

**Proposal for a panel at the 13<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, to be held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from July 21–27, 2013**

Organizer: Markus Viehbeck, Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context," University of Heidelberg

**Panel: "When Different Worlds Meet: Transcultural Encounters in the Eastern Himalayas"**

While cultural exchange is an immanent and continuous element of human societies, there are certain places and conditions that accentuate this element and make it more visible. With the intensification of trade in the wake of the British Younghusband invasion to Tibet in 1904, the border region between Tibet and India in the Eastern Himalayas gained importance as the main transit hub for the exchange of Tibetan and Western commodities. Economic development was accompanied by population growth: the historical mixture of various local ethnic groups was enriched by an influx of traders and the settlement of British Indian colonial officers, Christian missionaries, Tibetan dignitaries, Western Tibetologists and spiritual seekers, etc. This development did not only yield a pathway for the exchange of material goods, but also for the exchange of knowledge between worlds that knew very little about each other.

In this panel, we would like to address these encounters with regard to various interconnected key areas, such as trade, media, religion, politics, scholarship, education, etc., and with different methodological and disciplinary approaches.

**Proposed list of speakers (in alphabetical order):**

- Isrun Engelhardt: A Dedicated Initiator of Cultural Exchange: Tharchin's Innovative Communication of Knowledge between Tibetan and Western worlds
- Tina Harris (University of Amsterdam): The Yak's Tail: A Window onto Contemporary Changes in Trade in the Himalayas
- Charisma K. Lepcha (North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong): Christianity and the Lepchas of Kalimpong: The Changing Dynamics of a Tribal Society
- Todd Lewis (College of the Holy Cross): Patrons, Middlemen, Artisans: The Role of Newar Merchants in the 19th and 20th Century Himalayan Buddhist History
- Emma Martin (National Museums Liverpool): Charles Bell and his Kalimpong Networks
- Natalia Mikhaylova, Pavel Grokhovsky (Saint-Petersburg State University): The Tibet Mirror as an Integral Product of Eastern Himalaya Transcultural Exchange and a New Impetus in Tibetan Literary Work

- Kei Nagaoka (Kyoto University): Transcultural Practices of Medicine and Social Relationship in Tawang, Northeast India
- Anna Sawerthal (Tibet University, Lhasa): The Melong Newspaper: Media Production in a Transcultural Context
- Samuel Thévoz (University of Lausanne): On the Threshold of Tibet: Alexandra David-Néel and the British Dream of the "Land Beyond"
- Markus Viehbeck (University of Heidelberg): Conceptualizing Transcultural Encounters: Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone"

**Preliminary abstracts:**

**Isrun Engelhardt: A Dedicated Initiator of Cultural Exchange: Tharchin's Innovative Communication of Knowledge between Tibetan and Western worlds**

**Tina Harris (University of Amsterdam): The Yak's Tail: A Window onto Contemporary Changes in Trade in the Himalayas**

In nearly every issue of the twentieth-century Tibetan-language newspaper, the *Tibet Mirror* (*yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*), there are price listings for items such as white yaks' tails, pig hair bristles, and gold, as well as services such as mule caravan transport between Kalimpong and Lhasa. These lists of commodities and their fluctuating costs can be seen as indexes of the diversity of goods and values in Himalayan trade during the mid-twentieth century.

This paper is based on several ethnographic and historical "snapshots" of the paths of exchange of one of these commodities: the yak tail; through these snapshots, it examines transformations in trade and transport along the borderlands of China and India during two different but significant periods of political and economic change: the late 1950s and the early 2000s. For years, Tibetans, Marwaris, Newars, and numerous other groups have been involved in the selling, transporting, and brokering of goods in the dynamic trading landscape between Lhasa and Kalimpong. Today, this Himalayan region remains crucial for trade purposes, as evidenced by ambitious state infrastructural plans such as the construction of roads and opening of mountain passes along the borders of Tibet, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nepal.

This paper demonstrates how yak tails have remained in circulation as a trade item - but in considerably different forms and for very different purposes - and how such a micro-analysis can be used as a window onto the area's rapidly changing economic and political geography.

**Charisma K. Lepcha (North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong): Christianity and the Lepchas of Kalimpong: The Changing Dynamics of a Tribal Society**

“When a Lepcha becomes a Christian, he becomes a *saab*.” This is an oft-repeated phrase expressing the change in attitude, lifestyle and identity of a Lepcha as he accepts the newfound religion.

