

THE JOURNAL
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
BUDDHIST STUDIES

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Volume 13

1990

Number 1

CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

1. Tibetan Materials in the Asia Rare Book Collection of the Library of Congress *by John B. Buescher* 1
2. The Religious Standing of Burmese Buddhist Nuns (*thilá-shin*): The Ten Precepts and Religious Respect Words *by Hiroko Kawanami* 17
3. A Possible Citation of Candragomin's Lost **Kayatrayavatara by Peter Skilling* 41
4. Meditation and Cosmology: The Physical Basis of the Concentrations and Formless Absorptions According to dGe-lugs Tibetan Presentations *by Leah Zahler* 53

II. CONFERENCE REPORT

1. "Buddhist Soteriology: The *Marga* and Other Approaches to Liberation": A Conference Report *by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello* 79

III. REVIEWS

1. *Mahamudra: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, by Tashi Namgyal [tr. Lobsang Lhalungpa] (Matthew Kapstein) 101
2. *Les Tamang du Népal: Usages et religion, religion de l'usage*, by Brigitte Steinmann (David Holmberg) 114

IV. NOTES AND NEWS

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Notice of <i>Studies in Central and East Asian Religions</i>
(Per Kvaerne) | 117 |
|--|-----|

- | | |
|----------------------|-----|
| LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS | 119 |
|----------------------|-----|

15. *Gdams nag mdzod* (Delhi: N. Lungtok and N. Gyaltsan, 1971) vol. XII, plates 736–7.

16. *Sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa rin po che ji ltar gnas gyur dus kyi nges pa rjes su dran pa bskyed pa legs bshad sa bon tsam smos pa nyung ngu don gsal rin po che'i sgron me*, in *The Collected Works (Gsun 'bum) of Kah-thog Rig-'dzin chen-po Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu* (Dalhousie, H. P., 1977), vol. IV, plates 103–161. Plates 157–8 are those that concern us here.

17. Lokesh Chandra, ed., *Dpag-bsam-ljon-bzañ, part III* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1959). The data relevant here will be found on pp. 55–68.

18. *The Collected Works of Sman-sdon Mtshams-pa Rin-po-che Karma-nes-don-bstan-rgyas* (Bir, H.P.: D. Tsondu Senghe, 1976), plate 331. This work was written in 1897.

Les Tamang du Népal: Usages et religion, religion de l'usage

by Brigitte Steinmann

Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1987. 310 pp., photographs, maps, index, references, glossaries, appendix. 159 francs (paper).

Les Tamang du Népal: Usages et religion, religion de l'usage is focused on the customary practices of everyday life among a group of eastern Tamang, the largest Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic group of Nepal. Although Tamang have historically been in communication with greater Tibetan Buddhist culture, Brigitte Steinmann avoids a common inclination in studies of religion in the Himalayas to reconstruct cultures, like that of the Tamang, as pale or degraded expressions of putatively purer forms, forms generally abstracted from textual sources. She grounds her study in the immediate world of village Tamang whom she sees as “steeped in a magico-religious ambiance” (227) and reconstructs their religious world in local idiom. She provides the most detailed ethnographic accounting of everyday life we have of an eastern Tamang community, and the book is a major contribution to our knowledge of Tamang, Nepal, and Tibet. Each chapter contains a wealth of finely grained and fascinating ethnography. We learn of everything from the details of house construction and notions of space to Tamang theories of souls and shamanic cures. This detail is not only intriguing in its own right; it is of extensive comparative interest to other specialists of Nepal and Tibet.

