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Tibetanness outside Tibet

Campus Condorcet, Paris, France

October 19th, 20th and 21st, 2023

Due to its enormous expansion of the networks established by the Tibetan Empire between the 7th and 9th century, Tibetan culture, language, and religion spread across a vast territory, reaching from Ladakh in the west to Dartsedo in the east, and covering parts of present-day Nepal (Mustang), Bhutan, as well as regions today administered by India and Pakistan (Gilgit-Baltistan). The area where Tibetic languages are still spoken, and where cultural traits, which can be identified as being of Tibetan origin goes far beyond the current Tibetan Autonomous Region and further Tibetan autonomous prefectures currently administered by the People's Republic of China. Thus, scholars often use the term “ethnic Tibet” to define this entire zone to distinguish it from today's geopolitical entity of Tibet.

Two workshops have already taken place: the first one, in January 2020 at the University of Bonn, aimed to discuss in detail the various forms of assertion or rejection of belonging to a real or imagined wider Tibetan community among speakers of Tibetic languages outside of Tibet; the second one, in November 2021 at the University of Strasbourg, pursued the reflection by exploring in particular how religious and political identity building strategies are surrounding and sometimes interwoven with affirmations of Tibetanness.

This third and last workshop proposes to continue the dialogue by tackling Tibetan identity affirmations with regard to migration, displacement, isolation, and/or translocal and global relations. Most of the Tibetic language speakers outside Tibet live in areas difficult to access and where there is a lack of educational and economic opportunities due to poor infrastructure. Thus, mobility and/or migration have become part of people's way of life be it seasonal, temporary or in the long-term, especially when it comes to the younger generations. The interdisciplinary approach may give some trends to a better understanding of how migration creates, structures, and restructures social, political, ideological, doctrinal, and economical organisation of communities and societies. Together with the papers from the two previous workshops, we plan to publish a first volume on the different understandings of ‘Tibetanness outside Tibet’.



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Program

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19 October 2023 (Centre colloque, salle 3.05)

- 14:00-14:30 Introduction: Nicola Schneider
The project 'Tibetanness outside Tibet'
- 14:30-15:30 Nils Martin
Old Tibetan inscriptions west of Tibet
- 15:30-16:00 Coffee break
- 16:00-17:00 Cameron David Warner
'The First Tamang Tulku': On the Nepali Assimilation of Tibetan Buddhism
- 17:00-18:00 Chloé Lukasiewicz et al.
Pe cha, Re wa, Sem pa. Smashing imaginaries through urbanity in hip-hop songs

Dinner

20 October 2023 (Centre colloque, salle 3.05)

- 09:00-10:00 Pascale Dollfus
The House: Mirror of a society and its changes
- 10:00-11:00 Ute Wallenböck (Masaryk University Brno)
Continuity and Change in Foodways among the Tibetan Diaspora in Switzerland
- 11:00-11:30 Coffee break



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- 11:30-12:30 Tenzin Desal
Affective Tribal Solidarity and Epistemic Dissonance in Bhoti Language Movement in India
- 12:30-14:00 *Lunch*
- 14:00-15:00 Carla Biagioli
Rediscovering the Swat Valley- A landscape in transition
- 15:00-16:00 Radhika Gupta
The Perso-Tibetan cultural repertoire in Kargil
- 16:00-16:30 *Coffee break*
- 16:30-17:30 François Jacquesson
Language maps and the past
- 17:30-19:00 Film screening: *Fathima The Oracle*
Discussion with the filmmaker Geleck Palsang (on zoom)

Dinner

21 October 2023 (bâtiment Nord)

- 09:00-10:00 Salomé Deboos
Rethinking Zanskari identity building process today
- 10:00-10:30 *Coffee break*
- 10:30-11:30 Zuzana Vokurkova
Migration, social changes, and identity in the modern Dolpo society
- 11:30-12:30 Final discussion



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Abstracts :

-Carla BIAGIOLI (EPHE-CRCAO)

Rediscovering the Swat Valley - A landscape in transition

The valleys of Kandak, Kotah, Najigram and Karakar are located at the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains, in the district of Swat valley, close to the archaeological site of Barikot-Bazira in the northern region of Pakistan. These valleys are the oldest inhabited areas, shaped since ancient times by the presence of human activity.

