minium or red lead, a substance of the highest ritual status on the mountain as is clear from my next chapter.

Later, having gone back to Yul-stod, behind there [he found] a Vajravārāhi-like mountain, and having made a bamboo hut beneath a tree like a yogin's trident (*khaṭvāṅga*) he dwelt there for three months. As a result, one dawn, there appeared sounds, lights and the sweet fragrances of incense which were beyond the reach of the imagination, and at that very moment the seventh superior Buddha manifested before him. He bestowed upon him the entire doctrine of causality. With an unimpeded knowledge of all things that can be known he became accomplished as a Buddha with perfect dual knowledge (*mkhyen-gnyis*).

At that time, the three—gNyos, 'Gar and Chos—intended to circumambulate Tsa-ri. They went before the ['Bri-gung] sKyob-pa, and thus he dispatched them with instructions stating, "You could not circumambulate Tsa-ri because you did not encounter the face of dMar-nag [i.e. Ekajātī]. Return once more." On the second occasion, he said, "Once again, you could not circumambulate [to] Cig-car. [26a] There you did not meet the four gods which are special to me." He dispatched them a third time, sending them to Gru[-ma valley].<sup>52</sup> On that occasion gNyos-chen-po entered into the ranks of those who had given all the heroes (*vīra*) and sky-goers in Cig-car a circular feast offering. After he dwelt in that place it was known as gNyos-kyi rDo-gcal (gNyos's Paving Stone). In this place I, Padma dKar-po, built the temple of rDo-rje Phag-mo bDen-gnyis-zhal (Two Truths Face Vajravārāhi) through the inducement of the field-protector sky-goer's words,

You should labour zealously because the time has arrived for a pig-faced one to be self-produced under the ground, the appearance of a Vārāhi active in the sky above and a Vārāhi active on the earth between these!<sup>53</sup>

On that occasion also, in this region an inconceivably extensive garland of heroes and sky-goers singing and dancing came as nectar for the ears of all those assembled there.

On that third occasion, the three—gNyos, 'Gar and Chos—had a vision just like a divine host manifested within.

Of the eighteen functionaries, the servants of the Four Superior Lamas [of the bKa'-brgyud lineages] who moved to Yul-stod, six were 'Brug-pa, one was Zhang Tshal-pa, two were gDan-sa-thil-pa and the remainder were 'Bri-gung-pa.

At the time they arrived there [26b] a personal disciple of the glorious Phag-mo Gru-pa, the yogin possessing a consort (*mudrā*) known as Gyer-sgom Zhig-po<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Gsum pa rdzong gru stsal*: which could also read, "He dispatched them a third time, sending them on the ferry (*gru*)", as the event takes place at Dwags-lha sGam-po on the north bank of the great gTsang-po river.

<sup>53</sup> Padma dKar-po built his temple in Cig-car after he received this prophecy and while excavating the foundations discovered 'gNyos's paving-stone', see his autobiography in *bKa'-brgyud gSer-'phen*, vol.3:597. The temple is named after the symbolism of the Vajravārāhi icon which possesses two heads, those of a woman and of a sow (*vārāhi*).

<sup>54</sup> Gyer-sgom Tshul-krim Seng-ge (1144-1204) established the Shug-gseb monastery in sNye-phu in 1181, thus founding the little known Shug-gseb-pa bKa'-brgyud lineage. They followed the system of the

was already dwelling there in Yul-stod. Thinking it improper that this power place was occupied by a yogin with a female partner, they told him so, and therefore Gyer-sgom rode off upon a white mare. As a consequence, later that pass which he rode over was called rTa-dkar (White Horse).<sup>55</sup> He dwelt in the cave of sKjus-mdo (Lower sKjus Valley).<sup>56</sup> In that place there still can be seen the *stūpa* containing relics of his Final Decease (*parinirvāṇa*). When he went, because he left behind his fire flint there he said, "In my wake also, there will probably be nothing but continuous smoke [i.e. my lineage will continue here]." Later, hermits of the Shug-gseb-pa at sNye-phu were sent out by the Tshal-pa.<sup>57</sup> These are the gCod practitioners of the present. After that, having been accepted by rTsang-nag Phug-pa Thugs-rje Seng-ge,<sup>58</sup> they became 'Brug-pas.

When rGyal-ba rGod-tshang-pa<sup>59</sup> dwelt at Pho-ma lHa-khab he was afflicted by leprosy. Although he went elsewhere, such as Ti-se and Jālandhara, it would not leave him. Later he arrived at this place. Because of his great physical strength he took care of all those at Tsa-ri who were sick and weak. Subsequently, because he used to fetch and carry [sacks of flour] his back became covered with sores. At that time the others said [of him], "Can I borrow that old, red donkey of you 'Brug-pas?" At that time he dreamed that his entrails all fell out [symbolising the removal of his defilements]. Because he wondered, "Will they go back inside me?," a white man told him, [27a] "If your diligence [in practice] is small they will return." At that time all his defilements were purified, the basis of his illness disappeared, and he gained incomparable advantages in his meditation. He practised in the many mountain hollows of Tsa-ri and remained one-pointed. The sGrol-ma-la (Tārā Pass) of upper Cig-car was also opened by him. As one out of about every hundred pilgrims who passed the extremely fierce Bird-face [rock]<sup>60</sup> of mGon-po-rong (Protector Ravine) died there, he turned back the face such that this stopped happening. In the great 'Od-'bar-mtsho there was a large chunk of turquoise. Because the Master [rGod-tshang-pa] said, "May it stick to this pine staff!", on account of his 'truth utterance' it stuck to that [staff], and thus he grasped it in the lotus of his hand. The [eighteen] functionaries wrangled over it, and so having thought it bad if it became the object of a dispute he told them, "You go to the shore of the 'Od-'bar-mtsho and I will throw the turquoise chunk back in there." And saying, "We will do that", they gathered on the lake shore, and from Yul-stod

Zhi-byed-pa; see *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.1:385.

<sup>55</sup> This is the 16,700' 'Takar La' at the head of the Bya-chu, north of gSang-sngags Chos-gling, and used by pilgrims to connect western Tsa-ri and Bya-yul.

<sup>56</sup> The sKjus river flows down from rTa-dkar pass to gSang-sngags Chos-gling, and lies just outside the sphere of the Tsa-ri *maṇḍala*.

<sup>57</sup> On the Shug-gseb-pa see above. bSam-gtan dPal-ba (1291-1366) was the Tshal-pa *rTogs-ldan*, also known as *rTog-ldan* Tsa-ri-ba, responsible for this. He founded the monastery of lHun-grub-sdings at Tsa-ri; see Tshal-pa Kun-dga' rDo-rje (1981:140-4); Roerich (1979:885).

<sup>58</sup> This is Sangs-rgyas sTon-pa brTson-'grus Seng-ge (1219?-1290?) the 7th Shangs-pa bKa'-brgyud hierarch and holder of the gCod lineage, see Roerich (1979:743-6).

<sup>59</sup> rGod-tshang-pa mGon-po rDo-rje (1189-1258) was a disciple of gTsang-pa rGya-ras and founder of the sTod-'brug tradition. Much of the following account about him is given in Roerich (1979:683).

<sup>60</sup> Also called Las-mgon Byar-gdong, it is said to have a 'water covering' (or 'waterfall?', *chu'i zhal khebs*) in some guides, which is presumably the subject of this passage.

he threw the turquoise chunk. Because it went splashing back into the lake the matter was resolved. After that he went to Pho-brang dBu-rtse (Pinnacle Palace). When he bound the god Brahma by oath in the Nam-mkha'-phug (Sky Cave), he saw a face in the great *maṇḍala* palace there. Kha-gdong-ma<sup>61</sup> asked him, "Do you want the mundane paranormal powers?" Because he said, "The mundane paranormal powers are of no use to me, I am striving for the supreme ones", [27b] and announced his intention of offering a gemstone ladle full of gold and turquoise as a present to the chief [deities of the *maṇḍala*], he met with the chief father-mother union (*yab-yum*) [of Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhi]. They prophesied that he would obtain the supreme paranormal powers during his life, and thus he said,

When I meditated in the forests of Tsa-ri,  
The divine faces manifest within appeared as human beings.  
As I have attained the mundane [paranormal powers] I am sufficiently  
cultivated, thus  
I am a yogin who is dedicated to the supreme [paranormal powers].

Then, a short time after this, because U-ri dBon-po excelled in the midst of an assembly of about eight hundred accomplished ones he received the name Tsa-ri Ras-chen. When they were performing such things as offerings he arrived there by flying through the air. The spot where that happened was named Bya-phur-sgang (Bird Flight Spur). After a generation had passed the so-called 'eight assistants' (Ya-brgyad), who were disciples of the Lord sPyan-snga [Grag-pa 'Byung-gnas] and 'Bri-gung Gling-pa, arrived there. They opened the door to gSar-ma Yang-mdzod (New Innermost Treasury). After that, around this part of Tsa-ri many inauspicious omens appeared for most people. When the Mongol army overran 'Bri-gung [in 1290] because of the Sa-skya-pas, that incredible miracle, the many-doored *stūpa* which possessed the lay-out of Dag-pa Shel-ri<sup>62</sup> and contained two thousand eight hundred deities was destroyed. Eighteen thousand monks were burnt in the fire, and as a result, one hundred people who had attained magical powers flew through the air from that spot and later landed in mNga'-ris and Glo-bo. It is said that, "Regarding the great damage done to the teachings of the precious dKar-brgyud [at that time], it was unprecedented and never to be repeated."

With the passing of another generation after that, the 'Brug-pa functionaries were much too powerful. As the Tshal-pa-bas could not tolerate this they felled the tree like a yogin's trident [which was the 'Brug-pa's vitality-tree (*bla-shing*)], breached the lake shaped like a blood-filled skull [which was the 'Brug-pa's vitality-lake (*bla-mtsho*)] and smashed the boulder that was like the nipple of [Vajravārāhi's] body [which was the 'Brug-pa's vitality-stone (*bla-rdo*)], and a spring gushed forth from beneath the threshold of the large meadow where there arose a clay mound as had been prophesied previously by the Dharma Lord gTsang-pa rGya-ras. Because of all these things it happened that the 'Brug-pa officials needed to leave. As a result of that [jealousy], many people and cattle died through being infected by the plague of a wrathful mother-goddess, and as a consequence thirteen human

<sup>61</sup> Or Kākāsyā, the crow-faced goddess who is one of the eight wrathful guardians of the Saṃvara *maṇḍala*, stationed at the eastern gate.

<sup>62</sup> On this *stūpa* which was built in accord with a vision of Tsa-ri by sKyob-pa 'Jig-rten gSum-mgon see Roerich (1979:601) and Könchog Gyaltsen (1988:21,36).

bodhisattvas, such as the rKyem[-dong] king sTag-rdo-rje,<sup>63</sup> went to the great, glorious seat of Ra-lung-thil. At that time, when the Dharma Lord sPos-skyapa<sup>64</sup> was the throne-holder, they thus made a petition directly to that Lord asserting, "There is no need to stop meditators going to places which give rise to emotions." With that, king sTag-rdo-rje drew out a knife from his waistband and made a petition which hit straight to the point: "If you don't allow meditators there I won't go home, except dead, I'll commit suicide! Going back [now] would be no better than dying anyway because of the mother-goddess's plague." So the Dharma Lord told him, "If it is that important to you, I promise to let the meditators go back. You should choose the Protector of Beings ('gro-mgon) yourself," [28b] And because of the decree, the king pointed his finger saying, "Although the Protector of Beings bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan<sup>65</sup> is the youngest from amongst the Great Ones, he is good."

And thus, his request was granted. For the protection of the hermits within this area he invited about thirty monks from 'Brug Ra-lung, and the dBon-po of 'Gran-ras from the centre [i.e. dBus], the master Chos-sku bDe-ba Chen-po and his students as the external sponsor, and different functionaries from Chu-bo-ri, La-kha-shar, Byang-dbu-ri, sTod, Zangs-zangs-ne-ring, and so on, as the attendants of the hermits, and thus the dispatch was completed. So, in accordance with his Lord's instruction, "Because there is a place called Cig-car dPal-gyi Nags-ljongs (Sudden [Realization] Glorious Woodlands) which was given to me by one possessing a mane of flesh, the colour of blood, called Cig-car dMar-po, the field-protector's younger brother, go there." They asked, "How do we get there?", and thus they went according to the instructions, "When you have passed the thirteen waterfalls as far as Chos-zam-gdong (Dharma Bridge-Face) there is a three-tiered meadow like a turquoise *mandala*, so go into that." They proceeded to follow the waterfalls as far as Chos-zam-gdong and so went down to Sen-mo-gong. They arrived there, the sun shone at its zenith on the morning of their stay, and a sky-blue woman mounted on a mule came up from the river bank. The Protector of Beings followed after her, and as a consequence that woman disappeared into that rock of Zam-gdong. Because he waited for a moment in that very spot, [29a] a boy about eight years old who was red with a disheveled mane of flesh appeared, after which he said, "Because the path to your place is one which is found above here, come!", and taking hold of the Protector of Beings' garment he lead him. Then the Protector of Beings said, "I could pass through, but what about the pack-yaks?", so [Cig-car dMar-po] directed the yaks further down saying, "It is enough that they came as far as this." In that spot where the Protector of Beings passed a bridge was later constructed, and thus was known as IHa-mo Zam-gdong (Goddess Bridge-face). From there, when they all went

<sup>63</sup> sTag-rdo-rje was a fourteenth century king of rKyem-dong on the gTsang-po river between Dwags-po and Kong-po. He patronised early temple building at Tsa-ri, see Kah-thog Si-tu Chos-kyi rGya-mtsho (1972:365-6), and the meditation community, see Padma dkar-po (1968:f.303a-b). The area remained an important source of patronage for practitioners at the mountain. Later it became the site of a government rDzong ('Kyimdong Dzong' on Western maps) which partially administered Tsa-ri district.

<sup>64</sup> sPo-skyapa Seng-ge Rin-chen (1242-1297 or 1258-1313), abbot of 'Brug Rwa-lung, see Roerich (1979:671); Smith, Preface (1969:33).

<sup>65</sup> 'Brug-pa history is populated by various persons named bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan, but I have been unable to positively identify any of them with this figure.

down to the alpine pastures of Cig-car, the Protector of Beings told the king, "Shoot an arrow", so the king shot an arrow, and seven animals, a mother and her offspring, appeared.

Because the Protector of Beings asked the king three times there what they were, the king also replied three times, and by offering the explanation, "They are rGya [i.e. Saiga-antelope]" it was established that this was the Ser-spang-ma (Yellow Meadow) which was prophesied with the words, "It is a good omen that the tracks of one rGya are followed by another."<sup>66</sup>

This was the northern door. On that day, the final door to the circuit of Tsā[-ri] was opened. This was of great benefit to all, and this Protector of Beings is that great person who is mentioned in just the same way in the *Padma Lam-yig* also.

#### v. How is a Prayer a Map?

Padma dKar-po's text provides one example of a traditional narrative map of Pure Crystal Mountain. I will now provide another, this time in the form of a prayer. In Tibet, as in other parts of the world, people pray to mountains. This has been a practice since before the introduction of Buddhism, but prayers to mountains have not always meant the same thing because the conception of what or 'who' a mountain is has changed. In the past Tibetans might have worshipped Pure Crystal Mountain as a clan ancestor spirit, a monarch assimilated to the mountain via his personal guardian deity (*sku-bla*), a warrior god (*dgra-lha*), a god of the country (*yul-lha*) and as the vitality mountain (*gnas-ri*) of a community or single person. Since the conversion of the mountain to a Buddhist site all of these possibilities have become more or less redundant, being incorporated or erased by a conception that is altogether more grand in scale and detail.

Tibetans praying at the Buddhist Tsa-ri have a vast landscape palace inhabited (*gnas*) all over by more than two thousand eight hundred deities of all descriptions and ranks whom they must address. As we have seen from the previous text different deities may have their own fixed abodes at the site, may move between several, or be in all places simultaneously. Their residential locations are as ritually important as they are themselves. This is not only because one must address or visit certain spots in the landscape to encounter them directly (*mjal-ba*), but because the beings themselves are not ontologically distinguished from the physical environment which constitutes their abode.

How does the worshipper keep track of this complex divine residential landscape? With another type of oral map, or landscape index in the form of a prayer (*gsol-'debs*). The text of

<sup>66</sup>According to an oral tradition from SG the three rGya here are also intended to refer to [gTsang-pa] rGya[-ras], the first 'Brug-pa lama to begin opening Tsa-ri, his later successor in this process [bSod-nams] rGya[l-mtshan], and [Blo-gros] rGya[-mtsho] the person credited with opening the *rong-skor* circuit.

the *Gnas chen tsā ri tra'i gsol 'debs* translated below is an example of one such 'prayer map'.<sup>67</sup> Like many oral texts it is 'fluid'. The opening sections of the prayer can be chanted separately. The first six lines form a well-known short invocation to Tsa-ri attributed to Tsong-kha-pa, and are found used in many other contexts.<sup>68</sup> A version of the following seven lines is found in Padma dKar-po's narrative above (see f.22a) where it is attributed to the 'Brug-pa yogin sKye-bo Ye-shes rDo-rje, and it too is employed separately in various rituals.<sup>69</sup> These two early verse sections seem to form the core of the prayer, in particular the second one, which in its original form begins to address specific deities and their local sites. The general form of this Tibetan ritual text is not unique. Some texts relating to the *bsangs* offerings practised in the folk religion also contain lists of local deities and their geographical locations or abodes.

The long version given here is remarkable in that it continues this pattern and becomes the most extensive surviving index of the mountain's powerful beings, both divine and human, and the main 'abodes' where they or their empowerment are situated. As an oral map it describes and catalogues toponyms of major landscape features including mountain peaks (*ri*), hills (*sgang*), passes (*la*), ravines (*rong*), lakes (*mtsho*, *bla-mtsho*), plateaux (*thang*), caves (*phug*), cemeteries (*dur-khrod*), meditation retreat sites (*sgrub-sde*, *sgrub-gnas*), alpine pastures (*ne'u*), entrance paths (*'prang-sgo*), and even meditative states which one can 'travel' to at the site. It is at once both a map of the vast array of spirit forces that occupy the mountain, and an earnest petition for entry into their realm and access to the power that is situated there.

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<sup>67</sup> The version (c.1975; and see my appendix 4.2) translated here was recorded from the oral traditions of elderly refugees living in India. This valuable work was done during the mid-1970s by my informant 'Bri-gung *mKhan-po* dKon-mchog rGyal-mtshan, himself a native of Tsa-ri Chos-zam. My own elderly informants could never recite more than about fifty lines. This version contains one hundred and sixty two lines excluding the title. *mKhan-po* printed this text as a nine page pamphlet (approx. 500 copies) which was distributed privately among Tibetan refugees in India about 1975. According to refugee Tsa-ri-bas who revisited the mountain in 1984 wood-blocks for a version of this prayer have now been carved at Tsa-ri and printed locally. I do not know whether it was ever written or block-printed in Tibet prior to 1959. My translation retains all original spellings of place names, giving the most common versions found in the standard guide-books in brackets where there are variations.

<sup>68</sup> Tsong-kha-pa is reputed to have chanted these seven lines in response to the local *dākinī*'s punishment for his doubts at Tsa-ri (c.f. Padma dKar-po's narrative above, f.19a, and appendix 4.1). It was chanted by pilgrims who visited Tsa-ri, and they were required to memorize the verses. The first three lines of it are sung by all the monks at the 'Brug-pa monastery of gSang-sngags Chos-gling whenever they eat *thug-pa* broth. They however substitute *la mchod pa phul* for *la gsol ba 'debs* in the second of these three lines to give "I offer this to the... *dākinī* and *dharmapāla*, etc...". The full seven lines form part the inscription on the rear of the *thang-ka* pictured in this work showing Dag-pa Shel-ri as a *stūpa*, see appendix 4.3 for the full text.

<sup>69</sup> It can be chanted when entering the sphere of the Tsa-ri *maṇḍala* near Bod rDo-mtshan-can, and was sung to commence local seasonal rituals, such as the summer festival (*dbyar-mchod*), at Tsa-ri.

## *Prayer to the Great Abode Cāritra*

Lamas of the bKa'-brgyud [lineage], and *yi-dam*, gods, *dākinī*, *dharmapāla* [at] glorious Cāritra, Khecara Pure Abode, I entreat you! Grant the empowerment to purify bad deeds and obscurations, to dispel adversities and dangers, [and] bestow both the supreme and mundane paranormal powers.

Oh! Lead the way to open this door.  
 Open the veil of both cloud and mist.  
 Reveal the divine faces which manifest within.  
 Oh! Those who pray, and Vajra[yāna] kin,  
 If suitable requests are made, empowerment will be produced.

I pray to my gracious root-lama,  
 Seated upon the sun-moon throne atop my head.

I pray to the fathers, the bKa'-brgyud lamas,  
 Whose abode is the palace of the radiant *dharmakāya*.

I pray to the Buddhas, protectors of the three classes [of beings],  
 Whose abode is the palace of body, speech and mind.

I pray to the five families of victorious Buddhas, [2]  
 Whose abode is the palace which thoroughly cleanses the five poisons.

I pray to the five types of mother *dākinī*,  
 Whose abode is the palace of the five cognitions.

I pray to the divine assembly of inner, Secret Mantra,  
 Whose abode is the palace of the Tsā-ri *maṇḍala*.

I pray to the two thousand eight hundred deities,  
 Whose visible representation is the palace of Dag-par (pa) Shel-ri.

I pray to the white-bodied *dākinī*,  
 Whose abode is the palace of Ka-la Dung-rtso (mtsho).

I pray to the four-armed protector,  
 Whose abode is the palace of bDud-mgon Bla-mtsho.

I pray to the Lord Chos-kyi mGon-po,  
 Whose abode is in Cig-car dPal gyi Nags-khrod (ljongs).

I pray to the accomplished one Sha-ba Ri-pa,  
 Whose abode is the palace of Ca-pa (lCags-sbal)-rong.

I pray to the *dākinī* who bathe secretly,  
 Whose abode is the palace of mKha-'gro 'Khrus-byon (mtsho).

I pray to the accomplished one La-va-pa,  
 Whose abode is the palace of La-va-phug.



I pray to the twenty-one Tārās,  
Whose abode is the palace of sGrol-ma Bla-mtsho [3].

I pray to the sixty-two [deities of the] Saṃvara [*maṇḍala*],  
Whose abode is the palace of bDe-mchog Bla-mtsho.

I pray to the mother Ekajaṭī,  
Whose abode is the palace of Ki'u-tshang-khang.

I pray to the animated human corpse which grants paranormal powers,  
Whose abode is Ki'u-tshang Chos-skyong Dur-khrod.

I pray to the protector Bya-roq Gdong-can,  
Whose abode is the palace of mGon-po-rong.

I pray to the *dākinī* with the *mātrkā*'s speech,  
Whose abode is the palace of Chos-skyong bZang-mtsho.

I pray to the *dākinī* with the *mātrkā*'s mind,  
Whose abode is the palace of Mu-min (men) mThing-mtsho.

I pray to the mother dPal-ldan lHa-mo,  
Whose abode is the palace of mThing-skor Pho-mo.

I pray to the *dākinī* Srin-mo Yon-tan,  
Whose abode is the palace of sKu-chung Srin-mtsho.

I pray to the divine assembly of beneficent and wrathful Jinas,  
Whose abode is the palace of Sa (gSar)-ma-rong.

I pray to the protector Amitāyus,  
Whose abode is the palace of Sa (gSar)-ma Yang-mtsho (mdzod).

I pray to the protector Byams-sems sKyong-ba,  
Whose abode is the palace of Byams-pa-rong.

I pray to the divine assembly of Phur-pa 'Phrin-las, [4]  
Whose abode is the palace of Phur-pa-rong.

I pray to the mighty god Indra,  
Whose abode is the divine residence of rNam-par rGyal-ba.

I pray to the sixteen sublime *sthavira*,  
Whose abode is the palace of lHa-khang Pho-mo.

I pray to the divine assembly of 'Jam-ming (dpal) 'Phrin-las,  
Whose abode is the palace of Phra-mo gSang-tshul.

I pray to the glorious Vajrapāṇi,  
Whose abode is the palace of Phyag-rdor Bla-mtsho.

I pray to the manifest, divine assembly of Hevajra,  
Whose abode is the palace of 'Od-'bar g. Yu-mtsho.

I pray to the *dākinī* gSang-ba Ye-shes,  
Whose abode is the palace of mKha'-spyod-ri-bzhi.

I pray to the speech-protector Ekajātī,  
Whose abode is the palace of dMar-nag Rakta.

I pray to the fathers, the bKa'-brgyud *gurus*,  
Whose abode is the palace of bKa'-brgyud Bla-mtsho.

I pray to the divine assembly which manifests within,  
Whose abode is the palace of Pho-brang g. Yu-mtsho.

I pray to the divine assembly of manifested Blood-drinkers,  
Whose abode is the palace of Pho-brang Longs-sku.

I pray to the mother *dākinī* of Life, [5]  
Whose abode is the palace of Pho-brang sKyog-mo.

I pray to the protectors Zhing-skyong Yab-yum,  
Whose abode is the palace of Pa-ta-gangs.

I pray to the mother flesh-eating *dākinī*,  
Whose abode is the palace of sTag-tshang-rong.

I pray to the protector Khyi-thod-can,  
Whose abode is the palace of Dom-tshang-rong.

I pray to the *dākinī* Me-gcig (Ice) 'Bar-ba,  
Whose abode is the palace of Me-'bar Bla-mtsho.

I pray to the accomplished one Gling-chen Ras-pa,  
Whose abode is the palace of lHa-mo-phug.

I pray to the self-manifested clay *stūpa*,  
Whose abode is in Srin-mo lHa-yi Nang (Ne'u)-ring.

I pray to the protectors rTa-pa (phag) Yab-yum,  
Whose abode is the palace of rTa-mgrin-rong.

I pray to the father Cakrasaṃvara,  
Whose abode is the palace of Phar-phyin dPa'-bo.

I pray to the mother Vajravārāhī,  
Whose abode is the palace of Phar-phyin dPa'-mo.

I pray to the mother Vārāhī lHa-khang,  
Whose abode is the palace of 'Phrin-las mTsho-bzhi.

I pray to the eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara,  
Whose abode is the palace of Jo-bo-la. [6]

I pray to the glorious Cakrasamvara,  
Whose abode is the palace of rTa-g.yag-thang.

I pray to those glorious ones in tune with reality (Chos-nyid-pa),  
Whose abode is the palace of 'Od-ba('bar)-thang.

I pray to the three fathers, gNyos, 'Gar and Chos,  
Whose abode is the Yul-stod Mahāmudrā meditation place.

I pray to sKyob-pa 'Jig-rten gSum-mgon,  
Whose abode is the palace of Me-tog-steng.

I pray to gTsang-pa rGya-ras, Protector of Beings,  
Whose abode is the palace of sBal-pa Bla-ntsho.

I pray to the Eight hundred Yogins of Tsa-ri,  
Whose abode is the palace of sDong-po dKyil-krung.

I pray to the animated human corpse which grants paranormal powers,  
Whose abode is the Ki'u-tshang Chos-skyong Dur-khrod.

I pray to the meditation master Guru Padma[sambhava],  
Whose abode is the palace of Zil-chen gSang-phug.

I pray to the accomplished one O-rgyan-pa,  
Whose abode is the palace of gZil-byin (Zil-chen) sGrub-sde.

I pray to the Dharma guardian Ma-ang-ki,  
Whose abode is the Yul-smad *mātrkā* and *dākinī* meditation place.

I pray to the clan of a billion *dākinī*,  
Whose abode is the palace of mKha-'gro 'Bum-sde [7].

I pray to Bram-ze sKye-ba bDun-pa,  
Whose abode is the palace of lDe'u-yag.

I pray to the door guardian mGon-go-ba,  
Whose abode is the palace of Phra-'gu (Prang-sgo)-bzhi.

I pray to the *yi-dam* Vajrabhairava,  
Whose abode is the palace of sDong-po Khro-zhal.

I pray to the Buddha Akṣobhyavajra,  
Whose abode is the palace of Dag-par (pa) Shel-phug.

I pray to the *dharmarāja* Srong-btsan sGam-po,  
Whose abode is the palace of dGyes-rdor-phug.

I pray to the protectors Zhing-skyong Yab-yum,  
Whose abode is the palace of mNgon (rNgam)-pa sGra-sgrogs.

I pray to the protectors, the eighty accomplished ones,  
Whose abode is the palace of the eight cemeteries.

I pray to the superior Dharma of Mahāmudrā,  
Whose abode is the impartial, tranquil state of being.

I pray to Guru [Padmasambhava's] eight excellent manifestations,  
Whose abode is the palace of Siṅga-la.

I pray to the protector bsTan-pa'i bDag-po,  
Whose abode is the palace of sDong-po Tshogs-khang.

I pray to the Dharma protectress mGon-lcam-bral,  
Whose abode is the cemetery of Sil-ba-tshal [8].

I pray to my Vajra[yāna] brothers and sisters, my religious kin,  
Whose abode is the palace of pure, spontaneous luminosity.

I pray to mother A-phyi Chos-kyi sGrol-ma,  
Whose abode is the palace of instructions and vows.

I pray to the protector *virā* and *dākinī*,  
Whose abodes are the palaces of the twenty-four countries.

By my prayers may the six classes of beings be empowered. I pray that my 'stream' be matured and brought to deliverance. I pray that inner and outer impediments do not arise, and that I be granted the supreme and mundane paranormal powers.

## *Looking For Sexed Rocks: The Ongoing Interpretation of Landscape*

If these above texts are narrative maps with which to navigate the place of Tsa-ri, how exactly are they used by Tibetans? At least one common way is in the interpretation of landscape, a common ritual activity in Tibet: it is done in specific contexts of space and time; it requires, and can be a test of, 'faith' (*dad-pa*) and other personal qualities of the performers; it involves much more than merely 'looking' at a site or feature, but has a strongly developed performative dimension for Tibetans as particular landscapes and bodies must be 'fitted' together in prescribed ways; it can involve mental activity in the form of visualisations; it is directed by a set of oral and written ritual manuals, some forms of which we have seen in this and the previous chapter.

Landscape is interpreted on both a very large and a small scale. In its meditative dimension it is an individual act, but in its perceptual 'looking', and physical performative dimensions it is

frequently a group activity. In fact, on many of the shorter Tibetan pilgrimages I have attended the gathering together of persons at sites which required the ritual interpretation of landscape were often the most socially significant moments of these ritual journeys. It is in relation to these sites that certain representations of social order, persons, and their relationship to the physical world can be made explicit and contested. It is for this reason that they are worthy of attention. I have not yet visited Tsa-ri and can provide no first-hand account, as I have elsewhere,<sup>70</sup> to investigate landscape interpretation at the site. I do have a great many written and oral accounts which illustrate aspects of the practice of how sites are presented and interpreted on the mountain. I will now give a selection of these which relate to just one very small, but significant locality which every person travelling to Tsa-ri must pass by.

#### i. Sexed Rocks Can Be Hard To Find...

Divine body-parts, come down out of the skies to earth and turned into stone, are representational elements which have travelled great distances from their origins in the cosmic dismemberment narratives of ancient India. As Padma dKar-po's account of the cosmic subjugation drama and his narrative map above both show, some of them are located in a remote alpine valley in southern Tibet, at Tsa-ri. These particular body-parts are a set of stone genitals, a vulva and a phallus, which Tibetans call the 'Sexed Rocks of Tibet' (Bod rDo-mtshan-can).<sup>71</sup> The discrete rock formation constituting this site is doubly significant: it is not only held to be the Tibetan one of the stone representations of Maheśvara which he installed at the twenty-four action sites before his downfall (hence the name Bod for the area), but also the place where the first Tibetan to open Tsa-ri had a magical encounter with the leading field-protector *dākinī*. A standard guide-book for the area describes the site in the following terms:

There in...Tibet Mid-valley (Bod-klungs)... are clearly visible a vulva and mark of Īśvara (i.e. Śiva *liṅga*) which are made of stone, called Sexed Rocks (rDo-mtshan-can), and which have water that is self-produced flowing out of the centre of the vulva. This immutable power place, so marked, is the site for perfectly obtaining the paranormal powers of psychic breath (*rlung*) and mind (*sems*). At this site sKyes-bu Ye-shes rDo-rje had a personal vision of the five *dākinī* families and the *dākinī* Seng-gdong-ma; and the *dākinī* Seng-gdong herself is said to have been absorbed into the genitals of stone once again.<sup>72</sup>

The site is clearly presented as being of significance to Tantra practitioners, those in a position to cultivate *siddhi*, for instance. But in general it was important not only to yogins,

<sup>70</sup> Huber (1993 forthcoming) on the related site of La-phyi.

<sup>71</sup> The site is still patronised. KG reports on his visit in 1984: "rDo-mtshan has a settlement, more houses than 1959, but life is still the same and people still graze yak and dzomo, horses and mules in the large pastures...I visited the sacred genital rocks, they are still there being worshipped by pilgrims, and the small local temple is being repaired."

<sup>72</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:6a-b; 8a-b; 1985, vol.2:172).

but also lay pilgrims as twentieth-century accounts point out. An aristocratic women pilgrim who visited the site in about 1930 with a local guide states:

...we halted for the night at a sacred place called Do Tsen. Do Tsen translated literally means sex organs of the male and female, and in this place there were natural forms of the male and female organs in the rocks. Since these forms were not man[-]made, they bestowed special powers of procreation, enabling any childless couple who prayed to them to be blessed with children.<sup>73</sup>

A leading meditation master at Tsa-ri in the 1950s adds:

At that place there are miraculous rocks, and to understand them you have to go around them bit by bit and have them explained, but there was nobody who could really do that completely. The Sexed Rocks were in the shape of genitalia, and from the stone vulva there the pilgrims used to drink the water of a spring. Yogins can see this as a place of the *dākinī*, and there is empowerment to aid you in gaining realisations...Famous lamas like rDzogs-chen Padma Rig-'dzin came to this place to meditate and they attained realisation there.<sup>74</sup>

Both of these accounts are by elite persons (senior cleric and aristocrat) who had access to the narrative maps of the site, to the oral and written guides. They show that lay people and Tantric practitioners did interpret the site's powers and their benefits in very different ways. They did different rituals there: some prayed and consumed while the others visualised. But there are also other important differences, already hinted at. In their interpretations higher-level practitioners could actually perceive the site differently from lay persons. How this might be so is explained in another guide:

There is the Sexed Rocks of Tibet, and...in the space between three smooth, white mounds there exists a town of the *dākinī*, and that which is said to be seen by those with pure vision as a great city with four open streets; by those who are middling as a small hut which is blue [?] (*ni-la-me*), and by those who are lowest as a few rocks and plants is this rock formation.<sup>75</sup>

As I have discussed Tibetan notions of the graded perception of landscape with both ethnographic and historical examples elsewhere<sup>76</sup> I will limit my remarks here. Regardless of the élite clerical theories relating 'karma and fortune' (*las dang skal-ba*) and purity of vision (*dag-s nang*) to perceptual ability that are invoked, all 'levels' of person in the Tibetan world can and do find landscape interpretation an ongoing challenge. Two accounts by pilgrims who visited Sexed Rocks three hundred years apart from each other show this to be the case. The first is by one of the most high-ranking 'Brug-pa clerics of the eighteenth

<sup>73</sup> Yuthok (1990:93-4).

<sup>74</sup> SG, interview.

<sup>75</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:11b).

<sup>76</sup> Huber (1992 in press, 1993 forthcoming).

century, who had access to esoteric written sources on the site:

On the eleventh day of the ninth month of the water-male-tiger year [1782] I arrived at the Sexed Rocks of Tibet within the place of Cāritra, the powerful Khecara. Previously, when sKyes-bu Ye-shes rDo-rje came to first open the door to this place, he was meet here by the Tshe-ring mChed-linga. In the middle of a mixed thicket of *bsangs* there was a flat rock with a chequered pattern...I expected to see the Sexed Rocks as a *linga* or a vulva, but instead it appeared to resemble thighs pressed together. I knew there were symbols which look like thighs, explained as the twenty-four symbols, including the symbol which looks like thighs and the symbol which looks like a *linga*, in [Tantric] commentaries about the twenty-four countries. Today anyone, the wise and the foolish, going to see the site will all agree it resembles thighs pressed together, no matter how much time you spend above it. From another position it suddenly seems to be placed exactly like a stone *linga*. There, it appeared recognisable as Sexed Rocks, and it is only this view which accounts for it as [one of] the twenty-four Sexed Rocks [?].<sup>77</sup>

My informant Ngodrup, an uneducated peasant from Kong-po who visited the site in about 1958, when in his 20s, had this to say:

When my brother and I went to Tsa-ri our village neighbours had explained the route beforehand; they told us of the Sexed Rocks, saying it was an important place where a lama opened Tsa-ri, the only rocks like this in Tibet, where you made prayers and could get empowerment, and drink the fertility water. When we got there we were disappointed as we thought the genital shapes would be bigger and more obvious, we couldn't make them out really. My brother thought he found them, but we didn't know if it was correct. Lamas can see them, but none was present. So we left, and went on to Cig-car.

Both were prepared with a narrative map of the site before they got there, but nevertheless both high lama and farmboy had to put a conscious effort into their act of interpretation to make it 'fit' with what was expected. Needless to say, not one of the Western expeditions which visited Tsa-ri mentions this site although some spent considerable time in close proximity to it, and all noted various other 'holy places' in the Tsa-ri area. They had no narrative map with which to distinguish this one rock from any of the others along the valley.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Yon-tan mTha'-yas (1975:107b-108a). This is only a provisional translation of the passage, the latter part of which is particularly difficult to interpret with certainty. Nevertheless, it provides evidence of the point I am trying to make here.

<sup>78</sup> But even with a narrative map Westerners may still have considerable difficulty locating and interpreting the powerful landscape of Tsa-ri. A recently published English version of a Tibetan guide to Tsa-ri (see De Rossi Fillibeck (1990:3) describes what is presumably Sexed Rocks, referring to it as "Bod-khung-gzhung-rdo" or "Bod-rdo" (translation: 'Stone Middle Pit [of] Tibet' or 'Stone [of] Tibet'). This interpretation of the site, which does not mention stone genitals of any kind, also rates it as "the central place" of Tsa-ri, tells us that it was gTsang-pa rGya-ras who saw the *dākinī* there, and that it became the site where the famous Vajravāhī *lha-khang* was built, a temple which was located ten kilometres to the east of

The numerous pilgrim visitors who used the site always required maps of some kind to negotiate its significant landscape features and powerful environment. But there was another category of ritual users of the mountain who were intimately familiar with it as they resided there, often for long periods of time, performing meditation and various other specialised activities around its slopes. These were the meditators and yogins who were either lineage descendents of, or inspired by, the Tantric superheroes of the past who had opened the place and reputedly attained powerful insights into the nature of reality there. It is to these practitioners and their activities at Tsa-ri that I will now turn in chapter four, as their role in shaping the development of most ritual on the mountain was fundamental.

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the Sexed Rocks that the Tibetan accounts used here are describing. Other new and interesting landscapes are also generated in this same article.



## Chapter Four

# Inner Space and Peak Experience

### Meditators and Yogins on the Mountain

#### *Introduction*

Here I want to begin discussing the main ritual institutions which constitute the relationship between person and place on the mountain. By a Tibetan reckoning these fall approximately into four categories: Tantric meditation and specialised circumambulations; three non-Tantric annual circumambulation pilgrimages, all with differing itineraries; one large twelve-yearly procession; and the local, annual cycle of domestic economy and village festivals. The remaining chapters will discuss each of these in turn, relating the performance of ritual and observation of certain ritual constraints to the representations of landscape and place outlined so far.

Tibetan sources portray Pure Crystal Mountain as having been first and foremost a place *par excellence* for serious Tantric practitioners. There seems no reason to doubt this. Only in much later times, from the sixteenth or seventeenth century onward, did it begin to attract very large numbers of lay and non-Tantric clerical pilgrims from many parts of the Tibetan world. Tantric yogins, as an élite of either permanently wandering or temporarily non-monastic practitioners, and their *gurus* (many of whom did lead monastery-based lives in later life) were more the heirs of an Indian Vajrayāna heritage than any other class of Buddhist practitioner in Tibet. The genealogy of all the Tibetan material I have presented in chapter two is originally Indic. Its ancestral Buddhist representational systems were intentionally imported to Tibet and applied to local landscapes by an élite of Tantric practitioners, many of whom were both religiously and politically active and influential in the society of their day. Aspects of this introduction process were not always unanimously accepted, even within this élite itself, but the process went on regardless and attained a high degree of sophistication.<sup>1</sup> It was Tantric yogins who introduced and established the foundations of all the social practices found on the mountain in later times. Although over time their actual population at the site seems to have drastically declined, while 'popular' pilgrimage increased, the institutions they created to serve their own specialised needs have endured, and shaped the way all other categories of practitioners use the mountain's environment. Not only do I want to outline Tantric rituals at the site, but show that far from being just exclusive and esoteric activities as they are often presented, they have significant social and 'public' dimensions as well.

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<sup>1</sup> See Huber (1992 in press).

## *Tantric Meditation Communities*

### i. Preliminary Historical Considerations

From the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onward, when Tsa-ri was colonised in particular by various sub-branches of the bKa'-brgyud-pa sect, a style of Tantric asceticism involving homeless wandering and remote mountain retreats by yogins (*rnal-'byor-pa*) and solitary meditators (*sgom-chen*) was common in Tibet. At the personal retreat places of famous practitioners, often the founders of sects or lineages, small meditation communities (*sgrub-sde*) developed in many mountainous and isolated areas throughout Tibet. Tsa-ri was no exception to this pattern. Such communities did not just develop by themselves, but were produced out of a specific combination of social practices.

Patronage has been a central theme throughout the entire history of institutionalised Buddhism. Despite popular Western notions about Tibetan yogins living completely independently from society, subsisting on thin air and wild herbs, in reality all practitioners and their meditation communities required sponsors or patrons (*yon-bdag*, *sbyin-bdag*) for their establishment and maintenance. Their fortunes were directly linked to the economic, political and religious vicissitudes of these supporters. Sponsorship was offered to yogins by persons and institutions for a variety of reasons ranging from the generation of personal merit through to the desire of a sect and its aristocratic patrons to lay claim to a certain territory for political reasons. Although often physically isolated from society, Tantric meditation communities were also an integral part of it in Tibet.

In the early centuries of the mountain's colonisation the communities at Tsa-ri probably remained physically remote from the rest of the social world, for Tsa-ri is a very isolated spot. This physical isolation was not to last, however. Tantric meditation communities were non-productive in a material sense, but on another level of economy they were productive through the generation for the practitioners and their sponsors of what Bourdieu would call symbolic capital. They produced status as well as, and by virtue of, spiritual cultivation. In various forms this was to remain a feature of Tibetan society up until 1959, and still exists in exile communities today. Status, as we know in the West, accrues not only to persons, but also to institutions and to 'names' (a C.V. with 'Harvard' on it opens more doors than one with 'Hicksville College'). But in Tibet, in line with certain aspects of the Tibetan world-view, status also accrues directly to place, and not just in name only, but in a substantial, physical manner. We have seen how generations of great Indian and Tibetan yogins were associated with the mountain by those writing its 'history' already in the sixteenth century. Not only did they gain enlightenment experiences due to the power of the place, but according to Tibetan thinking their own empowerment (*byin-gyis-brlabs*) fused into the physical substance of the mountain's already very powerful environment.

Due to accumulation of status by social reputation and physical empowerment Tsa-ri became one of *the* places to visit in Tibet for certain types of ritual interaction with place. In short, the result of this was that Tsa-ri was no longer physically isolated from the social world. If the Tibetan historical accounts are to be credited, many hundreds of yogins began to go there to perform retreats and pilgrimages, and following them, over the centuries, very large numbers of lay and non-Tantric clerical pilgrims as well.<sup>2</sup> That this happened, and that it was a constantly changing process over the centuries, is not in doubt. My present interest is with the establishment and maintenance of major ritual institutions, retreat centres, monasteries, pilgrimages, processions, etc., that have endured up to 1959 and beyond.

With regard to meditation retreat centres, we do have an account of one early community in the biography of Tshal-pa bSam-gtan dPal-ba (1291-1366), recorded only a century or so later in gZhon-nu-dpal's *Deb ther sngon po*. Although the colony did not last the account of it is worth repeating here for the details it gives on the economy and mechanics of sponsorship of such early communities on the mountain:

Later he founded on the same day [at Tsa-ri] the Yab-chos-sdings and the sGo-mo-chos-sdings monasteries, in which countless male and female yogins gathered...At the foot of the mountain, the place was filled with small huts, which could accommodate one hermit only...He did not discriminate between those who offered him a thousand *zho* and those who offered him a needle and thread, and received all of them with tea and entertainment...They [i.e. the Tshal-pa] did not keep any monastery lands for the upkeep of the above two monasteries (in Tsa-ri), but gained their livelihood by begging for alms. However they were able to distribute food to not less than a hundred hermits observing the annual seclusion (*lo-mtshams-pa*).<sup>3</sup>

There was sufficient interest in the mountain by the fourteenth century for this type of support to come from the local population and visiting pilgrims, and also for large religio-political institutions to provide long-term sponsorship of their community at Yul-smad in the western part of Tsa-ri.<sup>4</sup> During the early years of their reign (c.1360) the Phag-mo Gru-pa hegemony

<sup>2</sup> I do not intend to write a history of the early development of Tsa-ri here. Much of what one finds in various chronicles and biographies is already indicated by Padma dKar-po's 'Brug-pa account translated in the previous chapter. The clichéd 'Bri-gung-pa scheme for the colonisation of the three famous Sarnvara mountains has been outlined by Petech (1976), and is applied to Tsa-ri in various Tibetan sources.

<sup>3</sup> Roerich (1979:885); c.f. Tshal-pa Kun-dga' rDo-rje (1981:140-41).

<sup>4</sup> Roerich (1979:579,603). Much of the story of this community remains unknown. After a period of decline in the fifteenth century the 'Bri-gung-pa gave new impetus to their centres in places in the borderlands such as Tsa-ri, especially after the great master Kun-dga' Rin-chen (1475-1527) came to the seat; see Könchog Gyaltzen (1986:107). Petech (1978:321). KG has told me that a multi-volume 'Bri-gung chronicle of that school's activities at Tsa-ri used to be kept at 'Bri-gung-mthil before 1959, but has been missing since the Cultural Revolution. The 'Bri-gung-pa temple at Yul-smad was also burnt down during a feud with Arunachal tribal peoples in 1906, resulting in the probable loss of other materials regarding their history on the mountain.

under Byang-chub rGyal-mtshan of sNe'u-gdon set up a system of pilgrims' rest houses and provision caches at Tsa-ri and Mt. Kailash.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the earliest records of what might be called 'state' patronage of Buddhist ritual activity at mountain sites such as Tsa-ri. Both the Yul-smad 'Bri-gung-pa colony and the network of pilgrims' resthouses existed as important institutions at Tsa-ri in 1959.

Although the 'Brug-pa credit their own lineage with having first 'opened' the site, the available accounts show they were just one among a number of other schools who maintained communities around the mountain. Their meditators enjoyed early sponsorship from both the parent monastery of Rwa-lung in gTsang, and the nearby kingdom of rKyem-dong in Kong-po, later the site of a Tibetan government *rDzong*. The relationship with the people of rKyem-dong was to endure up to the present century. The 'Brug-pa Tantric community became and remained the leading group at Tsa-ri only after the fourth 'Brug-chen incarnation was found in a minor aristocratic house of Kong-po in the person of Ngag-dbang Nor-bu alias Padma dKar-po. He established a new 'Brug-pa power base directly adjacent to Pure Crystal Mountain by setting up his own important monastery of gSang-sngags Chos-gling in Bya-yul. He made various extended visits for meditation and pilgrimage at Tsa-ri, and during the middle of the sixteenth century established the Cig-car *sgrub-sde*, beginning the tradition still current in 1959 of placing thirteen yogins in a retreat hermitage there for training. He also founded the mountain's largest and most patronised temple there, the Cig-car Vajravārāhī *lha-khang*, around 1570. On the forested slopes of the upper Cig-car valley (see plate 4) were other smaller temples-cum-hermitages established at the sites of the very earliest meditation communities, including gDan-sa, rGod-pa, dBu-ri, gZim-khang and Sri-'burn-thang.<sup>6</sup>

## ii. Yoga Practice in Cig-car in the 1950s

The most well known Tantric community of Tsa-ri was the 'Brug-pa *sgrub-sde* at Cig-car. It was abandoned and destroyed in 1959-60 during the Chinese occupation, but its practice lineage still continues in exile. For at least the last three to four hundred years Cig-car has been the main staging point for all major circumambulation routes around Pure Crystal mountain. It had a domestic lay population living in substantial houses, some very popular temples for pilgrims' offerings with a resident body of monks, attendants (*sku-gnyer*), and various functionaries (*las-tshan*), and a constant, year-round flow of pilgrims of all descriptions from throughout the Tibetan world. It functioned as the seat of local government, having representatives of the 'Brug-pa aristocracy and Tibetan government resident there.

<sup>5</sup> Shakabpa (1984:82).

<sup>6</sup> For Tibetan historical accounts of Cig-car, see Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:12a-13a) & (1985, vol.2:173-4); bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1041); Kah-thog Si-tu Chos-kyi rGya-mtsho (1972:362-5); Yuthok (1990:94); and for Western descriptions, see Burrard (1915:335); Bailey (1957:199-202); Ward (1941:87).



Plate 4. Entrance to the Cig-car valley with Dag-pa Shel-ri summit behind, and sGrol-ma pass at upper left.



Plate 5. Dag-pa Shel-ri summit, described by my informants as the 'Four Khecara Mountains' (*mkha'-spyod-ri-bzhi*).



So Cig-car was, by all accounts, the most frequented site in the Tsa-ri district, yet it also housed the main community of Tantric yogins in retreat in the surrounding forests. The thirteen resident yogins there were very distinctive with their long, 'dreadlock' style hair, their beards and special striped robes called *ral-cha* (*ral-pa'i cha-lugs*, 'long-haired's costume'). In appearance they resembled the archetypal Tibetan yogin Mi-la Ras-pa; however, they were not just trying to cultivate an 'image'. They were heirs to the same lineage of practice as Mi-la, performing the same yogas at the great Saṃvara mountain sites as he had in the eleventh century. Aspects of their *sādhana* practice demanded total identification with an archetype deity, and they did not shave or cut hair as this would have been equivalent to performing the act on the deity itself. Theoretically, they were engaged on a level of concentration where actions such as body grooming became superfluous; being beyond discriminations of acceptance or rejection of appearance, they left things *au naturel*. This was the exact opposite to the non-Tantric clerical practitioner, and their special yogin's robes symbolised their alternative training and path.

The practice lineage of these yogins was the Cakrasaṃvara system of the 'mother' class of *anuttarayoga-tantra* used by the bKa'-brgyud-pa schools. This is precisely why they were at Tsa-ri, as the archetype deities on whom they would focus, Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī together with their large retinue of initiatory beings, 'dwelt' there in Pure Crystal Mountain *maṇḍala* palace. There is a yogin's song which expresses this notion:

By performing your three years meditation  
 In the power place of Cāritra,  
 You won't need many retreat assistants,  
 There are enough *mātrkā* and *dākīnī*!<sup>7</sup>

During their three-year retreat (*lo-gsum phyogs-gsum*) at Cig-car they would specifically prepare for and cultivate higher *sādhana* of the 'completion' or 'perfection-stage' (*rdzogs-rim*) of this system, such as *mahāmudrā* (*phyag-chen*), *caṇḍālī* (*gtum-mo'i me*), and 'dream' (*rmi-lam*) yogas. The specialist practice of the Cig-car *sgrub-sde* yogins I want to focus on was the performance of *caṇḍālī*, sometimes called 'yoga of mystic heat', or 'internal fire', because it produces a raising of natural body temperature. The specific purpose of such a practice is to purify psychic defilement and delusion and activate the psychic body network in particular ways, and the physical rise in body temperature is a purely secondary feature of it. This practice is classified as a yoga of the perfection stage 'which has signs'. This is because it depends upon meditating on the form of the internal psychic or subtle body made up of a vast network of major and minor psychic 'channels' or 'veins' (*nāḍī/rtsa*), the subtle 'energy' (*prāṇa/rlung*) which is circulated through them, and 'essential points' or 'drops' (*bindu/thig-le*) throughout, together with the hierarchy of energy 'centres' or *cakra* along the

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 3.8.

central axis of the body. Tibetans often refer to this complex as the *rtsa-rlung-thig-le* or *rtsa-rlung* system for short. I discuss its use at Cig-car in particular not only because it has a very long history of practice there, but because for certain reasons the Cig-car meditators were widely known for their abilities in forms of this yoga.

