

rNyingmapa rituals in Sikkim and Nepal

Divining the future, worshiping ancestors with “mdos”: the selection of salient features in individual biographies in order to frame the vicissitudes of social life.

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The homogeneity and unity of the whole ritual activity of the Buddhist rNyingmapa populations of Sikkim and Nepal could be found in the pervasiveness of the geometrical crossed threads constructions that we can see as ornaments for dough effigies, animals skulls or isolated in space, inside rNyingmapa’s domestic as well as tantric monastic rituals. They can be pure ornamental figures to bring luck and chase bad influences away, or complex constructions with different meanings to lure the demons. One of the paradoxes of these crossed threads constructions is that they can be both container and contents: they can shelter or incorporate momentarily the demonic beings, which are summoned in order to be deceived and destroyed. The aim of this paper is to re-approach rituals with crossed threads called *mdos* in literary or *nam mkha’*, *zor*, *glud*, *yas* (and eventually, many other local appellations) in Tibetan and non-Tibetan ritual and folk practices. We base our analysis on new and ancient research in Nepal and in Sikkim and we add a comparative perspective, opposing some Sikkimese and less known Nepalese Tamang examples of such rituals with *mdos* and *nam mkha’*: a divinatory ritual in Sikkim and a ritual for ancestors in Nepal.

Questions of terminology

While *mdos* would refer to a whole ritual process, where people represent both some crossed thread constructions associated or not with some figurative dough effigies representing the demonic beings to expel or the donor of the ritual, *nam mkha’* (“space”, “heaven”) would be more specifically a construction made with crossed threads. It can be an alternative term for *mdos*. These constructions may bear more or less complex aspects, representing a kind of palace or a house or simply, a geometrical interlace, with eventually a figurative aspect (like in the Tamang ancestors’ ritual). The *zor*, which is evoked in some Tibetan texts and recitations read by the lamas¹, is basically a magical instrument, sharp and cutting like a sickle. Finally, *glud* or *yas* is an effigy offered as a substitute for someone’s life and soul. It takes generally the shape of a figurative *gtor ma*, made with dough.

A formal approach would consist in taking an inventory of the different shapes of the crossed threads: there are polygons with four, five, seven, or eight sides, and polyhedrons limited by a certain number of faces.

. A polygon is a flat face (figure) limited by a succession of stops (arrests). There are for example pentagons, hexagons and tetragons.

. A polyhedron is a face (figure) in the space, limited by a set of faces among which, each one is polygonal. The cube, for instance, is a polyhedron limited by square faces; the dodecahedron is a polyhedron formed of twelve pentagonal faces. The faces are not necessarily regular, consisting of threads fastened to a skeleton of sticks. Each one of these faces appears as either a side of the polyhedron or some chosen axis. Most of these polyhedrons are convex and closed, but in certain cases,

some faces are open or empty and in other cases the structure is no more convex and no more closed. **For instance, the figure 1 is a non-convex polyhedron where all faces are open. The figure 2 is a polyhedron where certain faces are closed rectangular and other ones closed triangular. The figure 3 is a set of polygons formed of 4 closed triangular; and the figure 4 is a polyhedron where the rectangular faces are closed and the triangular faces are open. Of course, “open” and “closed” bear here more symbolic than real formal meaning: a space, a hole, an opening appears or not among the crossed threads.**

Anyhow, a common characteristic of each structure is that they are made of threads fastened to bamboo sticks. In certain cases, there are only a series of polygonal faces, which close up on themselves in a kind of “strip,” as in the case of the “demon rGyalpo”. We can also notice that if we consider the *mdos* as a graph², in all cases it is a non-planar graph. It means that there is no way to draw this graph on a plan without introducing new intersections between the different links of the graph.

In the most complex cases, the example of the Tamang *bumpa*, there is a real architecture with internal compartments and a complex system of communication between the different regions of the structure. In a formal approach, there should be also a procedural analysis. By “procedural,” we mean that it is not so much the final figure, which is given a name as the whole process of making these complex spatial figures, and the study of their relationships with a whole system of references. As a system³, this structure organizes the relationships between the human body, the society, the cosmos, and individual’s intentions and actions. Furthermore, in a procedural analysis, we would have also to frame how the whole ritual process constitutes the system of references and allows a categorization of the social reality.

