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WIM VAN SPENGEN

## WAYS OF KNOWING TIBETAN PEOPLES AND LANDSCAPES

In this concluding essay, I first sketch a brief outline of a Peoples and Landscapes perspective within a wider and changing social science context; second, present an overview of the field of Tibetan studies with particular reference to recent work in geography and anthropology; third, reflect briefly on ways of knowing “Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes;” and, fourth, situate the contributions of the authors to this special issue within their fields.

Quite a few will remember the 1995 movie *The Bridges of Madison County* in which the main characters Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep have a brief affair set against the background of a wooden bridge, so characteristic of Midwest American rural landscapes of the late nineteenth century. These wooden bridges and other material artifacts once formed the core of a discipline called cultural geography (Mikesell 1978). These studies focused, more often than not, on the distribution and morphology of manmade landscapes, thereby remaining true to mainstream Anglo-Saxon geography. Deep into the 1950s, the discipline pivoted around a time-honored man-land paradigm--Geography as the study of man in his earthbound quality--that was guided by an essentialist culture concept, and focused on cultural landscapes in which people were mainly seen as agents of historical landscape change. Actual live human beings were few and far between in these studies. As a result of the paradigmatic shift in the direction of a humanist geography in the 1970s, the post-modernist sweep in the social sciences of the 1980s, and the symbolic and cultural turn in anthropology in the 1990s, people came to be seen as more active in producing their own lived spaces and shaping their own landscapes (Duncan 1993). Culture came to be defined in much more fluid terms, sometimes to the point of its extinction (Mitchell 1995). The cultural approach that swept the social sciences in the 1990s did away with the notion that knowledge always has to be objective, that culturally pictured objects should or indeed can always be

clearly delineated, and that their substance would go unchanged and unchallenged over space and time. These new insights and interpretations also shattered notions of fixed identity: social, cultural, as well as territorial. As for territorial identity, it was, and still occasionally is, phrased in landscape rhetoric, the speech figures of which show signs of Romantic conservatism or worse (Hard 2001). The notion of ‘Tibetan Peoples’ from the title suggests that it is not only people as social agents that we are after in a scientific discourse, but also the group awareness of peoples who could be labeled in one way or another Tibetan. If we assume for the moment that groups of Tibetans can be meaningfully described in relation to landscapes, the rationale of bringing together seven articles in one issue becomes clear. There are big differences in the intent and levels of analysis among the papers presented. Some are staged at the level of personal experience of nomad life or of pilgrimage in a Tibetan setting. Others present insights at the level of historical religion and music which both in their hybridized forms show the influence of multi-cultural cross-fertilization. Still others couch their work in terms of cultural and economic globalization, interdependent processes, which alter the parameters of local conditions to the effect that some analysts have dubbed the phenomenon ‘glocalization’ (McMichael 2000, Lewellen 2002, Ritzer 2004).

### THE FIELD OF TIBETAN STUDIES

All the meta-changes in social and cultural studies described above have had a profound impact on the



field of Tibetan Studies. Unfolding at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a linguistic field of study, this field developed into a largely textually oriented science, in which first steps were taken to unravel the intricacies of Tibetan Buddhism, and made possible the first gleanings of Tibetan history. As a result, Tibetan studies, until deep into the first half of the twentieth century, had a largely cultural historical orientation in which attention to more distant epochs was congruent with the main research orientation of Classical studies in the West. Even the Younghusband expedition of 1904, in which a British military force entered Lhasa, did not immediately change this situation. Though Tibet was not a fully "losed Land" any longer, it took some decades to translate the British imperial interest in the Tibetan part of Inner Asia into a more contemporarily oriented field of Tibetan studies. In the first half of the twentieth century the interest in Tibet suffered from a Shangri-La aura that pervaded images of Tibetan religion and society, though perhaps less in learned circles (Bishop 1989). Yet the presence of a British political resident near the Court of the Dalai Lama, as well as authorized and unauthorized travel in Tibetan lands, over time made possible the construction of more realistic images of Tibetans and their lands (Bell 1924, 1928, 1946, Richardson 1998).

Next to the omnipresent and continuing fascination for Tibetan religion, geography, political history, and (from the 1950s onward) anthropology too, provided added lenses through which to view Tibetan society. The annexation of Tibet by the Chinese in 1950 and the Tibetan uprising of 1959 had a twofold effect on the development of Tibetan studies. On the one hand, it generated a stream of Tibetan refugees, which counted amongst them, members of the political and religious aristocracy. These elites created new interest in Tibetan studies particularly in linguistics and Tibetan Buddhism, and they often worked in collaboration with western scholars. On the other hand, it the uprising closed Tibet proper for fieldwork, a serious setback for any modern social science. However, from the 1980s onwards it proved possible, under certain conditions, to do fieldwork, especially in Kham and Amdo, an opportunity welcomed by Chinese, Tibetan, and Western scholars. A substantial amount of mainly anthropological fieldwork was also done on Tibet's southern, Himalayan frontier, in particular in northern Nepal, Ladakh, and to a lesser extent Bhutan. There was an upsurge in historical studies, partly based on the unearthing of Tibetan historical texts, but also on a closer scrutiny of Western and Chinese archival sources. Taken together these factors initiated a broad stream of publications, which engendered the first synthesized cultural-historical works making Tibetan studies accessible to a wider public and stimulating a scholarly interest in things Tibetan among the younger generation (Tucci 1949, 1967, Stein 1962, Snellgrove and Rich-

ardson 1968). These studies were followed by more in-depth surveys, made possible by the discovery and translations of multiple Tibetan manuscripts (Kapstein 2000, Smith 2001). Kapstein's study also shows a trend that became visible from the 1980s onwards: the blending of cultural history with anthropology, and occasionally philosophy. A new generation of scholars emerged which had a much better command of modern spoken Tibetan enabling them to work on a par with Tibetan scholars, and adding theoretical sophistication and technological innovation in the process. The development of a scientific field such as Tibetan studies, is also a social and institutional exercise, and I would like to emphasize the role played over the past twenty-five years by the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS). IATS's three-yearly conferences, bringing together scholars of different nationality and institutional background, has greatly reduced the geographical and disciplinary fragmentation of Tibetan studies. The resulting proceedings that go by the name PIATS offer a goldmine of seminal Tibetan work, although the older volumes are not always easy to locate. Technological innovation too, in the form of the worldwide web, has greatly enhanced the possibilities of scholarly exchange and information, the latest fruit being the development of The Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library ([www.thdl.org](http://www.thdl.org)), now offering its own electronic journal (JIATS). When we look at the major fields of enquiry and topics for discussion in Tibetan studies, we have to conclude to a highly heterogeneous picture. Partly guided by the contents of the PIATS publications, and taking into account a number of books and articles that have appeared elsewhere, I will venture to show the main research topics and orientations over the past thirty years. At the same time, I will try to situate our Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes perspective within this checkered field of academic interest, and see to what extent changes can be traced in it over the years.

