Kangchendzonga: Secular and Buddhist perceptions of the mountain deity of Sikkim among the Lhopo

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One day, my teacher Lopen Dugyal mentioned that there are many more spirits and deities inhabiting the environment in Sikkim than there are human beings. Indeed, nearly every mountain, hilltop, prominent rock, mountain pass, crevasse, valley, old tree, lake, river and stream seems to be the abode of some supernatural being. The mountain deity inhabiting the peak of Mount Kangchendzonga (gang chen mched lingo) is considered to be their chief and his worship is an important aspect of rituals everywhere among Sikkimese Buddhists. The deity, usually simply referred to as Dzog-rga, can be invoked in various capacities and rituals held in his honour may take many forms. This multiplicity of identities not only helped create a national symbol among a complex multi-ethnic society where Sikkim was still an independent kingdom but as we will see, still serves to unite all levels of ritual tendencies within the Lhopo community.

The political dimension of mountain deities in terms of national identity in Tibet has been discussed by Steven Karmay and Dzog-rga is no exception in this respect. Karmay distinguishes between two types of mountain cults. The first is the secular and unwritten tradition of the laymen whereby the mountain deity is the object of propi-

1. The descendants of the Tibetan immigrants who came to Sikkim in different waves from the 17th century onwards and established the kingdom of the 17th century's Tibet called themselves Lhopo (the po people from the South) but are generally referred to as Bhutias, Sikkimese or even Derjongpas. The term Bhutia however is misleading as it can refer to any Buddhist highland of Tibetan origin living in the Himalayas, and the term Sikkimese may lead to confusion considering that the Lhopo are now a minority in the state. Consequently, I will hereafter refer to them as Lhopo which seem to be the term that they themselves prefer.

2. Dugyal Acharya Bhutia was simultaneously my teacher, informant, research assistant, translator and friend during the whole period of fieldwork research carried out in his village of Tzingchim.

3. It should be pointed out that although Sikkimese do worship Kangchendzonga, they do not worship the mountain itself but the deity who inhabits that mountain.


5. The Kingdom of Sikkim was a protectorate of the British Government from 1890 until 1947. It was integrated into the Union of India and became its 22nd State in 1975.
tiation for mundane pursuits by the local people. It is "a survival of the ancient traditions which the spread of Buddhism never totally effaced. Indeed, it is deeply rooted and more marked among Tibetan communities in the border areas, where the Bon religion is often, dominant and where encounters with people of different cultures who display their own national aggressivity are a daily experience" (1993 [1994]: 419). The second type are the mountains which are the object of veneration and pilgrimage in a Buddhist sense, not just by local people but from people coming from other parts of the country because they are considered to have been the dwelling places of early saints where termas (ger ma) treasures have been found or may still be hidden. Usually, mountain deities will not be the object of both cults but those that are, seem to have recently been included in the Buddhist pantheon (1993 [1994]): 432-5.

Both cults, or at least some of their aspects, still seem to exist among the Lhopho. Aspects of Deu-nga and other Sikkimese mountain deities that do not originate from the monastic establishment are generally ignored in favour of Buddhist identities that have been promoted, for political and other reasons, by Tibetan and Sikkimese lamas since the 17th century. However, secular aspects of the mountain deity are still prevalent in some Lhopho village rituals such as Tingklim'. While the shamans (see below) in Tingklim will invoke Deu-nga as a pholha (pho lha, father god or lineage protector) following the secular tradition of mountain deities, the village lamas will usually, although not exclusively, invoke him as a high Buddhist deity. I argue that, at least until recently, this divergence of opinion was not a source of conflict between lamas and shamans within the village but a source of unity which found its best expression in the performance of rituals where all ritual specialists jointly officiated and invoked Deu-nga for the welfare of the community.

It should be stressed that unless otherwise specified, all the material

6. For the Nyinangpas, ter or moma are spiritual treasures, sometimes objects such as image but usually items attributed to Guru Rinpoche who hid them so as to be later physically discovered or revealed in other ways by Buddhist practitioners called omim (ger ma).

7. Tingklim is an agricultural village of 54 households, located in Sikkim's North District (it does not include its hinterland Nepalese populated). The village lies on the eastern bank of the river Tista at an altitude of 1900 meters, half way between Phodong monastery and Nangpa, the North District headquarters.
presented here applies to Tingchim village and is not intended to be representative of the Lhopo community of Sikkim as a whole. Variations in ritual procedures, terminology and other aspects of culture between Lhopo villages and areas within Sikkim can be significant from a Sikkimese viewpoint.

1. The ritual specialists of Tingchim village

Rituals are today performed in Tingchim by three types of ritual specialists: 1. The non-celibate village lamas (Kargyu and Nyingma); 2. The pamo (gaqubo) and the mojam (total four real), the male and female shamans of the Lhapos; and 3. The bhoome lama (boon dan), a spe-

8. After several visits to Sikkim, I returned in October 1995 to carry out fieldwork research in Tingchim proper between June 1994 and December 1995 with two additional fieldtrips to the village in May and December 1996. The research results are available in my doctoral dissertation, *Buddhism and Shamanism in Village Sikkim* (SOAS, 2002). The research on which this article and the dissertation are based was generously funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Frederick Williams Memorial Fund, Cambridge, and the Additional Fieldwork Award, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. This essay was written in 1997 while in residence in Kathmandu. I am indebted to Charles Robb for encouraging me to write on the subject of Sikkim’s sacred landscape and to Lionel Caplan for his much appreciated comments on an early draft.

9. Strictly speaking, the use of the term ‘lama’ in this context is incorrect as the term is normally reserved for particularly learned Buddhist ritual specialists. Two terms are normally used in the village: an initiated lama will be called a retog believe (gaug po buge pa) or simply a retog, i.e. a lama who has acquired the discipline of the Sangha and is now a full member of the lama-in共同体 of his village. Before his initiation, a student is referred to by the term chupa, or a man of Dharma (chupa pa). I have nevertheless kept the use of the term lama or lama student to refer to the village’s retog and chupa because of its widely accepted use in English publications.

10. Bhoome is the Sikkimese pronunciation of the word spelled - boon don - possibly a short form and a reversal of the Tibetan words - don do boon dr - ‘the monk who is a past of boon’. However, for Tingchim villagers, boon simply means the one who can recite the oral texts of boon. Bhoome is a term borrowed from the Lepcha language which is often used to refer to the lama of the Lhapos who are thought to act like the bhoome, the male ritual specialist of the Lepchas. According to Jesf (1976: 309), ‘it is an established Lepcha word for lama. See Mahawarg (1978: 151). Boniceuse mouth, (Mahawarg: 1978: 261) and one may consider the possibility of a connection with the Tibetan term boon’.
cian who performs the offering rituals for the supernatural beings of the locality. The **paowo** and the **nejum** specialize in maintaining good relations with the **pholu motha** (**pho lhu mo lha**, father god–mother god), the Lhopo' ancestral deities and lineage protectors through possession and offering rituals while the **bönhen jongthang**, who never gets possessed, maintains good relations with the ambiguous supernatural beings who inhabit the local territory. On very rare occasions, he may will do so through the offering of an animal sacrifice.

All ritual specialists usually officiate independently, but sometimes jointly or successively, so as to serve the villagers' ritual needs. In addition to their regular annual rituals, the **paowo**, **nejum** and **bönhen jongthang** as well as the village lamas will all regularly be called in separately to officiate in village houses in order to divine the cause of illness and perform curing rituals so as to appease the offended local supernatural beings thought to be responsible for the patient's suffering. To accomplish this, the **paowo**, the **nejum** and the **bönhen jongthang** will draw their ritual powers and protection from the **pholu motha**, while the village lamas will draw theirs from the supra-worldly deities of Tibetan Buddhism.

Tingchim villagers collectively refer to the ritual knowledge of the **paowo**, **nejum**, and **bönhen jongthang** as **bön** (**bon**). What they call **bön** has probably little relation with the **Bön** religion of pre-Buddhist Tibet and certainly no relation with the tradition of the modern Tibetan Bonpo monasteries. In Tingchim, the term **bön** refers to specific oral ritual texts that are chanted and considered to be the core of the **bön** specialists.

