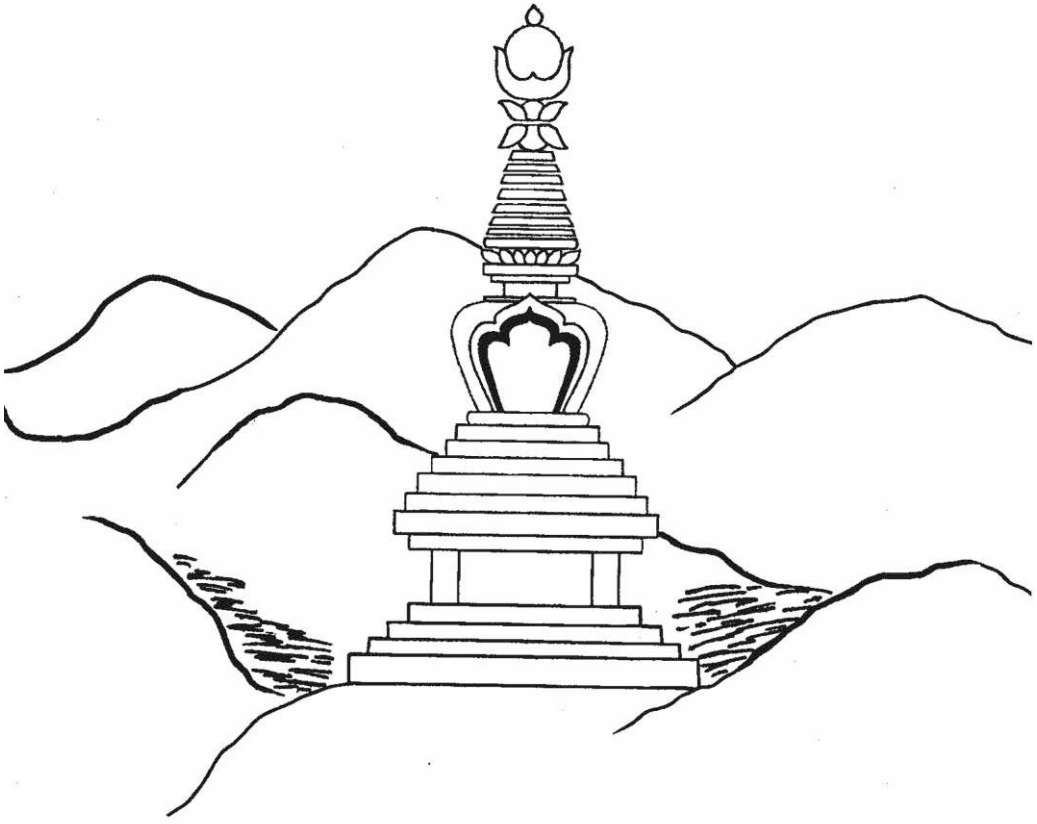
Bulletin of Tibetology



VOLUME 53 NO. 1

2022

NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY
GANGTOK, SIKKIM

The Bulletin of Tibetology seeks to serve the specialist as well as the general reader with an interest in the field of study. The motif portraying the Stupa on the mountains suggests the dimensions of the field.

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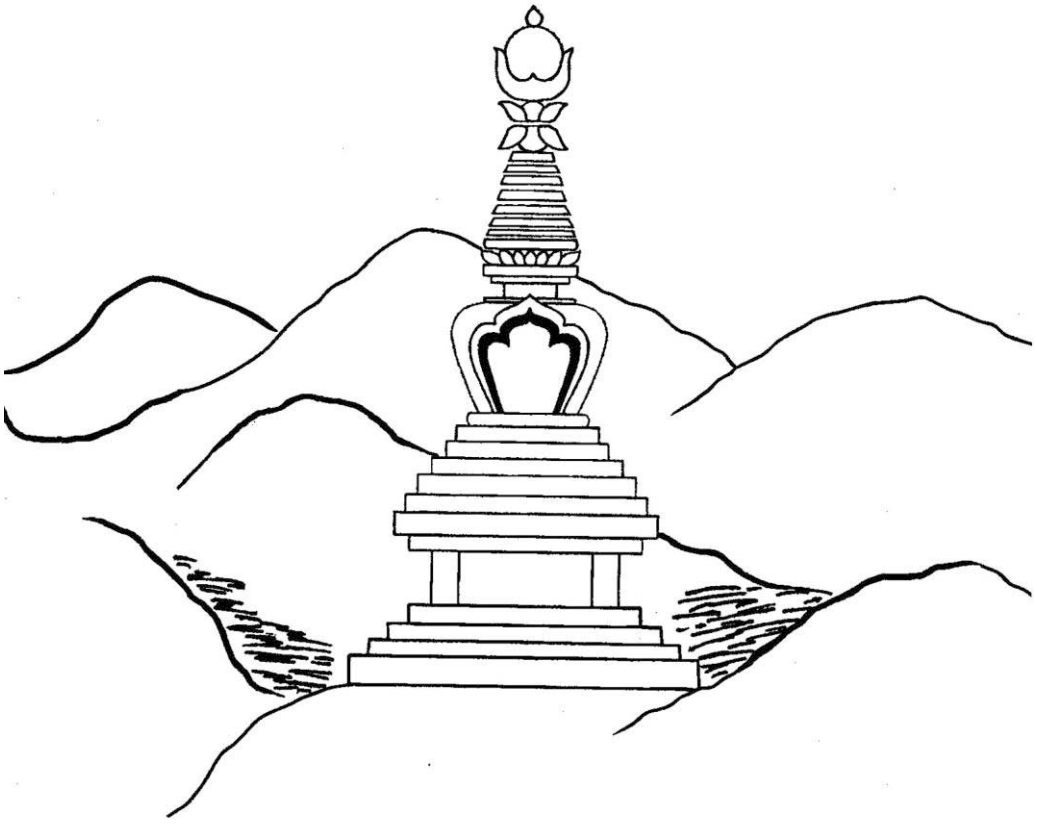

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The Bulletin of Tibetology is published bi-annually by the Secretary, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim.

Annual subscription rates: South Asia, Rs150. Overseas, $20.

Correspondence concerning bulletin subscriptions, changes of address, missing issues etc., to: Administrative Officer, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok 737102, Sikkim, India (directornitsikkim@gmail.com). Editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editor at the same address.

Submission guidelines. We welcome submission of articles on any subject of the religion, history, language, art, and culture of the people of the Tibetan cultural area and the Buddhist Himalaya. Articles should be in English or Tibetan, submitted by email and should not exceed 5000 words in length.

PRINTED IN INDIA AT VEE ENN PRINT-O-PAC, NEW DELHI

BULLETIN OF TIBETOLOGY

Volume 53 Number 1 2022

CONTRIBUTIONS BY YOUNG SIKKIMESE SCHOLARS

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

ANNA BALIKCI-DENJONGPA
Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

This issue of the *Bulletin of Tibetology* reflects some of the saddest moments we have lived through at the Institute, and in Sikkim in general, in recent months. The passing of Dodrubchen Rinpoche in February 2022 was a great loss to the world of Mahāyāna Buddhism. We have included an obituary to the great master, prepared by Acharya Tsultsem Gyatso and Tenzing Longsel Barphungpa. Although Dodrubchen Rinpoche had an international reputation and following, he also happened to be our neighbour, his Chorten monastery sitting on the hill a few minutes' walk from the Institute. Rinpoche was also an erstwhile member of the Institute, which he joined in 1960 as a 'Learned Lama'. His absence has been felt greatly by all Buddhists of this Eastern Himalayan region, where he made his home over six decades ago, and beyond.

Dodrubchen Rinpoche's passing was preceded by that of Barmiok Rinpoche Tashi Densapa on 13 November 2021, our Institute's Director of nearly 20 years. After he joined the Namgyal Institute in 2002, Barmiok Rinpoche literally brought the Institute back to life and made its presence felt on the international scene of Tibetology in many different ways. Working under Rinpoche was both an honour and a great learning experience. I personally prepared an obituary to his memory where I wished to list his most significant contributions to the field, together with memories that should not go unrecorded.

On a more joyful note, last year saw the publication of Alex McKay's *The Mandala Kingdom. A Political History of Sikkim* (Rachna 2021). A review of this important book written by John A. Ardussi is included at the end of this volume. With a primary focus on the British period, Alex McKay takes us through the history of Sikkim in a way which is both very readable and comprehensive. In Ardussi's words, "*The Mandala Kingdom* is the most balanced and thorough presentation yet written of the complex history of this small former Himalayan kingdom". There was a great need for such a balanced and accessible book, not only among students and young researchers embarking upon their Himalayan Studies journey, but also among Sikkimese society at large.

Coming to the articles, I am proud to herewith present four articles written or co-authored by some of the most promising and upcoming young scholars of Sikkim.

The first article presents the Drenjongke language's new Roman and phonological script. It represents the fruit of several years of labour on the phonology of Drenjongke or Sikkimese (Bhutia) language carried out by a dedicated team of Bhutia language teachers and speakers, together with the authors Kunzang Namgyal and George van Driem (Chair of Historical Linguistics, Bern University). Following a series of seven workshops held between 2016 and 2022, both at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and at the Bhutia Makhim, the phonology of Drenjongke was carefully studied and a straightforward phonological writing method, using both the Roman and Thonmi Sambhota scripts, was developed. It is hoped that this new method, which was released at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in June 2022, will increase the language's written use among the youth in everyday life and on the social media, and thus contribute to the language's survival.

Jigmee Wangchuk is both a Lama of Pemayangtse monastery and a scholar with a Ph.D. from Shantiniketan University. This rare double background provides Jigmee Wangchuk with the necessary tools to explore Sikkim's religious history and relevant manuscripts in a thorough and meaningful way. He contributes here a short article with the title "History of Namchag Phodrang: Pemayangtse Monastery's Erstwhile Retreat House". As Jigme Wangchuk argues, the existence of written records mentioning the functioning of the retreat house at the time of Jigme Pawo (1682–1735), provides evidence that Pemayangtse was then an important Dzogchen centre. It was used by renowned practitioners until the mid-20th century, when the retreat house eventually disintegrated as it went into disuse.

In the third article, Tenzing Longsel Barphungpa presents a biography of Ajo Rinpoche (1856–1962), a Bara Kagyud Sikkimese master born as Ngodup Dorje in the small village of Pam near Pabyuk in East Sikkim. Ajo Rinpoche studied at, carried out retreats, and eventually became the abbot of Kagyu Gonsar, a monastery located in the Chumbi Valley. Thanks to his mastery of certain Buddhist practices and reputation as a great meditator, it is believed that Ajo Rinpoche lived to the age of 121. Kagyu Gonsar stood right at the junction of frequently used trails connecting India, Tibet and Bhutan. As a result, many people stopped at the monastery and met Ajo Rinpoche on the way. Several British and Indian officers, Orientalists and botanists describe him in their books and his photograph appears in the photo albums of a number

of tourists who had permission to venture up to Yathung. This, together with the fact that he was an accomplished Buddhist master and practitioner, entirely dedicated to his monastery, contributed to the development of his reputation beyond the southern valleys of Chumbi and Sikkim. He married late in life, had five children, and spent the last three years of his life in East Sikkim in his father's village of Tsangay, where his remains are enshrined in a stupa nearby the monastery.

In the fourth article, Saom Miriam Malommu provides a detailed and well researched description of the Ajanta Hall frescos located on the top floor of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. This series of nine Ajanta-inspired murals were painted in the mid-1960s by Rinzing Lhadripa Lama (1912–1977), a brilliant royal painter also known as Barmiok Lhadrip, upon his return from visiting the famous Ajanta caves in Maharashtra. His paintings continue Ajanta's thematic genre, with canonical compositions of Gautama Buddha, his reincarnations and Jātaka tales, and as the author suggests, are the result of the artist's effort to bring Ajanta to Sikkim.

Rinzing Lhadripa was probably the best thangka artist Sikkim has ever had, but unfortunately, much of his murals did not survive Sikkim's humid climate and repeated earthquakes. Today his work can still be viewed at both the Namgyal Institute and at the Tsuglakhang Royal Chapel, where all the murals underwent proper conservation.

Among Rinzing Lhadripa Lama's works are a series of five thangkas commissioned by the late Chogyal in the 1960s, on display at the Institute, that visually narrate Sikkimese history from the time of Gye Bumsag's arrival in Sikkim and blood brotherhood with the Lepcha chieftain Thekong Tek at Kabi Longtsok, going through the main events, such as the coronation of the first Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal, up to British intervention in the region. These thangkas were recently published in *The Royal History of Sikkim* (Serindia 2021), where their various scenes illustrate early Sikkimese history.

DRENJONGKE PHONOLOGY, PHONOLOGICAL DRENJONGKE AND ROMAN DRENJONGKE

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DRENJONGKE PHONOLOGY

The Drenjongke phoneme inventory comprises 45 segmental consonant phonemes and 13 vowel phonemes. Drenjongke distinguishes two register tones, high and low. The Drenjongke initials /k, kh, c, ch, t, th, p, ph, tr, thr, ts, tsh, sh, s, hr, lh, hng, hny, hn, hm, h, ʔ/ are inherently followed by the high register tone. The Drenjongke initials /g', g, j', j, d', d, b', b, dr', dr, dz, zh, z, zh', z', r/ are invariably followed by the low register tone. The Drenjongke continuant initial phonemes /y, w, l, ng, ny, n, m/ may occur in either high register or low register tone syllables.

In syllables beginning with the latter type of onset, phonetic studies have shown that the high pitched portion of the tonal contour is realised predominantly during the continuant onset rather than during the ensuing vowel (Lee & Kawahara 2018, Lee *et al*. 2018, Perkins *et al*. 2018, Namgyal & van Driem 2020), thus providing synchronic acoustic evidence that this articulation arose diachronically from the reduction of the historical 'nyönju སྔོན་འཇུག་ *sn̂on-ḥjug* to the preglottalisation of the following continuant. Minor syllables might not themselves be tone bearing and so consequently assimilate for tone to the preceding syllable. The palatal approximant phoneme ཡ་ /y/ [j] may occur as a post-consonantal glide following any of the Drenjongke velar or bilabial plosive initials, and is written in traditional orthography with a yata ཡ་བཏགས་ *ya-btags*.

Consequently, any of 60 following different possible consonantal onsets may occur in a Drenjongke syllable. These onsets are shown in the following table. Each Drenjongke initial is given first in the phonemic script known as Roman Drenjongke followed by the corresponding phonetic transcription of the consonantal onset, as represented in the notation of the International Phonetic Association:

k [k]	kh [kʰ]	g’ [k̤ʱ]	g [g]
ky [kj]	khy [kʰj]	gy’ [k̤ʱj]	gy [gj]
c [ʨ]	ch [ʨʰ]	j’ [ʨ̤ʱ]	j [ʥ]
t [ʈ]	th [ʈʰ]	d’ [ʈ̤ʱ]	d [ɖ]
p [p]	ph [pʰ]	b’ [p̤ʱ]	b [b]
py [pj]	phy [pʰj]	by’ [p̤ʱj]	by [bj]
tr [ʈr]	thr [ʈr]	dr’ [ʈ̤ʱr]	dr [ɖr]

ts [ʦ] tsh [ʦʰ] dz [ʣ]

zh [ʑ]	z [z]
zh’ [ʑ̤]	z’ [z̤]
sh [ɕ]	s [s]

y [j]	’y [ʔj]
w [w]	’w [ʔw]

l [l] ’l [ʔl] lh [l̥]

ng [ŋ]	ny [ɲ]	n [n]	m [m]
’ng [ʔŋ]	’ny [ʔɲ]	’n [ʔn]	’m [ʔm]
hng [ŋ̊]	hny [ɲ̊]	hn [n̥]	hm [m̥]

h [h] ’ [ʔ]

The traditional ’Ucen དབུ་ཅན་ *dBu-can* script, which in the seventh century emulated the earlier Indic model of the Gupta writing system, does not appear to treat the glottal stop in initial position as a consonant phoneme, but rather as one of two contrasting types of vocalic syllable onsets. We list the glottal stop in the table above for the sake of completeness, but we treat the phoneme in accordance with the native scholarly tradition, which opposes vocalic onsets beginning with breathy phonation, followed in the modern Bodish languages by low register tone, written ཧ་ *ḥa* [ʱa̤], ཧི་ *ḥi* [ʱi̤], ཧུ་ *ḥu* [ʱṳ] and so forth, in contrast to vocalic onsets char-

acterised by sudden glottalic release, followed in the modern Bodish languages by high register tone, written ཨ་ *a* [ʔa], ཨི་ *i* [ʔi], ཨུ་ *u* [ʔu] and so forth. In accordance with our phonological analysis of the language, in Roman Drenjongke vocalic onsets in breathy phonation are left unmarked <a, i, u>, whereas vocalic onsets commencing with abrupt glottalic release are marked with an apostrophe <'a, 'i, 'u>. Continuant onsets of syllables in high register tone are likewise marked with an apostrophe preceding the letter symbol <'y, 'w, 'l, 'ng, 'ny, 'n, 'm>.

Only a small subset of the Drenjongke consonant phonemes occur at the end of a syllable. These consonantal coda phonemes are /k/ [k], /p/ [p], /r/ [r], /l/ [l], /ng/ [ŋ], /n/ [n], /m/ [m] and /ʔ/ [ʔ]. The nasal coda phoneme /ng/ is often realised as nasalisation of the preceding vowel.[1]

The Drenjongke vowel phoneme inventory comprises 13 phonemes. The phonetic realisation of the Drenjongke vowels differs subtly from that of their Dzongkha counterparts. Most notably, the phoneme rendered in Roman Drenjongke as <ä> [ɛ] does not have as open a realisation as the corresponding Dzongkha vowel. The Drenjongke vowels /a/ [ɑ], /e/ [e], /i/ [i], o [ɔ ~ o], /u/ [u] have long Drenjongke counterparts /â/ [aː], /â/ [eː], /î/ [iː], ô [oː], /û/ [uː]. Just as in Dzongkha, Drenjongke phonology treats the three apophonic vowel phonemes /ä/ [ɛ], ö [œ], ü [y] as inherently long. The three vowels /e, ê, ä/ lie much closer to each other in phonetic space than do the corresponding vowels in Dzongkha.

The symbols of Roman Drenjongke have been chosen both to represent the sound system of the Drenjongke, using the Latin script as much as possible in conformity with the usage of the Roman alphabet in English and other Western orthographic traditions, and to remain in harmony as much as possible with the conventions of Roman Dzongkha (Tshering & van Driem 2019). The differences between Roman Drenjongke and Roman Dzongkha faithfully reflect linguistic differences between the phonologies of these two closely related Bodish languages.

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[1] Contrary to what Yliniemi (2019: 38) maintains, there are no glottalised nasal finals. His example བསང་ 'incense' is correctly pronounced [sã]. Yliniemi anglicises the name of the Drenjongke language as 'Denjongke', though acknowledging that this transcription misrepresents actual native speaker pronunciation (Yliniemi 2019: 1, fn. 3). In his phonetic transcriptions, Yliniemi (2019) uses an inverted apostrophe for Drenjongke devoiced aspirate plosives in low register tone. The use of an inverted apostrophe is considered obsolete in International Phonetic Association notation. Conventionally, an inverted apostrophe is used to transcribe the Arabic sound 'ayn, and in some Polynesian romanisations, e.g. Hawai'ian, the inverted apostrophe indicates a glottal stop. In Armenian linguistics, the inverted apostrophe indicates aspiration, e.g. <p', t', k'>.

PHONOLOGICAL DRENJONGKE

Phonological Drenjongke is a phonemic writing system for the language in the native Sikkimese ’Ucen དབུ་ཅན་ *dBu-can* script. A one-to-one correspondence obtains between the pronunciation of the spoken language and the spelling. Each Drenjongke consonant initial in the following table is listed first in Roman Drenjongke followed by its rendering in Phonological Drenjongke:

k ཀ་	kh ཁ་	g’ ག་	g ཀྱ་
ky ཀྱ་	khy ཁྱ་	gy’ གྱ་	gy གྱ་
c ཅ་	ch ཆ་	j’ ཇ་	j ཇ་
t ཏ་	th ཐ་	d’ ད་	d ད་
p པ་	ph ཕ་	b’ བ་	b ཐྱ་
py ཕྱ་	phy ཕྱ་	by’ བྱ་	by ཐྱ་
tr ཀྲ་	thr ཁྲ་	dr’ གྲ་	dr ཐྲ་

ts ཙ་ tsh ཚ་ dz ཛ་

zh ཞ་	z ཟ་
zh’ ཞ་	z’ ཟ་
sh ཤ་	s ས་

y ཡ་	’y དབྱ-
w ཝ་	’w དབ-
r ར་	hr ཧྲ་

l ལ་ ’l ཟླ་ lh ླྷ་

ng ང་	ny ཉ་	n ན་	m མ་
’ng ང་	’ny ཉ་	’n ན་	’m མ་
hng ཧྨ་	hny ཧྙ་	hn ཧྣ་	hm ཧྨ་

h ཧ་

The conventions of Phonological Drenjongke are as much as possible in accordance with the traditional and historical use of the 'Ucen དབུ་ཅན་ *dBu-can* script for rendering Tibetan and also reflect the historical processes of phonological change that have unfolded over the course of centuries in the South Bodish languages, Drenjongke and Dzongkha.

Phonological Drenjongke uses the rago ར་མགོ་ *ra-mgo* 'superscripted r' in respect of traditional orthographic convention, where gocen མགོ་ཅན་ *mgo-can* 'superscript letters' and 'nyönju སྔོན་འཇུག་ *sṅon-ḥjug* 'prefixed letters' have protected initials from the inexorable forces of phonological change by hardening the initials, or rather maintaining their 'hard' or dra drakpa སྒྲ་དྲག་པ་ *sgra drag-pa* pronunciation. The unshielded letters on the other hand were left exposed, as it were, to the corrosive forces of phonological change and thus evolved into devoiced aspirate initials or 'soft' or dra jampa སྒྲ་འཇམ་པ་ *sgra ḥjam-pa* sounds in Drenjongke and Dzongkha, with subtle differences in the acoustic quality of these initials between these two closely related South Bodish languages. In Roman Drenjongke and Roman Dzongkha, such historically softened initials are therefore marked by an apostrophe after the letter symbol <g', gy', j', d', b', by', dr', zh', z'>.

Ideally, for the sake of orthographic consistency we would prefer to use the rago ར་མགོ་ *ra-mgo* as well in Phonological Drenjongke for the combinations representing the hard or dra drakpa སྒྲ་དྲག་པ་ *sgra drag-pa* initials སྦྱ་ /by/, སྒྲ་ /dr/, གཞ་ /zh/ and གཟ་ /z/, if only the computer fonts for the Tibetan script were to be so malleable at this time. At such time as computer fonts for Tibetan script are updated accordingly, Phonological Dzongkha could be likewise refined.

