The Gods Must Be Angry: A Study of Sacred Geography, Buddhist Belief and Environmental Implications in the Langtang Valley, Nepal

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# Table of Contents

Introduction  ..................................................................................................................  1

Literature Review ...........................................................................................................  2

Methodology ..................................................................................................................  8

Chapter 1: The Conceptual *Maṇḍala* of the *Beyul* ......................................................  15

Emergence of the *Beyul* & the *Jangter* Lineage .........................................................  16

Tripartite *Maṇḍala*: The *Tribhuvana* System .............................................................  21

Outer *Maṇḍala*: *Beyul* as a Place of Physical Refuge .................................................  23

A Place of Refuge in *Namgo* Dagam (“The Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form”) .......  30

Inner *Maṇḍala*: The Revitalization of the Dharma & Domar Ascendency .....................  36

‘Secret’ *Maṇḍala*: The Domain of Tantric Spirits and Deities .........................................  40

Chapter 2: Ethnography of the Langtang Valley, Nepal ..................................................  44

Taxonomy of Spirits and Deities .....................................................................................  44

Pure Vision of the *Beyul* ...............................................................................................  46

*Né Ri*: Tibetan and Himalayan Sacred Natural Sites .....................................................  49

Ethnography of the Langtang Valley .................................................................................  51

Belief in Deities and Spirits .............................................................................................  55

The Gods Must Be Angry ...............................................................................................  60

Misfortune, Topographical Agency, & the Happy Life ....................................................  65

Chapter 3: Sacred Natural Sites Conservation ...............................................................  69

Environmental Changes in Langtang ..............................................................................  70

Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) .........................................................................  73

‘Green Buddhism’ ..........................................................................................................  75

Deep Ecology ..................................................................................................................  77

Transpersonal Ecology ...................................................................................................  78

Criticisms of Ecophilosophies .......................................................................................  80

Nature-Culture Nexus in Buddhist Sacred Natural Sites .................................................  83

Local & Global Environmental Stewardship ..................................................................  85

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................  91

Bibliography ...................................................................................................................  92

Appendix A: Translation of *Supporting Retinue of the Territory God* (*yul* lha rten ‘khor) .........................................................  98

Appendix B: Figures ......................................................................................................... 101
Introduction

Sacred Landscape is a constellation of natural phenomena constituted as a meaningful system by means of artificial and religious signs, by telling names or etiological stories fixed to certain places, and by rituals which actualize the space.¹

Himalayan sacred valleys, referred to as “hidden lands” or beyul (Tib. sbas yul), serve as sanctuaries of ecological diversity and Buddhist cultural heritage, blessed by Guru Padmasambhava. The Langtang Valley (Tib. glang ‘phrang), also known as beyul Namgo Dagam (Tib. sbas yul gnam sgo zla gam), is a prominent Nepalese example of beyul – a variety of what scholars of religion describe as sacred geography. This understanding of the landscape as sacred geography, integrated with local stakeholders’ religious perspectives and historical traditions, can be correlated to an active appreciation of the region’s ecology, and efforts to counter increasing environmental degradation.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 traces the history of the beyul concept within the Jangter Treasure Tradition of Tibetan Nyingma Buddhism and provides background to the establishment of Langtang as a beyul. From this we can understand the beyul as a tripartite maṇḍala envisioned as outer, inner, and ‘secret’ in accordance with local liturgical texts and beliefs. Chapter 2 presents an ethnography of Langtang focusing on self-reported belief by locals in the power of territory gods (Tib. yul lha) and spirits (Tib. klu, btsan po, sman mo). Then, based on these beliefs, I draw out three implications that may be applied to environmental conservation: (1) Cultural memory is shaped by misfortune, and this has generated taboos regarding the protection of sacred natural sites (SNS), and shaped the religion in the beyul; (2) Belief in an agency of the landscape, and certain features embedded in the natural environment, is indicative of a respectful attitude toward the natural environment, displaying a deep environmental consciousness; (3) The pursuit of happiness—”the happy life”—involves a balance between traditional, ritual knowledge and sustainable development by local stakeholders.

Chapter 3 expands on these implications, and considers them in regards to the management of local and

global environmental issues. This research concludes that Buddhist SNS in the Himalayas, such as beyul, are akin to protected areas and represent a type of informal institution for natural resource governance that may incorporate non-extractive norms and active protection and management by local custodians.

Literature Review

This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between Himalayan Buddhism and the environment in beyul Langtang, and the implications of this relationship for the sake of environmental conservation in sacred natural sites. Because of this, the relevant literature pertaining to this topic is placed into three categories. The first category is comprised of literature on terma (Tib. gter ma) and ecological, religious, and social implications found in several beyul found throughout the Himalayan Range, as well as in Langtang specifically. The second category includes research into the vulnerability of Nepalese mountain ecosystems and communities to climate change, the impact of climate change on these ecosystems and communities, and the scale and scope of this impact in Nepal and the greater Himalayan Range. The third category draws its inspiration from Himalayan Buddhist liturgical texts and Western sources describing the Himalayan Buddhist view of mountains, territory gods, and spirits believed to inhabit the landscape and carry sentience. This last category is made up of literature on Himalayan Buddhist reverence for non-human entities that inhabit the landscape, sacred space, and “spiritual ecology”—a spiritual or religious approach used to engage with environmentalism on the basis of sacred space and sacred relationships with the environment. Additionally, this thesis employs ecological theories such as “deep” ecology, “transpersonal” ecology, and sacred natural sites conservation and its role in inspiring global conservationist outlook to consider how environmentalist implications, drawn out of beliefs present in a Himalayan beyul, may have both local and global impacts on environmental conservation.
1) Beyul Literature:

The “hidden land”, or beyul, is defined as a sacred valley, abundant with biodiversity and natural resources and inhabited by non-human spirits and deities who serve as protectors of the Buddhadharma. Because beyul are imbued with the esoteric, spiritual energy of Guru Padmasambhava, they are ideal locations for spiritual practitioners. As far back as 1912 with Jacques Bacot who came across a deserted community in Khams, several scholars have touched upon the topic of beyul and its place within Tibetan Buddhist belief. The topic of beyul is discussed in F. M. Bailey’s 1957 study of a newly established community on the southern slopes of the Himalaya. Both studies were the result of movements toward the beyul Pemakö in the Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal. A number of Tibetan Buddhists have written on terma and beyul literature; for example, Tulku Thondup Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche. Also, several Western Buddhist scholars have engaged with this topic, such as Daniel Hirshberg who researched the lives, activities, and works of prominent Nyingma tertöns, and Jacob Dalton who analyzed the mythology of Guru Padmasambhava and his “taming” of demons in Tibetan borderlands and beyul, and the impacts of this on the perception of sacred geography. Many beyul located in Nepal have been visited and described, such as Khenbalung, Nubri, Kutang, and Langtang. Current religious beliefs and practices centering on a beyul as sacred geography in Khenbalung have been detailed by Hildegard

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Diemberger, and Geoff Childs has looked into the historical, cultural, and socio-political implications that arose from the process of identification and settlement of beyul Nubri. Françoise Pommaret has studied the importance of mountain deities in Bhutan, and Charles Ramble has researched political implications that arose in the process of settling in a number of beyul throughout the Himalayan Range.

Toni Huber has translated “guidebook” (gnas yig/lam yig) literature and written on mountain deity cults in Tibet and along the Himalayan Range. More recently, Layne Mayard examined the environmental implications of belief in Guru Padmasambhava and spirit entities who abide in the terrain among pilgrims in beyul Pemakö. In addition to this wealth of literature, several more studies focus on the translation and contextualization of beyul terma texts. These works give context to the extent of research done in other beyul locations throughout the Nepalese Himalayas, which will inform this current thesis.

As for beyul Langtang, Franz-Karl Ehrhard\textsuperscript{18} and Geoff Childs\textsuperscript{19} both provide translations of a text written in the Langtangpa dialect of Tibetan, the “\textit{gnam sgo zla gam},” which serves an important role in this current research. In terms of anthropological work done in and around Langtang, Susan Hangen\textsuperscript{20} and David Holmberg\textsuperscript{21} have studied the impact of Nepalese state-formation on the ethnopolitics in locations bordering the Langtang National Park (LNP), and in greater Nepal. Francis Lim\textsuperscript{22} and Thomas Cox\textsuperscript{23} have studied the history, sacred geography, and social political status of the LNP, as well as encounters with tourism in the LNP and the ethnic identity of Langtangpa people. Additionally, the international economic and political forces that propel and fund infrastructure development in the LNP, and the impact development will have on the fragile mountain ecosystem in Langtang have been studied.\textsuperscript{24} Austin Lord continues to research the geopolitics of infrastructure development in the Langtang Valley and has spearheaded the Langtang Memory Project, a community-driven space intended to preserve the cultural heritage of Langtang and serve as a historical-cultural archive.\textsuperscript{25} The list of research regarding Langtang ends here, however, and research conducted on the relationship between Buddhist beliefs and practices regarding spirits and deities in the environment in Langtang is non-existent. This

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\textsuperscript{19} Geoff Childs, “Journey to the Hidden Land (Sbas-Yul) of Gnam-Sgo Zla-Gam” (Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Bloomington, Indiana University, 1993).
\textsuperscript{25} See langtangmemoryproject.com
\end{flushleft}
lacuna of information demonstrates the importance of this current research, and further contributions to the dialogue regarding sacred natural sites, local religious beliefs, and environmental conservation.

2) **Climatology:**

In recent years a large quantity of research into the extent and impact of global climate change on ecosystem degradation—especially mountain ecosystem degradation—has emerged, and many Nepalese climate and environmental scientists have studied this topic. A number of these scientists look at the effects of climate change in mountain ecosystems and on glacial melting specifically, an effect of climate change that threatens not only local ecosystems, but even regional and possibly global systems. Several more scientists have drawn a clear link between glacial melting and the buildup of water behind glacially-formed accumulations of rock and debris (called moraines) that act as natural dams and pose a serious risk of catastrophic flooding events termed “glacial lake outburst floods” (GLOF’s), which heightens the concern for environmental study and action. Scholars have looked into the vulnerability of impoverished mountain communities to climate change, the nature of the relationship between climate change and poverty in Nepal, and the impact climate change may have on nature-based tourism which serve as livelihoods for many families in the LNP and other mountain communities in Nepal. This literature helps to show where my research fits into the dialogue regarding how and to what extent climate change impacts these communities.

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change is affecting mountain ecosystems, glaciers, and mountain communities, especially those located in a national park, and how these changes might be interpreted religiously by people living in a beyul who face the brunt of climate change.

3) **Spiritual Ecology:**

Research conducted in the emerging field of spiritual ecology has tended to focus on the ecological vulnerability of what Bas Verschuuren refers to as “sacred natural sites” (SNS) and the importance of conserving SNS for biological and cultural diversity conservation globally. Bas Verschuuren has compiled an impressive list of SNS around the globe and analyzed each site for its potential to connect spiritual practice to environmental conservation. Edwin Bernbaum has explored themes that arise out of the cultures associated with sacred mountains. Together these two scholars have spearheaded a move to document the cultural and spiritual significance of SNS protection and conservation. Numerous studies have shown that sacred natural sites serve as reserves for biodiversity and bioresilence. Scientists have assembled quantitative data from sacred natural sites and compared their biodiversity and bioresilience values with those of surrounding protected areas and developed areas such as forest reserves and national forest land. For example, in the Annapurna Conservation Area and in Solu-Khumbu, Nepal, the potential role of sacred natural sites in protecting vegetation and preventing erosion is generally recognized within localities where tourism is a vital part of economic development. Surveys have included substantial areas where trees are strictly prohibited from cutting both legally and

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Another survey found high levels of biodiversity in sacred groves in the Uttarakhand Himalaya of India, and several studies have been conducted in Yunnan, China examining species richness, and the changing spiritual and ecological role of remaining sacred forests in sacred natural sites in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

**Methodology**

In October 2019, and again during the months of March and April 2020, for the sake of this thesis work I had the incredible opportunity to conduct fieldwork in the Langtang Valley, located some 100km North of Kathmandu in the district of Rasuwa, Nepal. The Langtang Valley, situated in the Langtang National Park, is a popular tourist trekking location nestled in the Central Himalayas renowned for its stunning mountain vistas, yak cheese production, and Himalayan Buddhist culture. During my time I spent in the beyul, I lived in a tent behind the house of the head lama, Lama Tenzin, and his family. During this time I conducted interviews with fourteen villagers, observed ritual performances, and documented sacred natural sites where local deities and malevolent spirits are believed to dwell. Due to the lockdown caused by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the potential social disharmony posed by the presence of a foreigner in the valley, my fieldwork had to be cut short and I returned to Kathmandu. This ethnographic research constitutes the heart of this thesis and represents my contribution to the study of Himalayan beyul and Buddhist sacred natural sites in the Himalayan Range. The primary research questions of this thesis are: (1) What is the nature of the relationship between Tibetan Buddhist religious belief and culture, and the environment in Langtang?; (2) What are the implications of this relationship to the conservation of Langtang specifically, and sacred natural sites in general?; and (3) How can Tibetan Buddhist constructs such as faith, sentience, and happiness inform contemporary

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environmental conservation? To begin to answer these questions, it is vital to identify the sacred natural sites in the research area—divine mountain, river, glacier, and geomorphic sites—and any associated monuments—stupas, stones inscribed with mantras (mani walls), prayer wheels, and prayer flag sites—in Langtang by means of local interviews and mapping.

This spatial approach will ground the research in a place-based focus to initially map out these locations, and determine precisely where the non-human supramundane entities who are believed to reside in them dwell, informed by interviews to determine what locals think of these sacred natural sites. Then, in order to gather the relevant qualitative data to engage critically with these research questions, I will employ a phenomenological approach. Specifically, this data collection follows Layne Mayard’s methodology of utilizing a phenomenological approach in her analysis of the relationship of Tibetan Buddhism and perspectives of the environment in Pemakö, a beyul located in Metok county (Tib. metog rdzong) in southern Kham in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Mayard identified relevant locations and conducted interviews with pilgrims to Pemakö concerning their beliefs in religious and mystical elements of performing pilgrimage within a beyul. By doing so, she avoids making any “truth” claims about whether and how these spaces are sacralized. Instead, this methodology enables Mayard to highlight the environmental and religious implications of faith in the power of Guru Padmasambhava in interviewees’ own words.

Because this research in Langtang shares many similarities with Mayard’s in Pemakö—asking similar sorts of questions, but in a setting of a different beyul (Langtang)—Mayard’s methodology provides an ideal model. However, because Pemakö is a pilgrimage site and Langtang is a national park popular within the Nepalese trekking industry, the economic and socio-political climates are much different. The two most important differences are: (a) There is a higher prevalence of development and commercialization which threatens the future viability and sustainability of the natural environment in Langtang versus Pemakö; (b) The 2015 earthquake caused a series of avalanches and landslides that completely destroyed the village of Langtang, destroyed livelihoods, badly damaged other villages
throughout the valley, and killed hundreds of people and cattle. This makes Langtang both an interesting
and challenging place to study the relationship between Himalayan Buddhist beliefs in territory gods and
environmental implications because, among the villagers in Langtang, there is a palpable belief that the
local territory god, angry at the villagers for neglecting him, caused the landslide that resulted in the
destruction of Langtang and killed so many.\textsuperscript{40} Thus, my own methodology does not simply mimic
Mayard’s, but rather adapts it to account for these differences.

Phenomenology of religion is concerned with the experiential aspect of religious experience that
is oriented with the experience of the believer or practitioner. As Mircea Eliade said:

A religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level,
that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a
phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art,
or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it—the
element of the sacred.\textsuperscript{41}

Phenomenologist of religion W. Brede Kristensen views this approach as seeking the “meaning” of
religious phenomena, but clarifies this supposition by defining the meaning that his phenomenology seeks
as “the meaning that the religious phenomena have for the believers themselves,”\textsuperscript{42} which is in large part
derived from Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. Furthermore, according to Kristensen, phenomenology
is not complete in classifying the phenomena according to their meaning, but in understanding the
phenomena: “Phenomenology has as its objects to come as far as possible into contact with and to
understand the extremely varied and divergent religious data”\textsuperscript{43}. Thus, if we are to understand the value
and/or implications of belief within a Himalayan Buddhist setting, we must firmly grasp the concept of
Buddhist belief \textit{at its own level} and avoid empirical reductionism of any kind.

\textsuperscript{40} See Ch. 2
This approach allows me to gauge local perceptions of sacred sites in Langtang and their faith in non-human supramundane entities who inhabit these sites (yul lha, klu, btsan po, sman mo) through a combination of key informant interviews, participatory observation, and identification of sacred natural sites. After building trust and rapport, interviews will provide the window with which to view respondents’ subjective perceptions and experiences, whereas participatory observation allows the examination of how the respondents relate ritually and behaviorally to their belief—or ambivalence—in the narrative of Guru Padmasambhava, local deities, sacred natural sites, and the spirits who dwell within.

To supplement the data gathered in the field, I will be cross-referencing the qualitative data (e.g. interviews, mapping, observation) with a textual analysis of Tibetan scriptural and “guidebook” texts (Tib. gnas yig/ lam yig) obtained from past scholars of the beyul concept, and Lama Tenzin in Langtang, with informed permission. Lama Tenzin, also known as Tenzin Tamang Lama, is considered by Langtangpa to be the head lama of the community, acts as the chief religious authority in the valley, and leads rituals associated with the sacred geography of Langtang.

These scriptural texts describe: (1) the narrative of the opening of the valley as a beyul and the ritual taming of angry spirits that re-enacts Guru Padmasambhava’s taming the demons, written by the tertön who “opened” the valley; and (2) descriptions, locations, offerings, and aspiration prayers to the 21 supramundane non-human entities and the “Horse-Headed God” located in Langtang, with heavy reference to Guru Padmasambhava and the lineage of tertöns involved in treasure-revealing in this

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44 Yul-lha (Tib. yul lha) - “territory god”, the primary Dharma Protectors (Tib. gon po) originally subdued and placed in charge of certain territories located within “hidden lands” (Tib. sbas yul) by Guru Rinpoche when he introduced Buddhism to Tibet.
Lü (Tib. klu; Skt. naga) - wrathful water spirits who dwell in the underworld, whose appearance is half human and half serpent, believed to inflict disease and misfortune if their territorial abodes are polluted or desecrated. They are often described as “childlike” for their tendency to be easily aggravated and just as easily placated.
Tsenpo (Tib. btsan po) - “Imperial spirits”; red in color and mounted on ferocious beasts, they are among the most wrathful spirits in the Tibetan/Himalayan spirit world, and are associated with red boulders and large stones. The thunderous crashes of boulders falling in the mountains are said to be the sounds of tsenpo fighting.
Menmo (Tib. sman mo) - Female, healing spirits associated with glaciers and glacial runoff waters. They are often referred to as “tsho menmo”, and depicted as half female human and half serpent, but less irritable as lü.
45 In total, seven Tibetan texts are referenced in Chapters 1 and 2. See “Primary Tibetan Sources” for a list of this source material.
location. These scriptures provide the canonical narrative in regards to the environmental deities, the “taming” and emplacement of the deities by Guru Padmasambhava, and the lingering esoteric energy of Guru Padmasambhava that permeates the land. The texts will be used in this thesis as a scriptural basis for the belief in local territory gods and supramundane beings in the beyul to be cross-referenced with expressed belief in these beings by villagers in the Langtang Valley. Additionally, these texts will give historical and cultural context to my research in the valley. I can then cross-reference this with the phenomenological data to understand how Langtang Buddhists perceive and relate to the land scripturally and perceptually, and what implications that might have for future environmental conservation in Langtang, and generally for sacred mountain sites.

Three ethical considerations arise in the scope of this research specifically. First, local people who are interviewed must be briefed and fully understand their involvement to provide informed consent. This is done in an effort to inform, include, and ultimately protect the people whose religion and perceptions are the objects of observation. All people interviewed gave informed consent to be quoted and named in this thesis. Second, in order to provide rich, or “thick”, descriptions of observations taken in the field, it is important that the researcher enter into a state of epoché, or suspension of judgement. Phenomenology seeks to “grasp the world as people experience it, shorn of their interpretations of those experiences,”46 not to act as an authority on the existence of phenomena, or to be a judge on the “truth” of the matter, but to examine a lived religion as it is experienced by those who identify as practitioners of the religion of study. This approach allows the researcher to avoid some bias by focusing entirely on religious experience without regard for their truth, what Spickard calls the “basic phenomenological approach of ‘bracketing’ or ‘epoché’”47 that can be utilized to uncover trends in thought or behavior within the field of religious studies. Drawing on informant interviews, mapping, observation of ritual, and a vast assortment

of scholarly and scientific studies, I attempt to show how belief in a Himalayan beyul can have an impact on how we approach environmental conservation.

Lastly, some final consideration must be made regarding notions of Himalayan Buddhist environmentalism and conducting fieldwork in a remote mountain location in Nepal. A large part of contemporary religious environmentalism is rooted in the “myth of primitive ecological wisdom,” or the often romanticized assumption “that religions encompass guidelines for the preservation of a believer’s natural surroundings.” For example, within the realm of Himalayan Buddhism, compassion has often been romanticized and has become too generalized to be appropriately applied to environmental conservation. Nevertheless, this research assumes that there is a connection between Himalayan Buddhist perceptions of the environment and environmental conservation. The phenomenological approach accounts for this, however, by allowing these assumptions to be tested as a kind of hypothesis. In other words, the hypothesis that there is a connection between Himalayan Buddhist perceptions to the environment and conservation in a beyul is testable via the phenomenological approach, and whether or not the findings verify the hypothesis depends on the data collected from fieldwork. Thus, the implications that are found are drawn from the data directly. Another limitation could be found in the tendency of the researcher to try to get “behind” culture, as if culture were a smokescreen that one could see through to uncover an underlying truth. But this limitation mainly lies in the act of interpretation of truth, which the phenomenologist intends to avoid. Instead, the phenomenologist seeks to understand lived experience, and in the case of this research, lived religious perception. “The fact remains that phenomenology is the only research technique that seeks to understand experience per se—as something separate from the interpretations that people place on it.” Because of this, I utilize a combination of spatial and phenomenological approaches to identify sacred sites and uncover theme(s) present within a

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49 Mayard, 2018: 1.
50 Mayard, 2018: 2-3.
range of environmental perceptions of Tibetan Buddhist villagers in Langtang without interpreting the truth of these personal accounts. I will analyze and interpret the data by means of a comparison between personal and scriptural narratives within historical and socio-political contexts to answer my first research question, and evaluate the themes that arise in regards to their association with sacred sites in Langtang and their implications for environmental conservation to answer my second and third questions.
Chapter 1: The Conceptual Maṇḍala of the Beyul

Following the downfall of the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty in the mid-9th century CE, Tibetans faced centuries of rampant insecurity, political turmoil, and constant threats of foreign invasion coming from all borders. It was during this time of insecurity and paranoia that the idea of the beyul—as a remote refuge, a naturally abundant haven safe from foreign invasion, and an ideal space for spiritual revitalization—became enmeshed in the Tibetan psyche that emerged as a theme resonating throughout Tibetan “Treasure,” or terma literature. This theme of seeking refuge in the southern Himalaya from foreign threats corresponds with historical invasions and political strife such as the Mongol invasion and subjugation of Tibet under Kublai Khan in the 13th century, as well as the scattering of the royal lineage of Gungthang (Tib. gung thang)—again by Mongol invaders—in the 16th century. This theme of refuge is often presented alongside narratives of preserving and reviving the imperial lineage of Tibet—members of which were believed to be the ideal leaders of Tibetan society—and symbolic keys of how to locate and access beyul where the royalty may ascend and the Dharma may flourish among a happy people.

