

Winter School ITI HiSAAR

24-25-26 Novembre 2021

Salle de Conférence MISHA



Histoire, sociologie, archéologie
et anthropologie des religions | HiSAAR

Les Instituts thématiques interdisciplinaires

de l'Université de Strasbourg

et Inserm

dans le cadre de l'Initiative d'excellence

Tibetanness outside Tibet



©Salomé DEBOOS

Organisatrices : S. DEBOOS, N. SCHNEIDER et C. BRANDT



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), as well as regions today administered by 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.

A first workshop, which took place 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. In the final discussion, we concluded that Tibetanness is nowadays evoked in various ways by Tibetic speaking communities either to emphasise distinctiveness from the majority (non-Tibetic) population in order to gain political recognition or to reject it when perceived as a threat to cultural or geopolitical sovereignty.

This follow-up winter school proposes to continue the dialogue by exploring in particular how religious and political identity building strategies are surrounding and sometimes interwoven with affirmations of Tibetanness.

This winter school is part of the global scholar program *History, Sociology, Archeology and Anthropology of Religion*, which studies, inter alia, "Religious re-structuring: Internal transformations and external interactions". It is part of the third axis of this program and focuses precisely on religion and politics. While "religion" and "politics" are often perceived as two antagonistic forces, this is not the case for Tibetan areas (the Plateau and the so-called greater Tibet), where they were always combined in one way or another. However, this is less the case for the peripheral areas where Buddhism is not practiced by the majority of the population. The interdisciplinary approach may give some trends to a better understanding how religious systems, here mainly Buddhism, but not only (eg Islam in Baltistan or in Surru Valley) create, structure, and restructure social, political, ideological, doctrinal, and even economical organisation of communities and societies.

We thus invite scholars of different disciplines studying Tibetic speaking groups with various religious affiliations in present-day Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, and focussing on identity (trans)formation processes among these groups, to address the following questions: Is there a common political goal among the different ethnic groups in this part of the Himalayas? What kind of strategies are ethnic groups using in order to gain more recognition especially political? How do geopolitical realities, aspects and endeavors challenge identity building around Tibetanness? Is there a perpetuation of the Tibetan cultural and religious chauvinism in the Himalayan region? How is the nexus between religion and politics in contemporary Tibetic speaking communities shaped by the state they live in?

If the current pandemic situation allows, we will have our winter school at the University of Strasbourg. Otherwise, it will be conducted online. We will cover travelling and accommodation expenses.

Organisers: Prof. Dr. Salomé Deboos (SAGE CNRS UMR 7363, University of Strasbourg), Prof. Dr. Nicola Schneider (Department of South Asia and Himalaya, INALCO), Jun.-Prof. Dr. Carmen Brandt (Department of South Asian Studies, University of Bonn).

Histoire, sociologie, archéologie
et anthropologie des religions | HiSAAR
Les instituts thématiques interdisciplinaires
de l'Université de Strasbourg
dans le cadre de l'Initiative d'excellence



Wednesday, the 24th of November 2021

OPENING SESSION

14h – 14h30: Welcome address

Organisers of the winter-school.

14h30 – 15h15: Religion – Politic – Identity building process, concepts to be discussed.

Dr.HDR Salomé Deboos: social anthropology, Institute of Ethnology, Université de Strasbourg, SAGE (UMR 7363)

Les concepts de “politique”, “religion” et “d’identité” sont souvent articulés comme points nodaux de compréhension d’une communauté ou d’un groupe social. Dans le cadre de cette intervention, je reviendrai sur la manière dont l’humain, loin d’être soustrait aux liens qu’il tisse tout au cours de sa vie, est dans le même temps contenu et contenant des représentations du politique et du fait religieux qu’il véhicule dans ses interactions. Cette présentation introductive ne prétend aucunement à l’exhaustivité mais bien au contraire, tente de poser quelques jalons pour une réflexion qui se développera au cours des trois journées de cette école d’hiver.