The sago ས་མགོ་ *sa-mgo* 'superscripted s' is used in the orthographic combinations that represent the voiceless nasal phonemes unique to Drenjongke. This convention respects the historical phonology of the language over the course of centuries by reflecting the phonetic environment that led to the historical development that gave rise to these Drenjongke phonemes: /hng/ སྔ་, /hny/ སྙ་, /hn/ སྣ་, /hm/ སྨ་, e.g. སྔ་ལེ་ hngâle [ŋ̊a:le] 'early', སྣོ་ hno [n̥o] 'snot' (Lachen), སྣའུ་ hneu [n̥eu] 'snot', སྙབ་ hnyap [ɲ̊ap] 'claim, seize', སྙ་ hnya [ɲ̊a] 'borrowed', སྙེ་ hnyê ~ hnyî [ɲ̊e: ~ ɲ̊i:] 'trap', སྙིག་ hnyik [ɲ̊ik] 'squeeze', སྙིམ་ hnyima [ɲ̊imɑ] 'impure', སྨེ་ hme [m̥e] 'lower'. A similar historical development can be seen in Burmese, but Dzongkha lacks voiceless nasal sounds. In the historical phonological development of Drenjongke, the lost sibilant represented in traditional orthography by the sago ས་མགོ་ *sa-mgo* also exerted this devoicing

effect on the liquid /l/ in native or *tadbhava* words, e.g. བསྣབ་ཟྱ་ lhap-ja [ɭɑpʤɑ] ‘counsel, advice’.

Phonological Drenjongke renders the use of the tshala ཚ་ལག་ *tsha-lag* superfluous. This Sikkimese diacritic invented in the 1980s by ནོར་སྦྱན་ཆོ་རིང་བྷུ་ཏི་ཡ་ Norden Tshering Bhutia and པདྨ་རིག་འཛིན་སྐུག་རྩྭང་དར་པོ་ Pema Ringzing Takchungdarpo mimics the flourish normally found on the upper right corner of the letters ཅ་, ཚ་ and ཇ་, but was transposed innovatively onto the the letters ཁ་, ཕ་ and བ་ to indicate that the bilabial initials represented had not morphed into a palatal by the addition of a yata ཡ་བཏགས་ *ya-btags.* In Phonological Drenjongke, the tshala becomes unnecessary, since the combinations ཕྱ་ /py/, ཕྱ་ /phy/, བྱ་ /by’/ and སྦྱ་ /by/ invariably represent the unique Drenjongke retention of a bilabial initial in combinations with a palatal approximant offglide. In phonemic writing, palatal phonemes are represented in a straightforward and consistent way by the palatal letter symbols ཅ་ /c/, ཚ་ /ch/, ཇ་ /j’/ and ཛ་ /j/.

སྐེན་	‘throat’	ken	ཀེན་
ཀེན་	‘palate’	ken	ཀེན་
ཀྱེན་	‘reason’	kyen	ཀྱེན་
ཕྱེད་	‘meet’	phe	ཕེ་
ཕྱེ་	‘separate’	phye	ཕྱེ་
དགུན་	‘winter’	gün	རྒྱུན་
རྒྱུན་	‘continue’	gyün	རྒྱུན་

With the new phonemic writing system in native Sikkimese script, other uses of the tshala are likewise rendered superfluous because Phonological Drenjongke brings back the use of the ’Ucen དབུ་ཅན་ *dBu-can* letter symbols to their original intent at the time of the venerable inventor of the script. The august linguist Thonmi Sambhoṭa understood the principles of phonology and developed a streamlined phonological writing system ideally suited to the language as it was spoken in the seventh century. However, the language has changed relentlessly since then and given rise to the modern Tibetan language as spoken in Shìkàtsé and Lhásá, the Dzongkha language of Bhutan, the Drenjongke language of Sikkim as well as the many other divergent Bodish languages as far as Amdo in the northeast and Baltistan in the west.

The symbols in the following table show the Phonological Drenjongke conventions for syllable beginning with a vowel. The thirteen Drenjongke vowels may occur in either the high or low register tone. The left half of the table shows the representations for vocalic onsets beginning with breathy phonation, followed by low register tone. The right side of the table shows the representations for vocalic onsets characterised by abrupt glottalic release, followed by high register tone.

ཨ་	ཨི་	ཨུ་	ཨེ་	ཨོ་		ཨ་	ཨི་	ཨུ་	ཨེ་	ཨོ་
a	i	u	e	o		’a	’i	’u	’e	’o
ཨཱ་	ཨཱི་	ཨཱུ་	ཨཻ་	ཨཽ་		ཨཱ་	ཨཱི་	ཨཱུ་	ཨཻ་	ཨཽ་
â	î	û	ê	ô		’â	’î	’û	’ê	’ô
	ཨཱ་	ཨཱི་	ཨཱུ་				ཨཱ་	ཨཱི་	ཨཱུ་	
	ä	ö	ü				’ä	’ö	’ü	

All thirteen vowels shown occur in Drenjongke in the high and low register tones. Not all vowel-initial possibilities shown occur at the beginning of attested Drenjongke words, but all are permissible within Drenjongke phonology. The following table illustrates the orthographic rendering of all thirteen Drenjongke vowels in a syllable with a consonantal onset.

ཀ་	ཀི་	ཀུ་	ཀེ་	ཀོ་
ka	ki	ku	ke	ko
ཀཱ་	ཀཱི་	ཀཱུ་	ཀཻ་	ཀཽ་
kâ	kî	kû	kê	kô
	ཀཱ་	ཀཱི་	ཀཱུ་	
	kä	kö	kü	

In accordance with the traditional usage of the ’Ucen script to indicate Indic long or *dīrgha* vowels, the འཛུར་ *ḥa-zur* or subscripted ཨ་ *ḥ* is used in Phonological Drenjongke to indicate vowel length, e.g. ཧཱུ་ hû ‘kettle’. The three apophonic vowels are indicated by a following ས་ *s* in accord-

ance with the historical regularity that the codas ས་ *s*, ད་ *d*, ལ་ *l*, ན་ *n* triggered apophony or *Umlaut*, e.g. སྐོད་ *skodm* 'neck' köm [kœm], ཡུལ་ *yul* 'place, village' ü [y], consistently at least in Chöke.

In *tadbhava* words both in Drenjongke and in Dzongkha, a historical final ས་ *s* has not generally yielded apophony, but has produced lengthening instead. For example, Drenjongke པགས་ཀོས་ *pags-kos* 'skin' is pronounced as པ་ཀོ་ pâkô, whereas historical གོས་ *gos* 'cloth, Bhutanese male garb' has come to be pronounced in modern Dzongkha as གོ་ g'ô, but this particular word has been written as བགོ་ *bgo* in Bhutan since the 1970s. The latter orthographic choice made at a time of modernisation is linguistically unfortunate because the spelling བགོ་ *bgo* suggests that the word is pronounced in the same way as སྒོ་ *sgo* 'door', whereas, in fact, both the initial consonant and the vowel are different in the two words. This phonological difference in the modern language is faithfully represented in the Phonological Dzongkha and Roman Dzongkha spellings as གོ་ g'ô 'Bhutanese mail garb' and རྒོ་ go 'door'. Likewise, Phonological Drenjongke and Roman Drenjongke serve the purpose of accurately representing the pronunciation of the modern living language in Sikkim today.

Both Drenjongke and Dzongkha are replete with *tatsama* borrowings that have in many cases crowded out the native forms. Therefore, just as Phonological Dzongkha, in Phonological Drenjongke too, a final ས་ *s* is likewise used to indicate apophony (*Umlaut*) of the vowel. Phonological Drenjongke must be consistent in that there must be a one-to-one correspondence between sound and spelling. Since a final ན་ *n* does not trigger apophony in native *tadbhava* forms, in Phonological Drenjongke, the letter ས་ *s* is used to indicate an apophonic vowel, even before a coda ན་ *n*.

In this respect as well, Phonological Drenjongke follows Phonological Dzongkha (Tshering & van Driem 2019), e.g. བདུན་ *bDun* [du:] དུ་ dû 'seven', whereas a coda ན་ *n* does trigger apophony in *tatsama* or Chöke forms, e.g. བདུན་ *bDun* [dyn] དྱན་ dün 'seven'. Therefore, the letter ས་ *s* is written in the Phonological Drenjongke rendering of དགུན་ *dGun* [gyn] གྱས་ gün 'winter', but not in the word རྒུན་འབྲུམ་ *rGun-ḥbrum* [gundrum] རྒུན་སྦྲུམ་ 'grapes'. This regularity is likewise manifest in the native pronunciation of proper nouns. Fore example, the name ཀུན་བཟང་ *Kun-bzaṅ* [kunzaŋ] is pronounced ཀུན་གཟང་ Kunzang or commonly also as [kunzo:] ཀུན་གཟོ་ Kunzô, whereas ཕུན་སུམ་ཚོགས་པོ་ *Phun-sum-tshogs-po* [punsumtshokpo] is pronounced ཕུན་སུམ་ཚོ་པོ་ 'thrice endowed', and the frequent proper name ཕུན་ཚོགས་ *Phun-tshogs* is commonly pronounced [puntsho:] ཕུན་ཚོ་ Puntshô, without apophony of the vowel in the first syllable and with the loss of aspiration in the initial as well.

Some examples adduced below illustrate the rendering of the long and short vowels in Roman Drenjongke and Phonological Drenjongke.

བཀབ་	‘cover’	kap	ཀཔ་
དཀར་པོ་	‘white’	kâp	ཀཱཔ་
འཇམ་	‘soft’	j’am	ཇམ་
འཇཱམ་	‘squirrel’	j’âm	ཇཱམ་
ལྕེ་	‘tongue’	ce	ཅེ་
བཅད་	‘cut’	cê	ཅཹེ་
སིམ་	‘dissolve’	sim	སིམ་
གསིཾམ་	‘sieve’	sîm	སཱིམ་
སོ་	‘tooth’	so	སོ་
གསོ་	‘sustain’	sô	སཱོ་
དགུ་	‘nine’	gu	ཀུ་
བསྒུག་	‘wait’	gû	ཀཱུ་

In Phonological Drenjongke, the consonantal coda phonemes are represented as follows, with the representation in Roman Dzongkha shown underneath:

-ཀ་	-པ་	-ར་	-ལ་	-ང་	-ན་	-མ་	-ག་
-k	-p	-r	-l	-ng	-n	-m	- ’

The Drenjongke voiceless occlusive finals /-k/ and /-p/ are represented by the symbols -ཀ་ *k* and -པ་ *p* respectively, whereas the phonemic glottal stop is represented by the letter symbol -ག་ *g*. The following examples illustrate that a final glottal stop contrasts phonemically with final /-k/.

རྟ་	‘horse’	ta	[tɑ]	ཏ་
སྟག་	‘tiger’	tâ’	[ta:ʔ]	དག་
བརྟག་དཔྱད་	‘examine’	takcê	[takce:]	དཀའ་ཚེ་
པ་	‘letter pa’	pa	[pɑ]	པ་
དཔའ་	‘hero’	pâ	[pa:]	པཱ་
པག་	‘dough’	pâ’	[pa:ʔ]	པག་
དཔག་	‘estimate’	pak	[pa:ʔ]	པག་
ཕྱག་ས་	‘skin, hide’	pak	[pak]	པཀ་

It is helpful at this point to be remind ourselves that, following Classical Tibetan, Drenjongke has inherited orthographic variation even when a conservative spelling is being favoured. The word for ‘dough’, for example, is spelt both as སྟག་ *sPag* and as པག་ *Pag*. Sometimes rival spellings co-exist in semantically differently shaded senses, the orthography པགས་ ‘skin, peel’ being in use alongside the spelling ཕྱག་ས་ ‘hide, leather, bark’, with the latter tending to be used once the integument has been removed, although there is no difference in pronunciation between the two.

In the table adduced above, the choice of the letter symbol -ག *g* to indicate a glottal stop final is motivated by one of the linguistic ideas underlying the genius of the Tibetan script designed by Thonmi Sambhoṭa. Generations of students of Tibetology have posed the question as to why the letters representing voiced occlusives <-g, -d, -b> occur in final position in traditional Tibetan orthography, but not those representing the voiceless occlusives <-k, -t, -p>, whilst it is more natural for voiceless occlusives to occur in final position. The answer lies in the fact that, as observed in Tibetan dialects and in many Tibeto-Burman languages across the Himalayan region, final voiceless occlusives /-k, -t, -p/ are often strongly glottalised. This situation is also likely to have obtained in the Tibetan language as it was spoken in the seventh century.

In the script as it was originally designed, the letters ཀ *k*, ཏ *t*, པ *p* represented voiceless plosives, the letters ཁ *kh*, ཐ *th*, ཕ *ph* represented the feature aspiration, thus designating the aspirated plosives. On the other hand, the letters ག *g*, ད *d*, བ *b* must have represented the feature of glottalic involvement in the informed linguistic conception of Thonmi Sambhoṭa, whether the articulatory nature of this involvement was voicing in syllable-initial position or the glottal reinforcement of an occlusive

in syllable-final position. For this reason, the choice of the letter symbol -ག་ *g* to represent the phonemic glottal stop /ʔ/ in Phonological Drenjongke has taken its inspiration from the linguistic genius of the creator of the Tibetan script.

Because a glottal stop phoneme does not occur in Dzongkha, and because the distribution of the glottal stop final in Drenjongke is somewhat restricted, the question might arise as to whether this segment has phonemic status in the Drenjongke language. In his grammar, Ylieniemi appears to be at great pains to adduce minimal pairs for the glottal stop that do not also involve vowel length and therefore do not, in fact, represent minimal pairs. In his attempt to arrive at a 'phonemic script', he therefore qualifies the glottal stop as a 'problematic issue', hedging that the segment 'functions in an intricate relationship with pitch, vowel length and vowel quality' (2019: 69).

With the vowels /a/ and /â/, the glottal stop appears more frequently to be associated with the long vowel /â/, e.g. རྟ་ ta [tɑ] 'horse' vs. སྟག་ tâ' [tɑːʔ] 'tiger', ཁ་ kha [kʰɑ] 'mouth' vs. ཁཱ་ khâ' [kʰɑːʔ] 'soup, gravy'. By contrast, with the other Drenjongke vowels, this relationship appears to be reversed.

With the other vowels /e/, /ê/ and /ä/, the glottal stop appears to be more frequently associated with the short vowel /e/, e.g. མཇེ་ je [ʤe] 'penis' vs. མཇེས་ jê [ʤeː] 'meet' (honorific) vs. བརྗེད་ je' [ʤeʔ] 'forget', བཤལ་ shä [ɕɛ] 'roam about, go from one to the next' vs. ཤེས་ shê [ɕeː] 'know' vs. བཤད་ she' [ɕeʔ] 'explain', རྒྱས་ gye [gje] 'fall' vs. བརྒྱད་ ge' [geʔ] 'eight' vs. འགས་ ge' [geʔ] 'blast' vs. རྒས་ gä [gɛ] 'old' vs. རྒྱལ་ gyä [gjɛ] 'win', ལྕེ་ ce [ʦe] 'tongue' vs. བཅད་ ce' [ʦeʔ] 'cut', རྫས་ dze [ʣe] 'gunpowder, element' vs. མཛེ་ dze' [ʣeʔ] 'leprosy'.

Similarly, with the vowels /o/ and /ô/, the glottal stop appears more frequently to be associated with the short vowel /o/, e.g. སོ་ so [sɔ] 'tooth' vs. གསོ་ sô [soː] 'save, keep alive, sustain' vs. སོག་ so' [soʔ] 'life, vitality', ལོ་ lo [lɔ] 'year' vs. ཟློག་ lo' [loʔ] 'light'. Likewise, with the vowels /i/ and /î/, the glottal stop appears more frequently to be associated with the short vowel /i/, e.g. གཟི་ zi [zi] 'onyx' vs. གཟིག་ zi' [ziʔ] 'leopard' vs. གཟིགས་ zî [ziː] 'watch' (honorific). Finally, with the vowels /u/ and /û/, the glottal stop appears likewise more frequently in association with the short vowel /u/, e.g. དབུ་ 'u [ʔu] 'head' (honorific) vs. དབུགས་ 'û [ʔuː] 'breath' vs. ཨུག་སིང་ 'u'sing [ʔuʔsiŋ] 'threadworm' (intestinal parasite).

Minimal pairs do exist, however, that show that the glottal stop final and vowel length are independent in Drenjongke, confirming the phonemic status of the glottal stop, e.g. ཁེ་ khe [khe] 'profit' vs. ཁེག་ khe' [kheʔ]

'ice' vs. ཁཱ་ khä [khɛ] 'tax' vs. ཁྲེ་ khä' [khɛʔ] 'difference'. The glottal stop phoneme also occurs in association with apophonic vowels, e.g. ལྷོད་ ལྷོད་ lhölhö' [l̥œl̥œʔ] 'calm, relaxed'. Historically, the glottal stop represents a phonetic residue of a former final, preserved in traditional orthography by the letter symbols -ས་ *-s*, -ད་ *-d*, or -ག་ *-g*.

Finally, the Drenjongke rhotic and liquid finals /-r/ and /-l/ are represented by the symbols -ར་ *r* and -ལ་ *l* respectively. The liquid final occurs infrequently, principally in *tatsama* loan words from Chöke. The Drenjongke nasal finals /-ng/, /-n/ and /-m/ are represented by the letter symbols -ང་ *n̂-*, -ན་ *n* and -མ་ *m* respectively. The Drenjongke velar nasal phoneme /-ng/ [ŋ] in syllable-final is often realised in natural allegro speech as the nasalisation of the preceding vowel [˜].

Drenjongke exhibits salient dialect differences across the regions of Sikkim and the Chumbi valley. These dialect differences pertain not just to the realm of phonetics but also involve morphological and lexical differences in the language. This dialectal variation should be documented urgently before this rich Sikkimese linguistic legacy disappears forever. Already young people from Lachung are adopting the speech spoken in Gangtok, whereas the variety of the language spoken by their grandparents shared many commonalities with G'yumbe kê ཇུམ་པའི་སྐད་ *Gyum-paḥi skad*, the language of the Chumbi valley. Drenjongke dialectal differences are not limited to those between the speech varieties spoken in northern Sikkim and what the inhabitants of Lachung call Markê སར་སྐད་ *mar-skad* 'lowland language' varieties, spoken in the high mountains of three lower southern regions of West, South and East Sikkim.

Drenjongke also shares other traits in common with Dzongkha. In disyllabic words, the 'nyönju སྔོན་འཇུག་ *snon-ḥjug* 'prefixed letter' of the second syllable is retained in modern pronunciation as the coda of the first syllable, e.g. Jamtsho རྒྱ་མཚོ་ *rgya-mtsho* 'ocean', Chundzom ཆུ་འཛོམ་ *chu-ḥdzom* 'confluence', although in recent years the artificial Chöke pronunciation 'Chudzom' for the Bhutanese place name can newly be observed to be making inroads due to the prominent placement of road signage containing this hypercorrect spelling in Roman script, which may lead to the gradual obliteration of the native Bhutanese pronunciation. The nasal realisation of the 'nyönju འ་ *ḥ* in the coda of the preceding syllable in this and other analogous forms is in keeping with the rhinoglottophylic tendency that a relaxed state of the vocal tract simultaneously involves both a lowered velum, characteristic of nasality, and a relaxed state of the glottis, associated with breathy phonation.

An additional feature which Drenjongke shares with Dzongkha is the tendency for some historically disyllabic words to conflate into a monosyllable, e.g. སྐར་མ་ *skar-ma*, pronounced ཀཱམ་ kâm [ka:m] ‘star’, the proper name པད་མ་ *pad-ma*, pronounced པེམ་ Pêm [pe:m] ‘lotus flower’, ཁྱོས་མ་ *khyos-ma*, pronounced ཁྱོམ་ khyôm [kʰjo:m] ‘reward, gift’.

Inevitably the variety of the Drenjongke language spoken in the capital city of སྒང་རྟོག་ Gangtok, pronounced གོང་རྟོས་ Gongtö [goŋtœ], sometimes in allegro speech even as གོ་རྟོས་ Gôtö [go:tœ], will prevail everywhere, and the Sikkimese heritage of dialectal diversity will be lost. Roman Drenjongke and Phonological Drenjongke furnish valuable tools for preserving information on the native regional dialects, since both systems of writing represent the language phonologically and can therefore accommodate any Drenjongke dialect. Roman Drenjongke and Phonological Drenjongke can therefore be used to capture the diversity and document this Sikkimese linguistic heritage before this rich legacy vanishes.

THE SLOW EMERGENCE OF THE VERNACULAR

The phonologically conservative Bodish languages of Baltistan and the comparative study of Tibetan dialects tell us that the dBu-can script once exhibited a one-to-one correspondence between the letters devised by Thonmi Sambhoṭa and the speech sounds which they represented in the living spoken language of the seventh century. Language changes inexorably, and so Tibetan spelling was already reformed during the reign of king ཁྲི་སྲོང་བཙན་ Thride Songtsen, also known as སད་ན་ལེགས་མཇིན་ཡོན་ Setnalek Jinyön, who ruled from 804 to 815, and king ཁྲི་རལ་པ་ཅན་ Thri Ralpacen, who ruled from 815 to 841. A second spelling reform was carried out by ལོ་ཆེན་རིན་ཆེན་བཟང་པོ་ Lochen Rinchen Zangpo in the eleventh century during the reign of ལྷ་བླ་མ་ཡེ་ཤེས་འོད་ Lha ’Lama Yeshê Öt. Afterwards, Tibetan spelling got fossilised and was viewed as something sacrosanct and therefore not allowed to change.

The various older spelling systems used for the liturgical and scholarly language Chöke, or Classical Tibetan, are referred to collectively as བཟ་ཉིང་ *da’nying* ‘old spelling’. The Chöke spelling in use since the eleventh century is still called བཟ་གསར་ *dasar* ‘new spelling’, except that this spelling is no longer new but in fact very old and rather difficult to learn. Meanwhile, the local languages evolved and diversified, all over Tibet as well as in Bhutan and in Sikkim.

The first and, for over a century, the only description of Drenjongke, the ‘rice district language’ འབྲས་ལྗོངས་སྐད་ *ḥBras-ljoṅs-skad* spoken in the lush and fertile country of Sikkim, was the succinct grammar written by

Graham Sandberg (1888, 1895), first published at Calcutta and later in a modified edition at Westminster. In the first part of the third volume of the *Linguistic Survey of India*, George Abraham Grierson (1909) included some of Sandberg's data under the name 'Ḍänjong-kä'.

Ernest Herbert Cooper Walsh (1905) compiled a glossary of the 'Tromowa' སྒྲོ་མོ་པ་ *Gro-mo-ba* language, spanning a few dozen pages in length. The northeastern dialects of Drenjongke form a dialect continuum with the western dialects of Dzongkha, with transitional dialects represented by the Dzongkha dialect of Hâ in western Bhutan, historically also spoken in the lower Chumbi valley, and the intermediate dialect spoken in the upper Chumbi valley, described by Walsh (1905). The Central Tibetan name for the valley is སྒྲོ་མོ་ *Gro-mo*, but this toponym is written རྒྱུ་མོ་ *Gyu-mo* in Drenjongke and Dzongkha and pronounced Gy'umo in Drenjongke and J'umo in Dzongkha, hence the English name 'Chumbi valley', taken from the Dzongkha adjectival form རྒྱུ་མེ་བའི་ J'umbi.