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11. Explaining the different categories of supernatural beings who inhabit or travel through the landscape from the viewpoint of Tingchim villagers as well as their relation with them would go beyond the limits of this essay. Among these are the deyges (sde byngs) eight categories of spirits, particularly la, ren ngru pa (chu, brum and bud), the la ren or spirit of the mountain pass (la brum) and the gga sas (a jo g sas), wrote 'Lhipa supernatural beings that have been adapted by the Lhpos. Unlike the lineages' ancestral deities or **pholu motha** who may also have their **gripe** within the local territory, these local supernatural beings are considered wild or only partly tamed and for this reason are considered ambiguous. In Tingchim, they are referred to as nyi pa (gned pa) as a group, 'those who cause obstructions, damage or trouble'. In this article, I will simply refer to them as the local supernatural beings.

12. The **bönhen jongthang**'s role in Tingchim is reminiscent of that of the **bla bon** of the Khambo in ut. Nepal, a priest specialized in the worship of clan and land deities (Dienzenberger 1997), the **bla bon** of Baragon in southern Mustang and that of the **spa** (a jo in central Tibet) who are equally responsible for the propitiation of local gods and the making of 'not' offerings (Ramale 1990, 1998 and Ramale, in press).
ritual knowledge. It may also refer to knowledge that has been imparted directly from the supernatural either during possession rituals in case of the *pawo or nyjum, or through inspirational or dream-like experiences in the case of the *khdum hungtshing*. Samuel has suggested that "While there are some grounds for using the term bön for the early religion of Tibet (...), there are few for applying it to the cults of the local gods and spirits as they exist today, and I shall avoid using bön to refer to this contemporary 'folk religion'" (1995: 12). Although I agree with Samuel as well as with P'ei K'ueitse who adds that the ancient Bon religion was neither animistic nor shamanistic (1999: 69), I will nevertheless use the term bön to refer to Tingchim's 'folk religion' (Tucci 1980), 'nameless religion' (Stein 1972) or 'pagas tradition' (Ramble 1998: 142) since this is the term that is used by the villagers themselves. However, bön as practised in Tingchim should not be perceived as the survival of an archaic form of pre-Buddhist ritual practice but as a living tradition concerned with this-worldly matters in terms of health and fertility which has evolved in interaction with Buddhism and the ritual specialists of neighbouring ethnic communities such as the Lepchas, the Limbus and the Bhutanese.

The lack of anthropological literature based on fieldwork research among the Lhapos has contributed to these being perhaps misrepresented through the writings of Tibetan lamas and other Buddhist elite or indirectly, through the publication of a series of monographs that focused exclusively on the Lepchas (Gomez 1987 [1988], Morris 1998, Sieger 1967, Foning 1987) or the relation between the Bhutias (Lhapos) and the Lepchas centered around the monastery (Chie Nakane 1966), or more recently, on the socio-political life of the state and its history (Sansen 1974, Sinha 1975, Pose 1978). This lacuna has contributed to maintain an image of the Lhapos as a Buddhist population that arrived, built monasteries and converted the indigenous population. But what these writings tend to do, is omit to acknowledge the existence of the commoner Lhapo villagers who didn't belong to the Sikhimse Buddhist and aristocratic elite and had a very limited understanding of Buddhism. Until recently, some of the...
these Lhopos lived of herding, hunting, gathering and slash and burn cultivation, in some cases side by side with the Lepchas in villages far removed from the six premier monasteries of the state\(^\text{15}\) and the Palace which were the centres of religious and to some extent, political power.

Tingchim was such a village where until the end of the 19th century, every patri-lineage had its own \textit{pawo or nejum} responsible for the lineage and its households’ rituals needs. Although villagers considered themselves Buddhists, there were no lamas in Tingchim and people were dependent on the \textit{pawo}, the \textit{nejum}, the \textit{bienben bongshing} and an ambiguous specialist called \textit{nagshong (mingags 'chang)}\(^\text{16}\) who all officiated at the rituals performed either for the benefit of the individual, the household, the lineage or the village. Buddhism was primarily confined to the important monasteries, their surrounding villages, the capital and the Palace. Tingchim lay on the northern edge of the Phodong ‘parish’, the closest monastery\(^\text{17}\) that also acted as the centre of local administration and tax collection, and where no men from Tingchim were lamas. Located some fifteen kilometres south of the village, the monastery was visited only once a year by Tingchim villagers on the occasion of the exorcistic rituals and annual \textit{cham ('cham)} dances held just before Losung, the Sikkimese farmer’s new year. Buddhism then gradually took over as the main ritual practice of the village in three distinctive phases. First, the Lachen Gomchen encouraged two or three aspiring lamas to undertake meditation retreats in the 1910s. By the 1920s, there were seven of them who performed rituals such as funerals for the benefit of individuals while all household, lineage and community rituals were still in the hands of the \textit{bow} specialists. The second phase was marked by the passage of Saky Lam Tshoda who stopped in Tingchim at the end of the

15. The most important monasteries of Sikkim are Penyangzong, Tashiding and Phensang for the Nyingmapa, and Rumtek (not to be confused with the Karmapa’s Dharma Chakra Centre), Ralang and Phodong for the Kagyupa. The premier monastery is Penyangzong as it was responsible for the performance of the royal rituals and annual monastic \textit{cham ('cham)} dances performed at the Palace’s chapel.

16. The nagshong or “the holder of tantra knowledge” was a ritual specialist thought to have mastered Buddhism’s tantric powers as well as the ritual skills of the \textit{bienben bongshing} and the \textit{pawo} that did not require possession.

17. Phodong monastery, the first to be built in the North District, was established as late as 1745, a whole century after the foundation of Sikkim as a Buddhist kingdom.
1920s to help take control of an epidemic in the village. As part of this remedy, the Sakya Lama instructed the village lama to perform the annual Buddhist rituals on a regular basis within the village’s prayer hall which once the construction of Tzingchim’s first prayer hall at the end of 19th century had been the meeting place for the older women of the village to pray. Lamas received training from the Phidong monastery on how to perform these rituals and from that point Buddhism stopped being individualistic and became an occupation of the community where the villagers’ participation, both in presence and in contributions, was required. During the third Buddhist phase, which was initiated by the arrival of Tibetan nypoches in Sikkim following the Chinese take over of their country in 1959, the transformation of the village’s ritual practice continued following the influence of the 16th Karmapa who tried to eliminate the practice of animal sacrifice. Buddhism effectively took over from bön as the community’s official ritual practice when in the early 1960s, the annual mong chu (mang gathering rite or offering) village ritual, which required the sacrificial offering of an ox, was abandoned and replaced by the Bumkor (bum bokor), a community ritual whereby the Buddhist scriptures are taken out of the village’s prayer hall to bless the village houses, as the village most important ritual of the year.

Gradually, Buddhism timidly imposed itself and came out as the better and most prestigious ritual practice while still accommodating bön and without even openly trying or succeeding to eliminate the practice of bön as its totality. The Lacken Gomchen’s, the Sakya Lama’s and the 16th Karmapa’s efforts were all directed at specific aspects of bön such as possession rituals or animal sacrifice without trying to eliminate the ritual complex as a whole. The 16th Karmapa is even said to have encouraged the Tzingchim Lhospo to maintain their ritual offerings in honours of their phusha molchs or ancestral deities. Today, the village lamas, the paus, the nejum and the bönchen khangshi are thought to generally get on and work together for the welfare of the people. We will see that this tolerated co-existence finds its best expression in the annual Chhirim (phyi rim, general ritual), where lamas and bönchen khangshi momentarily officiate together.

iii. Before the early 1960s when the practice was abandoned following the influence of the 16th Karmapa who provided a substitute Buddhist ritual for Tzingchim villagers, up to 60 cows a year were sacrificed as part of curing and other rituals. The practice has since been somewhat revived, and chickens and goats are now very occasionally sacrificed with the hope of saving the life of dangerously ill relatives.
2. Dzö-nga as a secular mountain deity

Although Dzö-nga, as a well subdued protector is no longer thought to be inflicting suffering on human beings, keeping good relations with him, as much for the bön as for the Buddhist specialists is considered important. As the head of all supernatural beings of the land, if properly propitiated, Dzö-nga can help keep malevolent forces under control. Thus, all will perform regular rituals aimed at maintaining good relations with the mountain deity so that he may later be invoked in time of need. But depending on the particular altar, Dzö-nga will either be included among and invoked along with the Buddhist deities of the lamas on the nesö (gnas pöch)¹⁹ and other ritual altars, or will be included as a secular mountain deity among the phol-ha molha of the pawa, the njejam and the bönben bongthing. Kangchendzönga as pholha has a number of identities; he is considered the chief of all local supernatural beings of Sikkim, the owner of the land (gekti bdag)²⁰, the warrior god or dzhiltha (dgra lha) of the Sikkimese people, the witness deity and, among certain lineages, the provider of sons. He is among the most important pholha on the altar and manifests himself during possession rituals as a powerful and protective landlord. Dzö-nga also has a number of Buddhist identities that are discussed in section 3 below.