By the early part of this century the 'Brug-pa practice lineage of *rtsa-rlung* yoga at Tsa-ri had declined drastically, and my informant Cig-car *dBu-mdzad* Shes-rab rGya-mtsho (SG) was sent to the Cig-car *sgrub-sde* from Bya gSang-sngags Chos-gling in order to revive it. SG received his full initiation into the lineage from A-pho Rin-po-che during his three-year retreat in Tsa-ri sKyid-phug in about 1940, when aged twenty-five. When he later lived in Cig-car SG taught the meditators who filled the thirteen or so places in the *sgrub-sde*. The candidates came of their own choice: it was not a compulsory part of any religious training system, although there were certain prerequisites for entry. They had to be members of the 'Brug-pa school, and almost all came from the regions adjacent to Tsa-ri, or from Tsa-ri itself. Most were quite young, well under forty years of age. This was no coincidence as the optimum age for efficient *rtsa-rlung* performance was considered to be approximately between sixteen and forty years. Practitioners had to be male. They also had to have strong motivation to undertake all the preparations required to perform the retreat training. Not only did they have the four hundred thousand preliminary exercises, plus an additional hundred thousand Cakrasaṃvara-Vajravārāhī *yab-yum* mantra to recite after initiation, but they also had to arrange their own sponsorship for the three-year period. As they gained no direct support from either the main monastery or the government, they had to locate individual sponsors from surrounding districts such as rKyem-dong, gNyal and Dwags-po. All such sponsors hoped to generate their own merit from such an act of support.

The *rtsa-rlung* practice was taught to the meditators<sup>7</sup> and the *Ras chung snyan brgyud* was followed, as was common in 'Brug-pa training. When meditators were thought to have mastered the particular practice of *caṇḍālī* yoga, they had to undergo something like an exercise, or ritual test. These were of two types: the first to be performed was the *ras-phud* (lit. 'casting off [the yogin's] cotton cloth', pron. *rimbik* in local dialect); and the second was the *chu-ras* (lit. 'wet cotton cloth'). The *chu-ras* was an exclusive performance, and could only be personally witnessed by other practitioners of the *Nā ro chos drug* yoga system.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, and also precisely because the *ras-phud* was by comparison an 'open' performance, I will detail the former ritual as it took place at Cig-car in the 1950s.

### iii. Upon a Winter's Night...

<sup>7</sup> Details of a version of this practice are available in English in Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (1982).

<sup>8</sup> David-Neel (1965:163-4) gives a poor account of *chu-ras*, making it seem more like sport than serious ritual; c.f. Evans-Wentz (1958:158-9).



Essentially, the *ras-phud* ritual consisted of spending all mid-winter night sitting near-naked in the snow, in the extreme cold of upper Cig-car (elevation approx. 4000m). In one sense it was a test of the yogin's mastery over the technique of *caṅḍālī* yoga, as proficiency did have the side-effect of raising physical body temperature, and hence give the meditators the ability to withstand the intense cold of the ritual setting. But it was not a test in the normal sense of the word, as SG, a supervisor of *ras-phud*, explains:

There was no pass or fail in the *ras-phud* and other such exercises; it remained the knowledge of the individual meditators whether they reached the goal of proficiency in *rtsa-lung* or not. People gossiped [about who was good or bad] of course, but only the meditators themselves knew about it. There was no absolute standard imposed, and no punishment for not performing. But those who were not good in practice used to get ill during the *ras-phud*; the color would drain out of them and they would really shiver, and that's a sure sign you hadn't mastered it. But the supervisor (*dbu-mdzad*) didn't ask afterwards if you did it well or not.

Although it lacked strict criteria, the ritual exercise did have a certain 'evidential value'. And it was this quality of the performance which became the most socially important aspect, regardless of whatever may have happened in the mind and body of any individual yogin.

In the depths of winter each year, those meditators who were ready to undergo the *ras-phud* began a regime of preliminary preparations. From the first day of the twelfth Tibetan month (= approx. late December) they moved out of the Cig-car *sgrub-sde* and lived outside in thin cotton tents. Here they remained engaged in various preparatory yogic exercises until mid-winter's evening, on the fifteenth day of the month. This day was chosen because according to Tibetan lineages of the Cakrasaṃvara system it was the most potent time one could make offerings to the archetype deities and hope to gain *siddhi* as a result. On that evening the 'eight functionaries' (*las-tshan-brgyad*), who were lay workers and patrons representing the eight traditional meditation and temple communities of Cig-car area, came to greet them and conduct them by degrees to the site of the ritual.<sup>10</sup>

The ground for the *ras-phud* was a flat clearing up in the forests above Cig-car called Sri-'bum-thang, or Plain of One Hundred Thousand *Sri* (an important class of early Tibetan spirits). Before arriving at this ground, the yogins were taken to visit two additional sites: firstly gZim-khang, which was the offering temple (*mchod-khang*) of rDo-rje g.Yu-sgron-ma, the local *kṣetrapāla-dākinī*; and secondly gDan-sa, the 'seat' of the Rin-po-che. At gZim-khang the eight functionaries would bring a young girl to welcome the yogins. This person took the

<sup>10</sup> See text in appendix 2. They represented the meditation sites and temples of dBu-ri, gDan-sa, gZim-khang, La-va-phug, rGod-pa, Sri-'bum-thang, and the stewards (*gnyer-pa*) from the Cig-car *sgrub-sde* and Cig-car *lha-khang* also attended. Originally all these posts were held by meditators (not monks), and only later were lay retreat assistants (*sgrub-g.yog*) appointed as a separate rank. Tsa-ri-bas explain this in terms of a decline in the retreat practices of the past, as a result of which yogins went to live with local women, have children and re-enter lay social life.

role of rDo-rje g.Yu-sgron-ma, and was said to 'be' the *kṣetrapāla-dākinī* during the ritual. She had to be a pre-menstrual virgin of a high-caste family who had never had any kind of relations with a man. In the temple was a large offering bowl for the goddess, and on this evening it was filled with local beer (*chang*), and offered to the yogins by the girl who took the part of the *dākinī*.<sup>11</sup> The yogins were permitted to drink directly from 'her' bowl. They could consume what quantity they liked, but even a taste was sufficient. This beer offering transmitted the goddess' empowerment (*byin-brlabs*) to the yogins, and was believed to give them heightened ability in the circulation of their *prāṇa*. The girl was escorted back to the village immediately after her duties had been performed.

The group then went on to gDan-sa and performed the *Bla-ma mchod-pa* offering. Here they had to prepare their costume for the night's performance. They could only wear light underwear, with about ten centimetres of tightly folded cotton shawl (*gzan*) covering them at the groin and a meditation band (*sgom-thag*) around the waist. Before setting out to the Sri-'bum-thang they would all take turns to sing different songs about their lineage, Tantra practice and yoga, for example:

On the Sri-'bum plain at Cig-car  
There is an excellent lion's throne.  
Our glorious 'Brug-pa  
Sit upon that throne.<sup>12</sup>

It was ten or eleven o'clock at night by the time they reached the snow-covered *ras-phud* ground. At the site there was a *dar-icog* covered in prayer-flags and a natural stone 'throne'. The supervisor would stop there, and having collected the prayer-beads of each participant, would throw these out onto the snowy plain one by one. Wherever a yogin's beads landed marked the spot where they would have to meditate until the next morning without moving. Each was given a very small pad or mattress to sit upon. The meditation had to be performed then regardless of the weather conditions during the period. If snow fell meditators would have to unfold their thin shawl, drape it over themselves, and flick off the excess snow. At sunrise the following morning, around eight or nine o'clock, the eight functionaries would return to the site to greet the yogins.

At this point in the ritual the esoteric and highly advanced Tantric yoga practice became transformed into a public spectacle of sorts. When the eight functionaries arrived they would have with them quite a crowd of both local people and visitors to the region, including men and women some of whom were patrons, who wanted to witness the event. They believed

<sup>11</sup> There are a variety of songs which mention the role of *dākinī* associated with Tsa-ri as 'beer-serving maids' (*chang-ma*), some of which are mentioned in the next chapter.

<sup>12</sup> In this song on the superior yogic practice of the 'Brug-pa meditators, the 'lion's throne' referred to is the seat of the Buddha, i.e. attaining Buddhahood. See appendix 3.6.

that they could obtain empowerment by direct sight of the meditating yogins, as these persons had in a sense temporarily become deities. The meditator's motionless bodies were arrayed around the snow covered plain when this crowd arrived, and the functionaries would formally greet each meditator in turn. The yogins were then allowed to rise, unfold the thin shawls from around their waists and drape them over themselves. It was a socially poignant moment, as ordinary men and women came face to face with an exhibition of the potent human powers which their religion claimed one could cultivate: control of the internal world and hence mastery over the external brute force of nature. Such a display of the power of Tantra had been conducted at the site for centuries. One Tibetan account from 1812 represents such a moment from the past as an inspiring encounter with this power:

In order to exhibit ('don) the superiority of *candāli* yoga the thirteen great meditators of the Cig-car *sgrub-sde* spent a night on a snowy plain at the foot of the snow mountain, wearing only a single shawl in the cold of the depths of winter. Early next morning the Tshul-pa patrons of Tsā-ri went to meet them carrying ritual parasols and victory banners, and as they witnessed them all coming forward with steam rising off their bodies an overpowering faith in these lineage sons of Mi-la Ras-pa was born.<sup>13</sup>

As the ritual was observed in the 1950s, when each yogin got up from their meditation position, they sang celebratory songs to the crowd. This was not only to rejoice but to proclaim the inner reality of what was being witnessed externally. For example:

On this present occasion I'll sing a happy song.  
On this present occasion I'll perform a joyous dance.  
When the reality of all the excellent Gurus and Jinas  
Arises in the primal expanse of my own mind,  
The yogin whose mind is purified rejoices!<sup>14</sup>

I have no doubt that the ritual generated faith in the public observers. By any standards it was a remarkable feat of human endurance. But there were also other more light-hearted performative dimensions at this point, as SG, himself a yogin, remembers:

It was hard for the yogins, they had to look good. If they got up and showed that they had cramp in their legs or something, then everyone in the crowd would make fun of them and say they didn't do it properly. There were jokes (*rtse*, lit. 'play acting') about this. Sometimes yogins put the thin shawl over their heads and pretended to sleep when the eight functionaries came to greet them. The functionaries would say, 'You are a well-developed meditator, please arise', but there would be no movement. The senior man would come over to look, and then indicate to the crowd that the meditator had died of cold. The people would gasp in shock, but then laugh when they realised the joke. It was not all serious at the

<sup>13</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:490).

<sup>14</sup> See appendix 3.9. This is one of a collection of about twenty songs that might have been used here.

end.

After the welcoming, the yogins went to dBu-ri temple and were greeted by people who lined the route. Then at gZim-khang they ate a meal that was laid out for them. Here they dressed in their normal robes once more. They performed the *Bla-ma mchod-pa* again. To complete the *ras-phud* they went to the 'golden throne' in the Cig-car Vajravārāhi temple and performed the Vārāhi offering.

In closing this short account of *ras-phud* one background feature of the whole ritual process must be mentioned here: the organisation of local space with regard to gender. In early accounts of the mountain, such as that of gZhon-nu-dpal quoted above, we find one or two very general references to Tantric yoginīs at Tsa-ri.<sup>15</sup> But in other accounts, such as Padma dKar-po's narrative in the previous chapter, we find early yogins being expelled for having women as their Tantric consorts (*mudrā*) in practice there. In later times there was a ritual exclusion of women associated with the presence of the Cig-car *sgrub-sde* and yogins practising Tantric meditation in the area. This was applied in two contexts, specifically to the *ras-phud* ritual, and more generally to the entire Cig-car area throughout the winter. At Cig-car in 1913 Bailey noted,

On the 15th day of the 8th [Tibetan] month when the pilgrim road is closed all women are obliged to leave Chikchar where there are several holy temples; they live during the winter at Yarap on the opposite bank of the river.<sup>16</sup>

Women remained at the g.Yag-rabs settlement, or were not permitted past it, until the following spring sometime before the upper mountain was ritually reopened during the middle of the third Tibetan month (= approx. late April). This represents a period of exclusion of over half the year. Although located only a few kilometres from Cig-car, g.Yag-rabs lay just outside the natural boundary of the sanctuary of Tsa-ri which was formed in the east by the Tsa-ri river. My informant SG offered this in explanation:

In the past they didn't want women there in the winter because the yogins had to spend the night in the snow semi-naked during the *ras-phud* exercise, and it might have caused them loss of concentration if women were there. That was the rule in times past.

This was later relaxed to allow temporary visits to the site, such as to obtain empowerment at the ritual's end. Similarly, Bailey's informants told him:

All the women from Chikchar are obliged to live here [at g.Yag-rabs] in winter,

<sup>15</sup> See also Dowman (1984:139 & 1980:104-11); Allione (1984:125).

<sup>16</sup> Bailey (1914:11).

so that the monks in the holy temples can meditate without being distracted.<sup>17</sup>

These Tibetan reasons for the exclusions are based on the ritual requirement for male yogins to observe celibacy during the practice of *rtsa-rlung* meditation. In general, chastity is one of the precepts for *Nā ro chos drug* practitioners. The exclusion of women from male 'clerical' or 'Tantric space' was found elsewhere throughout Tibet.<sup>18</sup> There also existed exclusions from male 'civic space' in Tibet, ostensibly on account of sexual distraction.<sup>19</sup> In a broader context the theme of women as a sexual distraction is familiar from Indian classical traditions on the tension between celibate, male asceticism and the desire and attachment represented in men's views of women's sexuality. The image of sexually active women as a major threat to male Buddhist meditators is found in Buddhist canonical literature.<sup>20</sup> Thus, what happened at Cig-car was not just a feature of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, but a long-standing one of the Buddhist tradition as a whole.

#### iv. Tantric Magic, Status and Place

The *ras-phud* is an interesting ritual, but not because it may seem fantastic or exotic to us outsiders. It is interesting precisely because it was fantastic or exotic for insiders, for the Tibetans themselves. Oral and written chronicles or biographies, local dance dramas and operas, songs, folk tales, paintings and other expressions of Tibetan life are pervaded by a mass of stories and references to the incredible magical powers of Tantric yogins. As we well know in the West, these stories have spread beyond Tibet and become part of the post-colonial cultural construction of that society by peoples in other times and places. The *ras-phud* is significant because it was more than just a story for Tibetans, it was a public demonstration of what Tantric practice could 'actually' do. It was not a spontaneous miracle that always happened 'somewhere else' to be seen by 'somebody else', but rather was one of those rare predictable, scheduled, and accessible displays. And even though it was a 'knowable' aspect of Tantra, public access to demonstrations of the power of *caṇḍālī* yoga did not make it something taken-for-granted. It probably led to the generation of further stories and references out in the public domain, and there does exist a large collection of 'popular' narratives about

<sup>17</sup> Bailey (1914:69).

<sup>18</sup> See for example Roerich (1979:650) on sTag-lung monastery; Sakya & Emery (1990:62) on Ngor monastery; Waddell (1894) on the Jo-khang. In Tibet during 1987 I observed that no women were permitted to enter the main *mgon-khang* at Ganden monastery; there were signs to this effect over the door and many women pilgrims waited outside while their male companions entered for worship. I was told by a monk that it is because women are polluted and might upset the protectors that they are excluded. A Tibetan explanation for this relating to menstruation and pollution (*sgrib*) is found in Chopel (1983:12).

<sup>19</sup> In the *rtsa-tshig* circulated to government *rDzong* the 'loitering' of women near the buildings was forbidden, see Carrasco (1959:94). Certain restrictions on women still apply at government *rDzong* in contemporary Bhutan.

<sup>20</sup> See Paul (1985).

this aspect of Tantric yoga. Even in Cig-car where the displays were held every year, there were all sorts of local accounts in circulation based on 'real life' characters and events.<sup>21</sup>

This ritual is but one example of the fact that Tantra was not just an esoteric and secret tradition, but had a public face in Tibet. And this had certain consequences in the social world. As I have pointed out elsewhere the public advertisement of Tantric powers and abilities only served to increase the symbolic capital of those associated with its practice. This was a singularly important feature in a society ruled by high-ranking Vajrayāna lamas and clerics and their supporters.<sup>22</sup> Definitions of place and space were intimately involved in this process in Tibet. The fact that the ritual took place at Tsa-ri, a place with a very high status which attracted visitors from throughout the Tibetan world, is not to be overlooked. This is so not only when considering its effectiveness as a form of 'publicity'. It could only happen there because of Tsa-ri's particular definition as a place, and that it did happen there served to reinforce that definition. Certain persons associated themselves with power places because there was an exchange of status which was important in the social world. Space had to be managed in relation to certain times and sites so that other persons, in this case women, would not jeopardize the functioning of such exchanges.

### *Circumambulation and Alchemy*

There are three major, and several more minor pilgrimage routes encircling Pure Crystal Mountain. Although Tantric yogins and meditators might use any of these routes and the numerous sites on their itineraries as places of practice, there are two types of pilgrimage that they specifically undertook on the mountain: the *rtse-skor* or 'peak circuit' and what I call the '*maṇḍala* pilgrimage'. Both are forms of ritual circumambulation (*bskor-ba*). In this present section I will detail the unique itinerary of the peak circuit, most of which was performed only by male meditators and yogins prior to 1959. As of 1983-84 the upper mountain has once again been opened for pilgrimage by Chinese authorities, and the circuits I will describe here can be performed. Thus, although I have had to use past tense herein for accounts of many rituals at Tsa-ri, I will use the present tense for the pilgrimages that are still functioning. The peak circuit is the shortest of the five different circumambulation routes around Pure Crystal Mountain. It is also the one highest in average altitude, and closest to the actual summit peak of the mountain. In relation to the representations of landscape at the site, it can

<sup>21</sup> One commonly recounted is the story of dBu-mdzad dKar-ri, a former supervisor of the Cig-car *sgrub-sde* with a great fondness for drinking beer. He would go into the village to consume ale in the winter, but as was the rule he had to return to the retreat centre each night. Sometimes he was too drunk to reach home and would fall asleep in the deep snow on the side of the trail. In the mornings villagers would find large patches of snow melted back to the bare ground along the path. They knew that this was where the dBu-mdzad, a Mahāmudrā yogin proficient in *caṇḍālī* yoga, had spent the night.

<sup>22</sup> Huber (1993 forthcoming).

be said to be closest to both the highest palace of the archetype deities in the *maṇḍala*, and also to the central vase and spire of the great crystal *stūpa*. This pilgrimage and the *maṇḍala* pilgrimage described in the next section were both more or less exclusive to male yogins. In theory any male pilgrim could pass over all, and any female could traverse part, of the physical routes of these specialised pilgrimages. But they could never engage in the rituals that yogins might perform on these circuits because they lacked the esoteric knowledge, initiations and training that was required beforehand.

#### i. The Peak Circuit Itinerary

The Tsa-ri *rtse-skor* or peak circuit is an annual circumambulation, which can be performed as many times as a practitioner either wishes or is able to. Prior to 1959 the route was officially opened around the beginning of the fifth Tibetan month. Due to the high average altitude it can only be easily performed between the fifth and eighth Tibetan months (= approx. June to October). It is a summer activity as much of the route is covered in snow and ice at other times during the year. The route forms a loop which begins at Cig-car and then ends back there again (see map 3). It usually takes from two to four days to complete, although duration is totally dependent on what specific sites are visited and stayed at along the route. The written guides only describe small portions of the peak circuit route. The fullest descriptions of the basic itinerary are found in oral *gnas-bshad*. In the following example I have added in known approximate altitudes for main points of the route:

From Cig-car (3870m) you cross over the sGrol-ma pass (4900m), and take a midday meal break in Mi-lpags ravine. From there, through the Sha-skam pass (4900m), Byams-pa ravine and dKar-rdog plateau you climb up to sTag-ma pass entrance (4420m) and spend the night there [at the resthouse]. After leaving there ascend with fleet-footedness (*rkang-mgyogs*), through to mKha'-gro Tshogs-gzhong and take a midday meal break in sTag-tshang ravine. Then you cross the Sha-ngus pass (5060m) and cross the Dam-can pass and meet (*mjal*) the Ka-la Dung-mtsho (5100m). After this you traverse the sKyobs-chen pass (4900m), and having met with the Trakṣad Bla-mtsho you return to Cig-car. That is how the *rtse-skor* is done.<sup>23</sup>

From Cig-car to the head of sTag-ma pass the route is the same as the *gzhung-skor* or 'middle circuit' described in the next chapter. But from the sTag-ma pass it deviates, and crosses a high ridge, formed in part by the peaks of the so-called 'Four Khecara Mountains' (mKha'-spyod-ri-bzhi), which runs south-east down from the summit of Pure Crystal Mountain. Sometimes this shorter route is not taken, and the route continues on the middle circuit a little longer to include other lakes and caves in the region of Pho-brang g. Yu-mtsho to the south. But from the summit of the Sha-ngus pass back to Cig-car the high altitude route, averaging about 5000m, is unique to the peak circuit.

<sup>23</sup> See appendix 1.

## ii. Landscape of Power

Simple circumambulation of the main peak of Pure Crystal Mountain by this route is an aim in itself. It generates merit if performed with the correct attitude of devotion. But in addition to this basic ritual, Tantric practitioners and other élite pilgrims, such as high-ranking clerics, use this strenuous high altitude circuit for other specific reasons. This high ground of the mountain is marked by many of Tsa-ri's most potent empowered sites. It circles closest to the central peak abode of the archetype deities, allowing for the most intimate encounter (*mjal-ba*) with that edifice of natural architecture. On its alternate routes it visits the most important meditation caves in the area, where the Tantric yogins of the past gained their supreme *siddhi* in meditation, and encompasses the primary lakes containing *maṇḍala* and ritual substances of the highest ranking. Here one begins to enter the sphere of the celestial Khecara purity zone, and the landscape and physical quality of the environment are charged in their very being by the immediacy of this interface. Oral and written narrative maps and guides tell us that in this region there are a myriad of sites and traditions connected with the ritual priorities of Tantra practitioners who perform peak circuits. I will give a few examples to show what might be of ritual importance to them.

On the peak circuit we find that the group of central mountains that constitute the main summit ridge running to the south-east, the 'Four Khecara Mountains' (see plate 5), are places where advanced Tantric meditators can engage in Mahāmudrā yoga in the various caves there. It was here in the high altitude rDo-rje cave, for example, that the Indian yogin La-va-pa attained bliss in his Tantric practice. The area is described as a place of such attainment in a language heavy with references to the Tantric practices of deity-visualization and *rtsa-rlung-thig-le* yoga:

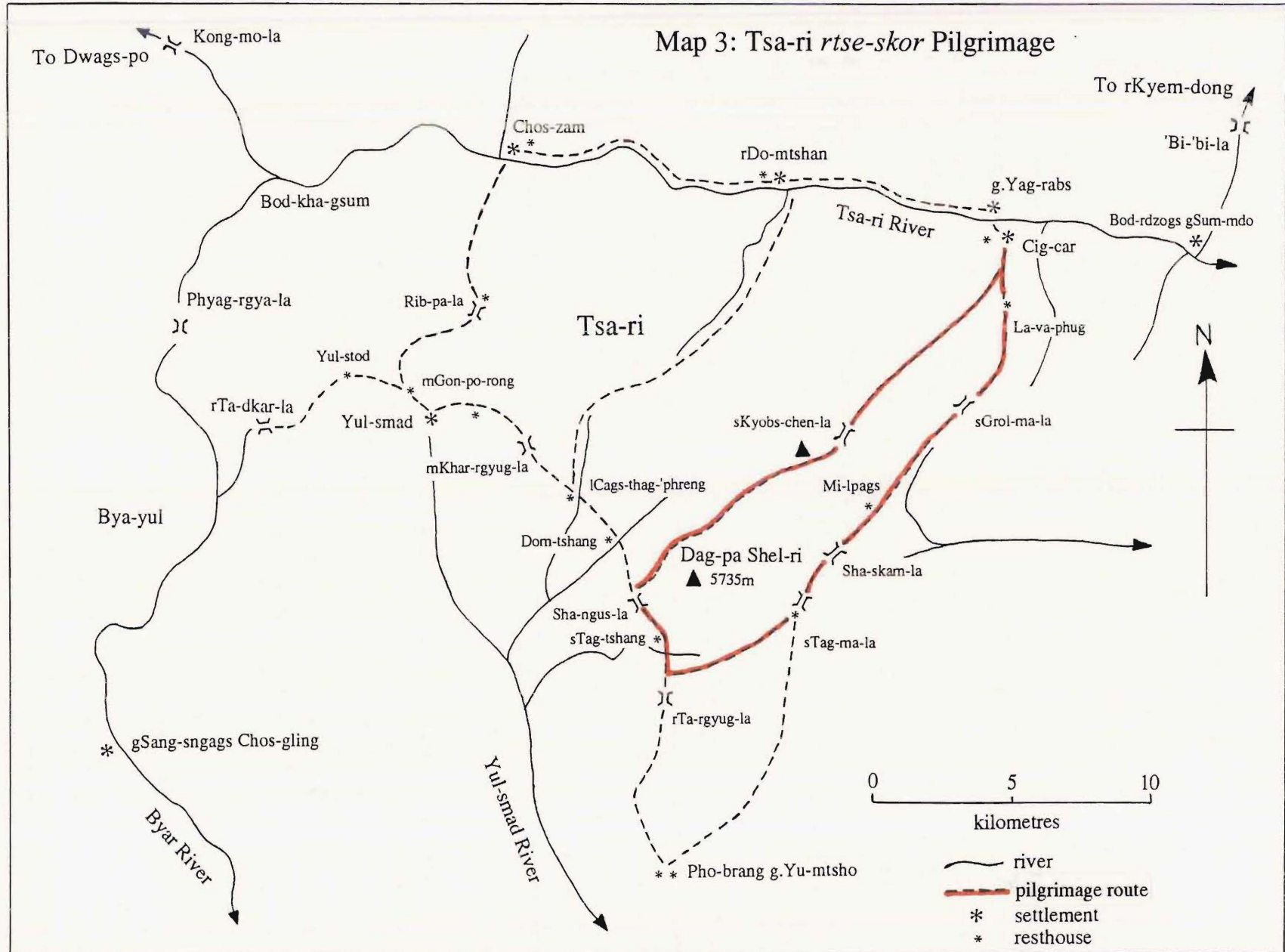
Thabs rDo-rje-ri (Vajra of Means mountain) is the place for cultivating the completion stage...Shes-rab Dril-bu-ri (Bell of Wisdom mountain) is the place for cultivating the generation stage...At the centre, the one called Thabs Shes-rab Zung-'jug dBu-ma-ri (Central Convergence of Means and Wisdom mountain), the *samādhi* of the convergence of the generation and completion [stages] arises spontaneously, one's own body is purified in rainbow light, and so on. It is extolled as the place for cultivating Mahāmudrā.<sup>24</sup>

At other spots one comes within very close proximity of the central *maṇḍala* palace, such as the lake of Ka-la Dung-mtsho directly under the main north summit, and site of yet another important practice cave of an early yogin. In relation to these places we find the language of architecture giving way to the honorific language of anatomy and personal effects to describe the landscape features, as the archetype deities themselves are right there in front of the

<sup>24</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:22b).



Map 3: Tsa-ri *rtse-skor* Pilgrimage





practitioner. So it is said, "This Ka-la Dung-mtsho is like the upper torso (*sku-stod*) of Pure Crystal Mountain."<sup>25</sup> It is a chance for direct physical encounter, "When Pure Crystal Mountain disrobes itself of its garment (*na-bza' ma-gsol*) of mist and cloud your meeting will be extremely close, and you must perform offerings and exert yourself in prayer."<sup>26</sup> What is more, the vital bodily substances of the archetype deities can be found and extracted from the landscape itself, as their bodies *are* the body of the summit. In the waters of Ka-la Dung-mtsho there is a thick white suspension, like cream. Yogins ladle and decant the waters in order to collect it. This 'cream' is considered to be the generative fluid or semen of Cakrasaṃvara, and also in another sense the white drops (*thig-le*) of *bodhicitta* which are circulated within the channel network of the psychic body in yoga. This highly empowered substance is used in Tantric alchemy and rituals.

Close by, on the opposite side of the main summit, is the Khecara peak of Shes-rab Dril-bu-ri. Yogins understand that its name is a symbolic reference to the female (*prajñā* and *ghaṇṭā*) archetype deity Vajravārāhī, and that her body is this feminine half of the summit's landscape.<sup>27</sup> And it is here that, "From the *dākinī's* secret vagina (*bhaga*) a flood of white and red *bodhicitta* flows down as *sindūra*."<sup>28</sup> Her menstrual blood, also conceived of as empowered psychic body-drops, is available to the Tantric practitioner in the lake waters of Pho-brang sKyog-mo-mtsho, also called Sindūra'i rGya-mtsho or 'Ocean of *Sindūra*'. The *sindūra* suspended in its waters, which we in the West would probably identify as minium or red lead powder, is regarded as a most potent substance, being the chief *dākinī's* menstrual blood. It can be consumed to gain direct empowerment. It is also prized for use in certain Tantric rituals, such as the construction of *sindūra maṇḍala* by drawing the design on a mirror's surface with the precious powder, or for certain steps in the initiation of practitioners into the meditation cycles of the Cakrasaṃvara system.

If substances around the peak circuit have a high ritual ranking, then so too must the persons who go there and collect them. Those who wanted to make collections required advanced levels of spiritual cultivation, and the holding of this qualification by someone was public knowledge, that is, they were recognised as a lama or yogin by others. As we shall see below, it also became public knowledge that certain qualifications were required by the way in which the supposed results of ritual breach in collection practices were explained by

<sup>25</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.2:186).

<sup>26</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:25b).

<sup>27</sup> Stein (1988:37-49) has looked at Tibetan literary materials, especially concerning Tsa-ri, on the hypostatic body of Vajravārāhī in landscape, entry into 'matrix' or 'womb' caves by yogins, and the psychic symbolism of certain Tantric meditations. One might compare his comments and questions at the bottom of p.40, with some of the Tibetan beliefs given herein; c.f. also Bäumer (1991), especially her comments on Kashmir Śaivism.

<sup>28</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:15b).

Tibetans. Potential collectors required a sufficient resource of symbolic capital, which could be generated by means of Tantric ritual activity. To gather material such as *sindūra* there male pilgrims (for no women are allowed near here, see the following chapter) must be Tantric initiates who have completed the Vajravārāhī retreat practice, or who have performed no less than thirteen middle circuits of the mountain already. Tibetans have related several narratives to me describing how terrible calamities struck lay pilgrims who visited the lakes and collected *sindūra* without these ritual qualifications.<sup>29</sup> Even those who are highly qualified are extremely cautious about their behavior when taking *sindūra*. It is not a practice to be taken lightly because of the immense power of the place and its divine inhabitants. For example, SG is a highly experienced Tantric yogin who knows the mountain intimately. In the 1950s he was one of only two persons officially authorised to collect *sindūra* on the mountain, as there had been some bad omens and 'mishaps'. Even Tibetan government representatives were not allowed to gather it, they had to get it from the yogins of Tsa-ri. He once collected a sizable quantity, too much in his opinion, of the substance while performing a peak circuit. On his descent he became hopelessly lost in wet weather for several days before being found in a very rough state by some yak-herders. He sees a direct connection between these two events. An interesting footnote to this story is that the villagers of Tsa-ri were very surprised when they saw this yogin looking stressed and in a dishevelled state.

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They could not understand how a yogin possessing Tantric powers could get this way, not realizing that one cannot effectively go without food and warmth unless seated in quite meditation.

The abundant glacial water (*gangs-chu*) in rivers and lakes is also considered extremely potent. In various oral and written traditions its sources and properties are catalogued and ranked, and like the other physical stuff of the upper mountain it can be ritually collected and consumed. Up here at certain spots one may be drinking the 'urine' (*gsang-chab*) of the archetype deity Vajravārāhī,<sup>30</sup> or the ritual water used in the Tantric consecrations (*abhiṣeka*) of *maṇḍala* initiation, and thus gain empowerment (*byin-gyis-brlabs*), purification of defilements (*sgrib-pa dag*), or even various levels of *siddhi*.

Yogins know that everything about the upper landscape of the mountain is charged with power and thus ritually significant as 'means' towards their goal of physical and psychic refinement. Much of this is also general knowledge—for instance, any lay pilgrim on the mountain will continually 'taste' the waters from streams and lakes to gain empowerment and purification. But Tantric practitioners are employing these substances in very different ways

<sup>29</sup> The biography of rDo-ring Paṇḍita, a layman, records that he extracted *sindūra* from a lake on Pure Crystal Mountain in 1794, and placed an offering of goods back in it in return; see bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1043). We know that the rDo-ring *bka'-blon* encountered many difficulties in his later life, some apparently connected with the mountain; see my notes on him and his family in the following chapter.

<sup>30</sup> On the Phag-mo gSang-phug see Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.2:180).

from the ordinary person, in terms of both the symbolic significance and the material efficacy that are attributed to them. So, for example, they may use materials from Tsa-ri in conducting specialised *gtor-ma*, *gaṇacakra* or *maṇḍala* rituals, although even here much of the significance of such uses known to non-Tantric clerical and lay practitioners. The biggest difference in Tantric and non-Tantric ways of understanding and using the mountain's substances is in the yogin's practice of 'essence extraction' (*bcud-len*) and use of special preparations drawing on alchemical theories.

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### iii. Tantric Botanists and Herbs of Liberation

The ritual collection of herbs and minerals by lay pilgrims at mountains such as Tsa-ri is common practice in Tibet. Some of the main reasons for this are already outlined above. For more specialist purposes, Tibetan doctors and pharmacologists also visit these sites to gather materials for use in medicinal preparations. Tantra practitioners collect herbs and minerals there also. But the way in which they use them not only combines the lay person's view that they are empowered by contact with the place, and the pharmacist's view that they have certain physical, chemical properties, but recognizes in addition that they either possess or are identified with the paranormal powers or *siddhi* of the divine residents of the mountain, or can produce these and other powers or results when prepared and consumed in a ritually correct manner.

By far the most famous of these Tantric substance used at Tsa-ri is the rare herb known in Tibet as *klu-bdud rdo-rje* (*Codonopsis* sp.). Many now know of this so-called 'supreme herb' (*rtswa-mchog*) as it is mentioned in a famous song, attributed to the Sixth Dalai Lama, about Pure Crystal Mountain and its empowered substances:

Water [from] the glacier [of] Dag-pa Shel-ri,  
 Dewdrop[s] of the *klu-bdud rdo-rje* [herb],  
 Balm of medicinal elixir,  
 The beer-serving maid[s] is [are] *ye-shes mkha'-'gro*.  
 If [one] drinks [it] with pure [tantric] commitments,  
 There is no need to undergo bad rebirth (*durgati*).<sup>31</sup>

This song has been brilliantly analysed by Dan Martin, whose translation is given here, and further elaborated upon by Per Sørensen.<sup>32</sup> Both employ a formidable range of literary sources to show how *klu-bdud rdo-rje* relates to the mountain and its divine inhabitants, what *siddhi* powers it is identified with and how it was used by 'Brug-pa yogins there in certain Tantric preparations, most importantly in the '*Ja'-'od ril-bu* or 'rainbow-light pellet'. Most of their findings and conclusions about the song and its contents could also have been

<sup>31</sup> Martin (1988:349-57).

<sup>32</sup> Martin (1988); Sørensen (1988,1990).

gained simply by talking to any knowledgeable Tsa-ri-ba. I do not intend to repeat any of their careful work on this herb and its uses at Tsa-ri here, but will add some further materials on this and other such herbs and minerals from oral traditions about the mountain.

Tsa-ri-bas all know of and also sing about the herb *klu-bdud rdo-rje*. For example, one such song goes:

Pour some dewdrops,  
Of Klu-bdud rDo-rje into a teapot,  
Then please drink your fill,  
And you will not need to undergo bad rebirths.<sup>33</sup>

This is a simpler song than the much-analysed one above, although it is very closely related to the same main theme. Comparing the two texts one of course is led to ask if this is a 'local' version of the one attributed to Tshangs-dbyangs rGya-mtsho, or was his a 'fancy' literary version of this local oral one?

Yogins who perform the peak circuit remain vigilant at certain points on the itinerary, particularly in descending from the sKyobs-chen pass to Cig-car, for the occurrence of plants of *klu-bdud rdo-rje*. One needs a careful eye to identify this species from others of similar appearance also growing on the mountain slopes. The serious Tantric practitioner will consult ritual manuals and guides, and be tutored in taxonomic skills by their *gurus* in order to botanize efficiently. The sites of discovery of patches of the herb are usually kept secret or shared only with other initiated practitioners. Most Tsa-ri-bas and pilgrims to the area also have stories about it being encountered inadvertently by humans or animals.<sup>34</sup> Many 'unusual' occurrences are attributed to the accidental ingestion of *klu-bdud rdo-rje* in the area. The most common of these narratives discuss lay pilgrims whose idle chewing on a grass stalk (actually *klu-bdud rdo-rje*) while circumambulating causes them to fly up in the air or have intense visionary experiences, or they recount the grazing on it by wild and domestic animals, leading to 'self-produced' markings and designs of Buddhas and *mantra* on their bones and horns, and also bodily deformities.

Yogins and Tantric practitioners also seek out other species of alpine herbs for which the mountain is famous. These are plants which, like *klu-bdud rdo-rje*, are credited with possessing the *siddhi* of the *ḍākinī* of Pure Crystal Mountain, and which can bring forth those *siddhi* in the yogin if consumed. Their use is also said to produce general physical vitality and aid *rtsa-rlung-thig-le* yoga practice. On the route of the peak circuit those who know can collect, cook and eat a type of wild radish (*la-phug*) which helps produce *siddhi*. They are believed

<sup>33</sup> See appendix 3.4.

<sup>34</sup> C.f. Yuthok (1990:98); David-Neel (1988:69-70,167 n.2)

to be the same as the *dākinī*-radish which was cooked and eaten by the Indian Yogin La-va-pa while high upon the mountain here, resulting in his departure to the Khecara pure abode. Another prized species is *gling-chen* or the 'giant Gling',<sup>35</sup> a tall species of herb resembling a wild onion, found growing in high alpine pastures upon Pure Crystal Mountain. It too is collected, cooked and consumed for the same purposes, just as the great yogins of the past did here. At still other points on the itinerary a white stone, know as *cong-zhi*, is sought out and collected for use by yogins.<sup>36</sup>

All such collections and uses of substances around the peak circuit and elsewhere on the mountain by Tantra practitioners are ritually important within the general framework of *rasāyana* or what Tibetans call 'essence extraction' (*bcud-len*), that is, a type of Tantric 'alchemy'. Here one consumes these substances in small quantities, usually prepared as pellets (*ril-bu*), as a substitute for bulk food during periods of meditation and yoga. It is the 'essence' (*bcud*) of the materials which is extracted that sustains and revitalizes both the physical body and the psychic body of the yogin. This is one way in which their consumption is believed to produce *siddhi*, as it generally renders the circulation and control of *prāṇa* more efficient. But in addition to this, as we have seen above, Tibetans seem generally to subscribe to notions of the substantial or physical presence or 'embodiment' (*kāya*) of either the *siddhi* powers of the *dākinī* or even the *dākinī* themselves in these substances. Presently I do not know how any individual Tibetan practitioner might distinguish or define the exact efficacy of such ritual consumption.

## *Maṇḍala Pilgrimage*

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Tantric practice on the mountain is its use as a gigantic, natural landscape *maṇḍala* by way of a systematic ritual journey or circumambulation.<sup>37</sup> Such a treatment of the natural environment is truly an example of what Vajrayāna Buddhists would call 'skill in means'. To fully realise the mountain as *maṇḍala*, and hence ultimately experience enlightenment, the practitioner must be a highly advanced *anuttarayoga-tantra* adept with all the preliminary practices completed, and holder of transmissions (*lung*), instructions (*khrid*) and binding pledges (*samaya/dam-tshig*) in the Cakrasaṃvara system.

<sup>35</sup> Das, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*: 257 has: "*glin darbha*, *kuśa* a kind of sacred grass"; however, neither of the grasses known as *darbha* (*Saccharum cylindricum*) and *kuśa* (*Poa cynosuroides*) in India matches the Tibetan descriptions I have for *gling-chen*.

<sup>36</sup> On this substance here see Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:12a-b); and the reference in Tucci (1980:158).

<sup>37</sup> It is, as far as I know, unique in the Tibetan context for its detailed ritual itinerary. But there are parallel esoteric Buddhist developments which treat natural mountain landscapes as *maṇḍala* by ritual journey in Japan—see Grapard (1982)—and which prescribe the ritual ascent of 'human-made mountain' *maṇḍala*, such as Barabudur, for which see Wayman (1981).

Then one is able to enter into the Pure Crystal Mountain *maṇḍala* and attain to the four levels of consecration or initiation (*abhiṣeka/dbang[-bskur]*). This involves a sophisticated ritual process with both physical external and psychic internal dimensions.

The great Tantric expositor of the mountain, Padma dKar-po, wrote a chapter in his guide entitled 'Circumambulation there Interpreted as Walking the Graded Path of the Great Secret [i.e. *guhyanmantra*']'. This provides the process of *maṇḍala* circumambulation in outline, and although to the uninitiated it appears packed with esoteric detail, an extensive oral commentary is implicit. Below is an example of the first three stages of this process which show the relationship between outer and inner landscape and ritual. The initial section describes *maṇḍala* entry at Sexed Rocks, where one encounters and appeals to the door-guardian in the same way as we have seen Ye-shes rDo-rje encounter the field-protector *ḍākinī* there when he first 'opened' the site. Then at Cig-car, where one ascends the mountain onto the upper level or 'enters the palace', the Tantric commitment to total union with one's *guru* and the divine inhabitants of the *maṇḍala* is invoked before full ritual entry can be achieved. The second section describes how the mountain's weather, which is renowned for being extraordinarily wet, provides the initial vase consecration. The image here is of the *ḍākinī* in the space of the Khecara zone above sprinkling the purificatory waters of initiation down as rain and mist. Thirdly, the traverse of the mountain's four 'great' passes and ravines parallels the practice of the initial purification and activation stages of internal yoga. Note that the process of transformation is marked by the shift from ordinary to honorific terms for the body, speech and mind of the practitioner here:

Pray, and enter the door from the Sexed Rocks of Tibet (Bod rDo-mtshan-can). Because there exist the likes of fierce local guardians they call out such things as, 'You need to be careful!'. As for the vision in Cig-car of all the lakes which liberate one from obstructions and enemies, which generate karma and which produce *siddhi* in the palace of *vīra* and *ḍākinī*: firstly make the inner (*nang*) entry into the great Vajrayāna *maṇḍala*, then those who hold binding pledges and vows make the secret (*gsang-ba*) entry into it. After empowerment is bestowed, the great *maṇḍala* is revealed...

As for the azure clouds totally enveloping every direction and the rising mists, and the continuous downpour of rain: it is water with the inherent nature of the five nectars, coming out of a perfect vase possessing a topknot of white cotton, for [washing] living beings who are greatly afflicted in their sins. This opens the way for the *bindu* of the body (*lus*) to awaken, gross defilements to be cleansed, and the vajra body (*sku*) to be put in order. This is the vase consecration (*kalaśābhiṣeka*) or non-regressing consecration, and as for the initiators, they are the chieftainesses of Khecara (i.e. *ḍākinī*)...

Having descended the four great ravines [Parpa-rong, mGon-po-rong, lHa-mo-rong, sTag-tshang-rong], and ascended the four great passes [sKyobs-chen-la, Sha-skam-la, dGa'-yo-la, Sha-ngus-la], offer many *gaṇacakra* in them. Also there, the semen (*khu-ba*) of the Bhagavat and the [generative] particles (*rdul*) of



Bhagavatī, who are both indistinguishable from the *guru*, descend in the ravines of the four *cakra* through the seventy-two thousand *nāḍī*. And that itself [then] ascends the passes which are the disciple's own four *cakra*. Orally tasting the five nectars which are the secret substances produces the conditions for the *bindu* of speech (*ngag*) to be dreamed, subtle defilements to be cleansed, and vajra speech (*gsung*) to be put in order, which is the second consecration called the 'secret one' (*guhyābhiṣeka*)...<sup>38</sup>

The text continues by relating the process of the third consecration, the *prajñājñāna-abhiṣeka*, to drinking from the water of the twelve lakes which are *maṇḍala* palaces and ascending to the summits of the four mountain peaks (Dag-pa mKha'-spyod-ri, Shes-rab Dril-bu-ri, Thabs Rdo-rje-ri, Thabs Shes-rab Zung-'jug dBu-ma-ri). By this one activates the mind (*gid*) *bindu*, cleanses extremely subtle defilements and prepares the seed of vajra mind (*thugs*). For the fourth consecration (*caturthābhiṣeka*) one 'rests' (in *samādhi*) in the four caves (sKyobs-chen-phug, 'Od-'bar-phug, mKha'-spyod-ri'i rDo-rje-phug, Mig-ra-phug), sitting on the four natural thrones (*khri-bzhi*), and then on the dGa'-yo pass sings an inducement to the *jñāna-ḍākinī* abiding in the Pho-brang g.Yu-mtsho. This prepares the inner psychic faculty of vajra-cognition. Finally the yogin must stride with intense energy to mKha'-'gro 'Bum-sde and climb onward to the site of Ma-chen, which completes the full *maṇḍala* consecration process. The 'psychic' allusions here are obvious.

Anyone familiar with the details of *maṇḍala* entry and consecration, the *nāḍī-prāṇa-bindu* yoga and the mountain's topography will see at once what a sophisticated interpretation of the ritual relationship between outer and inner space this represents. It is not just two different rituals happening at the same time, one outward and the other inward: it is the same ritual happening in two different modes simultaneously, as physical transit of the Saṃvara *maṇḍala* constituted in landscape and psychical transit of the same *maṇḍala* constituted in the 'channels', etc., of the meditator's body. As a result of successful *maṇḍala* circumambulation, the yogin experiences a state of bliss which is indescribable, but understood as equivalent to a Buddha's experience of enlightenment. Because the outward journey is also simultaneously the internal purification, and then realization of the symbolic union of the archetype deities by way of yoga in the psychic body, the state achieved is specifically referred to as 'Buddhahood possessing the seven features of father and mother face to face' (abbreviated as *kha sbyor yan lag bdun ldan* in the texts). This is of course what all the writings on Tsa-ri variously refer to when they talk of yogins attaining the 'supreme paranormal power' (*mchog gi dngos grub*) or *parama-siddhi*, *mahāmudrā-siddhi*, or 'resultant-time *mahāmudrā*' ('*bras dus kyi phyag chen*) on the mountain, it is Buddhahood itself.

Such a presentation reduces a highly complex ritual process to a glib routine. However, to say any more here would not only involve a breach of contract with my informants, but take

<sup>38</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:30a-31a); Stein (1988:40) has recently summarised the same text.

us well beyond the scope of this work. The above account may well have been inspirational centuries ago, but has anybody performed such rituals in more recent times? Yes. I have had accounts from two yogins describing abbreviated variations of this ritual scenario performed within the last forty years. But, regardless of whether anyone actually still does this nowadays, what is important to recognise is that the major portion of this Tantric ritual takes place around the high ground of the mountain. That is, yogins use the immediate environs and central zone of the *maṇḍala* palace as it is represented in the mountain's landscape. They quite literally go high to get high! And according to the theoretical prescriptions of the mountain as *maṇḍala* that is exactly what they should do to achieve the results they aim for.

### *What's In A Name?*

In the present context the answer to this question is: Everything! Names are a form of representation. They are social documents. Names for particular landscapes, as we have already begun to see, are loaded with conceptions about the place and space they are applied to. An entire landscape can be literally 'condensed' into a place name. What about the name Tsa-ri? In closing this chapter I want to discuss the Tibetan etymologies for the name Tsa-ri that I have collected.<sup>39</sup> I do this here in order to make a social and historical, rather than philological point.

The name Tsa-ri has been applied to both the general geographical area of this study and to the major peak within this area (*tsa-ri'i rtse*), alias Dag-pa Shel-ri, for at least a thousand years. During that period the name has been spelt in various ways. The variants are quite closely related, and all still in use today.

i. Tsa-ri: In all my work on Tsa-ri I have, for reasons of style and ease of pronunciation by non-specialists, intentionally retained this spelling. This is, incidently, also the spelling found in the modern Tibetan lexicons. It is the simplest form of the name, reducible simply to *tsa*, the seventeenth consonant of the Tibetan alphabet, and *ri* meaning 'mountain'. But in pre-modern sources Tsa-ri serves as an abbreviated form of item iv. below.

ii. rTsa-ri/rTsā-ri: *rtsa* means 'vein', and translates the Sanskrit technical term *nāḍī* for the channels in the psychic body of the yogin, thus yielding '*Nāḍī* mountain'; *rtsa-ba* can mean 'root', 'foundation', 'primary' or 'origin', and in relation to it being a naturally arisen *maṇḍala* some Tibetans explain it as 'Foundation mountain'.

iii. Tswa-ri/rTswa-ri/Tsa-ri rTswa-gong: *rtswa* (*tswa*) means 'herb', yielding 'Herb mountain'. This etymology is explicitly given in Tibetan texts; often the related compound form, Tsa-ri

<sup>39</sup> I asked for etymologies from most of my informants as a matter of course, but see the early textual discussions in gNam-lcags rTsa-gsum Gling-pa (1986:293-4=7a-b); Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:5b).

rTswa-gong, is used in older texts, where *gong* means 'superior', yielding in full 'Superior Herb Tsa mountain', or 'Superior Herb Cari[tra]' (see below). In Tibetan sources *rtswa-gong*, and sometimes *rtswa-mchog* (also *rtsa-mchog*), are used to identify the Tantric alchemical herb *klu-bdud rdo-rje* for which the mountain is famous.

iv. Tsa-ri-tra (abbr.= Tsa-ri), Tsā-ri-tra (abbr.= Tsā-ri), Tsa-ri-ṭra: All are transliterations, and their abbreviated forms, of the Sanskrit proper name Cāriṭra. In the ancient geography of India the site of Cāriṭra was a southern port city on the Orissan (Uḍra) coast. In Indian Tantric literature and Tibetan commentaries it is variously identified as one of the twenty-four 'action' (*caryā/spyod-pa*) sites or the eight great Tantric cemeteries. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p.393 gives us *cāriṭa* ('set in motion'), and *cāriṭra* ('moving', 'proceeding', 'manner of acting', 'conduct') from the root *cāra* ('wandering about', 'proceeding', 'motion', 'going', etc.). The root *cāra* in various forms is translated by Tibetans as the verb *spyod-pa*, meaning 'to do', 'to act', and substantively 'action', 'activity', 'way of acting', 'conduct'. Some Tibetan etymologies relate this form to *spyod-pa la gshegs-pa*, the 'entering into the *caryā*' phase of *sampannakrama* Tantric practice, in order to denote the site as one for yogic activity, and legitimate its identity in the Tantric geographical scheme.

What does all this tell us? Every single variant of the name I know of is derived from the historical, representational and ritual concerns of Tibetan Tantra. My point is simple: Tsa-ri is, or perhaps was, a Tantric mountain, and not just in name only. Historically, it has been 'constructed' by Tantrists to serve the particular needs of their own social practice. The external landscape spaces they have defined as most highly ranked or ritually important have been marked off by both their practices and restrictions, such that their own inner spaces may be ritually utilised to maximum advantage. There are major social ramifications inherent in this. In the following chapters I will show how the earlier prescriptions and proscriptions of this élite of practitioners have set a pattern to which all other users and inhabitants of the mountain have had to adapt and conform. In chapter five I will begin doing this by describing and analyzing the three popular annual pilgrimage circuits of the mountain performed by lay people and non-Tantric clerical practitioners.



## Chapter Five

# High Up and Low Down Men's and Women's Short Pilgrimages Around Pure Crystal Mountain

[At Tsa-ri] paranormal powers are bestowed in various ways:  
Directly in person to those who are advanced and superior  
And as visions of bodies and images to those who are middling,  
And also as lakes, rock mountains and trees to those who are lowest.  
As the likes of this do not exist anywhere else,  
This is a magical place for sure!<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

As this verse suggests, there was something for everyone at Tsa-ri. An elite of Vajrayāna adepts converted the site for the practice of their esoteric style of ritual. But they, as Buddhists, also maintained a theory of the graded faculties and ritual status of personhood which took account of karmic condition, levels of mental and physical cultivation and of purity. Thus, they considered that every devout practitioner could benefit from visiting the mountain in their own way. Advanced Tantric meditators might have been able to totally identify with the reality of the mountain as *maṇḍala*, or at least 'enjoy' the vision of its *sambhoga-kāya* representations. But those 'ordinary' (*so-so'i-skye-bo*) and 'impure' (*ma-dag-'gro*) persons whose faculties and status were held to be 'lowest' (*mtha'-ma*) experienced the *nirmāṇa-kāya* aspect, or its manifest embodiment in the form of physical landscape features and substances, organic life-forms and climatic systems. Not only were such persons believed to have lower grades of perceptual appreciation and ritual status, they also had to use correspondingly lower zones of space on the mountain's slopes, as we shall see. 'Ordinary' persons all knew some details of the alternative realities of the place, of its various representations. So, prepared with their narrative maps they visited the site, constituting by far the largest proportion of practitioners in a ritual relationship with the mountain. It is the activities and experiences as pilgrims of these villagers and nomads, traders and criminals, nuns and monks, government officials, and so on, to which I shall now turn my attention.

