DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

Olivia Aubriot : *Eau, miroir des tensions. Ethno-histoire d'un système d'irrigation dans les moyennes montagnes du Népal Central*, Université d'Aix-Marseille, 1996, 3 vol. 601p.

The subject of this dissertation is the study of social organisation in a Nepalese village through an analysis of the water management system. In this instance, irrigation is indeed a good entry point to understand the village's social organisation. Geographically, all the villagers' land holdings are within the irrigation work (40 hectares, irrigated by a six-kilometre-long canal on the hillside). Economically, these irrigated fields represent the primary agricultural resource. Socially, as will be demonstrated, water management reflects social units, relationships and group identities analogous to those observed in the community's daily life. The questions that arise concern the relationship between irrigation and society: to what extent does the organisation of irrigation reflect the elements of social organisation? How do social constraints impact on the technical aspects of the irrigation system? Does the irrigation system evolve at the same pace as society? Does the irrigation system reflect the evolution of social changes?

To answer these questions, a historical approach has been adopted and two main themes have been developed through this research. The first one relates to the construction, stemming from a local initiative, and the development of an irrigation system, from 1893 to the beginning of the twentieth century. In examining the history of the irrigation system, the focus is placed on the socio-economic conditions prevalent during that period (population, land use, agricultural products, political incentives, etc.) to permit an understanding of the logic regulating the system's management. In the prevailing environmental conditions, the analysis of the water distribution system reveals that the use of a water clock to determine individual water rights is not technically required. A comparative study of various distribution systems shows that this technology is not commonly used in Nepal. Its presence in this village is the result of adopting an irrigation technique in use in a neighbouring village. Moreover, this technique was imported to this area and is common in arid zones. This analysis emphasizes that a technical process must be considered within the context of the society

through the values attributed to it by that society, and not by physical determinism.

The second theme relates to the evolution of the relationship between irrigation and society. The initial water distribution scheme reflects the lineage system of the village : an irrigation block, that is the land receiving water at a given time, is determined by the land owned by a specific lineage group. As local society evolves and some lineage groups disappear; the water distribution system continues to follow the established pattern of irrigation. However, there is then no management mechanism in place to assure the evolution of those irrigation blocks which no longer belong to a specific lineage group. A greater stability of land distribution due to the sale of fields and inheritance within a lineage group may be observed in those irrigation blocks retained by specific lineage groups, which in turn reflects the influence of a lineage water organisation system. It is not only water distribution, but irrigation management more broadly, which reflects other aspects of social organisation. When conflicts arise among lineage groups, farmers resort to issues of water management to express social tensions. Leaders too will use issues of water management to assert their social position in the village. Problems related to water distribution are also exploited through political conflicts arising out of the more recent establishment of the multi-party system.

Irrigation should not only be seen as a system of technology but as part of the fabric of social organisation. As such, it becomes a reference point for many forms of social expression.

Pascal Bouchery : *Les Hani. Introduction à l'étude d'une population tibéto-birmane du Yunnan en relation avec la Chine*, Université Paris X, Nanterre, 1995, 3 vols., 725 p.

(translation : S. Keyes)

This dissertation chiefly examines the Hani, a minority society from Chinese Yunnan, whose kinfolk are also found in countries adjacent to southern China (Viet Nam, Burma, Laos) as well as in Thailand, and the population represented today numbers approximately 1,500,000.

The general perception of this society, which even today remains particularly misunderstood from an anthropological point of view, is in keeping with the more general comparative anthropological perception. Until the present, the respective works of Sinology and those of anthropology dealing with societies without a written language system in this part of the world have accorded very little space to the study of cultural relations among the Han, on one hand, and the people living on the periphery of Chinese territory, on the other. In keeping with an extension of the ideas of Maspero, Eberhard and Mus, the author attempts to determine if institutions of people with different languages, political organisations and beliefs, in reality arise from common and ancient structures of thought or if they cannot be reduced to the simple phenomena of assimilation. To support this analysis, the author suggests comparing Hani society, not so much with contemporary Chinese society, but with the ancient cultural roots of China, and more precisely, the period anterior to the first Empire, i.e. up to the third century B.C., which is more favourable for revealing possible convergences.