The pholha molha can be divided into two general categories. The first are indigenous pre-Buddhist supernatural beings such as Dzö-nga as well as bön and Buddhist religious figures who act as lineage protectors. The second category are male and female ancestors of the same paternal lineage or, in some cases, legendary characters who, for reasons usually difficult to trace, came to be worshipped as 'ancestors'. The first category of lineage protectors, with a few exceptions, are more or less shared by all Tingphur lineages and are associated with different localities, either in

¹⁹. The nesö (offering to powerful sacred places) is an offering ritual to Kangchendzönga and all the deities of the land. The ritual is a celebration of Sikkim as a sacred hidden land.

Yarlung, Chumbi, Ha or Sikkim. On the other hand, the second group of phoṣha molha consists of real or fictitious ancestors and vary from one patrilineage to another. These ancestors are said to reside in the bīn paradise called rigdza (“rig ’dan gnas”) for men and mero mkad ma lding (“me rong padma lding”) for women, both located at Ny Dorje Ku, a sacred location between Ha and Chumbi. All pawa and nejum, along with other villagers who have distinguished themselves through their kindness, wisdom, wealth or power, are said to gain access to these paradises after death. It is from these places that they later communicate with their descendants, giving them general advice and predictions, through the medium of the pawa and nejum during possession rituals.

The powers the phoṣha molha are appropriated for and can bless their descendants with are the ability to provide sons and good harvests, to avert death in case of illness, to predict obstacles and misfortunes, to create a platform for discussion and arbitration in case of quarrels and to protect members from curses (byad bka’). These favours are indirectly implied through various rituals during which the phoṣha molha are first invited and introduced to the audience, then spoiled with their favourite offerings. Later, they may be thanked once these blessings have been conferred.

Although perceived differently, we will see that Dzü-rnga remains a common denominator, or a meeting ground of their respective pantheons, of Tingechin’s bīn and Buddhist ritual specialists and the recitation of the khlen (kha len), their common ritual practice. The khlen and its structure are the base of all bīn offering rituals. Countless versions of these invocations are in existence and are chanted at various ritual occasions in honour of the protectors of the country, the ancestral deities, or the supernatural beings of the local territory. They may be chanted by the lama, the pawa, the nejum, the böden lungshing or even by some village elders, not only in village houses but also at the village prayer halls, the monasteries and, until recently, at the Palace. Although these recitations are considered a bīn tradition, some khlen have been written down and included in Buddhist rituals. They always have four sections: purification, invocation, offering and dismissal.

21. This first group of lineage protectors (phu la) as found it Tingechin may vary considerably from those of other Lhappu lineages in Sikkim. Among other descension groups, Dzü-rnga may not be given the importance he is given in Tingechin and ne serma may be specifically dedicated to him on the altar.

22. Khlen (kha len) and its homophonic form skulen (zhol len) mean “expressing” or “addressing.”
3. Dzi-nga as pho-ba in the rituals of the Lhopos of Tingchim village

The most common regular rituals in honour of the pho-ba mo-lu-ta are the bi-annual harvest rituals held at bi-tas (byi ras), the summer harvest of rice, and nang-te (nang ras), the winter harvest of wheat. These are performed in every single Tingchim household without exception. During bi-tas and nang-te, the pho-ba mo-lu-ta are offered the first fruit of the harvest as a bi-annual recognition, honouring and thanking them for their help and protection which ensure the prosperity and continuity of the lineage. These harvest offerings are the only recurring occasion where rituals are held successively by all three ritual specialists: the pa-bo, the brin-ben long-ti and the lama. The pa-bo will make harvest offerings to the pho-ba mo-lu-ta, the brin-ben long-ti to the ajo-nya (a jo, a jio)21, Lepcha supernaturals that have been adopted by the Lhopos; and the lama will perform a ritual offering called崩崩 (bbrang go)22 in honour of Kabor Kangsen - the tsen (tsen) of the snows - a feared and untamed mountain deity who is considered to be the owner of all the harvest rituals in Tingchim.

A pa-bo is not the mouthpiece of a specific deity such as the prestigious Tibetan oracles who act as the exclusive medium to powerful protectors such as Pehar (Prince Peter 1979). Although a pa-bo has a tutelary deity who will assist him in his duties, he is there for all the pho-ba mo-lu-ta and local supernatural beings, so all may have the chance to use him as a medium so as to interact with the villagers and ask for and obtain the recognition or the offerings they crave. A genuine pa-bo is thus chosen as their servant by a consensus of all supernatural beings involved. Unlike Laldak and among other Tibetan speaking people23, the lamas are not consulted nor play any role in the identification, initiation, training or performances of the Sikkimese pa-bo, and Sikkim appears to be a rare case where the monks’ and monasteries’ influence on the pa-bo’s ritual practice has been minimal.

21. Ajo means grand-father and ajo-nya grand-father. Both terms are borrowed and adapted from the Lepcha language.
22. Bbrang go means to fulfill and gur means to fill, or replenish. Together bbrang go means to replenish (make offerings) until satisfied.
23. For the influence of the monastic establishment on the medium of Tibetan speaking people, the assimilation or eradication of their practice see Day (1990) for Laldak, Ornes (1995) for the Sherpa and Bergell (1976) for pa-bo among Tibetan refugees.
The _paaw_ is usually the first to perform his part of the harvest rituals called _sha chö_ (sha method). Before the _bri_ or _nati_ ritual can start, the _paaw_ will prepare the rice _sorma_ depicting the _phodha molha_ of this particular household which always include Dzö-nga\(^{16}\), and display the appropriate offerings. All the rituals performed by the _bön_ ritual specialists are based on the _kholo_ oral ritual text that will be chanted during the performance. Whether they include _trances or not, or whether they are dedicated to the _phodha molha_, the _ajo ayo_ or other local supernatural beings, the basic structure of the rituals remains more or less the same. In brief, the performance has four parts: first, there is a short purification of the ritual specialist himself, followed by the _song bön_ (buang bon) which is a larger purification of the location and the offerings through the burning of incense. The core section is the actual invitation called _den ju_ (gyaen behag). Here the _phodha molha_ and local supernatural beings are individually praised and invited to leave their abode in order to come and bless every single offering displayed for the occasion. This is when the attributes and powers of each are revealed or reminded to present villagers and when the _paaw_ would get possessed if he was officiating. When addressing the audience through the medium of the _paaw_, the _phodha molha_ will usually express their pleasure over witnessing the performance of the _riki_ held in their honour, and may offer some prediction or advice for the general welfare of the household or the health of one of its member. Each share of the display of grain, flowers, butter lamps and _shang_ is then individually offered to each during the _szi bül_ (tsi- _nbig_). The lineage protectors and other beings are then given a farewell called _shakdai_ (沔yed _gshis_) and are asked not to bring any disease to the people living upstairs or to the cows staying downstairs, nor to provoke fires in the summer and floods during the rains.

The _paaw's_ ritual offering is followed by that of the _khenm bongthreng_ for the _ajo ayo_ and other local supernatural beings such as the woman of the house's particular protector (_shang sha_).\(^{17}\) It may also hap-

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\(^{16}\) As previously mentioned, Dzö-nga may not have a _sorma_ specifically dedicated to him as a _phodha_ among other Khmer descent group elsewhere in Sikkim. He may be included in a general _sorma_ dedicated to all the protective land deities (_ja la gshis_ dags)_ of the lineage or failing this, to my knowledge, will always at least be invoked in the _kholo_.