Her primary concern is to situate Tamang ritual practices and religious consciousness in the everyday exigencies of a harsh life in the midhills of the Himalayas. For Steinmann, villagers are tied inex-

trically to a world of things that must be produced and transformed and it is in relation to these things and their customary usage that ritual life must be understood. Religiosity, at least in what she sees as a primary level, is not defined by ethical precepts derived from high religion but by rules or taboos related to the world of things in which villagers are inextricably enveloped. She writes, for instance, that "the interdictions against women to plow, to kill animals, the recommendations to avoid cremation grounds and the altar of clan gods, the prescription to serve nourishment with the right hand, are ascribable to [an] ensemble of non-written rules which condense consciousness in a certain type of religiosity. It is not defined by the observance of grand ethical codes, but by an ensemble of taboos and of mechanisms which have their profound reasons, but which the community itself most of the time ignores" (153). Tied to this orientation is an attempt on Steinmann's part to delineate the particular of Tamang culture. She is concerned with the distinctiveness of Tamang and how this distinctiveness is related ultimately to the specificity of their material and historical circumstances. The book proceeds on two levels. First of all, it is a detailed ethnography of Tamang practices and secondly, a theoretical argument about levels of religiosity an argument developed in direct reference to these practices.

The first of three sections of the book is devoted to clinical descriptions of what Tamang eat and who eats what, how they clothe themselves, how they construct and inhabit their dwellings, how they order, use, and furnish space within the house, how they light and heat their dwellings, how they cleanse and purify objects and persons, and how they transport things. She concludes the first section with an overview of local economy, including the play of money. Each of the chapters of the first part includes a detailed table of the materials and the methods of local production.

The second section deals with what she calls "the magico-religious" dimensions of Tamang practice. Here the major emphasis is on rituals of the life cycle, collective rituals related to social structure, and the production and manipulation of ritual objects. She provides detailed accountings of specific rituals and the theories on which they are based. In the process she introduces us to the array of extrahuman beings who inhabit the local cosmos, theories of souls and bodies, and the main specialists of the local field of practice: Buddhist *lama*, *bombo* (shaman), *tamba* and *dhami*, *loban lama*, and *labon*.

The third section begins with an overview of the roles and attributes of these specialists and moves into a focused discussion of the

tamba, a specialist who appears to be unique to the eastern Tamang. The *tamba* is simultaneously an expert in oral recitations, a ritualist, a village headman, and a sage. The *tamba* occupies a central position in Steinmann's study because he articulates what she distinguishes as a religion of the "earth" and a religion of the "sky." The former responds to an order of worldly things and the latter to the practices of Buddhist lamas and bombos. In reference to these specialists and a primary level of system of taboos and precautions, Steinmann identifies her levels of religiosity. The *tamba* takes form in Steinmann's scheme as a master of ceremonies who generates and perpetuates a specifically Tamang "rationalization" of practice, a construction that is meaningful to villagers in their immediate experience of the world. "Our *tamba* ... occupies a stable position rooted in the earth of religion. Nevertheless, and without having much to exercise from a theological point of view, he edges easily in the milieux which rule the meteorology of the sky of religion" (23). The *tamba*, for Steinmann, is less a practitioner than a sage who takes what is given and confers it with meaning. In support of this explanation, Steinmann provides us with the translation of many of the chants of the *tamba*, many of which are recited on ritual occasions. Eastern Tamang, more so than other sectors of Tamang, however, have for the last few decades been increasingly circulating outside of the closed domains of village subsistence and the *tamba*, whose validity is linked to this domain, is under assault. The traditions for which he speaks are in demise and subject to the transformations motivated by the new experiences of those who move beyond the confines of the village. Tamang in the Timal area where Steinmann worked have in particular been engaged as porters in an external and cosmopolitan world of tourism that transforms their relation to and understanding of their traditions. The book is framed in this overall context of change. Her insights into these transformations are especially important because the conversion of Tamang of Timal into a Nepalese proletariat presages changes now occurring throughout the Tamang world in Nepal.

Steinmann has provided us not only with a precise ethnography true to local realities and a theoretical argument about the linkage of "usage" to "religion" but a work of significant comparative value. Her marvelous control over the practices of a local Tamang group is woven into a dialogue with greater Tibetan traditions and the Tibetological study of those traditions. Her engaging portrayal of local elaborations of Buddhism and shamanism will speak to anyone interested in the Himalayas and with the religious practices and oral traditions found there.

David Holmberg