Essentially, the Chumbi valley had been under Sikkimese rule even before the establishment of the Chos-rgyal dynasty and the emergence of the Sikkimese state. This state of affairs dates from the thirteenth century, when རྒྱད་འཁུམ་བསགས་ *Gyad ḥBum-bsags*, pronounced རྒྱ་རྨུམ་སས་ Gy'e Bumsä in modern Drenjongke, who ruled over the Chumbi valley, extended his rule to Sikkim. Gy'e Bumsä was the name given by ས་སྐྱ་པཎྜི་ཏ་ *Sa-skya Paṇḍita* (1182–1251) to this མི་ཉག་ *Mi-ñag* prince of ཁམས་ Khams. The descendant of Gy'e Bumsä, Phuntshô 'Namgye ཕུན་ཚོགས་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ *Phuntshogs rNam-rgyal*, established the Chos-rgyal dynasty in 1642 as the first Sikkimese *dharmarājā* or ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ *chos-rgyal*, pronounced chôgye or, in a *tatsama* pronunciation, chögye (Mullard 2011, Ardussi *et al*. 2021: 67–72).

Gy'e Bumsä was a Mi-ñag prince in Khams. The Tibetans used the term མི་ཉག་ *Mi-ñag* both to refer to the Tangut (黨項 *Dǎngxiàng*) state that arose in the eleventh century in the land of འགའ་ *ḥGaḥ* (夏 *Xià*) and was subsequently vanquished by Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century, as well as to their close linguistic relatives, the མི་ཉག་ *Mi-ñag* (弭藥 *Mǐyào*), whose ancestors had remained behind in ཁམས་ Khams (Stein 1947). After the destruction of the Tangut capital by the Mongols in 1227, the Tangut dispersed in all directions, but a large segment of the population remigrated to eastern Tibet, where they rejoined their linguistic brethren in Khams (van Driem 2001, 2018). Ksenia Borisovna Kepping proposed that the modern མི་ཉག་ *Mi-ñag* (木雅 *Mùyǎ*) in eastern Tibet, or — after the redrawing of political boundaries by Chinese occupying forces — in western Sìchuān, represent their linguistic descendants. Sperling (2011)

reported that this view is also held by Chinese scholars. Sperling likewise observed that the prevalence of the attribution of descent of the Sikkimese royal dynasty from the Tangut imperial family, both inside and outside of the literary sources, does not warrant us dismissing this tradition.

After the destruction of the Tangut empire, there was evidently more than a single line of direct patrilineal descent. The Mi-ñag prince Gy'e Bumsä, who was ancestral to the Sikkimese royal dynasty, was himself one of three brothers. Another descendant of the Tangut imperial family in Khams is mentioned in a portion of the འབྲས་ལྗོངས་རྒྱལ་རབས་ *ḥBras-ljoṅs rGyal-rabs* that presents a rather heady cocktail of fact and fancy. Sperling (2011) demonstrated that the མི་ཉག་ *Mi-ñag* mentioned in connection with སེ་ཧུ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ *Se-hu rgyal-po* was indeed the Tangut empire in the land of འགའ་ *ḥGaḥ*, although other documents make the connection with the Mi-ñag of Khams. There need be no contradition here, but the particular family into which of *Se-hu rgyal-po* was born is depicted as demoniacal, and he was not ancestral to the Sikkimese royal dynasty, but instead to the དར་སེན་ *Dar-seṅ* family in ལ་སྟོད་བྱང་ *La-stod Byaṅ* in གཙོང་ *gTsaṅ* (Stein 1947, Rock 1953, Balikci 2008: 67, Ardussi *et al*. 2021: 61).

From the time of Gy'e Bumsä in the thirteenth century, the Chumbi valley constituted an autonomous self-governing polity, but at the beginning of the seventeenth century under ཞབས་དྲུང་དགའ་བབང་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ Zh'apdru Ngawa 'Namge (1594–1641), the lower Chumbi valley came to be administered by the Bhutanese from ཧོར་ Hâ. The Sikkimese historical claim over the Chumbi valley was reaffirmed at the time that land grants were accorded by the Tibetan government to the third chôgye Châdor 'Namgye ཕྱག་རྡོར་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ *Phyag-rdor rNam-rgyal* (*regnabat* 1700–1717). These land grants comprised གཏིང་སྐྱེས་རྫོང་ *gTiṅ-skyes rDzoṅ* and རྒྱལ་མཁར་ནང་པ་ *rGyal-mkhar Nang-pa* to the northwest of Sikkim and དཔལ་སྡེ་རྫོང་ *dPal-sde rDzoṅ* and སྣ་དཀར་རྩེ་རྫོང་ *sNa-dkar-rtse rDzoṅ* on lake ཡར་འབྲོག་གཡུ་མཚོ་ *Yar-ḥbrog gYu-mtsho* to the northeast. The remains of the Sikkimese summer palace in Chumbi are believed to stand on the site of Gy'e Bumsä's original residence (Ardussi *et al*. 2021: 122, 517).

Over a century and a half later, in the wake of the Sikhim War of 1888, today sometimes referred to as the 'Sikkim expedition', Tibet began to exercise what Walsh (1907) described as 'merely nominal' control over this sliver of territory wedged in between eastern Sikkim and western Bhutan. Yet, ever since the illegal Chinese occupation of Tibet began in 1950, contact between the speakers of the Chumbi dialect and the other speakers of Drenjongke in Sikkim has been hampered, and the very

fate of the native forms of speech of the Chumbi valley now hangs in the balance.

In the 1960s, both the Sikkimese and Bhutanese governments were aware that the discrepancy between the vernacular and written Chöke presented a challenge to the national education systems. At the time, the spoken tongues were often popularly viewed as corrupted forms of the written language, instead of as the direct modern living linguistic descendants of the language of which Chöke was the surviving literary exponent. In Bhutan in the 1960s, the language taught as Dzongkha in the schools was essentially still the liturgical language Chöke, and in Gangtok the government weekly *Sikkim Herald* was published in Tibetan and Nepali from 1962.

The use of Chöke spellings for modern spoken Dzongkha was challenged by Bhutanese scholars in the 1970s. Both སློབ་དཔོན་གནག་མདོག་ 'löbö 'Nâdo and སློབ་དཔོན་པདྨ་ལ་ 'löbö Pêmala proposed innovations to Dzongkha spelling. Most of their proposals were rejected, and have since been forgotten. The Zhung Dr'atsha གཞུང་གྲྭ་ཚང་ *gŹunî Grwa-tshanî* or Central Monk Body opposed changes to the spelling because at the time many people still mistakenly equated Dzongkha with Chöke in their minds. The Central Monk Body was, of course, correct to insist that we cannot change the historical spelling of Chöke. However, neither should the modern vernaculars of Sikkim and western Bhutan ever have been confused with Chöke.

Sikkim underwent a similar vernacularisation campaign in 1975, spearheaded by the maverick lexicographers and textbook writers ནོར་ལྡན་ཚེ་རིང་བྷོ་ཏི་ཡ་ Norden Tshering Bhutia, པདྨ་རིག་འཛིན་སྦྱག་རྩུང་དར་པོ་ Pema Ringzing Takchungdarpo, རྡོརྗེ་རིན་ཆེན་བླ་མ་ Dorjee Rinchen Lama and དཔལ་ལྡན་ལ་ཆུང་པ་ Palden Lachungpa. New spellings were introduced in new dictionaries, and school books and primers were produced under the auspices of the Directorate of Education of the Government of Sikkim. Balikci (2008: 327) reports that vernacular language classes only reached some localities in Sikkim in the late 1980s. Similar work was undertaken for Dzongkha during the same period by the Dzongkha Development Commission in Thimphu.

However, both in Sikkim and Bhutan, the unsystematic nature of the newly introduced *ad hoc* spellings in combination with a reluctance to abandon most of the familiar, and therefore beloved but hopelessly archaic, spellings rendered both Drenjongke and Dzongkha even more difficult to learn for schoolchildren in Sikkim and Bhutan than it had been for them previously to learn the Classical Tibetan liturgical language.

The pedagogical difficulties of teaching and learning Dzongkha became a recurrent theme in the Bhutanese media, and voices airing similar concerns with regard to the didactic challenges of instruction in Drenjongke were heard in Sikkim.

Beginning in 2016, six workshops were organised by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and by Makhim at Gangtok, in which members of the Drenjongke language community and professional teachers of the Drenjongke language conferred with linguists on the phonology of the living spoken language of Sikkim. This community effort has yielded the two orthographic methods elucidated in this instalment, as presented at the seventh workshop on the 21st of June 2022.

Roman Drenjongke in the Latin alphabet and Phonological Drenjongke in the traditional Sikkimese 'Ucen དབུ་ཅན་ *dBu-can* script are both phonological writing systems. In both these phonemic scripts, an intuitive one-to-one correspondence obtains between the pronunciation of the spoken vernacular tongue and the spelling, making the system easy to learn and use.

In April 2019, Juha Yliniemi defended his grammar of Drenjongke as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Helsinki. In our previous paper (Namgyal *et al.* 2020) and in the present paper, we correct some of the inaccuracies in Yliniemi (2019). However, despite these and other blemishes not yet addressed, Yliniemi's contribution to the documentation of the language represents the most comprehensive account of Drenjongke grammar to date.

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE USE OF THE PHONEMIC SCRIPTS

Each of the two phonological writing systems is easy to learn, but this does not mean that they do not have to be learnt. Just as Ratru Drukpa and his colleagues currently organise workshops in Thimphu in order to train people in the use of Roman Dzongkha and Phonological Dzongkha, so too both Roman Drenjongke and Phonological Drenjongke have to be taught and learnt. Gifted individuals might be able to catch on quickly without any training, but most people would probably benefit from instruction by native speakers who have already acquired a mastery of the new writing systems.

The prospects for the use of these writing systems are diverse. In an overly cautious and conservative approach, the use of these newly developed phonemic scripts could be limited to pronunciation aids in dictionaries, and Phonological Drenjongke could be used to write Sikkimese words for which no Classical Tibetan orthography exists. This first op-

tion would leave Sikkimese schoolchildren to struggle with the obsolete orthography and compel them in future to memorise an erratic spelling, which make English and French spelling look like child's play.

The second option is to adopt the two phonemic scripts, developed in Gangtok since 2016 by a concerted Drenjongpa community effort, as the new Sikkimese བརྡ་གསར་ *dasar* 'new spelling'. The Drenjongke language can be written in Phonological Drenjongke, that is in traditional 'Ucen དབུ་ཅན་ *dBu-can* script using a new, easy-to-learn and elegant Sikkimese spelling system. Roman Drenjongke, on the other hand, can be used as a learning aid for foreign learners unfamiliar with the 'Ucen script and on maps and road signage.

The late and dearly beloved Tashi Densapa was quite right to argue that people might as well learn traditional Tibetan spelling because today there is no literature of note written in Drenjongke. This argument can be turned around, however, because a young and budding Drenjongke literature is unlikely to flourish if constrained by a burdensome spelling that was designed for the Tibetan language as it was spoken in the eleventh century. Moreover, the old spelling has already been changed in Sikkim. Despite the noblest intentions, these efforts rendered the spelling more complex, with numerous new inconsistencies. So, for Drenjongke today the 'old' spelling effectively dates from 1975 and features the embellishment of the *tshala*, which represents a break with tradition.

In respect of another point contained in Tashi Densapa's argument, even if the living spoken Sikkimese vernacular is written in its own modern streamlined and user-friendly spelling, then Sikkimese students and youngsters enamoured of history, cultural heritage and Buddhist studies will still learn Chöke, just as before. Just as French, Italian and Spanish students learn Latin, but write their own languages each in its own spelling, so too Sikkimese students can learn Chöke, yet write their own native tongue in its own spelling, optimally suited to the phonology of the living language. Nothing will be lost, and for Drenjongke much stands to be gained.

Most of the world's languages today are endangered, and often it appears that written languages are more resilient to the threat of extinction than unwritten languages. French, English, Thai and Burmese are examples of written languages with spelling conventions that are challenging to learn. Mastering the orthographies of such languages is, however, still quite doable. The situation of Drenjongke and Dzongkha is far more difficult, however, because the spelling systems presently available are unsystematic and excessively archaic for the modern languages.

Once people acquire a difficult orthography, however, they cannot help but grow attached to the familiar spellings. If people of the younger generation wish to use Roman Drenjongke or Phonological Drenjongke to write new Sikkimese literature, conduct personal correspondence and produce new content in their own language, these easy phonemic methods may stimulate ever more creative use of the language and help the Drenjongke language to survive in the face of the relentless encroachment by Nepali and English. Roman Drenjongke and Phonological Drenjongke could serve as the most effective means to make the living spoken language thrive and to help writing in Drenjongke to flourish.

LINGUISTIC CONVENTIONS

<	>	orthographic brackets, European morpheme brackets
[	]	phonetic brackets, etymological brackets
/	/	phonemic or phonological brackets

The spelling of words in written Drenjongke, Dzongkha and Tibetan is transliterated in accordance with European Tibetological convention, and in this article the transliterations of traditional orthography appear in italics.

ཀ	ཁ	ག	ང
k	kh	g	ṅ
ཅ	ཆ	ཇ	ཉ
c	ch	j	ñ
ཏ	ཐ	ད	ན
t	th	d	n
པ	ཕ	བ	མ
p	ph	b	m
ཙ	ཚ	ཛ	ཝ
ts	tsh	dz	w

ཞ	ཟ	ཧ	ཡ
ź	z	ḥ	y
ར	ལ	ཤ	ས
r	l	ś	s
	ཧ	ཨ	
	h	a	
ི	ུ	ེ	ོ
i	u	e	o

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HISTORY OF NAMCHAG PHODRANG: PEMAYANGTSE MONASTERY'S ERSTWHILE RETREAT HOUSE

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It is believed that one of the spiritual sons of Lhawen Choying Lhendup (Tib. Lha dbon chos dbyings lhun grub, d.1684)[1] named Ponlop Namchag (Tib. dPon slop gnam lcags) designed and built Namchag Phodrang (Tib. rNam lcags pho brang), the retreat house near Pemayangtse monastery.

After the death of Lhawen Choying, Ponlop Namchag took upon himself the responsibility to search for and recognise the reincarnation of his teacher.[2] Eventually, Khenchen Rolpai Dorje[3] was recognized and enthroned as the second reincarnation of his teacher. Later, Ponlop Namchag entered into a lifetime retreat at the sacred site of Namchag Phodrang till his Mahā Parinirvāṇa.[4] The hill where the retreat centre is built appears like the forehead of a sleeping elephant as mentioned in many sacred religious texts. Hence, the place came to be known as Namchag Phodrang, and is located a mere five minutes' walk to the east of Pemayangtse monastery.

The collected works of Dzogchen Jigmed Pawo open up several doors of Sikkimese history, luring and enticing us into further investigations and exploration. The site of the Namchag Phodang is mentioned in the collected works, clearly stating that on the 21st day of the 12th Month of the Wood-Horse Year (corresponding to 1714), the Third Lhatsun Dzogchen Jigmed

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1 Lhawen Choying Lhendup was the nephew and heart son of Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo Namkha Jigmed. See also Ehrhard, F-K. (2008: 10).

2 1st Lhawen Choying Lhendup,
2nd Khenchen Rigdzin Trinley Rolpai Dorje,
3rd Kalsang Dondhup,
4th Dorje Ongden Tsal,
5th Kyapgoen Losang Rigzing Chopel (1819–1847).

3 Khenchen Rolpai Dorje started construction of the Pemayangtse monastery under the patronship of the Third Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal in the year 1705. Eventually, after the arrival of the Third Lhatsun Chenpo Dzogchen Jigmed Pawo, they together, consecrated the newly built monastery in the year 1710. He also acted as the Head Lama of Pemayangtse monastery and brought several developments to the monastery.

4 rDzogs chen rig 'dzin 'jigs med dpa' bo'i bka' 'bum (mthong grol chen mo), Sangchen Pemayangtse, 1970, pp. 29–32.

Pawo, on his way back to Pemayangtse, spent a day enjoying traditional dishes with Umze Sangchen, Chingsang Gyelong and twenty-five other practitioners living there.[5] The retreat is on the other side of the route which was then used by the monks of Pemayangtse on their journey to Tashiding and Sakyong.

The existence of this site reveals the true facts about the in-depth Dzogchen practices in Pemayangtse and is concordant with the title given to the practitioners of the Lhatsun Tradition in Sikkim. The ruins of Namchag Phodrang, surrounded by a variety of self-appearing herbal plants and vegetables (Tib. *rma rmos po'i lo tog*), itself marks the place for meditation.

The site where Namchag Phodrang once stood

Remnants of the retreat house's walls

5 Ibid.: p. 333.

Many years ago, there used to live a hermit at Pemayangtse who spent his entire life in meditation there, but was unable to visualize his tutelary deity Mahākāla, which greatly unsettled him. One day he came out of the retreat in search of nettle in and around the site reciting the secret mantra of self-visualization according to Rigdzin Jatson Nyingpo's (1585–1656) Treasure Text.[6] Suddenly, the Great Mahākāla (Tib. Ye shes mGon po) appeared before him and blessed him with his sublime power.

In the later part of the 19th – early 20th century, many practitioners such as Ven. Rabim Yap Gomchen, Lingdham Gomchen and Lingmo Gomchen also spent several years in retreat there. Gradually, the retreat house fell into disuse and disintegrated.[7]

However, the *Dor u cho sum* Managing Committee of Pemayangtse monastery has decided to build a new retreat house in the exact same location for the monks seeking to undertake rigorous retreat.

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6 Ratnasamanyasaṅgha; H'um bhyo, la's la cha's tshe srog bdud cha lugs 'dzin, zhal gcig phyag gnyis sku mdog mthing nag 'bar, srid gsum gzig phyir spyn gsum brang la shar, dmag dpon bzhi 'gyed spyn bzhis lhu tshugs brgyan, stag ral gzig shubs btgas ns rta nag zhon, bdud mdas dgra snying gzer 'debs gling bzhir rgyug, spyn nas khrag 'dzg me yi kha brlngs 'bar, kha Tam grigug lcgas spar thogs nas su, snng srid pho rgyu thams chad pho nyar 'gyed, etc, (sNyingpo, Rig 'dzin 'ja' tshon, rDzogs pa chen po dkon mchog spyi 'dus, Nepal, 2002, pp.104–105).

7 Interview with Late Ven. Dorje Lopen Gomchen Chewang on Friday, December 26 2014, 9:10 am at the new Shedra's construction site; and also with Ven. Dorjee Lopen of Sangag Choling; Yap Kunga Tsh in the year 2018; Yap Lopen T. Gyatso on 20 April 2020; Yap Sonam Choda 15 April 2020; Yapo S. Yongda on 22 May 2020 at Pemayangtse monastery.

PORTRAIT OF A VAJRA SIDDHI:

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE AND WORK OF BARA KAGYU MASTER AJO RINPOCHE (1856 – 1962)[1]

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Ajo Rinpoche (1856–1962)

INTRODUCTION

Esoteric Buddhism from the Himalayas has captured the world's imagination since the beginning of the twentieth century. Many

[1] I would like to thank Dr. Jigme Losal for his help during my fieldwork. I am also grateful to Dr. Anna Balikci Denjongpa for her continued support and encouragement. I would especially like to thank the family of Ajo Rinpoche, in particular his daughter Anyo Zangmu and granddaughter Ani Chunni, for their valuable contributions.

distinguished yogic adepts and tantric masters have both fascinated and intrigued western scholars and travellers with their spartan asceticism and spiritual accomplishments. Following the footsteps of the great Milarepa (Tib. Mi la ras pa, 11th – 12th century), they lived amazing lives of meditation and devotion, commanding awe and reverence in equal measure.

Ajo Rinpoche

While many of these masters came from Tibet, there were a few who were native to Sikkim and gained huge followings in Sikkim and beyond, among them were the important Sikkimese Nyingma meditators, Labrang Gomchen and Lingdok Gomchen. Another adept, belonging to the lesser known Bara Kagyu (Tib. *'Ba' ra bKa' brgyud*) school, was one of the first who came in touch with Western scholars and intrepid travellers. Born in a tiny village surrounded by lush forests, he would gain renown as Ajo Rinpoche (Tib. A jo Rin po che).

BARA KAGYU

The Bara Kagyu school belongs to the Yangonpa branch of the Upper Drukpa (Tib. *sTod 'brug*) school. It was founded by Barawa Gyaltsen Palzangpo (Tib. 'Ba' ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzang po, 1310–1391), also known as Cho je Barawa (Tib. Chos rje 'Ba' ra ba), whose root guru was Zurphugpa Rinchen Palzang (Tib. Zur phug pa Rin chen dpal bzang). The birth place of Cho je Barawa was Bara Drag (Tib. 'Ba' ra Brag), in the Shang Valley, southern Tibet, and the word 'Bara' stuck both to his name and that of the school he founded. The Bara Kagyu merges the teachings of Shangpa Kagyu and the Zhije teachings of Padampa Sangay, with the Drukpa Kagyu (Tib. *'Brug pa bKa' brgyud*) teachings.[2]

This school made its way into Sikkim in the seventeenth century through the efforts of Drubthob Kunchok Gyaltsen (Tib. Grub thob dKon mchog rGyal mtshan, 1601–1687).[3] There were many exceptional Lamas who were significant in the development of the school in Sikkim, one of the foremost was Ajo Rinpoche.

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2 https://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/Bara_Kagyu

3 John A. Ardussi, *Bhutan before the British: A Historical Study*, 1977: 115.

AJO RINPOCHE

Early life

Ajo Rinpoche was born in the quaint hamlet of Pam, Pabyuk (Tib. sPa phyug), East Sikkim.[4] His mother's name was Phuntsog Wangmo. She was from Pam and belonged to the Kagyedpa clan, while his father, Dawa Zangpo, was from nearby Tsangay and belonged to the Phyanakpa clan.[5] They both came from the nomadic Phalong Drokpa families who used to migrate with their herds to Chumbi (Tib. Chu 'bi)[6] Valley during summer and down into the temperate valleys of East Sikkim during the winter months. He was given the name Ngodup Dorje (Tib. dNgos grub rdo rje, Skt. Vajra Siddhi), which can be translated as "Great Adamantine Master of Spiritual Accomplishments".

Education

Whilst in his teens, Ajo Rinpoche was sent to Chumbi to study at the Kagyu Gonsar (Tib. bKa' brgyud dgon gsar) monastery.[7] There he met and studied under several teachers. One of the most important was the Fourth Kagyu Trulku, Kalzang Choying Gyatso (Tib. sKal bzang chos dbyings rgya mtsho, 19th century),[8] from whom he learnt the Ngondro (Tib. *sNgon 'gro*) preliminary practice and under whom he completed six months Ngondro practice.

However, his root guru (Tib. *rtsa ba'i bla ma*) was Dongpa Kyabje Rinpoche (Tib. Grong pa skyab rje Rin po che), whose monastic name was Ngawang Tenzin Gyatso (Tib. Ngag dbang bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho). Ajo

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4 This hamlet has since been relocated after the original area was acquired by the Ministry of Defence, as per information received from Lama Tenzing of Pabyuk, age 28, 15th December 2021, 11:30 am.