Although the proceedings of the earlier (and much smaller) conferences in Tibetan studies were not yet labeled PIATS, it was decided at the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz, Austria 1995, to devise an orderly system of referencing in what would otherwise become a confusing set of books almost all labeled 'Tibetan Studies'. This retroactive declaration was of course also an exercise in institution building, an act of making the field academically and internationally more visible. Given the fact that Tibetan studies largely developed from an interest in Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism, it should not come as a surprise that the earlier Seminars, starting with the one at Zürich 1977, were dominated by textual, religious, and to a far lesser extent historical studies. Only two out of eighteen papers presented covered other topics, both of them based on anthropological fieldwork.

The second IATS Seminar, held at Oxford, two years later,



showed a much more diverse input. Next to linguistic papers and the unavoidable Tibetan Buddhist ones, we notice an increased interest in the political history of Tibet (old and new), as well as the anthropology of Tibetan groups. The third Seminar, at Columbia University in 1982, showed a further shift in the direction of historical and anthropological topics, though not eclipsing attention to linguistic and religious ones. The Munich 1985 Seminar broadly showed the same picture, but specific themes increasingly came to the fore, like the Old Tibetan Empire, the Gesar epic, as well as shamanist ritual in Tibetan societies, all foreshadowing further specialization in Tibetan studies.

The conference in Narita, Japan 1989, produced two volumes, showing both the growth of the field and its diversification. The slimmer Volume One was subtitled *Buddhist Philosophy and Literature* while the much thicker second volume was given the blanket title *Language, History and Culture*. However, closer inspection reveals that many contributions to the latter volume are based on anthropological

fieldwork, sometimes combined with textual study. It also carries a few contributions that touch on our Peoples and Landscapes theme in the sense that explicit attention is paid for the first time to the importance of the land as lived environment, for example in Graham Clarke's paper on the social organization of Tibetan pastoral communities (Clarke 1992), and Samten Karmay's paper on a pilgrimage to Kongpo Bonri (Karmay 1992). Both were based on fieldwork in Tibet. The Fagernes Seminar in Norway 1992 continued the trend in the direction of anthropologically infused papers focusing on contemporary lived religion and ritual, at the same time basing these studies in a reading of the landscapes that made these experiences possible. This conference also saw analytical papers on the iconography of Tibetan Buddhism, a subject not particular new to Tibetan studies, but pursued with a new vigor as a result of the new fieldwork opportunities in Tibet from the 1980s onwards. Here too, for the first time (with the possible exception of Ekvall 1960), we find a few papers on the question of Tibetan nationality and identity



Stanzin and her mother

PHOTO: MARTIN HARTLEY (C/O WWW.MARTINHARTLEY.COM)



formation, a theme congruent with the worldwide social science attention for nationality studies at the time (cf. Gellner 1983, Anderson 1991, Smith 1995).

The 7th IATS Seminar, Graz 1995, marked something of a watershed development. For a start, the conference drew a vastly superior number of participants compared to earlier venues. The number of research topics and orientations, too, showed a proliferation beyond expectation. At the same time, the ongoing specialization of sub-fields reached such dramatic proportions that in the end seven conference volumes had to be produced ranging from classical studies in Tibetan language and religion, via contemporary development and diaspora studies (Clarke† 1998, Korom 1997) to anthropologically inspired and theorized studies of Tibetan mountain deities and their cults (Blondeau 1998). Many contributions conspicuously figured a fieldwork orientation.

The well-organized Bloomington Seminar of 1998 unfortunately failed to yield any proceedings so far, but following its program it is still possible to present an outline of presentations made. These were grouped under the following headings: literature, history, anthropology (six separate panels under that name for the first time in IATS history), philosophy, religion, development and current issues, language and linguistics, comparative gender roles, art, legal and political documents, medicine and astrology, and, finally, music and material culture. Interestingly, for the first time, there was a separate panel on the Bon religion, a highly specialized field, strong enough to organize conferences in its own right over the next years. The anthropological panels continued their earlier interest in the mythical interpretation of place, the practice of ritual, and the role of pilgrimage in Tibetan societies.

The Leiden 2000 Seminar saw an extension of this multi-disciplinary and multi-focal trend. Interestingly, there was a strong presence of historical papers, not only touching the by now familiar subjects of the Tibetan empire, items of Tibetan 'medieval' history, and 17th century Gelukpa supremacy, but also studies in regional history, focusing on eastern Tibet, in particular Kham. Biography emerged as a useful sub-genre. Anthropological research, in addition to, and sometimes merging with, linguistic and religious studies, showed its strong presence, regionally focusing on Amdo. But there were also applied anthropological papers merging with contemporary development interests. From our Peoples and Landscapes perspective, the conference volume *Territory and Identity in Tibet and the Himalayas* (Buffetrille and Diemberger 2002) is of outstanding interest. Institutionally speaking, it was largely the result of a Franco-Austrian research project, started in 1992, to which ethnographic studies focusing on territorial cults and contested notions of territory and identity were central. The discovery that historical 'sacred' territory could acquire new political

significance, lent added relevance to the project.

The 10th jubilee Oxford Seminar of 2003, the proceedings of which will be published shortly, featured the exposition of several digital projects, another sign of the vitality of the field. The main program showed further proliferation of themes and topics, as well as increased specialization. Panels on Bhutan, the Tibetan-Mongolian interface, development studies, music, biographical studies in history and religion, Tibetan frontier studies, and Tibetan medicine, all contributed many new and worthwhile insights. The disciplinary labels of history, religion, and anthropology featured in earlier conferences had disappeared from the program, in exchange for a more topical organization, a further sign of increasing specialization and multi-disciplinary orientation.