A phenomenological approach

According to our experience, to the definitions given by lamas and people in Sikkim and Nepal and to the charts of the rituals, it is necessary to perform rituals with crossed threads and to use effigies in order to ransom the life of a person and to cure all kind of diseases. Human life is full of obstacles and unpredictable events that need to be anticipated and understood by the lamas and the shamans, who then engage in rituals of making reparations. These complex assemblages built according to textual instructions or by memory are made to attract, trap and lure unknown, hostile and undesired guests. Everybody in the society agrees on the efficacy of the entire process and the general idea that there are exchanges with other worlds and a therapeutic effect. As far as the ritual is a crucial moment of the transformation of relationships between social actors, we can rely on a phenomenological approach like Alfred Schütz’s⁴, for instance, who has provided a scientific description of the social reality and common knowledge in everyday life. He analyses particularly the interplay between different subjectivities: therefore, we should be cautious and refrain from judging the efficacy of the ritual according to objective criteria when the transformation of the intersubjective relationships is a real fact; even though the arguments which guide the operations resort to a mythological domain. More generally, A. Schütz criticizes the whole process of objectification by the researcher. We shall conclude with some remarks about the importance of such an approach in our perspective.

I - Some general hypothesis about rituals with *mdos* constructions: outlines of the functional process

The process can be seen as dual:

The making of magical weapons by the lamas and shamans through the *mdos* is effective. It helps people to solve individual problems in their daily lives; it is also an collective way of expelling hostile forces which can be nationwide. Metaphorically, we should state that it is a way of writing down individual life-stories.

- 1) In certain cases, we have also collective biographies with the creation of a real "body-universe": a figurative *mdos* displays the cosmological, social and political character of a community. It is intended to relate the people and the group to the inhabited territory and to reassure its links with the whole (the Universe, the nature and the supernatural environment)

But we need to distinguish the originality and the specificity of the *mdos* rituals as constructions with cross threads, in comparison with the ransom rituals with substitute effigies (*glud*, *gto*) where they appear. The pervasiveness of the rituals where *mdos* or *nam mkha'* are built is too complex and ambiguous to allow us to draw any summary or exhaustive description of their variety in Buddhist ritual practices⁵. The term *mdos* itself remains very ambiguous. I am aware that "ransom rituals", *glud*, *gto* with *nam mkha'* and *mdos* may take on very different meanings across the Himalayas and I don't want to impose Tibetan scholarly analysis on their popular understanding and usage. For learned Tamang lamas, for instance, *mdos*, or *mdos-ris* evoked a *glud* with *nam-mkha'*, although Tamang ritual texts could describe *mdos* type activities (like *mamo'i mdos*, *rgyal mdos*, *zor mdos*) without *nam-mkha'*; and *glud* with *nam-mkha'*; shamans and lay people in turn could ignore completely the meaning of *mdos*, while building and using *nam mkha'* as pure ornaments for the *gtor mas*.

Ritual activities with constructions of substitute effigies (*glud*), surmounted or not with cross threads (*nam mkha'*), isolated or not, figurative or non figurative, have been witnessed and described by many researchers throughout the Himalayan enclaves of Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman culture⁶ (e.g.: Namkhai Norbu, Samten Karmay). They concern important monastic rituals or minor daily life activities; they range from astrological and religious to medical and funerary practices. Yoshiro Imaeda had observed a *mkha' klong gsang mdos* in a monastery in Central Tibet (sMan ri), performed on the 6th month of the Tibetan calendar. The abbot had to collect resources for the ritual among several nomadic communities. Nicolas Sihle has analyzed also some *mdos rgyap* or *gtor rgyap* in the Tantric communities of Kag, North Nepal, engaging the whole ancient kingdom. In the twenties, a great exorcism of the nNa' zhaba Kingdom had been celebrated in the form of a *mdos*. Marceline de Montmollin has shown in 1986 some examples of figurative *mdos* with the image of the person inserted in the threads. Another example is given by Nebesky-Wojkowitz: under the 13th Dalai-Lama, in order to prevent a Gurkha invasion by the Nepalese troops, four great *mdos* were burnt to liberate the demons which had been asked to kill the enemy. The same day, there was an earthquake in Nepal⁷. [Needs a footnote here with page number of N-Wojkowitz] *gTor rgyap* or huge *gtor mas* in the form of complex crossed-threads surmounting a mask with open-mouth, are the ritual weapons of the tantric ritual priests in Sikkim. Finally, one can cross everyday in the streets these assemblage of effigies and threads, thrown down by the ditch or the gutters, hung behind barber wires, crushed into the dirt or comfortably displayed on

the platform of the sewerage systems; half-eaten by dogs, or transformed into biodegradable rubbish.