During these times of turmoil in Tibet, threats were not only in the form of military incursions, for religious elements also played a major role in the Buddhist-inspired migrations of Tibetans to the southern Himalayan beyul. Charles Ramble identifies a genre of “guidebook” literature in which Tibetan Buddhist language and concepts are employed to locate and idealize hidden lands. Of particular significance for this research, these “guidebooks” construct cartographic images of hidden lands visualized as a maṇḍala and situate a particular hidden land in reference to other hidden lands. Texts that fall into the “guidebook” genre also consistently describe the natural beauty, safety, and prosperity of hidden lands, constituting an “outer” representation of the maṇḍala of a beyul as both a map and a place of refuge. Almost all “guidebooks” contain language that evokes a deeper understanding of the sacred

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53 *dkar chag* (register), *gnas bshad* (guidebook), *lam yig* (passport), and *go la’i kha byang* (global description). “Whatever they may properly signify, some of the terms themselves seem to be used almost interchangeably by Tibetan writers…” (Ramble 1995: 83).
landscape maṇḍala of a beyul as a place which has the power to revitalize the royal lineage of Tibet, preserve the teachings of Buddha, and offer a sanctuary for sincere Buddhist practice. Moreover, among Buddhists dwelling in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape, the beyul functions as a physical manifestation of a Pure Land and serves as an ideal place for spiritual practice. To elucidate the “guidebook” genre and the language found within, this chapter will provide examples of “guidebooks” that lead to the identification of the Langtang Valley as the beyul Namgo Dagam.

Drawing on both historical Tibetan “guidebooks” and contemporary scholarship, and focusing on several key treasure revealers—tertön (Tib. gter ston)—pertaining to one beyul in particular in North-Central Nepal, this chapter will provide background information on the emergence of the beyul concept, and focus on the themes of refuge and revitalization realized in the beyul as manifestations of the outer, inner and ‘secret’ aspects of the conceptual maṇḍala. This chapter provides the historical background to the emergence of the beyul concept, and positions the beyul concept within a conceptual maṇḍala—perceived as inner, outer, and ‘secret’—in order to give context to the religious, political, and ecological themes imbedded in the beyul concept. Furthermore, this chapter will introduce some key Tibetan texts that give descriptions of the deities who abide in the environment of a beyul in order to provide some literary Himalayan Buddhist context for the belief in local spirits and deities present in Himalayan beyul. This provides the basis for the mystical conceptualization of the maṇḍala and beyul as one—an enlightened field of the territory god (Tib. yul lha) surrounded by his retinue of lesser deities and non-human entities (Tib. glu, btsan po, sman mo), imbued with the esoteric power of Padmasambhava.

Emergence of the Beyul & the Jangter Lineage

Scattered along the southern slopes of the Himalaya lay the beyul which are valleys of enchanting beauty, abundant resources, and were, according to Tibetan Buddhist accounts, concealed as inaccessible sanctuaries by the legendary tantric master Padmasambhava “so that the faithful followers of dharma might be able in the future to find refuge there from the enemies of their religion and live a life of happiness, free from all earthly suffering.”54 Beyul are believed to have been established by
Padmasambhava during his travels through the Himalayas. Padmasambhava “is thought to have taken almost every route through the mountains that connects India to Tibet and China, specifying some 108 geographical locations along the way as ‘hidden’. “55 Beyul are places of immense spiritual energy, hidden locations where tertöns can reveal treasures and refuges “for meritorious individuals from all strata of Tibetan society during a time of moral and political degeneration, as well as a place of accomplishment for those who are spiritually inclined.”56 As a place of security and refuge, it is an ideal location for settlement, a fertile landscape “where society can function with a king as legitimate ruler, and where an idealized version of Tibetan society can be sustained remotely, safe from deteriorating conditions in Tibet.”57 Intrinsic to the value of a beyul is the representation of nature and landscape deriving from Tibetan tradition of mystic geography, which has a very important place in the religious imagination of Tibetan society and religion in which territory gods and dharma protectors, tamed by Padmasambhava, abide in the sacred mountains, visualized as a maṇḍala. This tradition of mystic geography likely stems from before the time of the Tibetan empire, the re-centralization of Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal—particularly in Kathmandu, Swayambhunath, and Boudhanath—and the bringing of Buddhism to Tibet by Guru Padmasambhava.

Throughout the history of Buddhism we can trace a development of the beyul concept to the North of India, first in the Central Himalayas, then into Tibet. In his study of the transmission of Mahayana Buddhism from India to the Kathmandu Valley, Alexander von Rospatt shows that Buddhism made its roots in Nepal considerably earlier than the 5th century C.E., at a time when it was still thriving in Northern India, possibly in the 3rd century C.E. He argues that Buddhism underwent a “re-centralization” from India to Nepal, specifically to the Kathmandu Valley. In the centuries following the 3rd century C.E., monks who studied in Northern Indian Buddhist institutions “came to play an

54 Orofino, 1991: 239.
55 Mayard, 2018: 77.
56 Childs, 1999: 128.
important part in the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet, with Nepal serving as a major
meeting place,” and popular trade routes serving as the avenues.\(^{58}\) (Fig. 1; See Appendix B) When
Rospatt refers here to “Nepal”, he is referring to the Kathmandu Valley. This trend resonates in later
centuries as well, with Kathmandu, Swayambhunath, and later Boudhanath serving as major Buddhist
meeting places between India and Tibet, and as pilgrimage destinations for devout Buddhists.
Furthermore, the creation of the Śvāyambhūpurāṇa, the mythological tale of the formation of the
Kathmandu Valley by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who dwell there, “serves to relocate the center of
Buddhism away from its homeland in India right into the heart of the Kathmandu Valley”\(^{59}\) in the early
5th century C.E. This text may have played an important role in the development of the beyul concept
across the Sacred Himalayan Landscape later on. As Rospatt states:

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The Śvāyambhūpurāṇa transforms Nepal into a Buddha-field (buddhakṣetra) and … Nepal becomes a kind of Sukhāvati, that is, a paradisical realm where a particular Buddha manifests himself to the Bodhisattvas reborn there, and where these Bodhisattvas practice and realize the Buddha’s teachings without encountering any obstacles and hardship … This view that Nepal is a blessed country, a puṇyabhūmi, is reinforced by the Śvāyambhūpurāṇa’s account of the many sacred sites spread over Nepal, because they exist also today and hence link the present landscape to the paradisiacal one in the past.\(^{60}\)
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Nepal’s status as a Buddhist sacred landscape, although only partially traceable throughout history, can be
verified from the account of the Buddhist saint, Marpa (1012-1097). Upon his arrival in Nepal after a long
pilgrimage he exclaimed, “the exhaustion to get [to Nepal] is fully rewarded: I have seen Nepal, a
heavenly country. One cannot stop marveling at all the earthly goods; I asked myself whether these
people are little gods of the realm of desire.”\(^{61}\) Later on, this chapter will discuss the theme of natural
beauty and abundance in sacred beyul in more detail.

\(^{59}\) Rospatt, 2001: 181.
\(^{60}\) Rospatt, 2001: 184.
It is important to know the first figure involved in the tradition before continuing with a discussion of *beyul*. In Tibetan Buddhism, Padmasambhava came to Tibet from *Uḍḍiyāna* to tame the fierce mountain deities guarding the hidden lands, spread the teachings of *dharma* and *tantra*, aid in the construction of Tibet’s first Buddhist monastery, and hide esoteric teachings, symbols, and signs throughout the Nepalese and Tibetan landscapes for a time when people of the land were in need or ready to receive them. The concealment of Tibetan *terma* texts is mostly attributed to Padmasambhava, and the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of hiding texts could be understood as a means of preserving indigenous Himalayan religious thought and practice in the face of institutional persecution. For example, according to some early Tibetan sources, the phase of alleged persecution under the reign of Langdarma (Tib. *glang dar ma*, 838-841?) includes the first instances of Buddhist treasure burial. During the “Era of Fragmentation” in Tibetan history, Tibetans were integrating Buddhist thought into their culture thereby making “Buddhism their own.” Then, in the 11th century, *terma* text revelation began likely in response to the rise of the New Translation (Tib. *gsar ma*) schools during the same period, and the *terma* tradition “served as a connection to the glorified depiction of both Padmasambhava and Tibet’s Imperial Age.”

According to Dudjom Rinpoche, an established authority within the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, at the time Padmasambhava was crossing into Nepal from Southern Tibet via Mang Yul after his stay in Tibet, the Guru declared:

> The result of the perverse aspirations of the ministers of Tibet will be the decline of happiness in Tibet. Although the great wheel of the doctrine will have made one complete cycle there will be great strife at an intermediate time. The nagas and Gyelpo [sic] spirits will be ill-disposed and the dynasty itself will disintegrate, due to its neglect of the law.

Dudjom Rinpoche verifies Padmasambhava’s prophetic declaration and reveals a narrative that incorporates the concept of pure vision in which the Guru stayed in Tibet far longer than the recorded

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63 Hirshberg, 2016: 90.
64 Dalton, 2011: 759.
65 Mayard, 2018: 75.
history found in the Testament of Ba\textsuperscript{67} may tell, even up to one hundred and sixty years. “The Testament of Ba and other works, which tell us that Padmasambhava stayed in Tibet for but a brief period, do so because the master emanated a second body to be seen by the evil ministers”\textsuperscript{68} which fled Tibet, while his ‘actual’ body remained in hermitages, caves, and sacred places in Tibet, meditating and hiding treasures. If it wasn’t the Guru personally hiding treasures, it was his female consort, Yeshe Tsogyal (Tib. ye shes mtsho rgyal, 757-817/877?), who is claimed to have lived for more than a hundred years following the Guru’s departure, and who “concealed hundreds of treasures.”\textsuperscript{69} Drawing from Dudjom Rinpoche’s perspective on the concealment of terma by Padmasambhava, one can see that the Nyingma perspective on the terma tradition can be defined not simply by a religious belief in the authenticity of the texts, but as Andreas Doctor summarizes, “in its institutionalisation of such spiritual discovery.”\textsuperscript{70}

Several Tibetologists make a connection between the Jangter (Tib. byang gter), or “Northern Treasure,” branch of the Nyingma tradition and beyul as a place of refuge. Although the latter is not exclusively affiliated with the Nyingma school, as Geoff Childs states, the concept of beyul “is most closely connected with the Byang-gter branch of the Rnying-ma-pas by [Rigdzin Gökyi Demtruchen (Tib. rig ’dzin rgod kyi idem phru can, 1337-1408),” the first of the Rigdzin Dorje Drak lineage,\textsuperscript{71} “and in fact he was the most influential figure in the rise of the popularity of hidden lands.”\textsuperscript{72} Demtruchen and the lineage that grew from his legacy are of great importance to the “opening,” and subsequent development of settlements in the Langtang Valley and other locations along the Himalayan Range. Born in the

\textsuperscript{67} See Daniel Hirshberg (2016) for the historical details of the Testament of Ba in comparison to the first hagiography of Padmasambhava, the The Copper Island Biography of Padmasambhava (padma ’byung gnas kyi rnam thar zangs gling ma), composed by Ngadak Nyangrel Nyima Özer (mnga’ bdag nyang ral nyi ma’od zer; 1124-1192) after having a mystical visionary experience in the Copper Island near Samye monastery.

\textsuperscript{68} Dudjom Rinpoche, 2002: 747.

\textsuperscript{69} Dudjom Rinpoche, 2002: 748.


\textsuperscript{71} the Jangter tradition was directly inspired by Rigdzin Gökyi Demtruchen and came to fruition under the tutelage of Rigdzin Ngakgi Wangpo (rig ’dzin ngag gi dbang po, 1580-1639), known as the third cenate reincarnation of Dorje Drak Rigdzin (rdo rje brag rig ’dzin) by virtue of the fact that he founded the Jangter monastic center of Dorje Drak situated in the Tsangpo (gtsang po) valley just west of Samye. His two previous incarnations, Rigdzin Gökyi Demtruchen and Lekden Dorje (leks iden rdo rje, 1452-1565), were labelled Dorje Drak posthumously.

\textsuperscript{72} Childs, 1999: 128.
Thogyor Nagpo (Tib. *tho gyor nag po*) region of Tibet, Demtruchen discovered three major *terma* and one hundred minor *terma* from key information he received in 1366 CE, and “rediscovered” that same year the important literary collection known as *The Five Treasures* (Tib. *mdzod lnga*) concerning the tantric cycle of *Vajrakila*, as well as many other treasures, in a cave previously opened by Nyangrel Nyima Özer.73 Franz-Karl Ehrhard likewise has identified Demtruchen as a key figure in the theme of *beyul* whose *terma* works “can contain probably the most abundant material relating to the topic of hidden lands.”74 Demtruchen is a key figure among *tertöns* and revealers of *beyul*, for he demonstrates “how the text material of the treasure works has passed on from one treasure finder to the next,”75 as well as how the keys to *beyul* are hidden and revealed to the next *tertön* along what Hirshberg calls a lineage of “catenate reincarnation.”76 Demtruchen obtained the keys to eight *beyul* extending from Bhutan to the region south of Kyirong (Tib. *skyid grong*), including Namgo Dagam,77 and following in the footsteps of his forebears, hid these keys within a mountain near Kyirong that only an adept *tertön* could reveal. As we will see later, these keys and the doomsday prophecies that came with them were fulfilled with the opening of *beyul* Namgo Dagam during a time of political strife and warfare in Tibet.

**Tripartite Maṇḍala: The Tribhuvana System**

The theme of *beyul* as a place of refuge and the conceptual *maṇḍala* are intimately connected, for within the conceptual *maṇḍala*—either spatially or as the abiding mode of the ‘pure nature of mind’—lies the *beyul* as both a physical sacred space and a space of/for liberation. As Diemberger states, the *maṇḍala* as a model for the conceptualization of sacred space and sacred abiding, “was imported with Buddhism from India and applied to Tibetan landscapes. This model for conceptualizing sacred space which was

73 *Dudjom Rinpoche*, 2002: 946.
76 See Hirshberg, 2016.
77 Ehrhard (1997) gives the disclaimer for interpreting prophecy: “The text material on which the myths of *mkhan pa lung* and *za gam gnam sgo* are based is part of a literature that passed in various versions through the hands of various authors and commentators. In the process it was easy for overlapping traditions and differing ways of defining geographical reality to arise. We need also consider that the greater part of the literature was ‘prophecy’ (*lung bstan*), which is subject to various interpretations from the outset” (341).
originally used in rituals for soteriological and religio-political aims,78 became a concrete and practical model of orientation connected to a universal way of conceiving space and cosmogony.79 In other words, the conceptual *maṇḍala* that was imported to Tibet developed into a spatial mode of incorporating lands into a Buddhist sphere of influence, functioning as a map. Furthermore, the *maṇḍala* is conceptual in that it serves to orient the Buddhist to the abiding mode of mind. The conceptual *maṇḍala* was especially vital for the incorporation of regions bordering Tibet that occupied the fringes of the Tibetan *maṇḍala* as a map, such as Sepa, Mangyul, and current day Langtang and Nepal. This is what Jacob Dalton calls “an extension of the mandalic spatial models that flourished at the time of the Mongol invasions.”80 But before diving into the history of invasion and refuge, it is important to look at the Tibetan mandalic view of the cosmos and the three layers of *beyul* as a part of the conceptual *maṇḍala*.

The Tibetan and Himalayan versions of the subjugation narrative of Padmasambhava typically divide sacred space *maṇḍala* into a triple-tiered system organized around a central point both horizontally and vertically. As Toni Huber observed regarding the “Great Crystal Mountain” in Tibet:

> The tribhuvana (*sa gsum*), or “three levels,” system is an earlier Indian cosmological scheme found in the Sanskrit sources from which the Tibetans derived their narratives, and which appears to be analogous to indigenous Tibetan tripartite ordering of the phenomenal world. Regardless of its origins, such a three-level organization of space is completely pervasive in Tibetan thinking about the world, whether in a vast and more abstract cosmological sense or in terms of the perceivable physical environment on any scale.81

Huber remarks that the phenomenal and cosmological vision of the world for Tibetans is organized as a tripartite *maṇḍala*, and this triple division implies a vertical as well as horizontal gradient of sacrality from mundane at the lowest and farthest from the center, to pure or refined at the top or central point of

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the manifold. The conceptual manifold, organized in the tribhuvana system, is important for understanding the Tibetan and Himalayan ordering of space. Following the tribhuvana system, conceptual manifold can be broken down into three categories and applied physically, psychologically, and spiritually within a horizontal and vertical spatial construct. As Toni Huber states:

[T]he mandala and tribhuvana systems have very closely related ways of ordering space. The mandala, in addition, develops a horizontal pattern of order at the site. Just as the tribhuvana system is repeated at various levels to interpret the phenomenal world, so, too, is the process of mandalization […] the mountain is a mandala, but also on the mountain itself a group of the most important individual sites are described as mandala: the alpine lakes that are found around the high summit. In the ancient Tibetan worldview and the folk tradition, lakes along with mountain peaks are the most significant type of landscape feature, and the two are often considered together as a gendered pair (commonly male mountain, female lake) forming an ideal unit of sacred geography.  

This gradient applies equally to the quality of physical locations of the landscape as well as to esoteric beings and other forms believed to abide within the landscape. Thus we can see that the conceptual manifold is an essential idea for understanding the Tibetan and Himalayan model for organizing actual sacred space, and will be vitally useful to imagine the beyul as a manifold and ground our understanding of this phenomenological research from an emic perspective.

**Outer Mandala: Beyul as a Place of Physical Refuge**

The Tibetan understanding of the universe is informed by the image of the manifold. R. Ray states: “given that the phenomenal world of pure appearance is beyond thought, the symbolic language that is used in [tantric Buddhism] to suggest the actual way in which the world appears is that of the manifold.” In Indo-Tibetan iconography, a manifold is usually portrayed as a circular form or design that represents a sacred realm. In its simplest form, the manifold contains a central square (or series of squares) surrounded by several circles, and the entire space can depict a consecrated ordinary reality, an ethereal plane, or, at the highest level of understanding, the whole universe as a macrocosm. As Huber shows,

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82 Huber, 1999: 50.
the *manḍala* is one of the most important sacred Indian organizing principles, serving as a model for the perfect city, a framework for political power, or even an illustration of the vital energies found in the human body. As a central symbol of tantric Buddhism, the *manḍala* symbolises the realm of a specific deity who serves as the focus of a certain set of practices. The central deity is surrounded by a square enclosure, with gateways located on each side representing entrances to the ethereal inner sanctum. Within the enclosure of the *manḍala* there may be hundreds of attendants, Buddhas, wrathful and peaceful esoteric beings, symbols, and landscapes characteristic of the deity’s specific powers or virtues. As Mayard notes, the *manḍala* shows the way for humans to become a “mirror of the cosmos.”

Following a scheme widespread in Tibetan Buddhism corresponding to three types of *terma*, three levels of seeing a *beyul* are portrayed: external, internal, and secret. The external level can be perceived by ordinary sensory experience allowing the vision of a secure, fertile, beautiful, and naturally abundant *beyul*, but does not confer any esoteric realization. The internal level can be enjoyed only by the yogin who has embarked on the path of realization, “who can receive from the vision of the inner secret land a strengthening of his spiritual powers as well as the possibility of finding secret treasures, hidden secret texts and every kind of tangible good, all of which will make the initiation journey easier.” The deepest, secret level can only be accessed by those who have been ‘properly initiated’, who have attained a high level of spiritual achievement, and who can enter into a mystic state and receive the highest esoteric teachings directly from the pure lands of the buddhas, or the ‘*beyul* of suchness’.

The physical *beyul* occupies space along the borders of the *manḍala* of Tibet functioning as a map. The spatial mapping function of visual representations in a *manḍala* constitutes, as Susan Walcott

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86 Mayard, 2018: 78.
87 1) earth treasure (*sa gter*) - hidden by Padmasambhava, Yeshe Tsogyal, or rehidden by a later tertön, retrieved from the physical ground; 2) exalted-mind treasure (*dgongs gter*) - hidden by Padmasambhava or his closest disciples in the pure nature of mind, drawn from the expanse of enlightened awareness by an accomplished yogin; 3) pure-vision treasure (*dag snang*) - visions from the pure buddha realms revealed to a realized yogin by a deity in a dream-like state.
explains, “a sacred space conceived as a cognitive graphic of an area that is seen as becoming real, is virtually inhabited, and entered into by the observer who then navigates through it on a mental pilgrimage.” In this sense, maṇḍalas are maps that exist in the material world but depict an “imaginal world-patterning directly affecting inner structuring of physical and mental senses through ... a world-picture reflecting the brain's perception of its environment,” which then becomes imbued with a sacred presence. To fully appreciate the nature of the maṇḍala’s use as a map, the maṇḍala must be understood as a physically existing entity that metaphorically represents a multidimensional space. This type of space can range from a tangible world portrayed on a mundane map to a space visualized as a three-dimensional dream-like image, to a purely metaphysical mind-training exercise. “The practitioner peels back the layers of the external-physical-tangible along a guided navigated journey through the maṇḍala towards realization of an internal harmonious integration.” Thus, the maṇḍala serves as a map as well as a physical-spatial metaphor that captures and contains a mental and metaphysical space.

Before moving on to a detailed explanation of the conceptual maṇḍala manifesting itself as outer, inner, and ‘secret’ aspects, it may be useful to delve into the concept of a ‘map’, common depictions of maps, and in what cultural milieu these depictions arise in. Tibetans don’t use maps, in our sense, as much as they use verbal descriptions of space. In Western literature and academia, our notion of a map derives from paper maps of classical Western cartography depicting the earth’s surface oriented in the four cardinal directions. Our notion of maps also include social maps, cognitive/mental maps, complex computational maps used for electrical engineering, mathematical maps, and many others used for navigating dimensional and/or conceptual space. Like many cultures including my own, Tibetan and Himalayan peoples have employed a variety of maps and cartographic systems used to navigate physical space. According to Huber, there have long been graphic maps depicting Tibet and her neighboring lands.

called “shingiköpa,” or “arrangement of a region/field”.