5 Informant: Anyo Zangmula, Gangtok, age 87 years, 4th December 2021, 3:30 pm.

6 Chumbi or Dromo (Tib. Gro mo) is a slice of land wedged between Bhutan and Sikkim. Though currently under Chinese occupation, it was once a part of Sikkim with the Sikkimese king or *Chogyal* regularly in residence at his summer palace there.

7 Kagyu Gonsar was the seat of the Bara Kagyu hierarch in Sikkim, i.e., the Kagyu Trulku (Tib. bKa' brgyud sprul sku), as well as *ma dgon* or mother monastery to the other Bara Kagyu monasteries of Sikkim, such as Kagyu Choling (Tib. bKa' brgyud Chos gling) in Pedong, Tashi Choling (Tib. Bkra shis Chos gling) in Pabyuk and Sanga Rinchen Phuntsoling (Tib. Gsang sngags Rin chen Phun chos gling) in Tsangay.

8 Kalzang Choying Gyatso was born in Paro, Bhutan. His reincarnation status was contested and there may have been two Kagyu Trulkus during his time. His silver reliquary can be seen inside the monastery, Pabyuk.

Rinpoche received teachings on Mahāmudrā (Tib. *Phyag rgya chen po*)[9] and the Six yogas of Nāropa (Tib. *Na ro'i chos drug*)[10] from this teacher. These teachings gave him a solid grounding for further education and practice.

Another significant teacher was Khyungdu Dorje Chang (Tib. Khyung dus rdo rje 'chang) of Sapolung, in Chumbi. A skilled yogi, he used to perform special prayers for the long life of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Ajo Rinpoche received the main Bara Kagyu teachings called Bara Cho drug (Tib. *'Ba' ra chos drug*) and Ri Cho Kor Sum (Tib. *Ri chos skor gsum*) from this master, who had numerous students, among whom were Tingzam Rinpoche and the then Kagyu Trulku. Ajo Rinpoche's daughter, Anyo Zangmu had in her possession a letter sent by Khyungdu Dorje Chang to Ajo Rinpoche summoning the latter to Sapolung, Chumbi in the first month, tenth day of the Tibetan calendar (year not specified) to receive teachings related to the Upper Drukpa school.

From Kyirong Dungsey (Tib. sKyid grong gdung sras) Rinpoche, he received many teachings including the fourteen volume "Collected works" of Choje Barawa, i.e., *Chos rje 'ba' ra ba rgyal mtshan dpal bzang mchog gi gsung 'bum*. This extensive work includes profound practices and prayers, yoga techniques and devotional songs (Tib. *mgur*).

Activities

Ajo Rinpoche was a brilliant student and excelled in his studies. This attracted much jealousy from the other students at the monastery. They teased him, calling him a *Mon pa*, i.e., Southerner (as he came from Sikkim, which was to the south), but used here derogatorily to mean 'barbarian'. They hurt him physically and may have even killed him, but for the intervention of Dongpa Rinpoche.

Apart from their studies, young monks also had to help with the chores in the kitchen. Ajo Rinpoche as a novice monk, was once lifting a big pot. Since it had just been on the fire, the handle was still hot and so he inadvertently dropped it, thus breaking the utensil. This was a serious offence as, in this remote high altitude valley, things were hard to come by. He was taken to the then Bara Kagyu hierarch and his teacher, Kagyu Trulku Kalzang Choying Gyatso, and was given two choices. He could

[9] Mahāmudrā is a profound practice lineage of understanding the real nature of mind.

[10] A set of advanced tactic Buddhist practices, it includes, yoga of inner/mystical heat (Tib. *gtum mo*), yoga of clear light/radiance/ luminosity (Tib. *'od gsal*), yoga of dream state (Tib. *rmi lam*), yoga of illusory body (Tib. *sgyu lus*), yoga of intermediate state (Tib. *bar do*), yoga of transference of consciousness to a pure Buddhafield (Tib. *'pho ba*).

either pay for the utensil or go for intensive solitary retreat. He did not have the money, so he went for the retreat. He had to stay confined to a small space for a very long period of time. During his confinement, his mother would sneak in porridge and black tea through a small opening.[11] Despite all the hardship and prejudice, eventually, he was able to establish himself as a great scholar and meditator.

Owing to his white, undyed, cotton clothing (Tib. *ras*), reminiscent of Milarepa, and similar to the Naljorpas (Tib. *rnal 'byor pa*) or 'wandering ascetics', he was also known as Ajo Repa Rinpoche. A striking figure, he usually wore a white shawl with broad red stripes and a meditation belt across his torso (Tib. *sgom thag*). This was in stark contrast to the conventional scarlet robes of the monks usually seen in monasteries. He never cut his hair and wore his long braided hair (Tib. *gos dkar lcang lo can*) coiled up on his head. White, spiral-shaped conch earrings (Tib. *dung long*) completed an overall unforgettable appearance.

He practiced Prānāyāma (Tib. *rlung gyi nyams len*), the yogic practice of channelling the vital life force. He could sustain himself on this, and came to be known as 'The Yogi who sustains himself by consuming his own vital energies' (Tib. *rlung gyi nyams len brtag pa*). He was famed across the Himalayas for his ability to survive without food, merely on his own inner energies, through engaging in meditation, a yogic practice known as Rasāyana (Tib. *bcud len*).

He was particularly renowned for his mastery in the yoga of inner/mystic heat or *gtum mo*. This is one of the most remarkable practices whereby the practitioner, is able to raise his body temperature and withstand extreme cold, as part of his journey to increase his wisdom and dispel the darkness of ignorance. Ajo Rinpoche was proficient in tapping the subtle wind energies (Tib. *rlung*) that course through the veins (Tib. *rtsa*). These body channels are visualised as *thig le* or Bindu in Sanskrit. Thus, this practice is also known as *rtsa rlung thig le*.

It is believed that he lived to a very old age thanks to these practices – by some accounts 121 years. Having practiced long life meditation several times, he not only extended his own life but could also give longevity empowerment (Tib. *tshe dbang*) to others. He blessed many people in this way. Some of them were the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Sakya Trizin Rinpoche, the Sixteenth Karmapa, the Dzogchen master Chadral (Tib. Bya bral) Rinpoche and the Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche. Thus, his long-life empowerments were sought after by many people and his reputation grew. It is also believed he could cure

[11] Ajo Rinpoche was with his mother in Chumbi, while his father remained in Tsangay.

many ailments and infections by merely blowing on the affected area. He is particularly remembered for his proficiency in treating victims of rabies and other dreadful maladies.

He was also revered for his abilities to communicate with spirits and control them. The Bara Kagyu *sungma* (Tib. *Srung ma*) or 'guardian' at Gangtok's Enchey monastery, Drubwang Gyalpo (Tib. Grub dbang rgyal po), is believed by some, to be a spirit subjugated by Ajo Rinpoche.[12]

Chumbi Valley and Kagyu Gonsar stood right at the junction of frequently used trails connecting India, Tibet and Bhutan. Therefore, many people passed this way. Great scholars and Orientalists such as Sir Charles Bell and Professor Giuseppe Tucci met Ajo Rinpoche, as also the German Buddhist scholar Anagarika Govinda and his wife Li Gotami in 1947–1948. It is their writings and their pictures of Ajo Rinpoche that have popularised him beyond the secluded valleys he dwelt in.

Kagyu Gonsar in the Lower Chumbi Valley, 1938

[12] Tenzing Longsel Barphungpa, A Tale of Two Kangsopas: A Unique Tradition at Enchey Monastery, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Gangtok, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 52 (1), 202: 45.

In August 1936, the British Political Officer in charge of Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet, Sir Basil Gould (1883–1956) and Frederick Spencer Chapman (1907–1971), army officer and mountaineer, met Ajo Rinpoche at the Kagyu Gonsar while they were en route to Lhasa. Chapman describes the monastery in some detail and also writes about Ajo Rinpoche, who was presiding over the monastery at the time. Chapman records that Ajo Rinpoche was an old man, who had been abbot of the monastery for twenty-seven years. He wore a grey robe, had long hair which he had tied up, and wore earrings as well as rings on his fingers.[13] He was fully devoted to the monastery and was not averse to doing any sort of work including chopping wood.[14]

Anagarika Govinda (born Ernst Lothar Hoffmann, 1898–1985), in his book "The Way of the White Clouds", writes that he met Ajo Rinpoche in 1947–48. Govinda describes how austerely Ajo Rinpoche lived at Tsecholing (Tib. Tshe mchog gling) monastery, as Kagyu Gonsar was known by then. He lived a simple life in a small cottage with his wife, having spent all the money that was offered to him, by loyal patrons from Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet, on the monastery. He had built a two storeyed temple replete with scriptures, statues, frescoes and thangkas.[15]

Ajo Rinpoche performed the religious marriage of Anagarika Govinda with the artist Li Gotami. At this time the Seventh Kagyu Trulku Jigme Ngawang Tenpai Gyaltsen (Tib. 'Jigs med Ngag dbang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1939–2007) was only about nine years old and so Ajo Rinpoche, who was eighty-four years old at the time, served as his regent. Ajo Rinpoche advised the young trulku that since the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Kagyu Trulkus[16] had all died young, he should go for long life meditation retreats. Accordingly, the young trulku went for retreats and lived a long life.

By this time, Ajo Rinpoche had gained renown as an outstanding meditator or Gomchen (Tib. *sgom chen*). Over the course of his life, he went for solitary retreats more than eighteen times. He was revered as one of the reincarnations of the Mahāsiddha, Dombi Heruka (8th–9th century). He was not only the regent of the Tsecholing monastery but also looked

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13 F. Spencer Chapman, *Memoirs of a Mountaineer: Helvellyn to Himalaya, Lhasa: The Holy City*, 1945: 191-94.

14 Ibid.: 132.

15 Lama Anagarika Govinda, *The Way of the White Cloud*, New Delhi, B.I. Publications, 1993: 156.

16 The Fourth and Fifth Kagyu Trulkus, Kalzang Choying Gyatso and Thubten Hoeden both lived in the 19th century, the Sixth, Sangay Gyatso probably lived sometime in the early 20th century. All three had been born in western Bhutan.

after the mountain retreat nearby (Tib. *tshe chos gling gyi ri khrod*). At the age of 63 years, he took a wife (Tib. *mkha' 'gro ma*) of the Phing ma clan from Chumbi. [17] Her name was Doma Lhatso. Anagarika Govinda describes her thus, "... his wife was a real 'Damema' (*bdag med ma*), which means 'the Selfless One', as Marpa's wife was called, a mother to all who came within the charmed circle of her and her Guru-husband's life."[18] Govinda adds that Ajo Rinpoche was the first monk to receive the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru when the latter visited the Chumbi Valley en route to Bhutan, in 1958.

According to his daughter, Ajo Rinpoche built a monastery at Pedong (Tib. sPos sdong or sPos mthong) near Kalimpong in North Bengal. But since he had to look after the monastery at Chumbi, he sent his father-in-law, Ajo Ngawang (Tib. A jo Ngag dbang) to take charge as the Abbot of the Pedong monastery. This is the Kagyu Choling (Tib. bKa' brgyud chos gling) monastery at Topkhana, Pedong, which, by other accounts was built by Ajo Ngawang himself. The site where this monastery is constructed could also be the site of an earlier monastery built in the seventeenth century by Drubthob Kunchok Gyaltsen in Damsang (Tib. 'Dam bzang).[19]

Ajo Rinpoche went on pilgrimages to Tibet and Nepal. He went to Tsāri, Mt. Kailash and visited the holy sites of Milarepa such as his caves at Nyalam and Drakkar Taso (Tib. Brag dkar rta so), Lapchi (Tib. Lab phyi), Chuwar and Kyirong. He also visited Bodh Gaya in India and Maratika, Nepal, where he did long life meditations. He encouraged everyone to go for retreat in the caves of Maratika.

Indian diplomat Apa Pant, first met Ajo Rinpoche in August-September of 1955. He describes his interactions with the great yogi in his 1970 book *Surya Namaskar: An Ancient Indian Exercise*. He recounts that Ajo Rinpoche was ninety-seven years old at the time and that he found him "a very kind, compassionate, old man who bubbled with mirth and humor when he spoke". Pant was told that Ajo Rinpoche could travel through space and manifest himself anywhere in an instant and he goes on to narrate an incident, echoes of which can be heard in narratives from many people who had a similar experience with the great yogi.

Once, while crossing the Nathu La pass from Sikkim to Chumbi, Pant and his entourage were met with horrendous weather conditions. They lost a couple of their pack animals and barely made it across to Chumbi. When,

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[17] Ajo Bhaichung, Kagon Tsecholing monastery, age 45 years, 8th January 2021, 11:30 am.

[18] Lama Anagarika Govinda, *The Way of the White Cloud*, New Delhi, B.I. Publications, 1993: 156.

[19] See *bKa' brgyud gser phreng*, Vol. III, 115.2.

upon reaching there, he recounted his ordeal to Ajo Rinpoche, the latter asked him why he had not sent prior notice. Slightly bewildered as to what was meant by this, Pant nevertheless followed the great yogi's advice and informed Ajo Rinpoche during his subsequent trips.

> I had the occasion of crossing this pass about twelve times during the six and a half years of my stay in this region. Each time I let the venerable Ajo Rinpoche know about it, and it is unbelievable but true that each time we crossed the pass, we had the most brilliant sunshine overhead, in spite of thunder, snow and rain on the adjoining peaks.[20]

The Sikkimese kings or Chogyals (Tib. *chos rgyal*) also frequently travelled to Chumbi, which had once been part of the Sikkimese kingdom, albeit within the larger Tibeto-Chinese and even Bhutanese sphere of influence. There was even a summer palace there from the 1780s till 1888 when the new British overlords curtailed Tibetan influence in Sikkimese affairs. Whenever the Chogyal visited Chumbi, Ajo Rinpoche always welcomed him as his king and received him with warmth and ceremony (Tib. *gser bang*) at his monastery.

Ajo Rinpoche was reluctant to leave Chumbi. But due to difficult circumstances, with the Chinese in Tibet, he had to ultimately leave for Sikkim. The Chogyal at the time, Sir Tashi Namgyal (Bkra shis rnam rgyal, r. 1914–1963), sent a jeep to receive him. He was brought to Gangtok, where he stayed at Mazong House, Tathangchen, for a period of five-six months. During this time, some relatives of his visited him from Pam.

Thereafter, the Chogyal offered to give him some land to build a monastery and a hermitage, where he could carry on his practice. Ajo Rinpoche chose Tsangay in East Sikkim and settled there. He also built a monastery at Jorebungalow, Darjeeling. This monastery he later handed over to Chadral Rinpoche when the latter was looking for a place to settle after leaving Tibet. He built another monastery in the Tirpai area of Kalimpong, near the modern day cremation ground. This monastery is no longer existent.

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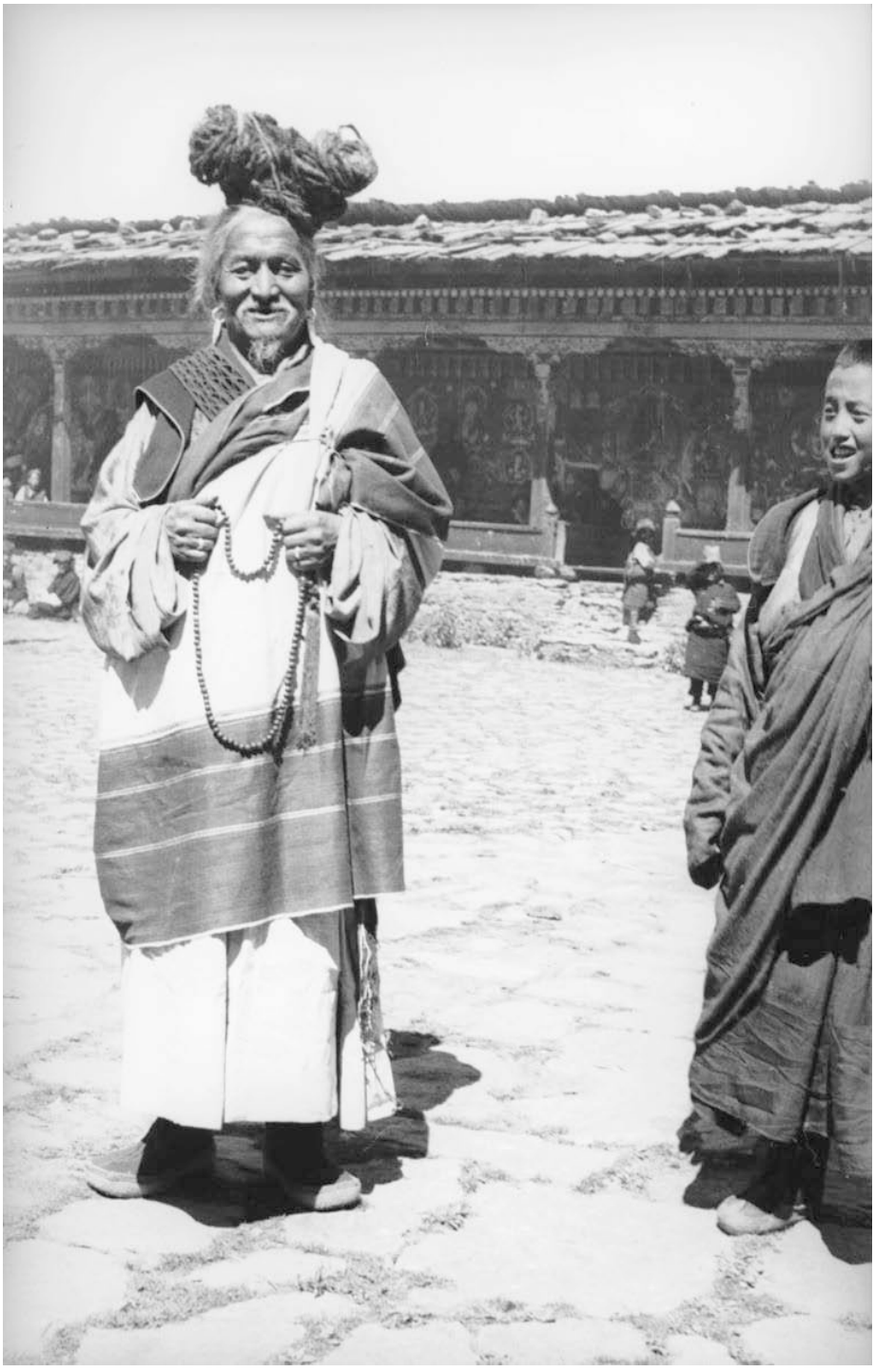
[20] Apa Pant, *Surya Namaskar: An Ancient Indian Exercise*, Hyderabad, Orient Blackswan, 1995: 68.



Ajo Rinpoche at Kagyu Gonsar, 1934

Students

Being an accomplished meditator, he attracted many followers and students such as the Seventh Kagyu Trulku, the Seventh Tingzam Rinpoche, Kyirong Dungsey Rinpoche, Ajo Dolop and many others. Prominent among them were:

- The Seventh Kagyu Trulku - The Kagyu Trulkus trace their lineage from Mahāsiddha Saraha and they are the head of the Bara Kagyu school in Sikkim. The Seventh Kagyu Trulku Jigme Ngawang Tenpai Gyaltsen was a child during Govinda's visit to Chumbi and his book gives a fine account of the young Trulku's early life.

- The Seventh Tingzam Rinpoche - An important figure in the recent history of the Bara Kagyu in Sikkim, he was a highly respected Lama who lived in Rinag (Rhenock) and Gangtok, after leaving Chumbi due to Chinese aggression. In Gangtok, he stayed in a cottage built for him by Mazong Yap Palden Kazi, and it was here that he passed away in 1966. His reliquary can be seen on the steps of the Paljor Phuntsog (Tib. dPal 'byor phun tshogs) monastery in Aritar, East Sikkim.

- Kyirong Dungsey Rinpoche Jampal Palden - Another lineage that has significantly influenced the growth of the Bara Kagyu school is the Kyirong Dungsey Rinpoche of the Jamling (Tib. 'Jam gling) family of Kyirong. Also known as Dra Kusho (Tib. Grwa sku shog), the current Rinpoche is the holder of the major transmissions from Ajo Rinpoche.

- Ajo Dolop (Tib. A jo rdo slob, short for *rdo rje slob dpon*) - An accomplished practitioner, he went on to become the abbot of the Paljor Phuntsog monastery, one of the major Bara Kagyu establishments in Sikkim. He was also one of the early teachers of the Eight and current Tingzam Rinpoche Karma Loday.

Death

Roughly three years after returning to Sikkim, he realised that it was time for him to retire from the world. He donned his robes, sat in a crossed legged position and passed away on the midnight of the third month, fourteenth day in the Tibetan calendar (1962) at Sanga Rinchen Phuntsoling (Tib. Gsang sngags Rin chen Phun chos gling) monastery,

Tsangay. He remained in *thugdam* (Tib. *thugs dam*)[21] for three days after his death. At the time of his death Tingzam Rinpoche, Dongpa Trulku, the Seventh Kagyu Trulku, Ajo Dolop and many other monks were present and offered prayers. He had been remarkably fit till his last days, could walk unassisted and do his *gtum mo* practice till the age of 102.

The *'Ba' ra bKa' brgyud bla ma'i gsol 'debs* text at Lingtam Chuzang (Tib. Chu bzang) monastery, located near Rongli, shows Ajo Rinpoche's unbroken transmission lineage going back to the Indian saint Tilopa. The lineage, which as indicated in the text was composed by the Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa (Tib. rGyal dbang 'Brug pa), is as follows:

> *Tilopa > Nāropa > Mar pa > Mi la > sGam po pa > Phag mo gru pa > gLing ras pa > gTsang pa Gya ras > rGod gtsang pa > Yang dgon pa > spyan mnga' Rin ldan > Rin chen dpal bzang > rGyal mtshan dpal bzang > Nam mkha' seng ge > Kun dga' Chos rgyal > Mon rdzong ras chen > Nam mkha' rGyal mtshan > Nam mkha' rdo rje > Nam mkha' dpal 'byor > Nam mkha' rGyal po > Sangs rgyas chos 'phel > Kar ma gsal byed > dKon mchog rGyal mtshan > Rin chen bstan gsal > bLo gros Chos 'phel > Ngag dbang Ye shes > Chos grags rgya mtsho > Kar ma dpal ldan > Chos kyi rGya mtsho > Chos dbyings rdo rje> bsKal bzang rGya mtsho> bKa' brgyud Chos 'phel > bsTan 'dzin bzang po > Vajra Siddhi/ Ajo Rinpoche.*

His remains were placed in a chorten *khang bu brtsegs pa* or 'chorten built in the shape of a house' on the premises of the Sanga Rinchen Phuntsoling monastery at Tsangay. This was built under the supervision of his eldest son Ajo Thongyal, Tingzam Rinpoche and Ajo Dolop. The most precious object placed inside the stupa was a statue of Jowo Sakyamuni, which Khyungdu Dorje Chang had given Ajo Rinpoche. It is believed that the Buddha's mind has been dissolved in this statue.