Exactly what lay or non-Buddhist rituals were focused on the mountain before its conversion, we can only speculate. There is fragmentary evidence that autochthonous deities, such as the brTan-ma bcu-gnyis group of mountain goddesses, were worshipped there, but little else can be said on the subject. Even the extent and development of later Buddhist lay and non-Tantric clerical visits to the site is difficult to determine before about the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. During this century, up to 1959, the primary ritual activity of ordinary pilgrims was a circumambulation itinerary traversing the numerous radial ridges and valleys of the

<sup>1</sup> rGyal-dbang Kun-dga' dPal-'byor (1428-1476) quoted in Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:32b).

mountain. This was known locally as the *gzhung-skor* (also *bar-skor*) or 'middle circuit'. It also had two important variant itineraries, the *snga-skor* or 'advance circuit', and the *skye-dman gyi skor-ba* or 'women's circuit'. In this chapter I will briefly describe each of them in turn.<sup>2</sup>

All three circuits were lower in average altitude, further from the main summit and consequently longer than the peak circuit described in the previous chapter. However, although lower, these circuits were still very physically demanding. For instance, to perform the full middle circuit over the course of about a week one had to cross no less than seven steep mountain passes between 4500-5000m, make multiple ascents and descents of at least 1000m on consecutive days, in what were frequently miserable weather conditions, and all the while observe various codes of behaviour and ritual performances with an attitude of one-pointed devotion. Like all pilgrimages around the mountain, it was not an exercise to be entered into lightly! The basic middle circuit itinerary is now being performed again since the mountain was reopened in the 1980s.

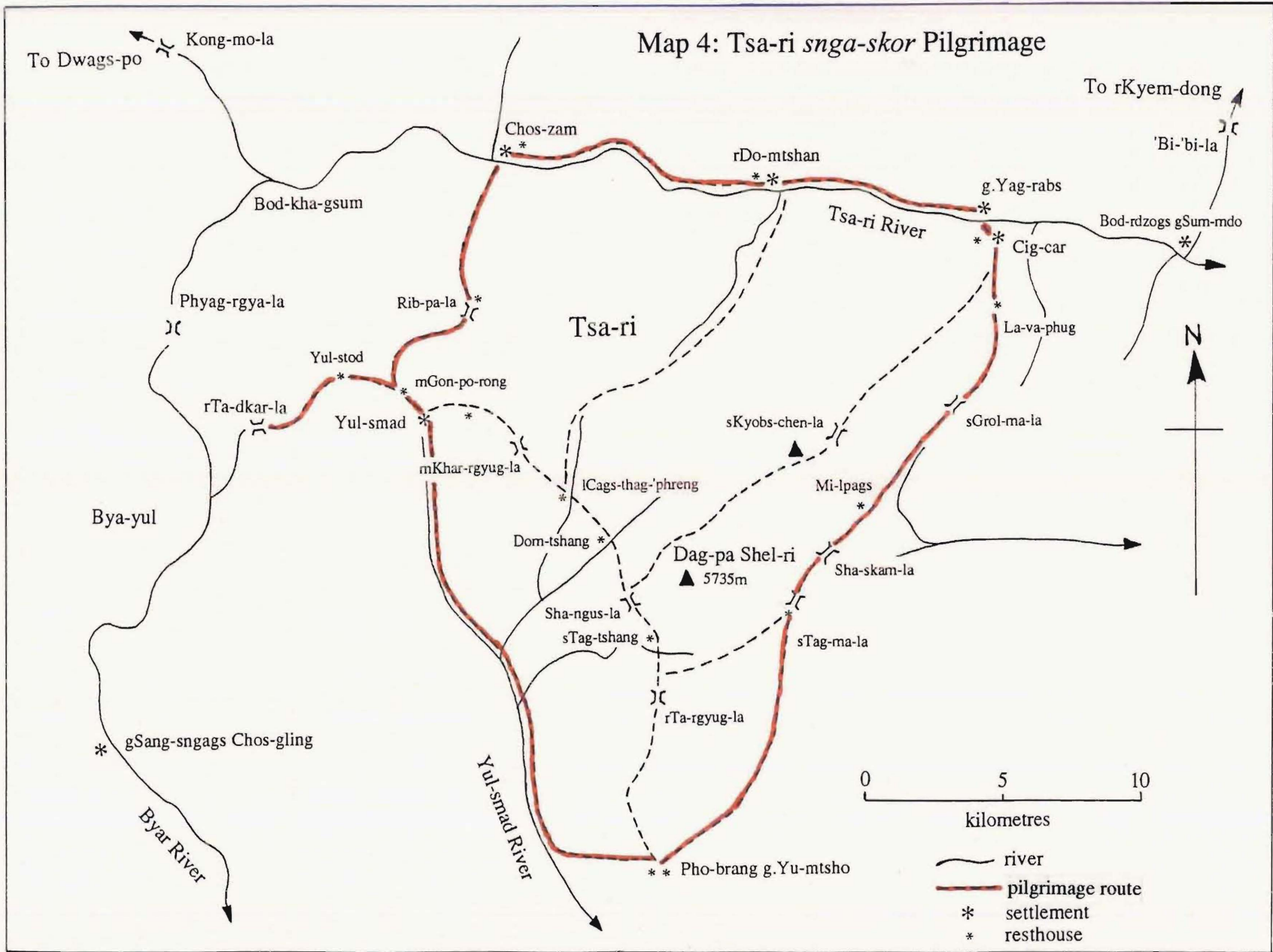
### *Pilgrimage of Snows*

The main middle circuit is an annual event which can be undertaken at any time throughout the Tibetan summer and fall. Prior to 1959, a special ritual 'opening' of this route on the upper mountain was performed as a single circumambulation by a procession of pilgrims. This opening route, known as the 'advance circuit' (*snga-skor*), followed the initial portions of the middle circuit, but then dropped to a lower altitude to complete it. This was done about the middle of the third Tibetan month (= approx. late April), when the entire mountain was still snowbound, and the majority of the circuit involved walking over ice and deep snow. The middle circuit route was serviced during the summer by a series of small and basic pilgrims' resthouses, locally known as *tshul-khang* (see chapter eight below). During the previous autumn, in preparation for the extreme cold of the advance circuit, the *tshul-pa* or resthouse-keepers laid large amounts of firewood in store before closing their huts up for the winter. This was vital for the pilgrims in the advance circuit procession, who needed it for cooking and keeping warm during their icy journey.

On the fifteenth day of the third month the initial rituals for mountain opening were conducted in Cig-car village. These consisted mainly of '*cham*' performed by ten lay people from Tsa-ri. These were danced in the evening around a large bonfire that had been lit at the festival ground. The dancers dressed in special costumes, with robes, tiara (*rigs-lnga*) and *damaru* drums, and were referred to as *dpa'-bo* and *dpa'-mo*. One of the main themes was a

<sup>2</sup> The *gzhung-skor* is the only one of the mountain's ritual itineraries which Westerners have performed, and for which we have non-Tibetan accounts. The Pandit explorer Kintup performed it in 1883-4, see Burrard (1915:335); the British agent Bailey in 1913 (1914:11-12,68-71; 205-11); and the British botanist Sherriff in 1936; see Fletcher (1975:109-12). They give us mainly geographical descriptions, with virtually no mention of the variant *snga-skor* or *skye-dman gyi skor-ba* routes.

Map 4: Tsa-ri *snga-skor* Pilgrimage



To Dwags-po  
Kong-mo-la

To rKyem-dong  
'Bi-'bi-la

Tsa-ri

Bya-yul

Dag-pa Shel-ri  
▲ 5735m

0 5 10  
kilometres

— river  
— pilgrimage route  
\* settlement  
\* resthouse





re-enactment of a story from the later 'opening of the door' to the area by the 'Brug-pa lama 'Gro-mgon bSod-nams rGyal-ntshan found in Padma dKar-po's narrative guide to the mountain. The performance specifically commemorated the life and liberation story (*rnam-thar*) of bSod-nams rGyal-ntshan's yak, which held some significance for the lay people of Tsa-ri, and was performed at other times of the year also.<sup>3</sup>

In the later 'opening drama' of the mountain, this yak was sent off by itself to lead the lama's pack-animals for several days on to Cig-car, while the lama himself followed another higher route there in the company of the local protector Cig-car dMar-po. The yak, whose name was 'Dren-g.yag ('Leading Yak') Nyi-ma Khyil-pa, crossed the Tsa-ri river to Cig-car at the site of the small bridge and winter settlement of g.Yag-rabs, 'Yak Ford', so named in remembrance of this event. 'Dren-g.yag Nyi-ma Khyil-ba lived for eleven more years at the great Tantric practice site of Cig-car, and attained enlightenment upon his death. The footprints of his miraculous pack-animal are to be found impressed in certain rocks around the area. This lay opening festival is dedicated in part to the worship of the main field-protector of the mountain, the *kṣetrapāla-dākinī* rDo-rje g.Yu-sgron-ma. This deity is significant because she is reckoned as being the resident autochthonous brTan-ma goddess before her 'conversion' by the Tantric yogins who opened the doors to the place. A similar but smaller set of ceremonies was also held at about this same time further down the Tsa-ri valley. They marked the annual opening of the pilgrimage to the lake of mTsho-dkar, an important related site to the east of Pure Crystal Mountain.

The following day the advance circuit procession was formed and got underway. Its leading members were two lamas who arrived from the 'Bri-gung-pa meditation centre at Yul-smad in the west of Tsa-ri. These ritual specialists used their magical powers to facilitate the clearing of a path through the often deep snow, and to avert avalanches which might sweep down on the pilgrims. The core of the procession was comprised of a party of Tsa-ri-bas who were experienced as porters and guides on the mountain. They were joined by hundreds of lay pilgrims,<sup>4</sup> mainly nomads and villagers, who came to Cig-car from surrounding districts such as Bya-yul, Dwags-po and rKyem-dong. No women took part in this procession. Only oral narrative maps (*gnas-bshad*) of the route exist (see map 4), for example:

There is a circumambulation called the rTsa-ri *snga-bskor* during the third Tibetan month. On the 15th day able-bodied men only are assembled in order at Cig-'char. After two ['Bri-gung-pa] lamas, the 'Snow-cutter' (*gangs-gshag*) and 'Snow-firmer' (*gangs-brtan*) arrived from Western rTsa-ri they chanted *mantra* aloud and led the way in front, and it was one day to go to La-va cave, then across the sGrol-ma pass and into Mi-lpags ravine. From there, on the following morning it

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> My informants report about seven hundred to a thousand pilgrims attending, and Bailey (1914:11) about two thousand.

was one day to go across the Sha-skarn pass, and then descend down through Byarns-pa ravine and dKar-thog plateau to the 'Od-'bar ravine and plateau. From there, they climbed up to mKha'-spyod, and having circumambulated Pho-brang g. Yu-mtsho they went down into the 'Dong-mo Chu-bslugs [which was a steep gorge or chute formed by running water]. Then in the morning they went up from Klo-'gag [a tribal 'toll station' for pilgrims] to Zhing-skyong gTor-ma, in the direction of Yul-smad. From there it was one day up to sDong-rag Gong-'og. After that they encountered the temple in Yul-smad and the mKha'-'gro 'Bum-bdal. Then those from Dwags-po, sKong-po and sKyem-pa crossed the Rib pass, and having gathered in Chos-zam those from Dwags-po returned [home] by crossing the Gor-mo pass. Then the sKyem-pas returned by crossing the Bim-bi pass. From Yul-smad, those people from Bya-yul, mNyal, and Byar went on through Yul-stod, and after crossing the Phag-sha pass they returned variously through dKyud-nang and gSang-bsngags Chos-gling. That is how the rTsa-ri *snga-b Skor* was performed.<sup>5</sup>

This particular route avoided many of the high altitude sections of the standard middle circuit because of the snows. It achieved this by dropping down into the valley of the Yul-smad river to the west of the mountain, the same valley up which the twelve-yearly 'ravine circuit' (*rong-skor*) procession came before it arrived at Yul-smad settlement (see the following chapter). Clerics who recall this advance circuit in the 1950s mention the *mantra*-chanting lamas and their magical powers as essential for clearing a safe path in the snow. However, it is revealing to hear the same event described by one of the *tshul-pa*, the local people who attended the procession:

The lamas know it (= My God)! We had to dig out the snow. The lamas know it! There were two men who were the snow diggers [in front]. The lamas know it! There were two ['Bri-gung-pa] lamas. They used to tell us, "Each of you dig, each of you dig!" The lamas had with them young men who cut through the snow. There were about twenty men like that. Although they were told, "Cut through the snow" they couldn't cut through it very well. Those young men had to break through the snow [crust] bit by bit.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that the lamas chanted more than just magical formulae on the advance circuit! In addition to the snows, there were other obstacles to deal with. As the route dropped down from Pho-brang g. Yu-mtsho into the lower valley of the Yul-smad river, it crossed a piece of territory which the Klo-pa, the Arunachal tribal people living to the south of the mountain (see the following chapter), considered their land. At a point on the route, a place the Tibetans called Klo-'gag or 'Klo-pa Obstruction', the path was blocked by a wooden barrier. Here the tribal people waited and only let pilgrims pass through one by one upon payment of a small toll or passage-fee. The amount was not fixed, and payment could be offered in coin or parched barley flour (*tsam-pa*), or any other bits and pieces the pilgrims happened to be carrying. These particular tribesmen came from the nearby borderland area of Klung to the

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup> rTsa-ri Tshul-pa bKra-shis-lags (1987:15).

west in lower Bya-yul, right where the Subansiri river cut through the main Himalaya from Tibet into India. The Tibetans accordingly referred to them as Klung-du Klo-pa, and at least in the middle part of this century these peoples had reasonable relations with their Tibetan neighbours, unlike many of the other adjacent tribal groups. Because of this, any 'local' pilgrims, that is from gSang-sngags Chos-gling, from Eastern and Western Tsa-ri or from Klo Mi-Khyim-bdun village to the south of Cig-car, were exempted the toll.

When the procession was completed, and the pilgrims had left the area, the mountain remained closed until the summer season. Usually towards the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth Tibetan month (= approx. June), when most of the snows had melted, the *tshul-pa* went up and opened their resthouses once again. From then on pilgrims could perform the middle circuit.

### *The Popular Middle Circuit*

The *gzhung-skor* or middle circuit around Pure Crystal Mountain was the most popular annual ritual at Tsa-ri. From the beginning of the summer, up until the pilgrimage route was officially closed again about the middle of the eighth Tibetan month (= approx. October), there was a constant flow of pilgrims performing this circuit. They came from all over Tibet and from Bhutan, Ladakh and areas of Northern Nepal. They were people from all walks of life and ranks of society. But despite this great social diversity they all shared some things in common. In terms of the Tibetan Buddhist theories of personhood on which they drew to define and represent themselves, they all had degrees of pollution (*sgrib*) and gross and subtle moral and cognitive defilements (*sdig-sgrib*) obscuring their being in some way. They also all understood that Pure Crystal Mountain as a natural shrine or Buddha-field could be used as a zone of purification if approached in the correct manner. Its reputation as a place with the power to wipe away the 'shadows' which clouded body and soul was well known in Tibet. This type of pilgrim describes their ideal ritual relationship with the mountain as being a rich regime of 'contacts' utilizing body, speech and mind, directed by the goal of physical and karmic purification, and performed with an attitude of faith and devotion. I will describe how this ideal was acted out at the site and illustrate a few general social outcomes of the process as it occurred at Tsa-ri in the 1950s.

#### i. Entering the Sphere of the Mountain *Maṅḍala*

All pilgrims begin the middle circuit upon entering the valley of the Tsa-ri river, east of the mountain (see map 5). They descend from the various high passes that connect Tsa-ri with adjacent districts to the west, north and east. No matter which of these high passes they cross, as most return home by way of the same route after their circuit they in effect close a ritual circle around the mountain. For nearly everyone this entails passing through the places

of Bod-kha-gsum and Chos-zam to the north in the first stages of the journey. This re-enacts the initial entry during the opening of the place by the yogin heroes, such as gTsang-pa rGya-ras. The local landscape features there, and the shrine at Chos-zam village contain relics and reminders of such events, which pilgrims may gain empowerment from by seeing and touching with their bodies. At many stages throughout the journey the narrative maps of the route signify the local terrain with references to these past dramas. Continuing down the valley through the site of rDo-mtshan, which we have already discussed, they arrived right at the foot of the mountain in Cig-car.

Many pilgrims made various renunciations and vows as they entered the course of the Tsa-ri valley and Cig-car, for they had now come within the sphere of the great natural *maṇḍala* or shrine which appeared in the form of the mountain. Men and women abstained from sexual relations, some gave up drinking alcohol and tea, and if they carried weapons, such as firearms or swords, they left off using them in any way until they were clear of the mountain once again. Some silently or audibly recited *mantra* for the duration of their circuit, often having vowed to perform a certain number while in the vicinity of the mountain. Pilgrims had to recite, and commit to memory, a standard and well-known prayer to the mountain before proceeding onto its upper slopes:

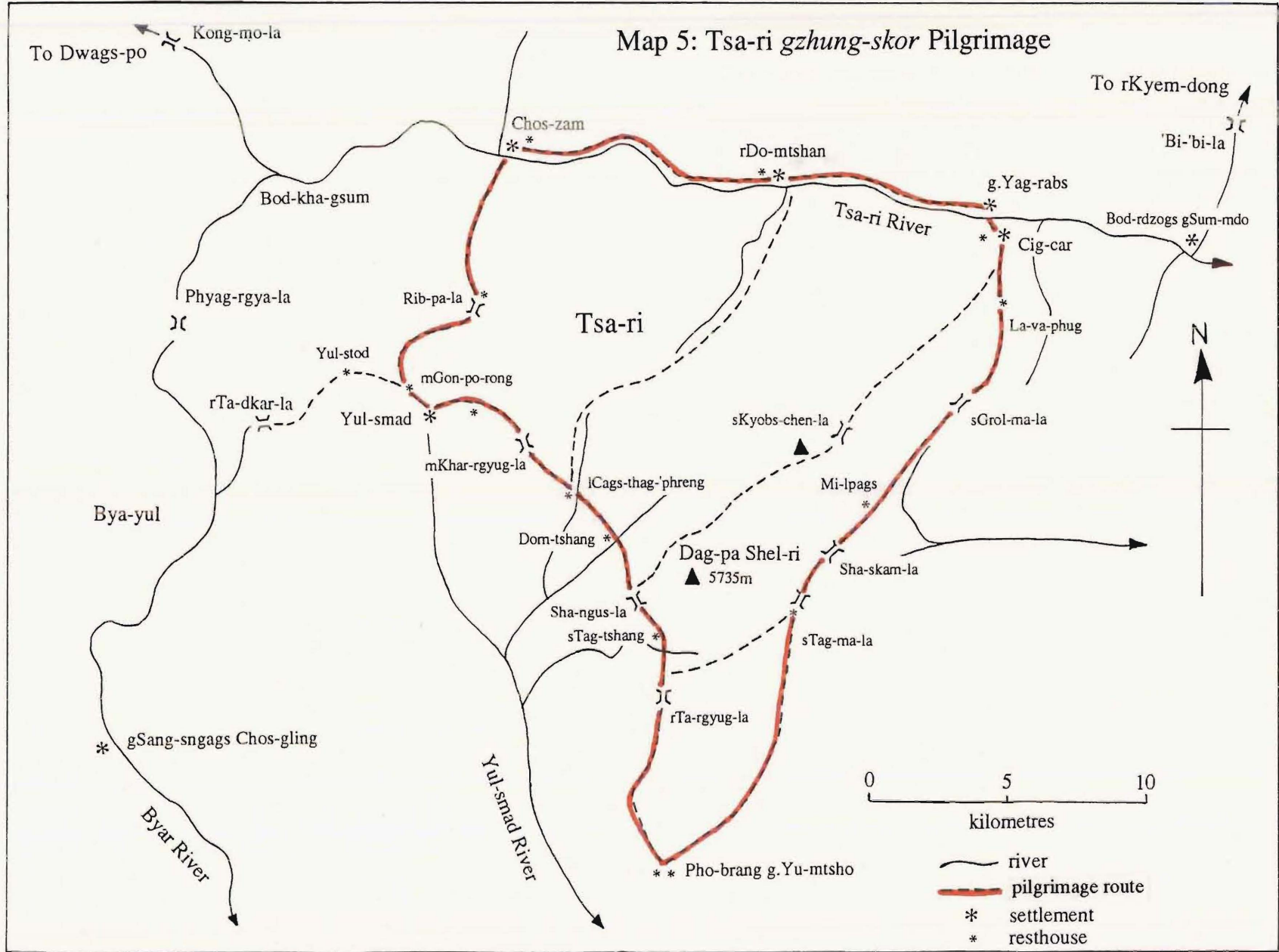
*Gurus* of the bKa'-brgyud [lineage], and *yi-dam*, gods,  
*Dākinī*, *dharmapāla* [at] glorious Cāritra,  
 Khecara Pure Abode, I entreat you!  
 Grant the empowerment to purify bad deeds and obscurations,  
 To dispel adversities and dangers, [and]  
 Bestow both the supreme and mundane paranormal powers.<sup>7</sup>

Its purpose was to generate faith in the mountain based on a correct knowledge of what or 'who' was there, and what exactly it was that the performance of ritual motivated by faith might gain for one. Thus, one addressed the three types of powers that prevailed at the site, beings that liberate, beings that protect and a place (*gnas*) that purifies, and requested the three possible results of ritual: purification, protection and enlightenment. Through committing this prayer to memory, right from the outset pilgrims were aware of the great powers of the mountain and the purpose they themselves were there for.

There was no mistaking that this mountain was a 'serious' place, and one had to act in accordance with that. The place is often described as being 'fierce' (*gnyan-pa*) and 'dangerous' (*drag-can*), even for those who are spiritually refined. Visitors were reminded of this from the very context which produced their entrance prayer. It was sung by one of Tibet's greatest practitioners, Tsong-kha-pa himself, after he got a crippling pain like bamboo splinters in his feet as punishment for his doubt and subsequent ritual breach when on pilgrimage there.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 4.1.

Map 5: Tsa-ri gzhung-skor Pilgrimage





A simple song, sung by pilgrims and local people, makes this point eloquently in the form of a pun on Tsong-kha-pa's misfortune:

One ought not to say "Don't go,  
To the place of fierce Tsa-ri!"  
By all means go, but make sure,  
That you don't get bamboo splinters in your foot.<sup>8</sup>

The whole attitude that the mountain, and by extension its resident deities, are fierce and dangerous is similar to widespread Tibetan representations of the potentially martial or violent character of the indigenous mountain gods, and the consequent need to treat them and their abodes with great respect.

Horses and yak could be ridden down the broad and open valley to Cig-car, although many walked as this was more meritorious, and the animals were used for baggage by those who travelled heavily laden. Coming close to Cig-car, an area credited with special properties that promote the acquisition of Tantric powers, pilgrims had to pass by a small mound with a peculiar shape which was planted with numerous prayer flags. This marked the abode of Cig-car dMar-po, the powerful field-protector of Cig-car valley. He is a manifestation of none other than the 'Lord of Death' himself, Yama or gShin-rje Chos-rgyal, who, as directional guardian (*dikpāla*) stationed at the south of the cosmic Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala*, has his divine palace as a subterranean 'construction' here. There are various local ritual observations in view of his presence. This site marks a boundary point where one must pay respects to the deity before entering his territory. Before 1959 any pilgrim mounted on an animal, even Dalai Lama or 'Brug-chen incarnations, had to dismount here and from then on only lead their animals in the area, or the auspices for a visit to the mountain would not be good.<sup>9</sup> If one failed to do this, the offering of one hundred butter lamps in the nearby Vajravārāhī temple was a standard way to rectify the ritual error.

## ii. The Upper Mountain

Climbing the mountain from Cig-car, the pilgrims could spend from four to eight days to complete the high sections of the middle circuit. Here is an example of a brief Tibetan oral map of the route:

After about the 4th Tibetan month, the route of the rTsa-ri *bar-bskor* or *gzhung-bskor* ('middle circuit') is opened. Firstly, from Cig-'char men and women are permitted to go together as far as the summit of the sGrol-ma pass, and from there the women go back down to Cig-'char. Then if [the women] go to mTsho-dkar they have to pass through Glo-bo Mi-[khyim]-bdun. If they don't want to go

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 3.5.

<sup>9</sup> C.f. Bailey (1957:200).

there, they pass through to rDo-mtshan from Cig-car, and those who go on from rDo-rje-brag as far as lCags-thag Phrang-sgo get there by evening. After the sGrol-ma pass, [the men] take a midday meal break in the Mi-lpags ravine, and then cross over the Sha-skam pass. Up from Byams-pa ravine and dKar-thog plateau they go on and spend the night at sTag-ma La-sgo. They travel successively across the dPa'-bo, dPa'-mo and other passes, and then encounter 'Od-'bar Bla-mtsho. Whichever of the three routes to Pho-brang g.Yu-mtsho one takes, the sGo-la [pass route], the rGyab-bskor [around the side] or the mKha'-'gro gSang-lam [straight up], you arrive at Pho-brang g.Yu-mtsho. After having a midday meal break there, they encounter Pho-brang sKyog-mo. Descending from the rTa-rgyug plateau they arrive at mKha'-'gro Tshogs-gzhong, after which they make a *tshogs* offering there. Down from there they spend the night in the sTag-tshang ravine. Then they depart in the morning and arrive at lCags-thag Phrang-sgo for the midday meal break. From there, having crossed over the Khar-rgyug pass they arrive in Srin-mo Ne'u-ring. Then they pass through rTa-mgrin ravine and reach Yul-smad. They go off to their various lands like they do at the time of *snga-bskor*.<sup>10</sup>

It is immediately clear from this that women and men undertake almost completely different pilgrimages on the mountain. I will discuss the alternative women's itinerary at length in the following section. Whether we choose the itineraries for women or men, a great deal of ritual variety is possible along their fixed routes. Just what any pilgrim might do at the numerous sites of significance, such as caves, rock formations, springs, lakes and small shrines along the way, was dependent to a large extent on what detailed knowledge of the site they were prepared with beforehand. One important aspect of this preparation for ordinary pilgrims was contact with the keepers of the pilgrims' resthouses, which were stationed on both women's and men's circuits. These people, the *tshul-pa*, had much knowledge about the mountain, and could transmit detailed oral narrative guides to pilgrims about what they might encounter (*mjal*) in the immediate area.

While the basic ritual was circumambulation, on the upper mountain circuit men engaged in other rituals which one might find performed on any circumambulation or pilgrimage itinerary in Tibet. At points where they enjoyed clear views of Pure Crystal Mountain's peak they said prayers for protection, long-life, or purification of defilements, confessed their moral transgressions, and so on, and made small offerings of butter and barley flour, or planted prayer flags on the mountain passes. Because of the steepness and ruggedness of the alpine terrain they did not perform full-length body prostrations around the circuit, as was done at other sites. At many points along the route, but particularly at spots very close to the main summit, pilgrims set up small stone cairns or altars in very large numbers. This is a very common Tibetan practice in relation to the worship of local deities, and I have seen it done with frequency on mountain passes and close to the *gnas* of *yul-lha* and *zhing-skyong* throughout Central and Western Tibet. Rather than repeat here what is already familiar from other ethnographies of Tibetan ritual behaviour I will give examples of several practices that

<sup>10</sup> See appendix 1.



are more specific to the site of Tsa-ri itself, and which express a certain belief about the place and the relationship with it that lay and non-Tantric clerical pilgrims maintained.

Most ordinary pilgrims did have a level of 'mental' relationship with the mountain through prayer, the chanting of certain *mantra*, and having a constant awareness of their actions in relation to ritual protocols. But it was nothing like the meditative identifications, visionary experiences, and collapsing together of inner and outer spaces that the serious yogin cultivated. Ordinary pilgrims brought themselves and the mountain together in other ways, by cultivating a direct physical relationship with it. This involved various forms of consumption of substances, contacts by touch, collections of material, offerings made in exchange, and so on. The sheer physicality of these dimensions of ritual are very important to ordinary Tibetans as pilgrims and, as we have seen, can be to yogins as well. Such physical acts of contact are also found at other important places which Tibetans visit as pilgrims, so I will single out a few examples which are specific to beliefs about Pure Crystal Mountain.

### iii. The Cult of Bamboo

My first example is not limited to the activities of male pilgrims on the upper mountain, but covers all pilgrims on the middle circuit and its variations. It concerns the ritual collection and usage of bamboo canes growing on the mountain's slopes. At least in more recent times the bamboo from Tsa-ri has become a sort of identity-marker for the place in Tibetan cultural discourse. This might be explained due to the relative exoticism of a very useful subtropical material up on the cool and arid high-altitude Tibetan plateau. It is a rare material associated with the warm, damp *rong* or ravine country to the south. But even in Bhutan, a Tibetan Buddhist country whose ravines abound in bamboo, Tsa-ri bamboo has a particular value.<sup>11</sup> There is far more to this bamboo than meets the eye.

Pilgrims used bamboo in various ways at Tsa-ri. The plant grew only on the lower slopes of the mountain, where either pilgrims collected it themselves or local people collected it and sold it to pilgrims at places like Cig-car. Most commonly, bamboo lengths were fashioned into pilgrim's walking-sticks. These were an essential pilgrimage accessory on the mountain, as they were constantly put to use crossing the rough and often steep alpine landscape, or the many small streams throughout the area. Some say the tradition of using such walking-sticks here goes back to the opening drama, when the local *dākinī* instructed the yogin sKye-bo Ye-shes rDo-rje to bring one for his first visit to the site. But here again, as in the case of exoticism, one cannot reduce the importance of bamboo at Tsa-ri to functional necessities, such as walking-sticks. Many local people and pilgrims also cut out the nodes from the canes

<sup>11</sup> There is a cult of Tsa-ri bamboo in Bhutan, on which see my notes to the following chapter. My informants Mynak Tulku and Kunzang Tengyal state that the site of Chu-mo-phug ('Chumphu') near Paro is recognised by Bhutanese as the 'second Tsa-ri' (*Tsa-ri gnyis-pa*), and that pilgrims also collect the bamboo there and regard it in the same manner as the Tibetan traditions about bamboo at Tsa-ri I am detailing here.

and strung these small sections around their necks on strings, a practice not unlike the common Tibetan one of wearing *srung-mdud* or 'protective knot' strings.<sup>12</sup> Large bundles of canes of various sizes were often harvested by pilgrims and carried away after their middle circuits were completed.<sup>13</sup> These were distributed to friends and relatives back home. As well as other materials, monks collected bamboo from the site and used it to empower *stūpa* and images by inserting it inside during the special consecration ceremony (*gzungs-'bul-gyi cho-ga*) which brought such objects and constructions 'to life'.<sup>14</sup>

Tsa-ri bamboo was so popular with ordinary pilgrims because it was believed to physically contain the empowerment (*byin-brlabs*) of the Tsa-ri *dākinī*.<sup>15</sup> The nodes of the cane in particular were believed to have empowerment concentrated within them. Thus, bamboo was a portable source of the mountain's great powers, which pilgrims could keep close to their bodies as walking sticks, necklaces, or even as simple accessories like cane bracelets. This belief in the power of bamboo is expressed in a common song:

There is a pilgrimage around the peak of Tsa-ri.  
There is bamboo on the rocks through the ravines.  
The empowerment of the *mātrkā* and *dākinī*,  
Is infused into the nodes of the bamboo.<sup>16</sup>

But pilgrims did not simply come and take bamboo from Tsa-ri. I have called it a 'ritual collection' precisely because it is closely related to the performance of pilgrimage there, and a particular relationship with the mountain itself. Bamboo was collected *on condition* of pilgrimage there. One had to make a middle circuit and so honour the *dākinī* whose 'substance', in part, one was removing from the site. Failure to operate such an exchange was a breach of ritual protocol. It is not unlike the cautions that had to be observed when Tantra practitioners collected empowered substances, such as *sindūra*, that they prized on the mountain. As pilgrims would sing, the *dākinī* to be most respected was of course the 'Chieftainess of Khecara', Vajravārāhī herself:

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<sup>12</sup> Ngawang Dargyey told me that in Khams strings of Tsa-ri bamboo nodes were worn as general protective charms.

<sup>13</sup> The *thang-kha* (see plate 3) showing pilgrimage around Tsa-ri depicts pilgrims either side of the summit departing from the completed circuit with bundles of bamboo canes upon their shoulders.

<sup>14</sup> Olschak (1987:8) gives a contents analysis of a bronze image of Padmasambhava, containing "...small bags filled with...earth from the holy mountain Tsa-ri...Between the bags were bamboo ear-rings from Tsa-ri". SG, interview, states that when large monasteries in Tibet planned to construct major *stūpa* or images, they would send to Tsa-ri for bamboo, soil and water for use in their fabrication and empowerment.

<sup>15</sup> In a Tibetan guide to the mountain Kha-ba dKar-po, located in the south-eastern Salween-Mekong gorges region, and also represented as a Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala*, it states: "Il y a les arbres essences de vie des Dākinī: ce sont tous les bambous qui poussent là." see Blondeau (1960:237).

<sup>16</sup> See appendix 3.1.

I made a pilgrimage on the peak of Tsa-ri.  
 I cut bamboo from the ravines.  
 There is no reason for Vajravārāhī  
 To impose a punishment on me.<sup>17</sup>

We can see that the ritual collection and later distribution of bamboo from Tsa-ri by lay people was one of the many processes by which the mountain's fame and identity spread in Tibetan popular culture. One finds references to Tsa-ri and its bamboo in a wide variety of songs which were sung in places far from the mountain itself. For example, a verse from a western nomad's marriage song compares the female partner's body to the bamboo:

Her figure doesn't resemble the bamboo of rTsa-ri,  
 Her physique is like a lama's small box.  
 Its exterior appearance is nothing special,  
 Inside there are plenty of desirable things.<sup>18</sup>

In another northern plateau nomad's song (*'brog-glu*), classified as a 'dancing song', we find:

Having erected bamboo from Tsa-ri,  
 Take hold of the middle of the bamboo cane.  
 Having taken hold of the middle of the bamboo cane,  
 Twist the bamboo leaves down to the ground.  
 Having twisted the bamboo leaves down to the ground,  
 You will spread the Doctrine in Tsa-ri.<sup>19</sup>

A third example is an interesting Tibetan or Bhutanese song whose subject, according to its recorder Chandra Das, is a slender bamboo cane, about one foot long, which is used as a straw to drink home-made millet beer in Bhutan and Sikkim. His explanatory notes appear to suggest it is a type of 'drinking song':

Explaining the cane of bamboo.  
 Best is the bamboo of middle rTsa-ri:

Its base has the suppleness of  
 The mother beer-serving maid's tavern jewelry. But,  
 If you say her tavern jewelry isn't supple,  
 Then go back to middle rTsa-ri.

Its centre has the suppleness of  
 The lord patron's arrow. But,  
If you say his arrow isn't supple,

<sup>17</sup> *Bod kyi dga' gzhaz*, vol.1, p.99, no.5, Tibetan text quoted in Sørensen (1990:137).

<sup>18</sup> Tibetan text given in Tucci (1966:33).

<sup>19</sup> See *Bod kyi dmangs gzhaz*, vol.2 (1990:72). This whole song could be interpreted as dance instructions. The other verses are identical in form, but have a 'Chinese fruit-tree' and a 'willow in Lhasa' as their subjects.

Then go back to middle rTsa-ri.

Its top has the suppleness of  
The superior lama's staff. But,  
If you say his staff isn't supple,  
Then go back to middle rTsa-ri.<sup>20</sup>

This may well be a drinking song in some contexts, but we also have here various allusions to more esoteric activities. My yogin informant SG suggests that the 'middle rTsa-ri', written *rtsa-ri gzhung* here, can refer to a pilgrim performing the Tsa-ri *gzhung-skor*, but that a Tantra practitioner familiar with Tsa-ri might read this song differently. The expression *rtsa-ri gzhung* could also refer to the middle and main 'vein' (*nāḍī/rtsa*) of the psychic body of the meditator at rTsa-ri, or *Nāḍī* Mountain.

Stein, who has already alluded to this connection in another context, tells us that the central (*dbu-ma*) vein in the meditational body, called *avadhūti*, is represented by Tibetans as a thin, hollow bamboo reed with three nodes.<sup>21</sup> This provides an alternative to the lay person's beer rising up the three levels of the bamboo reed. Stein has also noted that, "...*bodhicitta* is made to rise through the central artery, starting from the sexual organ and ending at the crown of the head, by way of the three 'bamboo joints' of the psychic centres."<sup>22</sup> He has further attempted to show that the yogin's psychic transit up the central 'bamboo cane/vein' can be symbolised by a journey up the centre of the hypostatic body of the *yi-dam* Vajravārāhī in the mountain of Tsa-ri.

The 'mother beer-serving maid' (*a-ma chang-ma*) of our song can refer to the chief female *yi-dam* of Tsa-ri, Vajravārāhī, 'mother' of all the *dākinī* at the place, who is referred to as *chang-ma ye-shes mkha'-'gro* in another song about the mountain with strong Tantric connotations, that of the Sixth Dalai Lama discussed in the previous chapter. She is also the 'owner' of the 'external' bamboo which pilgrims collect for their walking-sticks and beer-drinking straws. The three personal subjects of the song are the three that are most important to the Tantric yogin: his *yi-dam* as symbolic female consort, his *guru* and his worldly patron. To return to pilgrimage briefly, a stick with three 'nodes' is listed as standard pilgrim's equipment in a Tibetan song recorded by Tucci,<sup>23</sup> who comments that the pilgrim stick with three knots

<sup>20</sup> Tibetan text in Das (1972: appendix X), see here his comments on the subject of the song, and also on p.50.

<sup>21</sup> Stein (1988:42).

<sup>22</sup> Stein (1972:225).

<sup>23</sup> Tucci (1966:50):

By the parents who have been so gracious (with me)  
I have been sent to visit the holy places;  
on the head I wear the hat with visor called skal-bzang,  
and in the hands I have the cane-stick with three knots.

alludes to the three means of liberation (*vimokṣamukha*).

Besides what they show us about the way *Tsa-ri* and its bamboo are understood by Tibetans, I have elaborated these details here for several other reasons. This is a good example of how a song circulated in a popular lay context can also be redolent with Tantric references. I suggest the song may be meaningful to beer drinkers, pilgrims and Tantric meditators alike. Although I am not in a position to answer such a question, it would be very interesting to find out just how much of what the yogin reads in the song is also seen by lay persons, especially those who sing it while sucking on their beer-straws. It is also a good example of how seemingly straightforward material can be potentially difficult to interpret and classify for non-Tibetans. It adds further weight to the point made so eloquently by Dan Martin in relation to another song about *Tsa-ri*: Philologists trained in the Indological or Buddhological context who work with Tibetan textual sources may 'get the translation right', but they can often fail to recognise the universe of Tibetan cultural meanings associated with certain combinations of apparently mundane references.<sup>24</sup>

#### iv. A Note on Jewelry and Excrement

While performing the upper circuits pilgrims, as we have seen, had to pay close attention to the ritual collection or removal of the mountain's valued materials and substances. There are two ways the need for caution and ritual propriety can be understood: because the mountain is an abode (*gnas*), and one has to deal correctly with its powerful inhabitants when taking their property; and because the mountain and everything on it are ontologically continuous with these divine inhabitants by way of embodiment (*kāya*). These two Tibetan explanations are entirely compatible. We also know that all persons had a general ritual ranking in relation to the mountain: Tantric practitioners were higher than ordinary lay persons, those who had circumambulated it were higher than those who had not (the number of circuits performed was significant),<sup>25</sup> and, as we shall see shortly, men were higher than women.

But pilgrims of various ranking did not just take materials and substances from the upper mountain, they also left them behind. They were involved in certain physical exchanges with the mountain, in some instances involuntary and in others highly intentional. Because of the above attitudes about the mountain anything exchanged with it or left behind there was also subject to particular attention. There was what Marriot and Inden would call a certain

<sup>24</sup> Martin (1988).

<sup>25</sup> The ranking gained from the number of circuits performed was not arbitrary, and various catalogues or enumerations are found in the guide-books. See for example gNam-lcags rTsa-gsum Gling-pa (1986:302-3=11b-12a); Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.4:32a-b); Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:28b-29b). Similar systems are said to apply at sites such as Mount Kailash, for example see Johnson & Moran (1989:121) and Kawaguchi (1909:167-8).

'transactional logic' involved.<sup>26</sup>

The 'Turquoise Lake Palace' (Pho-brang g.Yu-mtsho) ranked along with Cig-car and Pure Crystal Mountain's summit area as one of the most potent locations on the mountain. This alpine lake lay at the southernmost point on the middle circuit, and was thus accessible to all rankings of male pilgrims. It was the site of an aquatic *maṇḍala* palace of the archetype deities, and could also be thought of as a kind of portal into the heart of the great mountain *maṇḍala* itself. It was well used as a meditation site by Tantric practitioners, who 'entered' it in a visionary manner, and for laymen it was an important place to make offerings and prayers to the mountain's chief deities and to drink of its waters. In this sense it was an exchange point between man and mountain. Like every major ritual on the mountain there were alternative levels of approach. For instance, for yogins and monks the different offerings, classed as *cho-ga* or rituals of the initiated, that they could make at Turquoise Lake Palace were the three grades of *maṇḍala* offering, outer (*phyi*), inner (*nang*) and esoteric (*gsang*), using various types of symbolically designated substances (*mchod-rdzas*). But here I will limit my brief discussion to the gross material offerings made there by lay pilgrims.

SEE ERRATA

In recognition of the intensely powerful divine inhabitants that they were confronting here through the surface of the lake's waters, lay pilgrims made proportionally intensive material offerings to them. This consisted of throwing items of great value, such as jewelry, gold and silver, coins, and ritual objects made of metal, into the lake, with an accompanying prayer. The practice is not a recent one, and existed long before the 1950s. An aristocratic pilgrim's account from the late eighteenth century notes that the party threw in as offering items including a set of metal ritual implements, *rdo-rje* and *dril-bu*, ten *dngul-srang* (approx. 370gm.) of Chinese silver and three *zho* (approx. 37gm.) of gold.<sup>27</sup> In the late 1950s my informant Sarnten, a herder from sDe-dge region, visited the lake and threw in his sister's turquoise and silver earrings, a gold ring and a handful of small-denomination silver and copper coins as offerings.

The offering of jewelry, and especially turquoises, in this manner seems to have been quite common. Sometimes valuable objects would be seen on the shore or at the outlet, but pilgrims did not dare to steal them, and threw them back into deep water for fear of provoking the deities. There were two pilgrim's resthouses at the site, and it is said that sometimes the *tshul-pa* who lived there in the summer used to take a few valuable items with them at the finish of the pilgrimage season.<sup>28</sup> Although the offerings were ostensibly being made by pilgrims to supreme Tantric archetype deities and their retinues, the ritual was not unlike

<sup>26</sup> Marriot & Inden (1977), Marriot (1976).

<sup>27</sup> bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1043).

<sup>28</sup> SG, interview.

other lay offerings to the various classes of autochthonous protective deities or mountain gods that inhabited the natural and domestic environments. The *brngan-mchod* or 'reward-offerings', for example, require the offering of expensive material goods and wealth, but reproductions are usually substituted for the real thing.<sup>29</sup> At Tsa-ri the real thing was used, and it had to be used to give the appropriate exchange value in terms of the way Tibetans considered the mountain and what they might be, or were getting back from it.

These offerings were an intentional form of human exchange with the mountain. The need to defecate, urinate and expectorate while on the middle circuit were involuntary forms of personal substance-exchange with the mountain. The excretion of body waste of any form was considered extremely polluting on the upper mountain. Spitting was not allowed after the sGrol-ma pass summit. From there on also through to the Dom-tshang pilgrim's resthouse defecating and urinating, which took place of necessity, were restricted to special sites along the route. These were ritually designated and marked by the *mantra Om Ah Hūm* written on the rocks, and pollution could be minimized by stopping at such spots. The restrictions on excreting bodily substances applied to all the high-altitude areas of the mountain, those closest to the main summit. In fact all human domestic operations on the high zone of the middle circuit were managed in order to avoid pollution.<sup>30</sup> At other landscapes bodily discharges would not be an issue for concern, but here the pilgrim was walking within proximity of the Khecara Pure Abode around the upper mountain, and on a *maṇḍala* palace itself there was every cause for concern about ritual observances which avoided pollution.

While male pilgrims were being careful to answer the call of nature correctly on their clockwise circumambulation of the high slopes of Pure Crystal Mountain, elsewhere in the area their female counterparts were walking off in the opposite direction.

### *Born Low, Stay Low: The Women's Circuit*

It is already obvious that a person's ritual rank or status correlated with the definition and use of the space around the mountain. But this was not based purely on what type or level of practitioner a person might be, it also related to Tibetan notions of gender differences and the body. Just by being born in a female body all women ranked lower than all men in relation to the mountain. Thus all of them, whether laywomen, nuns or yoginīs, local residents or pilgrims, were completely banned from performing the peak circuit and much of the middle circuit, excluding them from a large area of the mountain coinciding with its main power

<sup>29</sup> C.f. Tucci (1980:200).

<sup>30</sup> SG, interview. Compare the concern for excrement here with the beliefs and practices relating to the Dalai Lama's bodily excretions in Sherring (1974:251). Over one hundred years ago Kinthup (Burrard 1915:335) already reported: "On the journey to Tsāri by this [middle circuit] route, no one is allowed to spit even, and the halting places are kept exceedingly clean."

places.

Although there exists an extensive body of Tibetan writings about Tsa-ri, apart from an oblique reference the Tibetan writings I have reviewed to date are completely silent on the long-standing fact of women's exclusion around the mountain. I think it is significant that the various formal references we have to the ranking of persons and their relationship to the site do not mention gender as a factor, yet it is implicit. It is a commonplace of Tibetan Buddhist definitions of personhood that women are generally at the lowest ritual rank. In contrast to their invisibility in (male-generated) writings the traditions about women and their exclusion from Tsa-ri are available in multiple oral texts. Fortunately, a few earlier foreign travellers in the region found the subject of sufficient interest to record what Tibetans told them. I now add to these records further oral texts to begin building up a picture of how women used, or rather were permitted to use, the mountain's landscape.

### I. Historical Records

The historical origins of women's exclusion are unclear, but Tibetans think they may go back a long way. In early times the mountain was considered the abode of an important pre-Buddhist brTan-ma goddess called 'Vajra Turquoise Lamp' (rDo-rje g.Yu-sgron-ma). Buddhist oral sources place the exclusion tradition after the goddess's subjugation and conversion by a Buddhist yogin, gTsang-pa rGya-ras, in the late twelfth century. It is interesting to note that the written narrative of this incident (see chapter three) shows how feminine manifestations of autochthonic powers at the site are expelled or rejected by Buddhist male power: first a series of vaginas appears and is banished through sexual penetration; then the goddess is rejected by the yogin precisely because she is female, and when he does finally accept her as his yogic partner (another kind of conquest through penetration?) it is only after she has been disempowered by having to demote herself to a low social ranking, as yak-herder. One report states that exclusion may have started sometime before the last phase of the 'opening of the door to the place' (*gnas-sgo phye-ba*) by the fourteenth century 'Brug-pa lama 'Gro-mgon bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan.<sup>31</sup>

Our earliest record of exclusion dates from about 1720 when the Jesuit traveller Desideri recorded the following while visiting the nearby Dwags-po region:

The other place the Thibettans venerate exceedingly is called ce-ri (Tseri or Tsari)...Troops of pilgrims, men and women, go thither to walk in procession round the foot of the mountain...It is considered a sacrilege for any woman, even for nuns, to go to the upper mountains; and there is a point beyond which they

<sup>31</sup> SG, interview.



are forbidden to pass.<sup>32</sup>

In 1913 Bailey made various observations :

Women were unable to perform the Small Pilgrimage [i.e. *rtse-skor*] as the route crossed the Drölma Pass, which was tabu for women. Some of them however would go as far as the pass and then return, acquiring thereby what little merit the tabu allowed them. [p.201]...Women were not allowed to proceed on the Kingkor [i.e. *gzhung-skor*] beyond the first stage...The first day I went five miles up [the mountain] to the Tsukang called La Pu, where one of my carriers had to be sent back because she was a woman [p.205].<sup>33</sup>

And further,

...the Drölma La, 16,000 feet. No woman is allowed to cross this pass...From the [Sha-ngus La] pass we went down 3000 feet to Tomtsang, the sixth rest-house in a forest of fir trees. We found a woman in charge of the rest-house here, but they are not allowed to go further along the pilgrimage being excluded from the road between the Drölma La and this rest-house.<sup>34</sup>

Upon reaching the exact summit of the sGrol-ma pass women pilgrims were permitted to walk exactly seven steps further down the other side before returning back the way they came.<sup>35</sup> Women were thus banned from a 25-30 kilometre stage of the middle circuit between the summit of the sGrol-ma pass to the east and the Dom-tshang pilgrim's resthouse to the west of Dag-pa Shel-ri peak (see map 6). This included by necessity the entire peak circuit as it too was reached by way of the sGrol-ma pass. According to Tsa-ri-bas and pilgrims this was the extent of the exclusion up to 1959. It is reported to have been enforced after the re-opening of the mountain in 1984.<sup>36</sup>

## ii. Women's Circuit Itinerary in the 1950s

Although women pilgrims were stopped from accomplishing clockwise circumambulation of the upper mountain in conformity with orthodox Buddhist ritual performance, they did have an alternative route for completing what they could of the pilgrimage. But it was the reverse of the prescribed ritual order. The 'women's circuit' (*skye-dman gyi skor-ba*, or more literally 'the low-born's circuit')<sup>37</sup> retraced the main pilgrimage route from the sGrol-ma pass summit

<sup>32</sup> Filippo de Filippi (1971:143).

<sup>33</sup> Bailey (1957:201,205).

<sup>34</sup> Bailey (1914:70).

<sup>35</sup> SG, interview.

<sup>36</sup> KG, interview.

<sup>37</sup> On the social significance of *skye-dman* and other colloquial Tibetan gender terminology see Aziz

down to Cig-car and back up the Tsa-ri river again and over the northern flanks of the mountain from the site of rDo-rje-brag at rDo-mtshan to the rest-house of lCags-thag-'phreng.<sup>38</sup> This was located on the main route of the middle pilgrimage which could then be followed to its normal conclusion at Yul-smad. This route appears to have been used by women since at least the late eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> A Tibetan oral narrative of the full possible itinerary is as follows:

When women started from the base of the mountain they reached La-va-phug, and just below there the mKha'-'gro Khrus-mtsho, then they ascended to the mKha'-'gro rDo-yi sNying-phug, the abode of rDo-rje g.Yu'i-sgron-ma. Then they went to the sGrol-ma pass, and did their seven steps down and return to the rDo-yi sNying cave. Then they traversed the face of the mountain north across to a lake called Bong-bu Bla-mtsho, the abode of the ass which is the mount of dPal-ldan lHa-mo. Some women, not many, went across further to visit the Trakṣad Bla-mtsho, the abode of mGon-po Trakṣad, but this was a very rare occurrence. Most women went down from Bong-bu Bla-mtsho and continue on to rDo-mtshan, then continue on to rDo-rje-brag near rDo-mtshan, then on to lCags-thag-'phreng directly up the mountain. They were allowed a little further to Dom-tshang resthouse, but then they had to return to lCag-thag-'phreng. They crossed the mKhar-rgyug pass to Srin-mo sNe'u-ring and on to Yul-smad to finish.<sup>40</sup>

Some women pilgrims visited Tsa-ri without ever ascending the mountain on these special women's routes. They chose instead to remain around its base and perform another difficult, but unrestricted pilgrimage to the related site of mTsho-dkar, a lake some 40 kilometres east of Dag-pa Shel-ri.<sup>41</sup>

### iii. Tibetan Explanations of Women's Exclusion

The preceding summary shows the limits placed on women's ritual movement on the mountain; what are the Tibetan explanations for these controls? I was given multiple oral accounts about women's exclusion. Some are direct explanations and others deal with the consequences of women defying the restrictions placed on them at Tsa-ri. Together both types expose Tibetan discursive constructions of gender, body and landscape. I will now present several to show the variety in the accounts and also that there is a contest of meaning over the reasons (1989:79-82).