These maps have been employed sparingly throughout Tibetan history to depict topographic landscape features, much in line with the Western cartographic concept, but Tibetan maps have been employed mostly to depict other perceived world-systems of Mahayana Buddhism, mapḍalas, cosmograms, and “the paradiisical landscapes of alternative realities, such as the ‘hidden land’ of Shambhala or of Zangdok Pelri, Padmasambhava's ‘Glorious Copper-colored Mountain.’” This style of painting world-systems in the form of a mapḍala, in most cases, were not utilized to navigate the landscape, but to navigate the mental and spiritual landscapes of Buddha fields and the nature of the inner mind. However, in recent times (19th and 20th centuries) there exist a few examples of maps that depict topography in line with Western cartography, possibly inspired by Tibetan exposure to Western cartography. These maps are termed sabtra (Tib. sa btra), literally “variegated countryside,” and depict landscapes from a singular perspective, usually a high place, and do not appear to have any special ritual status, unlike other Tibetan stylized ‘maps’ used for soteriological, pedagogical, and ritual purposes. The history of Tibetan maps is fascinating to say the least, but the main point in bringing up this topic is to show that maps used as graphic representations of the landscape, as we know of them in Western cartography, were exceedingly rare in Tibet prior to the 19th century.

In place of painted, drawn, or otherwise graphic representations of the landscape, Tibetans and Himalayan peoples relied primarily on oral and written textual maps—termed “guidebooks”—to navigate difficult terrain and the topography of mountainous regions. As Huber states regarding the written textual forms of maps employed by pilgrims and tertön to locate sacred beyul prior to the 19th century:

These forms are much more intensive and immediate ways of relating to landscapes and places, as they can simultaneously invoke history, myth, cosmology, theories of substance, place, and person, social relations, and much more, besides just geography and topography. They are carriers of multiple systems of representation and signification, and they have a certain fluidity as well.

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92 Huber, 1999: 59.
93 Huber, 1999: 59.
94 Huber, 1999: 60.
For the pilgrim in search of sacred lands, one can see that the Tibetan narrative maps, or “guidebooks”, function on a number of related levels simultaneously. Additionally, for the pilgrim and tertön, it is most likely general knowledge that the central mountain of a beyul is a supernaturally special place that is “self-arising” (Tib. rang byung), “spontaneously arising” (Tib. lhun gi sdrup), and in possession of an inherent “empowerment” (Tib. phyin rlab), giving it high ontological status. The narrative guidebooks that spell out precisely how to access such beyul tell how to ritually access the power of the mountain-centered maṇḍala, and how to ritually cleanse the area and mind of the accessor of defilements. Furthermore, these narratives often reveal that the mountain and the surrounding beyul house a number of non-human deities and spirits “whose individual powers humans must either subdue and convert or pay great respect to,” depending on the ranking of these non-human beings in the maṇḍala hierarchy.

From another angle, the outer dimension of the maṇḍala of a beyul is an extensive geographical area bounded by mountains, rivers, lakes, and, a series of interlinked valleys that act as landmarks to access these hidden lands. In this sense, the outer maṇḍala is the natural landscape. As Childs states, “in a coarse and practical sense, the outer beyul is the real beyul, since it must be capable of supporting a sizable population engaged in an agro-pastoral lifestyle.” These are important distinctions of beyul for several reasons. First, The emphasis on the natural landscape informs our understanding of the conceptual maṇḍala of a beyul as containing topographic elements and incorporating natural features. Second, this shows that the concept of beyul was put in place for the practical purpose of sustaining a population in times of danger and strife. Lastly, the depiction of beyul as a maṇḍala suggests that beyul occupies a place along the borders of the external maṇḍala of Tibet, whose people, by the mid-13th century, began to see Tibet as “the center of the Buddhist universe.” As the political environment shifted and Tibet faced a number of invasions from the 13th century onwards, the Tibetan people found themselves not at the...

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95 Huber, 1999: 61.
96 Childs, 1999: 129.
border of the Buddhist world, but in its very center. This also caused a shift in how threats to Buddhism and Tibet were perceived. As Jacob Dalton states, “no longer did the principal threat to Buddhism lie within the Tibetan landscape; now it was located outside, in the border regions.”

From Dalton’s analysis, we see the spatial metaphor of Tibet as a grand mandala shifting to further incorporate boundary regions on Tibet’s southern border.

Dalton traces the conversion and settlement of Tibet’s border regions to the 14th century onwards during a time when Tibet faced the onslaught of Mongol invasions from the north. Rigdzin Gökyi Demtruchen, who was alive during these troubling times, was a pioneer of the southern borderland beyul. As he states in his General Inscriptions on Hidden Lands (Tib. sbas yul spyi’i them byang, 466.1.): “The Mongol oppression will last one hundred and twenty-five years, after which Mongol rule will collapse. During this period, people will have to flee to Tibet's hidden lands.”

At this time, Tibetans viewed the borderlands as being associated with demons, darkness, and untamed barbarians. However, from an early date, Tibetans have been “deeply ambivalent” towards said demons which can be seen in the mythology of Padmasambhava and his taming of the demons. Dalton saliently summarizes this duality:

The borders offered both demonic dangers and hope of sanctuary. The ambivalence of Tibetan attitudes toward their borderlands cannot be separated from the spatial structures of the mandala and the demonic population at its dark edges. Tibet's barbaric neighbors are its demonic protectors, dancing and drinking blood at the edges of civilization, simultaneously threatening and protective [...] Like the mythic demons that were adopted even as they were expelled by the buddha at the center of the mandala, Tibet's neighbors play a liminal role in the Tibetan imagination. Just as Tibetans are deeply divided over the dangerous power of tantric violence, they are of two minds about the barbarians that populate their borders.

To make sense of this, one can understand the borderland beyul as having undergone a transformation. Before, the beyul was a dangerous demonland. Now, after the demons have been pacified and given the Buddhist task of protecting the dharma, the beyul is a hidden sanctuary. In a sense, the beyul functions as both the poison and the antidote for Tibet and her people. It offers protection to her people in times of

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100 Dalton, 2011: 152.
political turmoil so long as the local deities are (re)tamed under a Buddhist face in the same manner in
which Padmasambhava did centuries ago. But in order to garner the protection offered by the demonland,
these border regions must be subsumed within the Buddhist conceptual *manḍala*, a process that is still
ongoing since the unpredictable, often violent nature of Himalayan valleys pose as many natural dangers
as they offer protection to Buddhists. In the case of Langtang, as will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the
danger of landslides and avalanches caused by earthquakes (and for many people, caused by the territory
god himself) poses a very real and very imminent danger that must be overcome.

The Tibetan universe “is permeated by spirits dwelling in the sky, on the earth or underground. The
malevolent entities are capable of inflicting physical, environmental and societal difficulties, thus a
prevalent concept found in Tibetan religion is the necessity of pacifying them.”\(^{101}\) Tantra became the
method of subjugating these beings and placing them onto the topography, as exemplified by
Padmasambhava during his time in Tibet.\(^{102}\) The Himalayan landscape is dotted with sacred sites where
the Guru is said to have overpowered and converted the local non-human entities. His success was
marked by their loyalty to him, and their promise to protect their former haunts as places of refuge for
Buddhists. This included the designated hidden lands, within which mystical forces could manifest as
mist, poisonous water, a snowstorm, a landslide, an avalanche, or an animal.\(^{103}\) This is deeply
representative of the psychological imaginations of the Tibetan people because of the extreme
ambivalence on the part of Tibetans towards to border regions. Dalton elaborates:

The realities of the borderlands and the lives of their inhabitants matter less here than the
reflective power that these places have in the Tibetan imagination. Tibetan attitudes
toward these places thus represent Tibetans' own internal dislocation, a divide over
violence that they have represented to themselves as an external dualism between center
and periphery.\(^{104}\)

\(^{101}\) Mayard, 2018: 77.
\(^{102}\) Dalton, 2011: 760.
\(^{103}\) Huber, 1999: 63.
Thus, as we can see, the concept of the *beyul* occupies a physical as well as psychological space within the conceptual *maṇḍala* of the Tibetan view of their own country and the imaginaire of their sacred space surrounded by fierce demon invaders *and* protectors. It may be understood that the demons that occupy the borders of the conceptual *maṇḍala* were once dangerous but are now tamed by Padmasambhava and given a Buddhist face, thus they have been transformed into Dharma Protectors (Tib. *chos srung ma*).

**A Place of Refuge in Namgo Dagam (“The Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form”)**
During times of political strife and invasion, Tibetans looked to the slopes and valleys of the Himalaya and the *beyul* within as places of refuge. A number of scholars believe that the *beyul* concept has a parallel with ancient Tibetan beliefs centering on political turmoil and the necessity for places of refuge. Other scholars maintain that *beyul* literature first arose in the 14th century following the invasion of Tibet by the Mongols. However, Childs makes the argument that *beyul* literature arose prior to the 14th century based on texts written by Tseten Gyaltser (Tib. *tshe brtan rgyal mtshan*, 1147-1266) that date to the 12th or 13th centuries. Rigdzin Gökyi Demtruchen is said to have revealed the “keys” (Tib. *lde’u-mig*) to seven *beyul* but is not believed to be the initial identifier of the locations in question; “therefore it can be inferred that the existence of concealed lands was already acknowledged by Tibetans prior to this discovery.”

Nevertheless, from an emic perspective there are a number of purposes to *terma* and *beyul* in general, including happiness and safety. As Dudjom Rinpoche states:

> Generally speaking, all the profound treasures exist only as means to increase the happiness and felicity of [the people of] Tibet and Kham during this and future lives; but, in particular, this Northern Treasure (*byang gter*) contains, without omission, everything that anyone might require for increasing the teaching, turning back invading armies, terminating infectious disease, the pacification of civil war, exorcism of Gongpo spirits, restoration of governmental authority, and the control of epidemics and plagues.\(^{106}\)

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\(^{105}\) Childs, 1993: 5.

\(^{106}\) Dudjom Rinpoche, 2002: 782.
Here we see from an authority figure of the Nyingma school that a primary reason for the existence of beyul is to turn back invading armies and the restoration of governmental authority. This has some historical background which we can see in the history of the rulers of the Gungthang royal court.

In the 13th century, members of the Gungthang court had consolidated large regions under their control in southern Tibet, thanks in large part to their connections to the Sakya school and their Mongolian patrons. By the 15th and 16th centuries, the Gungthang royal court had shifted its allegiances, due to shifting political power, to the Nyingma school which distinguished itself with terma revelation. Thus we find in the 15th and 16th centuries the treasure finders Rigdzin Chogden Gonpo (Tib. rig ‘dzin mchog lden mgon po) and Rigdzin Pema Lingpa (Tib. rig ‘dzin pad ma gling pa) as spiritual dignitaries of the Gungthang court. In the 17th and 18th centuries, we find Garwang Dorje (Tib. gar dbang rdo rje), Rigdzin Nyima Drakpa (Tib. rig ‘dzin nyi ma grags pa), and Rigdzin Nyida Longsel (Tib. rig ‘dzin nyi zla glong sal), who opened beyul Namgo Dagam, as dignitaries to the Gungthang court in exile, and seekers of beyul where the royal lineage of Gungthang may seek refuge and be re-established. As Ehrhard notices in his study of many “guidebook” and historical texts related to the Himalayas South of Tibet, there were many efforts to revive, “by way of foundations or renovations of old structures, the ‘places of realization’ (Tib. sgrup gnas) in areas that were once the southern border of the old Tibetan kingdom.” Moreover, the journeys undertaken by pilgrims and tertön from the 16th century onwards can be seen as a direct response to a precarious religious and political situation present in Tibet when Tibet was involved in a number of power struggles between Dzungar Mongols, the Chinese Qing Dynasty, and internal disputes within Tibet herself. Where southern borderlands used to be controlled by

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107 On a fascinating sidenote, one of the reasons for accessing a beyul is the termination of infectious diseases and to control the spread of epidemics, plagues, and even pandemics. Near the end of my research period in Langtang, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world and I had the rare opportunity to witness the people of Langtang relate to this element of their home valley. In the face of globalized disease and unpredictability, the valley felt safe and secure.

108 See Ehrhard, 1997 for a full list of spiritual dignitaries to the Gungthang royal court.

military means, they were now to be controlled by ritual means, and offered protected locations for
spiritual realization.\textsuperscript{110}

Tulku Thondup Rinpoche identifies four catastrophic states that indicate the need to seek refuge
in a \textit{beyul}: social decay, religious degeneration, natural disasters, and foreign invasion/political unrest.\textsuperscript{111}
At the very least, we find the last condition present in 14th century Tibet, but it is likely that the previous
three were present as well. Many prophecies (Tib. \textit{lung bstan}) from the 14th century onwards state that
the time to seek refuge in a \textit{beyul} is predicated by Mongol invasions and threats to the lineage of the
Gungthang kings. These same texts instruct the settlers of hidden lands to be accompanied by a
descendent of the imperial lineage, who would become important for the establishment of authority in a
new settlement. The Gungthang lineage, a branch of Tibet’s medieval imperial family that had managed
to endure in southern Tibet for nearly eight hundred years after the fall of the Yarlung empire, was finally
extinguished in 1620, the fruition of the widely disseminated prophecy of the end of this lineage. In the
early 17th century, the Gungthang kingdom was subdued first by the rival Tibetan polity of Tsang. Later
the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobtsang Gyatso (Tib. \textit{ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho}, 1617–1682)
subsumed the area in 1641 under his rule with the help of his Mongol patrons and “made Dzongga the
administrative center of the southern region.”\textsuperscript{112} However, The royal family of Gungthang were not the
only living descendants of the imperial lineage living in the area, for a connected lineage was still
inhabiting the ‘tamed’ border realms near Kyirong, coinciding with the demise of the Gungthang kings.\textsuperscript{113}
These members found refuge-in-exile among the \textit{beyul} opened by their spiritual dignitaries and ascended
as the ruling class of new settlements due entirely to their royal bloodline.

A prophecy resurfaced in Gungthang in the late 16th century, believed to have been originally
written by another famous \textit{tertön}, Tseten Gyaltsen in Chumo cave (Tib. \textit{chu mo}) in Padro (Tib. \textit{spa gro}),

\textsuperscript{110} Ehrhard, 2013: 364.
\textsuperscript{111} Tulku Thondup, 1994: 180.
\textsuperscript{112} Lim, 2004: 43.
\textsuperscript{113} See Childs, 2001: 14-15 for a summary of the fall of the Gungthang kings in the 17th century.
Bhutan, and was passed on to Rigdzin Gökyi Demtruchen.\textsuperscript{114} Found within the *Passport to the Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form* (Tib. *gnam sgo zla gam lam yig*): “At that time the armies of rGya, Hor, Mon, upper and lower Sogpo, Karluk, and the rebellious troops from the frontier will march and all the regions of Tibet will be reduced to ruin. When the armies of the Duruka (Mongols) march, they will wander through the tutelary temples of the king himself and the temples of Lhasa, Samye, and the border-taming temples, and those beyond the border. At that time, the correct time for going to that place [the *beyul*] has arrived.”\textsuperscript{115} Thus we can see Demtruchen’s prophecy of the need to identify and open a *beyul*—specifically Namgo Dagam—in the face of invasion to preserve the Gungthang lineage.

Compared to other prophetic *terma* texts, according to Childs, this text pertaining to Namgo Dagam is the only one to contain such a detailed list of armies. “The portrayal is of an apocalyptic event: armies from all the borders will invade Tibet. This may be a reflection of the earlier Mongol incursions, which would fit the general timeframe of the text’s discovery during the 4th *rab byung* (1207-1266).”\textsuperscript{116} Similarly, in Demtruchen’s *sbas yul spyi’i them byang (The Series of Signs Identifying a Hidden Land According to the Jangter Tradition)* it is related that the time will come for Tibet when the temples will be destroyed and the laws will no longer be respected. “These will be times of terrible calamity, the followers of Buddha will suffer great hardship, and the reign of peace will be at an end, while hatred and disorder will dominate everywhere. These signs will indicate that the time has come to escape to one of the hidden lands, hidden by Padmasambhava.”\textsuperscript{117} Again, in Demtruchen’s *Passport to the Hidden Land of*
Khenpalung Along with an Assessment of the Land (Tib. sbas yul mkhan pa lung gis lam yig sa dpyad dang bcas pa) concerning the beyul Khenpalung in the Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal, Padmasambhava is speaking to the king (presumably Trisong Detsen): “When the descendants of the kings of Mang Yul are killed, the moment to open [the beyul will have come.”

The message is clear. In three texts related to three beyul, Demtruchen made the same prophecy; when the invaders come to destroy the temples, and Tibet enters a degenerate state of warfare and political strife, that is the time to seek refuge within a beyul.

One such prophecy is fulfilled by Rigdzin Nyida Longsel in 1680 when, under the tutelage of Garwang Dorje (1640-1685) in Kyirong, he was given the instruction to locate and open Namgo Dagam as prophesied by Demtruchen. The first task was locating where exactly Namgo Dagam is. Based on the prophecy said to be first uttered by Padmasambhava and recovered by Demtruchen, the beyul in question “is placed in the center of a sacred maṇḍala with Yolmo to the south, Mangyul to the west, Nyanang to the east, and Pelthang to the north, is easy to reach, lies near to Tibet,” and is “an extremely secure location.”

Here we see a clear example of the usage of maṇḍalic positioning to locate the beyul Namgo Dagam in the center of a maṇḍala rather than on the fringes of a maṇḍala map of Tibet.

Furthermore, the guide to Namgo Dagam describes a valley enclosed by mountains on the upper end and by a forested gorge on the lower end. Similarly, we can identify maṇḍalic positioning in a text originally composed by Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje (Tib. rdo dmar zhab sgra tsug mla ’gyur rdo rje, b. 1675) and reconstructed by the current head lama of Langtang, Lama Tenzin, after it was tragically damaged in the 2015 Nepal Earthquake.

In the Supporting Retinue of the Territory God (Tib. yul lha rtan ’khor) the beyul Namgo Dagam is positioned as a maṇḍala: “The abode of Gu Lang Lha, who was Brahma in a past life, north of the seat of enlightenment of the world [Bodhgaya], southwest of glorious Samye in Tibet, is the amazing place on the borderland of both Nepal and Tibet. Blessed by the great Lopön Ügyen, the

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120 This text was reconstructed from fragments Lama Tenzin retrieved from other Langtang villagers, and reproduced from memory in collaboration with other head lamas in the valley; Pema Lama and Sangye Lama.
secret hidden land ‘Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form’ is the dwelling place of the territory god Ge Nyen Chenpo.”

There are also references in both the yul lha rten ‘khor and Demtruchen’s gnam sgo zla gam lam yig to large and small rivers within, and a mirror-like plain on the southwestern border, descriptions which accurately fit the entire upper Langtang Valley and correspond to Longsel’s and Dorje’s assertions that Namgo Dagam and Langtang are one and the same. Thus, Longsel travelled to the Langtang Valley and met with a Domar\(^{122}\) man and his five-year-old son in 1680, indicating that the young boy was most likely the young Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje himself.\(^{123}\)

It would be useful here to turn to works by the founder of Langtang village, Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje, who promoted Langtang’s status as beyul Namgo Dagam by citing treasure sources revealed to Demtruchen by Padmasambhava, and arguing that Padmasambhava as well as Milarepa had consecrated this valley and predicted Longsel and himself to be the revealers.\(^{124}\) He wrote many works in praise of Langtang as Namgo Dagam, such as Three Expressions of Ascertaining the Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form [entitled] “The Joyful Naga’s Melody on the Summit” (gnam sgo zla gam gyi nges pa brjod pa sum rtse na dga’ ma’i glu dbyangs, ~c. 1700), a short text that comprises spiritual songs extolling the valley’s virtues, and the Identification of the Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form, [entitled] “Essence of Usefulness and Bliss” (Tib. gnam sgo zla gam gyi ngos ‘dzin phan bde snying po, ~c. 1700). The latter contains a somewhat long piece of polemic on the exact location of the beyul, and it not only offers geographical evidence, but also cites various authoritative writings. Within is a description of beyul Namgo Dagam:

[Namgo Dagam] is even more excellent than all the other secure hidden lands that have been described previously. It is easily reached and lies near Tibet. In other treasure mines,

\(^{121}\) sngon tshe tsangs pa gu lang lha vi gnas/ ‘tzam gling ste ba rdo rje gdan gyi byang/ bod yul dpal gyi bsam yas lho nub na/ ngo mtsar yul mchog bal bod gnyis kyi mitsams/ slob dpon u rgyan chen pos byin rlaus pa’i/ gsang ba’i sbas yul zla gam gnam sgo yil/ yul lha dge bsnyen chen po bzhugs pa’i gnas (verses 1-7).

\(^{122}\) The Domar clan of Langtang should not be confused with the term “Domari” which refers to Roma and Rajasthani gypsies. Domar (mdo mar) literally means “red rock” and may have connections with tsenpo (bstan po) spirits said to inhabit massive red rocks, and the imperial Tibetan dynasty, whom tsenpo spirits are believed to embody.

\(^{123}\) Ehrhard 1997: 346.

it is not dealt with in detail. Why? Because it is a secret and protected area […] In short, a hidden land is a land where a person flees to in the face of terrifying enemy troops. Its characteristic is that of a fully secure place. If, therefore, Yol-mo and La-phyi for example, are termed ‘hidden lands’, what is to be said [of a land] that surpasses even them in matters of security?\footnote{Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje, cited in Ehrhard, 1997: 346.}

We see yet again the theme of refuge in a hidden land. Here, the beyul Namgo Dagam is described as “a fully secure place,” even more secure than other beyuls. According to Dorje, this ideal beyul that is even more secure than other lands was located in 1680 as the Langtang Valley in North-Central Nepal. This theme of the valley as a secure refuge in which an ideal Tibetan society can be sustained resonates to this present day, and can be exemplified by the popular folktale of the defense of Langtang Valley by an elderly couple, touchingly referred to as grandma and grandpa. Facing an invasion by Gurkha soldiers in the late-18th century to control the Trisuli-Kyirong trade network, the elderly couple poured water over the slopes in the days preceding the invasion and let it freeze over the course of several nights. When the soldiers approached, they failed to climb the steep slopes to reach the village as they constantly slid down the ice. The comical image of the elderly couple laughing at the misfortune of the Gurkha soldiers is the punchline of the story.\footnote{Recounted from the ethnography of Lim, 2014.} The moral; if even an elderly couple can hold off an army, it is surely a secure location.