However, sometime later, the stupa was broken into and several artefacts and articles interred within were stolen. The Jowo Sakyamuni statue was eventually recovered by the police, but it remained in Pakyong Police Station for two months and then at the Gangtok Sadar Police Station for another month. Eventually, Anyo Zangmula was reunited with the statue after much difficulty (see Fig. 1).

The destruction and vandalism of chortens to steal relics within, is a most serious offense according to Buddhism, only less deplorable than the

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[21] *Thugdam* is a state in which the body of a realized master remains fresh without any signs of decomposition for many days after being declared clinically dead.

killing of one's own parents, Buddhas and Arhats. In Bhutan, such crimes are still a felony of the first degree and could invite a life sentence.

The chorten was rebuilt by Anyo Zangmu's daughter and son-in-law, Chunni Thakarpa and Yogesh Gurung. This time, a statue of Buddha Amitābha (Tib. 'Od dpag med or sNang ba mtha' yas) was put inside.

Ajo Rinpoche's reincarnation, recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa, was born into a Sikkimese noble family but the parents refused to hand over the boy to the monastery. There is believed to be another incarnation recognized in Phari (Tib. Phag ri) and installed at Tsecholing monastery, Chumbi.

Descendants

Ajo Rinpoche had five children: Ajo Thongyal, Ajo Thasong, Anyo Zangmu, Anyo Dechen and Ajo Wangda. Ajo Bhaichung, real name Jigme Rangjung Dorje, son of Ajo Thongyal, is a senior Lama at the Kagon Tsecholing (Tib. bKa' dgon tshe chos gling) monastery, Chandmari, Gangtok. Anyo Zangmu is eighty-five years of age and lives in Gangtok with her daughter, son-in-law and two grand-children.

Anyo Zangmu was born in Chumbi in 1936. When she reached the age of twenty-two, she, along with the Seventh Kagyu Trulku, Tsenkhar Tenzin and four other nuns, went to receive teachings from the amazing yogi Tripon Ngawang Pema Chogyal (Tib. Khrid dpon ngag dbang pad ma chos rgyal, 1876–1958). This was no easy feat as the master was in Kyitsong monastery, Tsibri (Tib. rTsib ri), an arduous hike across glaciers and rough terrain. From Chumbi they set off led by Kyirong Dungsey Rinpoche and eventually, after fifteen days, reached Tsibri in the 12th month of the Tibetan calendar.

The conditions were extreme, and so the elderly in the group were struggling with the cold and exhausted. Tripon Pema Chogyal advised the oldest two nuns to stay back in the monastery and proceeded with the rest of the group to Kyirong. It took another eighteen days to finally reach Kyirong. In all, this had been a thirty-three day trek across inhospitable mountains.

Upon reaching Kyirong, she stayed for almost three years with the great yogi, an emanation of Gyalwa Gotsangpa (Tib. rGyal ba rGod gtsang pa, 1189–1258).[22] Tripon Ngawang Pema Chogyal was an accomplished master, a heart son of the incomparable teacher, Togden Shakya Shri (Tib.

[22] Gyalwa Gotsangpa was an accomplished meditation practitioner and founder of the Upper Drukpa school of Drukpa Kagyu.

rTogs ldan Shākya Shrī, 1853–1919).[23] Like his guru before him, he was a good teacher, and students from far and wide used to gravitate towards him. Among his numerous pupils were the Labrang Gomchen and Lingdok Gomchen from Sikkim.

Anyo Zangmu received the nature of mind meditation from Tripon Ngawang Pema Chogyal. At Kyirong, she also completed her Ngondro practice. Thereafter, she along with another nun, Ani Samten, went on pilgrimage to Drakkar Taso. This was a most sacred spot where Milarepa himself had meditated for many years. Ajo Rinpoche had given them strict instructions to visit this holy site.

Three years later, they returned to Tsibri, where they met Gangri Lopen (Tib. Gangs ri slob dpon, 1919–1990), real name Kalzang Dorje, in Kyitsong monastery. He was a highly realised meditator, revered and respected by many including the Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa and the Sixteenth Karmapa.

CONCLUSION

Ajo Rinpoche was born in the secluded hills of Sikkim, among people regarded as barbarians by the Tibetans. He had to overcome enormous challenges in his life. He struggled to receive teachings from the best teachers. He had to leave home and face numerous obstacles during his education in a foreign land, where he was constantly reminded of his *Mon pa* roots. Eventually, with sheer dedication and hard work, he became a leading religious figure of his time.

Scores of monks have come from Tibet and influenced Sikkimese religion and culture. However, very few from Sikkim have gained distinction outside. Though Sikkimese monks have gone to Tibet to the prestigious centres of education, such as Mindroling (Tib. sMin grol gling) and Tshurphu (Tib. mTshur phu), predominantly, they did not make much of an impact there. Therefore, for Ajo Rinpoche to command such respect and enjoy patronage from Bhutan and Tibet, puts him in a select group.

Then, the cataclysmic political upheavals that rocked the Roof of the World in the mid twentieth century forced him to leave his monastery and everything he had built. He returned to his native Sikkim and began to work for the benefit of sentient beings.

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[23] Togden Shākya Shrī was a master of Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen tantras. A renowned teacher, his students included Ugyen Wangchuck, First Druk Gyalpo or King of Bhutan, Apho Rinpoche and the Tenth Drukchen Mipham Choekyi Wangpo.

But, here too, he faced many challenges. The number of Bara Kagyu monks in Sikkim were few and the school was completely overshadowed by the two dominant traditions of Nyingma and Karma Kagyu. The loss of the monastery Ajo Rinpoche built in Tirpai, Kalimpong, is indicative of the difficulties faced by the school.

Undeterred by either age or circumstances, he consolidated the Bara Kagyu school in Sikkim. He built monasteries, gave teachings and trained many practitioners who have passed down the profound teachings to a new generation. Travellers who met him were simply astounded by this modern day Milarepa. The writings of Pant, Govinda and others provide precious insights into his phenomenal life.

Monks continue to hold him as an exemplar of wisdom and tantric practice. He still casts a long shadow on the Bara Kagyu school, particularly in Sikkim. In light of all the challenges he was faced with, his life and work are truly exceptional.

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Ajo Bhaichung, age 46 years, Kagon Tsecholing monastery, Gangtok, 8th January 2021, 11:30 am

Anyo Zangmula, age 87 years, Gangtok, 4th December 2021, 3:30 pm

Photographic sources

Kagyu Gonsar in the Lower Chumbi Valley, 1938. Photograph by Ken Shepheard, Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, Cambridge.

Ajo Rinpoche at Kagyu Gonsar, 1934. Photograph by Margaret Williamson, Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, Cambridge.

Fig. 1: Jowo Sakyamuni

Fig. 2: Ajo Rinpoche’s ritual objects

Fig. 3: Ajo Rinpoche's ritual objects

Fig. 4: Ajo Rinpoche's hair

Fig. 5: Ajo Rinpoche's bone

RECREATIONS OF RINZING LHADRIPA LAMA (1912 – 1977): THE IDENTIFICATION AND ICONOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT OF THE AJANTA HALL MURALS, NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

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The ancient art of Ajanta is venerated as the root and prelude for numerous artists and artforms, with the UNESCO world heritage site revered as the base print for Indian art across many ancient, medieval and modern forms. An impressive panel of artists have accredited the Ajanta artforms as their muse, inspiring their styles, narratives and artistic subject. One such artist was the revered Sikkimese Lama, Rinzing Lhadripa (1912–1977), a brilliant royal painter also known as Barmiok Lhadripa, who went on to paint the Ajanta-inspired Ajanta-Hall murals at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, after the artist's visit to the aforementioned site. Considering the long route of a stylistic dynamic, that travelled across India, to Nepal, Tibet and finally rooting in Sikkim with its own new stylistic identity, this paper aims to identify and analyse the murals of Rinzing Lhadripa Lama and how these paintings reflected and honoured the Ajanta style in a Tibetan school of art.

Rinzing Lhadripa Lama was a brilliant painter, a young boy of ten adopted into the Ralang monastery to serve the Barmiok Lama, Karma Palden Chogyal. The young painter went on to flourish under Barmiok Rinpoche, the first to recognise his gift as an illustrator. His impressive compendium culminates with *Nyeten Churdup* thangkas, painted for Barmiok Athing, the *Dorje Phurba Tsog-shing* for H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche's monastery in Kongpo, and most importantly, the *Kagyu Sertheng* offered to the H.H. the 16th Karmapa.[1]

Perhaps the most striking of his roster is his Ajanta Hall on the top floor of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which Rinzing Lhadripa painted after his visit to the UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1964–

[1] Balikci, A. (2013: 67–68).

1965. The murals within this ancient site are symbols of the Buddhist pantheon and the history of Buddhist art. Following this, Rinzing Lhadripa's murals show a close connection to the Ajantan frescos, seen in the naturalistic colour palate, using the Indic earthy tones that suit the tenor of cave paintings. Frescos are an essential study of Tibetan esoteric art and this hall is the attestation of an amalgamation of the Tibetan and the Ajantan styles. Rinzing Lhadripa has taken this ancient Indian artform and its aspects and applied it to produce this distinct style of murals, which have categorically branched out from both its Indic and Tibetic origins. The caves and the artworks within have also been discussed as a form of mass communication[2] and this is an important parallel to highlight Rinzing Lhadripa's Ajanta Hall to be analysed as a means of bringing Ajanta to Sikkim.

The hall itself is named after the Ancient Indian cave monuments, located in Aurangabad district, Maharashtra, initiated as markers of Mahāyāna Buddhism under the Vākāṭakas.[3] The interior shows four walls, sectioned off by elongated windows, giving the artist nine cleanly sectioned panels as blank canvases and Rinzing Lhadripa Lama went on to paint the frescos in the Ajanta Hall as a vital revival of its namesake in a Tibetan narrative. Rinzing Lhadripa continues Ajanta's thematic genre, painting canonical compositions of Gautama Buddha, his reincarnations and Jātaka tales.

Mural 1: '*Birth of Buddha*'

Painted on the first fall to the entrance's left or Mural 1: 'Birth of Buddha', for example, can be understood as the scene of Queen Māyā giving birth to Buddha in the Lumbini garden:

> Then Māyādevī, due to the magnificence and strength of the Bodhisattva, knew that it was time for her to give birth. During the first watch of the night, she came to King Śuddhodana and spoke these words: "Lord, please listen to what is on my mind; For a long time now, I have thought about the pleasure grove. If you will not be upset, displeased, or envious, I should quickly go to that pleasure grove". (*Lalitavistāra Sūtra*: 61)

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2 D.N. Verma highlights the importance of Ajanta artworks as a means of communicating and advertising religion (1991).

3 Huntington, S. (2016: 239).

Although its condition is currently critical, the Ajanta Cave II mural of the same title is a reference for the Sikkimese painter. In a 7 by 8.1 ft wall space, the Lumbini garden is painted with the same treatment as it is mentioned in the *Lalitavistāra Sūtra*, as Queen Māyādevī is clearly the chief focus of the composition; although she isn't painted centrally within the mural. Rinzing Lhadripa uses the same format and set as the Ajanta mural, with the blessed child born from the right side of the queen, as he is held by two male figures Indra and Brahma.[4] There is a perspective depth to the painting with the queen as the vanishing point of a scene that unfolds in the lush garden, portrayed as the largest figure in the composition. With a soft hue to highlight the ephemeral beauty of Buddha's birthmother, her beauty is further accentuated in her graceful face, oval and slightly tilted to look over her child. The queen's eyes are captivating; Rinzing Lhadripa truly captures the essence of Ajantan physiognomy through his imagery. Māyādevī's stance is regal in its femininity, with a fluidity in her posture flowing from her sloping shoulders to a pinched waist and broad hips that seems to widen gracefully with a subtle twist of her right leg over her left. The Sikkimese artist paints her form as a homage to the ancient Ajanta artists, who were critically acclaimed for their posture, and this ricochets in Rinzing Lhadripa's figures within this and other panels. Māyādevī shares Ajanta-typical physiography with the rest of her retinue, complete with incisions over the neck and folds of the stomach, trivali [5] or the mark of beauty.

The overall softness of the figures in Lhadripa's mural matches the figures of Cave II, painted with soft facial outlines. Like most Ajanta murals, embellishments are added to enunciate their beauty; the painter's treatment of gold colouring is truly reminiscent of numerous Indian artforms and a key factor of the Tibetan style of paintings, which makes these frescos a blend of these two grand schools of art. Honing on this, there is a captivating effect borrowed from Ajanta, the use of the stippling method to highlight the pearl festoons. The artist has meticulously marked every singular white dot over all the pearl string necklaces and this truly attests to his skills. There is a refinement in his brushstrokes, and a variety to them, seen in his clever rendition of the queen's curls, flowing over her left limb. Canonically, she holds onto a fig tree branch in the śālabhañjikā posture[6] as she gives birth to the

4 Identifiable by their crown and an ascetic hairstyle, respectively. (Spink 2005: 52)

5 Joshi, M.C. (2018: 40)

6 "At this moment the Bodhisattva's magnificence and power caused the fig tree itself to bow down and pay homage to him. Māyādevī stretched out her right arm, like a flash of lightning appearing in the middle of the sky, and grasped a branch of the tree"

prince, who is held by a three-eyed figure, royally adorned but painted smaller than the queen. The person, honoured in the prince's presence, looks to Māyādevi with three full blown eyes; according to the *Acchariy'abbhūtadhamma Sutta,* the infant was held first by Devas.

Indra is also holding a parasol for the infant, who has miraculously taken his first seven steps as lotuses bloom under him.[7] This particular imagery can also be traced to the sculptural art of Ancient India, with a panel titled 'Sequence of Birth Scene, Nagarjunakonda', dated 3-4th century C.E.,[8] shows Buddha's aniconic representation with seven sets of footprints, which Rinzing Lhadripa has replaced with full blooming lotuses to embody the first seven footsteps of the prince.

The core shows Lord Buddha, identifiable via his halo, an uṣṇīṣa, and the white urṇā curl between the eyebrows that emits white light, with the elongated earlobes, a Mahāpuruṣa Lakṣaṇa:

> The Lord said: "There are, monks, these thirty-two marks peculiar to a Great Man and for that Great Man who possesses them, only two careers are open. If he lives the household life, he will become a ruler, a wheel-turning righteous monarch of the law, conqueror of the four quarters, who has established the security of his realm and is possessed of the seven treasures." (*Dīgha Nikāya*: 441)

The prince's physical portrayal is a rather rigid version of an infant painted with no proper proportions; Rinzing Lhadripa's treatment of Buddha's facial features is clearly superior to his anatomical accuracies. The new born shows a well-rendered three-fourths of his facial profile, which shows the painter's attention to detail, seen in prince Siddhartha's almond-shaped eyes and full lips that mimic a lotus bud. These features are shared with the queen, along with a sharp, high-bridged nose, with Rinzing Lhadripa vindicating the Ajantan standards of regal exquisiteness.

(*Lalitavistāra Sūtra*: 64); "Whereas other women give birth while sitting or lying down, that's not how the bodhisattva's mother gave birth to the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva's mother gave birth to the bodhisattva while standing"; "When the bodhisattva left his mother's womb, devas received him first, and then human beings." (*Acchariy'abbhūtadhamma Sutta*: MN 123)

7 "Then the whole sky filled with divine offerings and Brahma and Indra held him wound on a divine silken cloth…Then he said 'Look at me!' and placed his feet on the ground and walked seven steps in each direction." (Thurman, Robert F. 1997: 67)

8 Kumari, S. (2012: 167–168).

Mural 2: '*The Mānuṣi Buddhas*'

Mural 2: 'The Mānuṣi Buddhas'[9] further proves how rivetted the artist was with Ajanta,[10] with its similarities to the 'Seven Mānuṣi Buddha' murals of Cave XVI and 'Seven Mānuṣi Buddhas and Maitreya' of Cave XVII. The figures are painted on the second space, measuring 7 by 4.85 ft., where the top left figure is standing on a lotus, possibly in a Bhūtaḍāmara mudrā, while the figure to the right is seated in Padmāsana with his saṅghāṭī over his left shoulder and right hand in Abhay mudrā. Given his precedence or red colouring, he can be identified as the Sikhī Buddha. The top central figure has his hands in Dharmachakra pavartan mudrā, which is also repeated by the seated Buddha below him to the right, as a symbol of preaching, synonymous with 'turning the Wheel of Law'. The blue-hued Buddha, seated on a lotus in the bottom right corner shows his right hand in Abhaya and left in Dhyāna mudrā. The second central figure beside him, standing with a single shoulder saṅghāṭī upon a blooming lotus bears the Varada mudrā, which is often associated with the Gautama, signifying the 'flowering of Buddha's Gift of Truth', and the last left corner figure, painted in a yellow hue with his hands in Dharmachakra mudrā, is arguably the figure of Maitreya, as the last painted Buddha and the Buddha to come. The saṅghāṭī of all seven Buddhas are draped either over both the shoulders or over a single shoulder, but Rinzing Lhadripa trades the clinging and diaphanous wet drapery-style[11] clothing of Ajanta figures for heavy and maroon monastic robes in his mural.

Mural 3: '*The Chaddanta Jātaka*'

Through the panels, Mural 3: 'The Chaddanta Jātaka' and Mural 7: 'Mahājanaka Jātaka', Rinzing Lhadripa weaves an important literary thread of Buddhist cannon, the Jātaka tales, into his Ajanta Hall representations. Mural 3 is a marvellous fresco that shows a radiant

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9 Given that these panels aren't labelled by the artist or institute, this is the first complete published labelling and identification of these mural scenes, except for Anna Balikci's (2013) identification of 'Chaddanta Jātaka' and 'The 9th of the 12th deeds of Buddha' based on a preliminary list identifying all the panels prepared by NIT Research Coordinator Lama Kunga Yonten Hotchotsang.

10 The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology has a reserved copy of G. Yazdani (1930), with numerous standalone plates of sculptural and painted Buddha artforms of caves VI and VII, which could have influenced Murals 2, 4 and 8.

11 Huntington, S. (2016: 247).

reflection of a Hinayana period mural in Ajanta's Cave X's 'Chaddanta Jātaka'[12] painting with Rinzing Lhadripa creating a compressed narrative of the aforementioned scene. The artist's vision follows a linear narrative of Ajanta's painting in the scenes, (a) The Bodhisattva attacked by the hunters, (b) The hunters watching Bodhisattva and his herd, and (c) Fainting of the Queen at the sight of the tusks.[13]

The portrait in the cave paintings follows and ends with the six tusks of the Great Being, symbolic of his divinity; both murals pay attention to his proportioning, with the six-tusked elephant painted larger than the other animals. The Ajanta herd of the Bodhisattva is lavish, with over a dozen elephants grazing in the jungle, but Rinzing Lhadripa paints a smaller version of this wild scene, including the six-tusked elephant, his two queens, Mahāsubhaddā and Chullasubhaddā, and four other elephants, frolicking over a lotus pond. The former queen can be identified via the six-stemmed lotus on her back, offered to her by the Bodhisattva, which was another bone of contention for the latter queen in the background:

> Then a certain elephant, as he swam about the lake, gathered a large lotus with seven shoots and offered it to the Great Being. And he, taking it in his trunk, sprinkled the pollen on his forehead and presented the flower to the chief elephant, Mahāsubhaddā. On seeing this her rival said, 'This lotus with seven shoots he also gives to his favourite queen and not to me,' and again she conceived a grudge against him. (*Jātaka Tales, The White Six-Tusked Elephant*: 397–398)

The Ajanta elephants are painted with their tusks raised as a sign of an oncoming threat and imminent peril; this connotation is continued in Rinzing Lhadripa's lotus pond scene, where the trunks of the other are slightly raised as a sign of impending doom. Following this first scene, the fresco can be divided into two clear scenes, with the second scene showing the hunter in the centre, coming to the Queen of Kosala, with the tusks. The regal figure of Subhaddā seated on a pedestal marks the last scene of the Jātaka.

The Ajanta version, although damaged, shows three clear panels, which are compressed to a single panel, sized 7 by 11 ft. with two clear scenes in Rinzing Lhadripa's artwork. The former mural's artist changed

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[12] Spink, W. (2007: 136).
[13] Yazdani, G. (1930: Plate XXX).

the order of the Jātaka episodes,[14] without a linear account, but by compressing his fresco, the Sikkimese artist seems to bring clarity to his chronicle. Rinzing Lhadripa astonishingly managed to paint the smallest details that were not clear enough in a damaged cave mural, which is where G. Yazdani's monochrome prints came in. Plates XXX to XXXVII shows a monochrome representation of the Cave X 'Chaddanta Jātaka' mural and sections of the prints were clearly used as a blueprint. The similarities come in with the Sonuttara at the centre; from his stance to his garb and the rope-ties in which he brings in the four tusks of the Bodhisattva, the Lama painter was clearly inspired by Yazdani's almost accurate recreations. The colour scheme, however, is where the Rinzing Lhadripa showcased an artistic control over his palate, using a drab grey shade for the hunter's clothing, in contrast to which, is his turban, mixing an array of earthy colours used in Ajanta, with a light blue shade parallel to it, which is a different colour component. The characteristics of this particular colour palate can also be identified through the lotuses, painted in soft pink, blue and white shading. Furthermore, the elephants are painted with anatomical accuracy and an artistic quaintness that is a close copy of Cave X but is also eccentrically evocative of Cave I's 'Elephant in a Pond', a fantastic ceiling fresco renowned as one of the most popular and painterly examples of decorative friezes in the Ajanta caves.

The artist goes on to emulate the Cave X court scene centring the Queen of Kosala, painted with her eyes open but the turmoil around her attests to the suggestion that Subhaddā fainted after the hunter completed her vengeance against the Bodhisattva, and returned with the tusks. Seated on a stool with a vibrant similarity to Yazdani's monochromatic sketches, the king holds her by the shoulder. Ajanta artists have truly achieved dramatism and urgency in a narrative scene, which is an effect that Rinzing Lhadripa has successfully revived in his mural. The Lama painter's brushstrokes are careful in their delineation; the detailing of Subhaddā's coifed hair, the three curved incisions over her neck and stomach and the care in which her face is beautified with the stylized eyes and full lips are redolent of the ancient cave murals. The queen herself, although adorned with jewellery, is nude as most female frescos of Ajanta, sharing a close semblance with Queen Māyā of Mural 1, but

[14] "Beginning with the wild life of elephants in an impenetrable forest with marshy soil infested by alligators and pythons, and terminates with palace-scenes crowded with human figures and a royal procession to a place of worship comprising a stupa and a vihara. In the middle he has delineated the bath of the royal elephant in the lotus-lake and his favourite resort under a banyan tree, where he was first sighted by the hunter, Sonuttara". (Yazdani, G. 1930: 33)

in a humane scale and humbler indulgence; the former wears no crown, only a heavy gold necklace. The similarity also continues with armlets, bracelets and the Kosala queen's look is complete with the use of the stippling method to indicate a pearl garland.