If, for comparative purposes, we make a brief content analysis of the twenty-eight volumes that have appeared so far of *The Tibet Journal*, a Dharamsala based enterprise, published by the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, something of the same pattern as in our above analysis surfaces. The Editorial to its Volume 1, number 1 (1975) stated that the new journal's main aim was to disseminate knowledge about Tibet's unique culture and address topics in the fields of religion, philosophy, economy, history, literature, and the arts. The inclusion of economy in this list is as conspicuous as it was sadly lacking in the PIATS contributions. The journal also acted as a platform for Tibetan scholars to get their work translated into English. In addition, it had an important reviewing function. True to its intentions, *The Tibet Journal* over the years has published a number of papers on economic subjects and addressed topics of a contemporary, sociological nature, but again the main line was cultural-historical with room for phenomenological interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism, especially in its earlier volumes. Over the years, a number of important articles were published on Tibetan political and religious history, and, in later volumes, anthropology (Goldstein 1986, Macdonald 1987, Gyatso 1987, Martin 1990, Huber 1994, Upton 2000). Incidentally, Goldstein also was the author of a seminal article that was published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* (1973) under the title 'The circulation of estates in Tibet', which certainly has a sociological-historical bearing on our man-land perspective and highlights the maxim "to the victors the [landed] spoils". Next to the many individual contributions to *The Tibet Journal*, special issues featured from time to time, as for example on the Dalai Lama's tour of the United States and Europe in 1979, Tibetan social philosophy, Women and Tibet, Tibetan contributions to the Madhyamaka, Western Religions and Tibet, Powerful places and spaces in Tibetan religious culture, Tibetan Muslims, Russian-Tibetan relations, the Bon religion of Tibet, and the History of Tibetan art. Conspicuous again is the heterogeneity of the individual contributions and the generally great range of research orientations. A shift from



textual studies in religious history towards fieldwork-based anthropological interpretations of lived places and spaces is noticeable too.

With regard to our broad theme 'Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes', quite a few publications have appeared outside the two bodies of literature analyzed above. In the following section I will highlight a few books and articles pertinent to our theme, that do complement and have enriched our field of enquiry tremendously. This thematic treatment excludes attention for many important scholarly works, especially in the fields of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan political history—which in no way detracts from their inherent importance. I immediately break my own rule here by mentioning at least one book on Tibetan Buddhism: Geoffrey Samuel's *Civilized Shamans* (1993), and I do so because it portrays Tibetan Buddhist practices not only as religious per se, but also inextricably linked to highly diverse Tibetan regional societies, and influenced by processes of political and cultural change. This book is worth reading because it makes possible many insights in other Tibetan fields. One of the first programmatic readers with regard to our Peoples and Landscapes theme was a special issue of *Études Rurales* (1987) labeled 'Paysages et divinités en Himalaya.' It contains a seminal contribu-

tion by Fernand Meyer on the mythical reading of Tibetan landscape, which I don't think has ever been translated into English. All the research topics that play such an important role in later work of this kind within a Tibetan setting are already there: landscape as expression of lived, earthbound experience, pilgrimage, mountain gods and hidden valleys. The article is pervaded by a sense of geographical relativity; space is not seen as a container, but as cosmologically ordered place—a thoroughly man-made world of human perceptions and actions.

Another edited volume, which falls squarely within our working theme, is a collection of articles brought together under the title *Reflections of the Mountains* (Blondeau and Steinkellner 1996). It is the first full-blown scholarly outcome of the Franco-Austrian project mentioned earlier. The several contributions discuss the relation of myth, ritual practice and territory, (mainly in the forms of mountains and so-called 'hidden valleys' – revealed entities of sacred geography possessing special qualities or powers). Most contributors to this volume present their findings in a structuralist anthropological discourse infused with history and solidly rooted in extensive fieldwork. It was during these years that scholars also became more aware of the idea that landscapes



Himalayan landscape

PHOTO: MAUREEN SULLIVAN



Tibetan gentleman

Photo: Leo Dosremedios



are structurally ordered, sometimes in a hierarchical way. The best expression of this kind of reflection is to be found in the reader *Mandala and Landscape* (Macdonald 1997). In his foreword to this volume the editor refers to Tucci's terse but still valid definition of mandala as a "psychocosmogramme". According to Samten Karmay (1988) mandala represents 'divine residence', a mental construct that in the words of Macdonald "is projected onto precise and widely different landscapes," —however, this projection, for analytical purposes, should be set in "historical" time. Six out of ten contributions in this volume are played out within a Tibetan cultural setting, the others very much strengthening the comparative outlook of this volume.

Yet another collection of essays (Huber 1999a) travels much of the same road, but gives a wider specter of Tibetan examples. In the words of the editor, the essays to this volume "all attempt to document and interpret ways in which Tibetan peoples have identified and related to different categories of space and place as being unique or of higher ontological value, and as being set apart from many other spheres and sites of human life." The book brings together much recent and powerful work, which may be difficult to locate separately. As such, it cannot be overlooked in our sketch of Tibetan cultural landscapes. 1999 also saw the publication of Huber's magnum opus *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain* (1999 b). It is a groundbreaking ethno-historical reconstruction of a major Tibetan pilgrimage site, combining a wide range of written and oral resources (cf. McKay 2000). The study is subtitled "Popular pilgrimage and visionary landscape in Southeast Tibet," which again refers to the lived man-land quality in the organization of space and place, central to our discussion. As pilgrimage is a lived experience par excellence, it is interesting to see how Huber's work assumes a basically artificial character. In fact, the pilgrimage to Dakpa Sheri is a layered affair in which pre-Buddhist rituals are juxtaposed and intermingled with Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal cult practices that together engender an ongoing process of "Buddha-isation" (cf. Macdonald 1990). Altogether, this makes for a variety of ritual experiences to be had by different pilgrims at the same, yet different, site. This short characterization does not at all do justice to an overall rich academic study, and interested readers can only be advised to read the work for themselves.