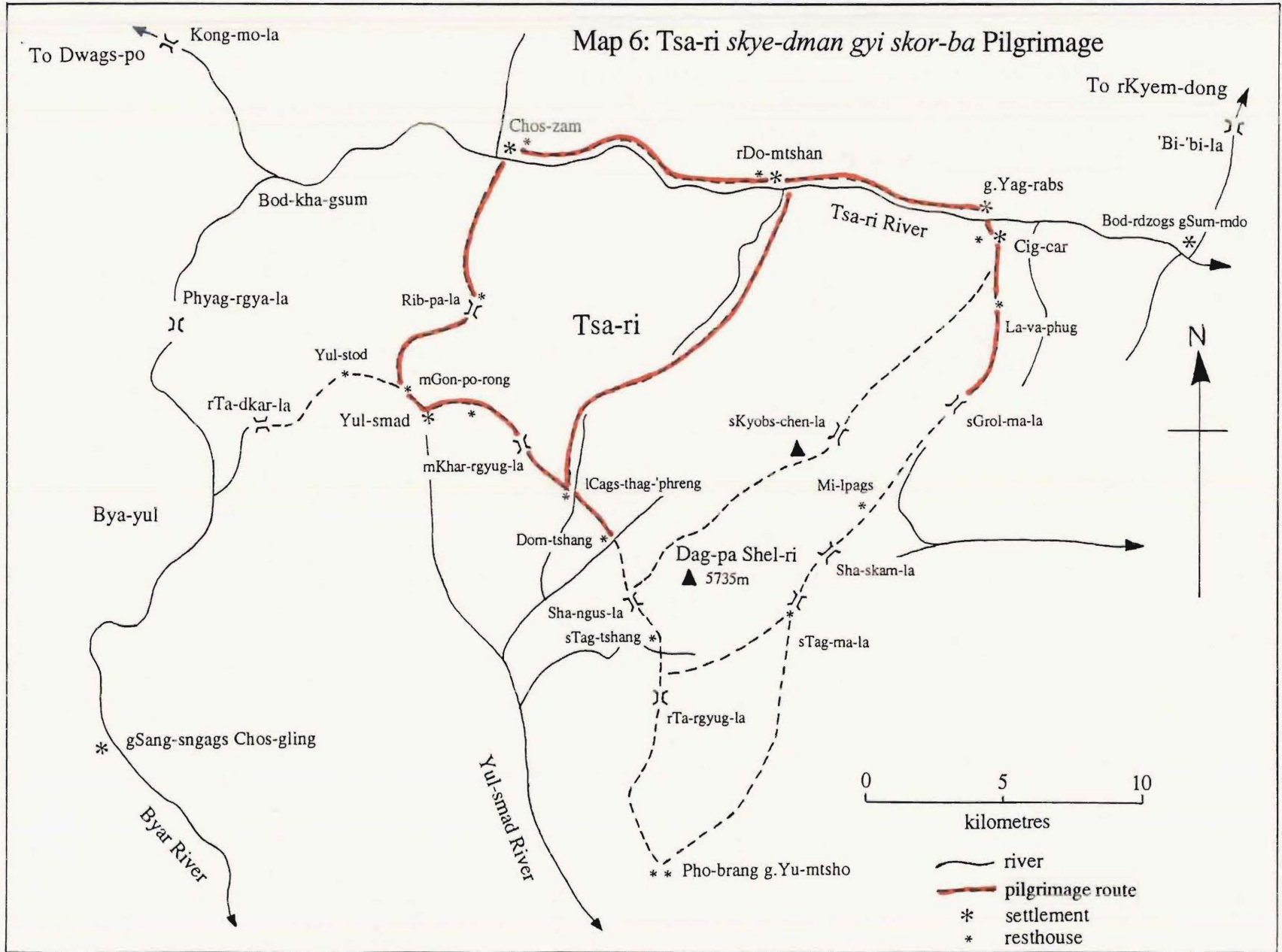
<sup>38</sup> The *thang-ka* (see plate 3) representing Dag-pa Shel-ri, its environs and the activities of pilgrims in the area depicts women pilgrims at only one point on the entire painting. Two women pilgrims are shown leaving rDo-mtshan about to ascend the eastern slope of the mountain up to lCags-thag-'phreng, by the unique 'women's route'.

<sup>39</sup> bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1042-3).

<sup>40</sup> SG, Interview:

<sup>41</sup> See Yuthok (1990:86-102). Note that although detailing the three circuits of the mountain she never mentions the exclusion of women.

Map 6: Tsa-ri *skye-dman gyi skor-ba* Pilgrimage





for exclusion between non-elite/lay accounts and elite/clerical accounts which are informed by different sets of discourses.

During his visit to Tsa-ri in about 1883-4 the 'Pandit' explorer Kinthup was given the following narrative by Tsa-ri-bas,

...formerly a goddess, named Drolma, who wished to judge the moral behaviour of men and women, laid herself across the path-way at the summit of the [sGrol-ma] pass. A man came by and found the road blocked by the goddess, who was disguised. So he asked her with kind words to get out of his way. In reply the goddess said, "My brother, I am so weak that I cannot stir; if you pity me, please find another road, if not, cross over me." On hearing this the man took a different road. After a short time a woman passed that way, and she also saw the goddess and told her to give way; the same reply was made by the goddess, but the woman crossed over her and went on. Therefore, from that day, women have been forbidden to pass over, and from that day the pass has been known as the Drolma La.<sup>42</sup>

I was told very similar versions of this narrative. Another narrative I heard is more widely known, and has many variants:

There was a government minister from the aristocratic family of rDo-ring.<sup>43</sup> His daughter was very arrogant and when she learned that women could not perform the middle circuit and the peak circuit at Tsa-ri she disguised herself as a man. Defying the restrictions she crossed the sGrol-ma pass, and circumambulated around Dag-pa Shel-ri and the zone of exclusion. Finally she reached the rest-house at Dom-tshang, the official limit for women at the other end. When there she boasted that it was all nonsense that women couldn't do the pilgrimage, saying "So what, I did it!" And then in the night she disappeared from the rest-house. A *mi-rgod*, a huge hairy beast, came and quietly stole her away out of the rest-house. Nobody noticed. The *mi-rgod* pulled down a large tree and put her body in it and then threw it up like an arrow. The people there went in search of her, and finally after many days of searching they found her in a large tree. The tree trunk had been split down the middle, her body was laid into this split and then the tree sealed back up again. She was dead, and parts of her body were sticking out either side. This was done to her as punishment by the Tsa-ri Zhing-skyong, the local protective deity who had manifested as the wildman.<sup>44</sup>

In some variants it is the minister's wife who breaks the restriction due to her envy of the male pilgrims, or in defiance of her pious husband's plea not to proceed. In others the

<sup>42</sup> Reported in Burrard (1915:335).

<sup>43</sup> Also known as the house of dGa'-bzhi, one of the five highly ranked *sde-dpon* families in the aristocracy; see (1973:50-64). This probably refers to the rDo-ring *bka'-blon* bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor who, together with female members of his family, performed the pilgrimage in 1794. He maintained close personal connections with the 8th 'Brug-chen who was very active at Tsa-ri.

<sup>44</sup> SP, Tashi, interview. SG and KG, both clerics, also give this narrative.

daughter is killed by a snow avalanche which is caused by the protective deity.<sup>45</sup> Desideri was also told about such consequences for women crossing the forbidden threshold,

This they never attempt as they believe that any woman who dares to pass this point will be put to a fearful death by the Kha-ndro-mà [i.e. *dākinī*], the tutelary goddesses of the place.<sup>46</sup>

But her death is not enough. The story is always recounted with an ending stating that from then on the rDo-ring family are obliged to pay a regular tax to the pilgrims at Tsa-ri,<sup>47</sup> both as a fine and a form of expiation of the sins (*sdig-pa bshags-pa*) brought upon the family by this unruly woman. This tax was imposed by the Tibetan government in order to appease the Tsa-ri Zhing-skyong, a deity who was associated with at least one of the Dalai Lamas.<sup>48</sup>

These accounts were told to me by lay people to explain the exclusion of women, although the story of the rDo-ring family is also sometimes told by monks. In these accounts we find a discourse on feminine character and its relation to the mountain's divine inhabitants. There is also a less well developed masculine character discourse. Feminine character is presented as disrespectful, irreverent and arrogant, impetuous and envious.<sup>49</sup> And as if to emphasize

<sup>45</sup> If this does refer to the rDo-ring *bka'-blon* bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor and his family as I suggest above, then the women in question who accompanied him were his younger sister Blo-bzang Don-'grub sGrol-ma who was a nun, his wife rNam-rgyal sGrol-ma and daughter Blo-bzang Chos-'dzom; see bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1042). Both rDo-ring and his wife fared very badly in political scandals surrounding the Gorkhali invasion and the role of the Zhwa-dmar-pa in it during the late eighteenth century. rDo-ring was involved in bitter public scandal again in 1805-6 over his son's appointment to the *bka'-shag*, see Petech (1973:56-60), and given all this perhaps our present narratives were intended as a slur on the family's name.

<sup>46</sup> Filippi (1971:143). Compare the above materials to comments found in some short Tibetan guide-books for the site of Halase in East Nepal, "If a women goes up to the top of the hill, as the masters of the place are protectresses (*bsrung-ma*) who have obtained realizations [or in another version "rock demons (*brag-btsan*)"], accidents will immediately happen to her", see Macdonald (1985:9). Katia Buffetrille (personal communication, April 1992), who has recently observed pilgrimages at Halase, reports that the exclusion of women from the summit of the hill does not apply at present.

<sup>47</sup> Various oral guides mention either a rest-house or a cave at certain points on the pilgrimage routes where the rDo-ring family had to provide a measure of *tsam-pa* or a cup of beer or curd to each pilgrim who passed. Also some state that the rDo-ring estate payed an annual tax of 100 lambs at Tsa-ri in the 7th month. But what was actually provided by the rDo-ring family, and why is unclear. Kinthup reports that a Tibetan government fine of supplying curd to every pilgrim high up on the *gzhung-skor* route was imposed on the "Dakpu Dungpa" (?) because his daughter crossed the Drolma La and was killed, see S.G. Burrard (1915), p.335. A Bhutanese map of the Tsa-ri *rong-skor* (see plates 10 & 11) shows a thatched hut near the end of the route in the lower part of Bya-yul. It is labelled the "rDo-ring rest-house of Bya river spur" (*Bya-chu-sgang rdo-ring tshugs-khang*).

<sup>48</sup> On the fifth Dalai Lama and Tsa-ri *zhing-skyong* see Karmay (1988:29); he also composed a prayer for peace to this deity entitled *Zhing skyong seng ge gdong can gyi las byang gnam lcags spu gri*, see Tohoku Cat. no.5693.

<sup>49</sup> C.f. lay Tibetan statements like, "The female Tibetans are descendents of the She-Ogress, hence the impetuous, violent, witch-like nature of women", Miller (1980:160); or the 'unworthy qualities' of

this through difference the male figures are reverent, considerate and cautious. The divine residents of the mountain are disturbed as a result of these feminine character traits and respond with prohibitions or certain death. The burden of their response falls not only upon the unruly women but extends through them to the male world of taxation and state administration: at Tsa-ri women must be controlled by men's rules so the goddesses and gods are not upset.<sup>50</sup>

It is interesting that on hearing these accounts monks often disregard them, or disparage them as 'ordinary people's stories'. Their alternative accounts contain a completely different set of discourses to give meaning to the exclusions. Several monks gave me the following type of accounts which centre on the relationship between representations of women and the female body and the powerful nature of the mountain's landscape:

Because it is such a holy place, inside the *maṇḍala* palace [of the mountain], that is why women are not allowed. There are *maṇḍala* in many of the powerful sites on the mountain, such as the three vitality lakes (*bla-mtsho*) of the [Tantric] deities; lakes such as the Pho-brang sKyog-mo, Pho-brang g.Yu-mtsho and the Sindūra'i rGya-mtsho. They have *maṇḍala* of the gods and goddesses within them and are supposed to be too holy for women to visit. Wherever there are *maṇḍala* [on the mountain] women can't go. The main reason is that it is a palace of the deities, and a *maṇḍala*.<sup>51</sup>

These now familiar conceptions of mountain as *maṇḍala*, and containing other *maṇḍala* within it, and others defining powerful landscape are related to further discursive themes of karmic status, bodily purity/impurity and self-control, which also serve to construct femininity and masculinity through difference. These are exhibited in the following accounts:

The only reason is that women are of inferior birth, and impure. There are many powerful *maṇḍala* on the mountain that are divine and pure and women are polluting. Women can go on the ravine circuit because you don't have to pass over any power places [as it goes outside the boundary of Tsa-ri's natural *maṇḍala*]. And if women went on the peak circuit and middle circuit they would be stepping on the power spots, and we believe that women are lower than men, and more impure, that's why. But when they go to sGrol-ma pass summit they walk just seven steps down the other side. On these seven steps they pray that in their next life they will be reborn as a man so they can complete the pilgrimage. The place is so powerful this is possible.<sup>52</sup>

women such as jealousy, wickedness, always doing what is not good or acceptable, unreliability, hypocrisy, etc., in Chopel (1983:83-6).

<sup>50</sup> For some compelling parallels between these Tibetan narratives and Hindu material see Sax (1991:94-7) on the story of Rukund and women's exclusion from the upper sections of the *Rāj Jāt* pilgrimage of Nandadevi in the Garhwal Himalaya.

<sup>51</sup> SG, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Nawang, interview. There are other Tibetan examples of women being considered as ritually impure in relation to place, see for instance Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:473) on maintaining the ritual purity

And further:

There are places where you can't go because its so holy, and you could make them impure. You can't just go to the toilet anywhere at Tsa-ri, that is why women can't go but men can. You need to have self-control over your personal desires and needs and wait until the allocated spot is reached.<sup>53</sup>

Other accounts give us further themes on women's bodies being problematic as they are linked to sexuality in various ways at the site:

The reason why women can't go up there is that at Tsa-ri there are lots of small, self-produced manifestations of the Buddha's genitals (*mtshan*) made of stone. If you look at them they just appear ordinary, but they are actually miraculous phalluses of the Buddha, so if women go there these miracles would become spoiled by their presence, and the women would get many problems also. They would get sick and perhaps die prematurely. It is generally harmful for their health so that is why they stopped women going to the holy place in the past, for their own benefit. The problem is that women are low and dirty, thus they are too impure to go there.<sup>54</sup>

Here the theme of women's low and impure bodies is negatively and dangerously related to a 'sexed' (*mtshan-can*) landscape, which they are excluded from. This contrasts with the lay traditions about the important site of rDo-mtshan or 'Sexed Rocks' discussed in chapter three. I should note here in passing that Tibetan landscapes and power places can not only be sexed, but they can also be gendered.<sup>55</sup>

We have also already seen in chapter four how there is a discourse on women as a sexual distraction given to account for the periodic exclusion of women from the retreat centres of Cig-car. There I noted that this theme used in elite/clerical accounts of exclusion is also represented in a wider Buddhist context. It can also be said that inferior karmic status applied to women is at least implicit in Indian Buddhism<sup>56</sup> and explicit in Tibetan Buddhist sources. Likewise, notions of the bodily impurity of women are also implicit in Indian Buddhism.<sup>57</sup>

of mountain springs in relation to weathermaking.

<sup>53</sup> SG, interview.

<sup>54</sup> "Padma", interview.

<sup>55</sup> See the interesting article on conceptions of gendered landscape in Tibet by Gyatso (1989).

<sup>56</sup> On the Mahāyāna see Paul (1985).

<sup>57</sup> Here, for instance, we can think of the Buddha being born 'cleanly' through his mother's side to avoid the polluting effects of her birth canal and vulva (note that this can also be interpreted as a 'perfect' birth devoid of the usual physical stresses and suffering of vaginal birth); the female genitals as the physical conduit through which all beings are recycled in samsara; also the presentation of some Buddha-fields as being so pure they contain no women.



They have long been explicit in Tibetan Buddhism,<sup>58</sup> although in Vajrayāna at highly developed levels rejection becomes acceptance as the inversion logic of Tantra transforms substances like menstrual blood from dangerous and polluting into bliss-giving and liberating in quality.

In other contexts above we have observed that Tsa-ri is primarily a self-created category of power place, and its power predominantly flows from itself to the persons who encounter it, rather than the other way around. Having this type of power it is considered to be 'fierce' and 'dangerous', even for those who are spiritually refined. This is partly why the site is said to be hazardous to women's health; why special caution is required to control one's desires and needs there, like potentially polluting bodily functions; and also why violations of the exclusion traditions through disrespect and arrogance produce such terrible punishments as in the above narratives.

Overall the representations of the mountain detailed so far give a full ordering of the landscape as a context in which women's exclusion may be understood in relation to certain Tibetan social constructions of the female person. They provide a hierarchy of vertical and horizontal space within which women may only use the lower-outer zone, all men use the middle-inner zone, and only spiritually advanced and/or purified men use the higher-central-inner zone. Such a general construction of space is not unique to the landscape of mountains which are represented as Tsa-ri is. In Tibetan thinking in general a hierarchical ordering of space that places maximum status on centrality and vertical height is pervasive: it is applied to the body, dwelling house, temple, world-system and cosmos.<sup>59</sup> In all these schemes beings, both human and divine, are systematically arrayed on the basis of ranked qualities and properties. What is significant about the case of Tsa-ri is that it gives a clear example of a Tibetan social context, i.e., complex rituals relating persons and places, where both sex and gender are invoked as being important *emic* factors of this ranking.

#### iv. Resistance To Exclusion

Discursive themes and representations, like those just described about women and landscapes, are not just formed in isolation, they are generated, reproduced and modified out of contexts of social relations which themselves engender and reflect power relations. One feature of analysing discursive themes is that they alert us to look for the resistance to power the themes are implicitly trying to contain. Often our texts that study Tibetan women's lives, or problematise gender in traditional Tibetan society seem to be governed by opposing forces.

<sup>58</sup> In that famous 10th century Tibetan Buddhist document, the 'ordinance' of lHa Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od, we find the 'village tantrists' he attacks as being, "Imprisoned in the dirt of the five kinds of sensual objects and women", see Karmay (1980:153).

<sup>59</sup> C.f. Stein (1957 & 1972:41, 204, 210-11); F. Meyer (1987:107-27); Corlin (1980:87-92).

On the one hand they bring in our images 'formed from afar' of women with freedom and independence which can mask the extent of the asymmetries of power between women and men. On the other hand they are also informed increasingly by feminist positions on the totalizing effects of 'patriarchy' (variously defined) on women's lives. We can and should try to work in the space between these two extremes which influence us. This mode of working entails generating detailed research about specific local-historical practices/contexts, without then making blanket generalizations from these on to the whole of Tibetan society. This is not to say that one cannot read from the specific on to the general, just that doing so without care tends to produce irreconcilable extremes of 'seeing'. Reading the accounts of exclusion at Tsa-ri from certain points of view I find not only further evidence of social limitations on women due to aspects of a male-generated world-view, but also strong echoes of women's resistance to this control.

It is possible to read the non-elite/lay accounts about women's exclusion as a response to the potential for Tibetan women's resistance. These narratives and their variants are about women who resist. The resistance becomes a feature of the feminine character traits seen as negative in the accounts. I think it is compelling how in these narratives women's resistance becomes the very discursive theme that justifies their exclusion. Also, when considering all the different non-elite/lay and elite/clerical accounts that cluster around the practice of exclusion, I am impressed by: their number; the range of themes they turn towards one purpose; the time period over which some of them have endured; and the persuasive force of what they tell us is at stake here—women's lives, women's health, the ruin or downgrading of a unique pure zone of liberation on the earth's surface, etc. If I ask the question, 'Out of what context did all these accounts get produced and reproduced?', part of my answer will be that there have been Tibetan women pilgrims, like the daughter of the House of rDo-ring, who reacted against their ban from the mountain.

Whether we read women as resisting in these narratives or not, there is certainly a resistance to women's exclusion that exists nowadays. Recent visitors to Tsa-ri told me that since the mountain re-opened for pilgrimage in 1984 Tibetan nuns have several times attempted to defy the ban on women performing the middle circuit, but were stopped from doing so by their pilgrimage parties. Present-day examples of resistance must be seen in the context of changing Tibetan lives which have been influenced by Chinese occupation, the conditions of exile and increasing contact with other cultures and world-views. These changes include people like myself who involve Tibetans in ethnohistorical research about gender and women's lives, and problematise issues such as ritual exclusion. While I found a general acceptance of the above explanations about women's exclusion among both my female and male informants, the working context itself produced several responses that should be noted here. One is from an educated young woman, a Buddhist, who has spent her whole life in exile:

Since I learnt all these things about Tsa-ri by being involved with your interviewing, and seeing those photos, I'm really interested in it. I very much want to go there and do the pilgrimage myself some day. It must be a special and beautiful spot. I don't care about the restrictions on women, they are just made up by men to keep the place only for themselves. In the old Tibet they had such bad ideas about women, it is one of the things that must change. We [modern young people] have very different ideas about women and men than those old attitudes in Tibet, so even those bad stories about the rDo-ring women wouldn't bother me if I did go to visit Tsa-ri.<sup>60</sup>

Explicit in this narrative we find a new attitude to both gender and place. To indicate the perhaps ironic vicissitudes of resistance I will leave the final words in this section to a senior monk who often makes visits to the West:

We talked a lot about women not being allowed to go on Tsa-ri pilgrimages. And you heard a lot from other old people. What they say is true, but you have to be very careful about this information. It could have bad effects if you write your book about Tsa-ri and include this in it. I mean, especially to Western Dharma students, and women in particular. They are feminist now and this sort of thing will make them angry and think that Buddha Dharma is against women. But, the problem is not the Dharma itself, it is old, conservative cultural traditions and attitudes in Tibet. Nowadays these don't count, and women are free to practice as they like.<sup>61</sup>

#### v. Some Very Long-Term Benefits?

Many Tibetans say that it is, at least theoretically, easier to transform a negative character trait than it is to transform a negative bodily attribute in any one lifetime.<sup>62</sup> Although this is a very general statement, it is perhaps part of the position from which Tibetans read the accounts of women's exclusion: gender-related attributes are more malleable than sex-related attributes. From this position the elite/clerical accounts together provide a much more total discourse for exclusion. While it may be possible to change one's character, particularly through Buddhist education and practice, changing bodies is quite another matter which requires a change in karmic status and at least another rebirth to accomplish. Since all women, even yoginīs, are banned because of their bodies all will have to wait until their next birth to see if those seven steps across the sGrol-ma pass worked to give them a male body and qualify them for the whole pilgrimage.

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<sup>60</sup> "Tsering", interview.

<sup>61</sup> "Rinchen", interview.

<sup>62</sup> However, there is a general Tibetan belief in the possibility of sex change, where an infant's sex is not necessarily fixed just after birth. For instance, there are various rituals involving naming and the use of charms to prevent newborn boys turning into girls; see Aziz (1988:28); Chopel (1983:4).

It should not surprise us that a Tibetan Buddhist ritual at Tsa-ri invokes karma and rebirth both to exclude women, and also to offer the promise of a liberation from the restraints of women's lives if the prescribed ritual is observed. Tibetans will cite *karma* as an important element in attributing female gender and also to account for the difficulties of women's lives. There also exist sentiments and practices focused on the spiritual and mundane desirability for women to be reborn as men.<sup>63</sup>

We should notice that while the non-elite/lay accounts are set out as narratives on specific incidents, the elite/clerical accounts are set out more as rules and ritual requirements. For Tibetans these rules and rituals exist not to protect women from the effects of the mountain, but to protect Dag-pa Shel-ri from the effects of women. The maintenance of its purity would thereby be better ensured. If it remains pure it is believed that it will continue to be an especially powerful zone for spiritual transformation. In this way the exclusions work to increase the status of the place with pilgrims and meditators, and it is men, particularly elite male clerics, as pilgrims and meditators who stand to gain the overwhelming share of the benefits of this arrangement. I reiterate that from my point of view one of the important benefits they gain is accumulation and maintenance of social status or prestige.

I would sum up the general *emic* interpretation by stating: the fundamental purity of the mountain is *maintained* by the exclusion of women. However, just by changing one word, one could propose this alternative *etic* interpretation: the fundamental purity of the mountain is *constituted* by the exclusion of women.<sup>64</sup> This small change of wording highlights issues of great importance for an understanding of attitudes towards women in historical Buddhism and the way gender is constructed in societies strongly influenced by Buddhism. Here, if space permitted, we might invoke arguments about the exact social origins of institutional Buddhism as a system of Indic, male renunciation; the complex of Indic attitudes towards sexuality and asceticism and the generation of a clerical male Buddhist symbolic capital within this context; and the representation of women and gender differences in Buddhism which arose out of this context. I believe that some of the issues that lie behind the exclusions at Tsa-ri resonate far throughout space and time in Buddhist South Asia.

The study of women's exclusion at Tsa-ri makes us consider the public settings where the distribution and reproduction of social power through gender and other important relations is contested and acted out. In pre-1959 Tibet at least, these processes did not just operate strongly and dramatically in great monasteries, administrative fortresses, trade markets, feudal estates or the grand religio-political pageants of Lhasa. They also took place in some of the most remote, wild and unpopulated mountains in the region. The majority of Tibetan women and men who went there did so to cultivate themselves in the hope of gaining a mobility and

<sup>63</sup> See for example Gyatso (1989:145, n. 59); Karma Lekshe Tšomo (1989:122-3).

<sup>64</sup> I am indebted to Paul Harrison for pointing this out.

power in the next life that they had no access to in their present one.

#### vi. Comparative Possibilities

Comprehensive and detailed studies of individual Tibetan sites like Tsa-ri are only in their infancy. I think it is still too early to compare much of the material I present here with other Tibetan power places and their rituals. Also, due to the very gradual development of the study of Tibetan women it is not yet possible to view women's exclusion at Tsa-ri in a larger frame of gender-exclusive spaces, sites and ritual contexts in Tibet. For example, some available material suggests that monastic spaces were zones for exclusion of women as pilgrims, but we are often left to guess at the specific Tibetan discourses informing such traditions.

There is another non-Tibetan context which I suggest has potential to compare with women's exclusions at Tsa-ri. This is the tradition of women's exclusion at mountain centres of the Shugendō mountain ascetic movement in Japan, which involves visits to mountain power places to seek access to spiritual realms by visualizing and encountering powerful deities, practice of austerities, or for group pilgrimages. Like Tsa-ri many of these mountains were centres of local mountain cults until they were colonized by Buddhist practitioners and their traditions. And significantly, they were also subject to similar styles of Buddhist representation as *maṇḍala*<sup>65</sup>

On Shugendō mountains the *kekkaï* was the 'restricted zone' centered around the main power places. On the *kekkaï* the noted Shugendō scholar Gorai Shigeru states, "At first this boundary might not be crossed by any unclean person, but later the "restricted zone" became exclusively a *nyonin kekkaï*, closed only to women."<sup>66</sup> Gorai also offers statements on the exclusion at Kōya-san, mountain headquarters of the Shingon sect, "At Kōya-san, the *nyonin kekkaï* is explained by saying that the presence of women would have distracted the monks from their studies. The real reason for it, however, was that Kōya-san was a Shugendō mountain... Kōya *hijiri* kept their wives and children at Arano [the middle shrine]. Later, the boundary apparently came to be marked by the Oshiage-iwa ("lifted-up rock"). Legend has it that when Kōbō Daishi's mother stepped onto the mountain itself, in violation of the *kekkaï*, she immediately begun to menstruate and fire rained from the heavens; while at the same time, Kōbō Daishi lifted up the rock before her to bar her advance."<sup>67</sup> The comments of Wayman are also pertinent here, "In Japan up to quite recently women were allowed in the outer circle of Mt. Kōya, understood as the *Karuṇāgarbha-maṇḍala*, but were not allowed to go further.

<sup>65</sup> Grapard (1982).

<sup>66</sup> Gorai (1989:138).

<sup>67</sup> Gorai (1989:139).

Only those who renounced the world and led the life of the *saṅgha* could go beyond."<sup>68</sup>

Also, Earhart has mentioned the Shugendō tradition on Fuji-san involving the exclusion of all lay persons from the mountain during special periods of ascetic practice (*nyubu*, 'mountain entry').<sup>69</sup> In general in present-day Japan all such exclusions are being liberalised, and the *kekka* are contracting in extent.

References such as the above invite us to make numerous comparisons with Tsa-ri. Indeed, this has already begun to take place in other topic areas. Stein has made an impressive review of sources on the 'womb/matrix cave' traditions,<sup>70</sup> bringing together materials on Tantric meditation at Tsa-ri and other Tibetan sites with traditions like the Shugendō practice referred to as 'passage through the womb' (*tainai kuguri*). When more detailed material becomes available on Japanese practices, and other instances of women's exclusion, I hope that some scholars will be able to use the present text on Tsa-ri in further studies of the topic.

Although all women were denied annual ritual access to the upper mountain, they were free to participate in what was certainly the best known, and perhaps the most prestigious, ritual event to be staged around the mountain. But, their chance to do so only came once every twelve years when the long Tsa-ri *rong-skor* or 'ravine circuit' procession was held there. In chapter six I will give a detailed narrative account of this major ritual, which was the only pilgrimage at Tsa-ri which any body without exception could perform if they so wished, or dared to...

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<sup>68</sup> Wayman (1981:160).

<sup>69</sup> Earhart (1989:211-12).

<sup>70</sup> Stein (1988).

## Chapter Six

# Dharma and Danger

## An Account of the Long Procession of the Ravines of Tsa-ri

### *Introduction*

In 1812 the brilliant Tibetan Buddhist yogin Zhabs-dkar-ba sang this metaphorical reflection on the vicissitudes of a pilgrimage and of *samsāra*:

When traversing with difficult passage  
The trails, narrow paths, rivers and bridges of the Land of Klo,  
It occurred to me that it must be like this  
When travelling the narrow paths of the *bar-do*.

When I saw the cheerful progress  
Of all those who were able-bodied and well equipped,  
It occurred to me that it must be like this  
When going to the next life with the Dharma.

When I saw the painful progress  
Of all those who were feeble and ill-equipped,  
It occurred to me that it must be like this  
When going to the next life without the Dharma.

When I saw the progress of those  
Leaving their ailing friends behind,  
It occurred to me this is just what one means  
When talking of friends who lack a sense of shame.

When I saw the progress of those  
Carrying their ailing friends on their backs,  
It occurred to me this is just what one means  
When talking of friends who have a keen sense of shame.

When I saw some giving food and supporting  
Those bereft of everything,  
It occurred to me that this is just what one means  
By those one calls bodhisattvas.

When I saw many pilgrims  
Dying of starvation and illness,  
It occurred to me that they  
Had truly given their bodies and lives for the Dharma.

When I saw pilgrims by the tens and hundreds of thousands  
 Parting to go their separate ways,  
 It occurred to me that this is just what one means  
 When talking of the impermanence of all phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

Zhabs-dkar-ba composed these verses in order to capture the intense human experience of his journey in one of the greatest Himalayan ritual processions, the Tsa-ri 'ravine circuit' (*rong-skor*). There is no doubt that this long circumambulation of Tsa-ri was the most renowned and perhaps most popular pilgrimage ritual in Tibet during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Every twelve years, at the beginning of the monkey year (*sprel-lo*) in the Tibetan calendar,<sup>2</sup> crowds of pilgrims numbering in the tens of thousands came from all parts of Tibet to assemble at Tsa-ri in preparation for this large ritual procession. The great reputation of the event among pilgrims lay in the fact that the procession involved intense physical hardships, even risk to life and limb. Its attraction came from beliefs that the place itself and the journey were powerful enough to effect strong transformations in the karmic status of the participants. Unlike the other circuits of Tsa-ri, with their restrictions, the ravine circuit was an event performed by men and women from any social or religious ranking, by both Buddhists and Bon-pos, and even by members of other ethnic groups, such as Bhutanese and Mon-pas.<sup>3</sup> When performed in full its route circumscribed the outer perimeter of the great *mandala* which radiated out from the Pure Crystal Mountain of Tsa-ri.

A study of the twelve-yearly Tsa-ri ravine circuit is important for two reasons. First, it can be characterised as a ritual of 'national' significance because it drew together such a range of peoples from throughout the Tibetan world in large numbers, and also because it was patronised and orchestrated by the dGe-lugs-pa state and its supporters in Lhasa. Second, it was last performed in the monkey year equivalent to 1956 and unlike other pilgrimages around the mountain, at least in the foreseeable future, is unlikely to be reinstated as the territory it traversed now lies astride a disputed and highly militarised Sino-Indian political boundary. A consequence of this, and of the fact that very few Tibetan written texts about the pilgrimage exist, is that the oral texts of a fast-dwindling number of aging informants are the only record of this major Tibetan ritual we have.

The following description of the Tsa-ri ravine circuit is an ethnohistorical account. It is one possible version of the event that I have constructed using a collection of Tibetan oral

<sup>1</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:500-501).

<sup>2</sup> Tibetan narratives which indicate why the practice was performed in this particular year are found in the following chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Unlike other popular mountain circumambulations in Tibet, no European ever performed a Tsa-ri *rong-skor*. I have not been able to exploit Chinese, Indian or Nepali sources, but it is possible that non-Tibetan/non-European language accounts of the ritual exist. The accounts of Tibeto-Burman tribal peoples living south of Tsa-ri could be most interesting.



narratives about the 1944 and 1956 performances, and with reference to the small body of written materials concerning the ritual. In the following chapter I will provide an analytical framework for this account by investigating the origins and development of the ritual, and reflecting on its cultural and political significations for Tibetan society.

## *Performance of the Ravine Circuit of Tsa-ri*

### i. Preliminary Preparations

With the coming of the sheep year (*lug-lo*) preceding the monkey year certain preparations in the staging of the ravine circuit were begun well in advance. Firstly, two government officials had to be appointed in Lhasa<sup>4</sup> to organise such aspects of the event as the negotiation and payment of the *klo-rdzong* or 'Klo-pa tribute',<sup>5</sup> and the collection and transportation to Tsa-ri of the goods and materials required for this. The Klo-pa tribute was a kind of safe passage fee which had to be given to the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Himalayan tribal peoples whom Tibetans refer to collectively as *klo-pa*, a term with pejorative overtones meaning 'savage' or 'barbarian'. In Western sources the major groups of highland tribes in the Subansiri river basin to the south of Tsa-ri are known as the Apa Tani, Nishi (or Dafla) and Hill Miri. These peoples either lived in or ranged through the jungle-covered hills to the south of Tsa-ri, and it was across this territory that much of the ravine circuit passed. The officials also had to arrange for armed troops from surrounding districts to be dispatched to Tsa-ri. These men, together with some temporary local recruits, were used to guard against the attacks on pilgrims by hostile tribals which could take place along the route. Finally, the government officials had to travel to Tsa-ri and accompany the pilgrimage for its entire duration.

Of the two officials selected in Lhasa one was a monk official<sup>6</sup> called the *rtse-drung*, and one was a lay official called the *drung-'khor* or *shod-drung*. Like all lay officials in the Tibetan government, the *drung-'khor* for the ravine circuit were aristocrats, and they seem to have held middle to higher rankings in Tibetan state bureaucracy.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the ravine circuit

<sup>4</sup> The brief written accounts by Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:479) of the 1812 event, and the '*Dzam-gling rgyas-bshad*' (written in 1820; Wylie 1962:26, 94-5) mention government involvement, but not specific officials, nor that troops were involved. Petech (1973:120) has 1835 as the earliest record of known government involvement

<sup>5</sup> An explanation of the term *klo-rdzong*, and its definition as a 'tribute' are given in the following chapter.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that these officials were not ordinary monks with strong ties to monasteries, but a group of clerical bureaucrats recruited from middle class and aristocratic families. They represented the interests of the government rather than the large and powerful dGe-lugs-pa monasteries; see Goldstein (1989:8-10).

<sup>7</sup> Petech (1973:under Tsa-ri in index) gives notes on a few of those involved. They came from

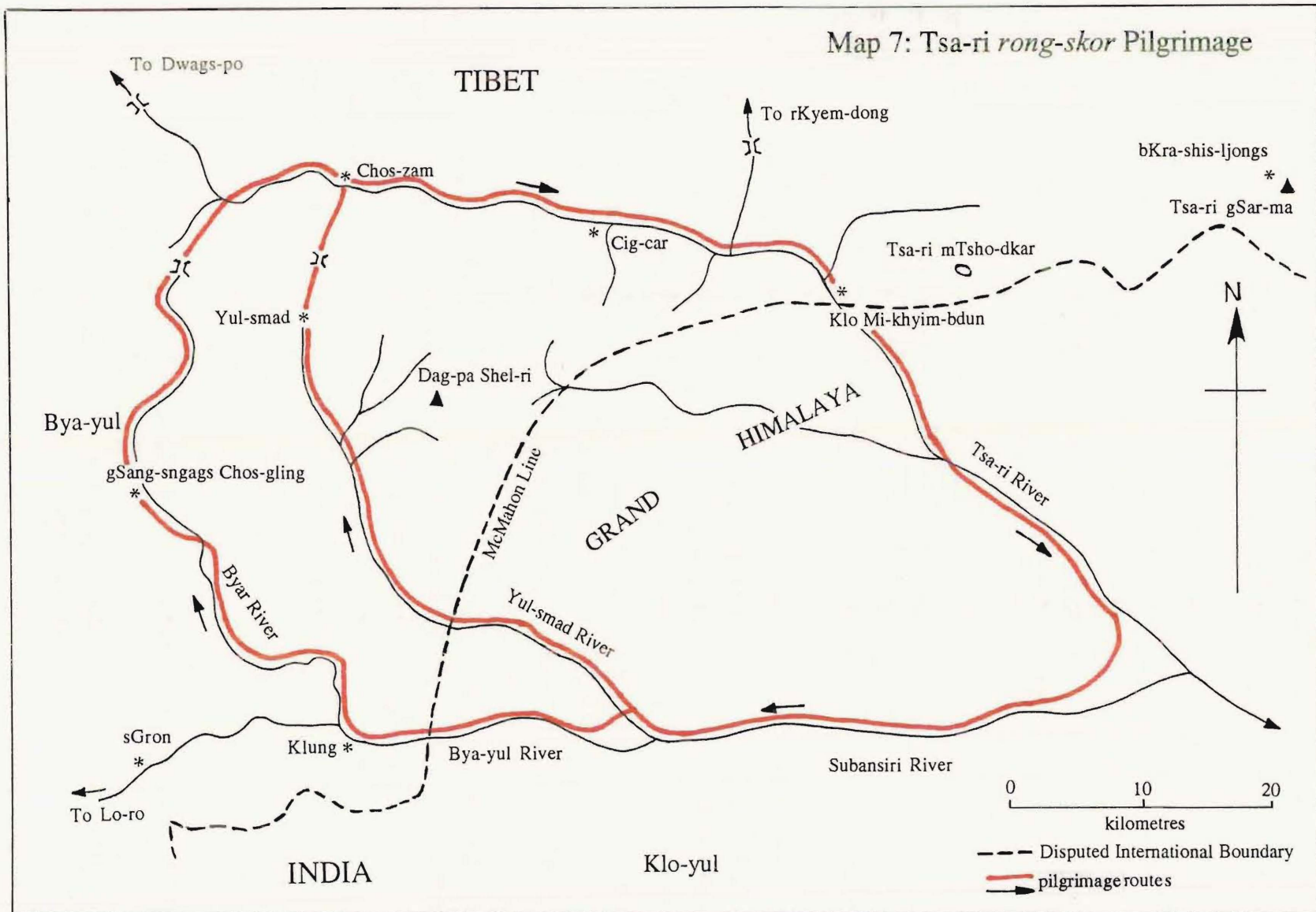
certain goods and produce were collected from throughout Tibet as a form of tax to support the event. The senior male taxpayers (*a-pha khral-pa*) from communities living around the mountain were involved in collecting this tax in the districts surrounding Tsa-ri. Many of these materials were kept at the nearby administrative centres (*rdzong*), such as sKu-rabs rNam-rgyal rDzong to the north in Dwags-po, which was in charge of Tsa-ri.

From about the tenth Tibetan month (= approx. November-December) of the sheep year onward, over one hundred yakloads of materials for the Klo-pa tribute were transported far to the south to a place called Tsa-ri Maṇḍala Plain (Tsa-ri'i dKyil-'khor-thang), the major staging point for the procession. To reach this place pilgrims and administrators had first to cross one of the high passes which connected Tsa-ri with surrounding districts and descend into the upper Tsa-ri river valley. By travelling south down the valley past Cig-car village, the main staging point for the two higher pilgrimage circuits of *rtse-skor* and *gzhung-skor*, they effectively began their long circumambulation around the base of Pure Crystal Mountain. This was the beginning of the great circle formed by their ritual journey, which would be closed upon the completion of their ravine circuit (see map 7).

Following the valley below Cig-car the pilgrims came to a river confluence marked by a single house. The place was fittingly called Bod-rdzogs gSum-mdo (see map 6), or 'Triple Confluence [Where] Tibet Ends', as it was here that another world began for the travellers. At this point the Tsa-ri river drops suddenly in a tumult of rapids for a thousand metres through a steep, narrow gorge. Leaving behind the flat alpine meadows and the coniferous forests of Cig-car, more broad-leaf trees and an ever-increasing variety of plants cover the steep valley walls in a dense scrub. Descending the narrow paths to Maṇḍala Plain and further to the ravine circuit below, another ecological zone was entered. For most pilgrims this was the beginning of a *terra incognita*. It marked the threshold of the *rong*, or 'ravine' country, those lands below the high plateau which lay at the southern extremity of the Tibetan world space. Although few ventured there, up on the arid, cool and treeless highlands one heard or read about this other world; of its wet, warm and verdant jungles with exotic species such as monkeys, tigers and bamboo; and of its human inhabitants, a 'barbarian' race naked, lacking the civilisation of Buddhist culture, and dangerous with their poison-tipped arrows.

Maṇḍala Plain was located almost at the border between Tibetan government territory and the positions of both lay and clerical designation within the system, such as 4th rank *rtse-phyug* (Dalai Lama's private treasurer), 5th rank *lha-gnyer* (Lhasa municipal head), 5th rank *Zhol-gnyer* (Zhol dependency magistrate) and 6th rank *chibs-dpon* (master and controller of horse and stud).

Map 7: Tsa-ri rong-skor Pilgrimage





tribal lands to the south of Tsa-ri, which the Tibetans referred to as Klo-yul,<sup>8</sup> or 'Klo-[pa] country'. The plain itself was located not far below the frontier village of Klo Mi-Khyim-bdun, or 'Seven Households of Klo', a name referring to a story about the original seven ethnic Tibetan families who founded this village in tribal territory long ago. The settlement contained about eighty households scattered on both sides of the river, interspersed by patches of cultivation and vegetation. Being at a lower altitude (3000m) it rarely, if ever, snowed here and was much warmer than the upper Tsa-ri valley above. The villagers could grow tobacco, potatoes and wheat here, crops not seen up on the plateau. Due to the high rainfall they could not employ traditional architecture, and had to build their houses with pitched, wooden shingled roofs. Even the local Tibetans were different, as a result of their environment and occasional intermarrying with their tribal neighbors. Unlike the pilgrim visitors many local people went barefoot, or smoked pipes, and most were able to speak some of the tribal languages (*klo-skad*) used to the south.

The ravine circuit was usually scheduled to commence once every twelve years around the time of the full moon in the first Tibetan month. However, all those participating in it, pilgrims, officials and troops alike, had to begin their journeys to Maṇḍala Plain many weeks or even months in advance of this date. Long travel times were not unusual in Tibet, but it was already mid-winter and the Tsa-ri valley could only be entered by a number of high passes, which when snow-bound or beset by bad weather could cause delays. Pilgrims came from everywhere: from gTsang province far to the west, from dBus and Lhasa in the centre, from lHo-kha, 'Brug-yul (Bhutan) and Mon-yul to the south-west, from Khams as far as Dar-rtse-mdo to the east, from A-mdo to the north and from the districts in the immediate vicinity of Tsa-ri itself. In all, their total number was between fifteen and twenty thousand persons.<sup>9</sup> From the time the first arrived it took up to four or five weeks for them all to assemble at Maṇḍala Plain.

To assist in the staging of such a large ritual event various other civil and religious personnel began to assemble at Maṇḍala Plain: a high 'Brug-pa lama and some monks from gSang-sngags Chos-gling monastery in Bya-yul; monks from the 'Bri-gung-pa retreat centre at Yul-smad; the 'Brug-pa *rDor-'dzin* from Cig-car; officials from the local *rdzong*; and the senior taxpayers

<sup>8</sup> The name may be ancient. Dan Martin has recently shown (unpublished conference paper, Fagernes, Norway, Aug. 1992) that the *Kun tu bzang po klong drug rgyud kyi 'grel pa*, attributed to Vimalamitra, lists Slos-po (=Klo-bo) and Slob-kra (=Klo-bkra), next to Bya-skrog, in the eleven border countries (*mtha'-khob*) between India and Tibet.

<sup>9</sup> All my informants give about this figure for the 1944 and 1956 events, but compare other sources: Zhabs-dkar-ba for 1812 (1985:501) 'pilgrims by the tens and hundreds of thousands' (*/ skor mi khri 'bum gang yod tshad /*); 'Dzam-gling rgyas-bshad in 1820 (Wylie:1962:36) 'Many tens of thousands of people assembled' (*mi khri phrag du ma 'dus pa*); Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:406) 10,000-15,000; Bailey in 1912 (1957:200) 100,000; Yuthok (1990:90) "some years the number of pilgrims had exceeded twenty thousand".

or headmen from the villages of Tsa-ri. Local people from the upper and lower Tsa-ri valley had to contribute their labour at different times during the proceedings. This was counted as a tax obligation which most villagers had to provide annually in the form of corvée labour (*'u-lag*). In addition up to two hundred armed troops were assembled.<sup>10</sup> About twenty regular soldiers accompanied the government officials from Lhasa, and between fifty and one hundred troops were sent by the *rdzong* from local militia (*yul-dmag*) in surrounding districts, particularly from Bya-yul, Dwags-po, Kong-po and sPo-bo. Some Tsa-ri-bas were also temporarily drafted to make up the troop complement. In payment they received food rations and *'bu-ras* (a type of local worsted cloth) but no wages in cash. They were required to use their own Tibetan-style flintlock rifles (*bod-mda'*). Tibetanized tribal men were recruited for specialist duties during each ravine circuit. The Tibetans classified them as 'forest Klo-pas' (*klo-nags*) whom they called the Bya-klo, as they lived in forest on Tibetan territory along the Bya river valley south of gSang-sngags Chos-gling. They could speak Tibetan and wore Tibetan-style woolen robes, but retained many of their tribal accoutrements and hunting equipment. Other similar men were recruited from the sGron and Klung areas along the Lo-ro river close to the frontier. The forest Klo-pa recruits were trusted and well known to the local Tibetan communities where they lived. These tribal men were used as guides and trail-blazers in the dense forests through which much of the ravine circuit passed. They also served as translators if other tribals were encountered along the route. The government officials gave them hatchets and thick yak-hair ropes for clearing trail blockages, and they kept these as payment at the finish of the pilgrimage.

The Tsa-ri-bas say that long ago, Ge-sar Lord of Gling, the heroic king of the Tibetan epic, pitched his camp here on Maṇḍala Plain when he visited Tsa-ri in order to suppress the 'Evil One of lHo' (lHo-bdud), Shing-khri rGyal-po and the wicked 'Minister of Mon' (Mon-blon), sKu-lha Thog-rgyal. This local story<sup>11</sup> prefigures well the pitching of the government camp and the enactment of the *klo-rdzong* which had to take place here before each ravine circuit could begin. As groups of organisers and pilgrims began to arrive, tents belonging to the government and local monasteries were erected around the Maṇḍala Plain to accommodate the officials, lamas and monks, and for the performance of Buddhist rituals. There were other well-appointed, private cloth tents erected by the servants of those aristocrats who had come to perform the ravine circuit. Then there were more humble tents of yak hair and small makeshift encampments established by pilgrims of every description.

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<sup>10</sup> The amount and composition of the troops varied from one *rong-skor* to the next depending on the state of Tibetan-tribal relations along this section of the borderlands. Bailey (1913:10) records 200 regulars from garrisons in sPo-smad, Kong-po and Bya-yul for the 1908 event. This strong force came in the wake of a 1906 attack by tribals on Tsa-ri Yul-smad village. Only one hundred troops were sent on the disastrous 1944 event, when several hundred pilgrims were killed by tribals, thus several hundred well armed troops were sent in 1956.

<sup>11</sup> A variant written account of activities here is found in the *Mon-gling g.yul 'gyed* (1982:492-500).

The *drung-'khor* and *rtse-drung* arrived from Lhasa, the latter carrying a set of the incumbent Dalai Lama's ceremonial robes (*na-bza'*) on his back. These had to be carried as no one except a Dalai Lama could wear them, and they were destined to journey around the entire ravine circuit in this manner. The presence of the robes on the pilgrimage was a symbolic substitution for the Dalai Lama's personal presence during the ritual. Because of their symbolic value much of the welcoming etiquette and ceremonial ritual used for the personal arrival of a Dalai Lama was prepared and then accorded to the robes which the *rtse-drung* bore upon his arrival. After the government party from Lhasa had arrived and established itself, various preparations began around the camp for the transaction of the Klo-pa tribute and the several protective rituals which attended it.

## ii. The *Klo-rdzong* and its Transaction

The exact timing of the Klo-pa tribute was difficult to figure as it depended on when the tribes who were to participate would come up the ravines and out of the forests to the south. To initiate the Tibetan preparations village workers moved the government tent into the centre of the plain. The goods which were to be used in the negotiations had to be unpacked and sorted. Some workers were sent off into the surrounding forest to cut lengths of timber and bring them back for use in the tribute ceremony. Meanwhile, the translators, several Tibetans from Seven Households village who spoke tribal dialect, were dispatched down the ravine into the forest. Here, hopefully, they would find the tribal parties gathering in anticipation of the tribute ceremony, so as to invite them to leave the cover of the forest for a few days and negotiate a settlement out in the open on the Maṇḍala Plain.

To the Tibetans the area to the south called Klo-yul was a vast tract of rugged, virtually unknown country. It was also an ethnic jigsaw puzzle of peoples who spoke different Tibeto-Burman dialects and had different customs and appearances. The Tibetans at times fought with some groups of these peoples, and also traded with others. When it came down to the question of which tribe would attack pilgrims, and which tribe would accept the tribute and take an oath of non-molestation, it was often hard for the Tibetans to know exactly who they were dealing with for any one *rong-skor*. They identified several different tribes who came to participate in the negotiations on the basis of the altitude at which they were known or thought to live, and by their other attributes. Although they did not always know exactly how many regional or subregional groupings were involved, the two main and two subsidiary groups who were entitled to receive the *klo-rdzong*<sup>12</sup> were classified as: (i.) the gCer-bu

<sup>12</sup> It is possible these have changed over time. The two early nineteenth-century accounts suggest it was the higher altitude tribes that were involved, as Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:479) has Glo Kha-khra and mTha-'khob Glo-pa ('barbarous border Klo-pa'), and the 'Dzam-gling rgyas-bshad (Wylie 1962:36) has Glo-pa Kha-khra as the ones who were offered the tribute. Das (1970:123) reports of a lama he met in 1882 that he "...had travelled in Tsa-ri. He related how the savage Lhokabra harassed the Tibetan pilgrims." The twentieth century accounts mention that lower altitude tribes were involved as Bailey's (1913:19) informants

Klo-pa or 'naked Klo-pa', who were called gTing-klo<sup>13</sup> or 'Klo-pa [from the valley] floors' (see plate 6); (ii.) the Klo-nags or 'forest Klo-pa' who were called Kha-klo (see plate 7),<sup>14</sup> living higher up in the forests closer to the Tibetan border; (iii.) the Klung-du Klo-pa and sGron Klo-pa who were Tibetanized groups living in Bya-smad near the border (see plates 7 & 8), a few of whom the Tibetans employed as translators with the gTing-klo; and (iv.) the Mi-khyim-bdun Klo-pa who were also Tibetanized (see plate 9), living in and near to Seven Households village and also serving as translators.

As the latter two Tibetanised groups had generally good relations with Tibetans during the mid-twentieth century their part in the tribute was not great. The other two groups, in particular the gTing-klo, were regarded as hostile and unpredictable, and as perpetrators of violence against pilgrims. Thus, it was to them that the main tribute was directed. Since representatives of the Tibetanised groups were already present the government translators had to find, make contact with and lead the gTing-klo and Klo-nags groups up and out of the forested ravines onto the negotiating area. Three or four different chiefs came with large parties of warriors numbering in the hundreds. Women were also present accompanying the armed men. When the tribal groups finally left the forest and entered the plain the Tibetans were confronted by the warriors they considered to be their enemies, to whom they must pay the tribute in exchange for the swearing of an oath not to harass the large ritual procession. For the Tibetans, especially the unseasoned pilgrims and officials, these people presented a striking contrast to themselves. Many men and women were almost naked with only small coverings over their genitals. Their bodies looked strong and muscular and were adorned with finely crafted cane accoutrements and heavy metal jewelry. In their hands they carried iron tipped spears, bamboo bows, and arrows dipped in lethal poisons made from herbs such as aconite. Others of rank and wealth were draped with wool blankets and carried Tibetan-style metal swords and knives. Some wore Tibetan-style tunics. Those not wearing woven cane helmets or feather headdresses had their long hair fastened into a ball at the front of their

have the Morangba Tingba (i.e. sMad-rong-ba gTing-ba), and Nebesky-Wojkowitz' (1956:406-8) informants the gTing-klo, or sMad-rong Klo-pa ('Klo-pa of the lower ravines') as the ones who disturbed pilgrims and were offered the tribute; c.f. also the description of Yuthok (1990:90).

<sup>13</sup> For descriptions see Bailey (1913:18-19) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:407-8).

<sup>14</sup> One Tibetan oral etymology of this term is 'border Klo-pa', meaning they were 'next to' or 'facing' (*kha*) Tibet. This is confirmed in modern usage by the entry under *Kha-klo* in *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.1, p.186: "Klo-pa who live in the upper parts of Klo-yul." It remains a question as to how this local name relates to the nineteenth-century term Glo-pa Kha-khra (note 12 above), which can be translated as 'striped-mouth/face Glo-pa', which I suspect refers to members of the Aka tribe just west of the Subansiri in the Kameng district. Fuchs (1973:199) states that Aka means 'painted' as they paint their faces with black marks; see also Aris (1976:628, n.66). Klo Kha-khra/Klo-bkra-pa is also used as a more general Tibetan classification, which according to eighteenth- and nineteenth century sources refers to distant tribes east of the Brahmaputra river or in Assam proper; see Wylie (1962:178, n.583), Rockhill's note in Das (1970:123), and the eighteenth-century work of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa (1972:32a).





Plate 6. Arunachal tribal people, identified by my informants as sMad-rong Klo-pa or gTing-klo from the lower Subansiri basin due south of Tsa-ri.



Plate 7. Tibetanized Arunachal tribesman, identified by my informants as Klung-klo or Kha-klo from the south-west of Tsa-ri.