Three characteristics of the effigies

- 1) Obstacles or non human being's (enemies/guests) are considered and materialized as elements of nature and the supernatural: dwellers of rocks, waters, underworlds, ghosts, vampires. The effigies symbolizing these elements are most often non-figurative: small cones representing the food, which is offered to them, animals supposed to be their vehicle. Every single element used bears a symbolic meaning, like the colored pigments and dyes applied on the cross threads, the quality of the wood and vegetal which tightens the threads. They are defined and classified in literary references through the eight categories of demonic beings *Lha srin sde brgyad*⁸ but the repertoires of written references does not influence the shape of dough effigies, which are made according to people's imagination and which can be very creative and aesthetic: figures with strong anthropomorphic and aggressive aspects are made as the support for the violent actions performed. On the contrary, the effigies of the practitioners are realistic, with benevolent expressions.
- 2) There is still a deep ambiguity in the hermeneutics. When some people say that the *nam mkha'* which accompanies various anthropomorphic or animal effigies is a simple ornament meant to embellish or to please the gods, other Tamang lamas explain that the constitutive elements of the *nam mkha'* (colored threads, figures oriented in space and linked with different kind of animals and beings) have a real effect against the supernatural and malevolent beings. They are able to accomplish people's desires thanks to lamas' and shamans' powers (*dbang* and *sngo ba*). The morphological aspect and qualities of cross threads and effigies should reflect some physical characteristics of the demonic beings, being their tent, canvas (*gur, khang*), their palace, and sometimes their body. But *nam mkha'* are also a trap. In other terms, these "images" can kill in different ways. In the philosophical terms of Spinoza⁹, they would be both "substance and extension", each attribute being related to a "soul" in Buddhist terms, a *bla*.
- 3) We must not forget the important dimension of the "aesthetics of suffering and illness", as it was tentatively defined by R. Desjarlais (1992)¹⁰: "The expressive figures built in the rituals are embodied with hopes, fears, desires, anxieties; they express very physically social fractures and oppositions. Through them, wars are performed and above all, dangerous exchanges and substitutions of lives are done, with effective results within the household and the society".
Individual as well as collective lives are transformed. We could refer here also to the notion of "rebellious narratives", relying on E.P. Thompson's definition of Custom¹¹. The reactions towards the effigies, once they have been thrown away, are generally disgust or fear, and people display strong resentment against whoever is taking pictures of *nam mkha'* in the streets, inside houses or in the monasteries.

Let us examine two types of rituals with *mdos* that we could witness between 1986 and 1996 among Sikkimese families in Pemayangtse and Yoksum, and among Tamang families in Kabhre Palanchok (Nepal).

II – Examples of rituals with *mdos*

1 – **A ritual in Sikkim:** *gTo ko bla glud* (or *bslu*): ransoming or calling back the *bla* through *gto* –“exorcism”- Also called *Thor ko bla glud*

On the 12th of September 1996, in the Garuda Inn in Pelling, the family performed a *gto kho bla bslu*. This ritual was identified by a monk teaching in Pemayangtse monastery as a *gto* type ritual, performed to “save the soul in difficult times”. The exact orthography of *bslu*, which was given, was *glus*.

The social context: The ritual was performed for the elder son of the family, the owner of the inn, who was a physician. He was entering his birth year, the “rat” according to the astrological cycle: and the ritual was to combat all kinds of possible obstacles, which could hinder his career. His father had died recently and the son was now directing the household. He had to ensure his social status outside and inside the family, which comprised 9 persons: the mother, three brothers, two children, two daughters in law and his own spouse.

