

THE JOURNAL
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
BUDDHIST STUDIES

93-2/14,2



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Roger Jackson
Dept. of Religion
Carleton College
Northfield, MN 55057
USA

EDITORS

Peter N. Gregory
University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA

Alexander W. Macdonald
Université de Paris X
Nanterre, France

Steven Collins
University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois, USA

Ernst Steinkellner
University of Vienna
Wien, Austria

Jikidō Takasaki
University of Tokyo
Tokyo, Japan

Robert Thurman
Columbia University
New York, New York, USA

Volume 14

1991

Number 2

CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

1. Reflections on the Maheśvara Subjugation Myth: Indic Materials, Sa-skyapa Apologetics, and the Birth of Heruka, *by Ronald M. Davidson* 197
2. A Newar Buddhist Liturgy: Śrāvakayānist Ritual in Kwā Bāhāḥ, Lalitpur, Nepal, *by D. N. Gellner* 236
3. Chinese Reliquary Inscriptions and the San-chieh-chao, *by Jamie Hubbard* 253
4. An Old Inscription from Amarāvātī and the Cult of the Local Monastic Dead in Indian Buddhist Monasteries, *by Gregory Schopen* 281

II. BOOK REVIEWS

1. *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka*, *by John Clifford Holt* (Vijitha Rajapakse) 331
2. *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Religion*, *by Sherry Ortner* (Alexander W. Macdonald) 341
3. *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies*, *by Gadjin M. Nagao* (Paul J. Griffiths) 345

- LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS 349

inner self-culture which emphasizes meditation. For it sits at the very heart of Theravāda spirituality, and when engaged in seriously, it has salutary results, both on the individual and society. Besides, it is on the whole more vital to traditional Buddhist practice in Sri Lanka than the veneration of deities (George D. Bond's recent investigations into the place of meditation in the revival of Buddhism there earlier this century brings to the fore several instructive considerations on this score; see *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation, Response*, Columbia, S. C., 1988, chap. 4, 5, 6).

Clearly, then, there is room to argue against many of the positions taken in *Buddha in the Crown*: its core interpretations in particular are sometimes open to dispute, and may fairly be countered with other accountings. Still, the new contribution to the study of religious change in Sri Lanka presented in this book fully merits attentive reading. Given its overall focus—Mahāyānism in Sri Lanka's Theravāda setting, a hitherto insufficiently examined subject—it is a source of much factual information. And even those who cannot quite agree with them are likely to find the theoretical approaches developed and applied here often both distinctive and thought-provoking.

Vijitha Rajapakse

High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism, by Sherry B. Ortner. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. pp. xxi + 245. 12 illustrations and 3 maps. Cloth: \$35. Paper: \$12.95.

Sherry Ortner knows the Sherpa area of Nepal well. She spent seventeen months there on general field-work in 1966–68; and in 1976 she helped to make a film in the area. In 1978, she published the book for which she is best known: *Sherpas Through Their Rituals* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press). The book reviewed here is the result of field-work carried out again by the author between January and June, 1979. It is based mainly on information collected orally in the field during that period. However, considerable use has also been made by S. B. O. of M. Oppitz, *Geschichte und Sozialordnung der Sherpa* (Innsbruck-München, 1968), translated by a nameless student (p. 231), and of the *Shar-pa'i chos-byung sngon-med tshangs-pa'i dbyu-gu* (Junbesi-Nanterre, 1971), translated into English for her by P. Pranke and C. Huntington (p. 234). Seemingly, Sherry Ortner does not read Tibetan; and she does not read Nepali (p. 207).

As is well known, the Sherpas are a small, ethnically Tibetan, group who live close to Mt. Everest in three districts of north-eastern Hindu Nepal (Khumbu, Pharak and Solu). Today, they live at altitudes varying between 8,500 and 14,000 feet. They combine agriculture (wheat and potatoes) with herding (yaks, cross-breeds and cows) and trans-frontier and local trade (salt, animals, etc.). Their villages are small and their homesteads sometimes isolated. They are organised in patrilineal clans which regulate clan-exogamous marriage. Property in herds, houses and land is privately owned. Since 1950, the boom in "trekking" and the proliferation of foreign mountaineering expeditions have opened up, to all ranks of Sherpa society, possibilities of non-traditional employment and the rapid earning of large sums in cash. The Sherpas practice Mahāyāna Buddhism and they are thought to have started migrating from Khams (Eastern Tibet) towards their present habitat in the 15th or 16th centuries C.E. Solid information concerning the religious habits and customs of the Sherpas prior to their arrival in Khumbu is scant: like many other Central and Southern Tibetan groups, they lay claim, in their writings, to prestigious ancestors in the North-East.