Christianity was introduced in Kalimpong following the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1864-65 as this paper seeks to trace the arrival, advent and acceptance of Christianity in Kalimpong among the native Lepchas. It shall look into the socio-cultural changes that took place in Lepcha society after the acceptance of the new religion. It has been argued that Christianity promoted “cultural dynamism” among Lepchas but Christianity also divorced them from many traditional practices. This paper will examine the cultural changes that took place since the acceptance of Christianity and the formation of a Christian Lepcha identity. It will then discuss what it means to be a Lepcha and a Christian or both; and whether the religious identity precedes the ethnic identity vis-à-vis the Christian Lepcha vs. the Lepcha Christian.

**Todd Lewis (College of the Holy Cross): Patrons, Middlemen, Artisans: The Role of Newar Merchants in the 19th and 20th Century Himalayan Buddhist History**

Among the changes wrought by the Younghusband incursion into Tibet (1904) was the opening of a more direct and protected trade route through Sikkim to reach Lhasa. For Newar merchant houses in Kathmandu that had already for centuries been working as middlemen traders bringing goods from India and Nepal to major cities in Tibet from Kathmandu, this dramatic change fundamentally altered their position most favorably. It allowed them scale up their imports to Calcutta to greatly and transport goods to central Tibet incurring less cost and so greater profits. Their numbers also increased in Lhasa and Shigatse, as families amassed new fortunes through their favorable connections to leading political and religious leaders. As devout Buddhists and merit-making patrons, some Newars took ordination as Tibetan monks, several of whom returned to the Kathmandu Valley to found their own *gompas*. More typical were merchants who invested their mercantile wealth in acts of merit-making across the region.

Drawing especially on recently discovered records from one of the most famous Newar traders, “Dhamma Sau [Tuladhar]”, including hundreds of letters and account ledgers, this paper will examine how Newar patronage was spent not only in the Kathmandu Valley, but also in central Tibet, Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Bhutan. It will also highlight case studies in this and other families’ roles in sponsoring

and supporting prominent lamas from central Tibet who visited Nepal to give teachings and alter the landscape of Newar Buddhist religious history.

### **Emma Martin (National Museums Liverpool): Charles Bell and his Kalimpong Networks**

Charles Bell (Political Officer for Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet 1908-18) came to Kalimpong in 1901, but having spent ten years working on the Indian plains, he came to this North-eastern frontier town as a complete Tibet novice. Twenty years later Bell would find himself riding into Lhasa for the first and only time to meet his old friend the thirteenth Dalai Lama, this final mission would complete what Bell saw as him becoming, 'in large measure Tibetanised' (Bell 1946: 29).

How did Bell become, 'Tibetanised'? Bell is credited with being one of the most important and the most successful colonial officers to have worked on the Himalayan frontiers, but his success was not gained by chance. His success and his understanding of Tibet, its culture, its people and its protocols can be attributed to a small network of Tibetan and Sikkim men who became Bell's trusted advisers and confidants. The on-going relationships that developed between Bell and these men began in Kalimpong, a contact zone that would see connections develop between Scottish missionaries, Indian photographers, Tibetan aristocrats and British colonial officers. Using previously unpublished photographs and family archives, archival research undertaken in the UK and India and fieldwork notes from visits to Kalimpong this paper will shed light on this network of men, their place in Tibetan, Sikkim and Kalimpong society and how they collectively enabled Bell to become 'Tibetanised'.

### **Natalia Mikhaylova, Pavel Grokhovsky (Saint-Petersburg State University): The Tibet Mirror as an Integral Product of Eastern Himalaya Transcultural Exchange and a New Impetus in Tibetan Literary Work**

Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long (literally "The Mirror of News From Various Countries" or, as it was called by its editor, "The Tibet Mirror") is one of the first periodicals in the Tibetan language (apart from the Moravian missionaries' publications in Ladakh and Kyelang, the Manchu amban Lian Yu's newspaper in Tibet and the Panchen Lama IX Tubten Chokyi Nyima's newspaper).

The Tibet Mirror was published in Kalimpong, West Bengal, India, during 38 years (1925-1963) by the outstanding Tibetan religious and public leader Dorje Tharchin, who has played an important role in the political and cultural history of Tibet and has greatly contributed to the development and modernization of his native land and people. Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long was an interesting example of an advanced transcultural exchange that was taking place on the Tibetan-Indian border. Dorje Tharchin himself, the editor of the newspaper - a Tibetan by origin, an Indian citizen by residence and a

Christian by faith - could be called a true transcultural offspring of this Eastern Himalaya border region with an amazing mixture of people of different nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds. Inspired by the liberal British press and willing to share both international and local news as well as the information about the latest technological innovations with his compatriots, Dorje Tharchin attempted to change the conventional Tibetan world outlook within Tibet and at the same time to preserve the Tibetan culture in this border area by launching the publication of a first ever multi-functional Tibetan periodical issued by a Tibetan editor.