Ritual periodicity: this action should be performed every ten years or once every time one’s own zodiacal sign would come back in the twelve years cycle. This re-appearance of the astral sign called *lo skag* means dangers for the person. All years finishing by the number 9 are also a threat. They are called *dgu mig* (*dgu mig nas thar ro*: “to liberate oneself from the influence of the *dgu mig*”).

The practitioners: Two monks from Pemayangtse monastery came accompanied with a younger one who carried the paraphernalia for the ritual and who executed orders. They were carrying the book to read: *gto bcos kyi dkar chag bzhugs so*.

The making of the *mdos*:

- Four big *mdos* are built, called respectively *rgyal mdos* (white), *btsan mdos* (red), *ma mo'i mdos* or *klu mdos* (black – opinions diverged on the identity of this *mdos*), a *yam mdos* (green). In front of them, various kind of food –cooked rice, meat, fermented beer and tea - was displayed.
- The effigy of the *sbyin bdag* is made, surrounded with colored arrows oriented in space; one puts a board with five cups filled with rice and water on the altar. The actor is sitting in front of the *mandala* and prostrates.
- The hand of the Buddha, drawn on a piece of paper is displayed with a *mandala* into the palm (*brGya bzhi*).
- *gtor ma* are put around the *mdos* (red, with white paste)
- A big vessel covered with a leaf and several dice [Is that ok? – ‘dice’ is both singular and plural Yes, OK] (the *bla mtsho*¹² or soul-lake)
- A kind of *mchod rten* on the *mandala* in Buddha’s hand is the seat of the *sbyin bdag*’s effigy, with all the offerings for the *dhamapala* and the *bdud bzhi* (*lha'i bdud*, *rgyal po'i bdud*, *btsan kyi bdud*, *ma mo'i bdud*) around.
- Besides the effigy, a plate is filled with a *mdos* with two wooden sticks with red and black lines [red and black lines are drawn –“painted”- on the sticks], cotton tips and a dice (a demon *bdud* and a *lha*).

Drawing the divinatory diagram: It is a wide rectangle with nine horizontal lines representing difficult passages of life in the ten years cycle. On each line, there is a small bamboo *gtor ma* surmounted with a flag. At the foot are placed some soil, cereals and offering of water in another bamboo vessel. On the first line, one puts sheep and goats' shoulder blades (scapula), tight together. The dividing lines in the diagram represent also the body's chakras.

Actions: the main actor comes, with a rucksack and a stick in hand. The action consists of crossing the different passes [or *la*, which are represented by the lines] and jumping over the bones, which are pulled from line to line. The *gtor mas* are eliminated progressively. Then the actor arrives in front of the altar where he meditates in front of a *thanka*.

Throwing away the *mdos* and the *sbyin bdag's* effigy on the roof-terrace:

The white *mdos* is eliminated through the door, on a white path made with flour. The same process is repeated for the three other ones, respectively eliminated through the different windows, in different directions. Then comes the preparation of the soul-lake (*bla-mtsho*) and offering of the *gtor mas* to the demons.

Last part of the ritual: the divination-game

The last part of the ritual is a divination-game with gods and demons, who are answered questions through launching dice; the collection of auspicious stones and turquoise in the soul-lake and the divination through a sheep in form of a *gtor ma* which is made to float on the "lake" (a basin filled with water). After being propelled, the mouth of the sheep should turn towards the lama and not towards the door, which would be considered highly inauspicious.

People's interpretations

The lamas and two brothers, commenting on the ritual efficacy gave their conclusions at the end: the ritual was successful. The nine lamps burning on the passes [The "passes" are both mountain passes, and men's steps in the life: the different ages of man – symbolized also through the 12 zodiac cycles-] meant light and brightness in the life of the beneficiary. The nine kinds of offerings (cereals, food) had been received by hostile beings and all kind of obstacles should thus have been removed. The whole action was interpreted as a way to "transforming the pass and the hills into fluidity, into water"; "smoothing the path", "flattening the obstacles". Negative emotions would be transformed into positive ones. Everybody described the ritual as a "psychological action" where the collective contribution had played a major role. The younger brother said at the end: with the *mdos*, we have done a "photocopy" of the gods. It appeared clearly that *mdos* and effigies were not considered by people as '*placebo*'. They acted on the minds as real medicines.