The central problem examined in this book is how, why, where, and by whom Sherpa monasteries were founded. The dates of the principal foundations were already known locally: the *dgon-pa* at Tengboche, Chiwong and Thami with which this volume is mainly concerned, all were founded within the past seventy or eighty years. Sherry Ortner has much that is new and interesting to tell us about the social motivations and mechanisms behind these foundations. The Sherpas who first settled in Khumbu were few in number, and the accumulation of capital sufficient to meet the cost of building large and fairly complex religious edifices took time. During that time, individuals became rich in widely differing ways, as tax-collectors, as political leaders, as traders, as labour-contractors in Darjeeling, etc. Some of this was already known through the works of Ch. von Furer-Haimendorf and others. The novelty of S. B. O.'s approach is that she draws attention to a "cultural schema" which, according to her, characterised Sherpa society during the years in question. She writes: "The tales begin with a political or fraternal rivalry, or both. The protagonists struggle back and forth, often quite violently, and the rival appears to gain the upper hand. The hero then departs for remote places and acquires a powerful protector. He returns to the conflict, and with the aid of his protector, defeats the rival. He acquires the rival's subjects. The rival is humiliated and leaves the area permanently. The hero founds a temple, an act of great virtue" (p. 71). The author emphasizes "the extraordinary cul-

tural generality of this story line" without, however, adducing much material to substantiate her claim. Indeed, throughout the book, cultural, social, economic and religious comparisons with other Tibetan local cultures in the Himalayas (Limi, Mugu, Dolpo, Mustang, Walung, etc.) are absent. Even Tibet as a conditioning cultural presence is only dimly perceived. Most of the book is in fact concerned with a threesome played out among "the Sherpas," the Raj in British India and the Gorkha Raj in Kathmandu. S. B. O. is convinced that the founding of "celibate monasteries" marked "the transformation of Sherpa religion" (p. 126). I am doubtful about this: it seems to me that the Sherpas were Buddhists before and after such events: society was not changed.

The book under review also aims to contribute to discussions among Western academic authorities concerning what has come to be known as the Theory of Practice (see, especially, pp. 11–18, 193–202). I do not feel qualified to assess the importance of the contribution this book makes to such debates. So, as I have personal knowledge of the Sherpa area, I shall focus my remarks on what might be called the celibacy issue. Is a non-celibate monastery a monastery? Let us start with the buildings. C. Jest, for instance, in his *Monuments of North Nepal* (Paris, UNESCO, 1981), pp. 31–32, divided the types of buildings he had studied into monastery (*dgon-pa*), temple (*lha-khang*), chapel (*bla-brang*), meeting house (*mi-mtshogs-pa*) and hermitage (*mtsham-khang*); and he stuck to this classification throughout. Whatever its merits or demerits, it corresponds to Tibetan and local usage. S. B. O. cares for none of this and jumps from one English word to another in her attempts to render local expressions. On p. 24 she writes: "The early Sherpa lamas are shown . . . founding *gompa*, which I will translate in the present context as "chapels." On p. 48: "Even if the early temples were not separate monasteries. . . ." On p. 68: "He erected a *gompa* (that is, Zhung temple) . . ." and on p. 209, note 21: "The Sherpas use *gonda* and *gompa* interchangeably for any religious temples." The perplexity thus induced in the reader's mind will be increased by the appearance of the term *labstang*, which the Glossary, p. 222, assures us derives from Tib. *bslab-tshang*, "a celibate monastery." Whatever this latter expression may mean—*slob-pa* means "to learn" and *slob-grva* is "a school"—it cannot mean "a celibate monastery." One wonders whether *grva-tshang*, "dwelling for novices," is not "behind" S. B. O.'s *labstang*; see Das, *Dictionary*, q.v., p. 1020 and Jäschke, *Dictionary*, q.v., p. 75. To my mind, when monasteries are considered as institutions, account should be taken, by an anthropologist, of the vows pronounced by their inmates. Of these, we learn next to nothing from S. B. O. Is the

supreme aim of a Rnying-ma-pa-society to have, in its midst, communities of celibate monks? Again, I am very doubtful about this. Yet, almost unwittingly, Sherry Ortner seems to me to have put a finger on an aspect of Tibetan society which, to date, has been little studied by Western Tibetologists. Undoubtedly, there were or are celibate communities in Tibet, Bhutan, etc. Such communities were and are considered by local communities as super-natural-power-houses. Nevertheless, if a village household calls a monk to do a ritual in a case of extreme difficulty, it will, in my experience, summon a 'Brug-pa kun-legs type of individual rather than a chaste monk from one of the great Lha-sa monasteries. Buddhism has never got rid of magic. S. B. O.'s view of Buddhism seems to me to be conditioned by American Pruitanism—in religion, sexless is best—and by the literature in Western languages authored by those in contact with Dge-lugs-pa. May I state quite simply that I admire this book as Anthropology? I respect it less as Tibetology. In Sherpa-land I knew very well a lama who “fell” for a woman. No one, in the local community, criticised his sexual activities. Everyone considered the fact that he had broken his vows as despicable. Homosexual relationships provoke less reprobation in local society. It has always seemed to me that Tibetans are much less worried than Westerners are by who has sexual relations with whom: and this sometimes makes the anthropological study of Tibetan kinship difficult.

Post-script:

Sherry Ortner starts her book by paying homage to her field-assistant Nyima Chotar, who died in 1982. While writing this review, I received the sad news that Sangs rgyas bstan-'jin had died on 12 July, 1990. For a partial view of his life, see “The autobiography of a 20th century Rnying-ma-pa lama” in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 4/2, 1981, p. 63–75. Before he died, he had completed a supplement to the *Shar-pa'i chos byung* which deals mainly with Sherpa marriage rituals. This, along with the Sherpa-Tibetan Phrase-Book and Word-list we had compiled, has been made over to our German colleagues F.-K. Ehrhard and C. Cüppers of the Nepal Research Centre at New Bhaneswar: and it is hoped that some of these materials will be published in the not too distant future. Sangs-rgyas bstan 'jin was a remarkable scholar; and several other Westerners beside myself have benefited greatly from his learning and teaching.

Alexander W. Macdonald