The landscape, considered as the expression of the relationship between the topography and the marks of those who shaped it over the years, shows in these valleys the history of a long and intimate relationship between people and their environment. But the landscape is also a dynamic construction that belongs to those who inhabit it on a daily basis, and here, while the historical landscape belongs to the Buddhist community, the present-day landscape is populated by Muslim communities, mainly the semi-nomadic Gujar group, the sedentary Pashtuns and the nomadic Ajar group. Alongside the ruins of Buddhist sanctuaries and schist sculptures, scattered throughout the area, there are rock paintings dating back to pre-buddhist periods and the remains in Udegram, of one of the oldest mosques of Swat.

This mystical landscape, considered sacred since ancient times, keeps showing the marks of multiple cultural interconnections, while the lives of its present-day inhabitants take place around these vestiges, naturally integrated in their daily social life.

-Salomé DEBOOS (Université Lyon 2 Lumière)

Rethinking Zanskari identity building process today

Zanskar is nested in the great Himalayas and belong to the Great Tibet area. Zanskarpa people are speaking a Tibetan dialect and at the same time, they are schooling in English, Hindi and Urdu. So, from the very first stage of the life, they are familiar with smooth transformation of their own identity: being Zanskari and belonging to Buddhist/ Muslim confessional group or being Darma/ Koran follower and belonging to Zanskar Valley, or even for some, being Indian Citizen, getting Muslim/Buddhist religious affiliation and being Native from Zanskar. Thanks to extensive fields researches I could understand that the meaning of "belonging" to a homeland or a confessional group, and therefore the transformation of the process of identity building in our modern world, is bridging the gap between tradition and modernity (*Homeland or Religion? Personal Identity Building in Zanskar, Indian Himalayas*, Brill – Leiden, 2023). This book tells the story of the Buddhist-Muslim community from Padum, in the Zanskar Valley - Indian Greater Himalayas. During this conference, I would like to present the major insight and result of these twenty years of work on this Valley and therefore showing the deep transformation these people from the Zanskar Valley had to overcome to readjust the inter-religious relations in order to face this new challenge which is becoming Union Territory in India, on one side and the rise of seasonal migration in the area on the other side.

-Pascale DOLLFUS (CNRS-Université Paris Ouest Nanterre)

The House: Mirror of a society and its changes

"Les conceptions relatives à l'agencement de l'espace habité représentent la religion la plus universelle, religion qui n'a ni nom, ni église organisée, et qui n'est autre que l'ensemble des coutumes et des notions



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religieuses d'une société donnée". (Rolf A. Stein, *Architecture et pensée religieuse en Extrême-Orient. Arts Asiatiques*, 1957, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 163-186)

Both a whole and part of a single socio-religious system encompassing lifestyle, beliefs, settlement patterns and landscape, the house is a means of expressing an identity (both single and plural).

Based on observations made between 1978 and 2022 in Hemis-shukpa-chan, a Buddhist village in Lower Ladakh, we will attempt to show how the house enables us to study the profound changes that have taken place in Ladakh over the last few decades, in economic, social, cultural and religious terms.

-Radhika GUPTA (Leiden University)

The Perso-Tibetan cultural repertoire in Kargil

Historically located between 'Tibet-i Khwurd' (Little Tibet, Baltistan) and 'Tibet-i Buzurg' (Leh-Ladakh), Kargil – as these Persian names from the sixteenth century suggest – was a crossroads of Tibetan and Persianate influences. Even after the decline of the Mughal empire, the influence of Persian was sustained through scholar-clerics who studied in Iranian seminaries. This is reflected in the vibrant poetry and material culture of the region. I suggest that Perso-Tibetananness must be recognized as being integral to "Tibetaneness outside Tibet" – a move towards de-essentializing what we understand as "Tibetaneness". With the incorporation of Kargil (Ladakh) into the Indian nation-state, the influence of Urdu, and the premium placed on an education in English, the Perso-Tibetan cultural repertoire of this region is facing erasure. This paper will discuss initiatives being taken to preserve this and the investment (if any) that the younger generation might have in sustaining this cultural repertoire.

-François JACQUESSON (CNRS-LACITO)

Language maps and the past

Today, speakers of Tibeto-Burmese languages are spread over a vast area. South of present-day Tibet, they can be found in parts of the Himalayas, in Assam and across the mountains to Burma and beyond. However, in north-east India, there are also some speakers of Tai languages, speakers of Mon-Khmer languages (the best known being the Khasi), and of course, from Assam to Bangladesh, speakers of Indo-Aryan. We will describe what can be known or assumed about the situation in earlier centuries.