Abdol-Hamid Sardar-Afkhani's 2001 Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard University bore the title *The Buddha's Secret Gardens: End Times and Hidden-lands in Tibetan Imagination*. It does for the hidden valley of Padma bkod what Huber did for the sacred mountain of Dakpa Sheri. While it is primarily a historical, textual study, it also attempts to show the conditions under which Tibetan yogins in earlier times "began to fantasize about hidden utopias" in order to psychologically, and in the end physically, escape the pressures of civil wars

and religious persecutions in times of political change. In doing so, the author shows an awareness of interweaving levels of analysis that can only contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationship between Peoples and Landscapes.

Many other original and sometimes seminal books and articles have appeared in other sub-fields of Tibetan studies, notably in history, anthropology, and religion. However, for self-imposed analytical reasons, it is not the place to discuss them here, but I will make one exception by mentioning Alex McKay's tour de force of bringing together, in three stout volumes, the most significant work done in Tibetan history (McKay 2003).

## WAYS OF KNOWING TIBETAN PEOPLES AND LANDSCAPES

It is difficult it is to assess the possibility of knowing whether Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes is a meaningful conceptual phrase for analyzing a particular geographical and/or cultural setting. Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* (1969) writes:

In general I take as true what is found in text-books, of geography for example. Why? All these facts have been confirmed a hundred times over. But how do I know that? What is my evidence for it? I have a world-picture. Is it true or false? Above all it is a substratum of all my enquiring. The propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing (OC 162)

We could ask in the same vein whether "Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes" is legitimate rubric. What is our evidence for it? Can we be absolutely certain that there is such a thing as *Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes*? For a start what do we mean by People? According to the Longman Dictionary of the English Language (1988), a People is "a body of persons that are united by a common culture, tradition, or sense of kinship, that typically have common language, institutions, and beliefs, and that often constitute a politically organized group." In such a definition, the notion of a People is fractured into a host of contextually connected concepts the precise meaning of which may be as 'uncertain' as that of People. As a proposition it refers to the identity of a body of persons sharing a set of mainly cultural traits. In a way it is a 'common sense' proposition (Stroll 1994), accepted by numerous people, but philosophically suspect because of its essentialist flavor. The Longman Dictionary definition refers to a way of looking at the external world that has been termed "naive realism." The danger of naive realism in the context of this issue of HIMALAYA is partly warded off by the use of the plural 'Peoples,' which suggests that the author of the phrase *Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes* was aware of the potential objections against too conclusive a definition of People based on too primordial a definition of culture.





This again brings up the question as to what culture or a particular culture is. Contemporary discourse in analytical philosophy is, among others, haunted by the vexed problem of skepticism – the question whether knowledge is possible at all, as well as the contextual quality of knowing. Translated to our problem of the definition and meaningful use of culture, the theoretical possibilities of the “existence of culture” range between a diehard primordialism and a skeptical denial of any such cultural bedrock. The preliminary outcome of discussing these kinds of problems in analytical philosophy over recent years is a mild form of anti-skepticism, which still makes possible certain forms of knowledge. At the same time there is a tendency to doubt whether reasoning along epistemological lines alone can bring a solution to our knowledge problem. If, in accordance with recent interpretations of Wittgenstein’s anti-skeptical position in *On Certainty*, we opt for a semantic rather than epistemic analysis (Koethe 2004, Pritchard 2005), we must logically tend in our analysis to a more description and use-oriented conception of culture. In Koethe’s words, “How does language manage to represent the world?” (Koethe 2004). Here we run into the contextual quality of semantic knowing, a condition that does not easily allow for isolation of terms and propositions from their context of use, because they will often lose their meaning.

What does this mean for a discussion of Peoples, in our case Tibetan Peoples? The Editorial in the first issue of *The Tibet Journal* (1975) spoke of “Tibet’s unique culture and way of life,” about its “rich cultural heritage and civilisation,” and also about “Tibetan values.” The question arises, in what does this particular ‘Tibetanness’ exist? According to recent views held in analytical philosophy, it is quite impossible to postulate anything “Tibetan.” At the most, we can only describe use-patterns of the adjective “Tibetan,” and in that way we may discover that there are as many Peoples as there are use-patterns. Also, the postulate of uniqueness is under pressure from incisive questions like Beatrice Miller’s “Is there Tibetan culture(s) without Buddhism?” (Miller 1993), or Rinzin Thargyal’s “Is there a process of secularization among Tibetans in exile?” (Thargyal 1997). The implication that cultural meanings are at most shifting descriptions is nothing new. As anthropological discourse has shown over the past two decades, culture, if it ever existed in this essentialist formulation, has given way to fragmented and highly fluid pictures of how People(s) describe their own identities. Of course, there are essentialist language games played out by groups of people with an instrumental or political interest, but from an analytic philosophical point of view, culture cannot easily be identified as a category of knowledge.

What about Landscape? In the Bridges of Madison County variety, Landscape has a visible and tangible quality, as is the case with other expressions of the language game focusing

on cultural traits and markers. The focus on material culture, so characteristic of a now outdated definition of geography, is the belated positivist expression of a man-land geographicity, an “written-in-the-earth quality,” that goes together with a fixation on the physical substrate of “superorganic” culture. That substrate, made recognizable by a particular place (name), often was phrased in terms of home, a psychologically safe haven, couched in terms of beauty and history. With the cultural and symbolic turn in geography and anthropology, places came increasingly to be seen as arenas for cultural expression, spaces that had to be fought over, losing their primordial identifying qualities, and creating new ones (Meinig 1979). Epistemologically speaking, it entailed the shift from fixed to fluid meanings, a shift that became noticeable in the changing metaphors describing landscapes from the mid-1970s onwards (Berdoulay 1982). Landscapes as socially and semantically constructed space replaced the graphically visible and value-laden pictures of place, thereby allowing for contending narratives of localized events (Folch-Serra 1990). Presently, culture in the social sciences has come to encompass a much wider conceptual meaning than it used to have. Such an open approach, over the years, has also brought more attention to ethical issues, because the choice of one narrative over another might mean the choice for the rich and powerful to the exclusion of the “damned of the earth” (Ethics, Place and Environment 1998). For the moment we seem to have arrived at a point where cultural landscapes are seen as lived expressions of multiple (counter-) cultures, characterized by processes of individualization and globalization, unfolding squarely in a world of contested space and rampant consumerism. Attention for the latter has finally brought economics back into cultural discourse (Handler 2005).