\textit{Inner Maṇḍala: The Revitalization of the Dharma & Domar Ascendency}

The acts of seeking refuge and establishing new settlements in the hidden lands went hand-in-hand with the revitalization of the Dharma and the imperial lineage of Tibet. As Hirshberg claims, since beyul and \textit{terma} “are so often presented as products of the imperium, reincarnate claims to imperial-era personages eventually became normative within the tradition itself.”\footnote{Hirshberg, 2016: 57.} As Childs states, the theme of reviving the imperial lineage “is a theme of central importance in the \textit{beyul} literature,” and “perhaps this theme represents an old idea based on the conception that, without a legitimate monarch as the supreme secular ruler, life in Tibet will be characterized by social instability, political fragmentation, and manifestations of
Thus finding refuge in a *beyul* is predicated on three factors: 1) an “evil” invasion force threatens the destruction of the Tibetan religion and way of life, bringing with it all forms of calamity and catastrophe; 2) identification of a *beyul* hidden deep within the Himalayan Range; 3) an entourage that traces their ancestors to the imperial lineage, allowing their ascendency to rise as the ruling clan of a new *beyul* settlement.

In the case of Langtang, Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje is not renowned simply for his praises of the Langtang Valley as the *beyul* Namgo Dagam. He was the founder of the villages of Langtang and Kyanjin, as well as the builder of the temple at Langtang village, and acted as the legitimized ruler of the villages as head of the Domar clan. The Domar clan traces its lineage to members of the retinue that accompanied the Princess Wencheng to Tibet when she was betrothed to Songtsen Gampo (Tib. *srong btsan sgam po*, 569–649/605–649?), and traces its lineage to noble members of Trisong Detsen’s (Tib. *khri srong lde btsan*, 742–797) imperial court in the golden age of Tibet. Additionally, each noble family of the imperial court carried with them legends of magical powers that distinguished them as nobles. For the Domar clan, their power was the ability to slay zombies and tame demons, making them perfect candidates for the establishment of settlements in the untamed borderlands.

The ascendency of the Domar clan in Langtang showcases the theme of royal revitalization, and presents a narrative of Tibetan Buddhist sectarian disputes and the overarching victory of the Nyingma school. The first settlers in the Langtang Valley were not Dorje and his cohort, but a small group of Drukpa Kagyupas led by a figure known only as Chorangri. Upon claiming the valley, Dorje engaged Chorangri in debate, but neither was able to best the other. Instead, they engaged in a competition to see

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129 The village of Langtang, Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje’s early-18th century temple, as well as another temple built in the late-18th century were tragically destroyed in the April 2015 Gorkhali Earthquake in Nepal. This singular natural disaster caused the deaths of over 300 people and destroyed cultural structures and relics over 300 years old. An ongoing project spearheaded by Austin Lord, the Langtang Memory Project, seeks to document and restore the cultural and religious heritage, as well as the lives, that were deemed lost by this natural disaster.
131 Lim, 2004: 49.
who could transform themselves such that they would not cause a blade of grass to bend over. Chorangri transformed into a snail and the blade of grass bent, whereas Dorje transformed himself into an ant, not moving the grass at all.132 Thus, Chorangri was defeated and banished from Langtang, along with his Kagyu companions. “Langtangpa also credit Dorje with the great act of banishing from Langtang a man-eating demon, or dü (Tib. bdud), that had demanded annual human sacrifice. Dorje conducted a rite of tantric exorcism, jinseg (Tib. sbyin sreg), a ritual fire with the capacity to burn out and destroy a demon.”133 The ritual failed; and Dorje was forced to team up with the local bönpo, Meme Pengyap, who was able to see the demon. They caught the demon, subdued it, and forced it down the valley to a cave near Syabru Besi at the mouth of the valley where they encased it in a boulder and put a goddess (Tib. lha mo) in charge of guarding the stone prison. Here we see the history of the settlement of Langtang village intimately related to the conception of the valley as a sacred geography, as revealed by the myth of its discovery and the submission of a demon, and manifest in the ritual and political dominance of the Domar clan. Furthermore, the Domar clan god, “The Horse-Head God” (Tib. lha rta), is believed to be the patron deity of the Langtang Valley who abides in the central mountain, Langtang Lerung.134

This coincides with Tulku Thondup’s depiction of Padmasambhava’s process of binding local deities under Buddhist oaths, transforming the enemies of the Dharma into Dharma Protectors.135 To this day, “The Horse-Head God’s” mantra among Langtangpa is: “Om Hrih Padma Sambhava Hum,”136 and he is “the only clan god in Langtang whose cult is not restricted to the clan of which it is the tutelary deity, given its wider function in the pantheon of Himalayan Buddhism.”137 Thus, the importance of “The

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132 Lim, 2004: 50.
133 Lim, 2004: 50.
134 This is verified in the yul lha rtens ’khor, verses 13-15: “Regarding the precious throne and Horse-Head God, whose nature is utterly white, [he is] situated above bundles of hanging silk scarves endowed with ornaments of jewels, inside [Mount] Lerung, the essential sacred abode of the god.” (rin chen khri dang lha rta ngang dkar ni / dar gyi chun ’phyang nor bu’i brgyan ldan steng / gnas bdag lha yi rtso bo gle rung la ni)
136 Lim, 2004: 58.
137 Lim, 2004: 60.
Horse-Head God” to the people of Langtang confirms and affirms the Domar clan as the principal protector and ruler of the community by royal decree.

But what of the flourishing of the Dharma? These stories convey religious authority and the binding of local deities under the symbolism of Buddhism, but how does this preserve the religion? In the case of Langtang, the first recorded settlers were Buddhist members of the Domar clan. Ehrhard makes the claim that a “journey to a sacred site in the southern border areas can result in the authority to idealize and spiritualize the landscape…” Perhaps the hidden lands functioned simply as sanctuaries in which pious Tibetans could continue their religious practice, but Childs does not see it this way. Childs argues that the preservation of Buddhism is not at the forefront of the Tibetan migrational agenda. Instead, the revitalization of the royal lineage is of the highest concern. He states: “an adept practitioner who has received the prophecy of opening a sbas-yul [sic] must lead the way to the sbas-yul. This is true, but he is not the only person required when it comes to settling a sbas-yul. Members of the royal lineage are prerequisites for taking possession of the hidden land and establishing a new administration.” The refuge of the beyul was for the people, and for Dharma practitioners, but primarily it served to guarantee the survival of the royal lineage. This is verified in the gnam zla gnas yig by Demtruchen: “A tantric who is blessed and who is from the unbroken lineage of the [sovereign] (Tib. mnga’ bdag) kings themselves is necessary to possess that land.” Childs seems to place a great deal emphasis on political motivations underlying the settlement of different beyul. Regarding topography and political territory, Ramble states, “although sacred representations of the landscape are an important idiom for conceptualizing territory, political considerations are often detectable only in a vestigial form.” Nevertheless, the survival of the royal lineage was seen as a means of enacting the flourishing of the Dharma in the same way that emperors of Tibet in her golden age commissioned and cultivated the growth of Buddhism in Tibet.

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139 Childs, 1999: 144.
Moreover, the happiness and spiritual prosperity of Tibet will be assured, since due to the divine origin of the Gungthang line of rulers, there was a perceived connection between the perpetuation of the royal lineage and the prosperity of Tibet. As Michael Aris summarizes in his book on the history of Bhutan, “all the Buddhist kingdoms founded at different periods in the Himalayas traced their descent from, and founded their legitimacy upon, the early royal dynasty of Tibet.”

Based on this evidence, it is now possible to view the revitalization of royalty and the Buddhist religion in hidden lands across the Himalayas as an expression of the inner maṇḍala. Beyul, seen as a tripartite maṇḍala, lends a deeper understanding of the sacred landscape maṇḍala of a beyul as a place which has the power to revitalize the royal lineage of Tibet, preserve the teachings of Buddha, and offer a sanctuary for sincere Buddhist practice. In this way the inner maṇḍala is an exercise in mapping the mind and finding a place within that offers the ideal circumstances for Buddhist practice. Revitalization of royal lineage and dharma is a psychological “becoming”, or an effort to realize prophecy and establish mental clarity within the mental sphere of the beyul.

‘Secret’ Maṇḍala: The Domain of Tantric Spirits and Deities

The third and subtlest view of the tripartite beyul maṇḍala is the tantric, or ‘secret’, view of the beyul as the ethereal level in which deities and spirits are seen to inhabit the landscape, dwell in ecologically important aspects of the landscape, and act as Dharma Protectors of the beyul. At its simplest, the subtle, ethereal aspect of a beyul “consists of the divinities who people the landscape and settlements,” constituting a sacred geography. Within the sacred geography of a beyul, the topography is idealized in such a way that natural features of the landscape (mountain peaks, rivers, glaciers, caves, and so forth) are included according to a quincunx pattern of a maṇḍala, a geometric pattern consisting of five points arranged in a cross, with four of them forming a square or rectangle and a fifth at its center.

142 Aris, 1979: 93-94.
Within a typical quincunx *mandala*, the center point is visualized as a sacred mountain personified as a territory god surrounded by a retinue of lesser deities and spirits. Within a *beyul*, “the phenomenal world is held to be inhabited by a host of spirit powers and deities who are organized into a single ritual cosmos and must be ritually acknowledged in relation to most areas of human activity.”¹⁴⁴ This visualization constitutes what Dan Smyer Yü refers to as the “mandalization” of a landscape, or “the vertical nature of sacredness concerning Tibetan sacred mountains, which suggests that the higher the mountain, the more sacred it is.”¹⁴⁵ Locals of a *beyul* consider these central sacred mountains with their imposing heights and powerful presences to be supernatural Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the corresponding subtle counterpart of this mandalization, the *né ri* (Tib. *gnas ri*), refers to the sacred qualities of a sacred mountain site, the natural places where gods and spirits reside, “rich with the spiritual power of saints who undertook solitary meditative practice there,” places where “gods are humanized and where humans are believed to find gateways into the realms of gods.”¹⁴⁶ In this sense, employing Yü’s phrase, the *beyul* is “mandalized.”¹⁴⁷

Himalayan Buddhists traditionally venerate mountain peaks and alpine lakes as the dwelling places of Buddhist deities, and *beyul* are often centered around one particular sacred natural site or sacred mountain believed to be the abode of a local territory god, or *né ri*. The sacred mountain is also often considered to be the physical embodiment of the deity. The meaning of this central focus is in direct reference to the mythical narrative of the subjugation of Himalayan deities by Padmasambhava and their transformation into Dharma Protectors, and the integration of the *beyul* topography into an esoteric, tantric vision of reality. As Huber states, “the main implication of the *né* principle for ritual is that places so designated are ascribed a very high or positive ontological value.”¹⁴⁸ Although a Himalayan valley

¹⁴⁴ Huber and Pedersen, 1997: 584.
¹⁴⁵ Yü, 2014: 490.
¹⁴⁶ Yü, 2014: 491.
designated as a *beyul* may have many mountains, and most certainly do, not all possess sacred status. However, if a central sacred mountain is specified as a *né ri*, it becomes the focal point of religious ritual and belief.\textsuperscript{149} In the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, powerful sacred natural sites have required “taming through religious practice and symbolism as a means to control the forces of nature.”\textsuperscript{150} This is physically accomplished in a *beyul* by imposing meaning onto the landscape through architectural structures—often actual buildings and the construction of a myriad of structures such as temples (Tib. *lha khang*), stupas (Tib. *chod rten*), water-powered prayer wheels (Tib. *klu khangchu ‘khor*), and mantras carved on stones placed across the extent of the sacred landscape (Tib. *mdo sngags/mdo ma ni*)—thereby redefining nature without any dramatic alteration of the landscape. In this setting, Buddhist practitioners have the opportunity to venerate the landscape, the local deities, and the Buddhadharma through common rituals such as circumambulation, prostration, prayer, the burning of *sang*, offerings and edifices erected for local spirits, and mantra recitation.

To summarize this chapter, I have covered a brief history of Guru Padmasambhava’s sojourn in Tibet which led to the development of the *terma* tradition, and the exploits of *tertöns* belonging to the Jangter lineage in the Himalayas to provide background information. I have employed the conceptual framework of the *tribhuvana maṇḍala* in an effort to identify the meaning of the *beyul* concept, which is expressed threefold: outer, inner, and ‘secret’. The outer *maṇḍala* can be seen to function as a map, and as the geo-political climate in Tibet shifted, the cartographic representations of *beyul* drew upon the *maṇḍala* to direct pilgrims and refugees to hidden lands. Furthermore, by invoking the *maṇḍala*, authors of “guidebooks” in Tibetan literature make a clear symbolic reference to the mythic narrative of Padmasambhava who tamed the demons in the borderlands of the Tibetan *maṇḍala*. In this way, the borderlands which were originally filled with malicious demons are now subsumed within the Buddhist

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\textsuperscript{149} Mayard, 2018: 109.

\textsuperscript{150} Mayard, 2018: 109.
maṇḍala, offering physical and spiritual protection. Based on the prophecies that circulate throughout the Gungthang royal court, and the “guidebooks” composed throughout the history of the Jangter lineage, such as works by Rigidzin Gökyi Demtruchen, Tseten Gyaltse, Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje, and Lama Tenzin, it is clear that imagery of a maṇḍala is utilized to locate the beyul Namgo Dagam as the Langtang Valley and describe the natural fortifications of this land as offering supreme protection.

Second, we can understand the theme of royal revitalization as constituting an inner aspect of the conceptual maṇḍala, exemplified by the Domari ascendency of beyul Namgo Dagam. Cultural memory of the golden age of the Tibetan Yarlung empire in which Songtsen Gampo and Trisong Detsen consolidated the Tibetan borders and fostered the Dharma at Padmasambhava’s behest brings to mind a simultaneous flourishing of the Dharma. In this way, the journey to a beyul and its settlement by a descendent of the royal retinue of the Yarlung dynasty can be understood as respective outer and inner elements of the conceptual maṇḍala. Lastly, the secret understanding of the conceptual maṇḍala is expressed in how denizens of a beyul may conceptualize their environment as a buddha-field of tantric deities surrounded by their retinues. Then from a firm understanding of the tripartite conceptual maṇḍala, it is possible to examine environmentalist implications in Langtang based on faith in the beyul narrative of Padmasambhava and the belief in sentience of the landscape and the non-human entities who abide there.
Chapter 2: Ethnography of the Langtang Valley, Nepal

In this next chapter, I present an ethnography of beliefs regarding four specific deities and spirits present in numerous sacred natural sites in beyul Langtang that draws on the written cosmology of the “Yul Lha rTen ‘Khor” presented to me by Lama Tenzin, personal interviews conducted during fieldwork, and ritual observation. This chapter focuses on the perceived causality of the 2015 earthquake disaster which left the Langtang Valley decimated, and how the belief in this causality can be understood as a strong belief in the agency of elements of nature that has environmentalist implications. While a belief in mountain gods could be seen as village superstition, it is the central argument of this thesis that belief in mountain gods carries with it strong implications for environmental conservation that focuses on elements of the landscape possessing agency, which thereby lends itself to the ecophilosophy that agents of the landscape deserve protection and reverence for their own sake. Following an ethnography of the inhabitants of the Langtang Valley, I draw out three implications that may have an impact on environmentalist study and practice: (1) culture and belief is shaped by misfortune; (2) misfortunate events shape beliefs of sentience and agency of features of the landscape seen to house spirits and deities; (3) the “happy life” is realized as a balance of traditional heritage and sustainable development and tourism.

Taxonomy of Spirits and Deities

A wide range of deities and spirits are believed to inhabit the landscape in the Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist traditions, and Tibetans have attempted to classify all of them. One Tibetan classification model, found particularly within the Nyingma school, groups all deities and spirits into the ‘eight classes of gods and spirits’(Tib. lha srin bde brgyad). Another more common system, in a possible effort to retain the standard Tibetan cosmological view, places all deities and spirits within the six Buddhist realms of existence. However, few contemporary scholars of Buddhism have successfully attempted to identify and categorize each deity and spirit type. The most in-depth taxonomy of Tibetan and Himalayan deity types to date comes from Christopher Bell’s research on protector deities:
The Tibetan ontological scheme involves four major divisions. First, there are the tutelary deities (Tib. yi dam; Skt. isdevatā) of Tantric Buddhism. These deities are encountered at the highest levels of Buddhist monastic ritual practice and yogic meditation. Second, there are the supramundane protector deities (Tib. ’jig rten las ’das pa; Skt. lokottara), who are emanations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Such beings are not usually concerned with worldly affairs. Third, there are the mundane protector deities (Tib. ’jig rten pa; Skt. laukika) who are more often associated with geographical features like mountains, lakes, and trees, and are subject to the law of karma. These deities are focused on worldly matters and constantly interact with humans. Fourth, there is the horde of unconverted local spirits and ghosts, who often bring about illness, bad luck, and calamity. The middle two categories are generally taken up with Dharma protectors, which, as the name suggests, are propitiated to protect and maintain the Dharma, the Buddhist teachings.¹

The deities and spirits who occupy the last two categories are not entirely distinct, and according to Samuel, there is a degree of fluidity between them.² The only distinction is that those deities who occupy the third category were once chief local deities who were “tamed” or “subdued” under Padmasambhava and now serve as Buddhist protector deities. The spirits classified within the fourth category, the dangerous, pernicious spirits often depicted as wrathful, occupy the retinues of the protector deities,³ and are the most challenging spirits to classify in a satisfactory manner. To complicate matters, a degree of fluidity between categories must exist within any satisfactory model of deities and spirits, and no one model is taken as the standard across the span of Tibetan and Himalayan spiritual belief. For example, Bell makes a list of seventeen different deity types ranging from gods (Tib. lha; Skt. deva) to war-like imperial spirits (Tib. btsan po) and serpent spirits (Tib. klu; Skt. naga), but neglects to mention a particular water or glacier spirit called a menmo (Tib. sman mo) envisioned to possess feminine healing qualities and abide in glaciers. On the other hand, Samuel makes a list of ten deities and spirits that are frequently found across the expanse of Tibetan Buddhist belief, but similarly neglects to accommodate many types found more locally.⁴ Furthermore, both Samuel and Bell acknowledge that the distinction between the three classes of gods (worldly, heavenly, and tantric) is heavily blurred. For the sake of this

³ Bell, 2013: 8.
⁴ Samuel, 1993. List of 10 spirit-types: Lü; Nyen; Sadag; Tsenpo; Gyelpo; Düd; Menmo; Sa; Nödjin; Lha.
thesis, I focus on four deity and spirit types identified in the *Yul Lha rTen ‘Khor*: (1) Lha; (2) Lü; (3) Tsenpo; and (4) Menmo. (See FN. 39, p. 10)

**Pure Vision of the Beyul**

To visualize the *maṇḍala* of a *beyul* as the ethereal abode of tantric deities is to see the landscape as underlain by a network of supernatural entities whose power can be perceived both in a positive and negative sense. However, to visualize the esoteric, ‘secret’ qualities of the *beyul* requires a level of spiritual accomplishment thought to be available only to those with the necessary karmic inclination and spiritual mastery. Pure Vision from the Tibetan Buddhist understanding is a spontaneous quality that grants the viewer the ability to receive teachings or experience visions directly from gurus, deities, or dharma protectors. Pure Vision is also given as the reason how a *beyul* is discovered, either physically or as a sacred landscape. Spiritual adepts with the right spiritual inclination sometimes activate Pure Vision upon gaining access to the center point of the *beyul maṇḍala* even if Pure Vision was not a precedent quality.

Supernatural entities present within a *beyul* express both benevolent and malicious qualities, and are seen as both internal and external, and with Pure Vision, an expression of the path to spiritual attainment. Locals within a *beyul* do not question this dichotomy, as within the Himalayan Buddhist cosmology, deities, demons, animals, and humans are seen to inhabit the same reality. “There is a continuity of being between the environmental qualities and inhabitants of the sublime and the gross material dimensions of the three-level world. This grading together can be, and does become, a phenomenal reality. Experience, and the quality of the environment, changes for Tibetans [and Himalayans] as they ascend or descend through it.”

This idea is a central realization of the Buddhist interpretation of the true nature of phenomena. Also, because of physical and metaphysical secretiveness, the *beyul* is known as the foremost repository for *terma*, and one’s ability to uncover these texts depends on one’s level of spiritual accomplishment and associated ‘vision’. Padmasambhava is especially linked

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5 Huber, 1999a: 57.
to the topographical features of the landscape, particularly to mountains, lakes, and caves where he and later tantric masters are said to have meditated. “Thus, the hidden land physicality is permeated by his subliminal ‘energy’, which renders the environment the perfect abode for wandering sngags pa [yogin] and unconventional gter ston seeking spiritual mastery.”

Chogyam Trungpa compared the journey of the tantric practitioner to walking along a precarious mountain trail fraught with dangerous challenges and obstacles, and this can be illustrated by the *mandala* which provides for the spiritual practitioner a guide to mental transformation proceeding from the grossest mode of subjective experience to the subtlest view of emptiness.

Understood this way, the tantric path enables the powerful capacity of Pure Vision, “directed to uncovering the buddha-nature within,” and with Pure Vision comes the esoteric vision of the sacred *mandala* which has a structure fundamentally different from the mundane, unenlightened view of reality. This reality is not something fixed or unchanging, but exists as dynamically fluid and spontaneously arising. In viewing the beyul *mandala* with Pure Vision, the protector deity who resides in the central and highest sacred mountain represents the state of awakening central to Buddhist ideals. Thus, the deity, and the central goal of the Buddhist path both occupy the center of the *mandala*. The surrounding retinue symbolizes Buddhist constructs relevant to the practitioner’s spiritual journey as well as strategies to adjust perception to the impermanence and emptiness of phenomena. Furthermore, the center of the *mandala* and its immediate surroundings are considered interdependent and therefore empty of any inherent existence; this being the impetus behind the *mandala*’s transformative potential and a testament to its centrality in Buddhist thought. “All aspects of the *mandala* influence each other, so that physical surroundings, practices and perception become part of the entire progressive experience towards enlightenment.”

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6 Mayard, 2018: 78.
Buddhism.

In his study of Japanese sacred mountains, Allen Grapard points out two significances of Buddhist maṇḍalas. One pertains to the “representation of the residence of the Buddha … [as] a metaphysical space which provided an insight into what Buddhism called the Realm of Essence.”\(^\text{11}\) The other significance is “the origin nature of our heart-mind, free of illusions and passions.”\(^\text{12}\) In the Japanese case, “mandalization appeared as almost purely an event of transforming a worldly place into a sacred space.”\(^\text{13}\) The Himalayan case, by contrast, involves not merely the perceived Buddhist sacredness but, more critically, it involves a range of ritual and conceptual interactions between mutual embodiments of Buddhism, place, gods, and people. The ecological, psychological, and spiritual aspects of sacrality in a beyul represent a place that inherently possesses a latent but also an able-to-be-perceived sacredness in its topographical formation. Mircea Eliade refers to this as a “hierophany,”\(^\text{14}\) a phenomenon wherein the potentiality of place-based spirituality is realized in the human interactions with the perceived local divinities. Within a “hierophany”—or mandalization in the case of Himalayan Buddhism—the engagement between people, place, and divine is an essential characteristic.