15h15 – 15h30: Discussion



15h30 – 15h45: coffee break



15h45 – 16h30: Little Tibet’: Positioning Ladakh as a Homeland for Tibetan Buddhism in India

Dr. Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg, Co-director, Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, University of Copenhagen

With the Chinese invasion in Tibet, exile-Tibetan Buddhist leaders have found new bases for their monastic endeavors in the Himalayan regions of India and Nepal. This paper highlights how Ladakh has become one such homeland for Tibetan-led Buddhism in India. While previously an independent kingdom, Ladakh has been coined “Little Tibet” due to its close geographical, political, cultural and religious association with the central Tibetan empire. The association of Ladakh with Tibet, while having been advantageous for Ladakhis, not least economic, has led to a misrecognition of Ladakh as indistinct from Tibet and subsidiary to the religious authority of Tibetan Buddhist leaders. When conflating Ladakh with Tibet, whether advertently or inadvertently, Ladakhis disappear into a ‘Tibetan cultural sphere’, thus subsumed into power relations that Ladakhis have historically struggled against. Through highlighting multiple and ongoing processes of Tibetanization, such as historical/political, cultural/religious and imagined, this paper illuminates the ramifications of positioning Ladakh as a Tibetan Buddhist homeland in India. Instead of considering Buddhist Himalayan regions as part of the Tibetan cultural sphere and forwarding the Tibetanization of the Himalayas, this

paper makes the argument that the distinct histories and cultural trajectories need to be made more clear.

16h30 – 16h45: Discussion



Thursday, the 25th of November 2021:

STARTING BY THE BEGINNING: ARCHEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW – HOW THE PAST ENLIGHTEN TODAY IDENTITY PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS

9h30 – 10h15: Archéologie, politique et religion: le cas du Ladakh

Dr. Lauriane BRUNEAU: Archeology, Indien and Central-Asia studies, École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) / Université Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL), Tibet, Bhoutan et Aire Culturelle Tibétaine du Centre de Recherche sur les Civilisations de l'Asie Orientale (CRCAO / UMR8155), Co-manager of the franco-indian archeology project in Ladakh (MAFIL), Junior member of the Institut Universitaire de France (IUF).

Notre intervention s'appuiera sur l'expérience d'une décennie passée en Himalaya indien avec la création et la mise en œuvre de la Mission Archéologique Franco-Indienne au Ladakh. Nous verrons les manières dont le politique et le religieux ont pu orienter nos recherches. Puis nous essaierons d'évaluer dans quelle mesure le sentiment de tibétanéité joue dans l'appropriation, ou non, des sites archéologiques en prenant pour exemple des vestiges pré-bouddhiques et des ruines bouddhiques anciennes (fin du premier millénaire-début du second millénaire). Enfin, nous nous interrogerons sur le rôle identitaire possible de l'archéologie dans le cadre du nouveau statut politique de la région comme Territoire de l'Union.

10h15 – 10h30 : Discussion



10h30 – 11h: Coffee break



11h – 11h45: The cultural and technical transformation of Ladakhi society through the ceramics production lens.

PhD. student Samara BROGLIA DE MOURA: Archeology, École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) / Université Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL), Centre de Recherche sur les Civilisations de l'Asie Orientale (CRCAO / UMR8155, Archéologie et Sciences de l'Antiquité (ArScAn/UMR 7041)

This presentation seeks to explore, through the examples of ceramics, how cultural traditions and techniques have been settled and transformed in Ladakh. To develop this topic further, we will focus on certain ceramic productions during the Late Iron Age, the First and Second Dynasties (5th BCE to 16th CE). This will allow us to understand the breaks and continuities in local productions from one period to another, as well as to observe how these productions were influenced by the various cultures bordering Ladakh. Technical and stylistic transformations of ceramics in Ladakh cannot be disassociated from the cultural and political context during these periods, and in this sense, we will also discuss in an overall manner how these ceramics can be situated in the construction of the Ladakhi society.

11h45 – 12h: Discussion



12h – 14h: Lunch Break



RITUALS AS A SYMPTOM OR ORIGIN IN THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY BUILDING PROCESS

14h – 14h45: Bon Identity, Past and Present: the Inner Conflicts of a Tradition

Pr.Dr.Charles RAMBLE: Social Anthropology, Tibetan philology, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Centre de recherche sur les civilisations d'Asie orientale (CRCAO – UMR 8155)