What about Tibetan Landscapes? In a Tibetan setting and application, the above thoughts on epistemology, culture, and landscape, reveal a change in the perceived significance of material landscape artifacts. The inventory and taxonomy of material artifacts as expressions of a specific cultural mentality, without reference to the social, political and economic conditions that gave rise to them, negates the very definition of culture that recent social science discourse wants us to integrate in our scientific accounts. It remains to openly admit my philosophical leanings towards a linguistic approach, in which theory is seen as descriptive and not necessarily as factual and generic. Therefore, I find it hard to underwrite the claim that “some accounts are more plausible than others on the basis of the available, closely scrutinized evidence” [meaning factual evidence] (Wilson 2004), simply because the question as to ‘What is evidence?’ can be answered in different ways.



## SITUATING TEXTS

Situating the various contributions to this special issue will be the final exercise in a modest work of reference. In briefly discussing content and context of the problem fields chosen, we hope that the reader will find it easier to place the texts offered in a meaningful matrix.

When I first read Karma-Dondrub's *Lived Experience of a Nomad Boy in Northeast Tibet*, two books came immediately to my mind. First of all, it reminded me of Urgunge Onon's *My Childhood in Mongolia* (1972), a similar attempt at capturing the spirit of nomad life as lived by a boy. Secondly, it irresistibly conjured up images of Clifford Geertz's *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (1988). The latter book's first chapter is significantly titled 'Being there', and subtitled, 'Anthropology and the scene of writing'. There can be no doubt: Karma-Dondrub was there, and in his 'being there', he succeeds in inverting Geertz's subtitle into one that reads 'The Author as Anthropologist'. This is a major achievement for a twenty-nine year old writing in a foreign language. Trying to establish himself as a writer, he inadvertently sheds light on a kind of knowledge that is not easy to come by in other, so-called more professional accounts of Tibetan nomad life. It may be said that the author has succeeded in portraying dimensions that must escape foreign observers, because they lack the mole's eye view of a resident insider. What strikes me in the first place is the omnipresence of the spoken word to negotiate existential problems in everyday nomad life. Legends and proverbs pervade family life, dealing with the herder's community at large, and ingraining into the individual's mind metaphors of caution and social responsibility. It is a necessary education, as the dangers of nomad life are many, natural, as well as human; wild animals, bad weather, shortage of water, sickness, banditry and poverty, all conspire to make the nomad's experience a hard one. In addition, storytelling provides a psychological and behavioral training, teaching people to deal with problems of life, love and death. Secondly, I was impressed by the deeply religious quality of nomad life, that also allowed, in times of social change, freedom to try out modern ways of warding off calamities, as on the occasion of the anthrax threat. Thirdly, I have learned more about the daily problems of Han-Tibetan relations in a frontier situation. Nothing is hidden in Karma-Dondrub's description as far as it goes. However, I cannot concur with the essentialist phrasing of the final statement of the author, although I sympathize with his intentions.

Of course, the above text should be set against the background of what has become known about nomad life in Tibet over the past years. With the partial opening up of Tibetan nomad areas for agro-pastoral and development-oriented research since the late 1980s, quite a few insights have surfaced regarding the dynamics of nomad society under condi-

tions of modernization and political change. A good account to start with is Namkhai Norbu's *Journey among the Tibetan Nomads* (1997), which relates his 1951 journey among the nomads of Dzachuka and the Golok of Sertha. It generally carries a wealth of information on pastoralism as a way of life in Central and Eastern Tibet at that time, moreover written down by a Tibetan with full command of the language. In addition, Goldstein and Beall's *Nomads of Western Tibet* (1989a) should be read and visually enjoyed, and, not to be overlooked, the story of their fieldwork, which was published for this journal in 1987. The scientific results were reported in *Asian Survey* (1989b). The work by Graham Clarke too, is required reading, in particular his 1992 article, which focuses on the social significance of the wider territorial group and kinship among nomads living to the South of the Ko-Ko Nor region (Clarke 1992), and also his slightly earlier account on the effects of China's reform policy on Tibetan pastoralism (Clarke 1987). In the following years, more fieldwork was carried out by geographers, anthropologists, and agro-ecologists, regionally focusing on Eastern Tibet, their reports having been brought together in the fifth PIATS Graz 1995 volume (Clarke† 1998). It contains several contributions well worth reading.

1999 saw the publication of the German-language monograph *Lebens- und Wirtschaftsformen von Nomaden im Osten des tibetischen Hochlandes*, a geographical study carried out among the nomads of Dzam-thang, bringing to the fore much detailed information on their pastoralism, but also on their settled agriculture, a common feature of mixed agro-pastoralist societies in Tibetan border regions (Manderscheid 1999). Part of this work was made available in English through her contribution to the PIATS Leiden 2000 Amdo volume (Manderscheid in Huber 2002). The latter publication also carried a paper by Bianca Horlemann on modernization and change among the Golok nomads in the period 1970-2000. Together these studies have greatly provided for an increased understanding of nomad societies within a Tibetan setting over the past twenty years. I have made no effort to fit the above section on changing nomad life in Tibet into our Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes mould. It is almost a truism to state that living so closely to the land can be viewed from a man-land perspective, and that the people doing so create and recreate their way of living as the conditions of economics and politics change over time. In situating the following contributions, I will not try to forcibly fit them all into our TPL perspective, but it is fairly obvious that religious experiences, demographic parameters, and economic developments are inextricably interwoven with the lived dynamics of the human landscape at large. No special issue on Tibet would be complete without a contribution on Tibetan religion. In this case, Donatella Rossi has given us a paper with the title 'An overview of Tibet's religions'. The plural

used is conspicuous, because it shows that the question as to 'What is Tibetan religion?' cannot be answered in a one-dimensional way. In fact, the first sentence of the concluding section of Rossi's contribution is "The religions of Tibet are a multi-faceted, complex and vast phenomenon". This statement accords with Tucci's treatment of Tibetan religions in his 1980 survey (Tucci 1980) and the purported complexity gains further substance in Snellgrove's *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (1987), from which especially Part III on Tantric Buddhism is worth reading. Samuel (1993), already mentioned above, is another standard work on the multifarious forms of Buddhism in Tibetan societies. It is a complexity that reaches much further than a description of the four or five major schools in Tibetan Buddhism alone. As Samuel has made crystal clear, the study of Tibetan religions should also include attention for pre-Buddhist religion and shamanism. It must emphasize the changing nature of religious culture to the extent that processes of amalgamation and synthesis are taken into account. Rossi is well aware of the multifarious ideas and forms in Tibetan religions because of her own interest in Bon. Having introduced the pre-Buddhist Bon