Particularly, he endeavours to show that the political organisation and the function of the Hani priesthood is based on a coherent intellectual structure whose constitutive elements have equivalents in China's archaic modes of thought. Among the Hani, a unique principle of the emergence of authority, based on notions of virtue and purity, at one and the same time circumscribes the recruitment of political and religious authorities at the village level. In addition, in its role as mediator between the human community and supernatural protectors, the village priest (*migu*) is placed at the centre of a global disposition of correspondences between the village microcosm and the macrocosm. A vital relationship which affects the inhabitants' survival and prosperity is embodied in him. A concept of the emergence of power in relation with the divine becomes clear. Hence, political and religious institutions lead to the realisation of the same project of social normalcy through the synchronism of human actions from the cycle of their social and religious activities and from the natural cycle established by supernatural and ancestral forces. Therefore, this principle of government presents indisputable affinities with archaic concepts which

underlie the "theory of natural government" elaborated by the Chinese at the dawn of the third century B.C., and which reappears as a model of governmental orthopraxy in imperial China. A comparable principle of the emergence of authority founded on the notion of virtue (*daode*) characterised the Chinese lord of the feudal period, the king, and later, the emperor. They all mediated the relation of their subjects with regard to important divinities in the pantheon, and throughout the ritual, they possessed a regulatory function essential to the general prosperity of the dictated territory and its inhabitants.

This homology of structure led the author to question the reasons for the permanence of an archaic organisation in Chinese society which obviously derived from ancient cultural foundations and whose structure never sought to deviate until the recent advent of the Republic. Returning to the manner in which political centralisation was elaborated in China through the influence of the convergence of cults, the author recalls that the progressive extension of the State was accompanied by a dispossession of traditional prerogatives belonging to various specialists at the local echelon, having a mediating relationship with the supernatural (priests, exorcists, shamans) to the benefit of State agents. A dogmatic theory of power was not replaced with another, but rather there occurred at the interior of an intellectual structure commonly shared by all, a simple substitution of the agents of power to the benefit of official representatives. But the concepts of religious order supporting this theory were found as well in the local substratum rather than at the level of the superstructure, and beyond the phenomenon of centralisation, these concepts were only finally adapted to a more vast unity. The process of the centralisation of cults reveals, on one hand, the Chinese principle of sovereignty based on relation with the divine. Far from incorporating any archaic relic, to the contrary, it was used in a permanent manner by the State as an instrument for legitimating its power, leading everywhere to the realisation of an infeudation of divinities in conjunction with political infeudation. Various examples from China's neighbouring countries permit broadening the scope of established facts and prove that the manipulation of concepts linked to mediation towards protector divinities constitutes a paradigm of political centralisation in Asia. Far from constituting any residual anachronism, the ancient concept of a chief mediator "elected by the gods" thus seems to have played an essential role in the process, if not of

development, at the very least of the State's extension. The hierarchical encasing of divinities has permitted, in the first place, the political integration of people at the heart of the State hierarchy, and it is through the infeudation of gods, especially earth gods, that the infeudation of man could be realised. This interpretation may explain why governmental orthodoxy in China has never been able to deviate from archaic concepts of power drawn from the ancient substratum, thus explaining the survival of modes of thinking as well as the imperial structure at the end of the Qing dynasty at the beginning of the twentieth century and among contemporary populations within China such as the Hani.

The research undertaken shows that the diversity of forms of political organisation established in this region of the world is a response to an important convergence of views concerning the practical and symbolic efficacity of power. It allows the disengagement of common intellectual structures around which political institutions in both State and non-State systems are formulated and the role these models play in the process of political centralisation emerging from the formation of countries in Asia. In the representation of traditional states of the sinicized world, it is evidence of cultural schemas pre-existing the State, notably a general concept of authority largely spread out among non-state agrarian societies. Founded on a privileged relation with earth gods, it is used during the course of societal development to establish legitimacy.

This remarkable extension of comparable historical processes in Asia, teaches us that, contrary to a summary evolutionism, the advent of the State, far from being a struggle with religious elements, pre-existing founders of authority, it most often perpetuated and amplified these elements. It tends to confirm the idea by which the magico-religious dimension is primary in the traditional conception of authority and constitutes the cultural melting-pot from which the proper political power of the sovereigns of primitive States emerges. Thus, the ancient concept of the chief "elected by the gods", elaborated in the countryside and villages, could well constitute the very foundation of the monarchical institution in this part of the world. And if this is the case, we can undoubtedly and definitively conceive this group of beliefs and

rituals drawn from Asia's ancient substratum as an integral part of the apparatus which we call the "State".

Katia Buffetrille : *Montagnes sacrées, lacs et grottes, lieux de pèlerinage dans le monde tibétain. Traditions écrites et réalités vivantes,* Université de Paris X, Nanterre, 1996, 3 vol., 813 pp, maps, illus., index.

This work, by focusing on pilgrimages in Tibet proper and in the Sherpa area (east Nepal), studies the relationship between Buddhism and popular beliefs. The notion of pilgrimage is a religious phenomenon full of strong and surprising vitality and it is also one of the chief religious acts of lay people. One of the subject's main interests is the intermingling of several traditions. One finds traditional practices that may be described as "popular" in the sense that they belong to the people and not to any learned tradition as well as Buddhist beliefs and influences from the periphery of Tibetan culture, all of them difficult to identify even today. The purpose of this study was not to separate Buddhist actions and beliefs from those that may be called non-Buddhist but rather to understand how this synthesis has taken place and is still evolving, and how and why some elements have been retained in the form.

Pilgrimage sites are numerous, but the only ones taken into account in this work are those that can be qualified as natural: sacred mountains, lakes and caves. This study primarily focuses on the following:

1- primary sources on Tibet: Kailash (western Tibet), A myes rMa chen (eastern Tibet) and rTsib ri (southern Tibet); and Nepal: the caves of Halase-Maratika (south-east of Okhaldunga) and the lake of 'O ma mtsho (north of Junbesi).

2- previous studies on Kong po Bon ri (east of Lhasa), Kha ba dkar po (in Yunnan, between the Salween and the Mekong) and Tsa ri (south-eastern Tibet).

Mountains are a permanent geographical reality in the Tibetan world; in addition, they form an indestructible religious substratum, an essential component of the religious landscape, as the work of A. Macdonald (1971) based on some of the Dunhuang manuscripts has shown. The association of sacred mountains, lakes and caves derives from the Tibetan concept of space, where these entities form a whole.

A two-fold approach was adopted for this research: the study of written sources (mainly pilgrimage guides) and the observation of actual pilgrimages combined with numerous interviews with Tibetans in Tibet and in Nepal.

The analysis is directed first to the traditional cult of the territorial gods, *yul lha.* These gods who, as a general rule, are "mountain deities" are mentioned as early as the Dunhuang manuscripts. They remain very present in the life of contemporary Tibetans. Most scholars agree that the concept of territorial gods and thus their cult preceded Buddhism. This cult, which appealed mainly to laymen, thrived until the Chinese occupation, and has recently enjoyed a revival, as witnessed in some regions of Tibet. Therefore, it is a living phenomenon. This remarkable continuity of tradition highlights the importance mountains have enjoyed down through the centuries, even when temples, monasteries and *stūpa,* symbols of the expansion of Buddhism, multiplied everywhere on Tibetan territory. The ritual for the territorial god which involved various competitions, was at the heart of political organisation. It was a life-giving ritual in A. Hocart's sense ([1936] 1978) since it allowed the revival of the environment and that of the society which depended on this environment.