-Chloé LUKASIEWICZ (Université Paris Ouest Nanterre) with 8sian, Gtashi, K.Kush, Ngale, and Tnammy

Pe cha, Re wa, Sem pa. Smashing imaginaries through urbanity in hip-hop songs

While Morcom has already shown how modern music artists inside Tibet use the link to the landscape to depict the situation due to the Chinese policies, this link also plays a key role in Tibetan identities' definition in exile. For this paper, a nomadic song performed by Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA)' artists, the piece "D Town" by GTashi and K.Kush as well as "Ka" by 8sian, Ngale and Tnammy will be compared to question these different "Tibetaneness".

Since the beginning of exile in 1959, the relation to the environment has been one of the main characteristics on which institutions have defined the hegemonic Tibetan identity. By reappropriating the Westerners' imaginaries of Tibet and Tibetans facing Chinese occupation, the elite of the diaspora has spread the idea of a Tibetan culture strongly linked to the natural environment since the 1980s. While TIPA has participated in the diffusion of this model, modern music artists give us another perspective. Indeed, the urban is at the heart of the definition of the narrative they propose of their lived experience. At the same time, they clearly reject the image of the "good refugee": a passive and destitute victim.



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Indeed, they use codes of hip-hop and show a cleverly orchestrated aggressiveness and opulence staged in the city. This comparison will highlight how young Tibetan artists in exile come to decompartmentalize our vision of what "being Tibetan" today can mean and to question our imaginaries.

-Nils MARTIN (CRCAO)

Old Tibetan inscriptions west of Tibet

Hundreds of ancient Tibetan inscriptions have been documented over the last decades in the Himalayan regions of Ladakh, Baltistan, Gilgit, and Wakhan. Most of these inscriptions are graffiti and dedicatory inscriptions accompanying the representations of stupas and swastikas. Some were made by Tibetan soldiers, while some others may have been made by merchants and villagers.

The dating of these inscriptions is especially difficult to assess as most were simply dated using the ancient twelve-year system. As a result, different hypotheses have been proposed in previous studies, notably by Philip Denwood, who inclined toward an early dating to the period of the military expansion of the Tibetan empire towards the west (7th to mid-8th century), and by Tsuguhito Takeuchi, who suggested a later dating corresponding to the formation of the kingdom of Maryul (mid-9th to 11th century). The discovery of a long Tibetan rock inscription at Kharul, near the present Indo-Pakistani border, by Quentin Devers, has provided us with strong evidence that at least some of these Tibetan inscriptions date to the military expansion of the West-Tibetan kingdom in the mid-11th century under the rule of the belligerent king 'Od lde. Whether the other inscriptions in Ladakh, Baltistan, Gilgit, and Wakhan relate to the same context, however, remains to be ascertained.

In this presentation, I will survey this epigraphic material and present its main features, notably as concerns the relation between text and image. I will trace some of the clans whose members authored the inscriptions, and try to do the same with some of these people themselves. Finally, we will see that several of these clans and people, among which some were new to these regions, settled and prospered over the next centuries in these areas outside Tibet proper.

-Tenzin Desal (Tibet Policy Institute)

Affective Tribal Solidarity and Epistemic Dissonance in Bhoti Language Movement in India

In a private member bill introduced by the MP from Ladakh on 1 April, 2022, Jamyang Tsering Namgyal sought the inclusion of the Bhoti language in the 8th schedule of the Constitution of India. In his speech in Lok Sabha, he stressed on the widespread use of the Bhoti language in various regions in the Republic of India that includes Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. At the same time, he remarked that the Bhoti language is recognized by different names as official languages in respective Himalayan states. Anthropological linguists mark Tibetic language difference in Tibetosphere based on variation of phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon. Recent scholarship profiling linguistic diversity of Tibetic languages have argued that both state and linguistic borders are mutually reinforcing and constitute a form of structural violence. On the other hand, ethnographic field data and advocacy literature for Bhoti language rights movement point to forging of what can be theorized as affective tribal solidarity across the Indian Himalayan belt. Evidently, there are two divergent and tangential advocates for linguistic preservation of Tibetic language/s. I argue that this divergence has emerged from epistemic disjuncture and dissonance in defining language as an analytical category. I call for attention to field view and epistemic intervention to yield diverse scholarships on the political economy of language in the Himalaya.