Mural 4: '*Gautama Buddha, Queen Yaśodharā and Rāhula*'

So far, Rinzing Lhadripa has managed to bring a nice balance of lavish storytelling in his frescos, as each alternate panel, namely Murals 2, 4, 6 and 8, are paintings with single scenes. Attesting to this is Mural 4: 'Gautama Buddha, Queen Yaśodharā and Rāhula', of the Ajanta Hall. A simple rendition shows Lord Buddha in Kapilavastu, painted larger in scale than the two other figures within the frame, identified as Prince Siddhartha's wife, Yaśodharā, who was married to the Enlightened one prior to his departure and had given him a son.[15] Prince Rahul can also be seen in the mural, as a child in royal garb and refined jewels, looking up to the divine form of his father. Artistry focuses on the physical representation as this specific sketch of Buddha is one of the most detailed works of the painter. Taking the inspiration from Ajanta's Cave XVII mural, the Lama has painted Buddha with unparalleled care and reverence, visualized in his round oval face and proportioned features. There is a consistency in Rinzing Lhadripa's brushstrokes, but considering that his inspiration is Ajanta, where the artwork spanned five centuries under varying patrons, there is also a difference in physical renditions of the varying murals. For example, this mural's Buddha is much more polished and distinguished compared to the figures of Mural I, and this could be accredited to the stylized and striking painting style of Cave XIV. The green ombre nimbus in the background truly draws out the blue irises,[16] hooded in the Buddha's half-green eyes that look onto his former family with benign care. The artist also takes care to beautify the Enlightened One with a highly bridged nose amidst elegant and highly arched eyebrows, also tinted with the same blue hue as his irises. This particular colour shading is a direct borrowing from Ajanta's Cave II and Cave XVI Buddha paintings, where blue has been shaded over the eyelids as 'late touches'.[17] The true effort is seen in his lotus

[15] "When the Buddha was in the palace, Princess Yashodhara arrayed her son Rahula in all his best attire and sent him to the Blessed one, saying, 'That is your father, Rahula, go and ask for your inheritance.'" (Piyadassi 1995: 66)

[16] A Mahapurusa Lakshana, "29) His eyes are deep blue." (*Dīgha Nikāya: Lakkhana Sūtra*: 442)

[17] Spink, (W. 2005: 197).

petal-like lips, stoking a sense of sensualism within the portrait. Buddha is painted with a Gandharan style sanghati that covers both his shoulders and reaches to his shin but unlike a wet drapery style as in the original Ajanta artwork, reminiscent of numerous Gandharan sculptures, this version of the clothing is maroon and has more folds. This could be stylistic liberty taken by a Lama who is familiar with the monastic attire of Tibet and Sikkim and is more climatically attuned to these regions. The Enlightened one also holds up the ends of his sanghati with his right hand, while his left hand holds an alms bowl, as he looks down kindly over the princess and her son.

Yaśodharā herself is a vision in blue, holding onto Rahul with both her hands and presenting him to Lord Buddha. The princess's Ajanta counterpart is painted carefully and Rinzing Lhadripa spares no effort to bring the qualities of an Ajanta-esque refinement into his mural. Bending in the presence of the Shakyamuni, Yaśodharā is painted with the same facial grace as Queen Māyā or the Queen of Kosala (Mural 1, Mural 3), with the only difference seen in her rose-tinted cheeks, a tamer coiffure. Rāhula looks up to the enlightened figure of his father, with both hands open, and this is the visual illustration of him asking for his inheritance, as instructed by his mother. The prince is painted with the same fervour as his Ajanta counterpart in terms of ornamentation and a coiffure that shows a top knot with the rest of his hair falling down his shoulder. Like the Ajanta painters, Rinzing Lhadripa respects canonical references and manages to capture the moment Lord Buddha's gaze fell upon his son and Rāhula's enrapturement, as is seen in his wide eyes, painted over three-fourths of his profile and unsmiling lips. The young boy is taken aback by the presence of the Lord and the Sikkimese artist manages to translate this look of bewilderment in his murals.

Mural 5: '*Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi and Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi*'

Rinzing Lhadripa Lama's attention to Ajanta hits a crescendo when he conducts a copy of Cave I's Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi and Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi in Mural 5. In perfect sync and symmetry, the two divine deities are painted parallel to each other in the largest panel of the Ajanta Hall, taking the viewer's immediate focus from the entrance. No detail nor effort is spared to emulate the magnum opus of Ajanta as his own masterwork, painting the Amitābha's reigning Bodhisattva, 'Padmapāṇi Avalokiteśvara, the "Holder of the Lotus"'. Rinzing Lhadripa's Padmapāṇi, like Ajanta, is painted white, the colour associated with the Bodhisattva, along with the blooming Padma in his right hand. As the

Compassionate One, both the Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi frescos are painted with an unsurpassed grace that attests to the aptitudes of the Ajanta artists and Rinzing Lhadripa Lama. This refinement reflects in the careful brushstrokes of the Sikkimese artist as he adapts to an Ajanta artwork and its nuances; Padmapāṇi's physiognomy, the tilt of his head and the triangularity of his crown balanced to the ovality of his face are derived straight from Cave I's orientation.

Ajanta artists have used colouring and shading in a manner that they have captured the Bodhisattva's essence without restricting his physical form, his painted body transcending the 'rules of the material world'[18] and the divine deity of the Lama is painted with the same ephemerality. The delicacy of the lotus-bearer rests on a highly arched unibrow, framing his striking eyes under drooping eyelids, that gives a hint of his detachment as a deity. The Bodhisattva's shoulders droop as though he bears the weight of all the compassion he holds for the world, but his countenance counters Padmapāṇi's apathy. The Sikkimese artist's blending and sense of colouring are to be commended, seen in a well-shaded aquiline nose and full and opulent lips. This colour sense is borrowed from Ajanta and is continued in the shine of the emerald pendant worn by the Bodhisattvas of both the frescos.

Parallel to Padmapāṇi is the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, painted on the same scale as the former, on the right side of the panel, painted with the same imperiality as its Cave I counterpart. The image's blueprint, like Padmapāṇi, finds its roots in Ajanta, starting with his extravagant and tapering crown; the particular ornament is with the care that is saved for the exhaustive style of Ajanta and Thangka art. It is befittingly the crowning jewel of the composition, with no other ornament painted in such a stylistic grandeur. The gold crown is a pentagonal diadem that represents the eminence of the five tathagatas and attention is drawn to it via the use of stippling to indicate pearl festoons. This also continues in the two distinct sets of pearl garlands over Vajrapāṇi's torso, as his right hand shows the Vitarka mudrā, while the other rests over his attendant. The figure, who is usually attributed with a vajra, is missing the thunderbolt imagery, which is also common with its Ajanta counterpart.

[18] Huntington, S. (2016: 259).

Mural 6: 'The First Sermon'

Mural 6: 'The First Sermon', also shows Gautama Buddha, who is seated in the Prālambapāda āsana,[19] on a lion throne, identifiable via the two felines serving as the legs of the seat. As symbols of power and strength, the lions are painted as snow lions of Tibet, which are usually portrayed with their front paws raised and wide smiles. The celestial creature is a direct derivation from the Ancient Indian allegory of the lion as a symbol of the Shakyamuni. Atop them are two podiums bearing elephants, and behind the Buddha is a continuation of the throne in the form of the most astonishing creatures, bearing the trunk of an elephant and jaws of a lion, from which, two geese emerge. Below the throne are the five smaller figures of Buddha's disciples, all painted with a single shoulder sanghati as the three central figures have their hands folded in the Anjali mudrā, in their Lord's presence. Through their identification, this scene can be justified as 'The First Sermon', as Buddha had decided that his kind-hearted companions would be the first to receive the teaching of Dhamma, as noted in the *Lalitvistāra Sūtra*:

> Monks, at that point the Thus-Gone One decided: "My five ascetic companions will be the ones to whom I shall teach the Dharma for the first time!" (*Lalitvistāra*: 313)

The Enlightened One on this throne, features the same white-green halo with an uṣṇīṣa and curls framing an oval face painted with the urṇā mark and the same features seen in the previous Buddhas of Rinzing Lhadripa Lama. The seated figure has a sanghati draped over his left shoulder and his hand showing the Vitarka mudrā, as he discusses his teachings with the five disciples at his feet. Measuring 7 by 4.72 ft, this is also the first mural which corresponds with the in-shrine relief of Cave IV and Cave XVI, where Buddha is seated in Padmāsana. With an elaborate parasol over Gautama Buddha's head, the two other figures at the ends of the mural also bear smaller parasols and the left-shoulder drapery, while the top of the mural shows three similar figures seated on blooming lotuses, with the sanghati over both shoulders.

[19] Also known as the 'European pose', identified via 'pendent legs'. A carved image of Buddha in front of the Cave XIX stupa shows a similar posture. (Huntington, S. 2016: 248)

Mural 7: '*Mahājanaka Jātaka*'

The next panel features Mural 7: 'Mahājanaka Jātaka', featuring the same condensed narrative as the earlier seen Chaddanta Jātaka mural. The massive fresco shows three scenes borrowed from the Mahājanaka Jātaka mural of Ajanta's Cave I, with the tale narrating the life of King Mahājanaka, a Bodhisattva who renounced his crown and all things worldly to take up the life of a monk. The prince's painting of Ajanta is highlighted as the reflection of a royal, mirroring the imperiality of the earlier discussed Vākāṭaka and Gupta patrons, and Rinzing Lhadripa honours this depiction in his mural as well. The right side of the panel shows the famed 'Dancing girl and musician' scene, vivid imagery of a vibrant performance for the king from his wife, Śīvālī. The routine is dynamic, centred around the dancer, who moves to the music played by the performers surrounding her. Rinzing Lhadripa was entranced by this scene, reflected in the thorough replication of the Ajanta mural as seen in the details of the dancer's stance and movement that highlights her slender form and waist, the striking strokes of her clothing, fascinated by the bandhani patterning over her garments. Behind this scene, there is perceptive depth in the architectonic development of the palace in this mural, that follows the same detailed drawing accredited to the artist.

The entire scene in the Ajanta Hall is a vivid revival of the ancient Ajanta murals, which reflects the palace scenes of the very donors living in their royal courts and its interior imitation in art. Along with the ornamentation, Rinzing Lhadripa also borrows architectural details from Ajanta, where the Cave I Mahājanaka mural shows bracketed pillars, seen as monolithic pillar-tops in the shrine anti-chambers.[20] Taking an example of how the ancient Indian painters borrowed examples from their surroundings, Rinzing Lhadripa continues this attention to architecture, notable in the left end of the panel, with the background structure featuring arches and a snow lion guardian mask over the entrance. This particular practice of utilizing mythological masks for protection over the doorway is much more linked to Tibet and is commonly seen in Sikkim, Nepal, Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. Just below the mask is the prince, his royalty indicated by his gold, pearl and jewelled crown and his internal conviction indicated by his hands in the Dharmachakra pavartan mudrā over his heart. Beside him is his queen, who ardently sits and looks onto him so as to process whether her musical deterrence was successful or not, which leads onto the third

[20] Spink notes that these particular architectural additions were common in the Ajanta caves after 475 C.E. (Spink, W. 2005: 102)

section of the mural, with the Bodhisattva exiting the palace gateways, in his complete attire to complete his ascetic wish.

Mural 8: 'Buddha's descent from Trayastriṃśa Heaven'

Following the even patterning, Mural 8: 'Buddha's descent from Trayastriṃśa Heaven', shows the most delineation from the Ajanta influence despite being modelled after the mural 'Buddha's Descent from Indra's Heaven' in the Cave XVII antechamber,[21] where the Enlightened one is painted with a serene look and sanghati covering only one shoulder. The mural is painted as the scene following the one where Lord Buddha became aware that Mahāmāyā had ascended to Trayastriṃśa, the heaven of thirty-three Gods. It was also a realm of desire with no deliverance from samsara for mortals reborn there, and so Buddha left earth for heaven and spent three months teaching her about Dhamma. Buddha's disciples, however, wished him back and Maudgalyāyana leaded with him to return and his lord was hesitant to do so. An extensive discussion followed and the painted scene shows that Buddha was persuaded to return to Earth, welcomed by his followers as he descended down the three stairways that the Lord Viśwakarma, had constructed for him out of gold, beryl and silver.[22]

The episode is set in Saṇkassa,[23] where the ladder was dropped for Lord Buddha as he clearly descends from the clouds above, stylized and shaded with white across a bright blue sky that fades into an orange shade. The use of this brilliant hue is not only an element of Ajanta, where traces of lapis lazuli in the frescos were rather popular but also an aspect of Thangka art, where deep blue shades were used in the upper areas whilst they faded into an ochre or yellow shading.[24] The mural shows two kinnarās hovering over his parasol and two disciples at his pedestal looking up at his large frame. Rinzing Lhadripa paints Buddha in the same facial features as the earlier discussed Buddha figures of the Ajanta Hall and similar physical proportions as his retinue, making the two chauri bearers beside him, Maudgalyāyana and Śāriputra. The two disciples of Buddha also have their hands in the Varada mudrā as well but are almost closed. Behind the Enlightened one is a three-eyed deity,

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21 Raezer, D., Raezer, J. (2015: 81).

22 "Seventh Year: Tavatimsa. Here the Buddha preached Abhidhamma or the Higher Doctrine to the deities headed by his mother, Mahamaya." (Piyadassi 1995: 43)

23 Thomas, E.J, (2006: 114).

24 Beer discusses that this fine gradient was achieved through a wet-shading, essential in Tibetan art to reflect the clarity of 'Buddha Mind'. (Beer, R. 1999: 31)

adorned in nothing but a striped cloth, a crown and ornate jewellery, similar to the person holding the infant Siddhartha in Mural 1 and thus identified as Indra or Brahma, the latter of whom had descended from the gold stairs along with Buddha. The ethereal stairs frame the left of the backdrop show different steps painted in green, red and blue hues, with the artist showcasing his shading mastery in terms of their visualizing. Whilst the entire retinue looks up to Buddha, his half-lidded eyes look outside the fresco and onto the viewer, with the Enlightened one blessing all those who look onto his mural.

Mural 9: 'Māra's temptation'

Mural 9: 'Māra's temptation' shows a crucial moment of Gautama Buddha's life, defeating Māra, the host of evils, who marched onto the garden so as to prevent the prince from attaining Nirvana with a massive army which colourfully covers the entirety of the top half as canonically described in the *Lalitvistāra Sūtra*:

> Monks, Māra, the evil one, did not pay heed to Sārthavāha's warning. Instead, he gathered all four divisions of his great and powerful army. It was a terrifying army, so brave in battle that it would make anyone's hair stand on end. Such an army had never been seen before, or even heard of, in the realms of gods and humans. The soldiers were able to transform their faces in a trillion ways. On their arms and legs slithered hundreds of thousands of snakes, and in their hands, they brandished swords, bows, arrows, darts, lances, axes, tridents, clubs, staffs, bludgeons, lassos, cudgels, discuses, vajras, and spears. Their bodies were covered in finest cuirasses and armour. Some had their heads, hands, or feet turned backward, or their eyes facing backward. Their heads, eyes, and faces were ablaze. Their bellies, hands, and feet were deformed, and their faces brimmed with vehement ardour. Their mouths, with protruding ugly fangs, appeared contorted in the extreme, and their thick and broad tongues, rough like a turtle's neck or a straw mat, dangled from their mouths. (*Lalitvistāra*: 230–231)

The grotesque forces were armed with ferocious faces expressing a colourful inclusion of the Tibetan palate and imagery of the tantric art style of esoteric Buddhism. The blueprint of this painting remains primarily Ajanta-influenced, where its Cave I mural painted over the left side of the shrine-doorway and a masterful sculpture within Cave 26

complex[25] shows Buddha battling Māra's oncoming army, as he is centrally seated with his hands in Bhūmispṛś mudrā.

The bottom right corner shows Māra's sons, yielding arrows and spears aimed toward the central figure. When violence fails, Māra brings his daughters to defeat the Bodhisattva, Rati, Tṛṣṇā and Arati, Lust, Thirst and Delight,[26] respectively, painted as beautiful and voluptuous women, adorned in jewellery over their nude torsos, just below Buddha's throne. Rinzing Lhadripa exceeds his detailing in this mural, with this Buddha envisioned with an orange bordered nimbus and the Ajanta-esque physiognomy. Much like the Cave I mural, 'Temptation of Māra', and the sculptural masterpiece of the same moniker in Cave 26, the enlightened one is seated in Padmāsana, with his hands in Bhūmispṛś mudrā, calling on the earth as witness to his acts of giving against the accusations of Māra. The Enlightened One's seat is a flat blue and grey surface; the throne is painted with careful accuracy and perspective, but he has not added the lotus pedestal that Ajanta's Buddha is seated on whilst Māra aims to disrupt him, nor does he enhance the seat like the Mural 6's lion throne.

Thus concludes the classification of the nine Ajanta Hall panels, the documentation and cataloguing of which was incomplete but important to account for Rinzing Lhadripa Lama's life and works as a Lama artist, who has truly achieved much in space usage and rendition, filling the halls with narrative and single scenes of Buddha's lives and forms. Conclusively, the Ajanta Hall murals are a great point of artistic heritage for understanding the importance of the ancient cave structures and their continuing effect on art and artists. To quote Giuseppe Tucci, 'To paint is to evoke' and these paintings are not simple reproductions of the revered Ajanta murals but replicate the emotions that were evoked by Rinzing Lhadripa Lama, a brilliant artist of Sikkim. Rinzing Lhadripa has managed to create a vital revival of a damaging heritage site into a small hall and this small state of Sikkim, giving the chance for many to admire the art of the UNESCO site and, while it is incomparable to the magnum opus of Indian art, the acknowledgement of a royal artist is unparalleled and visible in his dedication to document the frescos that inspired him until the murals became a stylistic identity for Rinzing Lhadripa Lama.

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[25] Spink W. (2007: 39, 337).

[26] Raezer, D., Raezer, J. (2015: 95).

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Mural 1: ‘Birth of Buddha’

Mural 2: ‘The Mānuṣi Buddhas’

Mural 3: ‘The Chaddanta Jātaka’

Mural 4: ‘Gautama Buddha, Queen Yaśodharā and Rāhula’

Mural 5: ‘Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi and Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi’

Mural 6: ‘The First Sermon’

Mural 7: ‘Mahājanaka Jātaka’

Mural 8: ‘Buddha’s descent from Trayastriṃśa Heaven’

Mural 9: ‘Māra’s temptation’

BOOK REVIEW

Alex McKay. 2021. *The Mandala Kingdom. A Political History of Sikkim*. Gangtok, Rachna Books & Publications. 332 pages, indices, bibliography.

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Dr. Alex McKay's recent monograph, *The Mandala Kingdom*, represents a culmination of the author's many years studying and writing on the history and culture of Sikkim in its broadest geo-historical context. Its primary historical focus is the era of British rule in India. And yet, as the author acknowledges (p. 4), "even this work is not a comprehensive history of Sikkim," noting the complexity of the documentary sources and the numerous topics still under active research. Nor, as he writes in the conclusion (p. 287) is it meant to be a history of the Nepalese in Sikkim; "… that history remains to be written." That said, *The Mandala Kingdom* is the most balanced and thorough presentation yet written of the complex history of this small former Himalayan kingdom, which since 1975 has become a state within the Republic of India.

Notwithstanding its small physical size, multi-ethnic Sikkim exhibits an outsized geopolitical importance. Located at the crossroads of four larger countries (India, Nepal, China/Tibet, Bhutan), Sikkim was influenced by each of them at different phases of their mutual history. Her mountain passes offer the most direct access route across the Himalayas between India and Central Tibet. Documents in multiple languages from Sikkim and adjacent countries come to bear, and many are still being identified and studied by scholars. Sikkim's history is thus a challenging topic to address.

The author breaks new ground in this study with his in-depth use of British colonial archives, in England, India, and Bangladesh. Importantly, he also uses for the first time the Sikkim Palace Archives, whose documents he recently helped to scan and deposit with the British Library Endangered Archives Programme EAP 880. He also avails himself of the most recent research by international and local scholars, and important publications of Sikkimese authors such as the unpublished 1909–10 draft translation by Kazi Dawasamdup of the *Denjong Gyalrab*, The *History of*

Sikkim (abbrev. *HoS)*, written in Tibetan under the pen of the 9th Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and his Tibetan wife Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma.[1]

The term *Mandala Kingdom* (explained on pp. 79–80) refers to an academic theory interpreting relationships between central states in Asia and their quasi self-ruling peripheries. Thus, as the author explains, when Sikkim was founded in the 17th century, it conceived itself as a peripheral Buddhist state loosely under Tibet, which itself was in various respects a peripheral state arguably under China. In a nutshell, the author presents in this book the story of how, why, and when Sikkim gradually shifted its status as a peripheral state of Tibet (and remotely of China) to one of British India.

The author begins with a brief survey of Sikkim's early ties to Tibet, the homeland of its Buddhist heritage and its royal family, the Chogyals ("Dharma Kings") whose monarchy was established in the mid 17th century. The author proceeds summarily through the subsequent rulers, touching on key questions and topics for further research, up to the period ca. 1815 when the impact of British India began to be felt in earnest.

A perennial aspect of Sikkimese society explored in some depth by the author is how its ethnic makeup affected the structure of Sikkim's governance and its relationship with British India. The main ethnic groups in question were the indigenous Lepcha (Tibetan *Mon*), the so-called "Bhutia" (an ambiguous term designating Sikkimese of Tibetan ancestry, though never used in the Tibetan text of *RHoS,* where we find instead the Tibetan term *Lho*), the Limbu (Tibetan *Tsong*), and more recently the immigrant Nepalese. Particularly important is the author's discussion of how those groups were perceived, and their role in Sikkimese society interpreted (often erroneously), by British civil servants and government officials.

McKay argues convincingly that the political relationship between Sikkim and British India was damaged by persistent cultural and linguistic misunderstandings. He points out that until the late 19th century, British knowledge of Sikkim was primarily based on three or four books written in English by authors who, with a single exception, never actually visited Sikkim nor spoke any Sikkimese language. There was, in addition, a series of largely incompetent British agents appointed as intermediaries with

[1] Here and there, throughout this review, we will refer to the recently published, new translation of this history (abbrev. *RHoS*), based on the original Tibetan manuscripts, which corrects many of Dawasamdup's *HoS* translation flaws. See Ardussi, John & Anna Balikci-Denjongpa & Per K. Sörensen (2021). *The Royal History of Sikkim*. Chicago, Bangkok, Serindia Publications.

Sikkim who were, as the author concludes, "appallingly ill-equipped for Himalayan diplomacy" (p. 284). None of them understood the delicate balance that the Sikkim monarchy had to maintain in its relations between such divergent clients as Buddhist Tibet and British India.

A key mobilizing event in British India's relationship with Sikkim was the acquisition of Darjeeling in 1835. Supposedly given in friendship as a land lease from the Chogyal to be used as the site of a British hill sanitorium, Darjeeling was for all practical purposes taken from Sikkim through the manipulations of agents Major George Lloyd and Dr. Archibald Campbell (see the discussion on pp. 48–52). Thereafter, British influence over Sikkim grew systematically, as the economy and population of Darjeeling rapidly developed far beyond its contractual status as a sanitorium.