2 – A ritual for the ancestors in Nepal: the Tamang 'Doila' (Tib. 'The *bla* of the *mdos*'?)

In the winter of 1988, we witnessed a rare Doila ritual or "celebration of their ancestors" by the Tamangs of the Eastern Valley of Kathmandu, in Temal (Kabhre Palanchok). The ritual consisted of the elaboration of a huge figurative *mdos* that was twelve meters high. The *mdos* here must be considered as an effigy, a real image of the human body. The complex assemblage of different *nam mkha'* or cross threads piled up and the whole ritual action performed during seven days and nights is called

“Doila”. We tried a semantic reconstruction of Doila in *mdos kyi lha* or *bla*, although no lama was able to assure us of this meaning.

The books

The Eastern Tamangs lamas generally base their textual corpus on the revelations received by Jatson Nyingpo. There are six major cycles of revelation (*gsung 'bum/_'ja' tshon snying po/ 'ja' tshon pod drug*). The first six of these cycles are known as the *'ja' tshon pod drug*. The texts which the Tamang seemed to refer to are the *dkon mchog spyi 'dus* or the *zhi khro nges don snying po*¹³. The book used by the *slob dpon lama* of Temal had been compiled six generations ago, ‘in the year of the dog, on the sixth day of a lunar month’, by a lama called Sherap Tenzin in the village called Mendo Gangyul (two days walking towards the north of Temal). It seemed that the Tamang lamas had condensed together in this ritual a *srid-pa spyi mdos* (a general *mdos* of the existence); a *Ma-mo'i mdos* and a *zor mdos*, the *mdos* which acts as a magical weapon; a *rGyal mdos* or a *mdos* destined to the category of the kings *rgyal po*; a *gza' mdos*, designed to chase away the bad influences of the planets *gza'*; and a *mkha'-gro grib mdos*, a ritual to purify a place or a person from death-pollution.

The social context:

The ritual addressed the whole Bal/Dong clan lineages deities, male and female (*pho mdos*, *mo mdos* in the texts, and *akhe/mam* in ordinary speech) through this “polysemic body” which is supposed to be both the ancestor’s male and female bodies and a divine or demonic image. The whole construction is destroyed at the end but the cotton threads of the figure above or male ancestor’s face go back to the sister’s side, (Father’s sister’ sons) and those of the female ancestor’s body go back to the in-laws (Bal clan’s brothers in law or *mha*). This partition and redistribution of the *nam mkha'* reproduces the laws of the exogamic marriage among the Tamangs. It must be noted here the dual classification of the clans, divided between dominant ones, who claim divine ancestry and who are the only ones authorised to celebrate the Doila and the male *pholha* with a *slob dpon bla ma*; and the subaltern’ ones, the Muktan, Shangdan, Pakhrin, Lopcan, Nyashur, who celebrate their *pholha* with animal offerings; among them the Thokar have shamans as masters of the lineage (*lhabon*). They celebrate their ancestors with a trance (*lhaptaba*, master of the *lha*). Other names are given to this kind of trance like *sna chigs pa*. The ordinary shamans or *bompo* practise the *tarpa* or *acho*.

Polysemic designations of the nam mkha' and relation to the myth of the origins

The face above or male ancestor’s face is called *Nam mkha' zhal*, *Akhe*, *Nam mkha'i rGyal po*, *Ui Tinga zhal*, *Jyoho*, (“Face of the Namkha, Grand-Father, King of the Namkha, Face in the Middle of the Heaven, Lord”); the body below or female ancestor’s body is usually called *Bumpa*, *Mam*, although in the text, it is called *Mamo'i mdos*, *sNang srid Mamo*, *Mamo khrag mdos* (“Sacred Vessel, Grand Mother, Mamo or Divine Female Figure, Mamo of visible appearances”). The couple is addressed by the people as: Shyal/Bumpa, Akhe/Mam. Sexual jokes around the Bumpa made by the Bal clan’s brothers are constant. These two bodies are closely related to the myth of the origins of the Tamang: the *srin mo* or carnivorous female ogre mated with the bodhisattva as a monkey and gave birth to her descendants through the incestuous alliance between her nine daughters and nine sons.