\(^{17}\) A bride will be followed to her new home by a protector called _shang sha_ who come from her _ashang_ _sha_ or maternal uncle's house. A girl's maternal uncle may have more long term responsibilities towards his sister's daughter than towards his own daughter.
pen that the bönhen longtshing will himself perform the paowo as well as his part of the ritual if it so happens that the household does not require the mediumship services of the paowo at this particular moment. Most anyo live in the attic of the Lhopho house where they are made offerings of grains and ornamentals. They are regarded as the protector of the house, its food stores, animals and material possessions. One particular anyo is the owner of the cardamom plant, the cash crop of the Lhophos, and is given an offering ritual in the fields before the harvest is taken away from her. These ajo anyo are still considered partly untamed and the bönhen longtshing may invoke his own phoiba molha including Dophage for protection while dealing with their darker side. Their state of semi-wildness is shared by a long list of supernatural beings who inhabit the local territory and who are thought to provoke illness and misfortune if offended by the presence of pollution (gerib) generated by certain human actions such as quarrelling between relatives, lying, destroying particular objects of nature or burning meat. They are made offerings as part of a bargain contract with the hope to appease them through flattery by pretending to elevate them into the ranks of the ancestral deities. Thus, the ajo anyo are honoured at harvest rituals as protectors and providers, and are each represented on the altar, not by rice sorma aligned on a wooden plateau as in the case of the phoiba molha but by miniature bamboo pots with straw similar to the ones used to drink chang. These pots are filled with fermented grains, wrapped in a piece of banana leaf and decorated with butter in the same way as the Lepchas do. In front of each pot or ajo anyo are displayed specific offerings according to each ajo anyo's taste. These offerings are displayed on a square piece of banana leaf and offered to the ajo anyo by the chanting of a second kholen where each ajo anyo and other local supernatural beings is individually invoked and invited to receive his share of the offerings. The altar and the offering for the ajo anyo will be laid slightly lower than that of the phoiba molha.

The paowo and the bönhen longtshing's performances are followed by that of the village lama. The harvest kongpo ritual is only held in honour of the troublesome mountain deity Kabu Kangtset in the many Tingchim households where he was sent to create problems by an unscrupulous ritual specialist a few decades ago. He is given a harvest ritual in the same way that the ajo anyo are honoured with the hope to

time them through flattery by pretending to elevate them into the ranks of the ancestral deities. Rituals held for partly tamed supernaturals are always meant as a bargain contract. But in the case of Kabur Kangtsen, not only is he given the honours of a pseudo-pho-lha as the owner of the harvests, he is also treated as a pseudo-Buddhist deity and given an entire Buddhist ritual by a village lama. In theory, while performing the kong-za the lama first invokes the high Buddhist deities presiding over the ritual so that they may help him remind Kabur Kangtsen of his submission vows to Guru Rinpoche and thus return him on the right path of the Dharma. But in the second part of the ritual, as a precaution, the feared Kangtsen is offered little pieces of meat on the altar and the khe-len, which is fundamentally a bon oral tradition, is chanted by the lama in addition to the written ritual text. The khe-len will invoke a list of over twenty local supernatural beings starting with Dzo-nga as the chief of all supernatural beings of the land, coming down the mountain towards the village including Kabur Kangtsen and finishing with those who inhabit the house. These are followed by the invocation of a list of twelve previous bon ritual specialists of the village. After the oral khe-len, the ritual text is resumed with the deg-shed-sgyen (sde brag sgya gser skyes, libation) and the tso-g-rgog offering. In this case, it may be unclear whether Dzo-nga is invoked as a Buddhist or as a secular mountain deity, a differentiation which probably depends on the inclination of the lama holding the ritual. Considering that Dzo-nga is neither represented by a tsong on the kongo altar nor is he invoked by the written text as he will be in the lama's neul (see below), it is reasonable to believe that he is here invoked as a secular mountain deity and head of all the supernatural beings of the land during the oral khe-len.

These harvest offerings are mainly a formality, a thank you ritual for the new harvest where the pho-lha mitha, the ayo ayo and Kabur Kangtsen are offered some freshly harvested grains by chanting the kir-len. Their main purpose is to maintain good relations with them so they don't withdraw their protection but keep dispensing their blessings. While the harvest rituals are the only regular events where the pho-lha mitha and Dzo-nga as a secular mountain deity are invoked, many other rituals which I list below are held in extraordinary circumstances.

One of the most important moments of a wedding is the chanting of the khe-len when the pawa or the biskrem bongtong invites the pho-lha mitha (which always includes Dzo-nga) of both the bride and the groom to witness and legitimise the alliance. The union of husband and wife
may only gain recognition once the khench has been pronounced. After
the birth of a first son, an important offering ritual is held by the pawa
or the khench bunting in honour of Masong (ma sarga khyung 'dus) and
the other phodba of the paritimaγ. The head and back leg of an ox are
offered to give thanks for this first son who will now perpetuate the lin-
eage. Masong, the most important phodba or lineage protector in
Tingchhim, is a mountain deity residing on the mountain range separat-
ing the Bhutanese Valley of Ha and the Tibetan Valley of Chumbi close
to Sikkim. The help of Dzo-nag, along with that of the other phodba
molba, may also be invoked in case of serious illness, in resolving dis-
putes among kin members, in sitting as supernatural judge, in helping
liberate the kidnapped soul of dead relatives (gshin 'dus), for protection
before going to war (rgya dbal), when apologizing after destroying objects
of nature, and when seeking protection from curses. The Seong
Gomchen (se bon gsum chen, hail protector great practitioner), the
most enigmatic lama in Tingchhim, has no other responsibility but that
of controlling the weather and protecting the ripening crops of thirteen
surrounding villages against hail, something he has been doing for twen-
ty-five years. For this purpose, he invokes the help of a number of deities
including Kangchenjungga in helping him control those supernatural
beings responsible for rain and hail.

But the phodba molba are given their greatest honour during the
pawo's initiation ritual and annual retreat called tsam che (rnyingma
bdae) when the pholba molba are made to interact with their descend-
ants through the medium of possession over a period of four days.
During these stanzas, villagers receive advice and predictions regarding
the cause of illness, upcoming obstacles or proper behaviour. During the
tsam che that I attended in 1994, Dzo-nag as well as his consort
addressed the audience a number of times, best to introduce himself
and then to join in on a debate which was taking place between a lama
in the audience and the pholba molba over the merit and demerit of
drin versus Buddhism. Addressing a lama who was the first to have
recently returned to the village with the Acharya (MA) Buddhist
degree, Dzo-naga as a pholba told him "not to break his vows" which in
this context meant that he shouldn't loose faith in him by rejecting
these trance sessions as phoney, or at best, as a lower form of religion
compared to the high Buddhism which he had been studying. This

29. For Tingchhim villagers, the pholba Masong is the main provider of vita while for
some Sikkimese, this role is fulfilled by Dzo-nag (see below).
couldn’t have been a better example to illustrate how, at the village level, Dzö-nga has maintained his identity as a pholha or secular mountain deity.

4 Dzö-nga as witness deity

Sikkim’s history relates that in the 13th century, Kye Fumma (gyud 'bum gags), the Tibetan ancestor of the Sikkimese king or Chogyals (chos phyag) who was then ruling in the neighbouring Chumbi Valley, came to Sikkim with his wife in search of the Lepcha patriarch and bungthang Thongk Tsho. The couple was childless and requested the Lepcha bungthang to perform a ritual where Dzö-nga was invoked so that they may be blessed with a male descendant\(^*\). Upon their return to Chumbi, the couple had three sons who later became the ancestors of two number of Lhopo lineages, including that of the Sikkimese royal family. For this reason, it is said that Dzö-nga came to be regarded among some Lhopos in Sikkim as a pholha or male ancestral deity who may bless the patrilineages with male descendants\(^*\).

When Kye Fumma and his wife later returned to Sikkim to express their gratitude and perform a thanksgiving ritual for their sons, a blood brotherhood was sworn between the Tibetan Kye Fumma and the Lepcha Thongk Tsho where the local deities of Sikkim were invoked to witness their alliance and many animals were sacrificed in order to cement the alliance (see Namgyal 1968: 18). This is how Dzö-nga later came to be worshipped and invoked as a witness deity during the national Boudhist ritual of Pang Lhatsol (drang la gned, offering to the witness deity) held at the Palace’s chapel at Gyantok by the Penangpse lamas, when dignitaries and representatives took a solemn oath in the presence of the protective deities of Sikkim, to serve the country. This 13th century ritu-

\(^{30}\) Chogyal (Dharmaraja) or the king who rules according to the Dharma, is the title of the Sikkimese kings. It was temporarily replaced by the title of Maharanij when Sikkim became a British protectorate and later reinstated during the reign of late Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal.

\(^{31}\) The annual worship of Dzö-nga was of course celebrated by the Lepchas long before the arrival of the Tibetans.

\(^{32}\) In Tingchum, although Dzö-nga is regarded as an important pholha, it is still M songs (ma sugs khyang 'dud, the mountain deity of the inhabitants of the valleys of Has and Chumbi where the Lhopos resided before coming to Sikkim, who is regarded as the chief provider of sons.
al of blood brotherhood performed between the Lhapos and the Lepchas is considered to have been the first Pang Lhasol. However, lamas who dislike animal sacrifice, usually advocate that the first Pang Lhasol had been performed in the 17th century by Lhatzin Namka Jigme (1577-1650), the chief propagator of Buddhism to Sikim, when he performed a thanksgiving ritual for his safe journey across the Himalayas as related by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1966: 402). This divergence of opinion is a direct reflection of the gradual change of identity, from phoiba to Buddhist deity. Kangechendzinga had been undergoing.

This change of identity becomes particularly evident during Pang Lhasol’s pungal (dpung lha sna) victory cham where Dzö-nga’s lay warrior-dancers praise the warrior deity and invoke him as their Buddhist warrior god (rgya lha), celebrating the subjugation of enemies33. But in this case, the meaning of enemy is particularly intended as the enemy of the Dharma and the monasteries, and consequently, the enemies of the Buddhist kingdom and its righteous administration. Indeed, it is mentioned in the novel (1558), that Jigme Pamo (1682- ), the third incarnation of Lhatzin Namka Jigme, reminded Dzö-nga of his own times before Guru Rinpoche that he would prevent enemies from entering Sikim, particularly anyone who came here with the intention of changing the structure of the administration as it had been established by the three lamas who consecrated the first Chogyal at Yuksum in 164234 and set the borders of the new kingdom. For this reason, some say that Dzö-nga can no longer be invoked for personal gain but only for the welfare and prosperity of the Buddhist kingdom. But this was not always so. Not too long ago, the warrior dance would still be performed by lay dancers in Tengchum on other occasions than Pang Lhasol where Dzö-nga was invoked as a secular mountain deity. And Waddell equally mentions that Dzö-nga is worshipped by all the laity once at least during the year in overcoming their individual enemies. Usually the whole village in concert celebrates this worship: the men carrying swords and shields, and they dance and leap about, concluding with a great shout of victory35.

Karmay mentions that “By the mountain cult I mean particularly the secular worship of the mountain deity (yul lha, gshi ldag), who is usually depicted in the style of a traditional warrior and is worshipped as an

33. This cham was designed by the third Chogyal, Chagdor Namgyal (1686-1722) when he established the Pemayangtse monastery upon his return from Tibet.
34. Some argue that the Tibetan year actually corresponds to 1642 or even 1640.
ancestor or an ancestral deity for protection" (1998 [1994]: 426). Dzö-nga’s identities as lineage protector or ancestral deity (pha lha), related to fertility of the lineages and the fields, owner of the land, personal warrior and witness deity as well as other secular representations among the Lhapos are today easily overshadowed by his Buddhist aspects which will be discussed below and which were promoted by Lhasün Namka Jigmé, the 17th century Tibetan Nyingma lama who opened the gate to the barjal (zar yul) or hidden land of Sikkim where he is considered to have been the chief propagator of Buddhism.

5. Kangchenzhönga becomes a Buddhist mountain deity

As in Tibet, Guru Rinpoche is said to have tamed all the supernatural beings of the land during his eighth century visit to Sikkim and to have bound them through solemn oath into being protectors of the faith and to refrain from causing harm to sentient beings. By this act, and by having hidden spiritual treasures (bza’i) to be discovered in later times, Guru Rinpoche is seen as having brought Buddhism and a civilized way of life. But depending on the context and the person’s point of view, the taming of these malevolent beings can either be read as a metaphor of the taming of the mind, of society, of the environment or even of the country (Ortner 1978: 98, Samuel 1993: 219). Indeed, Karmay has mentioned that “The subjugation of the spiritual inhabitants of the country is an extremely important part of the process in the Buddhist conversion of the people who believed in their existence. It was mainly for the need to create a sacred environment in accordance with Buddhist ideals of the universe” (1998 [1996]: 446). Although converted to Buddhism in the eighth century, it is only from the 14th that Dzö-nga’s deity as a defender of the faith and keeper of treasures was promoted by Terön Rigzin Gödem (1337-1409). And it is only in the 17th century, following Lhasün Namka Jigmé’s visit to Sikkim, that Dzö-nga became the object of the second cult previously mentioned within Sikkim, when mountains are the object of veneration and pilgrimage in a Buddhist sense because they are considered to have been the dwelling places of early saints where treasures have been found or may still be hidden (p.432-3).

Rigzin Gödem is thought to have been the first high lama to visit Sikkim where he is said to have meditated and discovered powerful sacred sites and spiritual treasures, including a prophetic text about the
hidden land of Sikkim. He is said to have made his discovery known in Tibet by attaching letters to the necks of vultures (Namgyal 1908: 13). He built Sikkim’s first known 14th century monastery at Pawo Huntri, a hill top between Yuksum and Silho in West Sikkim of which only the ruins can still be seen today. Although he was the first Tibetan lama known to have come to Sikkim, his visit did not result in the establishment of a major lineage based on the transmission of a particular teaching but did result in the establishment of a political entity. For these reasons, it is Lhatzun Namka Jigme (1597-1699), the Tibetan Drogchen master referred to as Lhatzun Chenpo who is instead regarded as the chief propagator of Buddhism in Sikkim.

When Dzö-nga was subdued by Guru Rinpoche and appointed keeper of the land and its treasures, he was not to let anyone enter and discover Sikkim’s sacred sites and spiritual treasures unless this person was the right one to further the intentions of Guru Rinpoche. When Lhatzun Chenpo arrived from Tibet, it is said that Dzö-nga first teased him before appeasing to him in the form of a white goose and giving him the permission to open the gate to the hidden land. In his welcoming discourse, Dzö-nga revealed the various places of sacred nature and old people believe this to have been where the nelö ritual was composed (Namgyal 1908: 24). The nelö is a celebration of Sikkim as a hidden land of byul and an offering ritual to Kangchenjungka and all the deities of the land. It is one of the most important and most often performed rituals in Sikkim, as much in the monasteries as in the villages’ prayer halls and private houses. When Lhatzun Chenpo arrived in Yuksum from the north, he met with Kathog Ngizin Chenpo and Nadak Senpa Chenpo, two great Tibetan Nyimga lamas who had entered Sikkim respectively from the western and southern gates (35). Together, they founded the kingdom and enthroned Phantso Ngamyal of Gangtok as Chogyal or king who rules according to the Dharma, thus

35 The treasure text discovered by Tenzin Rigzin Gölsem is called ‘The Prophetic Mirror of Sikkim’ (Bma ston lung byas pa'i bskal me long) and is concerned with Guru Rinpoche’s predictions about the establishment of Sikkim.

36 With the exception of the lamas of Tashiding and Silho monasteries who still today, follow the teachings brought to Sikkim by Rigzin Gölsem (Byang gser shugs grubs).

37 The kingdom of Sikkim was established by learned Nyimga lamas who fled the religious war between the Gelugpa on the one hand, and the King of Tshang and the Kagyupas on the other which led to the rise to power of the Gelugpa and the unification of Tibet.
entrusting him with both temporal and spiritual powers.

Lhatshun Chenpo discovered many texts but is especially remembered for his teaching and empowerment of the rig 'dzin srog sgrub. According to this text (5-5b), Dzö-nga may be invoked as either of the following three aspects which are said to have been ascribed to him by Guru Rinpoche: 1. as 'ka stong (skal stong) or the one who faithfully carries out the orders of Guru Rinpoche and who has promised to protect the words of the Buddha; 2. as the owner of the sacred locations, the local territory and the spiritual treasures as well as the five treasures (mnyad 'dga, see below) hidden within his peaks (gna 'jug gter gn bda); and 3. as an emanation of the king of the north or god of wealth (rgyal chen nare bshis stod), red in colour, wearing an armament, riding a snow lion and carrying precious stones, a spear, a turban shaped hat and a banner of victory over his head symbolising eternal victory over the evil forces. The god of wealth is his highest manifestation and in this capacity, Dzö-nga is considered a yeche lha (ye shes lha), a supta-worldly deity of the Buddhist pantheon as opposed to a deity of the impermanent world ('jig rten gyi lha). According to the same rig 'dzin text (5-52), Dzö-nga has three manifestations: outer, inner and secret. As his outer manifestation, he is half-lha half-ten and has the capacity of conquer them all (byes lha sgrub bstan). As his inner manifestation, he is a great monk who has taken lay man's vows and resembles a disciple of Sakyamuni Buddha with a bowl and a walking stick ('kang las sprul las de rgyan). As his secret manifestation, Dzö-nga is the king of nöjün (phreng pa gnad sbyin rgyal po rnam shos stod) by the name of rnam shos stod or god of wealth.