Plate 8. Arunachal tribesman, identified by my informants as a sacrificial priest of the Bya-klo or "Klo-pa of Bya river spur" (*bya-chu-sgang gi klo-pa*) area south-west of Tsa-ri.



Plate 9. Tibetanized Arunachal tribesman, identified by my informants as a "Klo-pa of Mi-khyim-bdun" (*mi-khyim-bdun gyi klo-pa*).



heads with large bamboo pins.<sup>15</sup> Many were smoking continuously from pipes. When they first crossed the plain they made a mock show of force, brandishing their weapons, dancing together and screaming out battle cries. The onlookers knew that these people would be the ones who might murder them, steal from and extort them, or capture and enslave them down in the *rong* if the tribute and oath-swearing were not completed to their satisfaction.

Unlike the Tibetans with their tents the tribal people slept out in the open directly on the ground. They collected and stacked firewood with the help of some Tibetan workers. The government officials ordered that each be given a *bre* measure (approx. 1.5 kg) of parched barley flour (*tsam-pa*), which took the workers many hours to distribute. At night, the Tibetans could see the warriors dancing around their campfires to the music of simple instruments. In the morning the tribute was transacted. The two government officials were seated on wooden chairs in the centre of the plain. The senior taxpayers (*khral-pa*) were arranged behind them, standing. The tribal chiefs and groups of their warriors were scattered over the plain directly in front of them. The taxpayers were termed *klo-bdag*, or 'Klo-pa owners' in the proceedings. This meant that the family or community groups they represented each constituted separate tax sources for the various tribal leaders and groups. Thus, one local family might be charged with collecting and paying the tribute tax for several thousand tribal people whom they 'owned' as a tax responsibility. Not all the materials used in the settlement of the tribute came from the collections by the *khral-pa*. Some were individual donations by wealthy nobles, others were provided or paid for by the Lhasa administration, and on occasion the officials who negotiated had to give some items of their own property which they held in reserve if the bargaining appeared to be on the point of collapsing.

With the help of the interpreters the first payment of the tribute was made to the tribal headmen or chiefs. Although they did not keep a written record<sup>16</sup> of past tributes they knew almost exactly what had been given them previously, both in quantity and quality, and they insisted that this was therefore the minimum they should receive in payment. The negotiations often became tense, with the translators moving between the two parties having to convey messages of dissatisfaction in both directions as diplomatically as possible. To avoid trouble on the coming ravine circuit the Tibetans ultimately had little choice but to pay what was demanded. Each chief was given a Tibetan woolen blanket, a knife or sword, a hatchet, a

<sup>15</sup> This head-piece, called the *podom* in Assam, is worn by Apa Tani, Nishi and Hill Miri, and although each group has a specialised way of fastening it the superficial appearance is the same for all three; Chowdhury (1991:120). This is but one example of various superficial similarities of appearance between these groups which make it impossible to precisely identify any particular tribe at the ceremonies from the various Tibetan accounts.

<sup>16</sup> However, Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:408) notes 'To keep evidence of agreements and when sending messages, the *gTing klo* cut various signs, mostly consisting of rings and crosses, into long bamboo sticks'; and of the Nishi, Fürer-Haimendorf (1967:63) records bamboo tally-sticks being used in mediated debates for the resolution of feuds.

walking-stick and a yak. Then, general payment of a wide range of articles was made to be distributed among all those attending. This consisted of many bags of salt,<sup>17</sup> sugar and *tsam-pa*, large quantities of coloured beads for women's jewelry, cotton cloth, raisins, long and short Tibetan swords, hatchets, metal bells used on pack animals, Tibetan Buddhist ritual instruments, including bronze bells,<sup>18</sup> large and small bronze cymbals, and a few animals such as a mithan ox (*glang*), goats and pigs. Some of these items, especially the Tibetan bells, metal swords and bags of salt, were highly prized by the tribal people.<sup>19</sup>

After the formal payment of goods was completed preparations for the oath-swearing ceremony began. The Tibetan government workers cooked large copper pots full of a meat and barley dumpling stew (*thug-pa*) which they offered to the gathered tribesmen. A ritual gate was built, with elements of both Tibetan and tribal design included. The warriors had to pass through this as they took the oath. Tibetan workers cut a large tree into three sections, two of which were erected in the ground and the third lashed across the top. On the top of the crossbar the Tibetan officials and monks fixed a statue of Vajrapāṇi, a Tantric deity whose appearance is wrathful. They also placed a Buddhist religious text next to it.<sup>20</sup> The Tibetans considered that the tribesmen would not understand the religious meaning of these items, and they placed them there mainly in order to frighten them into obeying the oath. Through the translators the warriors were told that once they had passed under the deity on the gate they would have extremely bad fortune in the future if they broke their oath.

In turn, the tribesmen consulted with their priest (see plate 8) and arranged various items on the gate which were of ritual significance to them. The Tibetan government had provided several yaks which the tribesmen were to sacrifice during the oath-swearing ceremony. These were firmly tied to the side posts of the gate. It was actually these animals which the tribesmen referred to as the 'tribute' in their own language. The yaks were swiftly sacrificed with the stroke of a long sword and the invocation of the tribal priest. As soon as this had been done many warriors moved onto the scene, and events began to unfold rapidly. Chunks

<sup>17</sup> SG, interview: at the 1956 *klo-rdzong* four *ru-khal* (= approx. 100kg) of salt were given.

<sup>18</sup> Such bells were highly sought after, although not for use as instruments. Only bells with mantras cast on them were acceptable to the tribal chiefs at the *klo-rdzong*. My informants suggest that small cymbals, *ting-shags*, also with mantra on them, were equally valued by the tribespeople. The possession and exchange of bells were related to status ranking in Apa Tani, Nishi and Miri societies; see Fürer-Haimendorf (1955:198-200 & 1982:54, 57, 85).

<sup>19</sup> Tibetan style swords were valued for both ceremonial and military purposes by various Subansiri tribes. Salt was valued as there was none in the Subansiri basin, and it had to be obtained, with difficulty, either from the plains of India or from Tibet.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to what my informants state Kab-thog Si-tu's *lam-yig* of his 1919 visit (1972:366,1) mentions, "At the time of the Tsā-ri rong-bskor, the image in which the Klo[-pa] place their oath is the treasure (*gter*) which [gTsang-pa] rGya-ras revealed". Hugh Richardson also mentions that texts were placed on top of the gate (personal communication 14.12.89).

of meat from the freshly slaughtered animals were attached to one side-post, and a piece of Tibetan wool, a ball of barley flour dough and a length of white cloth were attached to the other side-post. To the horrified Tibetan onlookers it appeared that the sacrificial animals were still alive as the crowd of sword-wielding tribesmen quickly drained the blood and stripped the flesh and entrails from their carcasses.<sup>21</sup> The senior tax-payers attended the event and organised for blood from the severed throat of one of the sacrificed yaks to be collected in a huge copper pot they supplied. A large skein of wool was dipped into it and soaked. Then the chiefs and all their warriors had to pass through the gate, cut off a piece of the raw yak flesh and eat it. As they passed through, the *drung-'khor* and the *rtse-drung* both instructed them not to kill or rob pilgrims during the coming ravine circuit, which each had to swear to in turn. On the far side of the gate the senior tax-payers took pieces of the blood-soaked wool, which they called 'nose-wool' (*sna-bal*), and smeared blood onto the noses of the warriors with it. This marked them as being oath-bound.<sup>22</sup> Some of the warriors were reluctant to participate in this ritual and the Tibetanised tribesmen from Mi-khyim-bdun and sGron had to force them to go under the gate. Others who had attended all the proceedings up to this point fled down into the *rong* before they could be put through the gate. The Tibetans considered this the most important component of the ritual for ensuring non-molestation by the tribesmen during the pilgrimage procession. They held that while the giving of goods in tribute was no guarantee of their cooperation, the sacrificial gate and its attendant oath-swearing ceremonies were believed to have the most influence over them because these rituals were partly derived from tribal customs.

After the completion of the oath-swearing, several additional Tibetan Buddhist rituals intended to effect a safe passage of the ravine circuit were performed by 'Brug-pa and 'Bri-gung-pa monks from Tsa-ri. The monks had their own tent in which they chanted numerous prayers for protection. A ritual dance (*'cham*) to propitiate and honour the Tsa-ri *zhing-skyong* Kun-dga' gZhon-nu, the main protective deity who presided over the region, was performed by the monks from gSang-sngags Chos-gling.<sup>23</sup> As these Buddhist rites progressed the

<sup>21</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:479) describes such a sacrifice in 1812, "...[The two yaks] were laid down after being tied up, and were set upon by many Glo-pas of the barbarous borderland who lunged at them with long and short swords, and cut off their legs and the like, their flesh and hide while they were still alive, then carried it off." It is instructive to compare these Tibetan descriptions with brief accounts of Apa Tani sacrifices by Furer-Haimendorf (1955:88, 120).

<sup>22</sup> Nebesky-Wojkowitz' informants mentioned the use of the sacrificial yak's hide in the oath-swearing (1956:407). None of my informants for the 1944 and 1956 events could confirm this, but suggested it may have been the case in 1932 or earlier when different tribes attended.

<sup>23</sup> This *'cham*, in which both a male and female *zhing-skyong* are portrayed in a human form with a lion's face, is still performed at the 'Brug-pa gSang-sngags Chos-gling monastery in exile in Darjeeling, India. The *'cham-yig* for it is entitled *Bod gsang sngags cho gling sprel zla tshes bcu'i gar 'cham gyi rtsa tshig nas zhing skyong kun dga' gzhon nu'i 'cham rtsis dge'o*. An origin account of this deity is given in the *Mon-gling g.yul 'gyed* (1982:499), according to which Seng-chen rGyal-po visits Tsa-ri and, "after binding the *gnyan-btsan* called Bra-ba Kha-shwa by oath, he gave him the name of Field Protector (*zhing-skyong*)

tribesmen finished eating and drinking the last flesh and blood of their sacrificial yaks, and began to carry off their latest tribute goods back down into the *rong*. Now that the *klo-rdzong* and the protective rites were drawing to a close the organisation of the enormous procession could be accomplished and the pilgrims would finally depart.

### iii. The Organisation and Progress of the Procession

Over about a six-week period prior to the commencement of the ravine circuit, pilgrims continued to arrive at Tsa-ri in large numbers. Those with time to spare before the procession departed, visited and worshipped at local power places, such as Chos-zam (Dharma Bridge), rDo-mtshan-can ('Sexed Rocks') and Klu rGyal-dbang Brag ('Mighty Nāga King Rock'), along the course of the Tsa-ri valley on their way down to Maṇḍala Plain (see plate 3). At Chos-zam, the first village of Tsa-ri district the pilgrims arrived at, the local temple-keepers would bring out the many religious treasures and relics stored there in the monkey year. These relics included such items as the walking sticks of lamas said to have opened the mountain, and which bore their hand-prints, and stones with miraculous foot-prints on them. To begin their ravine circuit here pilgrims made offerings of cash and kind in return for being empowered through having the relics contact their bodies. This was regarded as a preliminary bodily purification for the pilgrimage, and it was accompanied by the confession of one's bad deeds as well. The wealthier among them made the offering of a *gaṇacakra* feast at the Vajravārāhī temple in Cig-car, and also gave offerings to the community of meditators in that place. Some early arrivals were able to observe the completion of the *ras-phud* yoga examinations.. When they arrived at Maṇḍala Plain they found a very large and ever-growing encampment, packed with waiting pilgrims.

The newness of the surroundings, the large number of different peoples and the mounting expectations about the coming procession gave the place a charged atmosphere. Groups of friends, relatives and 'fellow countrymen' (*pha-yul gcig-pa*) were meeting up in the crowded camp and organising their march in the procession together. Some spent their waiting days engaged in religious practices, dedicating themselves to the performance of prostrations, recitation of prayers and making of offerings, to capitalise on the powerful environment of Pure Crystal Mountain and spiritually prepare themselves for the coming pilgrimage. Others passed their time in more worldly activities such as dice games and social conversations, cleaning their rifles, and preparing their equipment and provisions. As the days passed the campsite became increasingly crowded and befouled, and in the cool of the mornings one could not even see the sky due to the thick blanket of campfire smoke that hung over the area. In 1956 there was for the first time another foreign presence at the pilgrim camp, that of the Chinese. Some Chinese officials in Tibet had sent several small medical teams to Tsa-ri. One was temporarily stationed at Cig-car and the other visited Maṇḍala Plain. The medics Kun-dga' gZhon-nu, then appointed him as the Door Guardian (*sgo-srung*) of Tsa-ri."



treated and dispensed medicines to sick pilgrims who were travelling to, or camped at Maṇḍala Plain. When the procession was due to depart they withdrew and did not participate further.<sup>24</sup>

As the starting date for the pilgrimage drew near two logistical problems increasingly occupied both officials and pilgrims: food supplies and the formation of a ranked and orderly procession. These were vitally important matters because of the duration and nature of the journey. Travelling fast under ideal conditions, the whole route of the ravine circuit could be covered in about ten days. Each monkey year the bulk of the pilgrims took a minimum of fifteen days to cover the entire distance. The slowest among them required three or four weeks to complete it. Since most of the route passed through areas which were unpopulated or only sparsely inhabited by tribal peoples who remained for the most part unseen and uncooperative, pilgrims had to carry all their own food, as there was no chance of being resupplied en route.

During the wait at Maṇḍala Plain, even the best organised of pilgrims continued to use up the rations of food which they had purchased on the trip south. Due to the local ban on cultivation, butchering and hunting around Pure Crystal Mountain the district was already a food-deficient region, and local supplies from the upper valley and Seven Households village could not be relied upon. With such large numbers of pilgrims extra provision had to be made for food supplies. Government officials organised the transport of several thousand loads of *tsam-pa* to Maṇḍala Plain from the estates in neighboring districts, especially from Dwags-po to the north, and arranged for its distribution in rations of several *bre* per pilgrim.<sup>25</sup>

Food could also be purchased, but because of its scarcity and its necessity in the weeks to come, it became the object of speculation. Families of Bya-klo people from the southwest came to Maṇḍala Plain each monkey year specifically to trade and sell both food and their local wares, such as bamboo items, to pilgrims. The Mi-khyim-bdun Klo-pa also made a business out of food sales, as did a few Tibetan traders who carted supplies there from the highlands. The prices were inflated many times above the normal rates.<sup>26</sup> The tribal traders would wait until the first batches of pilgrims began to depart before they sold their food supplies. As the ordered departure was spread over five or six days, those pilgrims leaving last would continue to use up precious supplies at camp and then be forced to pay the trader's extortionate prices.

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<sup>24</sup> This incident is seen by some Tibetans as a reconnaissance leading up to Chinese occupation and border claims, a view not without substance. The Chinese army were to return to Klo Mi-khyim-bdun only three years later, but for a very different purpose. It was here in the summer of 1959 that the very first conflict in the Sino-Indian dispute over the McMahon line erupted as Chinese forces exchanged fire with Indian frontier troops stationed in the upper Tsa-ri river basin; see Woodman (1969:239, map 19).

<sup>25</sup> Some informants characterize these extra food supplies as 'gifts' from the aristocratic families who controlled certain estates, while others describe them as 'gifts' or 'support' from the government itself.

<sup>26</sup> Bailey (1913:11; 1957:201) mentions this was already happening at the 1908 event.

The Lhasa government and local officials had the task of forming the thousands of pilgrims into a series of large, single-file lines called *sho* (lit. 'column'). One *sho* was dispatched into the ravine at the beginning of each day, so as to leave a sufficient gap between them. This was necessary as most of the trails comprising the route were narrow, and in many places precipitous, allowing only one pilgrim to proceed at a time. When the trail became blocked, as it invariably did, by one type of mishap or other, a ravine circuit 'traffic jam' referred to as a *sho-bkag* (lit. 'jammed column') would result due to the difficulty of passing in many places. The initial spacing between the *sho* was supposed to allow time for such holdups to be cleared so that the total number of pilgrims following would not also be seriously delayed, although the columns invariably connected after a time. Such arrangements were justified in purely practical terms.

Each *sho* had a leader, an identity, an internal structure, and a ranking in the order of the whole procession. The leaders were called *stong-dpon*, or 'master of a thousand', although the *sho* often contained many more than that number of pilgrims. The four main *stong-dpon* were identified as sDe-pa gZhung, 'Brug-pa, 'Bri-gung-pa and Klo-nags. The first was a Tibetan government (*sDe-pa gZhung*) official who in effect represented dGe-lugs-pa state interests. The second two were representatives of the two bKa'-brgyud-pa sub-sects and their aristocratic patrons who together controlled and maintained the estate lands, monasteries, shrines, and sites of Tsa-ri and some of its neighboring districts. The forest Klo-pa representative was a member of that Tibetanized tribal community along the border to the south of Bya-yul. In addition to these four the large parties of Khams-pa pilgrims from eastern Tibet grouped together and selected an independent leader of their own.

The five *sho* were named after these leaders so that, for example, the column lead by the government official was called the sDe-pa gZhung *sho*. Pilgrims joined the *sho* which they felt best represented them and their interests, and in which they might best find support on the very difficult pilgrimage ahead. They chose on the basis of natal and residence place, the Tibetan Buddhist sect with which they had a connection, and the presence in the *sho* of other members of their clan, family and friendship groups. For many pilgrims these categories were, in any case, compounded on the basis of their home place, and the general composition of the *sho* reflected regional or provincial zones of Tibet. Within each *sho* the same pattern applied, and many pilgrims organised themselves into ever smaller sub-units based mainly on their country, province, locale, village and household.

The ranking of *sho* in the processional order was determined in several ways. The first *sho* was headed by local people from Tsa-ri as they knew the route, and was comprised of pilgrims from Bya-yul, Mon-yul and Bhutan. These peoples were held to be most familiar with, and best adapted, to the conditions of ravine circuit travel, as these were most like the places in which they lived along the southern Himalayan borderlands. They would forge and

clear a trail for the other highland pilgrims to follow. The ranking of the other *sho* was determined by the leaders rolling dice, with the highest scoring of them going first in order, and so on.<sup>27</sup> To be near the front of the procession meant finishing fast, and so avoiding the risk of being delayed, running out of food, and having to carry extra supplies to cover this possibility. It also meant that if pilgrims were stranded by problems, they had more chance of getting assistance from the other *sho* and not being abandoned in their wake. In the past, the *rtse-drung* bearing the Dalai Lama's robes went up the front of the procession, but due to the threat of tribal attacks the procession was lead by the *drung-'khor* in 1944 and the *Bya-yul rdzong-dpon* in 1956. A large party of armed troops also went in the front party to guard against tribal attacks, while the remainder, in smaller groups, accompanied the subsequent *sho*.

With the ranking of the *sho* completed, all the preparations culminated in the daily dispatch of the great columns in procession down into the ravines of Tsa-ri. For most of the next two weeks the pilgrims would walk narrow trails under cover of dense subtropical forest and undergrowth, climb the cliff-sides of ravines, cross slippery single-log bridges over rushing torrents, and continue to ascend and descend the steep ridges which came in punishing succession. The hot, humid and still air and the frequent rains down in the *rong* were a very oppressive travelling climate for the highlanders who had just descended from mid-winter at home. For the most part personal comfort and hygiene were at a minimum during the journey. The thick woolen Tibetan clothing which the pilgrims wore was not only too hot, but also became water-logged and began to rot in the warm weather. Some pilgrims suffered cuts, sprains and even broken bones in mishaps on the most difficult and dangerous sections of the route. Wounds and sores quickly became infected in such conditions, and many suffered gastrointestinal problems as in most places they spent the night it was not possible to make fires for boiling water or cooking food. Some pilgrims carried supplies of traditional medicines to help treat these problems en route.

Many of the pilgrims were used to travelling long distances and camping out, this being a fact of life up on the high plateau. But these conditions were different and much harder. None of the familiar beasts of burden could be used here. There were no open campsites, no place or means to make fires easily, and nowhere to restock any sort of supplies. Almost everybody had to carry all the requisites for life on their own backs. Those who had raincoats and blankets slept under them, others erected makeshift shelters if they could, and many just slept on the trail where their column halted for the night. Their supplies consisted

<sup>27</sup> Decisions of social allotment were often decided with dice, see Carrasco (1959:51) on community choice of pasture lands. As the word for dice in Tibetan is *sho*, the same spelling used for the word 'column', confusion can easily arise for both Tibetan and Western interpreters of *rong-skor* materials. The earliest use of *sho* occurs in Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:481) in conjunction with *gtang*, the past form of the verb *gtong-ba* ('to dispatch' or perhaps 'to make/construct'), and reads '...the columns (*sho*) were dispatched (or : put together?)'. 'To (throw) dice', when deciding ranking, is expressed *sho rgyab/sho rgyag* in recent oral accounts.

of the dried, portable foods used by most Tibetan travellers: *tsam-pa* and 'popped' whole roasted barley grain, strips of dried meat, butter and dried cheese, salt, brick tea and perhaps a little dried fruit. Not only were these light, but they required little or no cooking before consuming. Although they were heavily loaded, to carry enough to eat well for two weeks was virtually impossible and food had to be strictly rationed. A few, mainly wealthy aristocrats, did not have to travel this way. They either hired porters before setting out, or brought their personal servants along. Some invoked their entitlement as government representatives to exact *corvée* labour in the form of personal transport from the local people of Tsa-ri, whom they recruited as porters for the procession.<sup>28</sup> Thus they had small tents and bedding to set up where possible, could eat and drink well, and could carry other items for personal use and comfort.

While the entire circumambulation of the mountain via the ravine circuit covered over 150 kilometres, the distance from Maṇḍala Plain to sites such as Yul-smad and Chos-zam, where the event ended and the pilgrims separated, was over 100 kilometres. The actual route between these points was not marked by inhabited sites that appear on any Tibetan or Western maps. All the pilgrims knew was that they were to the south of Pure Crystal Mountain, otherwise the geography had no points of references for them except the unseen presence of the mountain itself, and the site which marked the end point of the procession (see plates 10 & 11). Only the Tsa-ri-bas who regularly performed the ravine circuit and the local tribal people had names for certain landscape features and campsites along the route.<sup>29</sup> Pilgrim groups who had local guides with them got information about points of interest along the way. Setting off from Maṇḍala Plain they got to the camp called Me-char at the end the first day. On the second day they halted at a place called dGe-log. Then they passed in succession through the spots known as Dwags-po Chu-'khor, Brag-sne Chu-'khor and rLang before beginning the demanding 'Nine Hills and Nine Valleys' (La-dgu Lung-gdu)

<sup>28</sup> Several informants state that some parties of aristocratic pilgrims had up to ten servants or porters per person. The performance of *corvée* portage on the *rong-skor* was bitterly resented by those who had to do it. On *corvée* transportation entitlements and obligations in Tibet see Carrasco (1959:90-91); Goldstein (1989:4-5). *Corvée* transport took many forms, but at Tsa-ri it appears to be unique in that it was demanded and provided specifically for pilgrimages.

<sup>29</sup> 'Dzam-gling *rgyas-bshad* in 1820 (Text in Wylie:1962:36, my translation) described the route as, "...down the course of the river of Maṇḍala Plain there are many precipitous footpaths and steep passes, including the so-called Nine passes, Nine valleys, Nine rivers and Nine bridges. After that one ascends a narrow footpath which was called Bird-rail, Mouse-rail (Bya-'dril Byi-'dril) in the past, and when you go on there is a place called Heart of Pure rTsa-ri (Dag-pa rTsa-ri'i thugs-ka). After that you descend, and then go up along the banks of the Bya-yul river, and complete the circumambulation when you reach [the place] called Dharma Bridge-face (Chos-zam-gdong)." Not one of my informants mentioned the names Dag-pa rTsa-ri'i thugs-ka or Bya-'dril Byi-'dril, which are probably antiquated.

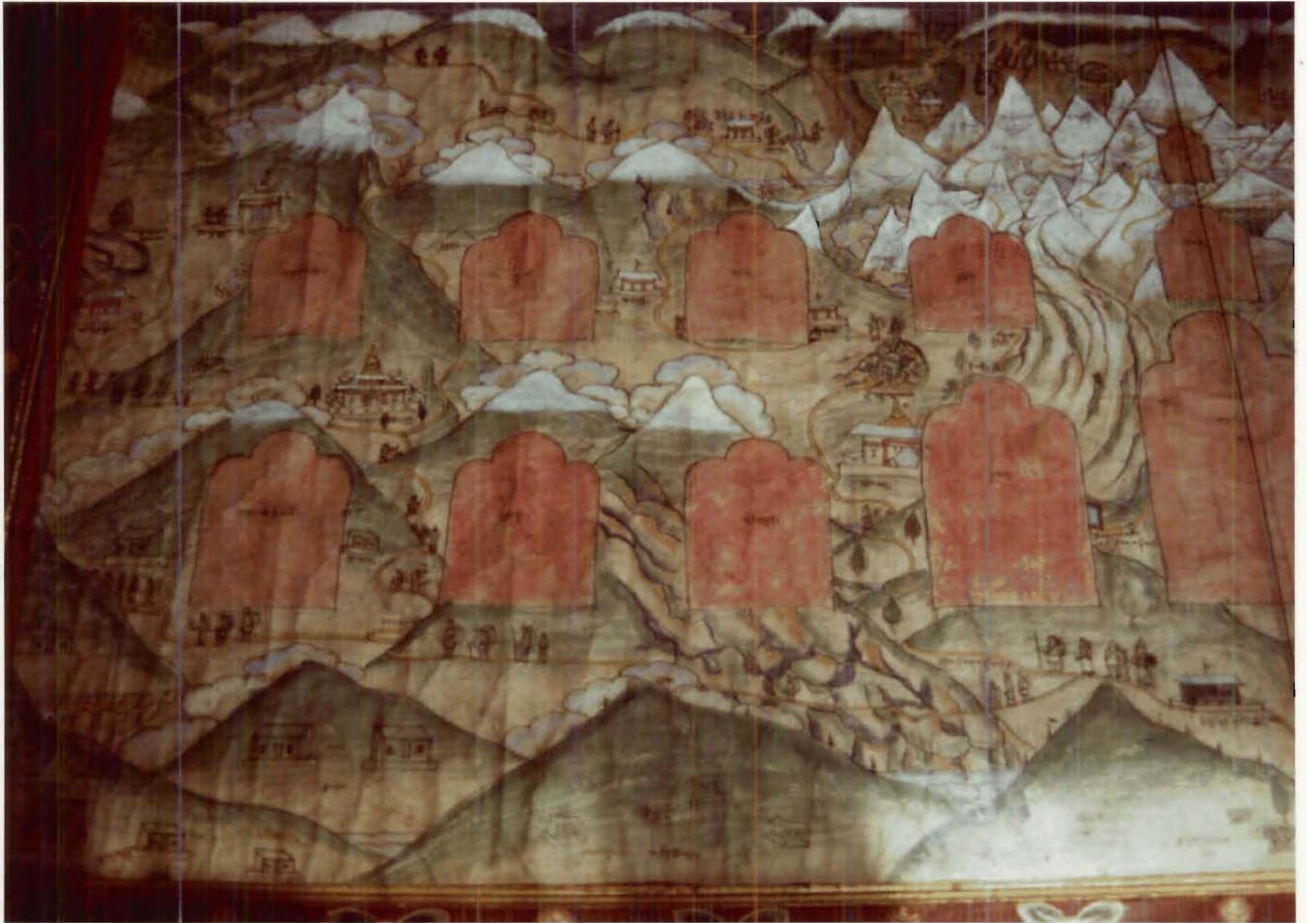


Plate 10. Hand-drawn Bhutanese map of Tsa-ri area viewed from the south, showing entire *rong-skor* procession route (west section).



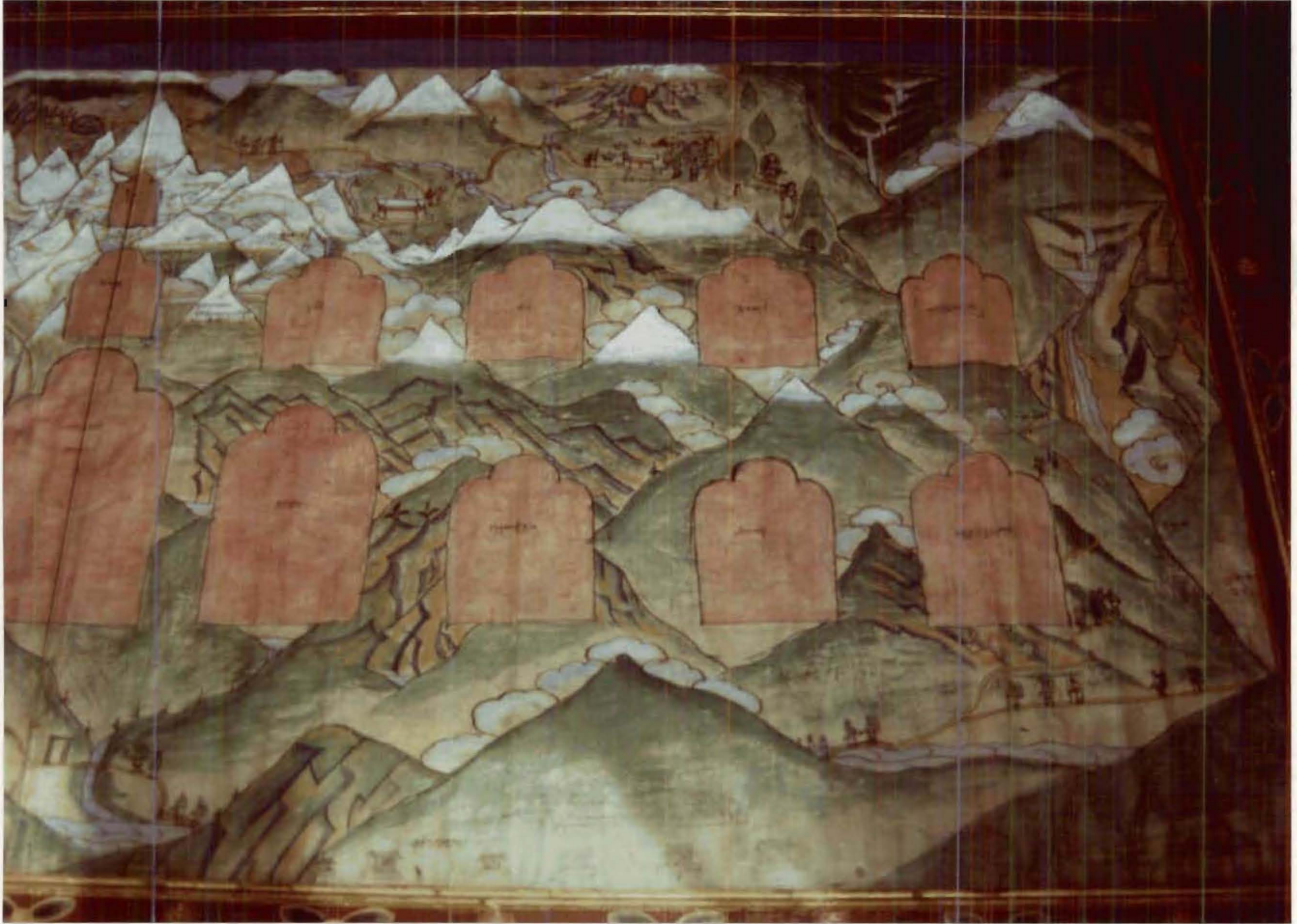


Plate 11. Hand-drawn Bhutanese map of Tsa-ri area viewed from the south, showing entire *rong-skor* procession route (east section).





section.<sup>30</sup> The route over the passes was complicated at this point and many pilgrims got confused in the steep terrain.

Descending from this area the procession eventually passed the place known locally as Takshing (sTag-shing or Dag-shing?), which was the only individual site of any note. This was regarded by the Tsa-ri people as the Tantric charnel ground of rNgams-pa sGra-sgrog ('Awe Inspiring Screams'), where certain Tibetan 'Brug-pa lamas had meditated in the past. Various Tantric cemeteries are represented as surrounding the perimeter of the Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* and the position of this site on the ravine circuit accorded with Tibetan perceptions of Pure Crystal Mountain's sublime *maṇḍala* geography. Like many of the cemeteries described in the Tantric Buddhist *sādhana* texts Takshing was marked by a huge tree in which the Tsa-ri Field Protector (*zhing-skyong*) was said to dwell.<sup>31</sup> Also the self-manifested forms of animals, such as jackals and birds, could be seen on the rocks there.

As pilgrims walked this long route they often held onto the backpacks or the robes of their friends or kinsmen in front of them so as not to lose their position in the *sho* and so become separated from their travelling companions. If one got left behind it might take days to find and regain one's position in the column because of the difficulty of passing in many places. In various precipitous areas the advance guides had fixed ropes to help climb cliffs and negotiate narrow trails. Some tribal people built log and cane bridges over the many rushing torrents that needed to be crossed. At certain of these the builders, who were armed, would wait and demand a toll from all pilgrims who passed, with the exception of the *stong-dpon* who were accompanied by parties of armed troops. At these spots there was no alternative route possible, and with hundreds of pilgrims building up in the moving *sho* behind there was no choice but to pay what the tribespeople asked.

For pilgrims this type of encounter with the tribal people was the most benign they might experience. The worst was a full-scale attack by the warriors in which pilgrims and officials alike might be murdered by poison-tipped arrows, or knocked off the steep trails by boulders that were rolled down from above.<sup>32</sup> The tribals preferred these remote ambush-style attacks

<sup>30</sup> An alternative route to this difficult section was first opened up in 1956. Instead of the multiple descents and ascents of the past, pilgrims had to make a steep climb for one full day, passing directly up the flanks of the mountain from the tropical forest zone up into the sub-alpine scrub.

<sup>31</sup> See Padma dKar-po's (1982: fol.14a) vivid description of this cemetery as part of his *maṇḍala* geography of Tsa-ri.

<sup>32</sup> My informants for the 1944 event regard it as the worst tribal attack ever remembered, with hundred of deaths and casualties. According to the accounts, the tribal leaders were dissatisfied with the tribute negotiations. Down in the *rong* they attempted to murder the Lhasa officials who conducted the tribute ceremony, but when this plot failed they turned on the procession at large killing whomever they could. In the wake of this in 1956 the heavily armed Tibetan troops accompanying the procession encountered no attacks at all. That year the tribute was well conducted, but the tribals were also otherwise occupied to the

to direct encounters, as they used the dense forest cover for protection from Tibetan rifle-fire and pursuit. The pilgrims and even the armed militiamen themselves greatly feared such attacks as they knew they were powerless against the hidden bowmen with their lethal arrows—there was nowhere to run or hide on the narrow and crowded trails.<sup>33</sup> In some areas, such as the rugged La-dgu Lung-dgu, tribals intent on robbery would attack pilgrims when the *sho* became spread out in the difficult terrain. They stole jewelry, ritual items, supplies and even clothing, the Bhutanese raw silk shawls (*'bu-ras*) being a much-coveted item. During such thefts pilgrims would be hacked to death with swords and hatchets or thrown off cliffs and into rivers. In addition to death and injury, pilgrims also faced the prospect of being captured as slaves or hostages, especially if they were young or female, as these were standard practices of tribal warfare to the south. There were cases when ransoms secured the release of Tibetans captured on the procession. To protect themselves many pilgrims carried guns and swords. Since the turn of the century automatic pistols had been a favoured 'companion' of some of the wealthy pilgrims<sup>34</sup> and the administrators, as they were light and could be fired repeatedly, unlike the large Tibetan flintlock rifles.

Tribal attacks did pose mortal dangers. But for everybody, even the privileged, just walking in the procession involved general hardships of all types, which were unavoidable. In the extreme cases of pilgrims who became seriously ill and injured they would have to be left on the side of the trail and would die there, succumbing to infections or eventually starvation. Zhabs-dkar-ba described such conditions en route in 1812:

On the journey I saw some people close to death due to illness, and also the corpses of some that had died. For them I provided assistance by way of blessings for a safe after-death journey (*skyabs-'jug*) and the transference of consciousness (*'pho-ba*). I saw some who went on their way after abandoning their own sick friends, and the latter then wept since they were stuck and unable to carry on. I approached and consoled them saying, "The pilgrimage is not yet over. Rest for a few days and then continue when your strength is sufficient", and went on after leaving them medicine and provisions...When I saw that everyone suffered hardships compassion arose in me.<sup>35</sup>

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south, as they were having to deal with Indian government administrators and troops who wanted to bring their territory under state control.

<sup>33</sup> According to Central Tibetan informants, some Khams-pa pilgrims from Eastern Tibet were actually 'looking for a fight' at Tsa-ri, and disputes had already broken out between them and various tribesman at Mandala Plain before the procession departed. During the event there were tribal revenge attacks against the Khams-pas, who, being heavily armed, fought back vigorously. Khams-pa casualties from skirmishes were said to be high.

<sup>34</sup> See Bailey (1914:11). One of my informants undertook the ravine circuit as a young man with a group of his peers. None owned a firearm or had much money, so the six pilgrims purchased a rifle jointly and carried it on their pilgrimage around Tsa-ri to shoot tribals if need be. Pilgrim groups from Khams always attended processions heavily armed.

<sup>35</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:482).

His account remains a valid description of the experiences of pilgrims one hundred and fifty years later. Death by starvation was quite common in the final stages of the pilgrimage, especially for those who took the higher and harder route north over the Rib-la pass to Chos-zam to finish. Exhausted pilgrims would arrive at the resthouses in these places, highly dehydrated and starved from pushing themselves to reach the end, and although they were given *chang* and *tsam-pa* some were past the point of being able to ingest anything and died a day or two after.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike the upper circuits of the mountain there was no specific itinerary of power places and worship sites to visit in the ravines, or rituals and offerings to be performed. Tibetans commonly represent the mountain in one architectonic form as a great *stūpa*, and like the *stūpa* in the village they circumambulated it on the ravine circuit, nothing more, nothing less. The ritual requirement of the procession was that simple: a long and difficult walk in mountainous country. Of course, as with any circumambulation or similar ritual, it was believed that merit would not be generated, or at least its generation would be impaired, if pure motivation were not maintained during the practice. This must be based on faith in the Dharma, and a vigilance of, and control over negative propensities of body, speech and mind. There is a Tibetan proverb which captures this notion:

Whenever you visit a power place  
Don't let your body and mouth  
Part company with your mind.

And whenever you fight on the battlefield  
Don't let your sword and shield  
Part company with your hands.<sup>37</sup>

As with any circumambulation ritual, the pilgrims could increase the merit generated by chanting prayers or *mantra* to themselves as they moved along, which many did.<sup>38</sup> But because of the tortuous terrain and the need to move at the speed of the procession, pilgrims could not increase their merit by measuring their body-lengths along the path to perform a prostration circuit, as was often done on other popular mountain pilgrimages, such as the well-known Ti-se *gnas-skor* in far west Tibet.

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<sup>36</sup> Most elderly Tsa-ri-bas remember the average pilgrim death toll from all causes per event as between fifty and one hundred persons. The 1944 event saw several hundred die due mainly to tribal attacks, while the 1956 death toll was very low as the logistical support given by the government was of a higher standard than other years.

<sup>37</sup> KPT, interview.

<sup>38</sup> Of her aristocratic relatives Yuthok (1990:92-93) reports, "All along the way they said their prayers and were expected not to talk unnecessarily. They read [religious] texts whenever they stopped to rest and also at night by candlelight."

Besides the basic act of circumambulation and its possible amplifications, the other important ritual dimension of the procession for many pilgrims was the collection and consumption of empowered natural substances. This is a fundamental activity in Tibetan pilgrimage and ritual relationships with place. Because Tsa-ri was considered such a tremendously powerful environment, all its natural substances were sources of empowerment (*byin-rlabs*). Although the purity and potency of substances at the site was generally ranked in relation to height and their proximity to Pure Crystal Mountain's peak, materials collected low down on the outer ravine circuit were still highly prized by pilgrims. Their value was high because of the rarity and difficulty of their collection—only once every twelve years under very difficult conditions; and also by association with the ideology of the procession itself—that it was considered extremely efficacious for the cleansing of pollution (*sgrib*), the karmic purification of bad deeds (*sdig*) and for increasing the chances of higher rebirths. Such was the power of the environment through which one processed.

Collection of materials included bamboo, soil (sometimes called *gnas-sa*), stones (*gnas-rdo*) and water. Pilgrims would store small quantities of these substances in their garment pockets, or fill containers with them as they travelled. Or they might be consumed on the spot. Such was often the case with water, and pilgrims would drink small amounts from the many streams that flowed down from Pure Crystal Mountain's peak high above, washing down the empowerment of the sublime abode of the deities. Some referred to this water as *chu 'gro-ba sgröl-ba*, 'the water which liberates living beings [from *samsāra*]'. Bhutanese pilgrims found and collected certain leaves, such as betel, and nuts from various trees they knew of for making wads of pān. For them this was an enjoyable way of being empowered by consuming the place. Many of the items and substances collected were carried back to pilgrims' home regions to be distributed to the fortunate and used as highly valued, portable sources of the mountain's power.<sup>39</sup>

After the Takshing cemetery the procession reached the site of Bya-chu-sgang rDo-ring Tshul-khang ('rDo-ring rest-house [of] Bya river spur').<sup>40</sup> This hut, built with woven cane walls in the tribal style, was the first contact the pilgrims had with their 'civilisation' since departing on the procession. Here in 1956 the pilgrims were met by Tibetanised tribal people

<sup>39</sup> On the very high value placed upon such materials by some, a Bhutanese informant related: "I collected many pieces of empowered bamboo on the ravine circuit, and gave it all to my grateful friends at home as they could not make the trip. Years later, after Tibet and Tsa-ri were closed by the Chinese, I thought of getting a small bamboo back from my friends as I had kept none myself. But not one would part with any, even when I offered to buy it back for a tidy sum, they said it was far too precious." TW, interview.

<sup>40</sup> A rare Bhutanese map of the Tsa-ri *rong-skor* (see plates 10, 11) kept at rTa-mgo monastery near Thimphu shows a thatched bamboo hut marked with this name near the end of the route in the lower part of Bya-yul. The noble family of rDo-ring, after whom the resthouse is named, was one of the aristocratic 'sponsors' of the ravine circuit.

from Bya-yul, whom the authorities had sent with many sacks of popped corn, which they distributed in one *bre* rations to famished pilgrims. It was here that the procession divided into two groups, depending mainly on their onward travel plans upon completion of the circuit. One group continued west passing through the lower gorges of the Bya river (= Subansiri river), then followed the northern tributary up to gSang-ngags Chos-gling monastery to finish. As these peoples from western and southern parts of Tibet and from Bhutan had all initially passed through here en route to Maṇḍala Plain they had closed their great ritual circle around Pure Crystal Mountain. The second group headed due north, ascending the valley of the Yul-smad river immediately west of the mountain, then crossed the Rib pass to complete their circle at Chos-zam. From here they would cross the passes north and east heading for their home places in central and eastern Tibet. With the pilgrimage completed no Tibetan would venture back down into the ravines of Tsa-ri for another twelve years.

### *Endings and New Beginnings*

As all the thousands of pilgrims departed from Chos-zam early in the monkey year, few were aware of a miraculous event that was taking place in the area. An auspicious sign had attended every ravine circuit procession for as long as local people could remember. At the beginning of every monkey year a female deer (*sha-ba*) miraculously grew a set of antlers.<sup>41</sup> This deer always lived alone, quite apart from all other animals. It was believed to be an incarnation of the Buddha. Towards the end of the monkey year it would die of natural causes. A Tsa-ri-ba's tale relates the death of this deer as a moral against taking life in the precincts of this great power place:

One day, towards the end of the monkey year, around the Jewel Hill behind the pilgrim's resthouse at Rib pass, rainbows appeared all day and a light like a burning fire appeared throughout the night. A local herdsman, g.Yag-rdzi Zla-ba Grags-pa, saw this and thought to himself, 'These are very auspicious signs, like those which appear when a special lama is born or something.' He went over to the hill and saw a female deer which had a set of miraculous antlers laying on the ground, slowly dying. He was about to kill it and cut off the antlers to keep. Just then the *dākinī* Seng-ge gDong-pa-can appeared and told him, "Do not kill this female deer, or cut off her antlers. If you do you will have great misfortune, you won't take a rebirth for another five thousand years!" So Zla-ba Grags-pa didn't cut off the antlers in heed of the warning. The deer died and its body went to the northern kingdom of Shambhala."<sup>42</sup>

As the monkey year drew to a close and the bird year arrived a new female deer was born

<sup>41</sup> At Chos-zam a set of these antlers was installed in a small shrine at the entrance to the bridge. The villagers had several other specimens which were kept at various resthouses in the district and used to bless pilgrims. The antlers were taken to other parts of Tibet on the annual begging tours by the Tsa-ri-bas, who told the story of their miraculous origins and blessed those who gave them donations.

<sup>42</sup> SP, SG interviews.

there. It too would wander the powerful mountain in solitude for another twelve years until its own miraculous transformation, death and passage to a Buddhafield marked another procession of the ravines of Tsa-ri.

## Chapter Seven

# Status, Identity and Faith

## The Significations of *Rong-skor* and *Klo-rdzong* Practice

### *Introduction*

It is possible, having read the preceding account, to interpret the entire ritual scenario that took place during ravine circuits at Tsa-ri as a kind of exercise in Buddhist subjugation (*'dul-ba*) of 'barbarian' borderland peoples and what they represented. I should make it clear from the beginning that in my thinking, and that of my informants, the relations between Tibetan and tribal populations defined by the ravine circuit and *klo-rdzong* rituals could not be regarded as *exercises* in subjugation. But what then did characterize the relationship between the three parties involved: the Tibetan state and its supporters, who regularly invested so many resources in staging this ritual in a remote, rugged border region; pilgrims of pan-Tibetan origins, who participated in such large numbers while fully aware of the high risk of death through accident, starvation or murder or, at the very least, of the great hardships to be endured; and Arunachal tribal groups, who faced the possibility of armed resistance or arrest from Tibetan forces during the ravine circuit or the *klo-rdzong*?

In this section I want to demonstrate that for both populations the event was in part about generating and accumulating prestige or status. For the Tibetan state and its supporters it was about the exercise of power and the need to be seen to be able to do so in certain circumstances. It also concerned the definition and maintenance of identities. For the ordinary pilgrims it was about an opportunity to transform themselves in various ways via their exercise of faith in the face of great risk and adversity. To arrive at these initial conclusions about the meaning of the twelve-yearly event at Tsa-ri I present below an analysis of materials which I have selected on the basis of some analytical 'frames' or contexts, which I identify as social and political, ethnic and geographical, and religious. In applying these familiar rubrics I do not intend to be entirely consistent, and will mix *emics* and *etics*, and at times question these categories themselves.

### *History, Society and Politics*

#### i. Origin Schemata

Unlike other major Tibetan pilgrimages that have guide-books containing collections of narratives and other data purporting to explain their origins, the ravine circuit has no written sources. There is only a small collection of materials, some of which follow a familiar

Tibetan pattern by trying to fix, retrospectively, the precedent for such a ritual in the actions of some former saint or culture hero, and others which indicate a definite time when the ritual was 'invented'. I will begin by mentioning examples of the first type to demonstrate the range of alternative explanations Tibetans have generated, in the absence of written guide-books, for the origins of the ritual. However, it is the latter type of material that primarily concerns us here.

According to the oral histories of some Tsa-ri-bas it was the Indian Tantrist Padmasambhava who first performed a *rong-skor* when he opened the southern door to Tsa-ri, so that the present procession follows in his footsteps. Another oral source states that when the 'Brug-pa 'Gro-mgon bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan opened the northern door, "...he circled about half the *rong-bskor*, which was originally called the *bskor-chen-mo*".<sup>1</sup> Two textual accounts can be added here. In a chapter of a version of the Ge-sar epic, Seng-chen rGyal-po is also credited with opening the door to Tsa-ri. It is said, "He established [there] a basis for prostrations and circumambulations in order to cleanse the bad deeds of the future generations of Tibet, then he stated in his own words, 'It is *tsa tsa* to cleanse the karmic defilements of all sentient beings who make a circumambulation in this [place] in the year of the monkey [and] bird', thus bestowing the name of Tsa-ri-tra Dag-pa Shel-ri on that [place]."<sup>2</sup> Although the *rong-skor* is not specifically mentioned, the fixing of the ritual space, ritual time and 'moral function' of the event are all encoded into this brief passage. An alternative to this is given in a modern Tibetan encyclopedia-dictionary, under the entry *Tsa-ri*: "It is the *gnas-ri* of Klo-yul [in] the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The custom of going on the *rong-skor* with the coming of the monkey year was introduced here by the bKa'-brgyud-pa gTsang-pa rGya-ras Ye-shes rDo-rje."<sup>3</sup> We are by now familiar with Padma dKar-po's account of gTsang-pa rGya-ras at Tsa-ri, which does not mention the *rong-skor* or the southern area, but here again, in general, the narrative fixes ritual space and ritual time<sup>4</sup> in order.

These brief accounts of the ritual's origin all project or imply purpose or intent: that of opening and setting in order all features and events of future importance. However, the second set of accounts seems to me to provide, at least in part, an example of how the initially mundane and the arbitrary or accidental can attain ritual signification through

<sup>1</sup> sLob-dpon bSod-nams bZang-po (c.1982:10).

<sup>2</sup> *Mon-gling g.yul 'gyed* (1982:498-99). I cannot translate the expression *tsa tsa* here, which appears to be idiomatic and intended as a false etymology of Tsa-ri-tra.

<sup>3</sup> *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.2, p.2183.

<sup>4</sup> Other historical sources confirm the date of gTsang-pa rGya-ras' visit to Tsa-ri as the year *sa-sprel* (=1188). This can be calculated from the dates given in his brief biography (intro. to Padma dKar-po 1982: nya-ta) which show he was there in his 29th year, 1188. *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.3, p.3225 gives this as the year he revealed the *Ro-snyoms* gter-ma cycle, and a version of his long biography states that he visited Tsa-ri immediately after doing this (the rDzong-khul edition, Darjeeling 1982:241).



routinisation and repetition.<sup>5</sup> There are two short oral narratives which state that the route of the ravine circuit was first 'opened' by chance by a 'Brug-pa lama, where escape from the scene of a crime of passion and his act of penance are the initial events in the origin scheme:

In later times, there was one called lama Blo-gros rGya-mtsho, the personal disciple of lama Shakya Rin-chen in rKong-bu Shel-stod who was the rebirth of Mi-pham Blo-gros. He [Blo-gros rGya-mtsho] was the son of an army officer (*zhal-ngo*) from sGron Ka-ru-brag. Because he murdered a man on account of a woman, he fled into the ravines (*rong*), and from the river junction of the lower country he went up. He arrived at Klo Mi-Khyim-bdun. After that he went before his lama. He completed a great deal of penance [for the killing], [and set off] according to the lama's prophecy, "Go to meditate in the rNgams-pa sGra-sgrog cemetery at Tsa-ri. You will obtain the Mahāmudrā *siddhis*." And although many of the Klo-pa's poison arrows pierced him they were unable to harm him as his faith had grown. A connection between the Klo-pas and the Tibetan people arose after this, and the practice of the great *rong-skor* was established [by] the Sle-lung [rJe-drung] bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje in accordance with a prophecy of O-rgyan Rin-po-che. With patronage by a Dalai Lama's mother the government made the Klo-pa tribute (*klo-rdzong*).<sup>6</sup>

A second version agrees with this and points out that Blo-gros rGya-mtsho's journey traced the whole ravine circuit in reverse order up to Klo Mi-Khyim-bdun from the south, then north and west over to gSang-sngags Chos-gling monastery to visit his lama, and finally south again to the Tantric charnel ground of rNgams-pa sGra-sgrog where he performed his meditations. Before proceeding with further historical analysis we should pause to reflect that the tale of Blo-gros rGya-mtsho itself is also a dramatic symbol of the Tibetan Buddhist ideology of ravine circuit performance: the accumulation of karmic defilements, a journey around, together with sincere Buddhist practice at Tsa-ri for purification, and the attainment of benefits in this life and, by karmic extension, future lives as well.

The second version adds,

They used to have a *rong-skor* every twelve years in the monkey year. That is the year in which the Sixth Dalai Lama's mother died, her death anniversary. When she died the Sixth Dalai Lama asked many people, all his confidants and teachers, what to do. Sle-lung rJe-drung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje, also known as Blo-bzang 'Phrin-las, was on good terms with him and he suggested to the Dalai Lama that there were three different circuits to go around Tsa-ri, and so far the *rtse-skor* and the *gzhung-skor* had been opened but not the one in the ravine (*rong*) area.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This point is made eloquently by Smith (1982:chapt.4), and his comments can be read profitably together with Bourdieu's (1977:171-183) discussion of symbolic capital and habitus.

<sup>6</sup> sLob-dpon bSod-nams bZang-po (c.1982:14).

<sup>7</sup> SG, interview.

## ii. Historical Materials

I propose now to focus on how Blo-gros rGya-mtsho's 'escape route' was formally established as a pilgrimage route in the early eighteenth century and then maintained by the newly founded dGe-lugs-pa state and their aristocratic patrons. Such a historical investigation is a difficult, and at this stage, incomplete task. But what information we can bring together is, I feel, very important for an understanding of the ravine circuit's social significance in Tibet.

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The first reference in the narratives above to the Sle-lung rJe-drung and 'a Dalai Lama's mother' is straightforward, but the second raises a host of historical and chronological difficulties which I am not in a position to solve at present. The problems become clear when we consider the known dates of important events which relate the Sle-lung rJe-drung, the Sixth Dalai Lama and Tsa-ri together:<sup>8</sup>

1682 Sixth Dalai Lama born

1697 Sle-lung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje born

1703-4 Sle-lung meets Sixth Dalai Lama to receive ordination

1704 *shing-sprel-lo*

1705-6 Sle-lung's second meeting with Sixth Dalai Lama

1706 Sixth Dalai Lama dies according to many historical sources

1710 Sixth Dalai Lama visits Tsa-ri incognito according to his 'secret biography' (*gsang-rnam*); Sle-lung meets seventh Dalai Lama

1716 *me-sprel-lo*

1719-20 Sle-lung, aged 23, visits Tsa-ri

1728 *sa-sprel-lo*

1740 *lcags-sprel-lo*

Independent confirmation that the ravine circuit was being performed every twelve years by about the middle of the eighteenth century is found in a small guide-book by gTer-ston gNam-lcags rTsa-gsum Gling-pa. He was a contemporary of Sle-lung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje, Chos-rje Gling-pa (b.1682) and Kah-thog Tshe-dbang Nor-bu (1698-1755).<sup>9</sup> But concerning a chronology, amongst other questions we must ask when did the Dalai Lama's mother die, and was it a monkey year? Did Sle-lung meet the Dalai Lama apart from when he was a child (this may have been so if the latter tradition was formulated with the *gsang-rnam* in mind)? What monkey year was the first *rong-skor* performed in? I will need access to more Tibetan historical sources than I have at present before these questions can be answered.

<sup>8</sup> Details of meetings between the two and dates are found in Aris (1988:159-60); Shakabpa (1988:130); *gSung-'bum dKar-chag* (1990:341-2); Sle-lung's visit to Tsa-ri is described in Sle-lung rJe-drung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje (*Collected Works*, vol.1:447-70).

<sup>9</sup> gNam-lcags rTsa-gsum Gling-pa (1986:12a-b), / *lo bcu gnyis la rong skor che ba'o /*.

Leaving aside the difficulty of establishing the exact details of persons involved, what is of interest is the relatively new dGe-lugs-pa state and its supporters becoming involved in Tsa-ri at this time. There were a number of personal, political and religious factors which shaped such an involvement. I will mention just a few of them.

To begin with, there is the visit to Tsa-ri by the 'founding father' of the dGe-lugs-pa school, Tsong-kha-pa himself. Practitioners in the bKa'-gdams-pa or later dGe-lugs-pa who were inclined towards Tantra were no less interested in Tsa-ri than their bKa'-brgyud-pa contemporaries. Tsong-kha-pa's biography records that he performed pilgrimage there in the summer of 1395, and had various powerful experiences.<sup>10</sup> The development of a cult of Tsong-kha-pa as the leading dGe-lugs-pa 'saint' was already strong by the time the dGa'-ldan Pho-brang came to power in Tibet during the mid-seventeenth century. As with the cults of Tibetan and Buddhist 'saints' in general, the holy places at which they attained sublime meditative experiences, or even visited, ranked especially highly as desirable places of pilgrimage and practice.<sup>11</sup>

Related to this is the general dGe-lugs-pa interest and involvement in the Tantric system of Mahāmudrā, and in particular the lineages of Saṃvara Tantrism in Tibet.<sup>12</sup> Many figures from this tradition, including Tsong-kha-pa, participated in the lineages of *anuttarayoga-tantra* based on this archetype deity. The pilgrimage and retreat places in Tibet associated with this Tantric cycle, such as Ti-se, Tsa-ri, lHa-mo-mkhar and others in which the bKa'-brgyud-pa schools had maintained a strong and long-term interest became increasingly important to the dGe-lugs-pa practitioners over the centuries. Later, by way of the cult of many of their past 'Worthy Ones' who had visited such sites they came to interest the school as a whole, and ultimately in some cases the Tibetan Government (which was at the time in many respects a dGe-lugs-pa hierarchy). A good example of this 'interest' is the assimilation of the Indian Tantric *pīṭha* of Devikoṭa to the site of Pha-bong-kha near Se-ra monastery in Lhasa by dGe-lugs-pa lamas probably early in, or prior to, the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup>

The rule of the dGa'-ldan Pho-brang instituted right across Tibet from the mid-seventeenth century issued in an era of continuous domination of religio-political life by the dGe-lugs-pa

<sup>10</sup> Kaschewsky (1971, 1 Teil:131).

<sup>11</sup> It is significant here that despite the bKa'-brgyud-pa 'monopoly' over the Tsa-ri traditions, one of the most popular short prayers to the mountain is attributed to Tsong-kha-pa. See bsTan-'dzin Chos-kyi Blo-gros, colophon to *La-phyi gnas-yig* (Delhi edition, 1983:406-7), also interview with SG.

<sup>12</sup> Willis (1985:308-11) points out this dGe-lugs-pa participation, beginning with Tsong-kha-pa, in what are often considered in many Western sources as bKa'-brgyud-pa lineages only. On 'dGe-lugs siddhas' meditating at Tsa-ri and related sites see De Rossi-Filibeck (1988:96).

<sup>13</sup> See the dGe-lugs-pa guide-book for this site, *Pha-bong-kha'i dkar-chag* by dByams-can dGyes-pa'i-blo-gros; also the Fifth Dalai Lama mentions the tradition in one of his works so we have a date for it during his lifetime; see Roerich (1979:729, n.2).

and their supporters. Already during the 'reign' of the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent, *sDe-srid* Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho, the dGe-lugs-pa set about 'converting' all the major and minor monastic institutions throughout Tibet, and regulating them in line with uniform, centralised monastic codes and fiscal controls. We know that when the Lhasa regime took control of bKa'-brgyud-pa monasteries and shrines at the related Western Tibetan pilgrimage places of La-phyi and Ti-se they initially gave them support, but this soon ceased and led to the decline of various sites during the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> However, during this same period of Lhasa's ambivalence towards the holy mountains of Cakrasaṃvara in far distant Western Tibet, these authorities seem to have become increasingly interested and involved in Tsa-ri and its traditions. This was not just by way of patronising the ravine circuit and *klo-rdzong*. For example, during his personal pilgrimage to Tsa-ri in 1794 the influential aristocrat rDo-ring *bka'-blon* bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor visited the meditation cave of Tsong-kha-pa upon the high slopes of Dag-pa Shel-ri. He details how the damaged cave was restored by the government using corvée labor, and also notes the setting up of a large image of the saint at the site.<sup>15</sup>

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Throughout this work I have argued that for Tibetans the status (i.e. physical purity, social, karmic, etc.) of persons is related to, and can be increased by association with particular places. In some cases, with persons of high standing, the reverse is also true, for example Tsong-kha-pa. Increasing the prestige or value of a place in this way usually requires actual physical presence by a particular saint, or other high-ranking person. It is another example of empowerment through physical contact. My *etic* intuition also tells me that when a person of very high status is even indirectly associated with a place, this increases its importance to others. It is from this point of view that we must view as socially significant the many indirect connections between the Fifth<sup>16</sup> and Sixth Dalai Lamas and Tsa-ri at the time the *rong-skor* and *klo-rdzong* began.

Already in the life of the Fifth Dalai Lama there was a connection with Tsa-ri through his natal place and personal religious practice and writings.<sup>17</sup> His family connection to the Byang 'Brug-pa at gSang-sngags Chos-gling, the custodians of Tsa-ri, was strong, as the Fifth 'Brug-chen, dPag-bsam dBang-po, was his cousin. The Fifth Dalai Lama appears to

<sup>14</sup> Huber (1989:88).

<sup>15</sup> bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1043-4).

<sup>16</sup> Willis (1985:311, n.15) has made the important point that most of the dGe-lugs-pa Mahāmudrā siddhas after Tsong-kha-pa had personal connections with the first five Dalai Lamas, and that "...through this particular set of lives, one can observe fairly directly the intricate interweaving of politics and religion in Tibet during this period." (p.311).

<sup>17</sup> In his *gSang-rnam* ('secret biography') the Fifth Dalai Lama records having a vision of the Tsa-ri Field-protector who was active in his birth place at 'Phyong-rgyas; see Karmay (1988:29); he also composed a prayer for peace to this deity entitled *Zhing skyong seng ge gdong can gyi las byang gnam lcags spu gri*, see Tohoku Cat. no.5693.

have had respect for the scholarship of Padma dKar-po, the great sixteenth century 'Brug-chen whose activities at Tsa-ri were so important. There was for a period preferential treatment of the Byang 'Brug by the dGe-lugs-pa state at this time, especially in the light of the difficult relations they had with both the Karma-pa sect and their rival 'Brug-pa lineage in Bhutan.<sup>18</sup>

The Sixth Dalai Lama and his family came from Mon-yul, an adjacent borderland area to the west of Tsa-ri. There is evidence that he had knowledge of, or took a special interest in Tsa-ri and its traditions.<sup>19</sup> If one accepts the attribution to the Sixth Dalai Lama of the well-known song beginning *Dag-pa shel-ri gangs-chu*, it must be acknowledged that he had an in-depth understanding of Tsa-ri and its traditions. This dense six-line verse is packed with references to the mountain's potent natural substances and specific Tantric cult.<sup>20</sup> A passage in his 'secret biography' (*gsang-rnam*) even has him go on pilgrimage to Tsa-ri in 1710 where he performed Tantric practice at Cig-car.<sup>21</sup> The other major figure in our accounts, the Sle-lung rJe-drung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje (alias Blo-bzang 'Phrin-las), was himself from a lHo-kha family and he, as we know from his biography, made an extensive tour of Tsa-ri and the adjacent borderlands.

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At this point one could continue to catalogue the connections—and there are many—of further Dalai Lamas,<sup>22</sup> highly ranked *sDe-dpon* and *Yab-gzhis* families and important clerics with Tsa-ri and surrounding regions, and advance these as reasons why the mountain became 'chosen' and remained important to the dGe-lugs-pa theocracy and their supporters. I think this is certainly part of the picture behind the development of the ravine circuit tradition. But it is perhaps more important to recognise a basic historical fact in such an accounting: it is precisely high-ranking aristocrats and lamas, their lives and their resources that are responsible for the origins and maintenance of this ritual.

### iii. Public Rituals in the Political and Social Environment

There are by now a few time-honoured Western equations of social relations found in

<sup>18</sup> Smith (1970:16-18). And, in view of their strategic position on the Southern border the Dalai Lama accorded both 'Brug-pa and Dwags-po incarnations highest official ranking immediately after himself, and even higher at the time than the Paṅ-chen Lama.

<sup>19</sup> Karmay (1988:29), Martin (1988:363) and Aris (1988:159).

<sup>20</sup> This song has recently been subject to 'philological overkill', for which see Back (1985:319-29), Martin (1988:349-63) and Sorensen (1988:272-4; 1990:113-42), and there is now no doubt about its subject matter or the knowledge of Tsa-ri required to compose such a verse.

<sup>21</sup> *Tshang dbyangs rgya mtsho'i gsang rnam* (1981:50-51); Aris (1988:188-9).

<sup>22</sup> For a twentieth-century example we might list the Thirteenth Dalai Lama whose family was from Glang-mdun in Dwags-po close to Tsa-ri. Aside from the claims about the Sixth Dalai Lama, the Thirteenth was the only incarnation to perform a pilgrimage to Tsa-ri, which he did in 1900.

Buddhist Studies: that non-renunciant lay persons support the sangha as a means of earning merit to attain better rebirths, and that rulers and ruling elites patronise the sangha and Buddhism in general to gain the legitimacy they need for the continued exercise of their powers. These statements are so universal that they need to be carefully tested and qualified in detail for any particular Buddhist place and time to see exactly what 'truth' they might contain as descriptions of Buddhist social processes.

For Tibetans themselves the linkage between power, status and authority on the one hand, and services to, or support of religion on the other has a long history. One finds constant reference in Tibetan histories and biographies to the notion that the wealthy and high-ranking, both laity and clerics, patronised Buddhism in all ways, and that they were 'great' and 'virtuous' because of this. In the case of the central Tibetan polity from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries we find in general that the distinction and separation between rulers and ruling elites and the sangha have collapsed. From the founding of the dGa'-Idan Pho-brang government the legitimacy of Buddhism, its support, and the exercise of power were all explicitly united. Goldstein has characterised this as follows:

He [the Fifth Dalai Lama] set out to create a perfect environment for the practice of Tibetan Buddhism in general and for the Gelugpa sect in particular...The government expressed its religious ideology with the term *chösi nyitrel* [chos-srid gnyis-'brel], which translates as "religion and political affairs joined together." The [dGe-lugs-pa] monks expressed this in the saying, "Ganden Photrang [the Tibetan government] is the head of the religion and the patron of the religion."<sup>23</sup>

According to this anyone who was involved in government was a patron of Buddhism, and this not only included many high-ranking incarnations and various other clerics but members from most of the aristocratic families in Central and Western Tibet who constituted entirely the ranks of lay government officials.

It is quite clear that at the level of the state as a whole, supporting religion meant serving its own interests. Just how this worked in practice will be discussed below. But at the level of the individual officers of the state and their supporters this was also true. This is more obvious for clerical government posts, but not so for those held by the laity. A Tibetan Buddhist 'reading' of an aristocratic family or a nobleman sponsoring rituals such as the Tsa-ri *rong-skor* and *klo-rdzong* would be that it was a merit-generating activity and a virtuous deed in the services of the Dharma. These are the terms by which such activities would have been defined by the actors themselves. However, there are other ways to consider such sponsorship of ritual and ceremony.

We know that in general, the Tibetan government allotted a portion of its annual income for

<sup>23</sup> Goldstein (1989:1-2).

grants to finance religious ceremonies.<sup>24</sup> There have been few in-depth studies of large rituals that involved the Tibetan state, but Karsten's work on the *ya-sor* shows that the high-ranking aristocratic lay officials had to donate men and also finance the parades. He describes this as a 'duty', as being 'obligatory', and that the organising, arranging and financing (which was a great expense) 'would show their capacity for government posts.'<sup>25</sup> Goldstein also notes the 'frequent necessity of large gifts to secure the higher positions [of government]', and the great expenses of ceremonial responsibilities that characterised the political mobility of the upper aristocracy in Tibet.<sup>26</sup> These comments are of particular interest, as they suggest that such activities requiring the investment of material capital could generate the necessary 'symbolic capital' to make it into important government posts. The higher the ranking one attained the closer one got to the 'centre' and its power, i.e. access to the Dalai Lama, the Regent and the *bka'-shag* which was the highest lay political body in Tibet and a stronghold of the nobility. Petech's analysis of Tibetan aristocratic political life concludes that, "...the social and political status of the nobility as a whole could oscillate only between very narrow limits", and that in terms of real access to power "...social differences within the aristocracy were much more marked than it appeared on the surface."<sup>27</sup> It was a tight and competitive system, and the patronage of rituals and ceremonial was a possible, and at times necessary avenue for status maintenance and mobility within it.

I suggest that the involvements of specific persons, such as Dalai Lamas and their families, and other eminent lamas, clerics and aristocrats in the origins, maintenance and orchestration of the Tsa-ri *rong-skor* and *klo-rdzong* for two hundred and fifty years were as much related to the need for generating social prestige within a small echelon of Tibetan society as they were about services to Buddhism and the generation of merit. But what about the involvements of the Tibetan government or state taken as a whole? Can the large role we know they played be defined only in terms of their own ideology as patron of Buddhism?

In an article reflecting on the foundation of Tibetan and Himalayan states, and the processes for the legitimation of their powers and authority Macdonald has drawn attention to 'theatrical representation' of powers and the role played here by state-organised rituals. He argues that the Lha-sa *smon-lam chen-mo* "...ceremonies are a public display of the state's monopoly of temporal power and of the Buddha's and the lama's monopoly of spiritual power; they restructure the Tibetan social and religious order."<sup>28</sup> We must consider whether any of these

<sup>24</sup> Carrasco (1959:123). Some of this was specifically allocated for certain rituals and sites, Goldstein (1989:2).

<sup>25</sup> Karsten (1983:118).

<sup>26</sup> Goldstein (1989:17).

<sup>27</sup> Petech (1973:17,19).

<sup>28</sup> Macdonald (1987:10-11).

types of observations apply to Tibetan state organisation, or aristocratic patronage of *rong-skor* and *klo-rdzong* rituals? As a prelude it is germane to point out that the 'temporal dramatics' accompanying the *smon-lam chen-mo* were initiated in the same general era, that is the development of a new Tibetan state, as the *rong-skor* and *klo-rdzong*.<sup>29</sup>

I have noted above that from a Tibetan point of view we cannot consider the *rong-skor* and *klo-rdzong* rituals as exercises in subjugation and conversion. However, like the rituals cited by Macdonald, they can be read by an outsider as representations of the powers of the Tibetan Buddhist state as a religio-political matrix. In both the tribute ceremony and procession the Tibetan government's religious and temporal authority are represented.

Perhaps the primary symbol here of the ideology of the 'combination' of both these types of authority in the Tibetan system is found in the main palladia or sacra<sup>30</sup> which accompanied the entire proceedings: the ceremonial robes of the Dalai Lama himself carried by the clerical official from Lhasa. As Westerners it is well for us to remember here that such an item was more than merely 'symbolic' to Tibetans. They believed the garment possessed empowerment (*byin-can*) through physical contact with the Dalai Lama's person. His power, and the combination of authority which he as head of state embodied, were in effect substantially present during the rituals.

Another such symbol was the use of space in the conducting of the tribute. The ceremonial tents, themselves no less markers of rank and power in Tibetan society than the castle, were pitched in the centre of a place designated as a *maṅḍala*, and to those that knew it, as the site of Ge-sar's victory camp. It was here in this centre that representatives of religious and temporal authority resided, and presided in their turn over both political negotiations and Buddhist protective rites for the success of the procession. And it was known to all those on the periphery that here too lay the source and control of the various material forms of the state's authority and efficacy attendant on the proceedings: the tribute goods, the armed troops, the local guides, translators and other workers, the supplementary food supplies, and so on. Many of these forms featured again during the course of the procession.

I noted briefly in my preceding account that the pilgrims who participated considered the government and the aristocrats who were involved as 'sponsors' or 'donors' (*sbyin-bdag*), and all the resources that they marshalled as 'gifts' (*spyin/sbyin-pa*, or 'alms' in a more Buddhist sense). Although they were conceived of as form of meritorious donation, it is worth considering the actual origins of these resources. The majority of personnel under government service for the event, troops included, were involved on the basis of special corvée obligations, and others, such as the Tibetanized tribal guides, received their equipment

<sup>29</sup> By the Fifth Dalai Lama himself; see Karsten (1983:117).

<sup>30</sup> C.f. Tambiah (1985:327-30).



as a one-off payment. Most of the tribute goods were collected from the populace in the form of a purpose-designed tax for the event, as was usual in the Tibetan fiscal system. Aristocratic houses, such as rDo-ring, who 'donated' food, redirected production which they obtained by free peasant labour under the obligation of the *khral-rten* contract, or which they collected as a direct tax. To me as an 'outsider' (*phyi-pa*) it seems very important that the orchestration and redirection constituting these Tibetan economic processes are perceived from the point of view of the 'insiders' (*nang-pa*) in terms of 'donor' and 'gift' in the context of ritual sponsorship. Such identification serves to increase the symbolic value of all forms of patronage of such rituals. Those identified as the patrons can be seen to have potential benefits both in terms of status-generation within their own ranks, as I have discussed, and also stand to gain prestige in the eyes of the population at large.

At Tsa-ri, the displays of the powers of the state and its elite supporters were consumed by an audience of thousands of women and men from every part of the Tibetan Buddhist world. The *rong-skor* and *klo-rdzong* provided a setting to dramatize dimensions of the state's authority to a more or less complete cross-section of its constituents. And the atmosphere in this setting was already charged with a certain degree of anticipation. Every pilgrim knew in advance, by way of reputation, the personal challenges and dangers they and others would have to face during the procession. This only served to lend importance to the role that the government's various supports (magico-religious, logistical, material and military) might play in ensuring their safe and successful completion of the event.

### *Ethnicity and Geography*

From the Mon-yul corridor westward the Grand Himalaya has numerous passes and travel routes which Tibetans have long used to cross the great divide to the southern flank of the mountains and the plains of India beyond. Klo-yul, or the Subansiri basin to the south of Tsa-ri, was not traversed by them for either trade or pilgrimage. It formed a vast geographical and ethnic barrier to Tibetan penetration from the north, the only major exception to this being the twelve-yearly ravine circuit procession.

Given the general lack of formal or sustained contacts between Tibetans and their tribal neighbors along this extensive borderland, the ravine circuit, and the *klo-rdzong* in particular, constituted a unique political institution, one in which the relationship was mediated through ritual. The oral sources tell us that the *klo-rdzong* ceremonies were part of the ritual schedule for the pilgrimage event right from the time of its inception, and indeed, it was only by virtue of them that the event could have been introduced in the first place. We also have written records of the practice of *klo-rdzong*, and the reasons for its maintenance dating from the early nineteenth century.

It is only in the context of such social relations between Tibetans and the Subansiri tribes that some of the forms and significations of the ravine circuit and *klo-rdzong* ceremonies can be appreciated. Almost all my material on the ravine circuit and *klo-rdzong* comes from the Tibetan point of view. However, there is some possibility of appreciating ways in which the Subansiri tribes constructed their relations with the Tibetans through these rituals and the events surrounding them. Prior to forced administrative and military contacts with the Indian state in the 1950s the upper Subansiri basin and its peoples were virtually unknown to outsiders. Apart from Tibetan sources, our most substantial and reliable ethnographic record is provided by the field work of Führer-Haimendorf in the region during 1944-45 and 1962, and the visit of Betts (= Graham Bower) in 1946-48.<sup>31</sup> Using this and some related materials from other areas there are at least three aspects of the relationship that we can consider from the tribal position. These are the institution of *rdzong*, the continued tribal hostility towards Tibetan pilgrimage processions, and sacrifice and the swearing of blood-oaths. An analysis of these aspects leads us to ask what exactly is 'Tibetan' or 'Buddhist' about the *klo-rdzong* as a ritual exchange regularly orchestrated and patronised by the Tibetan Buddhist state, and also how is identity and self-definition an issue here, and how is status a motivation from the tribal point of view?

#### i. The Institution of *rDzong*

For my informants, the use of the term *rdzong* to describe the government negotiations with the tribals at Tsa-ri chiefly denotes the giving of goods in return for safe passage of pilgrim processions. Under *rdzong* Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, p.469, has an entry, "fee for safe-conduct", which agrees with this, but also supplies, "the act of accompanying, escorting". It is possible that in a general sense the term could also have been used to mean the government presence and support throughout the pilgrimage. Tibetan sources also state that for their part the tribespeople who participated in the rituals considered the yaks they were given for sacrifice as the actual *klo-rdzong*. Above I have translated *rdzong* using 'tribute', as this captures well the nature of the transaction from the point of view of the Tibetans. But it might just as well be used to describe the tribal point of view. It is worth noting here that the word 'tribute' in standard English does not only define a political relation of submission between two parties, but can also mean a payment as 'a price of peace or protection'.<sup>32</sup>

Tribute as a form of political relation was often practised by Tibetan rulers in conjunction

<sup>31</sup> See Führer-Haimendorf (1955;1967;1982) and his own bibliography (1955:238); Betts (1949;1953). The only other recorded major visit by outsiders to the area was the so-called Miri Mission, a semi-military expedition dispatched by the colonial government of India during the winter of 1911-12.

<sup>32</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p.1145: 'money or equivalent paid periodically by one state or ruler to another in acknowledgment of submission or as a price of peace or protection'.

with neighboring states in high Asia; however, its use at Tsa-ri is not necessarily a Tibetan innovation, but a tribal one. Throughout the tribal hill districts of what is now Arunachal Pradesh, and in parts of Assam, the practice of tribute was a common form of political relation both between tribes, and between tribes and external powers, such as the British colonial rulers of India.<sup>33</sup> Fürer-Haimendorf reports that the semi-nomadic Hill Miris, most likely one of the tribes involved at Tsa-ri, were paid a form of tribute (originally paid in produce, later in cash), called *posa*, by the government. Each party had its own view of the practice: the Miri saw the tribute as a kind of rent for the use of their ancestral hunting lands by recent Assamese settlers; the government, however, saw it as a fee or payment with which the hill tribe could be bought off from raiding the plains.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that Tibetans also regarded the *klo-rdzong* as a pay-off to stop attacks. We are left to pose the question whether at Tsa-ri the tribes also saw it in this way or regarded the payment as a kind of rent for the temporary use of their territory.

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## ii. The Logic of Continued Tribal Hostilities.

If Tibetans are asked about why the tribals attacked, stole from, and killed pilgrims at Tsa-ri they reply that it is because they are "just Klo-pas", and Klo-pas are 'savages' and 'borderland barbarians' who do not follow the Buddha's Dharma which teaches respect for the lives of all sentient beings. A classification of self and other is invoked to explain the long-standing hostility, both threatened and actual, that has accompanied ravine circuit processions.

It is often stated by Tibetans that the tribals would mount terrible campaigns of carnage and looting against the pilgrims, as in 1944, when they were dissatisfied with their tribute payments. But this line of thought is not extended. The notion that the pilgrims were trespassers on tribal lands and that the correct 'rents' had to be paid or retaliation followed does not seem to figure here. From the Tibetan point of view the territory they passed through was considered uninhabited, without permanent settlement or cultivation. And apart from a few ephemeral signs of the tribal hunter-gatherer's presence they remained unseen by the pilgrims, except of course when confrontations occurred. To the Tibetans the southern flanks of the Pure Crystal Mountain massif were a vague boundary zone with no border fixed by permanent markers, maps or treaties. And, in any case, their historical narratives described the visits and activities of great Buddhist saints and yogins in the area, thus constituting it as a part of 'their' power place.

I am unable to comment on any sense of tribal ownership of, or rights over, the area traversed by the ravine circuit as a motivation for the continued hostilities against Tibetans.

<sup>33</sup> For some examples see Burrard (1915, part 1:178), Fürer-Haimendorf (1955:181-2,230), Lamb (1966, Waddell (1905:439, n.3) and Ward (1938:616).

<sup>34</sup> Fürer-Haimendorf (1955:182).

There are, however, certain features of the world-view and social life of one tribal society in the upper Subansiri basin, who were almost certainly attacking pilgrims, that provide an interesting cultural background to such events. In his ethnographic sketches of Nishi (Dafla) life Furer-Haimendorf brings out several points that interest us here.

Firstly, if tribesmen feel they have been wronged in a dispute, for instance over property, unpaid debts, theft or even violence, it is established practice to mount a retaliatory raid on the perceived perpetrators and their kinsmen. Such acts are supported by the community as a valid form of self-help in a social system with no centralised authority. The outcome of raids can range from theft and kidnapping of slaves or prisoners to violent injury and murder, much the same as was the result of raids on the pilgrimage processions. And, just as occurred on the ravine circuit, surprise ambush was the favoured form of attack. Raiding and retaliation in feuds could become extremely protracted,

It is difficult to draw a line between raids which are but the last phase in long drawn out disputes over property, and predatory raiding the only aim of which is the capture of slaves and the looting of property. Some raids appear to be unprovoked, but the organizers usually justify themselves by putting forward stories of old grievances, inherited perhaps from the generation of father or grandfather.<sup>35</sup>

Feuds could be settled in mediated debate, where the two sides lined up facing each other, compensation was negotiated, and the settlement might involve the transfer of goods of considerable value before satisfaction might be reached. Finally, relations could be normalised with a peace pact through the swearing of binding oaths witnessed by the gods and accompanied by a mithan sacrifice. In general form, at least, we have here the same scenario which began with raids on pilgrims and concluded with the twelve-yearly negotiation, compensation and oath-taking of the *klo-rdzong*. In making this comparison I am only trying to show that from the tribal point of view what happened at Tsa-ri was for them a version of 'normal' social relations.

The act and result of tribal raids was wholly unacceptable to the Indic Buddhist morality which was found in the 'orthodox' Tibetan point of view. Such acts led to down-grading of moral status and had consequences after death by way of bad karmic fortunes. But it was quite the reverse from the tribal point of view: violent and aggressive acts which lead to successes and gains were valued by the Nishi. This point is nicely reflected in Nishi eschatology,

On their way to the Land of the Dead, a land imagined similar to this earth, the departed have to pass a deity who acts as gate-keeper of the nether world and subjects the new arrivals to an interrogation regarding their doings in life. Those who can point to successful raids, the capture of prisoners, the acquisition of many wives and slaves, all symbols of worldly success, are received with honour,

<sup>35</sup> Furer-Haimendorf (1967:62).

whereas little notice is taken of the meek and peaceful who have led an inconspicuous life.<sup>36</sup>

In Nishi life martial and economic success were the kind of conduct that led to the acquisition of status or prestige. While this may count towards an explanation in theory for the motivation behind tribal raids on pilgrims, there is at least one compelling social and material complex in Nishi society which reveals motivations for tribal involvements with Tibetans at Tsa-ri.

In all his descriptions of Nishi life Furer-Haimendorf has noted the value placed upon building not only large affinal networks, but also networks of ceremonial friendship. Ceremonial friendship was most often forged by the ritual exchange of valuable property. The highest valued item in Nishi society was the Tibetan prayer bell, and it was the most prestigious item of exchange with which to cultivate solid alliances and friendships of this type. Tibetan bells, minus handle and clapper, were not regarded as musical instruments, rather they were attributed divine origins, named, gendered and passed on through descent lineages. Such items were intensely sought after, their possession generated a great deal of status and was linked to economic and political power. As Furer-Haimendorf put it, "...the owner of a famous bell, worth perhaps eight to ten mithan, gains as much prestige in Dafla society as the owner of a painting by Cézanne or Picasso acquires in European circles."<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that Tibetan bell possession and exchange were also related to status ranking in neighboring Apa Tani and Miri societies. New bells must have come into circulation through the sporadic tribal trading contacts with Tibetans along the frontier to the north, but as I have mentioned above the Tsa-ri tribute was a regular and reliable source of these bells for the leaders of the groups who attended. What is more, Tibetan pilgrims practiced devotions using these ritual objects during the long run-up to the procession's departure at Maṅḍala Plain, and carried and used them during the course of the pilgrimage itself. Pilgrims might thus be the targets of attack, theft or kidnapping down in the ravines in an effort to obtain the highly prized bells.

### iii. Blood Oaths and Sacrifice

As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, the Tibetans considered the sacrifice and oath-swearing rituals (smearing the blood) the most important component of the *klo-rdzong* ceremonies for ensuring a temporary end to tribal hostilities. They held that these rituals had the most influence over the tribesmen precisely because they were tribal customs. At first glance this point may seem minor, but it is of no small importance to the significance of this ritual in terms of the Tibetan definitions of themselves and their 'barbarian' tribal neighbors which are invoked by the practice of *klo-rdzong*.

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<sup>36</sup> Furer-Haimendorf (1967:70).

<sup>37</sup> Furer-Haimendorf (1967:72).

If one carefully compares the *klo-rdzong* events with those elements of Apa Tani, Dafla and Miri sacrifices and the peace-pact oath-swearing rituals reported by Furer-Haimendorf,<sup>38</sup> the Tibetan attribution of these practices appears to be justified: to the south they also tie sacrificial animals to erect posts, invoke the gods as witness, smear blood to mark a pact, divide up the carcass and distribute it, believe that the gods will avenge any breach, and so on. And, as Tibetan and Western sources often state, live animal sacrifice came to an end when Tibetans became 'civilized' by Buddhism. Classical Indic Buddhist ethics would not tolerate the use of live animals and various mock substitutes were introduced for use in a class of uniquely Tibetan Buddhist 'sacrifice' rituals.

The killing or not of live animals in the name of religion is precisely one of the definitional categories that Tsa-ri-bas and other groups of Tibetans use to distinguish themselves as 'civilised' from their 'barbarian' neighbors. This point is generally true of elite Tibetan Buddhist distinctions between *nang-pa* and *kla-klo*. Here I must invoke another set of relevant materials, some very distant from, and others contemporary with our *klo-rdzong*, which are worth reflecting upon. In Sino-Tibetan treaty oaths during the eighth- and ninth centuries, sacrificial animals were killed and Tibetan participants anointed their lips with the blood. On other similar occasions of oath-swearing they brought a god's statue to swear by. In this period there were other Tibetan political relations involving oaths sworn on sacrifices, with the gods called as witness.<sup>39</sup> In other eighth-century Tibetan sacrifices various animals were killed with knives, the gods were invoked by a priest (*bon*), the bodies cut into pieces and distributed.<sup>40</sup> The similarity of these ancient Tibetan religio-political rituals to the oaths and sacrifices of the *klo-rdzong* and to the tribal customs is striking and noteworthy. But what is of more interest is that Tibetans continued to perform live yak and other animal sacrifices in border areas during the period coincident with our records of such practices at the *klo-rdzong*.<sup>41</sup> We also have the report of Stein that, "The custom of sacrificing victims to confirm an oath (*man'-grib*) is said to have persisted till the present day in Kham. The formula for taking the witness has likewise survived."<sup>42</sup>

These materials call into question not just the actual origins of the rituals used in the *klo-rdzong*, but the way in which Tibetan participants themselves consider them effective and use them as markers in the construction of 'self' and 'other'. There is no doubt that most ritual components of the Klo-pa tribute have a long history in Tibet, pre-dating the full systematic introduction

<sup>38</sup> Furer-Haimendorf (1955:88, 120, 144, 154-155; 1967:64, 69).

<sup>39</sup> Stein (1972:200); Tucci (1980:239).

<sup>40</sup> Tucci (1980:230-31).

<sup>41</sup> See for example Asboe (1936), Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:237, 241, 427), Tashi Tsering (1985:206) and Diemberger (1991:140, n.14).

<sup>42</sup> Stein (1972:200).

of Buddhism, and surviving up to this century in some forms, in the border areas at least, in spite of the opposition of Buddhism. They are a feature of Tibetan social life and history that Tibetans as Buddhists would prefer not to acknowledge, but rather identify strongly with the representation of 'primitive', 'barbarian' or 'uncivilised' tribal others with whom they were forced to deal.

The contradictions and resultant tensions between real aspects of Tibetan life, especially the taking of life through hunting, domestic butchery, social violence and sacrifice, and the expectations of introduced Buddhist moral discourses is a time-honoured theme extending at least from the so-called *phyi-dar* period right up to the present day.<sup>43</sup> Below I will discuss how, from an individual pilgrim's view, the ravine circuit itself is precisely about addressing such contradictions and tensions and providing a solution to them. This tension, and issues of self-definition and identity that flow from it are amplified in the borderland areas, where self and other live side by side and have perforce maximum interaction. But it is also in these places that the representational distinction of identities can be most forcefully drawn out and reiterated within the context of certain organised forms and structures.

### *Religion and Personal Experience*

By focusing mainly on the origins and orchestration of the events so far, I have analysed my way 'around' the actual procession which constitutes the core ritual in the sequence of monkey year performances at Tsa-ri. This ritual had thousands of single persons as performers all operating at once, but within the context of an organised unit: an enormous human chain stretched out over an expanse of hostile terrain for several weeks. What do we know, and what can we say about the beliefs and experiences of the pilgrims as performers in this event, both as single persons and as members of the whole procession?

In the preceding chapters we have seen how much of the representation of the mountain in myth, iconography and so on, describes the site in all its aspects as a sublime *maṇḍala* palace, a Pure Abode or Buddhafield on the earth. We have also seen how social practices and relations have been defined and constituted through major ritual sequences which articulate beliefs about the intense purity associated with the site. So it is no surprise to learn again that purity and purification are fundamental themes in the motivations, goals and personal experiences of ravine circuit practitioners. But, as in each ritual sequence which relates person and mountain together at Tsa-ri, these themes have their own particular dynamics in the context of the ravine circuit procession.

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<sup>43</sup> See Huber (1991:66-8, n.21), Mumford (1989:chaps.3-4), and Diemberger (1991:140, n.14) as examples, and Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985) is full of examples of a lama's pleas not to hunt. In a chapter ironically titled "Pilgrimage-Travel-Hunting-Trapping" Rinchen Lhamo (1985:166) states of Tibetan hunting, "It is a great guilt but men will do it."

Any Tibetan who knows about the great Tsa-ri procession can tell you two things: the risk to life is high so before you leave home to perform it, you should take care to say good-bye to all your loved ones as it may be the last time you see them in this particular rebirth; and, whether you live or die during it, just by doing the procession with a strong and clear attitude of faith your bad karma will be cleansed and you will attain a better rebirth. These commonly heard statements about the event contain the basis for two notions of personal transformation for pilgrims. The first is that by facing dangers with faith the ordinary person is transformed into a type of hero or heroine, and the second is that the sinner is transformed into a purified being as bad karma and defilements (*sdig-sgrib*) are cleansed by both the act and the blessings of the environment.

### i. The Heroes and Heroines Return

Aziz has recently suggested, "...that pilgrimage is a cultural idiom for 'becoming the hero/heroine'—a means for negotiating a divine connection—with the legends of a people and place providing specific heroic or valorous ideals."<sup>44</sup> Here her comments relate to measuring up to ideals of human perfection, following the footsteps of saints, and 'negotiating a divine connection', etc. But what my informants say suggests that the heroism of the ravine circuit practitioner is not about these things at all. It is about being a tough and able (and lucky!) traveller in the face of all the legendary hardships of the route: poison arrows, cliff climbing, hostile jungle, lack of food, and so on. This is perhaps closer to the 'heroism' of our famous mountaineers or explorers, than to a religious 'heroism'. Many Tibetans say that this was the most difficult pilgrimage in Tibet, and that if you completed it then this showed you could travel anywhere in the country, regardless of the conditions.<sup>45</sup> A pilgrim remembers returning from the ravine circuit:

"When I came home after the *rong-skor* I was treated a little specially by people when they found out that I had finished it. They treated me well when they found out, they put me up in their houses and fed me. They asked for stories about the journey and its dangers, so I told them all."<sup>46</sup>

Partly, this heroism is not experienced by the pilgrims until it is socially ratified for them by their friends and acquaintances.<sup>47</sup> Talking to Tibetans about the ravine circuit one finds many are ready with a gripping account of the dangerous pilgrimage, but they have never

<sup>44</sup> Aziz (1987:257).

<sup>45</sup> Here it is interesting to compare the sentiments of the Buddhist *kaihogyo* practitioners of the gruelling 'mountain marathon' at Mt. Hiei, "If you do this [pilgrimage] there is nothing that cannot be accomplished", Stevens (1988:133).

<sup>46</sup> TW, interview.

<sup>47</sup> Gombo's (1985:239-40) comments on a Tibetan pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya, and Prindle's (cited in Macdonald (1985:13, n.14)) on the Hindu Dudh Kunda pilgrimage are relevant in this context.



been near Tsa-ri, it is the 'heroic' journey of their uncle or cousin or a woman from their village that they relate.

Between pilgrims who have been to Tsa-ri there is a degree of mutual recognition of each other as "Tsa-ri goers", as only they can really understand what each other has gone through to perform the ritual. This is not a shared identity as 'hero', but rather one of sharing hardships together, one of having been 'through thick and thin' or 'durch dick und dünn' with someone, as many Europeans might say. A song that was sung after the pilgrimage captures this feeling of solidarity through a juxtaposition of the ritual activity itself and the major concern one performed it for, to deal with the problem of accumulated 'sin' or 'moral transgression' (*sDig-pa*):

We are friends in Dharma because we circumambulated the place of Tsa-ri.  
We are friends in sin because we killed the white grouse.<sup>48</sup>

## ii. The Alchemy of Procession: Turning *sDig-pa* into *Dag-pa*

The transformation through the purification of one's bad karma (*las-sdig*) and physical impurities (*sgrib*) is the central theme of the ravine circuit pilgrims' experience in terms of goals and the redefinition of identity. This general theme is pervasive in pilgrimage traditions, and in other forms of lay Tibetan Buddhist belief and worship rituals.<sup>49</sup> What makes it different in the context of the ravine circuit are the extremes in which the purification theme is represented. The essential Tibetan equation of this transformation could be described as one in which a person's serious sin and pollution could be properly purified using much risk-taking and hardship on the journey combined with the effects of the empowered environment. Once again Zhab-dkar-ba's verses contain the essence of contemporary Tibetan Buddhist sentiments expressed about the Tsa-ri ravine circuit, for instance: "All men and women whose bad karma (*las-sdig*) and impurities (*sgrib*) are very great, should circumambulate and prostrate in this place", and "Just by performing one prostration and circumambulation [here], the door to rebirths in the three lower realms (*durgati*) will close even for a person with extremely bad karma."<sup>50</sup>

According to Tibetans the heaviest karmic burden is generated by the taking of life, especially

<sup>48</sup> See appendix 3.7. There may in fact be more to this song than a sentiment of solidarity. At the end of the ravine circuit many pilgrims were starving. Those from many areas had first to cross the Gong-mo pass, known for its white grouse (*bya gong-mo*), in order to exit Tsa-ri district. It is possible that hunting the birds for food inspired this song.

<sup>49</sup> See for example Gombo (1985:235-6), Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:307, 361, 388-9), Ortner (1978:36-7, 103-9), Schicklgruber (1992) and Tucci (1980:173, 196, 200-1).

<sup>50</sup> Zhab-dkar-ba (1985:481, 489); see also the contemporary published comments of Yuthok (1990:90).

if it is intentional. It was commonly believed that the combination of a pilgrim's great faith in the face of the many risks and hardships of the procession, and the intense empowerment the place inherently possessed could purify the bad karma of the most heinous crimes, including all types of murder from hunting to parricide. Tsa-ri-bas joke that the procession was so popular with the groups of well-armed, rough-and-ready Khams-pas, as they all had murders on their consciences for which they sought purification.<sup>51</sup>

Many academic discussions of karma and defilement in the Buddhist context treat these factors as somehow being abstract mental and cognitive elements of a person. But Tibetan materials on the purification of *sdig* and *sgrib* during the ravine circuit suggest that these are conceived of as embodied and substantial factors, and that their purification is indeed a physical process involving the pilgrim's body and the actual physical work it has to do.<sup>52</sup>

For Tibetans at Tsa-ri there is on one level at least a sense of bodily transformation involved in purification which is related to physical hardship. Zhabs-dkar-ba, himself a Buddhist scholar, linked bodily transformation and physical trial on his ravine circuit, but still in a 'mental' context, "When I was going along suffering the same hardships [as the other pilgrims] as well, I visualised that all my vices and obscurations had been purified."<sup>53</sup> However, he also relates the same beliefs as contemporary lay persons have in the purifying empowerment gained by the ritual consumption of physical materials along the route, "The animals who eat the herbs and drink the water [here], have their defilements cleansed (*byang*), and will obtain a human body in the future."<sup>54</sup> A clerical informant told me, "The ravine circuit is very rugged and you have to suffer a lot physically, and the more you suffer the more you wash off (*'byong*) your sins and purify yourself. That is why people don't mind if it's very hard."<sup>55</sup> This is not a commonly heard type of explanation, and the process for the elimination of impurities seems to be variously conceived from different points of view. The physical

<sup>51</sup> Here one cannot resist mentioning the Khams-pa brigand encountered by Kawaguchi (1909:173) at Mount Kailash, who sought purification for his past murders as well as any others he might perform in future lives!

<sup>52</sup> A contemporary Tibetan ritual text handed out to pilgrims and worshippers in India gives a three-fold classification of *sgrib-pa* and its cleansing: "When going to circumambulate the...great circuit of Tsā-ri-tra in the monkey year, defilements of the body will be cleansed through prostration and circumambulation, defilements of speech will be cleansed through taking refuge and praying, and defilements of mind will be cleansed through praying with one-pointed devotion." 'Bri-gung sKyabs-mgon Che-tshang Rin-po-che (1990:3b-4a).

<sup>53</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:482).

<sup>54</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:489).

<sup>55</sup> SG, interview. Why this statement is so interesting is that the metaphor of washing and cleaning, suggestive of water, is the opposite to the common Hindu one of producing ascetic 'heat', suggestive of fire, during the austerity of difficult pilgrimage. On physical hardship and expiation in Chinese pilgrimage see Naquin and Chün-Fang Yü (1992:20).

transformation of the pilgrim's body is best evinced in the welcoming ritual for the branch of the procession which finished at gSang-sngags Chos-gling monastery in Bya-yul,

The monks used to lay their large shawls (*khab-bslas*) along the ground on the path, like a carpet for the pilgrims to walk on, because they were now purified by the circumambulation. They, and others who could not make the journey, made offering there to the pilgrims as they wanted to get the empowerment of these purified persons<sup>56</sup>

### iii. The Importance of Death

The other dimension was personal transformation through risk-taking, and the proximity of death. "All were expected to be ready to sacrifice everything, even their lives if necessary, when they chose to follow the large circle going to Rongkor."<sup>57</sup> The notion was that pilgrims had to overcome every doubt, even fear of death itself, through the sheer power of their faith. This is a case of 'fighting fire with fire': one needed to personally face death to have the power to deal with the consequences of death, that is, death caused by killing and one's inevitable '*samsāric*' death and subsequent rebirth. There are many links between pilgrimage, death and suicide in the Indian-influenced Asian context, both Buddhist and Hindu.<sup>58</sup> In a sense placing one's life at risk on the ravine circuit was tantamount to suicide, and in some cases this is the only way in which participation could be described. Especially for old people, dying on the ravine circuit was their last chance to become purified before another rebirth. Some old people regretted not dying at Tsa-ri when they visited because of the popular belief that death in this Khecara Pure Abode on earth meant direct progress to a Buddhafield or heaven.

A final mention must be made here of a wider Tibetan context in which the ravine circuit procession, ritual concerns about death and transformations for karmic purity were all linked. This was the ritual cycle known in contemporary 'Bri-gung-pa circles as the *sprel-lo bka'-chos*,

<sup>56</sup> ND, TW, interviews; c.f. Grapard's (1982:207) comments on Japanese Buddhist mountain pilgrimages: "It is well known that pilgrims coming back from sacred spaces were regarded with awe: common people saluted them, made offerings, even tried to touch them."

<sup>57</sup> Yuthok (1990:90).

<sup>58</sup> On suicide and Indian pilgrimages see Aziz (1987:256); Sax (1992, esp. the references). On Buddhist sites and practices: my (1990) informants at Ermei Shan in Sichuan talked of a long history of Buddhist cliff-diving from the summit, which when done with strong faith and no fear of death ensured rebirth in Sukhāvātī; on Wu-tang Shan in Hupei see Lagerwey (1992:319-20); c.f. Schopen's (1987:202) notes on death at Kōya-san, and also his canonical and archeological materials on Buddhist pilgrimage deaths in the presence of the Buddha, as 'living' relics in a stūpa, giving rebirth in heaven. The parallels here with what was believed about Pure Crystal Mountain in its various representations are striking. On the problem of suicide and the body *maṇḍala* in Tibetan Buddhism see Stein (1972:183). KG, interview, gives the Tibetan clerical view that while in the stage of *rdzogs-rim*, and with total faith, an act such as cliff-jumping would not constitute a moral offence, although in almost any other context it would.

or 'monkey year Dharma teachings'. It was comprised of several large pilgrimage festivals which began with the winter attendance of the Tsa-ri ravine circuit at the beginning of monkey years and lead on to the '*Bri-gung 'pho-ba chen-mo*', the great 'Bri-gung transference [initiation]' at a site called Drongor Sumdho near 'Bri-gung in Central Tibet during the summer. The '*pho-ba chen-mo*' was not limited to the 'Bri-gung-pa, its popularity generated very large crowds of pilgrims from various backgrounds. The first extensive rehabilitation of the '*sprel-lo bka'-chos*' was held in exile this year (the water-monkey) at the 'Bri-gung centre in Rajpur, India.<sup>59</sup>

Essentially, the '*pho-ba chen-mo*' initiation and practice were intended as a special rapid method for purifying bad karma, so that one would be reborn immediately after death in the Buddhafield of Sukhāvātī. The origins of the practice performed in the public ritual are given in a narrative in which one of *Khri Srong-lde-brtsan's* ministers accidentally kills his parents, eleven other people and all his domestic livestock. By way of the practice he has all the resultant bad karma erased and attains instant rebirth in Amittābha's Buddhafield of Sukhāvātī.<sup>60</sup> During the initiation one prays for the 'purifying of bad deeds' (*sdig ltung dag byed*) and the 'empowerment to reach Khecara by the quick path of '*pho-ba*' (*myur lam 'pho bas mkha' spyod bgrod par byin gyis rlobs*). The visualisation conceives all bad karma and defilements being washed out of the pores of the skin, the anus and urethra, leaving in the form of a smoky dark liquid, after which the body becomes pure like crystal.<sup>61</sup> The similarities between '*pho-ba chen-mo*' and *rong-skor* practice are striking.

#### iv. Processional Logics

Processions feature in the social life of many cultures as both large- and small-scale forms of public ritual. They are, in a Durkheimian sense, representations "...in which some members of society represent their theories and systems of classifications and constructs to themselves and others."<sup>62</sup> Their characteristic form is of groups of people, ranked in order, connecting places together and defining areas of space by passing over territory along prescribed routes. Sax has observed that in this ritual form, as a collective representation, "The linear order of

<sup>59</sup> A third major pilgrimage or initiation was involved but none of my informants can recall it exactly. Due to lack of funding I was unable to do field work at Rajpur this year. This major public ritual cycle conducted in Tibet and now in India warrants detailed research, not least of all because of the large numbers of people it brings together.

<sup>60</sup> See '*Bri gung 'pho ba chen mo 'jag tshugs ma* (1986 edition:100-12.). I am still uncertain of the calendrical timing and frequency of this public ritual in Tibet. Tsarong (1990:81-2) gives photographs of the event at 'Bri-gung in Tibet with the date of 1953 (water-snake year) in his caption; Könchog Gyaltzen (1988:119-27) states it was held every twelve years; Brauen-Dolma (1985:246, n.4) suggests every sixth year.

<sup>61</sup> '*Bri gung 'pho ba chen mo 'jag tshugs ma* (1986 edition:102-3).

<sup>62</sup> Cohen (1990:44).

procession is an icon of society, and that is why to lead the procession, or to define its form, is to claim authority over land and people. Disputes over such things as the order of procession...have therefore to do not with "empty" forms or "mere" symbols but rather with tremendously potent political actions."<sup>63</sup> This statement is pertinent in interpreting the organisation of the ravine circuit procession.

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Although each ravine circuit pilgrim participated freely for their own set of personal motivations, in doing so they had to accept a processional ordering which was imposed on them. Each *sho* had a leader, an identity, an internal structure, and a ranking in the order of the whole procession, and my informants attributed the logic of this ordering to what they describe as utilitarian concerns. In part I would not want to disagree with this thinking as local people and 'Southerners' probably were more familiar with the conditions to go first. Joining a *sho* and ranking in a particular part of it because it represented one's interests through sectarian, regional or kinship identities probably did ensure some support in hard times. But beyond this, leadership and the ranking of *sho* were as much a part of the construction of this 'social icon' as practical concerns might seem to have been.

From the beginning of the proceedings the structure was orchestrated by central government officials and local political and religious authorities, and the chief representative (an official and his troops) of all these powers was placed in the premier position, at the head of the whole procession. Similarly, each *sho* was headed by the *stong-dpon* who represented another level of these powers. The appointment of two of the *stong-dpon* as leaders is of particular interest as it shows on the one hand that control over the ranking of the procession operated at the highest levels of power in Tibetan society, and on the other that this control and ranking itself was disputed.

A knowledgeable informant attributes the appointment of the Klo-nags *stong-dpon* for various practical and political reasons to the progressive military chief Tsa-rong Zhabs-pad (1885-1959).<sup>64</sup> Tsa-rong was in his day the richest and one of the most influential men in Tibet, and up to 1933 the third major 'favourite' (*spyan-gsal*) of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who had himself been to Tsa-ri on pilgrimage in 1900 and whose natal place was close by. Tsa-rong's involvement in *rong-skor* organisation is even less surprising when we learn he was also a close relative of the 'Bri-gung sKhyab-mgon Rin-po-che, one of the leading lamas of a Tibetan Buddhist school administering the Tsa-ri area. He is said to have made the appointment when he performed the *rong-skor* (date unknown).<sup>65</sup> Although I have no

<sup>63</sup> Sax (1991:202-3).

<sup>64</sup> SG, interview. On Tsa-rong see Goldstein (1989:66, 165, pl.21); Petech (1973:137-8).

<sup>65</sup> He was still in government at the time of the 1932 ravine circuit, but the date of his procession could have also been 1920 when he was commander-in-chief of the Tibetan army or, much less likely, 1944. We know that he gave a large "well-used" map of IHo-kha showing the western section of the ravine circuit

detailed evidence, my personal feeling is that this appointment was made by the government partly to further integrate the already Tibetanised Bya-klo tribesman into the Tibetan state structure, and help in defusing continuing problems of Tibetan-tribal relations in this part of the borderlands.