Ambiguities in a 'Tamang Buddhist' identity: the Doila as reflecting the whole order of a complex society¹⁴

Whenever it is question of taking place in the monastic rituals and rNyingmapa's hierarchies, the complex identity of this *mdos* is a reflection of the permanent problem arising for the Tamang. The recurrent use of alcohol and meat in the rituals and the constant allusions to eroticism and sex in the rituals always made them suspect in the eyes of the higher classes of Buddhist priests. The Doila is a synthesis of all the different ritual activities of the people's life cycle.

There is the play [re-creation? YES, OK for re-creation or celebration] of a marriage of the household's couple, paralleling the union between the *zhal* (ancestor's face) and the *bumpa* (female ancestor's body). Lamas repeat the cleansing of pollution at birth (*dip sgrib* or *mkon bslogs thap kyi choga* in the texts), the cleansing of major pollution by incest (*sna*) supposed to have taken place in the myth of origins: it is a highly dramatic part in the ritual, performed with a scapegoat chosen among virgin girls (*lhamo*); all kind of ransoms are also offered to the whole Tamang pantheon of deities (*klu, lha, tsen, bdud, gza'* –constellations-) with animal offerings (mainly black birds and a wild goat). The rules of alliance and the reception of *yang* or good health and prosperity are at the heart of the process: the male clans' kins' brothers play the central role, by telling lewd jokes and being boisterous. Women and in-laws appear only at the end of the ritual, to bring food offerings and fermented beer. But they play symbolically the most important role in the secret part of the ritual: it is a nubile girl who should show the yeast in front of the eyes of the terrifying ancestor's face: she is supposed to die from this action. In fact, it is a poor Magar man who was finally chosen.

The Tamang territory of the Bal/Dong clan is shaped in a cosmic image: the Mount Rirap of Mipham, which is the name given to the plinth below the construction. This Mountain of the origins is adorned with four *nam mkha'*, which gives its legitimacy to the appellation of a "Body-Universe" that we want to give to this ritual [as far as the *nam mkha'* represent the four different cosmic directions or Orients, together with all the meanings implied: bodhisattvas, four Paradises where to be reborn and symbolic elements and colours attached to the different guardians of Universe] Parallel to the couple on the pillar, there are the demonic figures below: *Gyalpo/Mamo*, the underworld replicas of the celestial figures above. I resume now the main parts of the ritual activities.

Meanings of mdos in comparison with ransoming rituals (glud)

Through the ritual texts, which are used during the ritual, *mdos* is equivalent to *zor* (*zor 'phang ba*). The Tamangs make a distinction between *gtor zor*, *yung zor*, *mda' zor* and *khrag zor*. But the *mdos* is obviously conceived as a vessel, a receptacle for the deities invited to come down. The different parts of the ritual in the texts are divided thus:

- 1st day: *thap gsangs*, purification of the place and asking the permission of the *yullha* (Konjyo chyo)
- 2nd day: the *bdud bgegs bsangs*
- 3rd day: the gathering of the necessary objects (*lha sgon*): the making of the different *nam mkha'*, the construction of the pillar on the Mount Mipham which is surrounded by the three roots (Lama, Yidam, Khandoma), the main *yullha* and *shibda* or *Zhyal zhi*.

- 4th day: the *choga bipa* or “*lakan garne*”: the yeast is shown to the ferocious ancestor’s face (*bram phulba* or *bdud rtsi phulba*). This is also the dedication of a young virgin girl or Mahakala *puja* or *mchod pa’i lhamo*. This phase is divided into *gyang gtor* (the offering of a huge *gtor ma*), and *mdos gtor* (the offering of the yeast): pure rice offering and fermented beer to get the *gyang sku* or *tshe sku* (long life, good luck) or *jiwan, ayu*.

This part of the ritual is also the calling back of the whole family’s soul or *bla* (*bla kuba* or ‘*gug pa*) through the offerings of ransoms.