The second enabling event in British India's fraught relationship with Sikkim was the 1848 plant-hunting expedition of English botanist William Dalton Hooker, who, guided by Campbell, contrived to cross the border into Tibet despite prohibitions against doing so. On their return, to save face with Tibet, the Sikkim authorities held them in short-lived detention in Sikkim. This act set loose a series of face-saving actions by the British beginning with a poorly designed military mission in 1860 led by Campbell, which ended in failure. A more serious revenge expedition followed, which resulted in a formal treaty between the two states, the 1861 Treaty of Tumlong, which was then the Sikkim capital. Meanwhile, Hooker had published his exploration memoir *Himalayan Journals* (London, 1854), replete with anti-Sikkimese prejudice, "a text of colonial power" McKay argues (p. 66), which nevertheless guided British policy for the next forty years until the publication of Risley's *Sikkim Gazetteer* (1894). That book, too, is filled with much hearsay and misinformation, written by a British ethnographer who never visited Sikkim.

It was in part to correct these mistaken interpretations of Sikkim that the royal couple Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and his consort Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma wrote their own history of Sikkim, *The Denjong Gyalrab*, and commissioned an (unpublished) English translation by Kazi Dawasamdup (1909–10).

The author takes us through a careful account of the decades after the Tumlong treaty, focusing in particular on events surrounding British India's fascination with establishing trade relations with Tibet via passes through the Sikkim Himalaya, which Tibet formally opposed. A border war with Tibet (supported by China) was fought in 1888 at Lingtu, a mountain rampart claimed by both Sikkim and Tibet. McKay considers the British

victory at Lingtu to mark the point when the British finally severed Sikkim from Tibet and became in full control of the Sikkim state (pp. 98–101).

There is much more important content in *The Mandala Kingdom* than this brief summary, including the establishment of a Political Officer in the Sikkim capital (1889), the imprisonment of the Chogyal and family in the suburbs of Darjeeling for failing to obey the Political Officer's commands, Sikkim's reluctant involvement in the Younghusband military Mission to Lhasa (1903–04), and the gradual modernization initiatives of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal's successors.

The book has been carefully edited; we found only three misspelled Tibetan and Sikkimese names. On p. 59, fn. 19, the author writes Srirong instead of Sidsum [i.e. prince Sridsum Namgyal]. On p. 38 fn. 27 a Sikkimese Lepcha general is incorrectly referenced as Yuklathup instead of Yug Drathub / Dathup, influenced perhaps by Nepalese scholars who have discussed him under that name. Lastly, on p. 59 the author incorrectly names the 14th Karmapa hierarch Thakchog, instead of the correct Thekchog Dorje.

We conclude by stating once again our appreciation of the solid scholarship and numerous insights in McKay's *The Mandala Kingdom*. It is a fascinating read, which belongs on the bookshelf of every advanced student and serious scholar of Himalayan studies.

OBITUARY

KYABJE DODRUBCHEN RINPOCHE THUBTEN TRINLEY PALZANG (1927 – 2022)

ACHARYA TSULTSEM GYATSO *and*
TENZING LONGSEL BARPHUNGPA

The 4th Dodrubchen Rinpoche (1927 – 2022)

On the afternoon of 25th January 2022, corresponding to the 23rd day of the 11th lunar month of the Tibetan Female Ox year, the Fourth Dodrubchen Rinpoche Thubten Trinley Palzang entered into Mahāparinirvāna at his meditation centre Phuntshog Ngayap Palri in Lukshyama, Gangtok, aged 95 years. His was an exceptional journey from a child in Tibet, to a revered master in Sikkim. He upheld the

integrity and purity of Buddha Dharma, and benefitted people wherever he went. His contributions to Sikkim are immense and his love for the people of Sikkim is equally reciprocated in their devotion towards him.

Early life

As prophesied by the Fifth Dzogchen Rinpoche, Thubten Choekyi Dorje (1872–1935), Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche was born in the Female Fire Hare year, 21st June 1927, in the village of Tsi on the banks of the Serchu river in the Sertha Valley of Golok, Domey province in Eastern Tibet. His father, Drala, was of the Jekar clan and his mother, Kali Kyi, was of the Kazhi clan. There were many miraculous signs before his birth. That year there were rainbows in the sky over his village almost every day. A raven from far away Dodrubchen monastery (distinctive because it was missing the upper part of its beak) was seen in his village. There were also precocious signs of religiosity after his birth. He was drawn towards the Dharma and could recite the mantra of Guru Rinpoche very early in his life.

At the age of four, he was recognized and enthroned as the Fourth Dodrubchen Rinpoche at Sangchen Ngodrub Pelbarling monastery, also known as Dodrubchen monastery, in Golok by the Dzogchen Rinpoche. 'Dodrubchen' literally means "The Great Siddha from Do Valley".

The Dodrubchens are the incarnations of the eighth century Prince Murub Tsepo (son of King Trisong Detsen of Tibet) and Terton Sangay Lingpa (1340–1396). The Dodrubchen lineage is as follows:

1. Dodrubchen Jigme Trinley Ozer (1745–1821)
2. Dodrubchen Jigme Phuntshog Jungne (1824–1863)
3. Dodrubchen Jigme Tenpai Nima (1865–1926)
4. Dodrubchen Thubten Trinley Palzang (1927–2022)

His early tutors were Puchung Rangrik and Chokor Lotsul. From Lushul Khenpo Konchok Dronme (Konme, 1859–1935) he studied scriptural texts such as *Mañjuśrīstotra*, Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and *Yonten Dzo*, a text of complete exposition of sutra and tantra by Jigme Lingpa. Khenpo Konme, among others, attested to the young Rinpoche's proficiency in performing miracles. However, Rinpoche, deeming it inappropriate to display such miracles, refrained from doing so and also dissuaded others.

When he was still only ten years of age, he received the *Longchen Nyingthig* (*Heart Essence of the Great Expanse*) and *Nyingthig Yabzhi*

empowerments in the year 1937 at Gekong Monastery in Dzachukha from Khenpo Kunzang Chotrak (Khenpo Kunpal, 1872–1943), a disciple of the Third Dodrubchen Rinpoche. At the age of fourteen he had a highly charged meeting, at the sacred Mount Drong ri, with Apang Terton Ogyen Trinley Lingpa (1895–1945). Apang Terton was the reincarnation of the great Terton and Nyingma master, Rigdzin Godem. As a result, he gained a profound insight into the true nature of existence and realized the Wisdom of Emptiness of objective reality. Apang Terton became his root guru.

From ten to eighteen years of age, Rinpoche studied at the Dodrubchen monastery. His teachers included Garwa Trulku Dorchok and Chokor Khenpo Kunga Lodro. He studied sutras such as *Mādhyamaka*, *Abhidharma* and *Vinaya*; as well as the tantras such as *Guhyagarbha tantra*, the *Sādhanās of the Three Roots* and *Vajrakīla of Longchen Nyingthig*. He received training in chanting, mudras and all the functions of a *vajra ācārya* or *Dorje Lopen* (grand master). He completed retreat recitation trainings of *Rigdzin Dupa*, *Yumka Dechen Gyalmo*, *Palchen Dupa*, *Vajrakīla* and *Guhyagarbha tantra*.

Rinpoche conferred many teachings such as *Rigzin Terdzo*, *Lama Gongdu*, and *Kamay Choekhag Chusum*. In 1941, he conferred the complete empowerments and *lung* of *Longchen Nyingthig* to around one thousand monks and nuns at Dodrubchen monastery. At the age of nineteen he made pilgrimages to Drepung, Sera, Radreng, Samye and other monasteries and holy sites around Tibet. He also completed a retreat of the sadhana of *Yumka Dechen Gyalmo*, in the room of Jigme Lingpa at Tshering Jong in the Yarlung Valley.

Upon returning to Dodrubchen monastery, aged about twenty, he took over the spiritual and administrative responsibilities of the monastery. In 1950, he learnt the entire practice of *Trekcho* and *Thogal* of Dzogpa Chenpo from Yukhok Chatralwa Choying Rangdrol (1872–1952), a Dzogchen adept considered to be Vimalamitra in human form. He built a scriptural college and provided woodblocks for printing the *Longchen Zod Dun* (the Seven Treasures of Longchen Rabjam).

From the great teacher Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro (1893–1959), at Dzongsar monastery, he received many transmissions such as *Semde Adon Chogye*, *Longde Dorje Zampa*, *Me ngagde*, the thirteen divisions of *Kama*, *Dupa Do*, *Longchen Nyingthig* and the *Sung bum* of Khyentse Wangpo, as well as empowerments of *Kālacakra*, *Guhyasamāja*, *Hevajra*, *Cakrasamvara* and *Vajrabhairava*. In return Dodrubchen Rinpoche gave the *Khandro Nyingthig* empowerment to Khyentse Chokyi Lodro.

At the Dodrubchen monastery he commissioned the carving of wooden blocks of *Zod Dun* and distributed them, built gold gilded statues of Guru Rinpoche and the lineage masters, built a large library and gave several empowerments.

Activities in Sikkim

At the time of the Chinese invasion, he left Tibet for Sikkim, thus fulfilling important prophecies. In *Ka Gya Ma*, a prophecy text, part of Sangay Lingpa's *Lama Gongdu* treasure cycle, it was recorded that the Fourth Dodrubchen Rinpoche would come to India. Similarly, Apang Terton had also prophesied that the Rinpoche would come to the Valley of Rice, i.e., Sikkim. Importantly, the Third Dodrubchen himself had predicted that his next reincarnate would come to India.

Photojournalist and ordained Buddhist nun, Marilyn Silverstone (1929–1999), who met Rinpoche in the late 1960s, describes how when the trouble erupted in Golok, Rinpoche had to escape carrying his mother on his back.[1] After a long and arduous journey, he finally arrived at Gangtok on October 12, 1957 at the age of 30 years. As per the recommendations of the then Chogyal Tashi Namgyal, Crown Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal and the eminent Dzogchen master Kyabje Kongpo Lae-Rae Trulzhig Pawo Dorje Rinpoche (1897–1962), he established himself at the Deorali Chorten complex in Gangtok. At this time, Rinpoche made visits to the Tashiding and Silnon monasteries of West Sikkim.

In 1958, he performed a number of ceremonies for his ailing teacher Khyentse Chokyi Lodro. However, Khyentse Chokyi Lodro passed away the next year, and a few years later, i.e., 1962, Trulzhig Rinpoche also passed away. The demise of these masters left a huge void in Sikkim, and it seems more than just providential that Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche had made his home in Sikkim after escaping the troubles in Tibet.

In 1960, Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche was requested by the Chogyal, the Crown Prince and the Founder-Director of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT), Shri N.C. Sinha (1911–1997), to join the Institute as a "Learned Lama". Here, he acted as Nyingma consultant and advisor for the Institute's research programs. Over a period of fifteen years, he conducted research on several topics such as the early translations of *Rigdzin Sogdrub* (Accomplishing the Life-Force of the

[1] Silverstone, M. (1973: 11).

Vidhyādharas), a Dzogchen teaching fundamental to Sikkimese Buddhism; the six volumes of *Jatson Nyingpo*, the 'Treasure Scriptures' of Pema Lingpa; and all the *tsaka-li* (miniature flash card images depicting deities, mandalas and auspicious representations used during rites and initiations) housed in Namgyal Institute.

His main area of research was concerned with the vast range of mandalas found in the oral and treasure teachings of the Nyingma school. These he worked on at the Chorten monastery, as well as at the Institute. His remarkable energy, skill and dedication has been documented by Marilyn Silverstone who, visiting his "workshop" at the Chorten, describes it thus:

> The floor is spread with books and papers; two monk assistants, one with a large wooden compass, are plotting a mandala on graph paper. His own place is cluttered with different sized photocopies of other mandalas which he is working on. Knowing nothing about the working of a camera, he has gotten hold of one, and figuring out himself, has hit on the idea of photographing a mandala which he has drawn large size, then reducing it by making a photographic print the size he wants, then making printing blocks of the reduced-size mandala for mass-producing and giving to the people who ask for them.[2]

He was also instrumental, along with other advisors and consultants, such as Khyungpo Gyalton Rinpoche (1908–1970, Kagyu), Dzongsar Khenchen Appey Rinpoche (1927–2010, Sakya) and Khenchen Lodoe Zangpo (1923–1986, Sakya), in preparing a list of Tibetan Buddhist texts to be procured for the newly established NIT library. Tibet had been closed from the outside world after the occupation, and at the time, not many people had knowledge about texts so their advice was invaluable.

He bestowed the teachings of *Longchen Zodchen Dun* (the Seven Treasure Stores of Longchen Rabjam), a total of four times and also printed this important text, thus being the first to publish it outside of Tibet. He authored several important books and publications such as *Gongter* (Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa's Mind Treasure), *Nyingthig Yashi* (the Four Heart-Essenses), *Namkha Zoekyi Choedhe* (Sky Treasury of Visionary Revealed Teachings) published twice, *Sangak Ngagyur Thunmin Lug gi Lapcha* regarding the origin of tantra in the Nyingma school, and his own brief autobiography, *A Short Account of Monastic Life in Dodrub (Golok)*, contained in the collective biographies *Lama Sum So Soe Rangnam Dang Gonpa chey kyi Jhungwa Dordue*.

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2 Silverstone, M. (1973: 12).

Around this time Rinpoche took as his consort, Khandro Pema Dechen (1923–2006) from the Dekyi Khangsar family of Drukla, Kongpo Valley. She was earlier the consort of Trulzhig Rinpoche. An accomplished practitioner in her own right, she accumulated about eighteen sets of the fivefold hundred thousand *Ngondro* practice.

Rinpoche was not averse to visiting his patron's homes to perform rituals. In 1963, Rinpoche gave *Longchen Nyingthig* teachings at Rhenock House, Gangtok, to a large gathering. This teaching was requested for and sponsored by Kham Nyagrong Lachung Rongyek Rinpoche Jangchub Dorje (c. 1894–1966).

Rinpoche bestowed the *Nyingma Kamay Chos Lug* teaching, his first *Kama* transmissions and empowerments in Sikkim, at the Namnang residence of Mazong Yap Jerung, real name Pema Wangyal Kazi, in March-April of 1969. This important ceremony was sponsored by the Tenth Tingkye Gonjang Rinpoche (b.1961) and Yap Jerung. An array of learned lamas was present from various parts of Sikkim, the largest number being from Phensang monastery. This was a huge event, lasting over a month, and attended by numerous people from Gangtok and surrounding villages.[3] Besides proper Sikkim, Rinpoche would even go as far as Darjeeling and Kalimpong to perform rituals for his followers such as *Phowa* or Transference of Consciousness to a pure Buddha-field.

In the early 1970s, at Enchey monastery, he received Minling initiations from Kyabje Minling Trichen Gyurme Kunzang Wangyal Rinpoche (1930–2008). Dodrubchen Rinpoche recognized the Seventh Dzogchen Rinpoche, Jigme Losal Wangpo (b.1964) whose enthronement was held in the Royal Tsuglakhang at Gangtok in 1972.

Rinpoche made a number of visits to the West, his first being on 25th of May 1973.[4] He set up a small center called the Maha Siddha Nyingmapa Center in Massachusetts. He has transmitted many teachings here.

He established a meditation college called Pema Hoeling (the Sanctuary of the Light of the Lotus), at the Chorten monastery premises, Deorali, in 1979. One of the first meditators here was Gonjang Rinpoche. During the inauguration ceremony, Rinpoche also ceremoniously

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[3] "Grand Nyingma Worship Ceremony in Gangtok", Sikkim Herald, Wednesday, April 2, 1969, Vol. 10 No. 47, Published by the Publicity Department, Government of Sikkim, and Printed by the Manager, Sikkim Government Press, Gangtok.

[4] Office Order No.2 – NIT/73. Dated Gangtok June 4, 1973. Personal file of Rev. Dodrubchen Rinpoche, Learned Lama/ Scholar – Nyingmapa Sect, (Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology), now Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

enthroned Venerable Dechen Dorje (1937–2012) as the abbot of Phensang monastery, North Sikkim. Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche expanded the Chorten complex by constructing a main assembly hall, residential quarters for monks, a Ngondro Drubkhang (Preliminary Meditation Center) and a storeroom for housing scriptures and Dharma books.

In 1981–1982, Rinpoche organized a recitation of the *Ārya Bhadracaryā* mantra one hundred thousand times at Bodhgaya. Khenpo Lha Tshering (b.1959), currently the chief abbot of Tashiding monastery, was the *Umdze* or chanting master, and many *sheda* lamas and *khenpos* from the Chorten monastery, Nyingma Sheda, Phensang monastery and other monasteries of Sikkim took part, including the Late Khenpo Dechen Dorje. This event was the precursor to the annual Nyingma Monlam, which formally began in 1989.

At the Chorten monastery, Rinpoche held two important practice retreats. One was the practice of *Yarney* or Summer Retreat, which was started in 1992. This is one of the *Duelwa Dzhi Sum* or Three Basic Rituals of the Vinaya from the Sutra tradition.[5] The second was the *Drubchen* or Observance of Sādhanā puja started in 1993. The latter is based on *Phurba Gyue lug*, tantric system of Kīlaya, from the Tantric tradition. These were held on the sixth month and at the end of twelfth month of the Tibetan calendar respectively, and were attended by thousands of devotees, mostly from Bhutan.

Rinpoche has identified and given recognition to some important Sikkimese Trulkus, most notably the reincarnation of Kham Nyagrong Lachung Rongyek Rinpoche Jangchub Dorje, also known as Lachung Trulku (b.1978) in 1983. He has also recognized Tamang Trulku Chopel Gyatso or Jigme Wangden Dorje, Jigme Trinley Dorje or Pakyong Trulku, Sang Trulku, Zhigling Trulku, Trulku Kunzang Jampal Rangjung and Trulku Kunzang Dodrul Thaye. The last two he recognized as per the request of Lachung Trulku.

In 1987–1988, Rinpoche gave initiations on *Rinchen Terzod* (The Great Treasury of Precious Termas) to hundreds of disciples at Tashiding for over two months. The ceremony was sponsored by Chogyal Wangchuk Namgyal (b.1953). Rinpoche always had a good relationship with the Chogyals. The same year he also led the recitation of hundred thousand Vajra Guru mantras of Guru Rinpoche at Tashiding.

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5 The other two Basic Rituals of the Vinaya, besides Summer Retreat, are the *Sojong* or Vow Restoring Healing and Purification Ceremony, and the *Gag jae* or Release Ceremony for ending the Summer Retreat.

In 1991, Rinpoche bestowed initiations and instructions on the *Lama Gongdu* (Summary of Guru's Intention) cycle of teachings and oral transmissions of the Nyingmapa School at Chorten monastery. The year 1995 saw Rinpoche give two major empowerments and teachings. The first was in Gangtok where he bestowed initiations and instructions on *Nyingthig Tsapoi* (Heart Essence of the Great Expanse) to a large gathering of monks and laity at the Chorten monastery. The next was an empowerment on *Jatson Poedruk* (The Six Volumes of the Pure Treasures of Jatson Nyingpo) at Pemayangtse monastery, West Sikkim.

In 1997, Rinpoche consecrated the newly constructed *Deshek Chorten* and *Due Dul Chorten* at Tashiding. In the same year, at the behest of Khenpo Dechen Dorje, Rinpoche bestowed the title of Khenpo to six monks of Ngagyur Nyingma Higher Studies (Sheda) at a special ceremony in the Chorten monastery, on the 7th of April. Later that year, Rinpoche was given the responsibility of overseeing the construction of the 130 feet statue of Guru Rinpoche at Samdruptse, near Namchi, South Sikkim. Under his guidance the project was completed and he performed the *Rabney* (consecration ceremony) in the year 2004.

He consecrated with a special prayer, *Chyaney*, the 137-feet tall statue of Chenrezig at Pelling in West Sikkim on 1st of November 2018. Also, in 2018–2019, Rinpoche constructed the Phuntshog Ngayap Palri Meditation Centre at Lukshyama, Gangtok.

Being closely connected to the Sikkimese people and the land, Rinpoche helped in the foundation of schools such as the Denjong Padma Choeling Academy in Pelling, West Sikkim in 1980 and Taktse International School in Gangtok in 2006. He also gave his blessings and spiritual guidance to a citizen's protest opposing the construction of a hydro-electric project on the Rathong Chu river near the historical sites of Yuksam, which began in 1994, as this directly affected the protectors and deities in the sacred geography of Sikkim. Recognizing his importance to Sikkimese life, the Government of Sikkim even provided him with a police escort.

In 2021, he built a Laptse, a stone structure topped with colorful flags, invoking all the deities of Sikkim, at his meditation centre in Lukshyama. Special prayers were held during the occasion to dispel negative forces, especially the Covid-19 pandemic. He thus had a considerable influence, apart from spiritual, on the social life of Sikkim.

Between 1981 and 1994, Rinpoche frequently visited Bhutan. The *Nyingthig* lineage has a long-standing connection with Bhutan, since Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam (1308–1363), one of the greatest lineage

holders of the *Nyingthig* tradition lived and propagated Dharma there for a long time. Among the four main disciples of Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa (1729–1798)[6] were the First Dodrubchen Rinpoche, Jigme Trinley Ozer, and Jigme Kundrol Namgyal of Bhutan, who built the Yongla monastery in Eastern Bhutan. Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche visited Gelephu, Samdrup Jongkhar, Bumthang, Pema Gatshel, Tashigang, Mongar, Lhuentse and other places in central and eastern Bhutan, where he gave teachings on *Nyingthig Yabshi*, *Jigling Sungbum* and *Rinchen Terzod*. He also established and sponsored monastic schools (*laptas*) in Bhutan,

Disciples

Among Rinpoche's disciples are Dzogchen Rinpoche Jigme Losal Wangpo, Dzogchen Khenpo Mewa Thubten Yoeser (1928–2000), Twelfth Gyalwang Drukchen Jigme Pema Wangchen (b.1963), the Tenth Gonjang Rinpoche, the late Lachen Gomchen Rinpoche (1949–2012), Lachung Chonyi Dungzin Rinpoche (b.1951), Serdup Dungzin Ngawang Lodoe Chopel Rinpoche (b.1956), Trulku Pema Wangyal Rinzing (b.1956), Lachung Trulku, late Khenpo Dechen Dorje, Khenpo Lha Tshering, and Chogyal Wangchuk Namgyal of Sikkim. Disciples from Bhutan include Lopon Thekchok Yeshe Dorje (b.1957) and Kunchog Yonten. Trulku Pema Thekchok Tenpe Gyaltsen (Trulku Theglo b.1937), Trulku Longyang Rinpoche (b.1963/4) and Trulku Thondup Rinpoche (b.1939) from Tibet, were also his main disciples.

Conclusion

As the foremost Dzogchen master and the principal lineage holder and propagator of the *Longchen Nyingthig* teachings revealed by the Omniscient Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche initiated, propagated and ensured the flourishing of Buddha Dharma in general and the Nyingma tradition in particular, in Sikkim and the world. He had received initiations from the greatest Buddhist teachers in Tibet and surrounding lands, for instance he received initiations on the Collected Works of Terton Pema Lingpa (1450–1521) in Bhutan from Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdral Yeshe Dorje (1904–1987), and from the same master, he also received *Rinchen Terzod* initiations in Nepal.

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[6] Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa was a Terton who discovered the *Longchen Nyingthig* cycle of teachings as a mind *ter*.