As several authors have argued, Tibetan Buddhism is better equipped to deal with a wider spectrum of human concerns than other forms of the religion. At one, its soteriological orientation ensures the ultimate salvation of all living beings, while at the other its arsenal of apotropaic rituals address the worldly preoccupations of its followers without obliging them to have recourse to other religions for such technologies. Even within Tibetan Buddhism, however, certain schools are associated more with salvific and scholastic goals and other with effectiveness in worldly matters. This specialisation does not apply to the Tibetan Bon religion, which embraces the entire spectrum on the grounds that it represents the teaching of its legendary founder, Shenrab Miwo. In presenting themselves and their religion to non-Bonpos, the representatives of Bon may therefore in principle emphasise any aspect of this spectrum without misrepresenting it. However, as some observers both within and outside the religion have remarked, it is very hard to reconcile certain emblems of Bonpo identity with others, leading in some cases to accusations of contradiction and even opportunism. This paper will examine a number of these apparent inconsistencies in a historical context, and will discuss some of the debates that have developed around them both in Tibet itself and in the international arena.

14h45 – 15h: Discussion



15h – 15h30: Coffee break



15h30 – 16h15: Transforming “Bön” rituals in Sikkim, asserting Bhotia ethnic ‘identity’

Dr. Mélanie VANDENHELSEN: Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Documentation of Inner and South Asian Cultural History (CIRDIS), University of Vienna

My contribution focuses on transformations of rituals performed by a Tibeto-Sikkimese ritual specialist called “Bönpo” in the first decade of the 2000s in Sikkim (north-east India). Despite his name, this ritual specialist shares more commonalities with the “tribal priest” of most communities of the Himalayas, than with today’s Bönpo religion. I will highlight the issues of Bhotia identity construction that these transformations reveal by making references to the political transformations in Sikkim at that time, to the responses of other ethnic communities in the state (notably Gurung and Limbu) to these politics, and to global religious dynamics.

The Tibeto-Sikkimese or “Bhotia” or “Bhutia” community of Sikkim was likely formed through an aggregation of small groups who came from different parts of the southern Tibetan

cultural area, possibly from the 13th century. They speak a Tibetan dialect called *Lhoke*, and most of them are Buddhist followers; the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism is the largest in Sikkim. The Bhotia founded the kingdom of Sikkim in the late 17th century, which was for long considered to be part of Tibet. In 1975, the monarchy was abolished, and Sikkim was absorbed into India as a federal state. Today, Sikkim is multi-ethnic and multi-religious.

Buddhism in Sikkim is closely interweaved with non-Buddhist religious practices and worldviews, including shamanic ones. In a Bhotia village in West Sikkim where I conducted fieldwork in the late 1990s, for example, three types of ritual specialists catered to the demands of the laity: the priest called Bönpo, the shaman “Pawo”, and the Buddhist monks. All three were members of high social status strata.

As regards the transformations of the rituals performed by the Bönpo, until the 2000s, the worship of clan deities by the high-status Bhotia clans included animal sacrifices. Then, members of two Bhotia clans decided to stop these sacrifices and to shift the worship of their clan’s protective deities to a Bönpo temple in South Sikkim. This change echoes three general trends: firstly, the affiliation of a local practice with a “great religion” (in this case Bön) – the creation of religious scriptures in other communities pertains to a similar principle; secondly, the rejection of animal sacrifices by a number Buddhist people and organisations in Sikkim in reference to international forms of Buddhism that emphasise humanitarian and environmental causes – the affiliation to Bön does not, indeed, contradict people’s Buddhist denomination; thirdly, a shift of certain (clan) rituals from the house to the temple, so as to give greater visibility to the community in a context where autochthony and cultural specificity of the ethnic group have become prerequisite for political and social recognition. Through these processes, the Bhotia of Sikkim seek to both differentiate themselves from the Tibetans who took refuge in Sikkim after 1959 for reasons specific to the Sikkimese political context, and join the form of “modernity” given to the Tibetan “large religions” in Sikkim as elsewhere in India and in the world.

I will thus discuss the following points in more detail: Sikkimese Bhotia history and religious practices; the interactions between non-Buddhist Bhotia rituals and Buddhism and Bön; ethnic politics in the 1990s and 2000s (in India, and as applied in Sikkim); identity issues associated with these politics and the common responses of several ethnic communities in the state; the relation of Sikkimese Bhotias to “Tibetanness”.