The *bsngo ba* of the lama plays a key role. Ngowa is exactly the “reversion of the merits”, through which the offerings made by the people can reach their aim. It is a discourse addressed by the *slob dpon lama* to the powerful beings which allows the offerings, especially the living beings (animals) to be transformed in something else. For the practitioner, it is the Yidam who operates this transformation. In the case of the Tamang offering of yeast, if we consider the use of the blood of the goat on the *khram shing*, the red offerings made to the Mamo with the goat’s entrails, and the need of a virgin girl to show the yeast, we can conclude that it is the women’s periodic blood which is exorcised in front of the pillar and that it is also necessary to sacrifice a young girl for this terrible operation.

- - 5th day: the offering of all the *gtor ma* to the demonic beings and the exorcism with the *khram shing*, dipped into the goat’s blood. This part is similar in all *gto* rituals. The *slob dpon lama* has to do the *pho ba* of the demons, or separating the *rnam shes* from the physical body before the destruction of the offerings.
- - 6th day is the destruction of the effigies or the terrible action of the *zor*.
- - 7th day is dedicated to Saturnales and theatre.
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Questions about the *mdos*: a model for dealing with “otherness”?

We have tried here to describe only a few of the complex spatial configurations made with cross threads, but the list is far of being complete. A formal analysis would have to go into details in the morphological descriptions of the figures. On the phenomenological side of the analysis, these rituals are obviously built on ideas of exchange and reward. To analyze such practices does not presume an automatic diagnosis of projection or reification. The practitioner of *mdos* is no more naïve a believer in the existence of supernatural entities than the practitioner of psychoanalysis who has faith in the unconscious or the superego. In both cases, the practitioner does not know exactly how to address the “other”. The *mdos* are the site of a complex elaboration of this “otherness”, in the form of the summoning of the deities and demons, which are at stake in the ritual. There seems to be a strong reification of the “intention to harm”, as a kind of “demonic being”. The enemy must be vilified; he is always more hungry, thirsty, greedy, ignorant and stupid but the making of these images is real relief from the tensions and anxieties of the group.

All these effigies and thread figures constitute an immaterial heritage, doomed to disappear. They are also a real piece of art, framing for the people the real core of Buddhist ways of conceptualizing the world: short-lived and embodying the interwoven subjectivities. There are no royalties to the authors of the constructions, and no future for the *mdos*, although the figures speak strongly about the past and the present. In the divinatory ritual, the *mdos* remain abstract constructions. They are neutral vessels for the demonic beings. In the Tamang *mdos*, the fusion between human and non human beings is more problematic as the Tamang have made a synthesis between different *mdos*. The construction is both a palace and a person, through a complex system of references, a model that we can find also among many

other Himalayan societies. We are confronted to a global Universe whose elements are drawn from the social imagination as well as from high textual traditions, which give these rituals their frame and justification. Divination rituals, rituals for ancestors and funerary rituals (*dge ba*) are linked through exorcistic activities of the *gto* type that should be examined also in their social context¹⁵.

Finally the Tamang Doila has a strong political meaning and a 'subversive' character: it refers to ancient periods, when the clans were still autonomous entities controlled by Bon priests and shamans. The Gurkha conquests in Nepal progressively replaced the traditional leaders (Coho) by *mukhiya*. Higher Buddhist hierarchs have also started to take hold of ritual life, starting in the eighteenth century and the transformation of the shamanic rituals with the influence of the unification of the rNyingmapa cycle (Ja tshon Nyingpo). The celebration of the Doila, which required gathering one year of agricultural resources among a very poor society, could be the demonstration of people's resistance to a modernity that they did not control, despite their enrolment into trekking and services; it was also an act of resistance to new modes of consumption and development that they did not share and which started to spread in rural areas in the 80s' with huge migrations abroad in search of a better living.