The second appointment concerns that of the Khams-pa *stong-dpon*, and the overall ranking of the Khams-pa *sho* in 1944 and 1956. Along with Central Tibetans, pilgrims from far distant parts of Eastern Tibet were high in number during the last two ravine circuit years.<sup>66</sup> The groups of pilgrims from Khams appointed their own leader, thereby asserting authority by defining their own part in the procession independently of the Central Tibetan officials. Moreover, the normal ranking by dice did not apply to the Khams-pa *sho* who went up near the front of the procession in both years. Regardless of the outcome of the dice throws the Khams-pas said they had 'won' and went to the front anyway. They were undisputed in this as nobody wished to challenge the large parties of heavily armed Easterners who made up that *sho*.<sup>67</sup>

If processions are, as I believe, a form of reflexive, metasocial representation,<sup>68</sup> then what is the ordering of the ravine circuit procession displaying to Tibetans themselves about the makeup of their society? Firstly, the ranking shows an assertion of overall authority by an elite of central government clerics and officials, and aristocrats, which was for the most part accepted.<sup>69</sup> When it was challenged, by a 'belligerent' faction from the periphery, it was toughness and force of arms that were able to assume organisational power. Toughness or hardiness and physical ability also defined those who were able to lead: soldiers (many of whom were local), and southern borderland peoples. Quite apart from any practical arguments and the Klo-nags areas to Hugh Richardson as a gift in Lhasa during 1944; Hugh Richardson, personal communication, December 1989.

<sup>66</sup> For example Tsa-ri Tshul-pa bKra-shis, p.9-10, states, "There were not a lot there who came from Western Tibet. There were many who came from Lha-sa. They were reinforced by those who came from upper Dar-rtse-mdo, and Dar-rgyas monastery area in Hor. A lot of Tre-hor Khams-pas came. The lamas know it! A great many Khams-pas from Dar-rgyas monastery in Hor and Tre-hor came. They were about one in every three, thus I could not estimate them."

<sup>67</sup> Some years ago, Hugh Richardson (1984 [1962]:11), a foreigner with pre-eminent first-hand knowledge of pre-1959 Tibetan society, remarked on Tibetan regional character, "...an even wider contrast in temperament is that which, following generally the division of political from ethnographic Tibet, distinguishes the central Tibetans from their kinsmen in the north-east and east...the Khampas...are in general livelier, more demonstrative, quick tempered, and less peaceable than the central Tibetans. They have a reputation for fierce and carefree bravery-which may degenerate into truculence; and, especially the Khampas, were much divided into clans which waged long-standing, bitter, and violent feuds with one another." A Central Tibetan might equally have made these same observations.

<sup>68</sup> See Sax (1991:202).

<sup>69</sup> This is true also of the social ranking found in small-scale, local Tibetan processions; for examples see Ramble (1987:232-3); Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:840-41).

for ranking, this is the way the Central and Western Tibetans defined these people in relation to themselves. By contrast, it was a distinction that the groups from Eastern Tibet obviously did not make in relation to themselves, or consider significant when it came to ranking.

Overall the central organizing principle was localised identity, determined by residence or natal place (*pha-yul*, lit. 'fatherland'), and community (*sde*), clan and affinal categories. This type of organisation prevailed on other Tibetan pilgrimages I have attended in Tibet, India and Nepal. Recent field work on the long procession around the mountain of A-myes rMa-chen in North-eastern Tibet showed that pilgrims travelled in discreet homeland or family based units, and hardly mixed with other groups at all, except at sites of particular interest or sanctity en route.<sup>70</sup> This type of ordering is, in my own observation, one the most pervasive ways in which Tibetans group themselves together socially. Its 'classical', pre-1959 institutional form would have to be the organisation of Tibet's most powerful social body, the monastic populations in the county's major religious establishments.<sup>71</sup>

The ravine circuit procession, read as social icon, displayed a fundamental parochialism of identity that in large part defined Tibetan society. While this type of identity definition was found between large provincial groups of the Tibetan population, it was also reiterated in much smaller units as well. This was certainly true of the population known as the Tsa-ri-bas, who lived permanently in the settled communities around the mountain, where various identities were defined and contrasted in a much narrower geographical and social space. In chapter eight I will now discuss the local identities in the communities at Tsa-ri, and detail how the people who held those identities managed to make their living while dwelling in and around a natural *maṇḍala* landscape.

<sup>70</sup> Katia Buffetrille, personal communication, 1992. To my mind, during such Tibetan ritual journeys there seems little evidence to suggest anything like Turnerian *communitas* occurring; c.f. Turner (1973 & 1978). However, it would be interesting if aspects of Turner's theory were applied to the massive Tibetan ritual assemblies, classifiable as pilgrimages, that take place in North India for the purposes of the Kalacakra initiation ceremony. These 'religious' events, which also have very significant political and social dimensions, should be the subject for detailed ethnographic work.

<sup>71</sup> This was the organisation of *grwa-tshang*, or 'colleges' in the leading dGe-lugs-pa monasteries of Lha-sa. Each college was divided into important sub-units, *khang-mtshan*, with enrolment determined by homeland region. These were further sub-divided into dormitory sub-units, *mi-mtshan*, "...which were even more specific with regard to the geographic origin of the monks"; Goldstein (1989:27-31).





## Chapter Eight

# Inhabitants of a *Maṇḍala* Representations of Persons, Human Ecology and Economy at Tsa-ri

The mountain around which the Short Pilgrimage (Kingkor) ran was an 18,000' peak called Takpa Shiri. Its choice as a holy place seemed to me an excellent example of human economy. If it had remained profane, life would have been on a far lower level. Sanctification was the greatest asset it possessed.<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

The reader will have noticed that in contrast to the classic ethnographic style I am ending with an account of features such as the local social and economic organisation of the people who dwelt permanently at Tsa-ri, and the physical environment and ecology in which they lived, rather than placing it at the beginning of the text, as is usual practice. I justify this textual inversion partly on the grounds of another type of inversion. As must be evident by now, Tsa-ri was an unusual place compared to other small Tibetan mountain districts in that it regularly experienced major population inversions. During much of the year, and especially every twelfth year, the district was temporarily, but consistently, colonized by large numbers of 'outsiders'. These outsiders who went there as ritual users of the site often far outnumbered the 'insiders' of the small community of Tsa-ri-bas, whose total number stood between about three and four hundred persons in the 1950s. Also, almost all the representations and ritual uses of Pure Crystal Mountain I have described in the preceding chapters were generated by outsiders to the region. These traditions were not only historically defined and applied there by them, they were also later developed and regularly reconstituted by outsiders as well. The lineage of yogins who were the recognised founders of the place, and who continued to come and dwell there in retreat were, by the very nature of their practice, itinerant visitors also. Over time all of these outsiders and their representations and rituals had a great impact on the development of lay domestic life in the region. That is why I have allowed the materials concerning them to provide a context in which to discuss what I know of the lives of the Tsa-ri-bas in the 1950s.

Although I have not seen any early Tibetan records (i.e. census forms, estate taxation ledgers, etc.) referring to the settlement history of the local population at Tsa-ri, all the Tibetan and Western historical sources indicate that established lay communities have existed there for at least the last three or four centuries. During the twentieth century the whole region around Pure Crystal Mountain was either permanently inhabited, or at least seasonally used, by a local lay population. This was comprised of at least two main ethnic groups, the

<sup>1</sup> Bailey (1957:205).

Tibetans and small groups of eastern Himalayan tribal peoples of adjacent Arunachal Pradesh, such as the Nishi and Miri. In this respect Tsa-ri was unique, compared with other major mountain sites of pilgrimage in Tibet, whose barren high-altitude environs were often uninhabited or used only occasionally by religious practitioners and nomadic herders. The climate and vegetation around Tsa-ri supported life in ways that were not possible at places like Ti-se, A-myes rMa-chen or gNyan-chen Thang-lha.

I have already made brief mention of how the lives of the various local inhabitants were affected by the performance of major ritual cycles in the region. For instance, the management by Tibetans of the annual summer pilgrims' resthouses, and the twelve-yearly involvement of both Tibetans and various tribal groups in the ravine circuit procession. Such examples only partially reveal the impact the ritual definition and use of the mountain had on the lives of local inhabitants. While outside visitors needed to observe ritual propriety and restrictions at the site only temporarily, Tsa-ri-bas had to live them out on a permanent basis. In this chapter I want to describe briefly the life of the Tsa-ri-bas, and show how their local identities and domestic ecology and economy took on unique forms by living in a landscape defined as a *maṇḍala*. We will see that ordinary human life in such an empowered environment was not without its share of ambivalence and contradiction.

### *Children of Saints, Barbarians or Divine Persons?*

#### i. Who are the Tsa-ri-bas?

Who are the Tsa-ri-bas? To answer this question in terms of the ethnological sense of descent lineages and genealogies is not yet and may never be possible.<sup>2</sup> Even if it were possible to do so, in the present context I am not primarily concerned with presenting factual data on kinship or producing the usual reifications of a local social structure. In most societies the parameters of self identity include such things as kinship, religion and occupation. Here I would like to demonstrate that place is also an important parameter of identity in this Tibetan community. I will answer the question in terms of the way the Tsa-ri-bas as a group define themselves in relation to others and represent this identity, and how they are represented by others. For Tsa-ri-bas both these levels of identity are bound up with the cultural definitions of the place they live in. This fact itself seems to hold true in other parts of the Tibetan world, and in South Asia generally,<sup>3</sup> but the particular identity found at Tsa-ri is unique to that place. Before going further I should point out that identities at Tsa-ri are related to the

<sup>2</sup> Due to the massive disruption of the Tsa-ri population with the Chinese occupation, and subsequent death of many of those who were its senior members in the pre-1959 period, it has been extremely difficult to gather reliable materials on local social organisation, kinship and descent. It is still possible that some substantial oral or written accounts may be collected among members of the exile community I have not yet interviewed, or from persons living in Tibet.

<sup>3</sup> See Sax (1990:493-4).

micro-geography of the region. They fall roughly into two zones: those for persons who live in the upper valleys around the mountain, especially from Cig-car/g.Yag-rabs area in the east around to Yul-stod/Yul-smad in the west; and those who live south in the *rong* areas, especially at Klo Mi-khyim-bdun and in the forests of lower Bya near Klung. There are of course exceptions to these general groupings.

## ii. Children of Saints?

If Tsa-ri-bas from the upper valley communities are asked to reflect upon their origins as a group (*sde*), their original clan ancestors, and the like, one gets the following type of answer:

In the distant past only meditators lived in Yul-smad [in the west]. But gradually some Tantric masters had children with women, and most of the people are descendents of yogins and yoginīs. It is similar in the east of Tsa-ri, how the people came to settle there and develop villages.<sup>4</sup>

And,

Tsa-ri was a place originally meant only for meditators, and then slowly villages grew because the meditators, male and female, started getting married and having children. And so the Tsa-ri-bas are by breeding very religious people, the offspring of meditators and saints.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible that their claim to being 'very religious' is not without some basis in fact. If one asked people from neighbouring Bya-yul they generally state that the Tsa-ri-bas were moderate and sober types in the 1950s. Even in 1913 Bailey was told, "...these law-abiding people give him [i.e. the nearby *rDzong-dpon*] little trouble, and we were told that no crime serious enough to be referred to him had been committed within the memory of the oldest inhabitant."<sup>6</sup> Whatever the case may be, their representations of their own identity are tied in with the site's history as a place of Tantric meditation retreats. The upper valley peoples are also unequivocal about their being of Tibetan ethnic origin. And there is a good reason for this.

## iii. Barbarians?

The identity representations associated with the Tsa-ri peoples who inhabited the lower *rong* area around the south of the mountain were far more complex than those of the 'highlanders'. From the point of view of descent many families there originated from mixed marriages or liaisons between Tibetans and neighbouring Arunachal peoples. And as I mentioned in chapter six, their life-style and their appearance in terms of dress, accoutrements, and in some

<sup>4</sup> SP, interview.

<sup>5</sup> Drolma, interview.

<sup>6</sup> Bailey (1914:10).

cases physical features, were a hybrid between those of Tibetan and tribal peoples (see plate 9). Most spoke both Tibetan and Arunachal languages. Tsa-ri-bas are clear about why this was so, and in the case of the large border village of Klo Mi-khyim-bdun ('Seven Households of Klo') they state, "Originally, the seven families after which the village was named were pure Tibetans. Gradually Klo-pa people started settling there and they mixed together."<sup>7</sup>

Generally the Tsa-ri and Bya-yul people classified the *rong* dwellers around Mi-khyim-bdun in the east as being more Tibetan, more Bod-pa than Klo-pa ('tribalized Tibetans'), while those around Klung-du and the Kha-klo and Bya-klo in the west were considered more Klo-pa than Bod-pa ('Tibetanized tribals'). Although these distinctions were made by local peoples, outsiders almost invariably referred to the Mi-khyim-bdun-pas as Klo-pa because of their appearance and proximity to the border. Klo-pa is a very pejorative term signifying 'barbarian' (derived from *kla-klo/mleccha*). Mrs. Yuthok gives a 'classic' description of how the Klo-pas at Tsa-ri were seen by people from Central Tibet and other regions:

The area around the holy mountain was inhabited by a primitive race of people called the Lobas. Though they officially were subjects of the Tibetan government and were nominally Buddhists...In many ways they were uncivilized and undisciplined. They did not wear any clothes except a small piece of cloth large enough to cover their sex organs. The Loba men always carried knives as well as bows and poisoned arrows. They are said to eat insects.<sup>8</sup>

The 'stereotype' of Klo-pa in most Tibetan accounts I have heard usually includes references to nudity, sexual openness, propensity to violence, lack of personal hygiene and particularly strong body odor, love of dancing, practice of slavery, consumption of exotic foods like frogs, lizards and monkeys, and the indiscriminate killing of 'sentient beings' (*sems-can*).<sup>9</sup>

Many Mi-khyim-bdun-pa took exception to being called Klo-pa, for they were 'Tibetans' as far as they were concerned. This sensitivity of identity was known to the other Tsa-ri-bas, who would tease the Mi-khyim-bdun-pa, saying "Hey, you Klo-pas", to which they would jokingly reply, "Hey, you beggars (*sprang-po*)" referring to the upper valley-dwellers' winter alms-collecting tours.<sup>10</sup> But eschewing the identity of Klo-pa at Tsa-ri is not just done because the term itself is derogatory, in some cases it is clearly a matter of status to be identified as 'Tibetan', as the following story by a resident of Cig-car during the 1950s points out:

---

<sup>7</sup> Norbu, interview. Their mixed origins were also noted by Ludlow (1938:9) during his visit.

<sup>8</sup> Yuthok (1990:90).

<sup>9</sup> Compare these contemporary comments with those found in Aris (1986:81, n.70); Gyatso (1986:99); Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:407-8); Wallace (1980:64).

<sup>10</sup> SG, interview.

There was a Klo-pa servant girl from one of the local households whom I knew. She ran away once and went to live with a Klo-pa deep down in the *rong*, and they had many children together. I was the religious and lay official in Tsa-ri at the time, so these Klo-pas used to say I was their relative, for obvious reasons. The Klo-pas used to say I was their forefather (*pha-mes*)! I also used to say that to them for a joke. But they always brought Klo-pa food like rice and maize to me when they came up to trade. My real relatives over in Bya-yul were disgusted with me for having relations with Klo-pas, and joking that we were related. It was not the thing to do, they were embarrassed by it. For the Klo-pa's part, it was to their advantage to be able to say, "We have relatives in Tibet", because when there were fights and rivalries they would be left alone as the others were scared of the possible Tibetan government reprisals if they harmed them. So, it helped them to pretend this.<sup>11</sup>

These identities of Tsa-ri-bas as Klo-pa were indigenous ethnic classifications, some of the 'markers' for which were generic for southern borderland peoples and of long historical standing.<sup>12</sup> But there was another set of identity markers applied to these people at Tsa-ri, and combined together with the notion of Klo-pa, which related directly to representations of place there.

#### iv. Divine Persons?

During the 1950s some of the lay people around Tsa-ri, particularly those recognised as Klo-pa, were identified as embodiments or incarnations of divine beings of one type or another amongst themselves, but particularly by outsiders. Several rituals and many beliefs were based on this notion. Such identities have a long history at Tsa-ri, which we must briefly review in order to appreciate the relationship between representations of persons and place in later times.

The occurrence of this type of identity can be traced back to the visionary definition of the total environment of Tsa-ri as a *maṇḍala* palace in one form or another by earlier Tibetan lamas who were Tantric practitioners. In the fourteenth century this environment was represented by the third Karma-pa incarnation Rang-'byung rDo-rje as follows:

<sup>11</sup> SG, interview. There is a 'real life' moral ending to this story: When Chinese troops overran Tsa-ri in 1959 Tibetans fled into exile southward through the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh. During many months of starvation and sickness in the jungles the local tribals showed little sympathy, and at times hostility, towards the refugees. SG received considerable help from this particular family, to which he owes his survival during the escape. Soon after, the family, like thousands of tribals, were themselves displaced from their forest home when the Indian army annexed their territory along the disputed Sino-Tibetan border. A few years ago one of the daughters came from Assam and re-established contact with SG, who has since given them financial assistance. Whereas both Tibetan and Western historical sources tend to depict Tibetan-tribal relations as adversarial, which they sometimes were, this narrative is a good example of how on the ground, at an inter-personal level, such monolithic views are a distortion of the situation.

<sup>12</sup> This is not only the case in numerous Buddhist sources, but in Bon-po ones as well, see the remarks on Kong-po in Karnay (1992:530).

As there are pure (*dag-pa*) manifestations of the *dākinī* as people of all kinds, and animals, various beasts of prey and game, one should not cause harm, and should generate a positive view towards everything [at Tsa-ri] because one cannot know just how they will appear.<sup>13</sup>

Other important yogins, such as the 'Brug-chen Padma dKar-po, had visions of local protective deities who resembled Klo-pa, with animal skin hats and leaves covering their genitals.<sup>14</sup> They also claim to have met with local women at Tsa-ri whom they recognised as *dākinī*, and so on. Later practitioners who visited Tsa-ri, and were familiar with such claims, interpreted their own meetings with Tsa-ri-bas on the basis of them. For example, a senior Bhutanese 'Brug-pa cleric visiting the area in the eighteenth century met, and had an exchange with a party of Klo-pa men and women, immediately after which he reflected, "The Master [*rje*, i.e. Padma dKar-po] said that any men and women you see in the place of Tsā-ri need to be thought of as *dpa'-bo* and *dpa'-mo*."<sup>15</sup> Claims such as these recur in sources on Tsa-ri right up to the present-day. Tibetan assumptions and ideas about the ontological continuities between persons and places, theories of embodiment, and their interpretations of the *dākinī* principle allow for human residents to be divine beings as a 'natural' feature of a power place such as Tsa-ri.

In an early nineteenth-century account of the area the local inhabitants are specifically related to the divine retinue of the *maṇḍala* and its landscape 'architecture':

...In Pure Crystal Mountain there dwells a divine assembly of two thousand eight hundred. In every rock mountain, lake and tree of its outer environs there live innumerable *dpa'-bo* and *dākinī*. The men and women who live here are a lineage of *dpa'-bo* and *dākinī*.<sup>16</sup>

At about this time we find this general representation of Tsa-ri-bas becoming specifically applied to the peoples in the area who were later considered to be Klo-pas, and in particular the people in the *rong* around Klo Mi-khyim-bdun. For example:

...There is a village which suppresses the Klo-pa (*klo-pa'i kha-gnon*) called Klo Mi-khyim-bdun. Here a human lineage of *dpa'-bo* and *dpa'-mo*, who originate in the twenty-four Tantric sites, are said to take birth. Even their population is exactly sixty-two [as in the Saṃvara *maṇḍala*].<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.4:17a-b).

<sup>14</sup> Padma dKar-po (1973, vol.3:449).

<sup>15</sup> Yon-tan mTha'-yas (1975:104b).

<sup>16</sup> Zhabs-dkar-ba (1985:489).

<sup>17</sup> Kun-gzigs Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1985, vol.2:175). Here I am interpreting the special term *zhing-skyes*, c.f. *Bod-rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.13:2388, *zhing-skyes-ma*.

And, in a well-known Tibetan geography of the world from the nineteenth century:

In that [place] known as rTsa-ri dKhyil-'khor-thang there are such things as households which are called Klo Mi-skya-sdeng [=khyim-bdun], and they are said to have *dākinī* in a succession of human descendents, who are known as the local guardian (*gnas-srung*) *dākinī* of rTsa-ri.<sup>18</sup>

In the early nineteenth century the identity of the Mi-khyim-bdun-pa was related to the local protective deities of Tsa-ri, and the place was seen as a sort of front-line defense of the *maṇḍala* against the non-Tibetanized Klo-pa to the south.<sup>19</sup> This fits with the general landscape architecture of the *maṇḍala* in its lower regions, as it is around its outer base that the classes of guardian or protective deities dwell, defending the perimeter against subversion. I think the specific identity the people in this hitherto little-known border settlement gained during the period has to be seen in the historical context of its growing importance to the staging of the popular ravine circuit around Tsa-ri. These identities of local people from Klo Mi-khyim-bdun became expressed in relations between Tsa-ri-bas and visitors to the area, both in attitudes and in ritual forms.

#### v. How Can You Be Sure Who's a God or Goddess?

Most pilgrims who visited Klo Mi-khyim-bdun by choice on their circuits, or who had to en route to Tsa-ri mTsho-dkar to the east, performed a particular ritual in the village. I have three brief but recent accounts of this ritual which present it from the point of view of the villagers themselves, of pilgrims who did it, and also of how the other upper valley Tsa-ri-bas saw it. A Lhasa aristocrat on pilgrimage there recalls:

The pilgrims who visited Seven Households begged food from the inhabitants following a long-standing custom. It was said that a living deity dwelt in the locality who was always ready to give a spiritual or physical boon depending on the prayer of the pilgrim. There was only one hitch: no one knew where she stayed and no one could recognise her. It was said that she gave the blessings through food begged from the inhabitants living there, but even the families in this village did not know when and how the deity blessed the food. In the hope that the food they gave to the beggars had been blessed by the deity and that they would also receive a blessing, the villagers gave generously to the begging pilgrims. Inspired by this tradition, the pilgrims did not want to miss the opportunity to get this immense spiritual and worldly blessing. So with their begging bowls they went to as many houses in the village as they could. They had firm faith that

<sup>18</sup> Wylie (1962:36) for Tibetan text.

<sup>19</sup> This particular designation of the area goes back earlier, and the cave of Padmasambhava there was called Klo'i Kha-gnon in the early eighteenth century; see Sle-lung rJe-drung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje (vol.1:466). The whole idea of the suppression of the Klo-pa to the south of Tsa-ri is found in the fifteenth century activities there of Thang-stong rGyal-po, on which see Gyatso (1986:91), who has translated the relevant passage.

somehow at one of the houses they would receive some food that had been blessed by the deity. It is strange that although the villagers never knew from which house, theirs or another, the blessed food had come, still they too believed in the legend and always gave food to the begging pilgrims. In our case we sent the servants with bowls to beg from every single household and warned them not to skip even one...They had brought a variety of foods...all of this was cooked together and was distributed equally between the family members, servants and even the animals. We never did know just who the deity was.<sup>20</sup>

A local resident of Klo Mi-khyim-bdun remembers pilgrims passing through the village:

When they arrived in our valley, although they had the status of Lhasa aristocrats, they had to go begging there in our village asking for, "Radishes, pots of yogurt, a little *tsam-pa*, a little butter", like that. If you ask why it was good to beg there, well, at the time there were always some *dpa'-bo* of the male lineage and *dpa'-mo* of the female lineage, and you could never be sure that those two [types of deities] were not standing at the door of these households. Because this was so, they each did the rounds of every household door to get all the food of the *dpa'-bo* and all the food of the *dpa'-mo*. Well, because of that, although they were government aristocrats they were forced to beg in that way. The people of our valley told them, "We are not Glo-pas. We are pure Tibetans". That valley of ours was like the border ravine [between Klo-yul and Tibet]. Because that was so they probably thought, "They are Glo-pas", but we were really of pure Tibetan stock.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, an informant from Cig-car saw it like this:

All the pilgrims went to each house to beg something from the villagers. What they gave was just something like a potato or an onion, but maybe that had the empowerment (*byin-brlabs*) because you never knew who might be the *dpa'-bo* or *dpa'-mo*. The people of Mi-khyim-bdun always kept giving to the pilgrims, just small things like a potato or so, but they didn't mind giving because everyone considered them divine, so they liked that!<sup>22</sup>

The ritual involved a play on identities at several levels: it briefly transposed subordinate and superordinate groups, and also allowed for the invocation of various distinctions. Potentially both parties, pilgrims and villagers, stood to gain. The pilgrims believed they got empowerment from the food obtained by thorough ritual technique, and felt the 'faithful' villagers were being benevolent towards them; the villagers had a feeling they gained status by having other, often high-ranking, persons begging from them and treating them as though they might be divine. They also gained a unique opportunity to represent their own peripheral identities to peoples from the centre and other upland parts of Tibet. It was an opportunity to resist the collection of often pejorative identity markers applied to them by others.

<sup>20</sup> Yuthok (1990:96-7).

<sup>21</sup> rTsa-ri Tshul-pa bKra-sbis-lags (1987:28-9).

<sup>22</sup> SG, interview.



## vi. The Field-Protector's Fierce Human Retinue

Although called Klo-pa by many, the people of Klo Mi-khyim-bdun were for the most part Tibetan or Tibetanised to some extent and were Buddhists, or at least nominally Buddhist. But in all the territory south of this village area the people were considered to be true Klo-pa by the Tsa-ri-bas. The Klo-pa groups already mentioned above, who had seasonal contacts and reasonable relations with the local Tibetans, were also represented by themselves and others as having a type of divine identity. According to the Tsa-ri-bas their nearby tribal neighbours were, or at least considered themselves as, the human 'retinue' (*'khor-ba*) or 'subjects' (*'bangs*) of the autochthonous local-protector deity who was simply referred to as the *zhing-skyong*. There are other Tibetan borderland precedents for such representations of Arunachal highlanders. Nebesky-Wojkowitz has shown how the costumes and accoutrements in the iconography of various classes of Tibetan protective deities are the same as those for southern tribal peoples, including the Klo-pa.<sup>23</sup> An identical type of representation is used to characterize the Dag-pa people of eastern Bhutan, who are held to be the human retinue of the deity Jo-mo Re-ma-ti.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the fairly benevolent Buddhist identity that the Mi-khyim-bdun-pas enjoyed, the Klo-pa as retinue of the *zhing-skyong* were considered fierce and barbaric. Tibetan sources which identify Tsa-ri with the sites like cemeteries in the Indian Tantric texts are careful to equate the local goddesses who are described as living in such places with the Tibetan *zhing-skyong* at Tsa-ri. Sometimes these deities are described as being 'violent' (*drag-chen-mo*), and dwelling in certain types of trees at cemeteries.<sup>25</sup> Tibetans worshipped the *zhing-skyong* at Tsa-ri, but as Buddhists they did so using Tantric rituals in certain contexts and *bsangs* rituals in others. My informant SG, who had regular contacts with tribal people to the south and spoke their dialects, reflected on the way the Klo-pa related to the *zhing-skyong* compared with the local Tibetans:

They used to worship the *zhing-skyong* quite often, they didn't know about any other Tibetan religion. They worshipped the *zhing-skyong* wherever they could, that was their main interest. They did a very different *zhing-skyong* ritual than us. When the Klo-pas did it their ritual priest, like in the photos you have, got a large male or female yak; the bigger the offering the better it was. Then they chanted, 'I make offerings to the *zhing-skyong*...', and so on, and at first just pretended to cut the animal, to sacrifice it. After this mental worship they really did stab it and kill it, with the priest leading the way. Then they cut the animal up and took the parts of the body away with them. Even if they could not make a large offering they would just crush an egg as a sacrifice. They always sacrificed living things, harmed them. There was a tree where the Klo-pa and the Tibetans believed the

<sup>23</sup> Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:8-11).

<sup>24</sup> Aris (1986:82, n.95).

<sup>25</sup> This material is dealt with in more detail in Huber (1992 in press).

*zhing-skyong* lived, down on the ravine circuit route. It was called bDag-shing, or maybe sTag-shing as in the *stag-ma* flower. That was a Klo-pa dialect name for the place not a Tibetan one. The Tibetans called it rNgam-pa sGra-sgrogs, the cemetery that is mentioned in the Tantras.

His further comments are revealing as to how Tibetans understood this violent identity relating to the deity, and used it to explain Klo-pa behavior within the context of their own practices and beliefs:

The Klo-pas considered themselves the subjects of the *zhing-skyong*. While we Tibetans were not allowed to hunt, or even shout or spit in certain holy areas, the Klo-pas went on hunting and killing wild animals and nothing happened to them [by way of the deity's retribution], so maybe they were the *zhing-skyong*'s retinue, that is what we believed. The Klo-pa themselves used to say, 'We are the *zhing-skyong*'s retinue.' Sometimes at Tsa-ri, if people dreamed about Klo-pas, that was taken as a sign that they must perform worship of the *zhing-skyong*.

There are many types of representations of person in Tibetan culture which invoke various non-human or semi-divine identities. But these, like identities in general, are never subscribed to in a monolithic fashion by those who share the same world view. They are debated, accepted or rejected. This was certainly the case with identities associated with the peoples of Tsa-ri, as is clear from the recent memoir of a visit to the region by a high-ranking Tibetan cleric:

This was the most famous place of pilgrimage in Tibet, for it is said to be the palace of the deity Cakrasamvara...Some say that the natives of Tsari are guardian spirits; but I think they are simply primitive people.<sup>26</sup>

### *Making A Living In A Power Place*

When questioning my informants who lived in the communities around the mountain it became clear that their life-styles, local economy and administration were all intimately linked to, and governed by, the beliefs about the area as a power place and the popular pilgrimages these ideas generated. Most pre-1959 Tibetan ethnography and ethnohistory tell us that local rural economies were based predominantly on the settled cultivation of crops, mainly barley, or pastoral nomadism, or a varying mixture of both modes of production. Hunting often supplemented the nomad economy, and, less so, that of the village dwellers. In some cases long-distance internal trading cycles were also involved, but these were often related to exchanges of the products of pastoral nomadism and necessitated by the remoteness of nomad communities from markets.

In general, taxation was related to productive units, that is to land area under cultivation

<sup>26</sup> Wallace (1980:64).

and/or head of livestock, and there were also *per capita* taxes on persons. Tax obligations and payments usually took the form of supplying produce and/or cash, and often in addition providing different forms of *corvée* labour services, such as road-maintenance or supplying transport animals to visiting government officials. In pre-1959 Tibet the functioning and maintenance of the state infrastructure, the large organised monastic institutions, and the estates of the landed aristocracy were all directly dependent upon these forms of taxation being levied in every community.

But at Tsa-ri there existed a very different type of life regime from that described elsewhere in Tibet. Although an apparently fertile area with good rainfall, and one with excellent game habitat, all cultivation and all hunting was banned around the mountain due to beliefs about the divine nature of living things at the site, and indeed the total natural environment. The area was treated in effect as a large nature preserve or sanctuary. Only a limited pastoralism was practised, the small-scale production of which was consumed domestically and not traded. So how, in relation to the pre-1959 Tibetan economy, did the local inhabitants support themselves and fulfill their obligations within the system? After a brief description of community organisation and administration, I will explain the major aspects of local economy and show how they relate to conceptions of place and representations of landscape.

#### i. Population and Administration.

According to the reckoning of a local official, during the 1950s the small Tibetan district named Tsa-ri maintained a domestic population of approximately three to four hundred persons.<sup>27</sup> This was subject to fluctuation as occasionally pilgrims would remain in the area after their visits, and marry into the local community,<sup>28</sup> while other residents migrated out due to economic necessity. This population lived mainly along the course of the Tsa-ri river valley to the east, and in the headwaters of the Yul-smad river to the west. They were grouped predominantly within family household units in four main village communities (Cig-car, Klo Mi-khyim-bdun, Chos-zam, Yul-smad), and four minor settlements (rDo-mtshan, g.Yag-rabs, Bod-rdzogs gSum-mdo, Yul-stod) around the area. There were also monastic and retreat communities at Yul-smad and Cig-car, and a nunnery at Klo Mi-khyim-bdun. Various other localities around the mountain were only seasonally occupied or used by pilgrim resthouse-keepers, yogins, pilgrims or local pastoralists.

Although the district was small in total area and population compared with many others in Tibet, it was subject to a complex civil and religious administration. At the district level there were three divisions, Tsa-ri Nub ('Western Tsa-ri'), Tsa-ri Shar ('Eastern Tsa-ri') and Klo

<sup>27</sup> SG, interview.

<sup>28</sup> This was particularly so for Eastern Tibetans during this century, many of whom found the area attractive compared to their much-troubled homelands on the Chinese border.

Mi-khyim-bdun area (see map 8). Each division had different administrative regimes. In relation to the central government in Lhasa, all three fell under the control of sKu-rabs rNam-rgyal *rDzong* located in the Gru-lung valley of Dwags-po to the north.<sup>29</sup> This relationship involved tax obligations, law-enforcement, defense and the transmission of various government decrees from Lhasa to the districts. Tsa-ri Nub also fell under the religious administration of the 'Bri-gung-pa sect and its aristocratic allies who maintained a local representative there. Tsa-ri Shar and Klo Mi-khyim-bdun fell under the religious administration of the 'Brug-pa sect and its aristocratic allies based at gSang-sngags Chos-gling in Bya-yul. Most of the population in these districts identified themselves respectively as either 'Bri-gung-pa or 'Brug-pa followers in accord with this. These relationships entailed various tax obligations to the two sects, control of local pasture lands in the form of estates (*gzhis-kha*), the operation and maintenance of monastic and retreat centres, and shrines and pilgrims' resthouses in each district. In addition to this Mi-khyim-bdun also had another level of government control imposed on it through rKyem-sdong *rDzong* located not far to the north on the Kong-po Dwags-po border. This mainly involved certain tax obligations.

As often happened in Tibet, control over religious and domestic affairs was collapsed together at Tsa-ri during the 1950s. At the beginning of the decade the lay official representing the central government at Tsa-ri, locally known as the *rDzong-dpon* (see plate 12) or sometimes *rDor-'dzin*, died. His duties were assigned to a 'Brug-pa cleric from gSang-sngags Chos-gling who resided in Cig-car, and who was leader of the religious community there. This person liaised with the *rDzong* and the monastery when needed, and was empowered to collect taxes on their behalf and ensure that dues were paid, arbitrate community disputes and rule on minor legal decisions. To do this he had to liaise in turn with the representatives of each community. The communities had a headman ('*go-pa*) and persons referred to as the 'tax-paying fathers' (*khral-pa'i a-pha*). They were senior men who had all the taxes for a place put in their name by the government, a sort of tax-representative for a family or group. They were the ones who paid all the taxes in cash and kind. Taxes discharged in the form of labour and service were the responsibility of designated individuals from a household or settlement. Some of the Tsa-ri *a-pha* were called dBu-ri, rDo-mtshan, Chos-zam, Yul-smad Tshul-khang, mGon-po-rong, and so on, being named after the locality where they lived, so that these were the names of their household units. These were the *khral-pa* families, with about thirteen main *khral-pa* families in Tsa-ri Shar and twelve in Tsa-ri Nub, but there were also many other individual tax-payers. Based on limited data I estimate that household size ranged from about six to fifteen persons per unit.

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<sup>29</sup> This had been the case since early this century at least, see Bailey (1957:201-2) and Ward (1936:403).

Map 8: Administrative Units

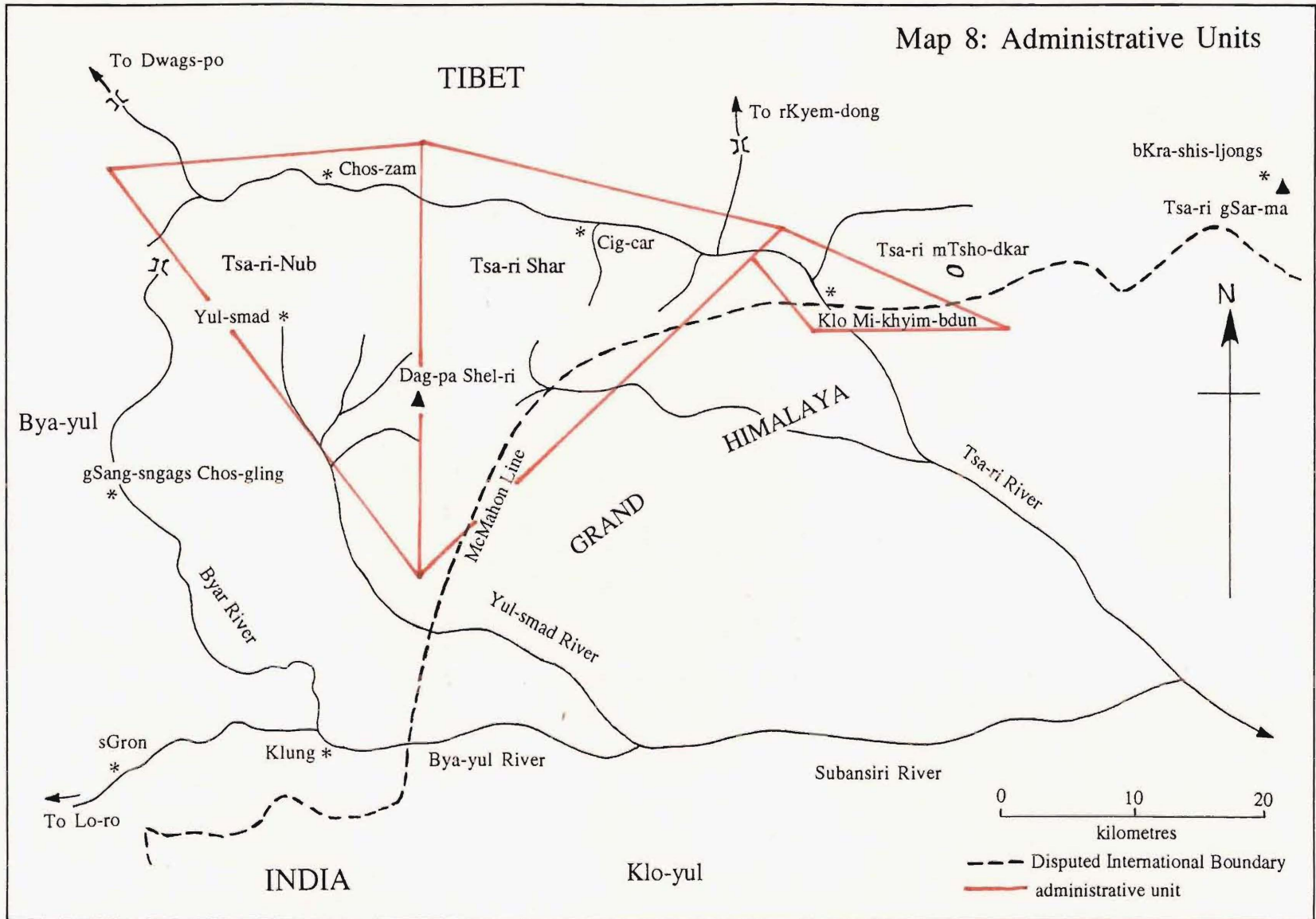






Plate 12. The *rDzong-dpon* of gSang-sngags Chos-gling, chief local administrator of Tsa-ri district, c.1935.





## ii. Conservation, Harvesting and Production

Almost every aspect of economy and production of the communities in Tsa-ri Nub and Tsa-ri Shar was related to the definition of the mountain's landscape as a *maṇḍala*, and its environment and all life-forms being considered embodiments (*kāya*) of the resident deities. We have already seen above that notions of environmental protection were related to these beliefs early on in the mountain's history as a Buddhist site. Once again it was yogins and elite clerics who established beliefs and practices that changed the lives of all who used the site later on. Up to and during the 1950s there was a complete ban on cultivation and the hunting or killing of any living thing around the mountain. The resultant limitations this placed on the development of any stable and extensive agricultural regime lead the Tsa-ri-bas to support themselves by way of a fairly diversified micro-economy.

Records of a ban on hunting wild animals in the area date back to the thirteenth century.<sup>30</sup> At least since Kinthup's visit in the 1870s, but also probably long before, there had been no cultivation permitted within the Tsa-ri district.<sup>31</sup> The only exceptions being very small kitchen gardens kept by some families in recent times, and cultivation of a variety of crops around the village of Klo Mi-khyim-bdun, which lay just outside of the designated area of the ban. The reasoning behind this prohibition is two-fold: firstly tilling or extensive digging of the soil killed numerous insects and occasionally small animals, so it was related directly to the ban on hunting and killing all animal life in the area; and secondly, it disturbed the actual substance of the divine abode which existed below the surface features of the landscape. Even though certain plant life at the site was believed to contain the empowerment of the divine inhabitants, there seem to have been no restrictions placed on the harvest or use of vegetation.

In pre-1959 Tibet there was nothing unusual or unique about this prohibition on hunting and killing, or the ethic that informed it. Such prohibitions were applied to numerous sites, particularly those of Buddhist practice like monastic or retreat centre environs and pilgrimage places in general. They were actively encouraged by Buddhist clerics as part of the ancient Indic code of non-violence. Similarly, sensitivity about cultivation and disturbance of the soil appears to have been perhaps even a pre-Buddhist concern of Tibetans. Rituals to placate the subterranean deities such as *sa-bdag* and *khu* still accompany the laying of foundations for buildings and the ploughing of fields. However, several points are unique about the prohibitions on hunting and cultivating at Tsa-ri. First, quite apart from the usual Buddhist ethical concerns, a complex and all-encompassing principle of physical embodiment (*kāya*) related to a major

<sup>30</sup> Roerich (1979:200).

<sup>31</sup> Burrard (1915:335), and for the twentieth-century Bailey & Moreshead (1914:7 & 1914:10,68), Ludlow (1938:9) and Ward (1941:81).

Tantric archetype deity was what justified them both doctrinally. Second, the extent to which they were applied seems unprecedented in Tibet. And, unlike other comparable sites, they were both applied to an area with a domestic population.

The prohibitions extended from the area of Bod-kha-gsum, at the foot of the high passes over which one entered the district from the north or west, along the course of the Tsa-ri river up to the point where it dropped down the gorge to Klo Mi-khyim-bdun. All of the area around Yul-smad and Yul-stod in Tsa-ri Nub east of the rTa-dkar pass was included, as was the entire route of the middle circuit, its environs, and all of the upper mountain that it encompassed. Within this area itself the prohibitions appear to have been carefully obeyed by the local community and pilgrims, a fact recorded by Western visitors to the area, most of whom also noted the localised abundance and tameness of wild animal and bird species there.<sup>32</sup> The Tsa-ri-bas have a song which celebrates the area around the meditation retreats in the west as a sanctuary for wild animals:

In Yul-stod and Yul-smad at Tsa-ri,  
When there are deer they are happy,  
As there are no enemies whatsoever outside,  
And the grass and water are plentiful inside.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, as a general rule nobody was allowed to even discharge firearms or fire arrows within this zone, because it was said to be offensive to the deities. The ban on killing things was taken so seriously that when, during the eighth Tibetan month (approx.= October) of each year, large numbers of a certain insect larvae were found all over the middle circuit route up on the mountain, it was considered a sign for the pilgrimage season to end. This was because of the difficulty of walking without killing any of these insects.<sup>34</sup> However, despite the great care exercised by devout Tibetans in observing the restrictions on taking life, animals continued to be hunted both within the area of the sanctuary and around its perimeters. On the southern and western flanks of the mountain Arunachal tribals hunted all the way up to the area around the resthouses at Pho-brang g.Yu-mtsho, sTag-tshang and Dorn-tshang, and occasionally even further up the mountain. Hunting parties would ascend after the middle circuit had ceased to operate and the resthouse keepers had quit and closed their *tshul-khang* for the winter. All local Tibetans knew this went on, but they were powerless to stop it, and in any case it was believed that the deities of the mountain themselves would mete out punishment if they were offended.

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<sup>32</sup> This is the area defined by my informants, c.f. Bailey (1914:11-12), Burrard (1915:335), Ward (1936:390), Ludlow (1938:9) and Ward (1941:82-9). KG remembers seeing herds of up to one hundred Bharal in the area of Chos-zam village during the 1950s.

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix 3.2.

<sup>34</sup> Norbu, interview; see Bailey (1957:201,207).

Tibetans hunted as well. The villagers in Klo Mi-khyim-bdun hunted near their settlement whenever they pleased, and sometimes further down in the forests of the *rong*. Mostly they hunted various species of small deer and antelope, such as takin, goral and serow, but especially musk deer. They also hunted for bear. Usually at the end of the pilgrimage season, the resthouse keepers and other villagers from the upper settlements descended into the lower valleys around the mountain, outside of the restricted area, and hunted for musk deer and bear. They used foot-snares for trapping musk deer, and in a good season one man might catch four to five animals per week this way. Bears were also killed, using a remote trigger mechanism which fired a short arrow up into the animal's abdomen. The main purpose of such hunting was for the villagers to collect musk gland (*gla-rtsi*) and bear's gall (*dom-mkhris*), which were rare and highly valued products used in the preparation of medicines. The exact incentive for collecting these products will be explained below. They also collected the skins and meat of the animals for use and sale.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to hunting outside the protected area there were a limited number of alternative agricultural and harvesting practices maintained within it and around its margins. These included the small-scale grazing of livestock for dairy production, and the harvest of bamboo. Both were ritually permissible, and both made important seasonal contributions to the local economy.

There were excellent pastures to the north and east of the mountain, and during the summer months Tsa-ri-bas were able to graze their small herds of male and female ('*bri*) yak and yak-cow hybrids (*mdzo*) on them. The best pasture land in Tsa-ri Shar was owned by the 'Brug-pa of Bya-yul, as it was part of their estate or *gzhis-ka*. This was in the main valley near rDo-mtshan, and they grazed and bred herds of horses, mules and cattle in this area. Thus, as owners they paid no fee for grazing there which might have contributed to the local economy. However, when local people from Tsa-ri Shar wanted to graze their few animals on those areas they had to apply to gSang-sngags Chos-gling to gain permission and an exemption from paying a grazing fee. Similarly, the inhabitants of Tsa-ri Nub had to apply to the 'Bri-gung representative for permission to graze and get exemptions in the best northern pastures. Tsa-ri-bas usually got grazing lease exemptions, but outsiders did not.<sup>36</sup> As a consequence of this policy, and in general, there were no nomads who made seasonal grazing migrations into the area from outside. Thus, the Tsa-ri-bas faced no grazing competition for available pasture lands.

The butter and cheese and yoghurt produced by this limited pastoralism was mainly used in the households, although some butter had to be used for tax purposes, and for trading. There were various ways that Tsa-ri-bas acquired the regular staple of barley grain and *tsam-pa*

<sup>35</sup> SP, interview.

<sup>36</sup> SG, Norbu, interview.

that they were unable to produce locally. They traded various goods, such as butter surplus to domestic needs, in nearby communities and markets. In addition to barley supplies they also obtained essentials like meat and brick tea.

The harvesting, processing and trading of bamboo and bamboo goods was another aspect of the complex of local economic practices. Bamboo did not grow in the upland areas of Tsa-ri Nub and Tsa-ri Shar, although it could be harvested down the Yul-smad valley south of Tsa-ri Nub, and within the *rong* at Klo Mi-khyim-bdun. The upper valley Tsa-ri-bas did harvest it occasionally, but for the most part they obtained their bamboo supplies by trading with the Mi-khyim-bdun-pa. Bamboo was either harvested and cut into standard length canes (*smyug-rkang*) to be sold or traded, or it was made into various domestic products. There is a local work song that describes the practice:

#### Explaining the Bamboo of Tsa-ri

If you don't know about the growth of sprouting bamboo,  
 When bamboo grows it sprouts in the interior of Tsa-ri.  
 If you don't know about the harvest of reaped bamboo,  
 When bamboo is to be harvested reap it with your little right hand!  
 If you don't know about the collection of gathered bamboo,  
 When bamboo is to be collected gather it with your little left hand!  
 If you don't know about the chopping of cut bamboo,  
 When bamboo is to be chopped cut it with a gold hatchet!  
 If you don't know about the fastening of bound bamboo,  
 When bamboo is to be fastened bind it with multi-coloured string!  
 If you don't know about the pulling of hauled bamboo,  
 When bamboo is to be pulled haul it with a small black yak!  
 If you don't know about the selling of sold bamboo,  
 When bamboo is to be sold sell it in the Lhasa markets!  
 If you don't know about the fixing of a set price,  
 Make it three *srang* and two *zho* for each cane!<sup>37</sup>

While men harvested and traded bamboo, it was mainly the women of Tsa-ri who made baskets of various types and sizes and tea-strainers from the local cane. The well-known pilgrim's walking-sticks already mentioned were also made in this way. Again, although upland Tsa-ri-bas did produce bamboo goods in their homes, for the most part they purchased or traded those which had already been made by the people of Klo Mi-khyim-bdun, and occasionally by certain Klo-pa. Because bamboo and its products, particularly those from Tsa-ri, were sought after in the highland markets of Tibet, the upland Tsa-ri-bas always made significant profits in their bamboo trading with the Mi-khyim-bdun-pa. In the 1950s Tsa-ri-bas sold bamboo goods locally to pilgrims. At Cig-car three grades of pilgrim's bamboo walking stick were sold, with the best usually selling for about five *srang* and the ordinary kind for

<sup>37</sup> *Bod kyi dmangs gzhas* (1990, vol.2:413-4).

about three *srang*.<sup>38</sup> The Tsa-ri *tshul-pa* made an annual winter trip to Lhasa, during which they also sold and traded bamboo and bamboo goods. In addition to the raw cane prices mentioned in the song, the *tshul-pa* got about ten *tang-ka* for large baskets and about five *tang-ka* for the small in the Lhasa markets during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>39</sup> A large load of bamboo wares sold in Lhasa could yield a substantial cash return, which could be used for purchase of staples.

Some upper-valley Tsa-ri-bas describe their life-styles as 'a kind of settled nomadism'. This was because they lived in permanent and substantial households, yet like the high plateau nomads they subsisted partly by the practice of pastoralism, harvesting (bamboo instead of salt), occasional hunting and the trading of the related products on a seasonal basis. This is indeed an interesting self-characterization which in part sums up, through a combination of deep-rooted cultural opposites (*'brog-pa* vs. *rong-pa*), the unique nature of the Tsa-ri-ba's life-style and economy.

So far I have dealt with more direct or primary forms of production and their derivatives, through which Tsa-ri-bas lived in relation to the land by utilizing its natural resources. Here the relationship between representations of place and types of economic practice is apparently determinative. I say 'apparently' here not only because it 'appears' to be so from the way Tsa-ri-bas present their own situations in the 1950s, but also because there may be alternative reasons why conventional Tibetan agricultural regimes did not operate in the area. I will discuss these below in the conclusions to this chapter. The other major dimension of the local economy involved utilization of resources in the human world, such as providing labour, services and engaging in activities like begging, all of which were related to taxation in some way or other at Tsa-ri. Here I will be describing the relationship between ritual practices and economic and fiscal practices.

### iii. Taxation, Pilgrimage Labour and 'Compensations'

In Tibet the most basic taxation equation was that all land-users were taxed in cash, kind or requisitioned services by the landowners and land-holders. In theory all land belonged to the Dalai Lama, and by extension to the state, but because of the different possible ways of owning, granting, holding and leasing land units this simple formula generated a very complex revenue system. In terms of production and management Carrasco characterised two basic units of the revenue system:

On the one hand, there is the peasant holding, worked by the peasant family, yielding a surplus in form of taxes or services either to the government or to a

<sup>38</sup> Tsering, interview.

<sup>39</sup> SP, interview. On this trade at the turn of the century see Waddell (1904:439, n.2).

grantee. On the other hand, the taxation rights of the state over a group of peasants and their holdings, usually together with demesne land to be cultivated with labor service of those peasants or with other laborers, form a cluster of interests over land managed as revenue-yielding units which can be assigned to a government office or granted to an official, church magnate, or monastery. These units [are]...called estates.<sup>40</sup>

At Tsa-ri, as in many other specific instances throughout Tibet, these basic definitions applied but were subject to modifications in line with local conditions. Both the Lhasa government and the 'Brug-pa of Bya-yul had rights over the land at Tsa-ri, the latter by way of the extension of their estate lands into the region as pasture. Both were eligible to receive tax from the Tsa-ri-bas occupying and using the land, and both had a hand in managing revenue obligations. The 'Bri-gung-pa had control over grazing rights in parts of Tsa-ri Nub, but they appear to have had no ability to tax as a land owner or grantee. As there was no cultivation allowed in Tsa-ri Nub and Shar, and only limited cultivation of non-regular Tibetan staples practised in Klo Mi-khyim-bdun, the standard tax in kind of surplus grain could not be applied in return for land use. Nevertheless, all Tsa-ri-bas paid taxes.

Published accounts of the area indicate that pilgrimages and taxes were linked there, but give a somewhat distorted impression of general taxation in the area. Recently Yuthok stated: "The people of Tsa-ri did not have to pay taxes. Instead they were assigned to help the pilgrims by keeping resthouses ready and aiding them in other ways."<sup>41</sup> While correct, such statements oversimplify the situation and perhaps lead us to believe that the power place of Tsa-ri was something of a Tibetan tax haven. This is far from being the case. I will give a brief account of actual tax obligations in the 1950s, and show that the form of their imposition and discharge was closely related to ritual practices at the site. I will first deal with the taxation applied to Tsa-ri Nub and Shar, then compare that of Klo Mi-khyim-bdun.

Tsa-ri-bas paid tax in three different forms: as surplus produce of land use, as specialised local goods, and as labour and service. To begin with I will deal with the last of these forms. In Tibet the provision of *corvée* labour (*'u-lag*) and special services in addition to or instead of taxes paid in cash and kind was very common. The range of requisitioned labour and services which were performed as tax obligations in Tibet was extremely varied, and in part paralleled the great regional diversity of the Tibetan state territory itself.<sup>42</sup> Judging from published accounts the most widespread and commonly utilized forms were related to transportation and communication. A hitherto unmentioned type of transportation *'u-lag* was the servicing of pilgrimages in various ways, and as far as I am aware it was a type only found at Tsa-ri. Servicing of pilgrimages as a tax obligation took a number of forms at

<sup>40</sup> Carrasco (1959:86).

<sup>41</sup> Yuthok (1990:89).

<sup>42</sup> Carrasco (1959:90-1).

Tsa-ri: the specific duties of the *tshul-pa*, the general labour recruitment of all villagers at certain times, and the performance of military service and other specific duties during the ravine circuit.

The maintenance of pilgrims' resthouses (*tshul-khang*)<sup>43</sup> and the duties of the keepers (*tshul-pa*) was the most institutionalised and complex form of servicing pilgrimages. The resthouses were located around the entire route of the middle circuit, and could also be used on sections of the peak circuit, and by ravine circuit pilgrims as far as the main Tsa-ri valley up to Cig-car. According to Tsa-ri-bas they were first started by the earlier 'Brug-pa and 'Bri-gung-pa administrators.<sup>44</sup> Being initially run as small private lodges when pilgrimage to the mountain became popular, villagers gained income by the sale of food and lodging. They eventually came to be administered partly by the Lhasa government and partly by the two sects. This was the situation in the 1950s. There were nineteen *tshul-khang* in the two main divisions of Tsa-ri. The 'Bri-gung-pa administered all resthouses on the mountain that fell with Tsa-ri Nub, and the 'Brug-pa all those within Tsa-ri Shar. Each administered one of the two resthouses at Pho-brang g. Yu-mtsho. This entailed ensuring a reliable attendant was appointed each season for every site. The actual obligation to run the resthouses belonged to the government itself.

Usually the job of *tshul-pa* was performed by, and passed down through, a family in a particular village. Some villages had several *tshul-pa* families, and the responsibilities and work were effectively spread within a group. Technically these appointments entailed specific responsibilities for the keepers (as individuals or groups) rather than the whole community, such that any tax relationship involved was only between the government and the *tshul-pa*. So as a form of taxation this work only applied to a limited number of Tsa-ri-bas. The actual work consisted of opening the resthouse in the late spring and making it weather-proof again after the winter snows. During the four and a half months of middle circuit pilgrimage keepers had to stay in residence and maintain a supply of firewood for pilgrims to cook with, keep large copper pots of water hot for the visitors, clean the quarters and ensure there were lamps to burn at night. At specific resthouses, especially where livestock grazed or in villages, a small ration of fresh curd or barley beer was distributed to each pilgrim. All these services were free for the pilgrims. In particular instances they provided blankets, and also cooked meals, although these were not obligatory duties. Some experienced keepers recited oral guides to pilgrims, a few literate ones had written copies on hand also, and local stories

<sup>43</sup> Local etymologies suggest that *tshul* here carries the notion of a 'duty' or 'responsibility' (as it does in *tshul-ldan* and *tshul-can* in general); c.f. Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, p.451: *tshugs-khang/tshugs-sa*, 'caravansary'.

<sup>44</sup> A late eighteenth-century account mentions most of the *tshul-khang* that still operated in the 1950s, and relates that they were administered by the 'Brug-pa and 'Bri-gung-pa at that time; see bsTan-'dzin dPal-'byor (1986:1040-44).

and anecdotes were often shared. It was accepted practice to make a small donation or give a gift to the *tshul-pa*, and this was especially so if food was cooked by them. In a good season a hospitable keeper could come away with a good store of small gifts in cash and kind. Some *tshul-pa* say pilgrims gave them presents so as to earn merit, as they believed these local residents had a semi-divine or higher status identity by living up near the mountain's summit for long periods.<sup>45</sup>

All residents of Tsar-ri Nub and Shar were obliged to pay an annual per capita government produce tax in butter to the Dwags-po sKu-rabs rNam-rgyal *rDzong*. It was collected by a visiting *rDzong* official locally known as the *Zhol-pa*, a title usually used in Lhasa for the magistrate in charge of the Zhol dependency under the Potala palace. This butter payment amounted to a few *khal* (1 *khal*= approx.12-13 kg) per household unit, which was a very light levy compared to other areas. The *tshul-pa* families were not exempt this tax, although they paid it at a reduced rate. They were, however, exempted from performing any regular *'u-lag* obligations which the other villagers had to do. They were also involved in another set of obligations and concessions with the government that other villagers were not. Each winter a representative of each of the nineteen *tshul-khang* went to Lhasa via Gong-dkar on a joint trading mission of sorts for several months. Not only did they sell their bamboo goods, butter and hard cheese along the way and in the Lhasa markets, but they also visited Tibetan government officials and presented them with quantities of rare musk gland and bear's gall collected during their annual hunting trips around Tsa-ri. The 'Bri-gung *tshul-pa* from Rib-la *tshul-khang* recalls the proceedings in the 1950s:

We took the animal products to the government officials in Lhasa and got paid for them in grain, butter and tea, but never in cash. There was no fixed price for these items, they just gave us various food products in return. Actually our trade of these animal products was part of an agreement with the government under which each *tshul-pa* was also given twenty-five kilograms of barley grain every year, it was incorporated with that, not a separate agreement. I remember this grain donation was a decree of a former Dalai Lama. From the Dalai Lama's office we used to get a letter which entitled us to collect the twenty-five kilos of grain from Lhun-rtse *rDzong* in gNyal on our return home.<sup>46</sup>

The institution of *tshul-khang* at Tsa-ri was a specialised and fairly complex form of obligatory service tax relationship with the government. Other villagers not involved in the running of resthouses were obliged to perform labour services of various types. Most of these involved pilgrimage in one way or another. Many high-ranking visitors to the area, particularly lay and clerical government officials, but often also their families and some high lamas, carried *lam-yig* or 'passports' issued by the authorities. The production of these entitled the bearer to free transportation services between fixed points, the providers of which discharged their

<sup>45</sup> SP, interview.

<sup>46</sup> SP, interview.



'*u-lag* obligation by performing the service. All households except *tshul-pa* had to contribute to this system. Most often this meant acting as porters for the duration of the dignitary's pilgrimage tour around the mountain as pack animals could not be used. For many ordinary Tsa-ri-bas this service was not a welcome obligation. As far as they were concerned '*u-lag* was for the purposes of transacting government business, which was, in fact, theoretically the case. It was not to be used by the privileged to go on personal pilgrimage tours. There were other reasons for discontent with these arrangements:

They were very bad and rude to us. When the government aristocrats (*sde-pa gzhung gi sku-drag*) came to Tsa-ri on pilgrimage they could not use horses and yaks there so they used to make us carry their tents and food. This was our tax, that the aristocrats and government officials could have the power to take fifteen people for '*u-lag* on the pilgrimage. The aristocrats forced us to go with them. When we did the '*u-lag* on the pilgrimage we never used to get any presents or tips. We used to get hit with a stick by the *sku-drag* if we didn't do the work they wanted.<sup>47</sup>

Corvée obligations were assessed on population, and as Tsa-ri Nub had about two-thirds of the total inhabitants of the upland area those communities had a proportionally larger labour payment due. On the middle circuit route '*u-lag* porters from Tsa-ri Shar provided services only between the resthouses administered by the 'Brug-pa, and at the midway point of Pho-brang g. Yu-mtsho the Tsa-ri Nub porters took over to cover their district. The extra '*u-lag* obligations of Tsa-ri Nub villagers were discharged in various other services, such as helping to open the advanced circuit route, annual maintenance of trails and assisting the *klo-rdzong* and ravine circuit preparations every twelfth year.

In addition to all the taxes mentioned so far, payments were also made to the 'Brug-pa monastery of gSang-sngags Chos-gling (but collected and used at their temple in Cig-car) for the people of Tsa-ri Shar, and to the 'Bri-gung-pa *lha-khang* at Yul-smad for those in Tsa-ri Nub. Although this was a tax (*khral*) which everyone was expected to pay, it was considered a form of 'religious offering' (*mchod*) as it was used to support the upkeep of monks, temples and shrines, thus one gained merit by its 'donation'. To continue to meet all these commitments and maintain household expenses, during the pilgrimage season villagers also worked as porters and guides in paid private arrangements, receiving either cash or a letter of credit to collect a grain or *tsam-pa* payment from the estates of wealthy pilgrims in the off season. In some cases they performed 'substitution pilgrimages', doing the middle circuit on behalf of wealthy, elderly or infirm clients. They were paid in 'offerings' of cash by the clients who thereby gained a share of the merits for the ritual. Even ravine circuits were performed as substitution pilgrimages, not only by upland Tsa-ri-bas, but Mi-khyim-bdun-pa as well.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> 'Apha', interview.

<sup>48</sup> SG, Norbu, interviews.-On substitution pilgrimages in Lhasa see Waddell (1894:319); and at

All the above part-time activities, trading, herding and pastoral production, harvesting and hunting, pilgrimage work, compulsory labour and craft work, contributed to the total economy. However, making a sufficient living was still a finely balanced affair, and certain 'compensations' were required. The fragmentation of economic activity and requirement of mobility and time spent away from the household unit put pressure on domestic labour in the home. The need for additional labour may partly explain why families in the area, particularly those closer to the border, kept unpaid Klo-pa slaves (*nyo-mi*) in their households.

The Tibetan practice of keeping neighbouring tribal peoples in slavery was common throughout the southern and eastern borderlands, at least from Tsha-ba-rong through to Sikkim.<sup>49</sup> There is a certain irony in the fact that many Tibetans use slavery as a tribal identity marker in order to distinguish themselves from their 'barbarian' neighbours. The tribes to the south of Tsa-ri did keep slaves among themselves,<sup>50</sup> occasionally captured Tibetans as slaves, and provided slaves to the Tsa-ri-bas when required. Both young tribal girls and boys were available to Tsa-ri-bas as slaves. Children were preferable to adolescents and adults as they were less likely to try and escape.<sup>51</sup> Concerning the local acquisition of slave labour:

To do business with the Klo-pas, and give them a ritual cymbal, they will exchange a boy for it, and he will become your servant or slave...The Klo-pas used to capture young Tibetan people for slaves, and unless you paid a large ransom you couldn't get them back. The local Tibetans also had Klo-pas as slaves, it worked both ways. Tibetans traded with them to get slaves. Cymbals and bells were especially valued, the ones with the six-syllable mantra inside them, those you could buy slaves with. But the Klo-pa slaves didn't stay long, they usually escaped and ran away.<sup>52</sup>

The other compensatory feature of the Tsa-ri economy was the practice of government-sanctioned begging (*slong-ba*) tours. All the residents from Tsa-ri Nub and Shar, including the *tshul-pa*, and some from Mi-khyim-bdun were eligible for the issue of a 'begging certificate' (*slong-yig*) which legally entitled them to seek alms anywhere in Tibetan territory. This was given to them explicitly because they were prohibited from cultivating their lands. These *slong-yig* were provided by Lhasa government officials, or by high ranking clerics from the 'Brug-pa and 'Bri-gung-pa sects. From the close of the pilgrimage season up to the next annual opening Tsa-ri-bas would make long begging tours over a wide area of the country. They ranged from Darjeeling and rTa-dbang to the west, up to Western Tibet (sTod) Kailash see Hedin (1909:202).

<sup>49</sup> See for example Bailey (1957:219), Bell (1924:78-9), Carrasco (1959:47, 56, 63, 68), Fletcher (1975:188), Rockhill (1891:285-6) and Ward (1941:121).

<sup>50</sup> Fürer-Haimendorf (1955).

<sup>51</sup> rTsa-ri Tshul-pa bKra-shis-lags (1987:35-6).

<sup>52</sup> SG, interview. On slave purchase and prices at Tsa-ri and adjacent areas see Bailey (1914:19, 33) and Fletcher (1975:188).

and Lhasa, through Kong-po and sPo-smad to the east, as far as Dar-rtse-mdo (Tachienlu) on the Sichuan border.<sup>53</sup>

On these sometimes extensive tours they sought and were given food staples and various items for trading including weapons, ritual implements and instruments, and live animals (horses and sheep), as well as cash. Certain important items were kept in store by the headmen to be used in the *Klo-rdzong* tribute payment. The trade items were usually exchanged to obtain more food and this was used for domestic provision and to discharge some of the various tax obligations. In general, the success of lay begging is often dependent on performative dimensions of the practice, and the Tsa-ri-bas had their 'act' and 'props' which invoked aspects of the powerful landscape they lived in. One account recalls a style of performance, in which the miraculous female deer with antlers, which appeared at the time of ravine circuits, was brought into play:

These [antlers from the female deer at Tsa-ri] had great empowerment and were very auspicious. Sometimes when Tsa-ri-bas went on begging tours they would just travel from place to place with these antlers, show them to people and explain the miracle of it. Sometimes they also took miraculous stones with them which had self-manifested Buddha images on them, or sometimes grass and herb leaves with self-manifested images on them. These were empowered objects. They could also tell many amazing stories about the mountain. They did go to different places with these things and get donations by begging.<sup>54</sup>

Particularly in far-off districts, the reputation of Tsa-ri was legendary, and its inhabitants too had a particular status among the faithful because of the stories about their semi-divine identities. At any rate, they lived in this distant and mysterious power place, but had come to visit with their stories and portable evidence of miracles there, seeking alms. By all accounts begging tours were successful for supplementing income. However, not all were so impressed by the activity. One resident of the nearby Glang-gong village in Kong-po remembers:

All the Tsa-ri-bas used to come to our villages in Kong-po to beg. They would bring small rocks, bits of plants, water and other substances and say that they were very precious and powerful as they came from the Tsa-ri mountain. So you had to prostrate before them three times, and then they would collect lots of offerings that people gave. Then they would move off through the whole of Kong-po begging like that. I think they were lazy! Some Kong-po-bas used to joke about the begging: If you had a neighbour or relative who was always asking you for something or other you would say they were like a Tsa-ri-ba!<sup>55</sup>

Such begging, as described here, is perhaps not too dissimilar from the activities and

<sup>53</sup> SG, SP, Norbu, interviews; rTsa-ri Tshul-pa bKra-shis-lags (1987:20-4); Bailey (1914:10).

<sup>54</sup> SG, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Chödrup, interview.

performances which earned a livelihood for the class of wandering Tibetan story-tellers and bards generally called *ma-ñi-pa*.

#### iv. Were Cultivation and Hunting Any Advantage?

I have now outlined the main features of the upper valley economy during the 1950s, and shown how it was intimately associated with representations of place and the rituals and the restrictions to which these gave rise. Klo Mi-khyim-bdun, the settled lower *rong* area of Tsa-ri, lay outside the area for cultivation and hunting restrictions. Yet, the lives of the Tsa-ri-bas there were still bound up in many ways with the general conceptions of empowered landscape applied to the mountain, and the various pilgrimages and associated rituals performed there. Most of these have been mentioned above, or in chapter six concerning the ravine circuit. The place also served as a staging point for the short pilgrimage loop around the associated mountain lake of Tsa-ri mTsho-dkar just to the east. So how different from the upper valley dwellers were the economic lives of the Mi-khyim-bdun-pa, since they could use their land as they liked without restrictions?

In and around Klo Mi-khyim-bdun there were barley fields, and the climate was warm enough for growing wheat, potatoes, tobacco, turnips and a range of other vegetables. Game animals and birds were abundant in the forests of the *rong* and could be hunted when they were required. The pasture land was good although not as extensive as the upper valley, and due to the lower altitude mainly male and female yak-cow hybrids were kept. Goats were also kept. The village had around eighty household units of varying size in the 1950s. Not only did the Mi-khyim-bdun-pa have *'u-lag* obligations for both pilgrimage and general work in the same way as the upper valley dwellers, they also had to make other large, separate tax payments in addition.

The Bya-yul 'Brug-pa had extended their religious influence into this developing border settlement by establishing a small nunnery there at the turn of the century, and through the management of pilgrimages. They also seem to have been able to extend the taxation rights they enjoyed over Tsa-ri Shar down to Klo Mi-khyim-bdun. The central government and Bya-yul 'Brug-pa divided up the per capita taxation of the village on the basis of gender. Men and all male children were taxed by the government, and women and subsequent female children by the gSang-sngags Chos-gling estate. An annual per capita (*mi-khral*) tax of eight *khal* of butter had to be given to the 'Brug-pa estate. Failure to pay meant having to perform forced labour for the estate. As butter production in the area was not great much of this tax had to be obtained by trading with upper valley Tsa-ri-bas and outsiders. I do not know the amount of per capita taxes due to the government *rDzong*.

An annual land and animal tax was due to both sKu-rabs rNam-rgyal and rKyem-sdong

*rDzong*.<sup>56</sup> Per household this totalled: one hundred yak loads of coiled madder vine lengths (*dmar-btsod* or *Rubia cordifolia*), which were used to produce the dye for monk's robes in the three great dGe-lugs-pa monasteries around Lhasa; over a hundred five 'doms-pa lengths (1 'doms-pa = approx. 1.7m, an 'armspan') of cloth, usually paid as two or three loads (*do-po*) of plain cotton; a cash payment, locally called *dpar-ka-dngul*, for each head of livestock; corvée labour to sKu-rabs rNam-rgyal *rDzong*; an unspecified quantity of rice and butter to rKyem-sdong *rDzong*; over a hundred five 'khar-ru measures (2 'khar-ru = approx. 1 *khal*) of *dban-po lag-pa*, an aromatic medicinal root; two 'doms-pa of pure white flag cloth ('*phyar-dar*); thousands of leather boxes of various types used in the butter festival (*bco-lnga mchod-pa*) after New Year; sixty large loads of the 'donkey's ear' biscuits (*kha-zas*) for the *lo-gsar* celebrations at New Year; a quantity of special double-sided baskets for delivering the 'ransom' (*glud*) during the King of Ransom ritual (*glud-'gong rgyal-po*) after New Year.

In total this was a very large quantity of tax to pay for a household, and like the *mi-khral* tax much of what comprised it was not locally produced or available. During the winter, Mi-khyim-bdun-pa had to trade with Arunachal peoples to the south for their tax materials such as madder, certain types of animal skins and rice. The goods most sought after by the tribal traders were not produced or available locally either. Goods such as salt, iron, swords and knives, ritual bells, beads, and so on, had to be either collected on begging trips or traded for local materials with the upper-valley dwellers or outsiders.<sup>57</sup>

According to my present understanding, it seems any advantages that might have been gained by land utilization were quickly lost again through the government taxation regime. Local production through free use of land and resources could not meet tax obligations, and extensive trading networks had to operate as well. My point here has been to show that even though the upland Tsa-ri-bas had only limited use of their lands, and were forced to diversify economically and beg extensively, they may not have been any worse off relative to other peasants in the area. Their village economy was certainly dependent upon more variables than those of barley-cultivating villages found at similar altitudes in other districts. Periodic scarcity of certain types of foodstuffs, such as meat and eggs, did occur, as did price inflations during such times. Whether living with the particular ritual restrictions that applied to their land was ultimately any better or worse than other Tibetan life-styles and conditions

<sup>56</sup> See rTsa-ri Tshul-pa bKra-shis-lags (1987:20-3).

<sup>57</sup> I suspect that the Lhasa government's tax policy here was partly to gain control over Tibetan-tribal trade, especially of rare goods and products that were needed in certain important civil and religious institutions. Klo Mi-khyim-bdun was a natural conduit in the area for doing this, particularly so because it was one of the few border points where tribal peoples did not have to cross high mountain passes for access to Tibetan markets. There were other government policies, such as the prohibition on tribal traders sleeping overnight in Tibetan villages, or moving more than one day's walk from the border, that had the effect of concentrating trade in such points so that it could be controlled and exploited (ostensibly these policies were to control tribals as 'undesirable' aliens).

will perhaps always be a moot point for observers separated in space, time, world-view and religious, economic and political structures. And from a Western point of view even the potential benefits of nature conservation due to these representations of place and ritual restrictions might not be as obvious or straightforward as they at first appear.<sup>58</sup> This whole discussion of the local economy ultimately revolves around the determinative effects of certain representations and social facts. But perhaps there are other factors to take into account here.

SEE ERDATA

#### v. Ecological Prohibitions: World-view or Necessity?

I have not yet been to Tsa-ri to see for myself, but some of the reports I have from reliable informants suggest there may be a physical, biological basis behind the lack of cultivation in the area. It seems very likely that the local soils and/or the local climate in the upper valleys of Tsa-ri are detrimental to the normal fruiting of flowering plants. Why do I think this? Talking to Tsa-ri-bas I heard several times that when the Chinese arrived there they did a small amount of cultivation, but were told by local people that it would not work, despite the good rainfall and apparent fertility. It did not work. These accounts were, perhaps predictably, always followed by comments like, 'Maybe the Chinese couldn't grow crops because it is a holy place and farming is forbidden.' In 1985 my informant dKon-mchog rGyal-mtshan, a highly educated and senior 'Bri-gung-pa cleric, visited his home place at Tsa-ri for the first since 1960. He made an extensive tour of the region, performed a complete middle circuit, and spent time residing in his natal place in Tsa-ri Nub. When discussing contemporary developments in the area he made the following observations:

In Tsa-ri there is no farming. In the past they were not allowed to, but also things do not grow there. They just grow radishes (*la-phug*) and potatoes, but no barley or grains...I saw they had walnuts growing there, but you can't eat them—they have such a foul taste. Now there are fruit trees there also, but you can't eat their fruits for the same reason. If they try to grow barley, it gets very tall, the stalk is very big, but there are no grains produced. It's as though they were sterile. Because it's a holy place it does not grow. That is why things like trading happen instead of farming. There are not so many people living in the area, it's small.

He further reports that people continue to graze the large mid-valley pastures around rDo-mtshan and Cig-car, and that upper valley Tsa-ri-bas go down to Klo Mi-khyim-bdun to purchase commercially grown potatoes, which appear to have become the local staple nowadays. Village-based land-use patterns have not changed since 1959, and a locally grown tuber crop (potato) has replaced the former imported 'fruit' crop (barley grain) as staple. The few European visitors to Tsa-ri this century, all either highly trained observers ('spies') (Bailey and Moreshead) or botanists and ecologists (Ludlow and Sherriff, Ward), have left us with

<sup>58</sup> I have already discussed this question elsewhere, see Huber (1991; esp. 69-72).

substantial notes on the area's climate, geology and geography, and flora and fauna.<sup>59</sup> All mention the unique micro-climate, which has an exceptionally high rainfall (a fact often noted in Tibetan sources also) compared with adjacent Tibetan districts, and very cold winters. This accounts for the excellent growth of alpine and sub-alpine flora in the area. I find all the above quite compelling evidence that it was, and still is, difficult to produce normal fruiting agricultural crops in the region.

If this is the case the cultural logics that modified people's lives at Tsa-ri have been developed in the context of these fundamental material constraints. They may form the basis for the only type of settled pre-industrial life-style pattern possible in the area, that is, one dependent on the existence of something like a major pilgrimage cult around the mountain. This is certainly a context which brings to mind the (perhaps inadvertently) perspicacious comments of Bailey quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

A Westerner working with a different representational system (and a different type of 'faith') might theorize that there is a critical trace element deficiency in the soil, a difficult climate pattern, or a complex of various inhibiting physical factors to explain this phenomenon. Tibetans have their own explanations, which do not necessarily contradict ours (Cakrasaṃvara's *kāya* could be dictating the inhibiting physical factors we can measure).

In addition to Tibetan theories and representations of Tsa-ri already discussed, there are also various local concerns about agriculture and fruiting crops associated with the upper valleys of Tsa-ri. One story from the Chos-zam area relates how when the place was first opened by the Tantric heroes of old, they found many wild animals, like bears and tigers, living there, and they established a tradition that no-one could grow any fruit, seed or grain crops which might attract them. If there was no food source there would be no danger to the yogins and other inhabitants. Another is imaged in the local landscape en route to Chos-zam. This is the hill called bSod-nams Lag-cha ('Destiny Implements'), which is said to contain a kind of natural hidden store of agricultural tools, such as ploughs (*thong-gshol*), hoes (*rko-ma*) and threshers (*rgyag-dbyug*), all of which are necessary for producing barley grain. According to a prophecy, Tsa-ri will become a farming land when the world around falls into decay and ruin, and the tools will be taken out and used.

Variations on this latter tradition are found in many of the descriptions of 'hidden lands' (*sbas-yul*) that Tibetan peoples locate throughout the Himalayan borderlands, often in remote alpine valleys.<sup>60</sup> The agriculture in such 'hidden lands' is usually described with crops that

<sup>59</sup> Bailey (1914, 1957), Bailey & Moreshead (1914), Fletcher (1975), Ludlow (1938), Ludlow & Sherrif (1937) and Ward (1936, 1941, 1947).

<sup>60</sup> I have avoided discussing Tsa-ri as a *sbas-yul* in the present work, although some Tibetans I know regard it as such and it is occasionally classified in texts that way; see Macdonald (1973:232). As a

require no cultivation but grow by themselves, or having a full range of grains and legumes as might be found on the plains of India or low valleys of Tibet, or yielding barley with phenomenal nutrient values, and so on. Agricultural tools are either hidden in these places, or guides instruct one to carry them in at the time of entry.<sup>61</sup> Having visited a few Himalayan areas so designated (e.g. La-phyi, Rol-ba mKha'-'gro-gling, highland Sikkim, etc.), and read accounts of others, it is clear to me that most do not and cannot support the regular cultivation of grain crops due to their climate and altitude. All references to such agriculture are related to the millenarian Tibetan visionary geography of these places.

For centuries the Tibetan people of Tsa-ri lived the mundane reality of one such place high in the Himalaya. They did not seek escape to some visionary paradise, but remained there and realized a sophisticated adaptation to it by way of their own human creativity and tenacity.

### *Afterword*

When the Chinese first came in the 1950s some of their officers and officials asked us, "Since there is no farming here, no cultivation, how do you make your living?" They also asked why we didn't farm or cultivate; at the time they were very polite, not saying much, just listening. We Tsa-ri-bas answered that it was a great power place, and that we just lived our lives by begging much of the time, which was true. So the Chinese told us they would change things such that we wouldn't have to beg any more. Many Tsa-ri-bas were very happy to hear this, for they were naive and innocent. (Shes-rab rGya-mtsho, Darjeeling 1991)

After 1959 much of the population of Tsa-ri either died or were killed during the Chinese occupation or their flight into exile. Those who remained and survived suffered torture, humiliation and starvation at times. Families were divided, and many remain so today. Monasteries and shrines in the area were razed to the ground. All pilgrimage was banned for twenty-five years. A Chinese road now runs down the course of the Tsa-ri river. It provides strategic access to a large military base on the disputed Sino-Indian border at Klo Mi-khyim-bdun. Logging trucks also use it to haul timber from the forests being felled along the mountain's flanks. Wild animals are seldom seen, most have now been shot. Soldiers and hunters patrolling the mountain relieve themselves without concern for pollution. There is still no cultivation in the upper valleys although, as far as I know, no-one living at Tsa-ri today has to beg any more.

style of representation of place applied to Tsa-ri it has only a minor role in relation to the materials I have presented herein. In the sense that Macdonald (1989:167, n.13) translates *sbas-yul*, as 'country in which to hide', there seems to be little Tibetan attention focused on the Dag-pa Shel-ri area. However, Tsa-ri gSar-ma, a place closer to Padma bKod in the east, may perhaps be thought of in these terms.

<sup>61</sup> See for example Reinhard (1978:23-6); Brauen-Dolma (1985:249).



## Chapter Nine

# What Is A Mountain?

After this comprehensive study of one mountain in Tibet there are still no obvious or simple answers to my original question, although several levels of Tibetan distinctions are now clearer.

SEE ERRATA

What is a mountain? To the Tibetan Tantric practitioner, it is a potential relationship-partner of a certain kind. The mountain is experienced intensely as a place with which one may enter into a "shamanic" relationship within a context of specialized Buddhist practice. Pure Crystal Mountain *maṇḍala* and the forces that operate in it are both within and outside of the meditator. Like the shaman, the yogin can both meet and identify with the deities of the mountain *maṇḍala* in a visionary space, and gain insights into alternative realities, obtain prophecies, paranormal powers, and so on, which can then become transformed into social products in various ways. We have seen that some of these, like the representations of the architecture of landscape, determine factors such as the social organisation of space at the site.

To many other Tibetans, it is the home or locus of powerful spirit forces, or is consubstantial with those forces. Its gods and goddesses have to be prayed to, bargained with or placated by offerings, and generally treated with the respect due to higher-status beings. But, how discrete are these persons from the spirits of the mountain? By way of the ritual transaction of substances they are believed to influence the quality of each other's being in various ways. The broadly conceived notion of embodiment even allows for them to become physically united at times. Persons who live at or visit the place ideally participate in a ritual interaction with it to maximize the positive effects of the place on themselves and minimize the negative effects they have on its environment. The physicality of this relationship is always important whether one is a yogin, lay worshiper or local villager.

Further, the mountain is a physical body or set of bodies which can be seen in the landscape, as it is animated in various ways on both large and small scales. Gyatso has pointed out that in general, this common Tibetan imaging of external landscape is 'preeminently atemporal', and not linked to temporal transformations of the outer world-space through creation myths.<sup>1</sup> I would agree, and in relation to Tsa-ri further point out the parallel that the visionary, internal landscape or architecture of the *maṇḍala* for yogins is also primarily atemporal. Whenever one enters the appropriate state of meditation the archetype deities who reside at the mountain are always present, and they, their inner palace and their *raison d'être* are unchanging. There is a strong connection here with the

<sup>1</sup> Gyatso (1989:49).

quality of external substances.

Finally, the mountain is a source of an empowerment which is atemporal and differentially distributed in space, and which gives the positive value to the physical relationship Tibetans can have with its environment. Whether it be the empowerment of the archetype deities present in the mountain or the empowered traces left behind by yogins in the cave where they realized identity with the *maṇḍala* a thousand years ago, the power remains there to be collected or utilized. But it is only in certain zones at this place, and not the next valley or mountain, that it can be found in high concentrations. Further spatial differentiation occurs as the qualities of the environment are articulated through Buddhist representations of the architecture of landscape, which prioritize centrality and relative height. The social organisation of space and the ritual and domestic uses of the cognized environment at Tsa-ri are mediated by these Tibetan notions about the quality and properties of place in conjunction with a set of ideas about the graded quality and properties of persons.

All these definitions and answers to the question are essentially relational and draw upon a common set of fundamental Tibetan assumptions concerning place and person, some of which appear to be ancient. Yet, all of the people I have talked to, observed, or whose works I have read during this research are Buddhists. Many of the major Tibetan representational categories applied to Pure Crystal Mountain can also be seen to have their origins in an introduced Indic Buddhist cultural system. As Buddhists, my informants' religious goals may often be expressed in terms of generating merit, gaining better rebirths or ultimately attaining enlightenment. However, the context of assumptions and practices in which they work towards them follows a uniquely Tibetan cultural logic. As canonical Buddhist explanations are not exhaustive, nor sometimes even illuminating, the study of Tibet as a predominantly Buddhist society *must* also make this shared cultural logic the subject of investigation.

Relations between persons and the mountain in pre-1959 Tibet not only reflected and influenced their ascribed physical and spiritual condition, but also their social status and mobility. In this latter respect we have seen that although my informants and sources are all Buddhist and express themselves by way of a set of shared Tibetan categories, this does not mean these people are homogeneous or static as a social and cultural entity. Differences in the way meanings can be constructed and modified are revealed in Tibetan attempts to interpret landscape, account for gendered access to space, organize processional ranking, represent their own and others identities or relate to the complex of economic practices in which they have been involved around the mountain.

Within the context of a range of both ritual and domestic activity at Tsa-ri social ranking

and identities were reiterated, developed, and at times challenged or contested in various ways. This study demonstrates that the cultural definition of the mountain was involved in these processes as they occurred in remote borderland settlements as well as the elite clerical and aristocratic circles of Central Tibet. These same cultural definitions of place at Pure Crystal Mountain were also used to establish and reproduce a viable and flexible local economy and human ecology there prior to 1959.

Since the earliest records of a distinct Tibetan civilization, mountains have been associated with religion, power and society on the high plateau. This continuity of importance throughout various cultural and social transformations is not only so because mountains form a dominant part of the Tibetans' environment. It is mainly because of a particular world-view which allows for persons and places to be related in certain compelling ways. Just how this world-view is being altered or adapted in the face of rapid developments in the lives of Tibetans during the late twentieth century I cannot yet say. What will Tibetans think about Pure Crystal Mountain in fifty or a hundred years' time, and will pilgrims still visit it with an attitude of intense devotion? If our own Western world-view has not changed too radically by then, and we maintain our anthropological curiosity, our children and their children may still consider such questions of interest and importance.



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# Appendix

## Tibetan Oral Texts

Note: After dictation in the field all texts were checked for accuracy by the informants themselves. No subsequent editing has been done, so as to leave local spellings of place names, special terms and dialect words intact.

༡ ཅིག་ཅར་དབྱ་མཇེད་ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོས་མཇེད་པའི་རྩ་རིའི་གནས་སྐོར་གསུམ་གྱི་བཤད།

༄༅། །རྩ་རི་སྤྱ་བསྐོར་ཞེས་པ་བོད་རྒྱ་གསུམ་པའི་ནང་ནས་བསྐོར་མི་ཕྱོག་ཞིག་ཅིག་  
ཅིག་འཆར་དུ་རིམ་བསགས་གྱི་ཚེས་བཅོམ་ཉིན་རྩ་རི་རྒྱལ་ནས་སྐོར་མ་གང་ས་གཤག་གང་ས་  
བརྟན་གཉིས་ཤེས་ནས་མ་ནི་འདོན་བསྐྱལ་ཐོག་ལམ་སྐྱ་བྱིད་ཏེ་ལ་ཤུ་ཡུགས་སྐོར་མ་ལ་  
བརྒྱད་མི་ཤུགས་རོང་དུ་བཞག་གཅིག་དེ་ནས་ཐོ་རང་ས་ཁར་གསལ་ལ་རྒྱལ་ཏེ་བུམས་པ་རོང་  
དཀར་ཐོག་ཐངས་ནས་མར་འོད་འབར་རོང་ཐངས་དུ་བབས་དེ་ནས་ཡར་མཁའ་སྐྱོད་ལ་  
འཇེགས་ཏེ་འཕོ་བྱང་གཡུ་མཚོ་བསྐོར་ནས་མར་འདོང་མོ་རྒྱ་བསྐྱལ་ནང་བཞག་གཅིག་དེ་ནས་  
སྤྱོད་ལོ་འགག་ནས་ཡར་ཡུལ་སྤྱད་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཞིང་སྐྱོང་གཏོར་མ་དེ་ནས་ཡར་སྐྱོང་རག་གོང་  
འོག་དུ་བཞག་གཅིག་དེ་ནས་ཡུལ་སྤྱད་དུ་སྐྱེའང་དང་མཁའ་འགྲོ་འབུམ་བདལ་མཇེལ་དེ་  
ནས་དུགས་པོ་སྐྱོང་པོ་སྐྱེམ་པ་རྒྱམས་རིབ་ལ་རྒྱལ་ནས་ཚོས་བམ་དུ་སྐྱོར་ནས་དུགས་པོ་རྒྱམས་  
གོར་མོ་ལ་རྒྱལ་ནས་འོག་དེ་ནས་སྐྱེམ་པ་རྒྱམས་རིམ་བུ་ལ་རྒྱལ་ནས་འོག་ཡུལ་སྤྱད་ནས་བྱ་  
ཡུལ་མཉལ་དང་བྱར་རྒྱམས་ཡུལ་སྐྱོད་བརྒྱད་ཕག་གཤམ་རྒྱལ་ནས་དཀྱུད་ནང་ནས་གསང་  
བསྐྱལ་ཚོས་སྐྱོང་ནས་སོ་སོར་འོག་རྩ་རི་སྤྱ་བསྐོར་འགྲོ་རྒྱལ་ཡིན།

༄༅། །ཡང་རྩ་རི་བར་བསྐོར་རམ་གཞུང་བསྐོར་ཞེས་པ་བོད་རྒྱ་བཞི་པ་ཅམ་ནས་འགྲོ་  
ལམ་ཕྱིད་ཏེ་གང་ལྟར་ཅིག་འཆར་ནས་པོ་མོ་ཚང་མ་སྐོར་མ་ལ་རྩེ་བར་འགྲོ་སྐྱོད་ཚོག་ཅིང་བྱད་  
མི་རྒྱམས་དེ་ནས་མར་ཅིག་འཆར་དུ་འོག་ཏེ་མཚོ་དཀར་དུ་འགྲོ་ན་སྐོ་བོ་མི་བྱིམ་བདུན་བརྒྱད་  
ཏེ་འགྲོ་དགོས་ཡོད་མ་འགྲོ་ན་ཅིག་འཆར་ནས་རྩོ་མཚན་བརྒྱད་རྩོ་རྩི་བྱག་ནས་ལྷགས་ཐག་  
ཡུང་སྐོ་བར་སྐྱེས་པ་རྒྱམས་དགོས་བསལ་སྐོར་མ་ལ་ནས་མི་ཤུགས་རོང་དུ་ཚ་ཕོག་རྒྱལ་ནས་  
གསལ་ལ་བརྒྱད་བུམས་པ་རོང་དཀར་ཐོག་ཐངས་ནས་ཡར་སྐྱལ་མ་ལ་སྐོར་ཞེས་ཞེས་ཞེས་  
པ་དཔའ་བོ་ལ་དང་དཔའ་མོ་ལ་སོགས་རིམ་པར་བསྐོད་ཏེ་འོད་འབར་སྐོ་མཚོ་མཇེལ་འཕོ་

བྲང་གཡུ་མཚོར་ལམ་ཁག་གསུམ་སྒོ་ལ་རྒྱབ་བསྐྱར་མཁའ་འགྲོ་གསང་ལམ་གང་རླང་ནས་འཕོ་  
བྲང་གཡུ་མཚོར་སྐྱབས་དེར་ཚ་ཕོག་རྒྱབ་དེ་ནས་འཕོ་བྲང་སྒྲིལ་མཇུག་རྒྱུག་ཐང་ནས་མར་  
བབས་མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཚོགས་གཞིང་དུ་སྐྱབས་ནས་ཚོགས་མཚོད་ཡུལ་དེ་ནས་མར་སྐྱབས་ཚང་རོང་  
དུ་ཉལ་དེ་ནས་སྒྲིལ་ཕོ་ཞེག་པ་ལྷགས་ཐག་ཕྲང་སྒོ་སྐྱབས་དེར་ཚ་ཕོག་རྒྱབ་དེ་ནས་མཁའ་རྒྱུག་  
ལ་རྒྱབ་ནས་སྐྱེན་མོ་ཉིང་རིང་སྐྱབས་ནས་རྒྱ་མགྲིན་རོང་བརྒྱུད་ཡུལ་སྐྱོད་དུ་སྒྲིལ་ཡུལ་སོགས་  
གར་འགྲོ་སྐྱས་བསྐྱར་སྐྱབས་ལྟར་རོ།།

༡། །ཡང་ཚུ་རི་ཚེ་བསྐྱར་ཅིག་འཆར་ནས་སྒྲིལ་མ་ལ་བརྒྱུད་མི་སྤྲུགས་རོང་ཚ་ཕོག་  
རྒྱབ་དེ་ནས་གསལ་ལ་ནས་བྱམས་པ་རོང་དཀར་ཕོག་ཐང་ནས་ཡར་འཛེགས་སྐྱབས་མ་ལ་སྐྱོར་  
ཞག་གཅིག་ཉལ་དེ་ནས་ཞེག་པ་ཡར་རྒྱང་མཚོགས་རྒྱབ་ནས་མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཚོགས་གཞིང་ནས་  
སྐྱབས་ཚང་རོང་དུ་ཚ་ཕོག་དེ་ནས་གཏུས་ལ་བརྒྱུད་དམ་ཅན་ལ་བརྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ལ་དུང་མཚོ་མཇུག་  
ནས་སྐྱོབས་ཚེན་ནང་བརྒྱུད་དྲག་བཤེས་སྐྱེ་མཚོ་མཇུག་ནས་ཅིག་འཆར་དུ་ལོག་ཚུ་བསྐྱར་འགྲོ་  
ལྷགས་སོ།།

༢ ཅིག་ཅར་དབུ་མཇུག་གས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོས་མཇུག་པའི་ཅིག་ཅར་དུ་མཚོད་པ་དང་རྒྱབ་པའི་  
བཤད།།

༡། །སྒྲིལ་ལོ་༡༤༥༤བར་ཚོས་བྱིམས་དར་གྱི་མདུད་པ་དུས་ཅིང་ཚུ་རི་གནས་རྣམས་  
བསྐྱར་མི་མང་སྐྱབས་པར་གནས་འདི་ནང་ཚོས་སྤྲུགས་མཇུག་རྒྱུལ་དུས་མཚོད་བཟང་བར་  
གནས་ཡོད། དབུར་དུས་མི་ཉོག་མཚོད་པ་བོད་རྒྱ་མཚོས་༡༥ཉིན་རྒྱུབ་གྲུ་ཡོང་རྒྱུགས་ནས་སྐྱེ་  
མ་མཚོད་པས་བདག་འདུན་འདུམ་གསུམ་དབང་མཚོག་དང་འབྲེལ་ཚོགས་མཚོད་དང་ལས་  
མཚན་བརྒྱུད་ནས་འདྲིན་གཡག་ཉི་མ་འབྲེལ་བས་རྣམ་མཐར་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་མགུར་  
དབྱངས། གུན་མཚོད་བོད་རྒྱ་མཚོས་གར་ནས་རྒྱུབ་གྲུ་དྲག་རྒྱང་རྒྱུགས་ནས་ཚོས་༡༥ལྷན་མོ་  
རྒྱུབ་སྐྱེ་ནས་གཟིམས་ཁང་བརྒྱུད་མགུར་མ་ཡོངས་རྒྱུགས་འབྲེན་ནས་རྒྱ་ཚོད་༡༡ཕོག་སྒྲིལ་འདུམ་  
ཐང་དུ་གངས་གྱི་དཀྱིལ་དུ་རྒྱུབ་པ་རྒྱང་ཡོད་པ་རྣམས་རས་རྒྱངས་བཏང་ནས་ཞེག་པ་རྒྱ་ཚོད་  
༥པ་བར་བཞུགས་ནས་ལས་མཚན་རྣམས་ནས་གསེར་བྱི་ཕོབས་བསུ་ཞུས་ནས་ཕག་མོའི་  
ཚོགས་མཚོད་བཟང་རྒྱས་བཞིན་རྒྱས་པ་བརྒྱུད་སྒྲིལ་ཡོད།།

३ ཅ་མི་འི་བྱ་སྤྲོ་ཚོགས།

३१

ཅ་མི་ཅེ་ནས་སྒོར་ཡོད།

སྐྱུག་མ་རོང་ནས་བྲག་ཡོད།

མ་དང་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་བྱིན་རླབས།

སྐྱུག་མའི་ཚིག་ལ་ཞུགས་ཡོད།

३२

ཅ་མི་ཡུལ་སྤོང་ཡུལ་སྤོང།

ག་བ་ཡིན་ན་དགའ་ལ།

ཕྱི་ལ་དགའ་ཡང་མིན་འདུག །

ནང་དུ་ཅ་ཅུ་འཛོམ་པ།

३३

དག་པ་ཤེལ་རིག་ཅོ་བྱས།

རི་ལ་རི་བརྒྱད་དུ་ན་བྱང།

དྲིན་ཅན་པ་མས་གཅོ་བྱས།

ཉི་ལ་ཉི་བརྒྱད་དུ་ན་བྱང།

३ॣ

ཇ་ཕྱའི་ནང་ལ་སྐྱུག་པས།

སྐྱུ་བདུད་དོ་རྗེ་བྱིལ་པ།

འདི་ནས་བཞེས་གང་བཞེས་དང།

ངན་སོང་སྤོང་དགོས་མིན་འདུག །

३।

ཅ་མི་དྲག་པོའི་གནས་ལ།

མ་ཕེབས་ཞུ་རྒྱུ་མིན་འདུག །

ཞབས་ལ་སྐྱུག་མའི་ཚེར་མ།

མ་གཟུག་བྱས་ནས་ཕེབས་གིག །

༣༦

ཅིག་ཅར་སྲི་འབྲུམ་ཐང་ལ།།

སིང་གི་བྱི་མཚོག་སྐམ་པ།།

བྱི་སྒྲིང་དེ་རུ་བཞུགས་པ།།

ང་ཚོའི་དཔལ་ལྷན་འབྲུག་པ།།

༣༧

གནས་ཚུ་རི་བསྐྱར་བའི་ཚོས་གྲོགས་རེད།།

བྱ་གོང་མོ་བསད་པའི་སྡིག་གྲོགས་རེད།།

༣༨

གནས་ཚེན་ཚུ་རི་ཏུ་ལ།།

སྐྱབ་པ་ལོ་གསུམ་བྱས་པས།།

སྐྱབ་གཡོག་མང་པོ་མི་དགོས།།

མ་དང་མཁའ་འགྲོས་ཚོག་གི །

༣༩

ད་ལྟའི་སྐབས་འདིར་བསྐྱེད་པའི་སྲུ་ཞིག་ཡིན།།

ད་ལྟའི་སྐབས་འདིར་དགའ་བའི་བྲོ་ཞིག་བརྒྱང་།།

མཚན་ལྷན་སྐྱམ་བྱེད་བ་ཀུན་གྱི་དངོས།།

རང་སེམས་གདོད་མའི་དབྱིངས་སུ་ཤར་བ་ལ།།

རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཉམས་བསངས་དགའ་བར་བྱས་ལགས་སོ།།

༤ ཅ་རིའི་གསོལ་འདེབས།།

༤༡

གནས་དག་པ་མཁའ་སྐྱོད་དཔལ་གྱི་ཚུ་རི་ཏུ།།

བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་སྐྱམ་རྣམས་དང་ཡི་དམ་ལ།།

མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཚོས་སྐྱོད་རྣམས་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས།།

ལས་ངན་སྤྲིག་སྤྲིབ་དག་པར་བྱིན་གྱིས་སྐྱོབས།།

རྒྱུན་ངན་བར་ཆད་ཞི་བར་མཇུག་པ་དང་།།

མཚོག་དང་མཐུན་མོང་དངོས་བྱུང་སྐྱེལ་དུ་གསོལ།།

༤༢

སྐྱོལ་མ་ལགས་ཀྱིས་མཇུག་པའི་གནས་ཆེན་ཕྱི་རྒྱ་རི་ཏའི་གསོལ་འདེབས།།

༄༅། །གནས་དག་པར་མཁའ་སྐྱོད་དཔལ་གྱི་རྒྱ་རི་ཏ། བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་གྲོ་མ་རྣམས་དང་  
 ཡི་དམ་ལ། མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཚོས་སྐྱོད་རྣམས་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། ལས་ངན་སྤྲིག་སྤྲིབ་དག་པར་  
 བྱིན་གྱིས་སྐྱོབས། རྒྱུན་ངན་བར་ཆད་ཞི་བར་མཇུག་པ་དང་། མཚོག་མཐུན་མོང་དངོས་བྱུང་  
 སྐྱེལ་དུ་གསོལ། ཀ་གོང་མོ་ཆེ་ཡིས་ལམ་སྐྱོད་དང་། སྤྲིན་ན་བུན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཞལ་ཁབ་ཕྱི། ནང་  
 སྐྱེལ་པའི་ལྷ་ཚོགས་གཏན་དུ་བཞུགས། ཀ་གསོལ་བ་ཐོབ་དང་དོ་རྗེ་སྤྲུལ། གསོལ་བ་གཤམ་  
 བཏབ་ན་བྱིན་སྐྱོབས་འབྱུང་། གནས་སྤྱི་གཏུག་ཉི་ལྗེའི་གདན་སྟངས། དྲིན་ཅན་ཅ་བའི་སྐྱེལ་  
 ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་སྤྱང་བ་ཚོས་སྐྱེལ་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། ཡབ་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་གྲོ་མ་ལ་  
 གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་སྐྱུ་གསུང་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། བཅོམ་ལྷན་རིགས་གསུམ་  
 མགོན་པོ་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་དུག་ལྡན་མ་དག་གི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། བཅོམ་ལྷན་རྒྱལ་  
 བ་རིགས་ལྡེ་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་ཡི་བེས་ལྡེ་ཡི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། ཡུམ་མཁའ་འགྲོ་སྤྲི་  
 ལྡེ་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་རྒྱ་རི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། ནང་གསང་ཐུགས་ལྷ་  
 ཚོགས་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། རྟིན་དག་པ་བེལ་རིའི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། ལྷ་ཉིས་སྟོང་བརྒྱུད་བརྒྱ་  
 ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་ཀ་ལ་དུང་མཚོ་གྱི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། དཀར་མོ་སྐྱེ་ཡི་ད་ཀི་ལ་  
 གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་བདུད་མགོན་གྲོ་མཚོའི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། མགོན་ཕྱག་བཞི་པ་ལ་  
 གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་ཅིག་ཅམ་དཔལ་གྱི་ནགས་སྟོད་ན། རྗེ་བཅུན་ཚོས་ཀྱི་མགོན་པོ་ལ་  
 གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་ཅ་བ་རོང་གི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། བྱུང་ཐོབ་ག་བ་རི་པ་ལ་གསོལ་བ་  
 འདེབས། གནས་མཁའ་འགྲོ་འབྲུས་བྱོན་གྱི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། གསང་པ་འབྲུས་ཀྱི་ད་ཀི་ལ་  
 གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། གནས་ལ་བ་ཕྱག་གི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། བྱུང་ཐོབ་ལ་བ་པ་ལ་གསོལ་བ་  
 འདེབས། གནས་སྐྱོལ་མ་སྐྱེ་མཚོའི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། སྐྱོལ་མ་ཉི་ཤུ་ཅུ་གཅིག་ལ་གསོལ་བ་

SEE ERRATA

འདི་བས། བནས་བདེ་མཚོག་སྐྱ་མཚོའི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། བདེ་མཚོག་ལྷ་དུག་ཅུ་ཅུ་གཉིས་ལ་  
 བསོལ་བ་འདི་བས། བནས་ཀིའུ་ཚང་ཁང་གི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། ཡུམ་ཨི་ཀ་ཇ་ཉི་ལ་བསོལ་བ་  
 འདི་བས། བནས་ཀིའུ་ཚང་ཚོས་སྐྱོང་དུ་རྩོམ་པུ་དེ་ན། དངོས་གྲུབ་མི་རོ་འཁོན་པ་ལ་བསོལ་བ་  
 འདི་བས། བནས་མགོན་པོ་རོང་གི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། མགོན་བྱ་རོག་གདོང་ཅན་ལ་བསོལ་བ་  
 འདི་བས། བནས་ཚོས་སྐྱོང་བཟང་མཚོའི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། མ་མོ་གསུང་གི་ད་ཀི་ལ་བསོལ་བ་  
 འདི་བས། བནས་མུ་མེན་མཐིང་མཚོའི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། མ་མོ་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་ད་ཀི་ལ་བསོལ་བ་  
 འདི་བས། བནས་མཐིང་སྐྱོར་པོ་མོའི་གཞལ་ཡས་སུ། ཡུམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་ལྷ་མོ་ལ་བསོལ་བ་  
 འདི་བས།

#### 4.3 Text and Translation of Tsa-ri *Thang-ka* Inscription

The following prayer is written in cursive script on the rear of the *thang-ka* shown in plate 3. The two *mantra* above the main text are positioned behind the image of the Buddha on the mountain's summit, and behind the archetype deities in the dome of the *stūpa*. The text is a very corrupt version of 4.1 above, with an additional line. Note: corrected spellings are given in (.).

Text:

Om Ā Hūm

Om Ā Hūm

[line i.] gnas dag pa khas (=mkha') chos (=spyod) dpal gyi rtsā ri sgrag (=tra or grag?) du dkar (=bka') brgyud bla ma

[line ii.] mam (=mams) dang yi dam lha kha' (=mkha') 'gro chos skyong mam (=mams) la so ba(=gsol-ba) bdebs (=debs) // las ngan sdig sgrib

[line iii.] bdag pa (=dag-pa) byin gyis blabs (=brlabs) rkyes (=rkyen) ngan bar chad zhi ba dzad (=mdzad) du sol (=gsol) chogs (=mchog)

[line iv.] thun mung (=mong) ngus (=dngos) sgrabs (=grub) tsal du sol(=gsol) // svamangalam //

[line v.] 'di sems can gang gis thongs (=mthong) 'am thos na ngal (=ngan) song rkyung[?]



(=rkyen) ngal (=ngan) las sgros (=sgrol) [ba?] bar rgyur (=gyur) cig //

Translation:

Ōm Ā Hūm

Ōm Ā Hūm

"*Gurus* of the bKa'-brgyud [lineage], and *yi-dam*, gods, *ḍākinī*, *dharmapāla* at glorious Cāritra, Khecara Pure Abode, I entreat you! Grant the empowerment to purify bad deeds and obscurations, to dispel adversities and dangers, [and] bestow both the supreme and mundane paranormal powers. Svamaṅgalam.

If this is seen or heard by any sentient beings may they become liberated from the adversities of bad rebirths!"