38. The main offering rituals to Dzö-nga are given in the rnam srog sgrub as well as in the nöjün. However, descriptions of Dzö-nga are available from much earlier sources and were reproduced in later texts. According to Lha Tshering of Tashiding, Khenpo of the Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyenma Studies at Gangtok, the best descriptions of Dzö-nga are given in the bka' ma dngos bkra shis lung bstan bka' bzhugs mdo, a text ascribed to Guru Rinpoche and revealed in the 14th century by Tsering Sangay Lingpa (1240-1296).

39. According to Dr Ripging Ngup Dunksa of the Namgyal Institute of Tiberology, to mention the significance of only a few of Dzö-nga's attributes and costume, the banner of victory fluttering over his head is golden and the spear signifies eternal victory over the evil forces, the gems symbolise which brings all that one wishes for, and his red colour symbolises loving attachment of sentient beings with sublime feeling of compassion (Paing Lhabsol, souvenir 1989, Sikkim Tribal Youth Association page 8-9).
Another important text known as the ‘hidden land of rice’s guide book to sacred places’ (shas yul ’bras mo snying kyi gnas yig), is a more recent compilation based on some three earlier texts prepared by Jigme Pawn. These texts give descriptions of Demojong, the area directly to the south and surrounding Mount Kangchendzongga in West Sikkim which has the highest concentration of powerful sacred sites and hidden treasures within Sikkim. Demojong is described as a paradise on earth with an abundance of fruit, vegetables and self-growing crops, and clues are given in the text on how to reach Belay Demoshoong (shas yul ’bras mo gshung), the elusive hidden land, the entry of which is located somewhere within Demojong. It is said that in the upper part of Demojong lives the mountain deity Kangchendzonga, who, like a king sitting on a throne, is the owner and protector of the land, its people, its powerful sacred sites and spiritual treasures. Kangchendzongga’s five peaks are the repository of five treasures: the first contains salt, the second gold and turquoise, the third Dharma scriptures and other precious objects capable of increasing one’s wealth, the fourth contains arms and the fifth medicine and different types of seeds. It is believed that all these treasures will be made available to the Sikkimese people in times of need. The centre of Demojong is Drakar Tashiding (lha dang dkar bera snying dbyin) where Guru Rinpoche is said to have given many teachings. In the four cardinal directions of Tashiding are four miraculous caves where one can attain extraordinary powers. In the east is shad zocht pa dphug (shad phyo shis dphug), the hidden cave of the east; in the south is lhan go sxang dphug (mchab ’gro gyung dphug), the womb of the celestial female deity; in the west is rgyan dchen dphug (rgyans tsho che’)

40. A rgyan (gnas yig) or guide book gives descriptions of the powerful sacred sites as well as clues to the hidden treasures.

41. According to Khempo Lha Tsering, the shas yul ’bras mo snying kyi gnas yig has been compiled from the following main sources: 1. Tertön Ngönchen Goldpa’s 17th century prophetic text (’bras snying bstan sgrub bka’ ’de’ leg’), 2. a text discovered by Tertön Sangay Lingpa in the 16th century (’bras snying bstan bka’ ’de’ legs mo), and 3. a later guide book discovered by a lama who never came to Sikkim by the name of Tertön Dzoe ’Dechen Lingpa of Doma Gön (mda’ mang rgyen) monastery in Kham who had been the first incarnation of present Yangtsang Rinpoche of West Sikkim.

42. ‘gshung’ as in Demoshoong means valley of rolling hills, while ‘snying’ as in Demojong means land or country. While Demojong is the heart of historical Sikkim, located around and below Mount Kangchendzonga, Demoshoong remains a true hidden land. Some people are said to have caught glimpses of it through an opening in the rocky while travelling through the mountains although the entry could never be found again.
phug), the cave of great happiness; and in the north is lha rin chen nyi phug (lha rin chen nyi phug), the cave of god's precious heart. Nearby, on the plateau of Tuksum where the first Chogyal was crowned just below Kangchendzonga, is considered to be a natural altar in front of the sacred mountains, caves, lakes and rivers where ritual offerings can be made. All of these locations are today pilgrimage destinations for all Sikkimese Buddhists.

Sikkim was, and in many ways is still regarded by its Buddhist inhabitants as a sacred hidden land or bryal. The following words of Tertön Dorje Lingpa (1446-1425) and Tertön Ratna Lingpa (1425-1478) quoted from the History of Sikkim summarize how most Lhapos still think of their country's potential. Tertön Dorje Lingpa described Sikkim as "a veritable paradise on earth, created by a miraculous supernatural power into a vast and magnificent palace where everything calculated to produce beauty and grandeur have been provided on the grandest imaginable scale" (Namgyal 1908: 9). The History of Sikkim also tells us that the land was initially blessed by Cintereig and Indra, followed in the eighth century by Guru Rinpoche who "exercised the land of all evil spirits, and rid it of all obstacles that would tend to obstruct or disturb the course of devotional practices" (Namgyal 1908: 10). Prophetical books were compiled and hidden by him in rocks so as to be rediscovered in later times. Treasures were hidden in one hundred and eight secret mines and stores to render this land productive, healthy and harmonious as well as to facilitate the spread of the Dharma. Tertön Ratna Lingpa qualifies Sikkim as "the best of all the sacred places of pilgrimage as it will come to be resorted to in the end of the evil times (..) everyone assembled to bless this sacred land: they took possession of it, blessed it and sewed all kinds of seeds in it. Then they hid treasures, appointed keepers and uttered hundred prayers (..). Every cliff, peak, cave and hilltop has been consecrated for devotional purposes. Persons who practise devotion in any of these blessed places are sure to attain siddhi powers and the high es knowledge and perfection temporally and spiritually" (Namgyal 1908: 10-11). The History of Sikkim adds that of all bryal, Sikkim is said to be the most sacred and sanctified, the king of all sacred places equalling paradise itself. Sikkim is described as the land of medicinal herbs and curative waters as well as a golden trough where anything

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4) There is a number of curative hot springs (토마다) in Sikkim all recommended for bone and skin disorders although each is said to have additional specific curative properties.
one wishes to sow will grow. It is mentioned that people who come here will not suffer incurable diseases and will not feel hunger as there are 103 different kinds of fruit and 360 types of edible plants. It is added that in Sikkim, wisdom, love, kindness and compassion grow spontaneously within oneself.

One cannot help but think that such descriptions of Sikkim as a treasure house could have been written as an encouragement for Tibetan people to come and settle, perhaps in order to populate these empty hills on the unprotected borders of Tibet. There are many legends regarding the existence of similar beyul across the Himalayas and Tibet, and Samuel (1915: 517) has pointed out that in the Nyinmgma tradition, beyul had been 'set aside by Guru Rinpoche as a refuge to be discovered at an appropriate time in a rather similar way to the discovery of the terma texts (...) Some of these beyul were quiet refuges set aside for meditation but others, like Sikkim and Penaköd, were places where lay people could settle to escape political turmoil'. Indeed, many Tibetans are thought to have taken refuge and migrated to Sikkim as a result of the religious wars of the 17th century.

6. Dzö-nga and the rituals of the village lamas

The nefar ritual, which is the Buddhist ritual of the land par excellence, is a celebration of Sikkim as a beyul and an offering ritual to Dzö-nga as the greatest deity of Beyul Demchöng. It is one of the most important and most often performed rituals in Sikkim, as much in the Nyinmgma monasteries as in the villages' prayer halls and private houses. There are different versions of this ritual in existence and the lengthiest and most orthodox will be performed by the lamas of Penyangtse monastery, Sikkim's premier monastery. An important difference between this lengthier version and the shorter one as performed in Tingham, is the fact that its kūlen has been standardised and put down in written form thus giving it an aura of sanctity and orthodoxy.

Whenever the lamas of Tingham gather at the village's prayer hall in order to celebrate the important days of the Tibetan Buddhist calendar, the nefar will be performed at some point during the morning session, whatever main ritual texts is also being read on that day. In such case, two altars, each with their respective set of terma will be prepared; the higher one for the Buddhist deities of the main ritual and a lower
smaller one for Drö-nga and the other deities of the nesol. It will only be performed on its own within the prayer hall when someone from the village returns from an important pilgrimage in order to apologise to the deities of the land, in case any polluting or disturbing actions may have been performed by the pilgrim while visiting powerful sacred places. The nesol will be performed in private houses whenever lamas are called to hold a major ritual, for example at weddings, as part of the rituals performed during funerals, when a new house has been completed (khyim gao bka' shis), or whenever a household wishes to offer a nag ritual during the winter for its general welfare and prosperity. But usually, the nesol is performed on its own in private houses as a shapton (shab yin bren), when someone is sick and a rical specialist has recommended it as a cure. In such cases, the khulen will specifically invoke, in addition to Drö-nga and the usual supernatural beings of the land, the entity that has been identified as the cause of the ailment, and little pieces of meat previously obtained from the butcher will be presented on the altar.

In the household performance of the nesol, the top shelf of the altar will have the usual Buddhist deities lama, yidam and khandro (bla ma yi idam mkha' 'gro) presiding over the ritual. On the next lower shelf are a row of ten smaller terma representing the Dharma protectors and the higher territorial deities of Sikkim such as Drö-nga who do not reside near Tingri but, for the most part, have their abode in the sacred areas of Denujong in West Sikkim. On the left of these ten terma are the sixing shongva (sbe rgyi mchog ilugs) the five celestial female deities. In a third lower row in front of them are twenty smaller terma representing various general categories of local supernaturals including one for Ajo Dongbong, the legendary Lepcha bongshong and interestingly, another terma for all previous nagabong of the village who best symbolise the result of the encounter between lama and Buddhism at the village level. Looking at the nesol altar and its inherent hierarchy, the top row represents the tantric deities who stand for Buddhism's highest and purest form which from the villagers' point of view is best understood and dealt with by the learned lamas of the monasteries and the Tibetan rinpoches. The second row of

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1. A shapton is a general term used to refer to any ritual performed in order to strengthen the life force of a person.
2. A lama, Guru Rinpoché dispenses blessings; as yidam, Guru Drakpa (ge nying po) dispenses progress; and as khandro, Seng Dongma (seng gling ma) gives protection. These manifestations of Guru Rinpoché are represented on both, Nyinma and Kagyu altars in the rituals of village lama in Sikkim.
torma for the local deities and protectors of Sikkim as a whole are associ-
ated with the village lamas since they are the most important and tangible
high deities of the land from a Sikkimese village's perspective. The lowest
row representing the worldly and ambivalent local supernaturals, from the
villagers' point of view, are still the domain of the bon ritual specialists who
are themselves present on the altar.

But it is in the Chirim ritual which used to be held in Tinchhim until
1994 on the occasion of Pang Lhabol, that the relation between bon and
Buddhism in the village has perhaps found its best expression. The
Chirim is the only annual ritual where momentarily, the khenben bongthi-
ing and the village lamas jointly participate in the performance of a com-
munity ritual within the village's prayer hall. First, in front of the prayer
hall and with the help of villagers, the khenben bongthing builds a long
frame of bamboo on which a series of at least six sets of offerings are laid
out, each for a particular group or individual ajo ampo and other super-
natural beings of the land with the usual offerings of grain, flowers and
eggs. Inside the prayer hall, the lamas perform the nechand at the appro-
priate moment, the lamas call the khenben bongthing inside the prayer hall
so that he personally chants the oral kherlen section of the nechand for Dzo-
nga and all other higher deities of the land, after which the khenben
bongthing returns outside to perform his own offering and kherlen for all
the ajo ampo and other less important supernatural beings not specifically
covered by the nechand. While the lamas invoked the higher supernatu-
ral beings of the land and the khenben bongthing the lower ones, it is con-
sidered the khenben bongthings duty to send them all back home, and
especially send back the troublesome ones after making them promise
not to come back to create obstacles for villagers until they are called
again next year to receive their new offerings. The bamboo frame cov-
ered with offerings is then taken to the lake and a village feast follows at
the prayer hall. Today, the Chirim ritual is still occasionally held, not as
a regular annual ritual at Pang Lhabol, but as a community shaptsen
whenever a number of villagers suffer of dysentery during the monsoon.

7. Dzo nga and the state rituals

The combined participation of both bon and Buddhist ritual specialists
must have found local expression in many similar ways throughout
Sikkim. In Tinchhim, the pawo and the khenben bongthing regularly per-
form together while the village lama sometimes joins in when his par-
icipation is required in the performance of complex eating rituals. The following example, illustrating the tolerance and respect the Chogyals showed towards the chen ritual specialists within their Buddhist kingdom, may be interpreted in different ways. Some believe that expressions of this amicable co-existence were encouraged by the Chogyals as a diplomatic measure to encourage the happy co-existence of the Lhaspos and the Lepchas, and the Chogyals’ popularity. I believe that, at least in the early days, these were more the expression of a lasser-faire attitude and of the true nature and belief of the Lhaspos, which the Chogyals themselves were not exempted from.

During the time of the kingdom and apparently until the late 1980s, some chen ritual specialists were invited to discreetly participate at the following state functions and officiate at certain personal rituals of the royal household which were described to me by Captain Yongda who had been one of Choglams Palden Tshondup Namgyal’s last ADC. On the occasion of the harvest rituals for the Chogyals’ fields, a Lepcha bongshing would come to the Palace and offer a khelem for the aja area and local supernatural beings who inhabit the area of the Chogyal’s farmer palace at Rabdentse as well as of the current Palace at Gangtok. The royal household’s phoiba molpa were made offerings to on a separate occasion by Jowo Bonpo from Nako-Chongping village whose family responsibility it has been for generations. Jowo Bonpos ritual performance was held around the time of the kagye cham (kha’ bregwa thong) dances held at the Palace’s chapel just before Losung, the Sikkimese farmer’s new year. In addition to the offering ritual for the royal family’s ancestral deities, Jowo Bonpo also performed two additional rituals following written chen texts. Around the same time, before the kagye cham began, in a little room next to the Palace’s chapel, a Lepcha bongshing would discreetly hold an offering ritual, it is said hopefully without the Remayangme lama taking notice as they would probably object to its performance. In its khelem, the Lepcha bongshing made offerings to the.

46. For a description of these cham dances see Nabolo-Wójcikowska (1979: 24-5).
47. The first ritual is called yebo (yang breg) and is held with the purpose of increasing a person’s or a household’s yang, the element which is thought to be beneficial for the production of wealth, children, animals, house, etc. The second is called sten (sri meam), a ritual performed to suppress the arising of negative forces. I was told that only Jowo Bonpo of Nako-Chongping village and late Bonpo Lharchips of Kyoughing village would perform these rituals following chen texts in Sikkim, these rituals being performed by Buddhist lamas in all other villages.
Lepcha ancestor Tekong Tek and his wife including Dzo'ngsa and all the local supernatural beings of the land.

Pang Lhabol was the most important ritual of Sikkim held at the Palace’s chapel and simultaneously in every monastery and village prayer hall throughout the kingdom. Pang Lhabol was the national ritual of the land, held at the end of the monsoon in early September, the main day falling on the 15th of the 7th month of the lunar calendar. This was the occasion when the royal family and the Dzog mi te, the traditional council of the monk body and the ny body, which consisted of the abbots of the monasteries, the landlord: (Kaji), the ministers, the main appointment holders and the representatives of the people, would renew their vows to serve the country. On the first floor of the Palace’s chapel, on the morning of the 15th, a senior monk of Pemayangtse monastery would first invoke Dzo’ngsa and all the deities of the land to stand as witnesses. During this khe-lam which also invoked the previous Chogyals and named the sacred locations of Sikkim, an apology was made for deeds done against the plants, the streams, the rivers and the rocks and a request made for freedom from obstacles, diseases, famine and war, for the protection of the royal family, and for the people and the land to be graced with wealth, good harvest and timely rainfall. The assembly then took the vow, in the presence of the protective deities of Sikkim, to carry out the intentions of the four lamas who founded the kingdom at Yuksum and not to do anything against the interest of the country or its righteous administration. As we have seen, Pang Lhabol was also a celebration of the blood brotherhood which was sworn between Khya Bumsa, the ancestor of the Chogyals and the Lepcha chief Tekong Tek in the 13th century, where Dzo’ngsa was for the first time invoked to witness their alliance. A finely-dressed woman then held the chog of which a few drops were sprinkled on the altar, the members of the royal family and the pangsi dancers after which members of the royal family offered silk scarves to the life-size effigies of Dzo’ngsa and Yapdi (yal bitu), the guardians of Sikkim’s southern gate. The pangsi dancers then sprinkled some rice in the air and left followed by the assembly. This ceremony was followed by the pangsi and the monastic cham dances which have been described by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1976: 19–24, 1991: 402–5). The pangsi is essentially a victory dance,

where lay men carrying sword and shield, praise the witness deity and invoke Dzö-nga as their warrior god while celebrating the subjugation of enemies. It was followed by a series of cham danced by the Pemayangtse lamas wearing elaborate brocade dresses and masks with Dzö-nga and Yabdül as the central deities to make appearances. A red and a black horse dedicated respectively to Dzö-nga and Yabdül participated in the cham; never ridden by anyone throughout the year, these horses are said to suddenly grow restless at a precise moment during the rituals as if mounted by the deities. While the rituals were being held at the Palace’s chapel a Lepcha songthong would perform a ritual for Yabdül at his abode above the Teesta, south of present day Sikkim. In the evening, the dignitaries and representatives who participated in the morning oath taking session, assembled again at the Palace ground for the annual chanting of the national anthem.