Mandalization involves actual physical and spiritual engagement of people with the landscape and the deity mountains through ritual because “when a deity mountain is revered as a sacred site, it is not merely because of its impressive height or shape but because it affords human spiritual acts and collective existential and cultural needs.”\(^\text{15}\) What Yü means by “affords” here is that the interactive spiritual relationship between humankind and the spirits in nature is expressed in existential, and ritual terms. These existential and cultural affordances provided by this interactive relationship between person, place, and divinity provides an atmosphere for a lived religion that can be understood as a type of place-based,

\(^{10}\) Mayard, 2018: 114.
\(^{11}\) Grapard, 1982: 209.
\(^{12}\) Grapard, 1982: 209.
\(^{13}\) Grapard, 1982: 209.
\(^{15}\) Yü, 2014: 496.
reciprocal spirituality “that is built in one’s social routines and that personalizes Buddhist enlightenment for a practitioner’s eco-religious vision of the living environment.”16 This type of spirituality stemming from belief embedded in social routines, such as ritual, permeates Himalayan Buddhist culture and, at the subtlest level of the mandalization, provides the affordance of cutting across the dichotomy of subjective-objective between the practitioner and the external world. The affordance serves a religious function by helping the practitioner to understand subjective-objective dichotomy as inadequate within Buddhist terms. Moreover, this reflexive relationship is both physical and spiritual, both a fact of the practitioner and of the environment. An affordance in this sense is the belief and knowledge garnered from communication between person, place, and divinity, and “points both ways, to the environment, and to the observer.”17 As can be observed in the case of beyul Langtang, the belief in local deities manifests as a reciprocal relationship between person and place; person and deity.

**Né Ri: Tibetan and Himalayan Sacred Natural Sites**

It can be difficult to pin down a precise translation of né ri from Tibetan to English, but Western equivalents to this type of local are “holy mountain,” “sacred mountain,” “power mountain,” and “sacred natural site,” the last of which I have chosen to use for this thesis because it evokes an emic understanding of né ri, and focuses on the entire landscape of the beyul, not simply the central mountain. These equivalents of né ri “attempt to capture the Tibetan conception of these sites or zones as being extraordinary because they are ‘consecrated’ or ‘empowered’, they involve specific relationships between them and persons (and also between persons) by way of practices such as pilgrimage,” and, most importantly, they are “centers where people are required to confront and invest in prescribed ideas and beliefs.”18 Based simply on our knowledge of the vast range of spirit and deity types, and the depictions of Himalayan beyul in the form of mandalas, the physical landscape is believed to be host to a number of spirits ranging from minor autochthons to the highest tantric deities and Buddhas in Mahayana Buddhism.

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18 Huber, 1999: 77-78.
Human interactions with place and spirit are also involved, actions that are ritually prescribed and mediated by local ‘folk religion’ (Tib. mi chos) practices. Overall, the term né ri, and in general né (Tib. gnas), “most often designates the abodes of all of these deities and spirits and their associated states of being, variously conceived. They may be in existence at, or dwell in, locations (gnas) in space (nam mkha’), substance or matter (rgyu), bodily forms (gzugs can),” or they can appear in all of the modes simultaneously. The term né ri thus is usually invoked as a kind of umbrella-term to refer to the all (micro) sacred natural sites within the (macro) beyul.

In her analysis of the myth of the “Supine Demoness”, Janet Gyatso draws attention to the Tibetan proclivity to read features of the landscape as animated. She states: “the image ranges from one of a being who inhabits a certain place [...] to the place itself as constituting the spirit of a deity of some sort [...] to the perception of the actual contours of the land as being anthropomorphic or animal-like, by virtue of which that place is thought actually to be the being so outlined.” The animated quality of né ri is also used to describe the dwellings these of spirit-types. In the local language in Langtang, mountains that are given special names beyond simply “snow mountain” (Tib. khangs ri) are signified as being sacred and the dwelling of a spirit or deity. Likewise, Himalayan people apply a great deal of colorful, spiritual language to mountains, alpine lakes, and other sacred natural sites which are deemed to be sacred, believing that spirits and deities dwell therein. Stone cairns that mark such places are referred to as “fortresses”, “castles”, or “palaces” (Tib. pho brang). Ayako Sadakane examined the linguistic links between natural phenomena as well as Buddhist virtues and taboos. For example, “a snow avalanche (Langtangpa: khayoo) is believed to take place when the valley is defiled by immoral behavior such as intrigue, sexual misconduct, or pregnancy before marriage.” And because the Langtangpa believe the valley is guarded by a multitude of deities and spirits that dwell in features of the natural landscape,

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19 Huber, 1999: 79.
Langtangpa “address these elements using the names of the personified spirits.” Thus, when referring to the central mountain of Langtang, Mt. Langtang Lirung, local Langtangpa will address this peak by its name, and likewise will address locations believed to house a spirit or deity type by the name of the spirit or deity. Any avalanches, landslides, and other disasters that originate from these sacred natural sites carry similar unique terminology. For example, a ha gig is an “avalanche which falls together with strong wind, rocks, and stones: this does harm to men and cattle when the valley is defiled by immoral behavior,” and “generally falls from Mt. Langtang Lirung.” One plausible explanation for this set of unique terminology is that Tibetan dialects incorporate honorific language (Tib. zhe sa) used to denote or address people and beings of greater hierarchical status by people and beings of lesser status. The mere existence of a set of honorific terminology pertaining to spirit and deity types and their associated features of the landscape suggests a nature-culture nexus in Langtang based on a place-based spirituality.

**Ethnography of the Langtang Valley**

In this section, first I trace the belief in local spirits and deities embedded in the landscape held by local Langtangpa. Then, drawing on the firmly held belief among Langtangpa that the chief territory deity, Langtang Lerung, caused the landslide that caused rampant devastation on April, 2015, I conclude that misfortune shapes cultural memory, and beliefs ascribe agency to features of the landscape which molds local perceptions of “the happy life”.

Langtang is named after the mythical tale of the valley’s opening by a bull who ran all the way from the valley opening at Bridim to Langtang village, and beyond to Mt. Langshisa, in an effort to escape slaughter. The bull is said to have found a “happy place” up in the high alpine pastures, and this is where the Langtangpa now reside and graze their cattle. The bull in the tale is believed to be “Guru Rinpoche in mind essence, the one to leave the footprints in the stones,” and serves as a symbolic reference to the precept of not killing sentient beings and Langtang’s status as a beyul blessed by Guru

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24 Lama Tenzin, October 2019.
Rinpoche. The Langtang Valley is a steep valley formed by the Langtang Khola river that runs from more
than 4,000m altitude at its highest to 1,500m altitude at its lowest, surrounded by peaks ranging from
6,500m to over 7,000m. The valley is dominated by its highest peak, Langtang Lirung (7227m) (Fig. 3),
which looms as a blinding white edifice over the high alpine valley. At its opening is the village of
Syaprubesi, situated at the confluence of the Langtang Khola and Trishuli Khola rivers, marking the
trailhead for the Langtang trek stretching to the village of Kyanjin Gumba and Mt. Langshisa (Fig. 4).

The status of Langtang as a beyul is universally known amongst locals living in Langtang, for this
concept informs their perception of Langtang as a place for both worldly and spiritual happiness, blessed
by a history of enlightened Buddhist masters beginning with Guru Rinpoche, and protected by an
assortment of wrathful Buddhist protector deities. The concept of beyul is inextricably connected to the
discovery or transmission of terma, however, there has yet to be one discovered in Langtang. That does
not mean it does not exist in Langtang. Lama Tenzin believes that terma has, in fact, been placed in
Langtang but has simply not been discovered yet. “Where the yul lha exists, terma exists. If terma is not
hidden here, who then composed the yul lha pecha?” The “yul lha pecha” that Lama Tenzin is referring to
is the Yul Lha rTen ‘Khor, a text that had been lost after the 2015 earthquake. Lama Tenzin reconstructed
the text by piecing together fragments recovered from the landslide, from villagers, and retrieved from
memory. (See Appendix A)

Protector deities and wrathful beings are believed to be embedded in the landscape itself, having
been there long before humans settled the land, and their dwellings are often marked by man-made
structures at the exact location of the sacred natural site. In Lama Tenzin’s words, “Beyul Namgo Dagan
spans from Ghodatabela to Kyanjin and beyond to Mt. Langshisa. Guru Rinpoche hid deities in the
valley. The mountain peaks are their abodes and the chortens (Tib. mchod rten) are physical
[manifestations] of this.” According to Lama Tenzin, before the arrival of Guru Rinpoche, the chief
territory god, Ge Nyen Chenpo or Langtang Lerung as he is referred to in the Yul Lha rTen ‘Khor, and his
surrounding retinue of “sentinels, tsen po [violent spirits], the collection of lü and menmo,”25 were not
assigned the status of Dharma Protectors from the start. “Guru Rinpoche assigned them as protectors.”

Along with the mountain peaks acting as abodes for the territory god, “lü khang and chortens are the abodes of [beings] from 1000 years ago. In some instances, lü are said to live near chortens [near Kyanjin Gumba].” Furthermore, Lama Tenzin regards Ge Nyen Chenpo (a.k.a. Lerung) as an accomplished master who was historically present in the valley and was assigned the role of “gatekeeper” (Tib. sgo srung), and given the highest mountain to be his spiritual abode. The name “Lerung” (Langtangpa: le rung) was thus ascribed to the most sacred peak in Langtang, now called Mt. Langtang Lirung on tourist trekking maps of the region.27 “In both mythological and historical terms, many important mountain deities in Tibet are both gods and humans, with human ancestors incarnated as gods and gods being the immortal form of humans.”

Several accomplished masters are said to have performed pilgrimage (Tib. gnas skor/gnas ‘jal) to/around mountains located in Langtang and other nearby beylu.

Physical remnants of Guru Rinpoche’s journey are dotted throughout the upper reaches of the Langtang Valley. Two indentations in stone resembling footprints can be found near the highest village, Kyanjin Gumba, and are believed by many locals to be the footprints of Guru Rinpoche “throwing terma into Hyolmo.”29 (Fig. 5) Additionally, a cave situated underneath the moraine of Kimjung Glacier on the side of Mt. Langtang Lirung is believed to be a site in which Guru Rinpoche meditated and “conversed with Lerung.”30 (Fig. 6) Along with Guru Rinpoche’s presence, his subjugation of local deities and spirits are embedded in the landscape of Langtang, both natural and man-made, and each sacred natural site corresponds with an associated deity or spirit. The tops of mountain peaks are believed to house the yul lha of the valley, and at these sites locals have placed piles of stones adorned with prayer flags called

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25 Yul Lha rTen ‘Khor.
26 Lama Tenzin, October 2019.
27 “Langtang Lerung” is used here to denote the chief territory god, whereas “Mt. Langtang Lirung” is used to denote the central mountain of the Langtang Valley. On an interesting side note, this appears to be a peak-naming trend among at least two Himalayan beylu; Langtang and Hyolmo. Dorje Lekpa, another accomplished master believed to have visited Langtang, is connected to one of five sacred mountains in beylu Hyolmo, Dorje Lhakpa, located just south of Langtang and separated by a chain of high peaks.
29 Lama Sangye, March 2020.
30 Lama Tenzin, March 2020.
“castles” (Tib. pho brang) to commemorate their assigned status as protectors of the valley. (Fig. 7)

Water-powered prayer wheels, said to be the “abodes of līū” (Tib. chu ‘khor/glu khang) mark streams that feed the main Langtang Khola river and act as signposts to watering points along the path as well as warnings against pollution. (Fig. 8) At especially sacred locations, chortens have been erected as reliquaries for the remains of accomplished masters or to serve as abodes for spirits. (Fig. 9)

Although differing in architectural design across regions and cultures within the Buddhist world, Buddhist reliquary mounds, or chorten, are viewed as maṇḍala palaces. “For Tibetans the two are functionally similar as ritual structures, as they both contain either Buddhas or the substantial and symbolic equivalents of Buddhas in the form of relics, texts, or images [...] Both possess a similar ambiance of empowerment.” As soon as one reaches the altitude at which beyul Namgo Dagam begins (roughly 2,500m at a village called Ghodatabela), walls of stones carved with mantras—referred to as “mani walls” (Tib. rdo ma ni) for the repeated carvings of the Tibetan “om mani padme hum hri”—line the path. (Fig. 10) A number of stones that make up the mani walls of Langtang are carved with prayers, the yidam mantra (A ‘sha sa ma ha), depictions of the Three Protector Deities (Tib. rig gsum gon po), and a few stones of red color are given prominent positions. (Fig. 11 & 12) The carved mani stones of reddish hue (Tib. rdo mar po) are given prominent positions due to a perceived connection to the founding clan of Langtang, the Domar Clan, and the tsenpo spirits for their proclivity to dwell within red stones, especially giant red boulders. Regarding each mani stone that make up the walls, “each stone was sponsored by a family who lost a loved one. Some are older than 250 years, all carvings happened locally.” Lastly, the elusive spirit-class known as menmo are said to dwell in a number of sacred natural sites such as glacial-fed streams and the glaciers (Langtangpa: tar tang) themselves. (Fig. 13)

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31 Huber, 1999: 53.
32 Manjushri (Tib. ‘jam pa’i dgyangs), Chenrezig (Tib. span ras ‘zigs), and Channa Dorje (Tib. phyags na rdo rje) alternatively named Vajrapani.
33 Lama Tenzin, October 2019.
**Belief in Deities and Spirits**

Based on the majority of interviews with people living in the Langtang Valley, belief in local deities and spirits remains robust. Nima Gyalmu Lama had this to say regarding her view of Mt. Langtang Lirung: “Langtang Lirung is our biggest mountain, that is why we have to perform puja [ritual offerings] to Him every year. We say that He is our biggest God. He really takes care of us.” This belief was echoed by nearly every Langtangpa interviewed and their sincere belief is palpable in how they revere Mt. Langtang Lirung and perform regular ritual offerings to the mountain. Choden Lama, sister to Lama Tenzin and owner of a poplar guest house in Kyanjin, performs a ritual offering “for the three protector deities, for bodhisattvas, and for the yul lha,” everyday, expressing a deep respect and belief in the range of expressions of Himalayan deities and spirits. Karto Lama, owner of the “Hard Rock Café” for the past 20 years (aptly named for it is nestled between two huge boulders) identified a site she believes houses a wrathful tsenpo located at Langshisa Kharka near a giant red boulder, where she gathers sea buckthorn berries—a Himalayan berry believed to help with altitude sickness for its high vitamin C content—in the summer. Lhakpa Jangba, the proprietor of a successful coffee shop and guesthouse in Kyanjin, listed several sites throughout the valley where liü and tsenpo are believed to reside, such around an old tree above Langtang village rumored to get one sick if one were to wander too near, a red boulder housing a tsenpo dedicated to the protection of the Domar descendents, a grove of trees located on an island in the middle of the Langtang Khola river believed to be the domain of several troublesome liü, and a massive boulder nestled behind the Kyanjin temple (Tib. lha khang) believed to house a particularly powerful tsenpo. According to Lhakpa, the temple was built there specifically because the largest boulder around Kyanjin is located there. “This boulder is called torma,” Lhakpa relayed to me, and when I asked for whom the torma is for, he responded, “for Lerung,” symbolizing yet again that all spirits located in the

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35 Choden Lama, March 2020.
36 Karto Lama, March 2020.
value form the retinue of Langtang Lerung. Several more sites can be found if one walks beyond Kyanjin towards Mt. Langshisa to the East where yaks and yak-cow hybrids termed “dzomo” graze in larger numbers than lower down in the valley. Sangye Lama, an owner of a guesthouse in Kyanjin as well as one of the most revered lamas in Langtang, pointed to a metamorphic stone formation along the trail believed to be the physical “nose of Vajrapani,” and one of the most revered caves found in Langtang in which Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche stayed and meditated for over two weeks in 2017, during his hiatus.

Testimonies of faith and tours of numerous sacred natural sites relay an existing belief in the Guru Rinpoche narrative, lending itself to the status Langtang holds as a beyul, but local faith in the yul lha Langtang Lirung is most evident in the belief locals place in the perceived causal chain of events that led up to the devastating earthquake and resulting landslide that fell with the force of half of the Hiroshima atomic bomb on April 25, 2015. Following this event that resulted in the tragic deaths of over 300 people and the total destruction of “old” Langtang village, many in Langtang believe the landslide was “brought down upon our very heads”38 by the angry protector god bent on punishing the Langtangpa for a number of, what they view as, transgressions. Among locals, accounts differ slightly in what exactly these transgressions are perceived to be. For Sangye Lama, who has lived in Langtang for most of life and in Kyanjin for over 10 years, he not only believes strongly in the existence and protectorship of the yul lha, he believes the yul lha actively caused the landslide. When I inquired as to why the yul lha was driven to punish the Langtangpa, he had this to say: “There was too much rubbish, people were killing animals and eating meat, the Nepali army [stationed] at Ghodatabela were killing and eating mutton on Dasain. There were too many people before, not enough space or respect.”39 Gyalpu Tamang Lama, also known as “Cheej Gyalpu” for his managerial position overseeing yak cheese production in the valley, echoes this belief that the yul lha caused the landslide. Moreover, he believes that the mountain carries with it some kind of curse. “Some climbers who tried to summit or who summited Langtang Lirung died

38 Sangye Lama, March 2020
39 Sangye Lama, March 2020.
from a curse. Two Swiss climbers succeeded in the 1990’s. One died on the way down. Ten years ago, an Italian and a Sherpa summited the peak, then they didn’t live very long. In fact, they were both dead three years later.” Gyalpu’s tone was reminiscent of preconceived images I held regarding the popularized “Mummy’s Curse” of Egyptian pyramids and tombs, and he may have been intentionally invoking this image. Gyalpu’s personal belief in this causality seemed to reflect his general view of karma, as he said shortly after relaying his belief in the sacrality of Mt. Langtang Lirung: “Belief helps the whole world. If you give good, you get good in return. If you give bad, you get bad in return.” Gyalpu’s idea of “giving bad and getting bad in return,” was echoed by many villagers throughout the valley, suggesting that the idea of desecrating a sacred natural site carries with it the possibility of grave, and magical, consequences.

In order to shed some light on the reasoning Langtangpa give for their belief that the yul lha exacted punishment upon them, it is important to observe the Buddhist precepts and taboos. Of those interviewed, a critical taboo was broken which Langtangpa believe led the yul lha to punish them. After the formation of the LNP, Nepalese soldiers were stationed in the valley and international tourists began arriving. Among these “outsiders” in the valley, many had an appetite for meat, and fresh meat was acquired by slaughtering animals such as goats, chickens, and yaks. Under different circumstances, the slaughtering of animals for meat would have been strictly prohibited within the beyul, for this is considered one of the most sacred Buddhist taboos in a beyul. Karto Lama and Choden Lama both draw a connection between the slaughtering of animals for their meat that began in the 1970’s and the angry yul lha who caused the landslide. Choden, who has lived in Kyanjin her entire life and who lost her husband in the landslide said, “because many people were not good in their hearts, because many people were killing yaks and eating the meat, the yul lha sent the landslide.” Karto Lama agrees, and moreover, she believes that the Langtangpa were punished for greed. “In past times people had little money and not enough food to feed themselves and their children, but we performed puja with great effort. Then, when

40 Gyalpu Tamang Lama, March 2020.
41 Gyalpu Tamang Lama, March 2020.
42 Choden Lama, March 2020.
people started making much money from tourism, the younger generation stopped performing puja and
the yul lha got angry.” Karto Lama is the daughter of Domar Pema Lama, another member of
Langtang’s most well-respected religious leadership, and granddaughter to Domar Rinzin Lama, the first
Village Development Committee (VDC) head of Langtang during the Panchayat Period. Karto Lama
related that it was her grandfather who formalized the list of taboos in the valley and pushed for the status
of National Park. Among the list of taboos are rules such as no fighting, no killing, no disrespect for
sacred natural sites where deities or spirits reside, and all Langtangpa must regularly pay respects to
Langtang Lirung.

Domar Pema Lama, during an interview appealing for donations at the site of the destroyed
Langtang gompa, had this to say:

We stopped doing puja and many people died as a result. We will all die at some point,
thus we must prepare for the next life. I call for all bodhisattvas to help us in this deed
[building a new gompa]. The territory gods became angry. Why are they angry? Because
we were selling meat and yaks [to be slaughtered]. We focused on being greedy and
making money. The search for this life led to disaster.

Pema Lama makes a direct connection here between the landslide disaster and a god angered by
numerous transgressions of established beyul taboos, drawing attention to his perception that the people
of Langtang became greedy by focusing too much on tourism and acquiring material wealth from the
lucrative tourism industry in Nepal. By turning to the lucrative tourist industry, Pema Lama believes that
Langtangpa had forsaken their ties to religious happiness and well-being in the search for material wealth,
something he views as conflicting with Buddhist values.

In a compelling story relayed to me just a few days before my departure from the valley, Lhakpa
Jangba tells of his deliverance from destruction by making regular offerings to the yul lha and his retinue
of lü shortly before April 25, 2015. Lhakpa firmly believes in the immense power the yul lha wields for
protection as well as destruction. Two weeks before the earthquake, Lhakpa visited a “fortune-telling

43 Karto Lama, March 2020.
44 Karto Lama, March 2020.
45 Video interview with Domar Pema Lama, courtesy of Austin Lord
lama” and was instructed to perform very specific ritual offerings to protect his family. “The spiritual power is there, but you need the proper ritual knowledge, otherwise it doesn’t work. It’s like being sick. You need to take the right tablet, if not you won’t get better.”46 By performing these ritual offerings, Lhakpa firmly believes that he was given a vision of clairvoyance and an impending sense of doom before the earthquake struck. As a result of this, Lhakpa put his family on a helicopter just days before the earthquake, thereby sparing them and himself from the tragic death that so many faced in Langtang. Lhakpa’s interview brought to light a revealing element of Tibetan language—emotions arise spontaneously. This is perhaps the case with Langtang Lerung’s wrath. In Lhakpa’s view it is not so much that the yul lha actively caused the landslide. Rather, certain causes and conditions gave rise to the anger of the yul lha, and the yul lha’s wrath was unleashed after bubbling up for so long, much like an earthquake is unleashed after centuries of geological tension.

Not all who live in Langtang believe the yul lha caused the landslide to punish the Langtangpa, and dissenting opinions can be found amongst the younger generation of Langtangpa. Ritu Lama, 22 years old, had just finished her degree program in hotel management in Kathmandu when I interviewed her. Like many younger Langtangpa, upon asking her if she believed the yul lha had anything to do with the landslide, she presented a skeptical look, and said flatly, “it was a natural disaster.”47 It seemed to me at the moment that she had grown tired of hearing this question, particularly from outsiders to the valley. Chime Rinzin Lama, a 28-year-old guesthouse manager in Langtang village, had more to say concerning his disbelief in the causal narrative given by many older Langtangpa. Sitting on the roof of his guesthouse, sipping tea and watching the white mountain peak, I asked him as to why he thinks other Langtangpa believe in the yul lha and his powers for destruction so strongly. Chime said:

It is an old belief. The beliefs that killing or burning garbage or sexual misconduct offend the god are old. We have pujas for Langtang Lerung, but we shouldn’t believe these [things] offend the god. If snow comes, an avalanche will happen. It is not because we made him angry. People can do puja to stop avalanches, but people need to be smart too.

46 Lhakpa Jangba, April 2020.
47 Ritu Lama, March 2020.
Prayers won’t stop an avalanche. Faith alone does not work. We need to work and not build our homes in an avalanche zone. In the same way His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] tells us to go for regular check-ups in a hospital and not just pray for disease not to strike, we must also think this way.\textsuperscript{48}

Ritu’s and Chime’s opinion regarding the causal chain of events that led up to the 2015 earthquake and landslide reveals a generational tension in beliefs, viewed as a “generational decay” like Lhakpa Jangba mentions, in which religiously imbued knowledge is slowly disappearing in a world that is quickly modernizing and secularizing.

I followed up on the opinions given by Chime and Ritu with Lhakpa Jangba and Lama Tenzin. I asked them why the younger generation seems to disagree on what may be considered at face-value a universally held opinion in Langtang. Lama Tenzin was not at all surprised by this, but he did not offer any explanation. Instead, he indicated that, in some way, this kind of change in perception, from traditionally religious to a more secular, rationalist viewpoint, might be the primary reason why Langtang Lerung exacted his punishment upon the Langtangpa.\textsuperscript{49} According to Lhakpa, on the other hand, disregard for established traditions and the adoption of secularization constituted a “generational decay” in the quality and timeliness of ritual offerings to the chief god and his retinue. Langtangpa have stopped performing a number of annual rituals—such as the \textit{nara puja} for the commemoration of the \textit{yul lha} and the \textit{Yulwa Jiju} (Tib. \textit{yul ba pyi ju}) ritual to commemorate the subjugation of Langtang Lerung by Guru Rinpoche—which, according to Lhakpa, was clear evidence that the ritual “generational decay” of Langtang was somehow deeply connected to the anger that Langtang Lerung felt, resulting in disaster.

\textbf{The Gods Must Be Angry}

What are we to make of the causal relationship as expressed through self-reports from locals living in Langtang? First, it must be stated that there is a perception of a causal relationship relating the transgression of the Langtangpa, the angry \textit{yul lha}, and disasters like landslides. Secondly, this belief is rooted in centuries of “doomsday” prophecies found in Tibetan guidebooks shows that locals of a \textit{beyul}

\textsuperscript{48} Chime Rinzin Lama, March 2020.
\textsuperscript{49} Lama Tenzin, March 2020.
may be pre-inclined to hold such strong beliefs. As discussed in Ch. 1, the time to seek out the Southern
beyul comes at a time of political, spiritual, and social strife, and these types of prophecies are echoed
throughout the literature, even sources pertaining to beyul Langtang in particular. The prophecies
repeatedly connect an age of strife and despair to earthquakes, natural disasters, and an overall denigration
of the natural environment and sacred spaces. For example, in Geoff Childs translation of the Guidebook
to Namgo Dagam (Tib. gnas yig gnam sgo zla gam), we can see such prophecies:

The chorten of ‘Phags-pa Shing-kun (Swayambhunath) will tilt to the north. Bya-rung
Kha-shor (Boudhanath), the chorten where the blessing of Sang-rgyas ‘Od-srung (the
previous Buddha) resides, will be destroyed and rebuilt again and again [...] On the earth,
at harvest time, [crops] won’t be ripe and the rain will be great in the valley bottoms and
tops. Earthquakes will strike again and again, and the glacier water of Ti-Se will be
spoiled.50

The tilting of Swayambhunath and Boudhanath Stupas may be a reference to earthquakes that have the
power to move these structures in such a way, and the 2015 earthquake did indeed cause damage to both
famous stupas in the Kathmandu Valley, and the Boudhanath Stupa had to undergo extensive repairs.
Moreover, this kind of prophecy found in a text held to be the paramount guidebook detailing the exact
“opening” of Namgo Dagam as Langtang will have left an imprint among Langtangpa, especially if such
prophecies are believed to have actually come true.

The beliefs uncovered by my first hand interviews and accounts in Langtang can be corroborated
in two documentaries produced about Langtang following the 2015 earthquake in which locals were
asked questions similar to the ones I asked. One such documentary entitled, “Gyalmu’s House” focused
on Nyima Gyalmu’s beliefs about the valley and her family’s arduous process of rebuilding. In one of her
testimonies, Nyima Gyalmu says:

It has been too many years since we last did puja for Langtang Lirung, so He became
angry and sent the avalanche, destroying all our people and our good houses. That must
be the reason, because landslides only fell where people lived. Nothing happened where
there were no people. I don’t know what happened this time. Something unimaginable,

50 Geoff Childs, “Journey to the Hidden Land (Sbas-yul) of Gnam-sgo Zla-gam” (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Indiana
University, 1993): 15-16.

As she spoke the last line, “what happened…?” one can see a confusion and trauma that made her eyes appear as though they were looking 1000 miles away, a look that often signifies deep post-traumatic stress. The trauma from this event has left a massive imprint, not just upon the Langtang topography and the Langtang cultural center, but also in the hearts and minds of those Langtangpa who witnessed their world crash down upon them. The disaster left the entire community traumatized and in a state of unimaginable shock, continuously asking themselves, “what happened…?” It is the young Chime Rinzin’s opinion that the continuous repetition of this question, in an effort to make sense of the horror that befell them, that the Langtangpa arrived at this conclusion. They felt they \textit{must} have deserved it.\footnote{Chime Rinzin Lama, March 2020.} For the Langtangpa, the gods \textit{must} have been angry, and they must have deserved whatever punishment the god had to give them.

In another documentary entitled, “Trembling Mountain”, Nyima Gyalmu’s husband, the very same Lama Tenzin I had the pleasure of living with and learning from, echoes this same belief:

With the coming of tourism we began to do well. We were much better off than everyone around us. However, whether it’s because of our former deeds, karmic law… in three or four minutes our villages were destroyed. Whether it’s because of our actions… we must have committed many ill-deeds. We did anything to make money… We must have cheated tourists in one way or another. While doing business, we competed and slandered each other… When we made money, we desired only to make even more. There was jealousy and disrespect even within our own families. We must have neglected our gods… The discord among humans must have further displeased our gods…\footnote{Kesang Tseten, \textit{Trembling Mountain}, Documentary (Langtang, Nepal: Shunyata Film Production, 2016): Gyalp Tamang Lama: (27:50-29:23).}

Lama Tenzin feels that the discord amongst Langtangpa—normally a very welcoming, kind-hearted, and agreeable community of people—agitiated the \textit{yul lha}. From his perspective, perhaps it was \textit{primarily} the mental discord that caused their destruction, for a major part of what it means to be a \textit{beyul} is that the
valley functions as a “happy place,” and a place where the Buddhadharma thrives and where spiritual attainment is possible. Without attitudes of equanimity, of respect, of balance and positive regard for one’s fellow neighbor, the structures of the “happy place” collapse, and the protectors no longer offer protection. He later said to me when I followed up on his statement, “we [Langtangpa] broke our agreement.”

As the chief religious authority in Langtang, Lama Tenzin’s belief holds immense weight among the Langtangpa, and the opinions held by Lama Tenzin certainly have an impact on what other Langtangpa believe. Nevertheless, the same reasoning is held by “Cheej” Gyalpu, who also offers a bit more regarding his personal reasoning that Langtang Lerung caused the landslide to punish “greedy” people in the valley:

Langtang was known as a sacred valley. It was a truly beautiful, heavenly realm. When I was a child, the state made our valley part of a national park. Because of that, tourism thrived and we all prospered. All was going well when… whatever the mountains gave us, the mountains snatched away from us [...] [The avalanche] didn’t touch places without human habitation. It just hit the village areas [...] Earthquakes hit all over Nepal, causing destruction, but in Langtang, it was not the earthquake… it was our neglect of our ancestral deities, our elders believe. Our culture and traditions have been eroding, isn’t it so? Because of tourism, competition, and growing jealousy, that is what happened.

The account that the landslides never touched locations where people dwelled is a statement I heard repeatedly, and whether or not this is true is of significantly less importance than the belief Langtangpa hold that this is true. The belief is the primary evidence that the landslides were sent by Langtang Lerung to punish them for breaking the contractual agreement made between denizens of the beyul and its protector deities. According to many Langtangpa, the contractual agreement between the protector spirits and deities of Langtang and the villagers who likewise dwell in the beyul is reciprocal in nature. But what exactly is this reciprocal contractual agreement between Langtangpa and the yul lha? Lhakpa Jangba summarizes:

54 Lama Tenzin, March 2020.
55 Tseten, Trembling Mountain: Lama Tenzin: (2:12-2:45); (33:10-33:16); (1:11:18-1:11:40)
This place that we have repeatedly said is a sacred place, with all the numerous protector deities and all… We have many gods around that protect us. Some must be offered milk, others water, others chang, in a ser kyem [gold or silver offering plates arranged in a tower]. As many believe, the tragedy happened because we failed to do this.56

On the one hand, as long as the people remain true to their Buddhist heritage—done so through regular ritual offerings to the local protector spirits and deities and by envisioning Langtang as beyul Namgo Dagam in accordance with traditional liturgies and long-held beliefs—the protector deities—entrusted with the protection of a sacred Buddhist valley by Guru Rinpoche himself—will physically protect the people from a multitude of natural disasters, psychologically train practitioners in compassionate and kind action, and simultaneously act as the necessary tantric vehicle to envision the landscape as alive, pulsating with the enlightened energy of Guru Rinpoche. On the other hand, if the contractual obligation is broken on the part of the people, the local protector spirits and deities will respond with reproach and fury. For the Langtangpa, they believe that by giving in to the temptations of wealth offered by taking on a more secular existence, by not performing regular ritual offerings to the yul lha, and by not honoring this reciprocal contractual agreement made between person and place—between person and protector deity—they incurred the wrath of the god and caused Him, in a furious rage, to destroy human lives, subsistence, and settlements.

These beliefs, although rooted in the past, also have an effect on how Langtangpa look to their future. For Lama Tenzin and his family, and for many Langtangpa of the older generation, the door to a happy and prosperous future in Langtang is unlocked by placing their faith in the yul lha and in the beyul blessed by Guru Rinpoche, and by preserving wholeheartedly the Buddhist practices that come with this. Many younger Langtangpa look forward to a future in which the sacred Buddhist tradition is honored, but also a future in which disasters can be predicted and the damages mitigated by careful planning and not “blind faith” alone. For Chime Rinzin Lama, he envisions a future Langtang where tourism is seen as a “good change,” because “before, life was hard, now we have access to healthcare, good education, solar

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56 Tseten, *Trembling Mountain*: Lhakpa Jangba: (1:11:00-1:11:17)
Many echoed these same words, but among the older generation of Langtangpa, a sense of complacency came with material wealth and comfort, and caused a “generational decay” in the quantity and quality of traditional rituals. Although these seem like differing accounts of the future “happy life”, Chime admits that both the Buddhist religion as well as secular developments and tourism offer a future filled with the “happy life”. “The combination of our Buddhist religious values and tourism [revenue] brings us happiness. The Buddhist path is leading to happiness. Tourists bring money and money can lead to health and happiness for families. Providing a better future for our children brings happiness. More, this place is né, and né is automatically happy.”

**Misfortune, Topographical Agency, & the Happy Life**

At this point, you may be asking yourself what any of this has to do with an environmentalist agenda. How might an examination of the belief held by a small Himalayan Buddhist community in the power of the *yul lha* to both protect and destroy lend itself to environmentalist implications in a time of global climate change? Based on the given information, it seems quite evident that Langtangpa possess a strong belief in the existence of spirits and deities who dwell within the landscape, and that those features of the landscape in which they dwell act as extensions of the spirits’ and deities’ cosmological form. Furthermore, for many Langtangpa, these features of the landscape possess an otherworldly power to provide good health or inflict disease; to ensure good weather or call down hailstorms; to remove obstacles in the way of spiritual attainment or wrathfully give rise to obstacles; to protect or to destroy. Embedded in this belief is the view that the landscape is animated with and engaged in a reciprocal relationship with humanity from which we can draw several implications.

One implication we can draw from this phenomenological examination in Langtang is that cultural memory is shaped by misfortunate events. The sacred geography of a *beyul* carries its own environmental implications, and when the sacred geography breaks down, disorder arises. Relationships

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57 Chime Rinzin Lama, March 2020.
58 Chime Rinzin Lama, March 2020.
between specific groups of people and specific supernatural beings “are dynamic, dependent on social context, and linked to social memory of unfortunate events.”59 The tremendous misfortune that befell Langtang and the belief that this misfortune was a divine act is one more event that shapes the religious, cultural, and environmental memory of Langtang along a long history. “The concepts of sin and karmic retribution are also intertwined in this model of understandings of misfortune, further obscuring the concept of the sacred as a category related to distinct sets of non-extractive behaviors.”60 Along with the memory of the misfortune in 2015, it would make sense that select misfortunes in the past, associated with one or more protector spirits in the valley along with a feature of the landscape, have shaped the spiritual beliefs in Langtang. Maybe a misfortune event happened in the past, a tremendous event of mysterious origins, and given the conditions of such an event, it may have led to the shaping of etiological belief that was preserved through cultural memory. Interestingly, Chime Rinzin Lama casually mentioned that the Langtang chorten is placed on the site of an old landslide that destroyed dozens of homes, a landslide that occurred about 90 years ago.61 (Fig. 14) Together, Chime and I wondered if perhaps the walls of mani stones that line the path through the valley were placed there as some buffer or warning post against landslides and avalanches.62 In remembering such events and their associated spiritual explanations, people of Himalayan beyul and in Tibet developed a perception of né ri, being a place rich and thriving with the bodies of spirits and deities, as divinely sentient, and potentially wrathful.

Numerous etiological beliefs that associate transgressive actions with spirits and misfortune can be traced across Tibet’s landscape and history. According to Norbu Chophel, many Tibetans believe that if one were to agitate a naga (lü) by befouling or polluting a sacred natural site associated with

59 Woodhouse et. al, 2015: 305.
60 Woodhouse et. al, 2015: 305.
61 Chime Rinzin Lama, March 2020.
62 Steven H. Emerman, “The Use of Lichenometry for Assessment of the Destruction and Reconstruction of Buddhist Sacred Walls in Langtang Valley, Nepal Himalaya, Following the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake,” Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research 49, no. 1 (February 2017): 61–79. This research raises the possibility that many Himalayan religious structures are not the original structures, but are replicates that are reconstructed after natural disasters, further implicating that such structures have been used historically as warnings or refuge sites for natural disasters.
waterways, misfortune and incurable disease will come. The disease can then only be cured by seeking the forgiveness of the naga through tantric ritual. “Generally, the nagas are believed to be like children: easily angered by the slightest irritation and appeased by the slightest appeasement.”

Breaking the norms associated with gods and spirits in the landscape is directly associated with misfortune, most commonly sickness. Additional beliefs include taboos against cutting plants and trees, digging earth or stones, and killing animals where any yul lha, lü, or tsenpo can see. Furthermore, many folklore tales from across Tibet evoke language that personifies features of the landscape. “The mountains, lakes and trees are believed to speak to us in many strange ways. Some people explain this by saying that these are abodes of spirits and gods. The mountains cry, and lakes and trees show strange visions uttering strange prophetic sounds.”

Another implication we can draw from the beliefs present in Langtang is that with a belief in the sentience and agency of features of the landscape comes a sense of reverence and respect for the landscape, reinforced through ritual. In Langtang, protection of local gods and features of the landscape is stated in ritual terms, and stakeholders of this landscape are taking ritual measures to reduce what they see as the underlying cause of environmental disaster and denigration; the increase of misfortune resulting from the “generational decay” of religious knowledge and ritual performance. During my time in Langtang I witnessed several ritual offerings directed to Mt. Langtang Lirung. (Fig. 15) One sunny day in March, a few neighboring men living in Lantang Gumba (just west of Langtang Village) erected a long wooden pole that would act as the first piece among many in the construction of a new house. Prayer flags (Tib. lung rta) were affixed to the top of the pole before it was lifted and set firmly in place. At the base of the pole, Lama Tenzin presented offerings of tsampa, butter tea, orange Fanta, and sang incense towards Mt. Langtang Lirung, and chanted a prayer, “for the removal of obscurations, and for the protection from tragedy.” We all grabbed handfuls of tsampa, and acting on cue we all tossed the tsampa...

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64 Chophel, 1983: 28.
powder into the air and shouted, “Lho Ghyello!” three times; “Victory to the God!” This minor, everyday ritual—along with large-scale rituals such as the Torpe ritual performed in 2019 in which all Langtangpa gather together annually and sweep the paths of the beyul clean of litter—may be understood as based on a Buddhist re-enactment of the subduing or taming (Tib. dul ba) of worldly spirits and gods by Guru Rinpoche, a common theme in Himalayan Buddhism. In practice, rituals directed towards the central prominent feature of the sacred landscape serves to reinforce feelings of reverence for the land itself.

A third implication from this research in Langtang concerns the pursuit of happiness, or “the happy life”. For Chime, “the happy life” is realized as a balance between traditional knowledge imparted through religious/cultural practices, and sustainable development by local stakeholders. The Langtang Valley has become much more accessible in modern times following infrastructure development and tourism. With its increased accessibility, modern material comforts arrived and locals in Langtang began making more money, granting them access to better education and healthcare. However, despite these benefits, many older Langtangpa still feel as though their cultural traditions and ritual performance are decaying. As such, Chime’s vision of “the happy life” points to a balance between tradition and modernization as the key to a better future, and a future in which Langtangpa can realize their potential as stewards of the beyul and as successful business people in the trekking industry of the Nepalese Himalaya. Bob Marley once said, “if you know your history, then you will know where you’re coming from.” This holds true for Langtangpa, as their identity is inextricably linked with the religion and culture of the beyul. The preservation—or even revitalization—of traditional cultural practices and rituals has the added benefit of making Langtang more appealing to outside tourists to experience the beauty of one of Nepal’s hidden valleys. However, preservation of previously-isolated, indigenous culture is made more challenging by modernization, which shatters the “tourist gaze” by which indigenous Langtangpa are viewed by tourists. If Langtangpa can manage to juggle the preservation of their culture with rapid global changes and modernization, their future and the future of other beyul looks bright.

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Chapter 3: Sacred Natural Sites Conservation

As the highest features of a landscape, sacred mountains have become associated with the highest values and aspirations of religions and cultures. These associations display that sacred mountains and their conservation have vital roles to play in future efforts to protect ecological and cultural diversity. If modern environmental degradation and climate change can be seen as a reflection of disharmony in the forces governing the cosmos as well as of human impacts on the environment, sacred mountains have the potential to inspire harmony between society and nature, and galvanize efforts for people to act as caretakers for the environment.

The relative isolation of mountain regions and the variety of microclimates that have made mountains sanctuaries of ecological and cultural diversity are now threatened by global changes and local developmental projects. Mountains are among the first places to show signs of climate change as species are driven to higher altitude and extinction, and snow cover and glaciers that supply water disappear. Other kinds of local changes, such as modernization and tourism, threaten to overwhelm traditional cultural practices that have preserved ecological diversity associated with sacred natural sites (SNS), and highlight the need to adapt them to changing conditions and challenges. By visibly linking religious and cultural values, ideals, and aspirations to features of the natural landscape, SNS highlight the cultural and spiritual importance of nature. The spiritual and cultural associations of SNS—what might be called a nature-culture nexus—draw attention to the various ways in which different cultures and societies depend on their relationships with the natural world for their identity and survival. Therefore, interest in religions and indigenous cultures fulfils contemporary conservation goals of grassroots participation and socio-cultural legitimacy. Modern environmentalist discourse, especially as represented in Buddhist modernist teachings and through the authority of religious elites, can potentially reinvigorate local religious ideas and practice with positive environmental impacts.
In order to illustrate what Langtang and other Himalayan *beyul* have to offer to modern environmentalism, this final chapter is broken into several subsections. By providing testimonies of Langtangpa and referencing scientific reports, the first two subsections will provide details of the local and global impact of climate change and environmental denigration. The next four subsections will enumerate a few key ecophilosophies, namely “Deep Ecology” and “Transpersonal Ecology”, discuss criticisms of these approaches in the face of such alarming climate change, and present the Asian philosophy of SNS conservation. The next subsection identifies the Himalayan *beyul* as a nature-culture nexus, and provides examples of culturally and religiously embedded ecological activities practiced by Langtangpa, giving evidence to the nature-culture nexus in Himalayan *beyul*. Then, in reference to Chime Rinzin’s idea of “the happy life”, the final subsection considers the potential impact of local and global applications of environmental stewardship based on the kinds seen in a Himalayan *beyul*. Communities in environments vulnerable to disasters and ecological collapse could benefit by striking a nuanced balance between sustainable development, in which local stakeholders are directly involved and benefitting, and the active preservation of local cultural traditions.

**Environmental Changes in Langtang**

For people living in the high Himalayas, climate change is obvious. Over several decades Langtangpa have noticed changes in the amount of snowfall, glacial recession, and the disappearances of water sources. Choden Lama has lived in Kyanjin village her entire life, and now operates a guesthouse in the village for trekkers. Because of the necessity in the trekking industry, she speaks English only at a functional level. Nevertheless, Choden immediately recognized the term “glacial recession”, and said she notices that the Kimjung and Lirung glaciers recede “maybe one or two meters”¹ annually. She also recounted the story of when she was a young girl, how snow used to fall on or two meters high and last all winter long, and on rare occasions she would see endangered animal species near the village. Now, snow

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¹ Choden Lama, March 2020.
falls at half a meter maximum, and for many winter months there is no lasting snow cover in Langtang. Choden also mentioned that, these days, many endangered animals cannot be seen around Kyanjin, such as snow leopards, bharal, and tar. Other Langtangpa reaffirm Choden’s observations, such as Sonam Norbu, who, during a walk we shared in a snowstorm, said, “there used to be one or two meters of snow from December until March. Now, this is the most we get.” That evening, snow fell at a height of 30cm or less. Echoing this, Sangye Lama, during a trek to visit known sacred natural sites in the upper valley, said there are “no more snow leopards in this region since many years ago.” When I asked what he thinks to be the cause of this, he solemnly replied, “climate change.”

When I asked “Cheej Gyalpu” if he had noticed any changes in the glaciers of Langtang, said “glacial retreat is obvious.”