-Zuzana VOKURKOVA (Charles University)



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Migration, social changes, and identity in the modern Dolpo society

The traditional Dolpo society can be characterized by isolation with only limited mobility mainly to neighbouring regions. While present-day Dolpo is still a remote place with almost no infrastructure, roads have been being built in several parts of Dolpo. The modern Dolpo society is best characterized by population outflow, primarily into the Nepalese capital or India. The migration is of two types: seasonal, of short period, with many Dolpo-pas leaving Dolpo to spend winter in a milder climate, and long-term migration with mostly the younger generations leaving Dolpo for a study or work stay in KTM, India, or other places.

Another major factor of the current state of the Dolpo society is the ongoing social change and change in living conditions of Dolpo-pas. One can observe a gradual increase in population of Chhetris and other ethnics over the past half century mainly in lower parts of the Dolpa region but also in Dolpo, which forms the upper part of this region. This has brought many changes into the life of Dolpo-pas, such as change in alimentation habits, the linguistic situation, or literacy. The Nepali and Tibetan languages have spread especially among the younger generations and children. Until recently, the rate of illiteracy was very high due to limited access to education. Therefore, children were sent to schools in India or KTM at an early age. In past two decades, schools have been established in main settlements of Dolpo.

Despite the migration and mobilities, Dolpo-pas have still preserved their identity thanks to their strong cultural and religious tradition, which has not been interrupted by any exterior intervention as it happened in neighbouring Tibet. In my presentation, I will discuss the migration processes, the above-mentioned types of social change as well as the challenges in preserving the Dolpo identity.

References:

Bauer, Kenneth. 2004. *High Frontiers: Dolpo and the Changing World of Himalaya Pastoralists*. Columbia University Press, New York.

Jest, Corneille. 1975. *Communautés de langue tibétaine du Népal*. Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique.

-Ute WALLENBÖCK (Masaryk University Brno)

Continuity and Change in Foodways among the Tibetan Diaspora in Switzerland

In the diaspora, cooking and eating Tibetan food are tangible ways to continue the Tibetanness. Hence, in this study, I will explore the dynamics between food, memory, and identity among the Tibetan diaspora community in Switzerland as food is an expressive practice through which people differentiate between self and others, thus finding their own identity. By taking their foodways with them, as food make people think of their ancestral land, food is used as coping mechanism in a new environment. Therefore, I state that food practices of the Tibetan diaspora reflect its historical and cultural characteristics and contexts of home and host country. I hence look at the development of culinary traditions among Tibetans in Switzerland. This study will enhance the understanding of the Tibetan diaspora, their hybrid and varied food culture, and their cultural identities: My research focuses on how Tibetans carried their food culture in/to Switzerland and how it contributed to the assertion of Tibetan identity and community formation. Methodologically, my research draws on an empirical approach to food and migration studies and utilizes data collected from interviews and participant observation among the Tibetan diasporic community in Switzerland.

-Cameron David WARNER Aarhus University)

'The First Tamang Tulku': On the Nepali Assimilation of Tibetan Buddhism

The Namgyal Foundation is a Buddhist organization in Nepal that boasts its leader, Tulku Losang Namgyal Rinpoche, as the first ever "Tamang tulku." The Namgyal Foundation, not unlike the Office of the Dalai Lama or other Himalayan Buddhist organizations, presents itself as both a community for the political protection and economic development of a particular ethnicity, in this case Tamangs of Nepal, as well as a benevolent Buddhist association with a universal message. Based on fieldwork primarily between 2012-2015, with periodic updates in later years, I compare the organization and development of the Namgyal Foundation to a generalized paradigm of Buddhist organizations in the Himalayas founded by Tibetan exiles, such as leadership by a tulku, financial sponsors from the Chinese diaspora in SE Asia, and satellite branches in the UK and America. Key to the self-image of the Namgyal Foundation is the construction at physical sites, through discourse, and practice of a Buddhism that is ideally monastic, centralized, institutional, and educational, contra to the historical forms of lay village ritual specialists that typified Buddhism among the Tamang in earlier generations. This assimilation of Tibetan forms of Buddhism resembles Sherry Ortner's classic work on the development of Buddhist civilization among the Sherpa through the construction of monasteries in her classic work, *High Religion*.