The life-giving rituals thus have a crucial political aspect explaining the interest temporal and spiritual Buddhist authorities have shown for the cult of the territorial god and its implications. Just as a centralised state is slow to tolerate the independence of local powers, its authorities could only reluctantly admit the designation of local chiefs in the name of a territorial god. They could neither accept the territorial gods, nor could they, for fear of violent opposition, completely suppress them. The solution arrived at was one of Buddhicization: the *yul lha* were deliberately transformed into "mountain holy places" (*gnas ri*); new cults and the practice of circumambulation materialised and consolidated this take-over.

The present work shows that the process of Buddhicization involves a ritual appropriation of space in which written sources play an important role They describe the submission of the indigenous deities and the installation of the *maṇḍala* of a Buddhist deity (generally that of

Cakrasaṃvara) within the landscape. The objective of a pilgrimage guide is to lead the ordinary pilgrim from the simple perception of a physical landscape to the conception of the place as a sacred landscape. These texts are literary stereotyped projections of an internal vision of spiritual reality destined to convey the pilgrim towards a supernatural level. Texts of this kind are in fact nothing but a Tantric *sādhana*. The pilgrim knows the content of these texts through the transmission of knowledge by religious people met along the pilgrimage routes. Thus, it is through written sources, passed on orally by religious people that the sacred landscape is created for the one who does not perceive it.

The appropriation of space also takes place on a physical level, in a concrete manner, through the arrival in the area of saints, the construction of religious buildings and marks left in the landscape by prestigious visitors.

Buddhicization also involves also the appropriation of wildlife which belong to the Buddhist world and was originally considered the property of the *yul lha*. One is again advised not to do any harm. In accordance with Buddhist ideals.

Time also falls under this ascendancy and the time of pilgrimage is determined, in a more or less precise manner, according to Buddhist criteria.

The extent of Buddhicization is unequally spread over the Tibetan area, in accordance with the interests of political and religious authorities. The study of various pilgrimages shows that this process is not linear nor monolithic.

Pilgrimages around sacred mountains intervene in many aspects of an individual's life (sickness, death, or the desire to obtain material benefits) and have also great importance for the community and its survival (for example in the case of incest and its purification). They also show how the Buddhist authorities have made compromises in order to impose Buddhist ideology.

Pilgrimages, in any case, reveal changes realised through the contributions made by Buddhism to popular religion, and also by the natural attraction laymen have for some of these contributions.

According to my observations, the lay pilgrim moves within a system that is not exclusively defined either by traditional notions antedating Buddhism or by Buddhist notions proper. It is a composite system harbouring a unique vision of the world and endowed with its own coherence. The behaviour of pilgrims differs according to the concept they have of the mountain they are circumambulating, but their aim is always to obtain material benefits to which spiritual benefits are attached.

Pilgrimages around sacred mountains enter into a logic based on an exchange between the pilgrim and the deity, which tends to disappear as the sacred mountain becomes a holy place. This law of exchange demonstrates the non-transcendental nature of the supernatural entities who inhabit the site. By constructing temples and by spreading Cakrasaṃvara's *maṇḍala* over the landscape, Buddhists have introduced a change in the relationship between man and deity. The old relationship of two partners disappears, giving way to an attitude of veneration in which the pilgrim implores the deity to grant him what he desires. Once the mountain has become completely "Buddhicized", the pilgrim acts as if he were in a temple.

During times of disorder, the revitalisation of pilgrimages, in Tibet, in India and in Nepal is one of the manifestations of the political and cultural identity of Tibetans. Buddhism, whose principles are often in conflict with popular beliefs, at least from what we know of them, is at present one of the cohesive forces of national identity. This revitalisation underlines the adherence of Tibetans to a practice which has been, in some ways, a symbol of Tibet's sovereignty ever since the Dalai Lama, its temporal and spiritual chief, led a pilgrimage to the sacred mountain of Tsa ri. By making pilgrimages, Tibetans seem to assert their identity, wandering along the pilgrimage routes, they map out their territory anew and reappropriate their space in the face of the Chinese occupancy.