In Tingchim, as in many other Sikkimese villages, Pang Lhabsol was observed by first sending offerings of chang or grain to the Chogyal through their representative which was to be part of the nag for the rituals at the Palace’s chapel that were going to involve a large number of lamas over several days. In exchange, the representative was fed and sent back with a maund (40 kg) of salt for the village. Offerings were also sent to the Phodong monastery where rituals were being held. Back home in the village, Pang Lhabsol was celebrated at the prayer hall with the lamas’ and the bonden songtong’s performance of the Chimtum. Although villagers usually did not attend the rituals in Gangtok, the sending of their representative with an offering of grain, the receipt of the salt for the village from the Palace and their own simultaneous performance of the nag in honour of Dzö-nga, Yabdül and all the deities of Sikkim, effectively linked Tingchim to the Palace, the lads and all other Sikkimese villages through the performance of a national ritual. In this way, Dzö-nga played an important role as a national symbol and it is said that all ethnic communities, whatever their origins and whether Hindu or Buddhist, used to recognise and worship Kanghendzönga if they considered themselves first and foremost as Sikkimese.

In the early days of fieldwork in Tingchim, I expected to witness a lama-shaman encounter similar to that described by Mumford whereby the traditions of the Gurung shamans and Tibetan lamas in Gyassmo

49. This partial description of the Pang Lhabsol ritual is based on a few people’s recollection of the events as they remembered them. The main contributions are from T.S. Gyalse and Captain S. Yongda.
were interacting as rival regimes (1989: 10). However, such confrontation in Tzinghim did not present itself and instead, the ritual cooperation between lamas and shamans unfolded as a well integrated ritual complex. Although each ritual tradition in Tzinghim, in theory, corresponds to a particular ritual field dominated by a specific altar and specialist performing distinct ritual offerings, these are not to be regarded as separate belief systems and practices. Rather they should be perceived as complementary elements that have moulded each other through decades if not centuries of interaction. Any bön- or Buddhist aspect of this pantheon may be invoked in the process of village ritual life, usually independently but sometimes through regular and curing rituals that require various levels of cooperation such as in the Chirim. Rivalries are rare and, until recently, not explicitly between bön and Buddhism since at the village level, all equally recognise the pantheon of the other while being fundamentally Buddhists. The chanting of the khelem remains the ritual performance shared by all which best symbolises this creative encounter. And whether performed by the lamas as part of the nechod, by the pasmo for the phoji nos maltha or by the bönchen bokhunga for the ajo ampo and other ambiguous supernatural beings inhabiting the territory, the khelem will be chanted to please or appease the deities of the land and seek the protective blessings of Kangchenjônga.

8. Conclusion: The progressive influence of high Buddhism

For the Lhops, although Dzö-nga's Buddhist identity was revealed and promoted by Lhasün Chenpo in the 17th century, the mountain deity did not shed his secular identities immediately. The taming has been a slow process and Tzinghim villagers still annually sacrificed an ox for Dzö-nga and all the local supernatural beings of Sikkim until the early 1960s. Nebesky-Wojkowitz also quotes a Sikkimese source as saying 'If... danger from tigers arises, then this is magic due to the dissatisfaction of mDrzod bsha stag rje'. Sacrifice a white yak. If no white yak is available, then make an offer as a substitute the image of a white yak made of butter and long like an arrow' (1976: 20). These examples suggest that, in

30. For a discussion about the lama-shaman relation in Tzinghim and the views of other authors on the subject in the contexts of other Tibetan cultural regions see my dissertation Buddhism and Shamanism in Village Sikkim (2002).

31. Dzö-nga is often referred to as Dzö-nga rgyal mchod rje or tiger peak.
the eyes of the Lhopos, Dzö-nga retained the ambivalent character of an untamed mountain deity for much longer than it is suggested in the scriptures. But today, the saming process seems just about complete. Although Dzö-nga's secular identities are still honoured by the village lamas in Tingchim, he is never found to be at the root of someone's illness or misfortune and blood will no longer be offered to him directly. Nevertheless, the debate over his identities is still ongoing. When discussing these with a rinpoche in Gangtok, he thought it impossible for Dzö-nga to take possession of the paowo in Tingchim: and address the audience. In his eyes, as god of wealth, Dzö-nga was too high a Buddhist deity and could not possibly descend from his heavenly abode upon the body of a village paowo. The rinpoche concluded that the possessing entity had to be an impostor.

Similar ideas are slowly finding their way back to the village as the lama-students return to the village after studying under the supervision of Tibetan rinpoches and knowledgeable lamas who established educational institutions or found employment in Sikkim following the taking over of Tibet in 1959. As the well educated lama-students take the place of their fathers in the ritual hierarchy of the village and the bön ritual specialists pass away, so are their rituals being forgotten, and with them, the identities of the photha molha and the supernatural beings of the land including that of Kangchendzonga.

And so it would seem that Karmay's observation that usually, mountain deities were not the object of both secular and Buddhist cults, has gradually taken place in Sikkim. From ambivalent photha, Dzö-nga progressively became a Buddhist deity. Thus, following his 17th century conversion, Dzö-nga's warrior aspect as a photha seems to have simply been gradually reoriented, from defending the person, the lineage and the territory against worldly enemies, towards defending the Dharma, the monasteries and Sikkim as a newly established Buddhist kingdom against potentially untamed subjects of the king. And his qualities as a worldly provider of grains and male descendents, replaced as a provider of Buddhist scriptures and other spiritual treasures.

More recently, Dzö-nga seems to have found new protective roles on Sikkim's ritual platform of the 1990s. Now a minority in their ex-Kingdom, the Lhopos are increasingly being faced with threats to the survival of their language, culture, and economic and political rights. These threats have led to the need to assert their unity and original Sikkimese,
or ‘sons of the soil’ identity which has found perfect expression in the worship of the deities of the land and its sacred locations. Such rituals clearly highlight the Lhopo’s ancient relation with the land and effectively distinguish them from Tibetans and people of Nepalese origin who, as recent immigrants and uprooted people do not recognise these supernatural beings. The monasteries, the spiritual treasures, the sacred sites and their rituals are the only thing left to the Lhopo which confers on them a sense of identity and a locus for their past history.

In this context, Buddhist rituals in honour of territorial deities have undergone a certain revival among politically conscious Lhopo lamas. The best example is that of the lamas of Pemayangte monasteries, who in 1994, took it upon themselves to resume, within the precinct of their own monastery, the performance of the Pang Lhabsol ritual which had been suspended some years before at the Palace’s chapel. More recently, preserving the sacred sites and spiritual treasures located at the heart of Demojong was the object of a campaign against the construction of a 30-megawatt hydro-electric power station to be built on the sacred Rabong Chu river at Yakaun in West Sikkim (Schäfer 1995). The resol specifically mentions not to destroy hills, rocks and cliffs within Demojong and the sound of the blasting of the dynamite at the project site had a powerful psychological impact on the Lhopos; it was as if the deities’ abodes were crumbling to pieces. In this case, the preservation of Demojong became a rallying issue for the Lhopo community to unite and wake up to the fact that they were losing their identity and strength as a community because of personal financial and other political interests. During the campaign, the resol ritual, held in honour of Kangchendzönga and all other supernatural beings of the land was repeatedly performed in many houses throughout Sikkim. The rituals were held in an effort to appease the deities following the destruction of the sacred land or with the hope of invoking Kangchendzönga’s blessings for the success of the campaign.
Bibliography


