

## Workshop

# “Tibetanness outside Tibet”

Date: January 30th and 31st, 2020  
Venue: Brühler Str. 7 (2nd floor), 53119 Bonn

Due to its enormous expansion of and the networks established by the Tibetan Empire between the 7th and 9th century, Tibetan culture, language, and religion spread in a vast territory, reaching from Ladakh in the west to Dartsedo in the east, and covering parts of present-day Nepal (Mustang) and regions today administered by Pakistan (Gilgit-Baltistan). The area where Tibetic languages are still spoken, and where cultural traits which can be identified as being of Tibetan origin persist, therefore goes far beyond the actual Tibetan Autonomous Region and further Tibetan autonomous prefectures currently administered by the People’s Republic of China. Thus, scholars often use the term “ethnic Tibet” to define this entire zone to distinguish it from today’s geopolitical entity Tibet. But while the term “ethnic” implies a specific belonging to one group, in our workshop we will discuss in detail the various forms of assertion or rejection of belonging to a real or imagined wider Tibetan community among speakers of Tibetic languages outside of today’s geopolitical entity Tibet.

The speakers of this workshop are scholars of different disciplines studying diverse aspects of Tibetic speaking groups in present-day Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, focussing on various identity (trans)formation processes among these groups. Among others, the following questions will be addressed: Does the Tibetan past play a role and if so, to what extent for the identity (trans)formation processes among these Tibetic speaking groups? What kind of endeavours to preserve and/or revive Tibetan heritage can be observed? What role do global networks, social media, local and international NGOs, education institutions, and the respective states play? Are Tibetan Buddhism and symbols in general allocated to this integrative elements of the identity (trans)formation processes? What local and global factors contribute to the assertion or rejection of belonging to a wider Tibetan community? How do members of these groups define Tibetanness?

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

**Contact:** [cbrandt@uni-bonn.de](mailto:cbrandt@uni-bonn.de), [deboos@unistra.fr](mailto:deboos@unistra.fr), and/or [nschneid@uni-bonn.de](mailto:nschneid@uni-bonn.de)

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# Workshop

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### Programme

Thursday, January 30th 2020	
9.00 – 9.15	<b>Welcome and introduction by Carmen Brandt and Nicola Schneider</b>
9.15 – 10.45	<b>Session 1</b>
9.15 – 10.00	<b>Some thoughts on identifying <i>bod pa</i> (Tibetan) and <i>bod rigs</i> (Tibetanness)</b> Kalsang Norbu Gurung (University of Bonn)
10.00 – 10.45	<b>‘Non-Tibetanness’ versus ‘Bhutaneseeness’ inside Bhutan</b> Mareike Wulff (Humboldt University Berlin)
10.45 – 11.15	Coffee break
11.15 – 12.45	<b>Session 2</b>
11.15 – 12.00	<b>Being Muslim and Scheduled Tribe Boto (<i>bod</i>) in Zangskar</b> Salomé Deboos (University of Strasbourg)
12.00 – 12.45	<b>Tibetan immigrant economy in Majnu Ka Tilla, Delhi (India)</b> Frauke Kraas (University of Cologne) & Jan-Christoph Schlenk (GIZ)
12.45 – 14.00	Lunch break
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Session 3</b>
14.00 – 14:45	<b>A “jewel box” of female Tibetan Buddhist role models: The wall paintings in the temple of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery</b> Dolores Zoé Bertschinger (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)
14:45 – 15:30	<b>Tibetan hip-hop as a therapeutic unifier of the youth, ergo a “<i>bod pa’i ngo bo’i theg pa</i>”</b> Martin Hanker (Charles University, Prague)
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee break
16.00 – 17.30	<b>Session 4</b>
16.00 – 16.45	<b>Forward to the past!” – Politics of musealising culture and identity in Ladakh</b> Kati Illmann (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg)
16.45 – 17:30	<b>The ‘National Anthem’ of the Western Borderlands: Donor Inscriptions and Prefaces from Guge, Kinnaur, Spiti, Lahaul, Zanskar, and Ladakh</b> Yannick Laurent (University of Oxford)
19:00	<b>Common dinner</b>
Friday, January 31st, 2020	
9.00 – 10:30	<b>Session 5</b>
9.00 – 09.45	<b>The quest for Baltiness in a geopolitically contested region</b> Carmen Brandt (University of Bonn)
9.45 – 10.30	<b>Jellyfishing in the postcolonial nation-state: Baltistan through the Zomia lens</b> Jan Magnusson (Lund University)
10:30 – 11.00	Coffee break
11.00 – 12.30	<b>Final discussion</b>

## Abstracts

### Session 1

9.15 – 10.00

#### **Some thoughts on identifying *bod pa* (Tibetan) and *bod rigs* (Tibetanness)**

Kalsang Norbu Gurung

(University of Bonn; email: [kesnu3@yahoo.com](mailto:kesnu3@yahoo.com))

**Abstract:** This paper will explore how the Tibetan, also known as Tsampa eaters, are identified. There seems to have roughly three different perspectives on identifying Tibetan and Tibetanness, like, foreign perspective, perspective of the Tibetan inside Tibet, and perspective of the native from Himalayan borderland. Until the mid-20th century, identifying and classifying Tibetan as one ethnic or cultural group, as it is done now, was almost non-existent or that was hardly necessary due to not having then any line of demarcation. But, today, identification of one's being Tibetan or not has become more important and also a sensitive issue for all the Tsampa eaters today, whether it be for cultural and educational opportunity, or for a job opportunity, or even for a political asylum status. I will explore on this topic by comparing Tibetan community in exile and the Tsampa eaters from Himalayan borderland and look at the process of transformation of their identity.

10.00 – 10.45

#### **'Non-Tibetanness' versus 'Bhutanese' inside Bhutan**

Mareike Wulff

(Humboldt University Berlin; email: [mareike.wulff@gmx.net](mailto:mareike.wulff@gmx.net))

**Abstract:** In April 2019, Dasho Karma Ura, the director of the *Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies* in Thimphu, opened the Third International Vajrayana Conference, by stating that he is taking pride in the fact that Bhutan is the last remaining Vajrayana Buddhist nation-state in the world, and his country consequently had a responsibility in safeguarding and preserving the Vajrayana Buddhist teachings. The prime minister of Bhutan, Dr. Lotay Tshering, gave an inaugural speech and H.M. Jigme Namgyal Wangchuck, the Fifth King of Bhutan offered a private audience to all international participants at the final day of the Conference, both of them reinforcing Bhutan's strong sense of ownership of the Vajrayana Buddhist teachings as their 'main stakeholders'. The conference was attended by a wide range of international scholars and practitioners of Vajrayana Buddhism, as well the local intellectual elite and people in power.

The Bhutanese Buddhist state was founded by a Tibetan Lama and many important Tibet-born Buddhist authorities directly impacted Bhutan by spreading the Buddhist teachings there in person. Still, in present discourse, Bhutanese exclusively refer to their Buddhist practice as Vajrayana and Mahayana Buddhism, rather than 'Tibetan Buddhism', and when talking about their liturgical language solely use the term *chos skad* ("dharma language"), avoiding the English term "Classical Tibetan" at all costs. Obviously, there is a politically motivated necessity to protect the tiny state's sovereignty by means of emphasising its distinctive culture which is not to be equalled with Tibetan culture, stressing Bhutan's 'Non-Tibetanness'.

When researching Bhutan's communal Vajrayana festivals, I was often taken aback, how different Bhutanese practice of '*cham* festivals is in comparison to all festivals I had observed in Ladakhi/Zanskari and Tibetan-exile monasteries in India and what I knew from literature about '*chams* located in Tibet. As a consequence, I started to understand Bhutanese practice of 'Tibetan Buddhism' as syncretism, a "creative blending of indigenous and foreign beliefs or practices into new cultural forms" (Havilland 2013), resulting in 'Bhutanese' of Vajrayana Buddhism in Bhutan, rather than 'Tibetanness'. Drawing on my field research, I would like to discuss 'Non-Tibetanness' and the transformation of 'Tibetanness' into 'Bhutanese' using the example of communal '*cham* festivals in Bhutan.