Nuns with candles

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religion, she proceeds to show that even after the historical confrontation with Buddhist practices after the eighth century, it is still a recognizable force in the landscape of Tibetan religions today. It has succeeded in preserving and extending a body of written literature, which only recently has become the subject of systematic translation and interpretation. Readers with an interest in Bon studies, may start with the Introduction to Per Kvaerne's *The Bon religion of Tibet* (1995, reprinted in McKay 2003), and then proceed to Samuel's analysis of shamanism and Bon in Tibetan religion (Samuel 1990; for a revised version see McKay 2003). The latter article gives an overview of Bon and Western scholarship, as well as a short but informed bibliography. Kvaerne too, as a leading Bon scholar in the West, eminently summarizes the past, present, and future study of Bon in the West (Kvaerne 2000, now in McKay 2003). Samten Karmay, hailing from a Bon environment in Eastern Tibet, and a great scholar and translator of Bon texts in his own right, gave us his 'General introduction to the history and doctrines of Bon' (in McKay 2003). Many articles by his hand have been brought together in Karmay (1998). He is also the co-editor of a comprehensive Survey of Bonpo monasteries and temples in Tibet and the Himalaya (Karmay and Nagano 2003), showing par excellence the 'written-in-the-earth' quality of the Bonpo tradition. Another specialist contribution to Bonpo studies is Dan Martin's *Unearthing Bon Treasures* (2001). The second part contains an exhaustive annotated bibliography of previous works about Bon. This little excursion into Bon studies (triggered by Rossi's interest) should not obscure the fact that it is Tibetan Buddhism in its main doctrinal varieties that still holds sway in Tibet and outside. In particular, the Gelukpa, ever since their seventeenth-century preeminence, have tried to preserve their doctrinal and political supremacy. The latter slowly eroded in the first half of the twentieth century (Goldstein 1989), the former yielded counter-movements, as for example the Rimed one in Eastern Tibet in the nineteenth (Hartley 1998). Any survey of Tibetan religions is not complete without reference to contemporary developments. The revival of Bon and Buddhism in Tibet, although bound to strict rules by the Chinese, has yielded a building boom over the past twenty years, the results of which are now highly visible in the religious landscape (see in particular Gruschke 2001a, 2001b, 2004a, 2004b). Other instances of religious revival have been brought together in the edited volume *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet*, carrying chapters on monastic life, Tibetan visionary movements, and pilgrimage (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998).

The next contribution is Anne Parker's "Pilgrimage in Tibet: the yoga of transformation". It is written in a thought style, which is not easily identified as "scientific" by mainstream philosophers of science. The latter's main concern is the problem of realism, the question as to whether our ideas



about the world refer to things that are real, or really exist. If in my brief exposé on epistemology in the above section “Ways of Knowing TPL, I reached something of a conclusion that knowledge is possible, but that the bases of that knowledge need not always be factual evidence, room is created for ‘other ways’ of knowing, producing kinds of knowledge described by evidential propositions that, as Wittgenstein wrote, ‘are not all equally subject to testing’ (OC 162). Anne Parker’s contribution requires such an open epistemological reading. It is easy to criticize an account, the form and semantics of which are not common in mainstream social science. But perhaps it does convey ideas about pilgrimage as a lived experience that cannot be known when using a sharp subject-object dividing-line. As such, it is a useful challenge to our taken-for-granted way of “doing science.” Parker made two pilgrimages to Kailash in 1996 and 2000 that shifted her view of her “role and movement within the natural world.” As I read it, the pilgrimages meant a profound spiritual transformation to her, which is consistent with phenomenological readings of travel and pilgrimage in relation to landscape (cf. Lemaire 1970). There can be no doubt: Anne Zonne Parker came away an altered woman. As she summarizes the experience in the concluding section: “The pilgrimage around Mount Kailash is etched in my heart.” When I read Parker’s contribution, it reminded me of Winand Callewaert’s “On the way to Kailash,” which is chapter 6 in Alex McKay’s reader *Pilgrimage in Tibet* (1998). Using the same personal approach of pilgrimage as a *lived experience*, Callewaert reaches a different conclusion: despite the beauty of nature and the Romantic enjoyment of landscape, the view of Kailash was disappointing to him. Even after coming home, Callewaert, a Belgian Sanskrit scholar, failed to give existential meaning to his pilgrimage, telling his friends “that it had been a wonderful trek, in splendid scenery, but that it had been a religious experience of nothingness.” He ends his report with a short poem, taken from notes written down a few days after his visit to Kailash and Manasarovar, the last line of which reads: “They are worthy to live in this land,” *they* referring to the Tibetans. The use of *they* seems to suggest a kind of cultural relativity on the part of Callewaert, which perhaps denies Europeans or Americans the kind of knowledge Tibetans semantically, behaviorally, and psychologically do possess. The question remains therefore whether these kind of highly personal experiences by westerners can lead to meaningful discourse. If they do it would perhaps be a different kind of discourse. It would require a book-length study to resolve these epistemological problems, but it should have become clear that hard-and-fast views on Tibetan pilgrimage are epistemologically suspect.

Kailash has been labeled the navel of the world, from which four of the six great rivers of Asia spring. Western understanding of the sacred geography of that mountain

and its attendant lake, Manasarovar, has mainly come from Indian sources (Loseries-Leick 1998). In fact, the place is a site which was, over the centuries, claimed by a number of cultural traditions, bringing together pilgrims of differing sectarian identity (McKay 1998). Hindu, Bon, Buddhist, and British colonial interpretations, generated a steady stream of lived experiences that were converted into guidebooks, travel accounts, and scientific articles. What is still lacking, however, is a major comprehensive, ethno-historical study of Kailash, based on a thorough knowledge of the local languages, something of an equivalent to Toni Huber’s work on Dakpa Sheri. The same holds true for Lhasa as a center of pilgrimage, about which the book has yet to be written. Next to these main centers, other places of pilgrimage deserve further exploration. In this connection, the work of Katia Buffetrille should be mentioned who has succeeded in combining textual sources with actually making some of the more remote pilgrimages herself, amongst others to A myes rMa chen in northeastern Tibet, and to Doker La or Kawa Karpo in southeastern Tibet (Buffetrille 1997, 1998, 2000). For a kind of TPL overview of the geographical and material contextuality of Tibetan pilgrimage see Van Spengen (1998).

Keila Diehl’s “Music of the Tibetan diaspora” is a more “People-centered” piece of work on the hybridization of music among Tibetan refugees, and the way in which new forms of making music help to form new personal and political identities in exile. The politically correct attitude towards Tibetan culture (because it is threatened) is one of preservation, but for these exiles, having settled in a mainly Hindi cultural environment, and being subject to Western influences, change is the rule rather than the exception. Is there Tibetan music? Music as a flow of vocally and/or instrumentally generated sounds is mostly being performed with certain purposes in mind: recreational, ritual, and political. The moods thus created may be seductive, ecstatic, or communal. If words are added to the musical performance, implicit meanings or explicit messages may be powerfully conveyed, even to the point of constructing new psychological states or political identities. Historically, music in Tibetan societies emerged in several forms: songs steeped in nature lyrics and backed up by words of love and joy (Norbu Dewang 1967), ritual chanting and epic singing by shamans and bards (Samuel 1991), and monastic music, invoking psychological states conducive to meditation and trance (Vandor 1976, Helffer 1997). There was also a long tradition of social and political street songs (Goldstein 1982). In the West, however, music from Tibet has become singularly associated with the deep, guttural chanting of Tibetan Buddhist monks. These singing monks have generally come to represent Tibetan music *sui generis*. Diehl sets out to systematically deconstruct this Romantic idea, one of the many that are circulating around the world to convey a “Tibetanness” that does not exist.



The Dharamsala-based Yak Band (in which the author took personally part) produces song lyrics that literally rock the crowd with ideas of Tibetan independence. It is this kind of politically infused and heavily westernized rock music that is appreciated throughout the Tibetan diaspora. It is a long way from the attempts to preserve “authentic” Tibetan music (cf. Helffer 1993). In line then with current epistemological argument, the author destroys the idea that there can be essentialist knowledge categories with fixed cultural contents. Cultural hybridization of music in the Tibetan diaspora is but one example of the fluidity of culture in a Tibetan refugee setting. The topic has drawn further interest in recent scientific discourse on Tibetan identity and self-presentation. Axel Ström pioneered a useful contribution to the Fagernes 1992 Seminar, based on fieldwork in 1985/86 in Tibetan refugee communities in Northern India (Ström 1994). The next years saw two more publications on the subject, both edited by Frank Korom (1997, 1997). A final remark: hybridization is not only the result of migration and acculturation, but also of technological innovation. Increased possibilities of transportation and communication within a vastly changed setting of information technology have produced a growing interdependency in a contracted world space and has speeded up processes of culture change.

Geoff Childs’ contribution on “Culture Change in the Name of Cultural Preservation” uses a quite different approach. It is the first paper in this special issue featuring explicitly formulated hypotheses. This was to be expected from an author who very recently praised the virtues of reliability, validity, and objectivity in a methodological essay regarding the study of past Tibetan societies (Childs 2005). The interesting question is: what kind of hypotheses are we dealing with here? The introduction of the term “hypothesis” instead of “informed guess” or “supposition” generally hints at an explicit sharpening in an empirical research procedure. Although Childs in the concluding section is careful enough not to speak of verifiable hypotheses which would remind one perhaps too much of the empirical cycle, he believes in close scrutiny of arguments “so that they can be evaluated, and then either accepted, refined, or rejected in the light of empirical evidence.” This smacks of positivism, but as far as the article goes, we are in fact only dealing with inductively derived hypotheses. The problem with this kind of knowledge generation, even in this mild form is, in my view, that it is too much bound up with degrees of generalization earlier on in the research process, especially in labeling research variables. The nice thing about Childs’ paper is that he admits so.

Despite the above methodological reservations, Childs’ article is a remarkable attempt at making visible processes of cultural and demographic change. It is remarkable because it succeeds in successfully interweaving different levels of

analysis: the Nepal highland Tibetans of Nubri, Tibetan exile monasteries in Kathmandu and India, and organizations of patronage in the West. His main thesis is that “foreign attempts to preserve Tibetan culture have stimulated demographic and cultural transformation in the ethnically Tibetan borderlands of Nepal.” He introduces this problematic by referring to processes of globalization and technological innovation that have greatly facilitated contacts between individual and institutional agents over greater distances. In this contracted world of contacts, it has become much easier to make westerners believe that Tibetan culture can be summed up in the normative tradition of monastic Buddhism—or at least that is what they want to believe. Having done extensive fieldwork in Nubri, Childs, as nobody else, knows that this is a major simplification of a complex reality. This insight is consistent with our earlier analysis that a Tibetan religious system involves more than monasteries and monks, and that in fact at the local level it includes several religious specialists operating independently of the local monastery.

The central argument in Childs’ contribution is that youngsters are sent away from peripheral local society to pursue a foreign sponsored education in one of the greater exile monasteries in Kathmandu or Dharamsala. The consequence is that many of them will never return, and that there may develop a shortage of religious specialists to perform rites according to local practice. And when some of them do come back, the Buddhist preservationist stance of their education has so alienated them from local religious practice that they become catalysts of change in the direction of doctrinal uniformity. In both cases, the result is culture change in the periphery mediated through a global system of patronage aiming at cultural preservation, and enacted at the analytical level of the exile monastery. Can these insights be generalized into valid insights of cultural and demographic change in Himalayan highland societies? Perhaps they can. But the diligent research that, according to the author, is needed may also show that his thesis is less applicable to economically more advanced highland societies, such as the Nyishangte of neighboring Manang. It could show that knowledge is more contextually and semantically derivative than empirical research formulas would admit, but I laud the author’s plea for methodological rigor. Yet, the question remains: what about epistemological rigor?