Yul phyogs so so'i gсар 'gyur me long was a major media channel between Tibet and the rest of the world and, therefore, enjoyed a high demand among the Tibetans, who had almost no other means to acquire any information about things happening outside their country. Besides, the newspaper was of interest to the Chinese authorities and was welcomed by the British officials in India, who were concerned with promotion of the Tibetan-British cooperation and occasionally provided a financial support to the edition of the periodical. It goes without saying that the influence of the Tibet Mirror extended far beyond its informative and educational purview, it was an elaborate lever tool for the incorporation of a traditional Tibetan society into the modern world and which, alongside with that, forwarded development of the modern Tibetan social thought and establishment of new agencies within Tibet.

Among the variety of possible approaches towards the Tibet Mirror this paper aims to explore the periodical from the perspective of its input on the Tibetan literary activity. While literature, being an inseparable part of culture, bears the reflection of historical events as well as the process of society evolution itself, Yul phyogs so so'i gсар 'gyur me long not only presents the first example of the Tibetan mass media, but contains first pieces of modern Tibetan writing which determined the future development of new Tibetan literary genres and contributed to the introduction of modern political and economical terminology and new grammatical and lexical features in the Tibetan language.

### **Kei Nagaoka (Kyoto University): Transcultural Practices of Medicine and Social Relationship in Tawang, Northeast India**

In this paper, I discuss the local context of transcultural encounters through an exploration of medicine in the everyday life of Tawang area in the Eastern Himalayas. The paper is based on three months of fieldwork I conducted between 2009 and 2012 in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh of Northeast India.

There are mainly four professional practices of medicine in Tawang which are (1) Tibetan medicine (2) biomedicine (or Western medicine but Tawang people call it “Indian medicine”) (3) treatments based on Buddhism (monks and healers who cure body problems by breathing out powerful

mantra and so on) (4) shamanism. These medical practices came from outside such as Tibet, India and the West. The medical plurality was gradually formed through historical processes which included change from society based on Bon religion to that on Buddhism. Tawang's geographical location changed from "nearest transit" of trade for Tibet to "marginal frontier" after the McMahon line drawn by British India in 1914, and furthermore to "defense wall" for the Indian government after the Chinese invasion of and withdrawal from Tawang in 1962.

Nowadays Tawang people use not only different medical care depending on the situation when they get sick but also use medical goods as important mediators which adjust social relationship between humans and non-humans, persons and relatives, persons and healers. Deriving insights from McKim Marriott's argument on biomorality (that we cannot separate meaning from materiality) and Bruno Latour's argument on purification and hybridization, I focus on the medical goods such as pills, liquids and ointments and will explore people's transcultural medical practices in their encounters with Tibetan, Indian and Western cultures.

Literature:

Latour, Bruno.1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Marriott, McKim.1976. Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism. In *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, edited by Bruce Kapferer. Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

### **Anna Sawerthal (Tibet University, Lhasa): The Melong Newspaper: Media Production in a Transcultural Context**

From 1925 to 1963, in Kalimpong a newspaper was published monthly. The *yul phyogs so so'I gsar 'gyur me long*, or in short Melong, as it was called, was founded by Babu Tharchin, an ethnic Tibetan from the border region of Northern India. He grew up under the guidance of Christian missionaries, had a fascination for Western culture, and continually studied his Tibetan roots. Inspired by his educators of the Moravian mission in Ladakh, he started to publish his own newspaper in Kalimpong while he was working at the Scottish mission there. With the newspaper running for more than 30 years, Tharchin is the founder of the first long-term newspaper in the Tibetan language. This exceptional newspaper was first financed through the mission, later on by the British and after WWII by Tharchin himself with occasional support from the Tibetan government. Containing broad content, e.g. World news, Local news, Tibetan folk tales, Buddhist sayings, Christian Bible extracts etc., the Melong can be seen as a reflection of the

highly heterogeneous environment in which it was published. Bearing references to various cultural backgrounds, with its editor Tharchin at the interface of European-Western culture and Tibetan culture it functions as a prime example for a transcultural product, reflecting transcultural processes in Kalimpong, and with Tharchin's Tibet Mirror Press house as a local meeting point also shaping them.

The Melong therefore presents excellent material to test new concepts like transculturality by merging them with classical instruments of the social sciences. Media content analysis has often been used to either quantitatively or qualitatively describe or evaluate media content. With the two hypotheses in mind, i.e. 1) Tharchin acting as a cultural broker and 1) the Melong being a transcultural publication, a media content analysis, designed according to these hypotheses, can trace and detect transcultural processes. Here, I would like to present different possible designs for such an analysis.