Numerous scientific reports have circulated identifying alarming changes in global climate. Over the past 150 years, human growth and activity have significantly altered the global climate, and overexploitation and corresponding degradation of the natural environment are generating crises at local and global levels. The average global temperature has increased 1.2 °C, and is expected to increase further between 1.4 and 5.8 °C over the next century. The scope of the consequences of this overall increase in global temperature are vast, and are already being witnessed in the Himalayan Range. “Across the Himalayas, global warming is real, and so is the impact […] the temperature is annually rising at the rate of 0.12 °C in the Nepal Himalayas, while the warming rate of the mid-hills and the Tarai of the country stands at 0.03 and 0.06 °C, respectively.” Temperature and ecological changes are felt more acutely in high alpine regions compared to lowland regions, and these changes are causing a number of negative consequences such as glacial retreat, soil erosion, avalanches and landslides, floods and

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2 Sonam Norbu, March 2020.
3 Sangye Lama, March 2020.
4 Gyalpu Tamang Lama, March 2020.
droughts, extinction of plant and animal species, deforestation, and damage to forest, wetland, and alpine ecosystems.

Mountain glaciers are seen as key indicators for temperature and climate changes, acting as global thermometers. Glaciers and ice cover ~17% of the greater Himalayan Range, a total area of ~113,000 sq. km., the largest area covered by glaciers and permafrost outside the arctic, subarctic, antarctic, and taiga regions. The greater Himalayan Range contains ~35,000 sq. km. of glaciers, and a total ice reserve of ~3,700 cubic km., and is the primary source of the nine largest rivers in Asia whose basins are home to over 1.3 billion people. A recent summary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts: “If current warming rates are maintained, Himalayan glaciers could decay at very rapid rates, shrinking from 500,000 sq. km. [in 2001] to 100,000 sq. km. by the 2030’s,” a total loss of ~80% of glacial surface area in the Himalayan Range. The fact that glaciers in high altitude terrains are melting is a crucial indicator that global temperatures are rising at an alarming rate.

Throughout the Nepalese Himalayas, river valleys are being targeted for infrastructure development and utilized for their potential for hydropower, posing both future benefits as well as geopolitical disputes and critical risks for human and ecological livelihood. Reflecting a grander pattern of development in Nepal, Rasuwa District—home to the Langtang National Park—is being targeted for hydropower and trade infrastructure development, particularly along the Kyirong-Rasuwa Highway. The Kyirong-Rasuwa Highway, spanning the distance between Kathmandu and Kyirong, a large border city in the TAR, “is projected to host the highest volume of trans-Himalayan commerce within five years.” The opening of the new Kyirong–Rasuwa highway and the Rasuwaghadi border crossing is accelerating a regional economic boom that many researchers and locals alike consider a preview of the future in

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7 Ibid, Executive Summary.
9 Rasuwaghadi is located along the Nepal-China border, 40km north of Syaprubesi.
Rasuwa, and possibly all of Nepal. In effect, the history of development and trade along the
Kyirong-Rasuwa highway, together with the planned hydropower projects in many neighboring
Himalayan valleys, has “transformed Rasuwa into quite possibly the fastest developing region in Nepal,
as well as a national model for development.” These sorts of plans reflect the government of Nepal’s
vision of development (Nep: bikas) to become a “hydropower nation expressed in terms of roads,
hydropower development, drinking water projects, schools, health posts, and other material tangibles.”
However, the continuation of large-scale development projects poses a number of environmental risks,
such as flooding and hydrological changes.

**Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**

The greatest local risk posed by climate change to high alpine regions is not simply glacial retreat,
but the resulting growth of glacial lakes and their potential to “burst”. “The Himalayan glaciers are
retreating at rates ranging from 10 to 60 meters per year and many small glaciers (<0.2 sq. km.) have
already disappeared entirely.” When ice melts the water needs somewhere to go, and glacial lakes are
increasing in volume as a result. When the volume of water held within these glacial lakes grows too
large, the pressure can potentially burst the glacial moraine which holds the water back, much like a dam
bursting. This type of event, known as a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), is often catastrophic for both
human settlements and the environment. In the past century, “at least thirty-two GLOF events have been
recorded in the Himalayas that resulted in heavy loss of human lives and their property, destruction of
infrastructure, and extensive damages to agricultural land and forests.” Several catastrophic GLOF
events have been recorded in detail in the Himalayan Range in 1964, 1977, 1980, and 1984. The most
well-recorded of these events is the outburst flood of the glacial lake Dig Tsho in 1984 located below

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10 Murton et. al, 2016: 7.
12 Samjwal Ratna Bajracharya, Pradeep Kumar Mool, and Basanta Raj Shrestha, “Global Climate Change and
Melting of Himalayan Glaciers,” in *Melting Glaciers and Rising Sea Levels: Impacts and Implications*, ed. Prabha
14 Ghimire, 2005: 49.
Langmoche Glacier in Khumbu, Nepal. The moraine-dammed lake, weakened by the pressure of the water, burst suddenly and sent a “10 to 15 meter-high surge of water and debris down the Bhole Koshi and Dudh Koshi rivers for more than 90 km. An estimated 1 million square meters of water was released, two to four times the magnitude of maximum floods due to heavy monsoon rains.” To provide some perspective on what a GLOF might look like, we may imagine a tsunami, but instead of waves engulfing a long shoreline, the force of the surge is contained within a steep valley resulting in absolute destruction within the disaster zone. It is likely that more GLOFs will occur within the coming decades at a higher rate due to the effects global warming is having on glacial retreat and the formation of ever more dangerous glacial lakes in the Himalayas.

International institutions have made an important first step in spreading awareness about GLOFs through the documentation of glaciers and glacial lakes, and the identification of potentially dangerous glacial lakes. In 2001, institutions like the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) produced an inventory of glaciers and glacial lakes, covering the entire span of Nepal and Bhutan. The study made a total inventory of 3,253 Himalayan glaciers with a total area of 5,332.89 sq. km. containing 2,323 glacial lakes in Nepal. Out of them, 20 glacial lakes have been identified as potentially dangerous in the Central and Eastern regions of Nepal. In the past, GLOFs have been an uncommon, but not unheard of, occurrence in Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. However, in the past century, GLOFs have increased in likelihood and intensity, posing a severe threat to society, the economy, infrastructure, and environment downstream. Furthermore, large infrastructure projects exacerbate the threat that GLOFs pose to human populations living in GLOF-prone mountainous valleys. “The growing population and the expanding infrastructures such as

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15 Ghimire, 2005: 50.
roads, bridges, and many existing and proposed ambitious hydropower projects in the river valleys capped by such [dangerous] glacial lakes, have increased the menace of the GLOF hazards in Nepal and Bhutan.”

To compound matters, the ambitious hydropower development projects planned by the Government of Nepal may be overlooking the dangers of large hydropower infrastructure in a seismically-active region. A major earthquake would have the potential to burst a man-made dam just as easily as a natural dam, an event that would be just as dangerous as GLOFs catalyzed by climate change.

Since 1987, air temperature as well as a number of different meteorological parameters have been measured at regular intervals by the Nepal Department of Hydrology and Meterology (DHM) station located in the Langtang Valley. The changes detected by this weather monitoring station show a clear indication of an annual temperature increase in the Central Himalaya regions of Nepal at a rate of 0.27°C, registering on the higher end of the spectrum of annual global temperature increase. With an increase in temperature comes the melting of sequestered ice, and glacial ice at higher altitudes is greatly affected. In Langtang, studies done on the Langtang Lirung Glacier and the Yala Glacier show rapid rates of ice melt since the 1970’s, a rate that also appears to be increasing. Although these glaciers and glacial lakes are not currently identified as being dangerously prone to any GLOF event, these glaciers serve as good examples of the extent of glacial retreat in the Himalayan Range, and may at some point in the future become sources of GLOF risk.

‘Green Buddhism’

The question now comes down to: how might we think about approaching this problem? Two ecological theories seek to engage with environmental conservation on a spiritual level, “Deep Ecology” and “Transpersonal Ecology”. Before delving into the two ecophilosophies, ‘Green Buddhism’ must be addressed. Details of the contributions of Buddhists for the sake of environmentalism go beyond the

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18 Ghimire, 2005: 60.
scope of this thesis, but the trend is clear. Contemporary Buddhists, especially of Western background, tend to advocate for the idea that “ecologically-articulate Buddhists can advance inter-religious dialogue to meet the challenges of global warming, overconsumption, and other systemic ills.” However, a large part of contemporary Buddhist environmentalism is rooted in the “myth of primitive ecological wisdom,” or the often romanticized assumption “that religions encompass guidelines for the preservation of a believer’s natural surroundings.”

In terms of ‘Green Buddhism’ this myth is often at play when compassion and interdependence are applied to environmentalist agendas. The Buddhist concept of compassion has been overemphasized in contemporary religious environmentalism and assumed to be a central driving factor for environmental conservation by indigenous groups present in the Himalayas. This application of compassion for the sake of environmentalism may be more a projection of orientalist Western ideology, or an appeal to Western ideology by exiled Tibetans inextricably linked with nationalist politics, than a recognition of the significance that traditional values and indigenous practices present for environmentalism. Also, the concept of systems within a scientific understanding, such as ecosystems, and the connection drawn between contemporary scientific knowledge and ancient traditions has been sometimes construed with Buddhist interdependence. The connections drawn between differing ideas of interdependence or systems theories may be more of a trendy topic in contemporary academia than it is a palpable connection to modern environmentalist thought. However useful the imagery of the Jewel Net of Indra found in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* may be to imagine the vast interconnectedness of the universe, by applying this image to modern environmentalism we may be overlooking that the Jewel Net of Indra was used as a pedagogical tool for teaching deeper Buddhist ideas, not as an appeal for environmentalism.

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22 Tomalin, 2009: 5
23 Mayard, 2018: 1.
24 Woodhouse et al., 2015: 295.
Several Buddhist concepts fit nicely within environmentalist thought. The Buddhist precept of not killing sentient beings is strictly adhered to by locals living in a Himalayan *beyul*, and has a direct impact on the health of an ecosystem. In Langtang it is strictly prohibited to kill any animals for any reason, and this is not simply because the Langtang Valley is situated within a national park, but because the Langtangpa adhere to this Buddhist precept. Secondly, the precepts are intimately tied in with the ideas of karma and merit. For a Himalayan Buddhist, all living things have a “life essence” (Tib. *tse sog*) and have karma, and it is therefore sinful to kill them and will result in the acquisition of negative karma, which may result in a lesser karmic rebirth. This applies mostly to animal life, but can also be stretched to apply to plant life in some instances. There are some references in Buddhist texts to the karmic benefits of planting groves.\(^{25}\) By performing benevolent and auspicious deeds towards living beings in one’s environment, one acquires positive karma, or merit, which has an impact on one’s future rebirth and happiness within this life. The idea of happiness (Tib. *skyid po*) is connected to karmic good luck, often involved within a communal sense, and often connected with the environmental well-being of a community and its natural surroundings. Within Himalayan Buddhist communities, “happiness is considered directly related to the state of the environment” and “the number of animals and size and health of the forest.”\(^{26}\) Referring back to Ch. 2, several respondents drew a connection between environmental health and happiness, and that the happiness of Langtang is connected to the religious inclinations of Langtangpa in combination with their economic success.

**Deep Ecology**

The term “Deep Ecology” was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the mid-20th century,\(^{27}\) and sits in contrast to what deep ecologists refer to as “shallow” ecology in that the former

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\(^{26}\) Woodhouse et al., 2015: 303.

ecosophy focuses on a deeper, intrinsic value of nature whereas the latter focuses on the pragmatic usefulness of ecological conservation for human use. Deep Ecology states that the motivation behind environmental conservation should be motivated by something other than human self-interest, i.e. something “deeper.” In order to avoid a mentality of ownership that has led to an unsustainable relationship between humans and nature, the view of Deep Ecology gives value to nature for its own sake. In this way, the deep ecologist views nature as possessing intrinsic value, and that value is distinct from its pragmatic usefulness to human beings. In other words, all forms of life, including ecosystems, have a right to flourish, akin to a current understanding of human rights. Deep Ecology identifies close connections between certain streams in world religions and environmentalist conservation, and posits that only by resacralizing our perceptions of the natural world can we learn to adopt sustainable practices and live harmoniously in the natural world. As Naess said, “a sense of place is strengthened through a tightening of the inter-relation between the self and the environment and how place determines one’s attitudes, one’s likes and dislikes, and one’s general outlook.”28 As Taylor says regarding Deep Ecology, it is “a radical movement challenging the conventional, usually anthropocentric ways humans deal with the natural world.”29

Transpersonal Ecology

Building upon Arne Naess’ Deep Ecology, Warwick Fox proposes the ecosophy he calls “Transpersonal Ecology” which serves as an application of transpersonal psychology into ecosophy. Transpersonal Ecology is the view that a landscape, an ecosystem, or even the earth itself, has the status of a living entity and has agency.30 This view is transpersonal because it involves a shift in our concept of sentience, and how we relate to agents and, most importantly, who or what we ascribe agency to. Fox psychologizes ecosophy by emphasizing the importance of the experience of nature from subjective

and transpersonal perspectives to further our understanding of ecophilosophy. From his understanding, the “transpersonal self refers to a wide, expansive, or field-like conception of self,”\(^{31}\) which is comparable to the sense of self one experiences when thinking of his/her family, of his/her community. It is a wider, yet still entirely personal, greater sense of self; a transpersonal self. By psychologizing and giving agency to a landscape, the transpersonal ecologist views the land as a living entity that has thoughts, feelings, and rights in the same way as we humans do. Thus the land deserves protection, by right, as an “individual”.

Transpersonal Ecology draws parallels between the value placed on SNS and the experience of “Self-Realization!” past peoples have experienced in SNS. What are these concerns and theoretical interests which transpersonal psychology and eco-philosophy share? Fox’s answer is “the idea of this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible.”\(^{32}\) According to Fox, the expansion of self is accomplished by means of a process of identification (or recognition of one’s commonality) with all that is. Fox’s expectation is that once such an expansive sense of self is achieved one will “naturally be inclined to care for the unfolding of the world in all its aspects.”\(^{33}\) What is being emphasized in Transpersonal Ecology is the experience that through the process of expanding one’s sense of identification, the experiential self can expand to include the natural environment, even though the self and the environment remain physically separate. In this regard, Transpersonal Ecology is distinct from other ecophilosophies in that it emphasizes an expansive sense of self in contrast to more self-centered ecophilosophies such as the anthropocentric aim of conservation so rampant in contemporary environmentalist discourses. Speaking ecologically, a transpersonal sense of self is compatible with an ecological perspective of self as an organism embedded in a network of interconnected relationships which in turn define an ecosystem. Transpersonal ecologists are not interested in supporting any approach that serves to reinforce the narrow, self-serving tendency of environmental protection, and are more

\(^{31}\) Fox, 1990: 68.
\(^{32}\) Fox, 1990: 69.
\(^{33}\) Fox, 1990: 69.
concerned with the psychological consequence of thinking environmentally and spontaneous unfolding rather than the logical consequence of viewing our lives as dependent on the environment. Our lives are in fact dependent on the environment, but the focus of Transpersonal Ecology seeks to look beyond merely that and usher in a more expansive field of psychological regard for environmentalism.

**Criticisms of Ecophilo sphies**

Much like any pragmatic philosophy, many have criticized Deep Ecology for overlooking important social issues. For instance, Murray Bookchin, a self-proclaimed “Social Ecologist,” attacked Deep Ecology for being ignorant of conflicting socio-economic factors. French scholar Luc Ferry criticized how Deep Ecology promotes “ecofascism,” or the reduction in human population in blind favor of ecological balance, believing it to be the primary cause of environmental denigration. Nevertheless, Deep Ecology has opened the floodgates of ecophilosophical thought to the notion of conserving nature *for its own sake*, and not simply as a means of preserving nature for the purpose of supplying human consumption. Deep Ecology has also inspired further thought into how precisely we humans are to realize nature as an independent entity deserving of its own rights and protection. Other scholars criticize Fox’s idea for its lack of pragmatism. Their argument is that a transformation of one’s view of nature does not necessarily entail active engagement in protecting it.

Deep Ecology and Transpersonal Ecology share a similar goal with the Buddhist path, such as the concept of “Self-Realization!” coined by Arne Naess. Both the capital “S” and the exclamation point are important to the presentation of both Deep Ecology and Transpersonal Ecology, for both are indicative of an identification process in which an individual comes to experience the entire world, ecosystems and all, as “interwoven with or componential of herself or himself,” spontaneously leading to a greater view of

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self as encompassing the entire world.\textsuperscript{38} Let’s compare this term with a Buddhist idea of self expressed as two truths. Whereas the lowercase “s” in regards to “self” is indicative of the mundane, everyday sense of self—the conventional self—uppercase “S” in regards to “Self!” along with the exclamation point are indicative of a transcendent sense of self that integrates the external world with internal psychology—the ultimate self. In this sense, Naess’ and Fox’s proposal of an integration of mundane, ecological, spiritual, and cosmological forms of self-identification implies a kind of spiritual transformation that must take place in order to promote a change in the individual’s regard for the environment. This is what Naess and Fox refer to as “steadfast friendliness” towards the earth. However, in order to inspire greater, effective change, this attitude must be adopted by a large quantity of people globally. This might not be a realistic ambition. As some ecological theorists argue, “the idea that a stance of ‘steadfast friendliness’ towards the earth will prevent or even slow the destruction of the earth is, unfortunately, mistaken.”\textsuperscript{39}

If we are to translate Naess’ and Fox’s term “steadfast friendliness” in tune with a spiritual transformation regarding the manner in which one views oneself into the Buddhist term “enlightenment,” it is clear that this sets an ideal that may not be possible to achieve, especially on a grander scale. It is no guarantee of social or ecological change, and those who claim it is may not be looking at the problems posed by climate change realistically. As Stavely and McNamara point out in their critique of Transpersonal Ecology:

Not all members of a Buddhist culture undertake this quest [of spiritual transformation] and not all who set out on the path continue for the duration. Furthermore, having enlightenment as a central cultural value does not guarantee that the culture as a whole will abide by the precepts of the discipline, nor that the population at large will succeed in behaving well. Warfare and social injustice are to be found in Buddhist South, and East Asia as well as in the West where self-aggrandizement is a central cultural value. One can predict with confidence that relatively few of the world’s people will spontaneously choose to pursue Self-Realization! and that, of those, few will attain it.\textsuperscript{40}


\textsuperscript{39} Stavely & McNamara, 1992: 209.

\textsuperscript{40} Stavely & McNamara, 1992: 209-210.
This same statement can be made regarding enlightenment, for “Self-Realization!” and enlightenment share the qualities of spontaneity, fundamental self-transformation, and clear realization. Nevertheless, the ecophilo-philosophies presented by Naess and Fox represent idealistic visions of how we might approach environmentalist problems. If we are to view the problems of this world—overconsumption, exploitation of resources, environmental denigration, etc.—as spiritual problems at the root, it might be best to address solutions to the problems in spiritual terms. In this sense, Naess’ and Fox’s application of “Self-Realization!” and “steadfast friendliness” serve as inspirational ideals to work towards, simply that. Furthermore, Deep Ecology and Transpersonal Ecology forego any focus on indigenous knowledge and the value of local environmental stewardship.

As self-reported by locals living in a Himalayan beyul, traditional practices associated with SNS and sacred mountains present an Asian philosophy of protected natural sites, “not as a rejection of the so-called Western ideology and philosophy behind the establishment and management of protected areas but based on the view that revisiting the traditional and ‘other’ values could add value to and enhance the management effectiveness of protected areas in Asia.”41 Accounts taken from religious—particularly Buddhist—perspectives tend to emphasize the significance of SNS in shaping human spiritual imagination. The value found in beliefs exemplified among villagers in a Himalayan beyul is based on taboos and prohibitions that have resulted in the creation of a number of SNS “that have significant value in terms of biodiversity conservation, equivalent or even surpassing that of formal protected areas in certain locations,”42 and the agency ascribed to features of the landscape which are believed to be the abodes or even the bodies of esoteric deities and spirits acting as protectors of the land.

Traditional ecological knowledge has the potential to complement Western approaches in tackling contemporary environmental issues such as global warming, climate change, natural disasters, etc. Essentially, the Asian Philosophy of Protected Areas [sic] should not be seen as a fossilized and romanticized image of Asia’s glorious past but as a

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42 Verschuuren & Furuta, 2016: 25.
potentially powerful driver in the search for new solutions to contemporary resource management and biodiversity conservation issues.\textsuperscript{43}

The intention here, rather than returning to 20th century environmental determinism, is to take into account the role of nature and landscape in actively shaping perceptions of the natural environment. Rather than taking a theory derived from contemporary science and applying it to traditional Asian belief and practice, we can draw upon traditional Asian knowledge of sacred natural sites to supplement and complement Western environmentalism. To this end, it is imperative to recognize the traditional ecological knowledge of Asia as complementing mainstream Western approaches to environmental conservation by incorporating scientific knowledge with religious traditional knowledge.

\textbf{Nature-Culture Nexus in Buddhist Sacred Natural Sites}

Throughout Asia, traditional spiritual beliefs and practices have played an important role in preserving ecological and cultural well-being associated with SNS and sacred mountains in particular. In terms of environmental conservation, Kuyakanon Knapp defines Buddhist SNS as “sites that may provide and maintain ecological functions as well as support biological diversity,” and “contribute to human well-being in countless ways, from spiritual to cultural to material resources.”\textsuperscript{44} However, the key defining aspect of SNS is the idea of the \textit{sacred}, and beliefs and practices revolving around sacratlity. It is being proposed that the effective conservation of sacred natural sites will help to protect diverse human cultures and a substantial portion of increasingly vulnerable nature, for traditional beliefs and practices have played an important role in preserving the biological and cultural diversity associated with many mountain ecosystems.

Nature and culture have often been viewed as separate, opposing conceptual entities, but this is becoming increasingly accepted as a false dichotomy. In place of this dichotomy is the idea that nature

\textsuperscript{43} Verschuuren & Furuta, 2016: 27.
and culture are intimately intertwined in what Knapp calls a “nature-culture nexus.” Since sacred natural sites conservation incorporates human ecology, indigenousness, and biocultural diversity, it is in the “defining and attempted categorization of such sites that the nature-culture nexus becomes visible and where fertile crossover exists between the conservation of culture and the conservation of nature at policy and implementation levels.” The agendas of several international environmentalist and indigenous rights institutions incorporate the idea of a nature-culture nexus within their statements and policies. For example, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2008 (UNDRIP) states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religions and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

Also, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) recognized sacred natural sites as areas of key interest for biocultural conservation, identified religious beliefs as one of several key “drivers” of environmental action that need to be better understood, and adopted the concept of cultural services—spiritual services in particular—as one of the four kinds of ecosystem services (the others being protecting, provisioning, and regulating). Thus, the nature-culture nexus is viewed as an acceptable viewpoint among international institutions for engaging with indigenous spiritual knowledge and environmental conservation.

The concept of a nature-culture nexus is applicable to many Buddhist SNS and Buddhist communities throughout the Himalayan Range. Many Buddhist SNS have been shown to have a higher incidence of biodiversity and bioresilience, act to preserve natural habitats of endangered plant and animal species no longer existent in surrounding ecosystems, and harbor valuable resources and ecological

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knowledge for human use and well-being.49 Many Buddhist SNS were pre-existing sacred sites prior to the advent and spread of Buddhism to the Himalayas. In many such sites, “elements behind the existence of what are broadly considered to be Buddhist SNS are the deities, beliefs, and practices which existed prior to the advent of Buddhism.”50 These past place-based expressions of spirituality—some may be influenced by the Tibetan Bön religion, others by local animistic beliefs—have a strong influence on Buddhism practiced and adhered to now in the Himalayan Range. Having taken on a ‘Buddhist face’, these practices and beliefs embedded in the landscape are often cited as having preserved the environment through fear of upsetting the deities and spirits believed to dwell within the landscape. Local communities and stakeholders, along with governing bodies, associated with sacred mountains have the greatest opportunities to control and reduce the impacts of population pressure, modernization, economic development, and tourism on the biocultural integrity of SNS. However, in order to have these opportunities local stakeholders need to be acknowledged and included as full partners in programs of protected area management that affect sacred mountains. In the case of sites that are significant for large numbers of people and widespread religious traditions, e.g. Mt. Kailash, representatives of non-local stakeholders, such as non-local Hindus and Buddhists who revere Mt. Kailash as a holy site, need to be included as well. In addition to bringing their views and concerns to the table, non-local stakeholders are often in better positions to influence the policies and actions of outside interests, such as corporations, governments, and the general public, responsible for the impacts of global climate change.

Local & Global Environmental Stewardship

Referring back to Ch. 2, three implications can be drawn out of the nature-culture nexus of beyul Langtang. First, cultural memory is shaped by misfortune, and this has generated taboos regarding the protection of SNS and shaped the religion in the beyul. Second, belief in a sentience and agency of the landscape and certain features embedded in the environment is indicative of a respectful attitude toward

49 Knapp, 2012: 123.
the natural environment. Third, the pursuit of happiness—"the happy life"—involves a balance between traditional knowledge and religious/cultural practices, and sustainable development by local stakeholders. These three implications have an impact on local ecological well-being. Conservationists have suggested that sacred sites are akin to protected areas and represent a form of informal institution for natural resource governance that may incorporate non-extractive norms and active protection and management by local custodians. Belief in the agency and sentience of SNS in a beyul displays a deep environmental consciousness and reflects a different classification of realms of existence that do not appropriate the environment and natural resources for human use. Of all the SNS examined in Langtang, such as the mountain peaks, chorten, lü khang, and pho drang, they were characterized by minimal human interference around the sites, significantly affecting biodiversity and reinforcing cultural belief.

Respect for the environment is expressed in ritual terms. Among Himalayan villagers, the primary function of rituals is to pacify and bind under Buddhist oath malevolent spirits who intend to do harm. Due to the constant threat to life, property, and well-being posed by an unstable landscape, a majority of ritual activity is directed at the prevention of and protection against forces of nature bent on destruction. The interaction between lay people and deities has the potential to go in a number of directions, particularly in a violent direction:

If well inclined, the local deities could protect the individual, family, or village against malevolent spirits. The gods, however, are also capable of unleashing the spirits on someone with whom they are displeased. These spirits may be conceived of as symbolic representations of disorder and of lack of balance within individual or community. In this sense, the local deities along with malevolent spirits provide a critical insight into the symbolic associations by which the Himalayan beyul is perceived. From times in the historical past to modern times, the landscape retains a threat to life, property, and well-being in which deities and malevolent spirits are intimately involved, and these threats can be circumvented by way of tantric power over these deities and malevolent spirits. In this way lamas exert a power over local deities and spirits that ultimately

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51 Samuel, 1993: 189.
rejects the power dynamic of divine over landscape; of the worldly over the Buddhadharma.

To illustrate this relationship between lama and deity, we may observe local *sang* offerings in which Himalayan juniper is burned as ritual offering to the local deities accompanied by the chanting of “Lho Gyello!” or “Victory of the God(s)!”. These rituals are performed for a number of reasons, but protection of cattle, property, and human life are of paramount concern, and rituals are often associated with supply of agricultural resources like precipitation and protection from inclement weather and disaster. This is clearly shown in the “Verse Prayer” section of the *Yul Lha rTen ‘Khor* and repeated during *sang* offerings. In adherence to ritual, people must also ensure that the sacred abodes of deities and malevolent spirits are kept clean and free from pollutants lest they anger the spirits and face potentially life-threatening repercussions. Such beliefs manifest as social taboos regarding killing of sentient beings and harvesting of resources near the abode of local territory gods, and stories of past misfortune reinforce this set of beliefs.

Rituals are often performed in, or directed to, SNS. SNS are “sites of on-going negotiation between local people and the landscape, in which features of the landscape, and the landscape itself, are understood as active beings whose needs and wishes must be respected. This agency of the landscape is personified by the deities and spirits believed to inhabit the landscape,” and can be perceived as a violence if environmental taboos are broken, such as can be observed in Langtang cultural memory. “Himalayan villagers may attribute a landslide or hailstorm to deities who are angry because of the violation of some social rule.” Relations with spirits and deities in nature are mediated through construction of sacred sites, local beliefs, perception of SNS, and ritual.

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52 *Yul Lha rTen ‘Khor: “Verse Prayer”*

53 Allison, 2015: 442.

54 Allison, 2015: 441.
In Langtang, vegetarianism (Tib. sha meds) is enforced in this region if the meat is procured by killing an animal. If the animal dies of natural causes, it is considered acceptable to consume it, even honored. During my stay in Langtang, I wrote an entry in my journal:

A yak died somewhere up in the high alpine grasslands, and must have been dead for a couple days before it was butchered and distributed to the villagers. Luckily, it is much like a refrigerator at high altitude. The meat was distributed equally to many families, but Lama Tenzin’s family was honored with the head. We boiled the head for more than six hours, and cut the meat into thin ropes to be salted and dried in the sun over the next few days. I was given the task of guarding the yak meat for hours from hungry crows, and ate the meat for weeks afterwards. Yak head meat is apparently a delicacy in the Himalayas, but I failed to stomach it, though not for lack of trying. I tried to eat it four times, gagged each time, and the elder men laughed at me. Despite its gaminess, the meat felt wholesome because the animal was not killed for our consumption. The animal dropped dead and we humans, perhaps out of some respect combined with a desire to eat meat, harvested the meat and ate it. The yak was not harmed, yet the meat was also not wasted.

This experience was significant because it showed firsthand the Buddhist precept of no-killing in practice, as well an underlying respect for other sentient beings, particularly for their cattle.

In Langtang, yak herding has been the traditional means of producing sustenance and trade goods, but in recent times traditional yak herding has come under threat. Being the manager of yak cheese production in Langtang, Gyalpu noted that the decline in traditional yak herding, brought about in large part by the 2015 devastation and the turn to the tourist industry for livelihood, is an urgent issue. The seven or eight lakh rupees in annual revenue herding yak for milk is small when compared to the twenty lakh rupees or more in revenue a year for hotel managers, and this has driven traditional yak herders to sell their yaks and turn to the more lucrative business option in Langtang.\textsuperscript{55} Yak herding can be seen as a prime example of traditional ecological practice in a Himalayan beyul, affecting environmental health positively. Yaks and other cattle help to keep pastures and meadows mowed, making it easier for birds of prey and scavengers to look for food, constituting a symbiotic relationship between cattle and many flora and fauna species in the high alpine. (Fig. 16) Yugo Ono and Ayako Sadakane have shown that Langtangpa adopted a process called “yak transhumance” to avoid overgrazing in an environment with

\textsuperscript{55} Gyalpu Tamang Lama: March 2020.
limited grazing lands. “Being restricted by the topographic conditions of a glacial valley, the grazing grasslands are located only on the narrow valley-bottom plain along the Langtang Khola, and on the gentle slope above the trough shoulder.”\textsuperscript{56} In an effort to account for demand and make the most efficient use of limited lands, the Langtangpa adopted a circulation system of transhumance. “To avoid overgrazing, every transhumance group (\textit{tshoba}) should be located in a different grazing grassland at the same time.”\textsuperscript{57} The researchers emphasize that “the circulation system of transhumance is the best way for [Langtangpa] to use a narrow space available for the grazing grasslands in the Valley.”\textsuperscript{58}

Yak transhumance and other traditional practices arose from Langtang being an isolated mountain community, but Himalayan \textit{beyl} are no longer isolated refuges. Infrastructure development, modernization, and tourism have turned these once-isolated valleys increasingly more accessible to the outside world, weakening cultural beliefs regarding SNS. In the words of Lhakpa Sherpa: “Modern education brings with it its own array of influences, and generally does not integrate the wisdom of traditional indigenous knowledge. Government agencies, resource managers, and scientists alike have thus far overlooked the value of traditional knowledge systems.”\textsuperscript{59} Beliefs embedded in the culture of a Himalayan \textit{beyul} can lend cultural support to environmental conservation actions and should not be discarded as anachronistic. Failure to recognize and reinforce local support for biodiversity conservation disregards a powerful ally for environmental conservation.

Since a \textit{beyl} possesses ecological and cultural characteristics that continue to favor biodiversity and bioresilience, the beliefs embedded in the nature-culture nexus of a \textit{beyl} serves as a powerful cultural basis for conservation, and one that may be more sustainable than governmental imposition of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Yugo Ono and Ayako Sadakane. (1986). “Natural Background of the Yak Transhumance in the Langtang Valley, Nepal Himalaya”. \textit{Geographical Reports of Tokyo Metropolitan University} (21): 95.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Ono and Sadakane, 1986: 100.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Ono and Sadakane, 1986: 104.
\end{itemize}
regulations. Recognizing and acknowledging the value of culturally rich and biologically diverse SNS is an important factor in developing and managing valuable landscapes in the future. Therefore, an effective approach for local land and nature protection involves emphasizing the cultural importance of SNS in a way that indelibly involves local stakeholders. On a global scale, a focus on the well-being of SNS keeps the focus of environmentalist action on the specifics of each location, providing a nuanced approach.

However, SNS conservation will differ between cultures. “SNS of different cultures “may not all lend themselves to the conservation of biodiversity. Some [SNS] are required to be kept secret, others are not compatible with the concept of biodiversity conservation.” On a grander scale, SNS serve as repositories and sanctuaries for biocultural diversity and bioresilience amidst rampant environmental degradation. Furthermore, an emphasis on the sacrality of the landscape may have an even larger, psychological impact on the manner in which we humans regard the earth.

60 Sherpa, 2003: 104.
**Conclusion**

This thesis was a study of the religious beliefs held by locals living in a *beyul*—a variety of what scholars of religion describe as sacred geography—in deities and spirits embedded in the landscape, and any environmental implications these beliefs lend themselves to. Having examined the history of *beyul* stemming from the Jangter Treasure Tradition and “guidebook” literature, the Langtang Valley, recognized as *beyul* Namgo Dagam, is a prominent Nepalese example of *beyul*. By understanding the *beyul* as a tripartite *maṇḍala*, we can envision it as outer, inner, and ‘secret’ aspects of a *maṇḍala* in accordance with local liturgical texts and beliefs. Beliefs are expressed as faith in non-human deities and spirits in *beyul* Langtang, subdued by Guru Padmasambhava, and re-established as Dharma Protectors. After garnering the Langtangpa belief surrounding four deities and spirits (*yul lha, lü, tsenpo, menmo*), the narrative of the *yul lha* believed to cause the landslide that destroyed Langtang village on April 25, 2015, reveals that faith in the power of the *yul lha* is alive and robust. Additionally, drawing on accounts given by Langtangpa, misfortune seems to be particularly formative in shaping culture in *beyul* Langtang. The cultural beliefs shaped by misfortune are expressed in ritual terms and as a belief in the sentience and agency of features of the landscape. This understanding of the landscape as sacred geography, integrated with local stakeholders’ religious perspectives and historical traditions, can be correlated to an active appreciation of the region’s ecology, and efforts to counter increasing environmental degradation for a more sustainable, happy future.
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Doctor, Andreas. Tibetan Treasure Literature: Revelation, Tradition, and Accomplishment in Visionary...


Appendix A: Translation of Supporting Retinue of the Territory God (yul lha rten ‘khor)

The abode of Gu Lang Lha,¹ who was Brahma in a past life, north of the seat of enlightenment of the world (Bodhgaya), southwest of glorious Samye in Tibet, is the amazing place on the borderland of both Nepal and Tibet. Blessed by the great Lopön Ögyen, the secret hidden land, [entitled] “Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form,”² is the dwelling place of the territory god Ge Nyen Chenpo.³ Endowed with the radiant arrow-shaft of light, unchanging king of mountains, pursuing the expanse of sky in the four corners of the Himalaya is the vast space of very beautiful rainbows and gathered clouds. From crystal clear discipline, the accomplishment of the divine citadel, excellence will be evoked in the mind in the middle of this great palace [mandala]. Regarding [his] precious throne and the Horse God⁴ whose nature is utterly white, [he is] situated above bundles of hanging silk scarves endowed with jeweled ornaments. Regarding Le Rung,⁵ the essential sacred abode of the god. Its body-color is extremely white, it is peaceful, it is sweetly smiling. Because the gods were tamed [by Guru Rinpoche], they wear white sashes tied around [their] foreheads. One offers food offerings to the gods [who are] endowed with the complexion of virtue and goodness, ornamented with gently flowing banners and precious garlands. [In Horse God’s] right hand is a victory banner endowed with the removal of needs and desires. [In his] left hand he carries a vase containing the essence of medicine. Guarding the teachings of Lord Buddha, he acts as chieftain of the gods. Many emanations of deities surround him, his eight companions: Sentinels, violent spirits, the collection of lü and menmo, together with divine birds, tigers, leopards, and packs of wild animals. [He] abides as the lord of all eight tribes/clans of haughty ones. By my invitation to an offering feast, without yawning, by means of [my] enjoyment, please approach. “Vajra samaya tsa tsa”⁶

¹ “virtuous god of Langtang” in Langtangpa dialect.
² Literally “Half Moon Heaven Gate” (zla gam gnam sgo)
³ Literally “Great Approacher to Virtue” (dge bsnyen chen po); name of the god, also name of an enlightened master who is believed to have visited the Langtang Valley
⁴ According to the author, this refers to the founder of Langtang Village; Domar Zhabdrung Mingyur Dorje
⁵ Mt. Langtang Lirung in Langtang National Park, Rasuwa, Nepal
⁶ Kyai: sngon tse tshang pa gu lang lha yi gnas/ ’dzam gling ste ba rdo rje gdan gyi byang/ bod yul tbal gyi bsam yas lho nub na/ ngo mtshar yul mchog bal bod gnyis kyi mtshams/ slob dpon u rgyan chen pod
OFFERINGS SECTION:

“Hung” - A cloud of offerings conjoining stainlessness and purity: Flowers, incense and lamps, provisions for the gods and, the objects of form, sound, smell, taste, and touch—the five objects of desire. These offerings are actually placed [on the altar] and conjured in the mind.7

PRAISING SECTION:

The chief of the collection of lay practitioners is utterly unrivalled in his powerful and skillful invocation. The great being [Skt. mahasattva] who delights in the teachings [of the Buddha], to you, oh peaceful, sacred one, I make praise.8

SUPPLICATION PRAYER:

“Hung” - the defining feature is to perform a ritual fully according to one’s vows. A mix of [tsampa and butter used during Losar],9 millet, beer, [a golden dish filled with sacred drinks used in ritual offerings],10 three whites, three sweets, medicine on top, and an assortment of grains, elegant [food offerings]11 serving as ornaments of taste and, objects pleasing to the sight, arrows with silk banners, yaks, sheep, goats, and so forth, offerings of samadhi, mantra, and mudra, [and] the vast fulfillment of the inexhaustible extent of

byin rlabs pa’i/ gsang ba’i sbas yul zla gam gnam sgo yi/ yul lha dge bsnyen chen po bzhugs pa’i gnas/ md’ zer mdwangs ldan lhun chags ri yi rgyal/ gngas dkar zur bzhin nam mkhi’i dbyings snyogs pa/ rab mdzes j’a mchon chu’ dzin ‘khrigw pa’i klong/ dwangs shel ddal las sgrubs pa lha’i mkhor/ bkong legs yid ‘ong pho brang chen po’i dbus/ rin chen khri dang lha rta ngang dkar ni/ dar gyi chun ‘phyang nor bu’i brgyam ldan steng/ gnas bdag lha yi rtso bo gle ru ni/ sku mdog rab dkar zhi ba’i ‘dzum bag can/ lha’ rnam’s ‘dal phir dar dkar la thod bcings/ ge le’i mdangs ldan lha yi na bza’ gsol/ lhab lhub dar ‘phyang rin chen ‘phreg bas brgyam/ phyag gyas dgos ‘ded gyo ba’i mnga’a da dang/ gyon pa bdud rtsi’i ncu/ ldan bum pa bsnams/ rgyal ba’i bstan bsrungs lha yi sde dpon byed/ mched brgyad sprul pa’i lha ‘khor mang po dang/ sgo ba btsan rgod glu dang sman mo’i tshogs/ lha bya stag gzigs gcan zan rol dang bcas/ dregs pa sde brgyad kun gyi rje bor bzhugs/ bdag gis mchod pa’i mgon du spyan ‘dren gyis/ ma gyal dges pa’i tshul gyis gshlegs su gsol/ ba dzra sa ma ya’ dzya dzya:

7 mchod pa ni/ h’um dri med Getsang mar spyar ba’i mchod pa’i sprin/ me tog spos dang snang gsal lha bshos dang/ gzugs sgra dri ro reg bya ‘dod yon Inga/ dngos su bsham dang yid kyis sprul te mchod
8 bstod pa ni: kyai: nyi shu rtsa geig dge bsnyen skun gyi gtso/ mthu stobs nus rtsal’ gran la zla med pa’i/ bstan la rap dges mchod pa’i sams dpa’a che/ zhi ba bbrang po khyod la bstod par bgyis
9 Literally “butter flower” (Tib. phye mar)
10 Literally “golden drink” or “celestial drink” (Tib. gser skyams)
11 Literally “torma” (gdor ma)
the sky, I offer. Moreover, by his delightful acceptance [of this offering], together with his retinue, may the hopes of my wishes be fulfilled.  

[VERSE PRAYER]:

In a past life [He] was a spiritual friend to Shakyamuni. While being the Lotus-Born [He] is the one who promised to bind under oath You, Dharma Protectors. Furthermore, I hold onto the Dharma lineage of the Lotus-Born without departing from this solemn oath. [He] arrives in this time to guard, protect, and assist the Kingdom of the Tathagata in these excellent years and, in particular, unto this country itself, [when] violent people, animals, plague, argumentation, and carnivorous animals [and] those who intend to harm [come forth], bestow pacification. In a time when frost and hail [come] out of season, [when] wind, strong rains, and so forth, [and when] enemies/foes [come forth], bestow protection. Bestow years [in which] people have a wealth of cattle and excellent harvest. We bearers of knowledge and yogis, What must we do? Endowed with enlightened activity, accomplishment, longevity, well-being, enjoyments and fame, reverse the conditions of the three times [and] from war, [and] remove obstacles. Bestow theory and practice, teachings, elaborations, and so forth, just as they are; Bestow [these] entrusted enlightened activities.  

12 'phrin gsol ni: h’um khyad par khyod kyi thugs dam bskang ba’i rdzas/ phye mar ‘bru bcud dza gad gser skyems dang/ dkar gsummngar gsum sman phud ‘bru sna’i tshogs/ ro bcud brgyan gyis mdzes pa’i gdor ma dang/ dpyan gzigs mda’a dar gyag lugs ra la sogs/ ting ‘dzin sngags dang phyag rgyas byin rlabs ste/ mi zad nam mkha’i ‘khyon yangs bskang ste ‘bul/ ‘khor bcas dges pa’i tshul bzhes nas kyang/ bdag gi ‘dod pa’i re ba bskang du gsol

13 Kyai: sngon tshe thub pa’i dge bsnyan te/ bar du padma ‘byung gnas kyis/ dam la bdag pa’i dam tshig can/ khod ni chos skyongs bsrungs ma ste/ bdag kyang pad ‘byung xhos brgyud ‘dzin/ dam tshig gnyan las ma ‘da’a bar/ bsrung skyob kha ‘dzin dus la bbas/ rgyal kham bde bzhing lo legs dang/ khyad par yul phyogs ‘di nyid du/ mi phyug nad wam ‘khrugs brtsod dang/ gcan zan gnod pa zhi ba dang/ sad srer dus min rlung char sogs/ ‘Bbun ba’i lo dgra bsrung ba dang/ mi nor lo phyug rtags legs mdzod/ rig ‘dzin rnal ‘byor bdag cag gi/ ci dgos ‘phyin las sgrub pa dang/ tshe dpal longs spyod snyan grags ldan/ ‘khor bsrung dus gsum rkyen bzlog bar chad sol/ bshad sgrub bstan pa rgyas pa sogs/ ji ltar bcol ba’i ‘phrin las mdzod
Appendix B: Figures

1) Trade routes passing by Langtang
2) Langtang situated at the center of a mandala
3) Mt. Langtang Lirung
4) Mt. Langshisa
5) Padmasambhava footprint
6) Kimjung Glacier and Tarna Cave
7) Spirit Castle (pho brang)
8) House of a lü, water-powered prayer wheel (lü khang chu ’khor)
9) Kyanjin Chorten
10) Mani walls
11) 3 protector deities
12) Red mani stone
13) Kimjung Glacier from Kyanjin Ri
14) Langtang Chorten with landslide in background
15) “Lho Gyello!” - yul lha ritual
16) Yaks grazing
3) Mt. Langtang Lirung in background with “yak pho drang” in foreground

4) Mt. Langshisa in the background, near Yak Kharka
5) Geomorphic footprint of Guru Padmasambhava, nearby Kyanjin Gumba.

6) Kimjung Glacier with Tarna Cave barely discernible in the foreground.
7) Spirit Castle (*pho drang*) atop Kyanjin Ri

8) A house of a *lü*, water-powered prayer wheel (*lü khang/chu khor*) near Ghodatabela
9) Kyanjin Chorten

10) Mani walls line Langtang Valley
11) Three protector deities from left to right: Jampelyang, Chenrezig, Channa Dorje

12) Red stone carved with a mandala, serving as a cornerstone on a mani wall.
13) Kimjung Glacier viewed from the peak of Mt. Kyanjin Ri

14) Langtang Chorten in the foreground, Langtang village, and the site of “old” Langtang village now covered by the landslide in the background
15) Ritual honoring Langtang Lerung during a celebration one lunar month after Tibetan New Year (Tib. lo gsar). The two men in the foreground tossing tsampa are Lama Tenzin and Pema Domar Lama. Participants are shouting “Lho Ghyello!” Photo courtesy of Austin Lord, March, 2020.

16) Yak-cow hybrids called dzomo graze near village of Kyanjin Gumba