For five decades, from 1963 to 2014, Rinpoche gave these precious teachings and several Nyingma initiations blessing the people of Sikkim.

Rinpoche always advised his disciples to follow the basic teachings of the Buddha enshrined in such seminal works like Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend* or *Shaytrin*, Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* and *Words of my Perfect Teacher by* Patrul Rinpoche.

Rinpoche was a man of few words, yet he exuded warmth, peace and a tremendous presence. When he did speak, it was in a friendly, straightforward manner, never involving himself in unsavory discussions. He gave important teachings and empowerments in various places, particularly Sikkim's premier Nyingma monasteries of Phensang, Pemayangtse and Tashiding. A great lama of high spiritual attainments, his contributions to humanity are immense and he leaves a huge void in the hearts of all Sikkimese and Dharma practitioners worldwide.

There was almost continuous snowfall for a few weeks following his demise. His *Kudung* was visited by numerous Rinpoches, monks and lay people. Though the global Covid-19 pandemic was still raging, there was not a single case recorded from the visitors to his meditation centre at Lukshyama. All this was taken by his followers as a sign that Rinpoche was unmistakably a great Dzogchen master.

Among the Rinpoches who came to visit his *Kudung* are: Dilgo Khyentse Yangsi Rinpoche, Minling Khenchen Rinpoche, Kyabje Dudjom Yangsi Rinpoche and Dungsey Garab Rinpoche.

The Government of Sikkim announced all Offices, Educational Institutions and Public Undertakings closed on the 15th of March 2022, the day of *Gong Dzog Shegu*, so that people could pay their respects at the *Kudung*. Thereafter, the *mar dung* (reliquary body) was prepared by Chorten monastery.

The Chorten monastery is currently headed by Dodrubchen Rinpoche's foremost students, such as Lachung Trulku, Trulku Thogmey, Gonpo Trulku, Trulku Dawa Zangpo, Trulku Karma Gyurmey, Khenpo Thinley Dorje and Dodrubchen Rinpoche's personal secretary Kunchog Yonten, under the guidance of Lopon Thekchok who was the principal student and very close disciple of the late Rinpoche.

H.H. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama and many other masters have composed special prayers for Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche's swift rebirth. Ven. Trulku Thondup Rinpoche has given a brief prayer:

By the power of the ocean-like infallible refuges,
May Jigme Thubten Trinley Palbar,
Through the brilliance of the sun of excellent Trulkus,
Swiftly accomplish all his wishes for the Dharma and beings.

Prayers for his swift rebirth are being performed everywhere.

The *mar dung* (reliquary body) of Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche
at his residence at Lukshayama above Gangtok, Sikkim

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REMEMBERING BARMIOK RINPOCHE TASHI DENSAPA (1942 – 2021) AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS AS DIRECTOR (2002 – 2021), NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

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Barmiok Rinpoche Tashi Densapa
together with his wife Kaysang Choden Densapa

INTRODUCTION

Fluid and adaptive, organized and disciplined, Barmiok Rinpoche was always active in multiple fields and carried many identities. As a member of the Barfungpa clan (Densapa lineage), he first considered himself a

Lepcha and often introduced himself as such. His father, Barmiok Athing Tashi Dadul Densapa (1902–1988), had been a leading landlord and state administrator, while his ancestors held important positions at court since the late 17th century. Although he didn't speak the language, Barmiok Rinpoche grew up hearing Lepcha spoken at home by his paternal aunts. His mother being Tibetan, he learnt the language along with Drenjongke, English and Nepali, the preferred languages spoken in the society in which he grew up. He moved comfortably among all social groups, whether it be the royal or the landlord class to which he belonged; the world of monasteries, high Lamas and Rinpoche; Sikkim's farming communities; the Tibetans and their descendants; the bureaucrats and Indian professionals; or among scholars and Westerners. While skilfully navigating these vastly different worlds, he always carried himself with dignity and commanded respect from everyone.[1] When it came to matters of the heart, Rinpoche didn't hesitate to sever with tradition by tying the knot with the woman he loved.

Barmiok Rinpoche Tashi Densapa spend a good portion of the 1970s studying and working in America, returning to Sikkim on several occasions. His final return was in 1980, together with his wife Kaysang and young daughter Dolka. At some point before 1975, he was asked by Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal to join the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology as Assistant Director. Barmiok Rinpoche complied with the Chogyal's order but eventually joined the Sikkim Government Administration, which was where his heart and ambitions lay.

The Chogyal however had good reasons to assign Barmiok Rinpoche to his Buddhist Institute, which he had established in 1958. As the tulku of Simik monastery, Rinpoche was recognised by the 16th Karmapa as the emanation of his uncle Barmiok Kusho, Karma Palden Chogyal

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[1] His understanding of these varied worlds led him to spread his activities and contributions to many different fields, including establishing the Barmiok Tea Estate in 1999 in his ancestral village for the betterment of the community and a vision to contribute to the international reputation of Sikkim.
Although Rinpoche used to complain that "Anna has her fingers in too many pies" (when referring to my numerous activities at the Institute), he himself definitively always managed the largest amounts of "pies". And this is perhaps what we appreciated most about each other. He neither ever displayed an ounce of laziness, nor did he ever think that something couldn't be done. Always open to share his knowledge, insights or opinions, I learned a great deal from Rinpoche about Sikkimese society, culture and recent history. I feel greatly indebted to Rinpoche for all the generosity and trust he extended to me over nearly 20 years.

(1871–1942),[2] who had been the Chief Lama of Sikkim from 1916 to 1931, and was considered a leading scholar on all matters relating to Tibetan Buddhism and Sikkimese religious history.

While studying in America, the circumstances of Barmiok Rinpoche's training were also particularly conducive to his newly assigned position at the Institute. His first master's had been in International Relations and Public Administration, but while pursuing a second master's in Asian Studies and Comparative Religion, Barmiok Rinpoche had the good fortune to be at Seattle's University of Washington at the time of the birth of Tibetan Studies in America. Turrell V. Wylie had invited Dezhung Rinpoche together with Geshe Nornang and Sakya Dagchen Rinpoche to the university of Washington in the early 1960s, where he established the Tibetan Studies program.

Around this time, a group of talented young students, who were later to become the doyens of Tibetan Studies in America, embarked upon a rigorous program of Tibetan language and Buddhist Studies. Amongst the scholars to have emerged from this pioneering program at Washington were E. Gene Smith, Melvyn Goldstein, John Ardussi, Cyrus Stearns, David Jackson, and Father Richard Sherburne, S.J. While pursuing his master's, Barmiok Rinpoche contributed to the Tibetan program as translator to the high Lamas. He himself had received instruction in Buddhism as a young tulku at the monastic school in Sikkim, where he had studied for three year before being sent to Mount Hermon, Darjeeling, for a conventional education by his father and eventually to St. Stephen's, Delhi University, where he graduated with a B.A. Honours in History. While at Seattle, he researched several articles, which were later published in 1977 in the Institute's journal, the *Bulletin of Tibetology*, with the titles *A short biography of 'Gro-mgon chos-rgyal 'Phags-pa* and *Kong-sprul Yon-tan rgya-mtsho*.

In the late 1970s, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation (JDR III), Barmiok Rinpoche undertook training in museum technology at the prestigious Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., a training which was to prove invaluable later in life when, under his direction, the Namgyal Institute's museum of Tibetan art was redesigned and its collection catalogued for the first time.

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[2] Barmiak Kusho Karma Palden Chogyal (1871–1942) was the tulku of Rechen Drubchog Wösal Dorje (1786–1869), Lama of Simik monastery, located east of the Teesta near Bhādong (*The Royal History of Sikkim* 2021: 400). All consecutive tulkus of this lineage, with Barmiok Rinpoche Tashi Densapa as its most recent, were considered *Rechens* (Tib. ras chen), emanations of one of Lhatsün Namkha Jigme's four main disciplines.

In those days, although the affluent class in Sikkim was wealthy in terms of landed property and access to labour, there was little cash available in rupees, let alone dollars, even among members of the royal family. Thus, when his father Barmiok Athing sent his tulku son to study in America, he expected him not only to study and return to contribute to his country, but also to work to finance his foreign stay. Rinpoche did so primarily by driving lorries, delivering luxury cars throughout the US, and driving a taxi in Seattle. Young and enthusiastic, he even had a short stint as janitor at his university, a tale he later relished to recount to his high caste Hindu friends, who couldn't possibly fathom that the tulku son of one of the most powerful families of the land could possibly take up such an undignified position, however temporary. Such was Rinpoche's paradoxical sense of humour.

When Barmiok Rinpoche eventually left America, he landed back in South Asia in style. One day, while driving his taxi, Rinpoche drove by Seattle's Boeing company and to his surprise, saw a newly painted plane with the name: Royal Nepal Airlines. Taking a sharp turn, he drove his taxi into Boeing Field and met the Nepalese pilots and crew who had come to collect and fly Nepal's first jet back to Kathmandu. As Rinpoche's stay in America was coming to an end, he was invited by the crew to join them on the plane's maiden flight to Nepal. The plane being empty, in addition to a suitcase he was carrying back for the Chogyal, Rinpoche brought along all his furniture and belongings accumulated over his several years sojourn in America. When they landed in Kathmandu, a huge gathering and the press were present to welcome the new plane with much fanfare and flower garlands, with Rinpoche tagging along and counted among the crew.

Back in Sikkim, after his short stint at the Namgyal Institute, Barmiok Rinpoche worked his way through the various government departments and up the ladder of Sikkim's State Administration until retiring as Principal Secretary to the Government of Sikkim in 2001. He contributed substantially to several departments, notably to the Departments of Tourism and Culture, but generally remained unsatisfied with his administrative career, mainly due to the usual political and financial constraints plaguing the bureaucracies of developing nations. The system had prevented him from making a lasting and meaningful contribution to Sikkim, in line with his vision and abilities.

And thus, when the time came, retirement at home was not an option. Still full of ideas and ambition, he decided to return to fulfil his obligations entrusted upon him over thirty years earlier by the late

Chogyal, joining the Namgyal Institute as its new Director in March 2002. Rinpoche immediately got to work on bringing the sleepy institute back to life, which had been without an active full-time director for a number of years. He brought with him a lifetime of experience and influential contacts, which were to prove crucial in his effort to rebuild the Institute's national and international reputation as a Himalayan Buddhist academic research and publishing centre, and to replenish the Institute's coffers.

SUMMARY OF BARMIOK RINPOCHE TASHI DENSAPA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

Throughout his tenure at the Namgyal Institute, Barmiok Rinpoche managed the Institute's activities strictly in accordance with the Institute's *Charter of Incorporation*, as amended in 1976. The Institute's Charter is an Old Law of Sikkim protected under article 371F of the Constitution of India.

Among Tashi Densapa's achievements, together with many research projects and publications he supported over the years, we can briefly list the following:

New programmes and faculties:

As a major contribution towards the end of his tenure at the Institute, Barmiok Rinpoche established the faculties of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies (Master's program in English) and Sowa Rigpa (BSRMS course) in 2017, together with the help of his long-time colleague K.N. Bhutia. All the necessary infrastructure to house these programs, their faculties and students were also provided or planned for.

Major international conferences:

During the time of the Kingdom and until the early 1990s, the Namgyal Institute enjoyed an international reputation thanks to its high profile founders, and the presence and contributions of high Lamas and other scholars with international ties. The Institute's international presence was revived by Barmiok Rinpoche, notably through the hosting of the following three conferences:

Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture, Namgyal Institute's Golden Jubilee Conference, 1–5 October 2008. The

conference's senior presiding scholar was E. Gene Smith and Alex McKay was its Academic Convenor. Over 60 presenters from South-Asia, Europe and North America were invited together with 50 from Sikkim and an additional 15 observers and official guests. The conference proceedings were published in three volumes in 2011: Vol. 1 *Tibet and the Himalayas*, Vol. 2 *The Sikkim Papers*, and Vol. 3 *The Tibetan Papers*.[3]

Science, Spirituality and Education, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 20–23 December 2010, with H.H. The Dalai Lama as the conference's Chief Guest, and Geshe Ngawang Samten, Geshe Dorji Damdul and Ven. Ringu Tulku Rinpoche as Academic Convenors. Some 38 presenters were invited from South-Asia, Europe and North America; and the proceedings were published in two issues of the Institute's journal, the *Bulletin of Tibetology*.

Quantum Physics and Emptiness in Buddhist Philosophy, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 27–28 March 2018, with 15 presenters from South Asia, Europe and North America.

During his tenure, the Namgyal Institute was represented at four seminars of the International Association of Tibetan Studies held at Oxford (2003), Vancouver (2010), Mongolia (2013), and Paris (2019), as part of the Bhutan-Sikkim panel, with panel proceedings published in the Institute's journal, the *Bulletin of Tibetology* on two occasions.

In addition to these major international conferences, a number of local seminars, special guest lectures, Buddhist teachings, and Tibetan language classes were regularly held over the years.

The establishment of Sikkim Studies

From his early days at the Institute, Barmiok Rinpoche Tashi Densapa wished to support research, cultural preservation and documentation efforts on Sikkim's specific forms of Buddhist rituals, culture, history and indigenous scholarship. At our first meeting in July 2002, he asked me to prepare a list of possible documentation and research projects with a focus on Sikkim. As a fresh Ph.D. graduate in social anthropology, this sounded more like a Christmas gift to me. The list of potential projects was long and the availability of Sikkimese researchers trained in modern

[3] McKay, Alex and Anna Balikci (2011), Tashi Tsering (2011).

forms of research in those early days was nearly nil. We quickly concluded that in order to involve young Sikkimese scholars, it was necessary, on the one hand, to enrol academically-inclined Sikkimese Lamas and introduce them to the methods and requirements of modern scholarship, and on the other hand, to undertake projects with strong visual content.

Initially, before the establishment of Sikkim University, and in order to help kick-start Sikkim Studies, Barmiok Rinpoche supported the work of foreign scholars to contribute fresh original research on Sikkim and help train local scholars in their respective fields, while carrying out their own work.[4] In order to promote Sikkim Studies, as editor and with Rinpoche's blessing, I decided to reorient the contents of the Institute's academic journal, the *Bulletin of Tibetology*, to the field of Sikkim Studies, and make the journal available digitally on the Institute's website.[5]

Over the years, substantial contributions to Sikkim Studies were made by Namgyal Institute scholars such as Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa,[6] S.G. Dokhampa,[7] Acharya Samten Gyatso,[8] Tsultsem Gyatso Acharya,[9] Hissey Wongchuk,[10] Kunzang Namgyal Lachungpa,[11] Tashi Tenzing[12] and Jigme Losel[13] among others. The Institute also published the Sikkim Studies-related works of scholars connected to the Institute such as Tashi

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4 Foreign scholars who contributed the most, on the ground, to the establishment of Sikkim Studies during the time of Tashi Densapa were Saul Mullard (Sikkimese history through Tibetan and indigenous sources), Alex McKay (Sikkim history through British sources), Jenny Bentley (Lepcha anthropology), Melanie Vandenhelsken (Bhutia anthropology), George van Driem (Drenjongke language), and myself, Anna Balikci (Bhutia/visual anthropology, Sikkim history). Many Ph.D. students, local and foreign alike, were given the opportunity to contribute to Sikkim Studies under the supervision of the Institute's scholars. For an overview of the efforts towards the establishment of Sikkim Studies by 2008, see Balikci, Anna (2011).

5 Latest issues of the *Bulletin of Tibetology* can be downloaded from http://www.tibetology.net, while back issues can be freely downloaded from: http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/bot/

6 Dokhampa, Rinzing Ngodup (1992, 1994, 1996, 2003a, 2003b).

7 Several forthcoming and independently published books on Sikkim's monasteries and sacred geography.

8 Acharya Samten Gyatso (2008).

9 Acharya Tsultsem Gyatso (2016).

10 Mullard, Saul and Hissey Wongchuk (2010).

11 Pang Lhabsol (forthcoming).

12 Tashi Tenzing (2015).

13 Jigme Losel (2019).

Tsering (Amnye Machen Institute),[14] Khenpo Chowang[15] and Khenpo Lha Tshering.[16]

Two research projects with strong visual contents were established under my supervision, which are still ongoing: *The Sikkim Historical Photo Project* and the *Sikkim Ritual Video Library*. In the former, to which a number of Sikkimese people contributed, a large number of historic photographs of Sikkim were located and scanned from both local and international collections. These were documented and the entire collection is being prepared for internet upload to a dedicated site by Longsel Barphungpa and Karma Sherab Bhutia. A number of photo exhibitions were held at the Institute and across Sikkim over the years. This photographic material was used to gradually reconstruct 150 years of Sikkimese visual history and compile short biographies of its prominent protagonists. Much of this material was included in the recently published *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House Namgyal*,[17] under the patronage of HM Ashi Kesang Choeden (Chogyal Tashi Namgyal's niece), which was supported by Barmiok Rinpoche.

The *Sikkim Ritual Video Library* project aimed to build an audio-visual archive of indigenous Bhutia-Lepcha rituals, recorded within their Buddhist cultural contexts. Two filmmakers substantially contributed to this visual anthropology project, Dawa T. Lepcha having recorded hundreds of hours of Lepcha ritual and culture in the Lepcha reserve of Dzongu, while Phurpo T. Bhutia made recordings among the Bhutias all over Sikkim but particularly in the Lachen region of north Sikkim. Ten films and numerous short records were edited from this material, of which several were screened at international ethnographic film festivals and earned awards on two occasions. These can be viewed freely on the Institute's website. The main aim of this library, however, is to archive hundreds of hours of unedited audio-visual record of Bhutia and Lepcha rituals and culture for posterity.

In the field of Sikkimese language, Barmiok Rinpoche supported three projects over the years: 1. Phonological and Romanized Drenjongke under the supervision and guidance of Prof. George van Driem (Bern University) with the collaboration of Kunzang Namgyal; 2. Sikkim Proverbs and Idioms project, implemented by Kikee Doma

[14] Tashi Tsering (2008a, 2008b, 2011, 2013).
[15] Khenpo Chowang (2003).
[16] Khenpo Lha Tshering (2006).
[17] Ardussi A. John, Anna Balikci Denjongpa and Per Sørensen (2021).

Bhutia; and 3. Documentation of Sikkimese place names, implemented by Samten Bhutia.

Museum, archives and conservation

With a background in museology, Barmiok Rinpoche quickly turned his attention to the Institute's museum. Display cabinets were redesigned, objects relabelled, dehumidifiers and a fumigation cabinet installed, and eventually, a first comprehensive catalogue was compiled, with every object professionally recorded and photographed.

In the early 1960s, Sikkim's foremost artist, Rinzing Lhadripa Lama (1912–1977), painted the murals of the Ajanta Hall located on the Institute's top floor.[18] These wall-painting had unfortunately sustained serious water damage over the years due to a leaking roof. With the help of André Alexander of Tibet Heritage Fund, the wall-paintings were restored by a team of professional conservators. Over the years, Barmiok Rinpoche also lent his assistance to a number of monastery conservation projects and supported a series of thangka conservation workshops held at the Institute by Ann Shaftel.

A humidity-controlled archival room was set up to house the Palace Collection of Documents and Photographs when these were entrusted to the Institute for safe-keeping by Chogyal Wangchuk Namgyal. The Palace Documents were subsequently fully catalogued by Saul Mullard and Hissey Wongchuk,[19] and all photographs scanned, documented and are being prepared for internet upload.

Digitization and computerization

A major digitization project was undertaken during Barmiok Rinpoche's tenure whereby the entire holdings of the Institute's Tibetan library were scanned and made available on the internet, along with a substantial number of manuscripts from Sikkimese monasteries.

The Institute was among the very first libraries in Asia to receive the full digital collection of Buddhist texts from the TBRC (Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre) presented personally by its founder, E. Gene Smith, who had been associated with Sikkim and the institute since the late 1960s.

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[18] About the Ajanta Hall, see article in this issue by Saom Miriam Malommu (2022) and Anna Balikci (2013).

[19] Mullard, Saul and Hissey Wongchuk (2010).

The Institute was also computerized and equipped with specialised scanners and video recording-editing equipment and its website launched during Barmiok Rinpoche's tenure.

Finance and infrastructure

Conservative in his views about expenditure, funds were not to be wasted or misused in anyway, even though these became available thanks to his capabilities and life-long experience and contacts in Delhi's central administration. So much so that during his tenure, he succeeded in raising the Institute's core fund established by the Chogyal with a few lakhs to a total of over eight crores, thus ensuring the future financial stability of the Institute. He successfully raised funds for the expansion of the Institute's infrastructure and the running of its research and publication programs, while he himself drew a salary of only Rs 60,000 per month, which was reduced to a symbolic Rs 100 in his last years of service as Director of the Institute.

When he joined in 2002, the Institute received Rs 10–15 lakhs as funds from the Central and State Governments. The year of his departure saw the Institute receive Rs 330 lakhs from the Central, and Rs 40 lakhs from the State Government, plus over Rs 158 lakhs from the State for running the Buddhist Studies and Sowa Rigpa faculties.

Over the years, the Institute's Annexe (housing a Conference Hall, English Library, seminar room, offices and studios) was constructed, the Guru Rinpoche and the Chogyal's statues erected, the museum refurbished, the original hostel remodelled, a boundary wall and two scholar residences constructed. Funds were secured from the Central and State Governments for the infrastructure of the Buddhist Studies and Sowa Rigpa faculties together with hostel facilities.

Barmiok Rinpoche's assistance was not limited to the Institute. As a committee member under the Ministry of Culture for the Preservation and Conservation of Buddhist Cultural Heritage, he ensured central funding to numerous monasteries in the State. He was Chairman, Advisor or Member to several Buddhist organisations and was actively involved in the planning of the Tathagata Tsal Buddha Park at Rabong, which was consecrated by H.H. The Dalai Lama in 2013.

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Returning to the Namgyal Institute later in life as its Director helped fulfil Barmiok Rinpoche's deep wish to contribute to the spread and consolidation of the Dharma as a Sikkimese Rinpoche. He did so not only by facilitating research and publications on Buddhist and Sikkimese Studies related subjects, but also by facilitating the conservation of Buddhist art and monasteries, inviting high Lamas and Rinpoches to address local audiences, holding regular rituals at the Institute for the welfare of all sentient beings, and primarily, at the very end of his tenure, establishing the faculties of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies and Sowa Rigpa, which were perhaps his dearest contributions of all.

In recent years, Barmiok Rinpoche personally financed the reconstruction of the Simik monastery, the seat of the Rechen lineage to which he belonged (see fn. 2). The first Simik monastery was built in 1843 by his predecessor, Rechen Drubchog Wösal Dorje (1789–1869). The new Simik monastery was consecrated in 2013 by Domang Yangthang Rinpoche (1930–2016). According to his wishes, Barmiok Rinpoche Tashi Densapa's ashes were enshrined in a *kudung* or reliquary located on the premises of the Simik monastery.

Following his demise on 13 November 2021, a series of prayers and rituals was held at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and at the Chorten monastery on behalf of the Institute, for Barmiok Rinpoche's swift rebirth.

Simik monastery

The *kudung* (reliquary) of Barmiok Rinpoche at Simik monastery

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