## Session 2

11.15 – 12.00

### Being Muslim and Scheduled Tribe Boto (bod) in Zangskar

Salomé Deboos

(University of Strasbourg; email: [deboos@unistra.fr](mailto:deboos@unistra.fr))

**Abstract:** Since 2001, I have been carrying out extensive fieldwork and research on the Zangskar region. At an altitude of between 3,600 m and 4,000 m, this region constitutes one of the five regions in Ladakh. Administratively, the Zangskar valley is a *Tehsil* of the district of Kargil, which itself is part of the LAHDC (Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council) and of which the second constituent is the district of Leh.

The Zangskar valley is populated by 13,800 people known as the Scheduled Tribe “boto” (Bod), who are followers of Mahayana Buddhism (92,73%) or Sunni Islam (7,27%). My previous researches enabled me to highlight the correlation between historical and political experience. As a result, I could conceptualise how among *Padumpas* (inhabitants of Padum) and *Zangskarpas* (inhabitants of Zangskar) the community identity is built up. The intensification of exchanges and the development of the global market, especially regarding tourism (from India and western countries), give benefit to local travel agencies in which Buddhists are firstly employed. On the other hand, on the political level, Zangskar is depending on the Kargil district which is mainly populated by Muslims. Therefore, being Muslim or Buddhist became two different identities, separately values, especially in regard to political and economic aspects.

This paper will show through narratives by old and young generations the change in the process of identity building among Muslims from the Zangskar valley and delve into the question whether they belong first of all to the Umma or to the locality.

12.00 – 12.45

### Tibetan immigrant economy in Majnu Ka Tilla, Delhi (India)

Frauke Kraas & Jan-Christoph Schlenk

(University of Cologne; email: [f.kraas@uni-koeln.de](mailto:f.kraas@uni-koeln.de) & GIZ; email: [janschlenk@web.de](mailto:janschlenk@web.de))

**Abstract:** The paper focuses on the immigrant economy of the Tibetan exile community in India’s capital by examining the development of the settlement Majnu Ka Tilla (MT) at the flood plains of the Yamuna River. MT developed from a squatter settlement in the 1960s into the Indian centre of Tibetan commerce in exile and a tourist hotspot. The economic development potential of MT is investigated by analyzing the data of a qualitative and quantitative field study grounded in concepts of ethnic economies.

The data show that the first migrants started with very simple businesses like food stalls, small pubs, brewing of Tibetan beer and small-scale textile enterprises – mostly ‘sweater-selling’ – which enabled them to survive in the city. The second generation, better educated than their parents, was already able to open stores allowing them to achieve greater financial independence. With increased options, economic activities became more diverse as demonstrated by the opening of travel agencies, beauty parlors and hotels.

The ‘microcosm’ of their own ethnic businesses forms the foundation for integration into the urban society of Delhi. Production and trade of Tibetan handicrafts and ethnic food contribute to the assertion of belonging to a wider Tibetan community and strengthen the feeling of togetherness of the Tibetans in MT. This is reinforced by the appreciation of the special “Tibetan flair” by many western tourists as well as Indians who visit the “Little Tibet” in Delhi. Furthermore, the Tibetan travel agencies organizing special direct bus services connecting MT with the most important Tibetan settlements in North India and even Nepal, also contribute to the strengthening of the spirit of the Tibetan community. This Tibetanness in exile has built the foundation for further economic diversification based on better education and the establishment of international economic networks connecting MT with the world.

### Session 3

14.00 – 14:45

#### A “jewel box” of female Tibetan Buddhist role models: The wall paintings in the temple of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery

Dolores Zoé Bertschinger

(Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich; email: [d.bertschinger@lmu.de](mailto:d.bertschinger@lmu.de))

**Abstract:** In the Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh, Northern India, around 60 kilometers from McLeod Ganj (Upper Dharamsala) and near the Tibetan colony of Bir lies the nunnery Dongyu Gatsal Ling. Its temple was established in 2015 and shows numerous representations of nuns, Yoginis, Dakinis und Bodhisattvadevis. Their selection, placement, iconography and meaning for the establishment of a «female transmission lineage» are object of my case study. The wall paintings throw up questions concerning women in Buddhist history and the role of the female in Tibetan Buddhism in general. The abbess of Dongyu Gatsal Ling is Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, the second ordained Englishwoman in Tibetan Buddhism and headmistress of “Sakyadhita – International Association of Buddhist Women”. In her nunnery she aims at two things: Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo wants to continue the yogic Togdenma tradition and she propagates the education of the first women ever to become Geshemas. This re-construction of Tibetan Buddhist women’s history is made visible on the walls of the temple.

At the intersection of history of religion, visual studies and gender studies I would like to introduce Tibetan Buddhist narratives, motifs, and symbols that contribute to the unique representations in the temple. I will discuss production and reception processes that contribute to the transmission and adaptation of Tibetan Buddhist tradition in Dongyu Gatsal Ling. By doing so I would like to answer the question how Tibetan Buddhism and symbols function as integrative elements of the identity (trans)formation processes of the Tibetan Diaspora in India.

14:45 – 15:30

#### Tibetan hip-hop as a therapeutic unifier of the youth, ergo a “*bod pa’i ngo bo’i theg pa*”

Martin Hanker

(Charles University, Prague; email: [Martin.Hanker@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:Martin.Hanker@ff.cuni.cz))

**Abstract:** Tibetanness (*bod pa’i ngo bo*), as a set of shared “fundamental cultural values”, has no single universal medium (*theg pa*). Due to the extraordinary diverse nature of Tibetan diaspora, neither language nor religion (the usual “suspects” and cornerstones of any culture) can be in this case regarded as “singular”, much less “universal”. However, popular culture, which builds on the foundations of its direct ancestor, folk culture, is now not so “local” anymore (thanks to social channels like WeChat, YouTube, and Facebook), thus being the perfect candidate for such medium. And one agent of pop culture particularly stands out in this context – music, the only “truly language” unifier.

In such orally-oriented culture as Tibetan, music had always a prominent position. It is thus surprising, why contemporary popular music is still such a neglected research subject in the field of Tibetan studies. Let alone, when a new phenomenon of Tibetan hip-hop has recently emerged and now genuinely “taps into the existing linguistic anxiety to tremendous effect”, as Timothy Thurston once pointed out. For circa ten years, a vibrant urban subculture of Tibetan youth has been forming around this adapted trend. It successfully blends together elements of the global hip-hop culture (including fashion, dancing, rapping, video production etc.) with various classic features taken from Tibetan tradition(-s).

This paper aims to introduce selected aspects of *bod kyi gzhas ma gtam*, thereby indicating its current role, possible prospects, and challenges too. These linguistic, religious, political and sociological features will be illustrated using examples of lyrics, video clips and biographical records of the artists. Special attention will be paid to the “cross-over” nature and the identity-awareness encouraging function of the subculture and its different movements.

## Session 4

16.00 – 16.45

### **Forward to the past!” – Politics of musealising culture and identity in Ladakh**

Kati Illmann

(Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg; email: [kati.illmann@ethnologie.uni-halle.de](mailto:kati.illmann@ethnologie.uni-halle.de))

**Abstract:** Cultural heritage in Ladakh becomes the subject of processes of identity-political interpretation and negotiation. The present study examines strategies with which local religious communities, but also local NGOs, as well as state institutions struggle for a hegemonic position.

Different constellations of interests thereby challenge the very reason they rely on, a common Ladakhi identity. This paper is devoted to the examination of cultural identity confirmations in Ladakh that create the tension between cultural unity and religious division, which on the one hand strengthen the historical and religious ties to Tibet and, at the same time, create an ambivalence through a demarcation from Tibet.

A holistic concept of a Buddhist Ladakh is propagated on the one hand. A self-affirmation that relies on Ladakh's historical and religious ties to Tibet. Such identity assignment aims to introduce a core of Ladakhi identity, the Tibetan Buddhism as religious or spiritual anchor, which shapes the way of life, the different practices and social manners, the institutions, the rituals and the moral self.

In contrast, Central Asian and above all the Muslim ties and origins of Ladakhi identity are emphasized. The newly founded Central Asian Museum of Ladakh (CAML) is to be understood as such an initiative to constitute a counterpoint of Ladakhi cultural heritage and identity which goes beyond a Buddhist identity, which fundamentally relies on Tibetan ties. The foundation of the Museum fundamentally questions this holistic attempt and thereby challenges the political efforts to determine a shared cultural heritage. With a case study of the ›Central Asian Museum of Ladakh‹ (CAML) this paper examines the ambivalent struggle for a Ladakhi cultural heritage and shows how political efforts focus on balancing conflicts about social unity and religious particularity.

16.45 – 17:30

### **The ‘National Anthem’ of the Western Borderlands: Donor Inscriptions and Prefaces from Guge, Kinnaur, Spiti, Lahaul, Zaskar, and Ladakh**

Yannick Laurent

(University of Oxford; email: [himalayaya@gmail.com](mailto:himalayaya@gmail.com))

**Abstract:** The expansion of the Tibetan Empire to the western margins of the Tibetan plateau in the 7th century set in motion a gradual process of linguistic and cultural assimilation. The completion of what could be termed ethnogenesis occurred during the 10th-11th centuries, when the western borderlands were integrated into a new territorial and political entity: the Kingdom of the Three Western Dominions of Upper Tibet (*stod mnga' ris skor gsum*). From the late 13th-14th century onwards, donor inscriptions and prefaces composed in Guge, Kinnaur, Spiti, Lahaul, Zaskar, and Ladakh provide perhaps the strongest and clearest claim from these regions for asserting their ‘Tibetanness’. A particular feature of these documents is to situate the donor's location within a wider Buddhist and geo-political context, with specific references to Buddhist cosmography, Tibetan geography, and to formal authorities. During his archaeological survey of the Indo-Tibetan border regions, A.H. Francke (1914) noted that the content of these documents was akin to some kind of “national anthem”. Despite the political and territorial fragmentation of the Western Himalayas after the mid-17th century, donor inscriptions and prefaces continued to be produced until the 19th century, using the same phraseology and symbols yet legitimising different political entities. As a communication strategy, these public documents conveyed similar social norms, beliefs, and worldviews, thereby distinguishing the inhabitants of these regions from their immediate neighbours to the west while simultaneously conforming to the ideological standards of the Tibetosphere.

## Session 5

9.00 – 09.45

### The quest for Baltiness in a geopolitically contested region

Carmen Brandt

(University of Bonn; email: [cbrandt@uni-bonn.de](mailto:cbrandt@uni-bonn.de))

**Abstract:** The home region of the Baltis, known as Baltistan, is today considered to be a borderland region. Geographically, it is situated in the Karakorum mountain range at the edge of the Himalaya between Central, East, and South Asia, while geopolitically it is contested between India, Pakistan, and to some extent China. Although the regionalisation of geographies and the emergence of states are results of modernity, during contemporary group identity formation processes, elements whose origin goes far beyond the establishment of these geographic and geopolitical units are often invoked and identified with these modern entities. While states often enforce these specific elements from the past during their nation-building processes on its citizens, there are also nations without states, such as the Baltis, which struggle not only for an official recognition but also a coherent and sustainable identity formation.

Based, among others, on research in Baltistan and interviews with Baltis of various backgrounds in 2014 and 2017, this presentation will discuss the difficulties of Baltis to build their nation without referring to elements which link them automatically to geopolitical entities or communities which are more advanced in their nation-building or identity formation. Thus, I argue that due to the lack of distinct geopolitical boundaries, weak state structures, and late identity formation endeavours Balti nationalists struggle today for the particularity of Baltiness and their geopolitical belonging. This will become most evident by looking at recent efforts of Balti nationalists to strengthen their ethnolinguistic identity by evoking elements from their glorious Tibetan past which need to be modified or reinterpreted in order to give them a particular Balti characteristic in the present.

9.45 – 10.30

### Jellyfishing in the postcolonial nation-state: Baltistan through the Zomia lens

Jan Magnusson

(Lund University; email: [jan.magnusson@soch.lu.se](mailto:jan.magnusson@soch.lu.se))

**Abstract:** The Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 divided the western Himalayan region of Baltistan in two parts. Being subject to internal colonialization, state- and nation-making by the two postcolonial nation-states the Balti community, like many other communities in the Himalayan region, has recently voiced demands of self-rule and experienced a cultural revival. The situation in Baltistan is seen in a Zomia lens focusing on what Scott (2009) terms jellyfish strategies of the community's history, language and culture to avoid being governed and on the community's escape from the rulers into a new, virtual friction of terrain in the form of ICT and the Internet. It is pointed out that South Asian minority communities like the Balti often find themselves suspended between demands of self-rule and a politics of development where they compete over access to the resources of the nation-state. A preliminary history of connectivity in Baltistan is also included.