ENDNOTES

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- In the book on the Tamang ritual of Doila (see the description of the ritual in the text), the Lamas evoke the *zor mdos* as a magical weapon, shaped as a sickle. It helps the lama to cut through the obstacles and to expel the demons at the end of the ritual.
- 2 Here, we define a graph according to the following data: 1) a set of points 2) a set of chosen pairs among this set, for instance: {A, B, C, D, E, F}, { {A, B}, {B, C}, {C, D}, {D, A}, {A, E} }. One can represent a graph with a diagram made of links between certain points. From the previous example, one gets the following scheme:
- $$\begin{array}{c}
 E - A - B \\
 \quad / \quad / \\
 F \qquad \quad D - C
 \end{array}$$
- One calls "planar" a graph, which can be drawn on a plan, with the condition that two distinct edges never cross each other.
- 3 We describe in the conclusion the whole system of references of the Tamang Doila. See also Steinmann (1988).
- 4 See Alfred Shütz (1987), pp.89-101.
- 5 Basing himself on many texts and literature to understand the meaning of the categories of beings which are designed in the crossed threads rituals, Namkhai Norbu (1995), pp.77-86 tries to unify a theory around the meanings of *nam mkha'* with both psychological and Buddhist definitions: "The *nam mkha'* serves to harmonize the energy of the five elements, in which the two crossed wooden sticks symbolize the person's life and the coloured threads wound around them the continuous functioning of the elements (...) The practitioner of the Shen of the phenomenal Universe consider the series of the rites of the *glud* as the most important among the four ritual traditions. They explain the expression *mnyam brje* contained in the expression "series of ransom rites" (*phenyul*) as an "equal exchange" - considering the actual negotiation engaged between the priest and the class of beings he addresses to, in which the troubling agent liberates its victims in exchange of the ritual effigy substitute, and the resemblance between the victim and his effigy regarding his physical appearance and the quality of his sensorial organs".
- 6 Here I use some examples and notes taken in a seminar directed by Me A. M. Blondeau (Paris, Maison de l'Asie: EFEO, équipe Tibet -UMR 8147- in 2004-5) on the subject of the "*lha srin sde brgyad*". See the different publications issued from this seminar in the *RET, Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, J. L. Achard ed., particularly A. M. Blondeau (2008).

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- About the mdos in general, see N. Wojkowitz (1975), p.369-397 and p. 495 about the example of the earthquake.
- 8 See A. M. Blondeau *ibid.*
- 9 G. Deleuze has given an interesting interpretation of the “soul” in Spinoza’s terms: “Everything which appears to us as a body in the space-attribute has for equivalent a soul in the thought-attribute. Therefore, what would be the “soul” of a particle of hydrogen, of a tree or of the solar system? (...) The Spinoza’s soul is nothing more than a power to discern (...) Everything is animated, every particle has a soul, in other terms: every particle can discern”; see G. Deleuze, *Course of the 6th January 1981*, Y. Citton and P. Watts in: *Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées*, Paris, juillet-août 2008, p.9.
- 10 Quoted by B. Gerke (2003), p.13; she describes a general mode of “somatic attention” affecting the transformation that people feel when they lose their *bla*.
- 11 According to E. P. Thompson (1991), who criticizes the reification of the notion of folklore, we must confer to “Customs in common” a meaning *sui generis*. Customs are not “survivals” of so-called “Little Tradition” (p.1) or “post-anything” (p 2) (...) “They are the rhetoric of legitimation for almost any usage, practice, or demanded right” (p. 6), “a *rebellious* traditional culture” (p. 9).
- 12 See Françoise Pommaret (2004), p.65.
- 13 We owe to Gene Smith, who we thank here, the complete list of the *'ja' tshon pod drug* and the identification of the Tamang Doila among them. In 1988, we had taken a photograph of the complete collection of the texts read in the Doila, although it took a long time before getting from the sLob spon lama of Temal (Kabhre Palanchok) the authorization to reproduce and to translate the text. This paper being more programmatic and also due to a lack of space, we shall publish later on a complete translation of the collected text of the Doila ritual.
- 14 We refer here to a first analysis of this ritual (Steinmann, Narita, 5th IATS 1989: pp.751-772); see in particular p.765: “La logique qualitative de l’ancestralité”.
- 15 See Shen-yu Lin’s analysis of the origin of these rituals in the Sino-Tibetan tradition (2007), p.105: “Kong tse ‘phrul gyi gyalpo is a visible figure which frequently appears in the Tibetan texts for the gTo rituals. This name is generally found both in the literature of the Bonpo and Buddhist traditions. Kong tse is regarded as the innovator of the gTo rituals, which are performed to solve various problems of daily life. The framework of this ritual resembles the “Stage of Generation of Tantric practices”, but the core of the ritual is proven to be related to sorcery. Kong Tse is the equivalent of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. gTo rituals are strongly related to the science of divination”.

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