16h15 – 16h30: Discussion



16h30 – 17h: first and second day assessment



Friday, the 26th of November 2017:

HOW RELIGIOUS DOXA IMPACT EDUCATIONAL POLITICS AND POLICIES

9h – 9h45: Script and Belonging: The Geopolitics of Writing Balti

Dr. Carmen BRANDT: Linguistik, Oriental and Asien studies Institute, Rheinische-Friedrich-Wilhelms University in Bonn

Balti, a Tibetic language, is predominantly spoken in a region which is today administered by Pakistan. It is closely related to Ladakhi and more distantly to Modern Tibetan. In contrast to those two languages, the standardisation of written Balti is still at its beginning. Moreover, Balti speakers are almost exclusively Muslims, receive mainly Urdu-medium education as children, and are hence familiar with the Perso-Arabic script. Consequently, the sparse literature produced in Balti is also written in this script. However, apart from recent standardisation endeavours for the Perso-Arabic script, there are also attempts to standardise Balti in Roman or Tibetan script.

This paper will give an overview on the various standardisation efforts for writing Balti in the Perso-Arabic, Roman and Tibetan scripts. Based on research in Baltistan and interviews with script activists in 2014 and 2017, it will discuss, on one hand, the reasons behind the diverging script choices, and on the other hand, the political dimensions of script choice. Particularly the nexus between the contested geopolitical status of the region, the marginalisation of Baltis within the Pakistani state and recent nation-building endeavours among educated Baltis illustrates the challenges for speakers of languages which lack until today a standardised written form.

9h45 – 10h: Discussion



10h – 10h30: Coffee break



10h30 – 11h15: Language, schooling and the question of belonging: Tibetanness in Spiti (H.P., India)

Dr Nicola SCHNEIDER.: Social Anthropology, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), Centre de recherche sur les civilisations d'Asie orientale (CRCAO – UMR 8155)

Spiti, a Himalayan region situated today in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, belongs to the Tibetan language and cultural area, or at least has been classified as such by Tibetologists because in the past it has been either under the rule of Tibet or under the one of Ladakh. However, the region has also always had close ties with other neighboring areas, which do not share language and certain cultural elements such as religion. Today, Spiti forms a district together with Lahaul, but even in this regard constitutes only one third of its total population.

My paper will address the ways Spiti people have to navigate between different languages and cultures and the effects this has had on the establishment of their own education system on the one hand and on their participation in politics on the other. It will show how they juggle between formal government schooling systems and Tibetan (monastic and non-monastic) education in order to be competitive in this context of high unequal power relations.

11h15 – 12h: Discussion



12h – 13h30: Lunch Break



IDENTITY CHALLENGED BY MIGRATION AND GLOBALISATION PROCESS

14h – 14h45: Horizon tibétain à travers les revendications socio-politiques et religieuses des populations Tamang du Népal : *Ambiguïté des revendications « bouddhistes tibétaines », entre autochtonie et internationalisation*

Pr.Dr.Brigitte STEINMANN: Social Anthropology, Université de Lille, Centre lillois d'études et de recherches sociologiques et économiques (Clersé – UMR 8019)

L'exposé tentera de retracer les luttes et les positionnements des populations Tamang de la Vallée de Kathmandu dans « l'aire de culture et de civilisation bouddhiste tibétaine », depuis les décennies 1980 jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Je montrerai comment, depuis l'enracinement d'un sentiment, partagé par les populations bouddhistes du Népal, d'oppression par les hautes castes hindoues (Chetris/Brahmanes), en particulier à travers leur participation à des mouvements politiques autochtones « janajati » et leur engagement paradoxal dans la révolution internationale de type maoïste –(à l'encontre des positions tibétaines-), les Tamangs n'ont eu de cesse de revaloriser leur appartenance très ancienne à des traits culturels tibétains antérieurs aux divulgations d'enseignements bouddhistes rnyingmapa « du Nord » (Byang gter). Il s'agirait de montrer, en quelque sorte, qu'ils sont des bouddhistes d'extraction beaucoup plus ancienne que toutes les populations tibétaines émigrées au Népal, à partir des années cinquante du 20e siècle, et de l'implantation des monastères aux 17e et 18e par les populations des frontières septentrionales du Népal.

Les stratégies des Tamangs, à cet égard, sont très contrastées. Elles vont des revendications pour un emploi laïcisé de la langue et de l'écriture tibétaine (confisqués par leurs propres lamas), aux affirmations identitaires basées sur les corpus et livres locaux (-coutumes, mais aussi emprunts aux pratiques monastiques tantriques indo-tibétaines dans les rites funéraires, ancestraux, chamaniques, la poésie populaire chantée célébrant le bouddhisme, les références à la cosmologie bonpo, l'adhésion à de grands mouvements pacifistes internationaux-), à des désirs d'ascension sociale et de réussite dans les affaires mondaines et auprès des élites intellectuelles prestigieuses (américaines en particulier), en passant par les luttes contre les discriminations politiques et raciales subies au Népal depuis l'imposition du code civil hindou de la caste, et l'homogénéisation des langues et des costumes.

Ces positions nationales sont soutenues et alimentées par les innombrables réseaux migratoires des Tamangs pour le travail en Inde, en Amérique, en Europe, en Asie orientale et du sud-est, et leur forte présence sur les réseaux internautiques (facebook, youtube et web). Le brouillage

des identités entre Tamangs, Sherpas, Tibétains, et toutes autres populations népalaises considérées par les étrangers comme étant « de type tibétain », est devenu un véritable enjeu international des migrations pour le travail, dessinant, en deçà, un réel désir de dé-essentialisation ethnique, tel qu'infligé par les pratiques coloniales intérieures et extérieures. Cette résistance s'exprime à travers de forts réseaux d'entr'aide (*sewa*) entre collatéraux et membres des familles d'émigrés, réunissant ensemble à l'étranger les populations qui se reconnaissent aujourd'hui comme membres à part entière de l'un des grands groupes autochtones népalais (Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu), à côté des Madeshis, Chetris/Brahmanes et Dalits du Népal. Nous discuterons, en particulier, la question de la reconstitution, à la fois au Népal et à l'étranger, de hiérarchies strictes de type clérical et religieux entre les populations bouddhistes népalaises elles-mêmes, selon qu'elles sont plus ou moins proches des hiérarques et des sommités monastiques, et influencées par les considérations 'tibéto-maniaques' internationales.

14h45 – 15h: Discussion



15h – 15h30: Coffee break



15h30 – 16h15: 'Tibetanness' in the Gulf: the case of migrant workers from Baltistan

Dr. Antía MATO BOUZAS: Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, London Metropolitan University

Tibetanness outside Tibet is no longer associated with Buddhism but Islam. In Baltistan, and Western Himalayas in general, Tibetanness is employed by social activists, and tacitly recognised by religious actors, as a means to claim belonging to a specific space—a former 'historical' Tibetan space which acknowledges religious diversity—and, on that basis, to make political demands based on a certain form of 'differentiation'. Another aspect worth considering about Tibetanness outside Tibet is its expression of a peripheral condition; partly because a number of the areas of former Tibet, such as Baltistan, are now located at the margins of other states and Tibetanness is deployed strategically as a means to claim a certain degree of political centrality, autonomy or recognition. Tibetanness outside Tibet is therefore reinterpreted in new ways to provide answers to pressing demands derived from geopolitical realities.

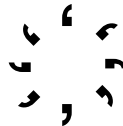
This presentation discusses manifestations of Tibetanness, in relation to religion and politics, in a migrant and development network from Baltistan in Kuwait. It does so by addressing the fact that Tibetanness is no longer represented by Buddhism but Islam (and Shia Islam mainly). Moreover, Tibetanness is deployed by migrant and other actors in this network as a means to claim a place of one's own (with its own centrality). The presentation will draw on previous research carried out in Baltistan, in which Tibetanness is intrinsic to the claim of a Balti identity. It will also include insights from fieldwork carried out in Kuwait on migrant and development networks, in which discussions about religion and politics in Baltistan are based on a shared space in which Tibetanness is reconfigured in new ways.

16h15 – 16h30: Discussion



16h30 – 17h : Closing session

Resume of the three days conferences and perspectives for the future.



Contacts:

Natalia RADANOVIC
Gestionnaire de l'ITI HiSAAR
Tel. +33 (0)3 68 85 61 98
MISHA bur. 120
5, Allée du Général Rouvillois
F – 67083 Strasbourg Cedex

Salomé DEBOOS
MCF – HDR Anthropologie
[*deboos@unistra.fr*](mailto:deboos@unistra.fr)
MISHA bur. 120
5, Allée du Général Rouvillois
F – 67083 Strasbourg Cedex

**Histoire, sociologie, archéologie
et anthropologie des religions | HiSAAR**

Les Instituts thématiques interdisciplinaires
de l'Université de Strasbourg & Inserm
dans le cadre de l'Initiative d'excellence