Tashi Tsering’s contribution about “A Tibetan Perspective on Development and Globalization” form the subject of our next contribution. His thoughts center on the conviction that processes of economic globalization have negative consequences for dependent countries and that in the case of Tibet this dependence is sharpened by the role of the Chinese state. Here we enter a world of committed people, organized in an anti-globalist movement, and as far as Tibet is concerned, in Tibet Support Groups, that squarely stand for outright Tibet-



an independence. That this is not the political stance taken by the Tibetan government in exile is of less importance than the idea of a free Tibet that would make possible autonomous processes of economic development decided upon by the Tibetan people themselves. The author does not hide his intentions, and right from the start questions the neo-liberal assumptions of the globalization project and the institutional support for a global free trade regime by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. According to the author, the more important aspect of globalization is “the utter absence of moral ideals about social justice and environmental stewardship in its guiding principles.”

The second part of Tsering’s paper centers on the role of the Chinese state. When China became a member of the WTO some years ago, the Chinese leaders interpreted that membership in “highly state-centric and state-empowering terms.” This is in contrast to the neo-liberals who state that globalization increasingly overrides national sovereignties and will set in motion irreversible transnational processes. In fact this is a debated point among the theoreticians of globalization: whether the state will come out weaker or will be as robust as ever. The main argument in Tashi Tsering’s paper is that the structural imperfections of the Chinese economy and the political motives behind the so-called Western Development Campaign (1999), will lead to spatially fragmented economic development and rising income inequalities along urban lines, to the detriment of the Tibetan people who by the nature of their predominantly rural way of life will benefit less or even suffer from a globally inspired economic project, implemented by a Chinese state bent on exploiting a profitable resource colony.

Interestingly, the author uses a roughly similar analytical framework as Childs in the previous paper. He discusses re-

cent economic changes in Tibet that are the result of globalization and the role played therein by the Chinese state. In fact, we find the same effort at interweaving different levels of analysis, the intermediate level being the Chinese state. What makes his analytical effort much more difficult to achieve than Childs’ is the geographical scale on which it is unfolding, as well as the broadness of the problem field chosen. To

treat “Tibet” as a unit of analysis is something quite different from making a few Nubri villages your analytical focus at one end of the globalization chain. The same goes for making the state of China the “hinge” in a three-fold analytical scheme, as compared to a limited number of monastic establishments in Kathmandu and India. It applies a fortiori to the broad concept of globalization as contrasted to a circumscribed set of institutions of foreign patronage at the other end of the chain. The problem with such an analytical focus is that it becomes very difficult to identify working concepts that bear a relation to what is actually happen-

ing on the ground. As for the language game chosen, one could have wished for a more thoughtful way of describing analytical concepts, a way that does not know in advance the outcome through a semantic presentation that betrays too much of a premeditated conception of how detrimental globalization is to Tibet. This hidden normative theorizing is epistemologically suspect, and precludes attention for more circumscribed fields of inquiry at lower levels of analysis, which might lead to more valid pictures of the effects of globalization in Tibet. There is also the problem of projecting backwards concepts like “environment” and “sustained resource use” that were not even perceived as such in former times, but are now made into cornerstones of Tibetan Buddhist values and attitudes (cf. Huber 2001, Kolås and Thowsen 2005). However, I sympathize with the author’s



Woman in Lhasa market

PHOTO: JACK IVES



moral intentions.

The last paper considered is "Human Activity and Global Environmental Change," in which Julia Klein looks at the effects of climate warming and changes in pastoral land use on the bio-ecology of rangelands in Northeast Tibet. As three-quarters of the Tibetan population are said to be nomadic pastoralists, the question of how their grasslands are affected by climate change and human action is of utmost importance. The author starts by defusing the idea that the Tibetan landscape and climate is static over place and time, and then continues to present evidence for global climate warming which is said to effect ecosystems in measurable ways already. She points at the relative dangers of global warming to less developed societies "which are more tied to their natural resource base." Subsistence based societies would be more vulnerable to these kind of changes. Then she turns to changes in land use that are the result of human action. Klein describes the effects of changes in rangeland management since the 1980s, which have led to rangeland privatization, fencing, and the settling of nomadic people in Northwestern Tibet. The important point to be noticed is that it concerns alterations in long-standing patterns of pastoral land use in the region. Based on findings in the field, the author began to simulate scenarios of warming which led her to the conclusion that the rangelands on the Tibetan Plateau are vulnerable to climate change, and that, interestingly, "rangeland degradation that has often been attributed to overgrazing may, in fact, be a response to anthropogenic climate change." The latter line of thought has in particular surfaced over the past decade. If we look for example at Wu Ning's study on the ecological situation and sustainability of rangelands in Western Sichuan, which appeared in 1997, no mention is made of the effect of global warming. But a large-scale survey of mountain geo-ecology on the Tibetan Plateau published only three years later briefly addresses the problem, showing at the same time that Chinese scientists were aware of the problem since the 1970s (Du Zheng, Qing-song Zhang, and Shaohong Wu 2000). The question remains how permanent this global warming is. After all, there were colder and warmer periods over the past thousand years that have been well documented. In addition, some of the literature on global warming is highly selective and reports from various sources sometimes contradict each other. That does not take away the necessity of studying these changes, because the nomads are living there right now. Yet the possibility for predicting these changes over the longer term, as the author would wish, is dependent on parameters perhaps not yet fully understood.

The last words of the previous line perhaps best convey the predicament of scientific understanding. We think we know, but at the same time realize that not all things are as yet fully understood, or indeed knowable. In addition, there are

many "Ways of Knowing." I hope that this essay on "Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes" has demonstrated the diversity of thought styles as applied within the wider field of Tibetan studies.

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