### **Samuel Thévoz (University of Lausanne): On the Threshold of Tibet: Alexandra David-Néel and the British Dream of the "Land Beyond"**

After Francis Younghusband led the infamous Frontier Commission to Lhasa in 1904, regulations between the British Rāj of India and Tibet generated what Charles Sherring (1906) called a “British borderland.” They gave rise to new central posts for the British officials — the so-called “Frontier cadre” (MCKAY 1997) — on the Eastern border between India and Tibet. Tibet consequently became a strongly restricted area.

Tibetan geography and cultures had just started to be discovered in the 1890s by Western explorers. While British and French explorers alike described the country in terms of “sacred landscape,” their underlying motivation to do so was distinct. In the context of the Great Game, British travelers considered Tibet as a “buffer state” beyond the British Rāj. The sacred character ascribed to Tibet amounted, in their view, to a protective power over the imperial territory. In contrast, the French travelers insisted either on the geographical (GRENARD 1904) or on the cultural (BACOT 1912) dimension of Tibetan landscape.

At the crossroad of these two British and French traditions, the well known adventurer Alexandra David-Néel, prior to her incursions beyond the border into Tibet proper, dwelled from 1912 to 1915 among the communities of British officials settled on the slopes of Sikkim. Her travel diary reveals the ambiguous and somewhat distant look she threw on the way her European fellows — among which the aforementioned — envisioned the “land beyond.” She herself proceeds to offer the reader — her husband — a synthesis of previous representations of Tibet, in which she distinguishes the “imagined Tibet” from the “real Tibet.”

In this paper, I will consider this account from David-Néel's diary from the perspective of a global history of representations of Tibet. I will highlight, in particular, two constitutive sources for her discussion: on the one hand, the various views on Tibet propounded by French explorers and scholars, British officials in India, and Western Theosophists. On the other hand, her own encounters with Tibetan monks and dignitaries in Gangtok, Kalimpong or Lachen monastery, encounters which one has to relate to her own spiritual quest and conception of Buddhism. As such, David-Néel's diary testifies, in the perspective of a cultural history, to a heterogeneous set of representations of Tibet in the first decades of the 20th century. I will then analyze the way she makes these representations her own and argue that she gives an unexpected twist to the categories of "imagined Tibet" and "real Tibet" she inherited from her predecessors. In this perspective, I will also show that she already develops in this text — before she actually entered Tibet — a set of images representative of the "magical Tibet" (LENOIR 1999) better known to us from her later travel narratives (*My Journey to Lhasa*, 1927; *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, 1929).

**Markus Viehbeck (University of Heidelberg): Conceptualizing Transcultural Encounters: Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone"**

Located in the northern hills of present day West Bengal the town of Kalimpong figured as a *contact zone* of singular importance between the Tibetan world and "Western" modernity in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the intensification of trade in the wake of the Younghusband invasion in 1904, Kalimpong gained economical importance as the major hub for the exchange of Tibetan and Western commodities, in particular, Tibetan wool, which was exported from Lhasa to Calcutta via Kalimpong. Economic development was accompanied by population growth: the historical mixture of various ethnic groups – Bhutias, Lepchas, Nepalis, and Bengalis – was enriched by an influx of traders from the neighboring countries and the settlement of British Indian colonial officers, Christian missionaries, Tibetan dignitaries etc. Embedded in the events of global histories, these agents met within a fundamentally imbalanced power situation: a politically weak Tibetan government together with a society that was – at least by some – perceived as outdated was set under pressure by its neighbors China, Russia and British India, and by the modern world these powers represented. As Kalimpong was however situated at the margins of the sphere of influence of the respective governments, local agencies are of particular importance for the ways this overarching asymmetry has been used.

What then is the significance of these asymmetries "on the ground"? How do they affect concrete encounters, how are they countered or circumvented, when do they become meaningless?

In my talk, I would like to address these questions by exploring the notion of a "contact zone," a term that has been coined and employed by Mary Louise Pratt (Pratt 1991 & 1992) for conditions when formerly separated agents and forms of knowledge enter the same space, due to colonial expansion, trade, long-distance media etc. As Pratt highlighted, asymmetrical relations are a typical feature of a contact zone. This, however, does not mean that all interactions are exclusively governed by the side that is perceived as more powerful in general. Eschewing a diffusionist understanding of these relations – a dominant culture subjugating and imparting knowledge on the weak and passive other – she introduced the term "transculturation" (coined by Fernando Ortiz), thereby ascribing power and agency to all parties within a transcultural process.

By critically applying these conceptual instruments to concrete encounters in Kalimpong in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I aspire to not only paint a nuanced picture of these events, but also to contribute to a more general discussion on theoretical issues in the field of transcultural studies.

#### Literature:

Pratt, Mary Louise 1991. "Arts of the Contact Zone", *Profession* 91 (1991): 33–40

Pratt, Mary Louise 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge