



The State Oracle of Tibet, Spirit Possession, and Shamanism

Homayun Sidky

*Department of Anthropology
Miami University, Oxford Ohio
sidkyh@muohio.edu*

Abstract

This paper is based upon five years of ethnographic research among the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, India, and extensive interviews with the medium of the State Oracle of Tibet and other spirit mediums. It investigates the nature of the oracular phenomenon and its place in the Tibetan Buddhist cosmology as well as the socio-political role of the Tibetan State Oracle, or Nêchung. The topics explored include spirit possession, shamanism, and spirit mediums. The central theoretical question addressed is whether or not magico-religious practitioners such as the medium of Nêchung and other Tibetan spirit mediums can legitimately be categorized as shamans.

Keywords

Tibetan State Oracle, shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism, spirit possession, mediumship

Introduction

In 1989 Geoffrey Arnott published a short but very interesting paper comparing the State Oracle of Tibet to the Oracle of Delphi, arguing that cross-cultural data where such practitioners still operate could “provide contemporary authenticated evidence of their workings, power, and credibility” (Arnott 1989:152). He did not claim historical or cultural linkages between the two oracles but considered them analogous phenomena based upon “commonalities in human experience and psychology.” Others studying the Tibetan oracular phenomenon have attempted to link it directly or indirectly to Siberian and Central Asian shamanism (cf. Diemberger 2005:129; Hoffmann 1979:25;

Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:528–553; Smith 2006:305). This paper describes the Tibetan oracular phenomenon and then considers whether or not the State Oracle of Tibet can legitimately be classified as a shaman. The study is based upon data gathered while observing the ritual performances of Tibetan spirit-mediums and the awe-inspiring oracular manifestations of various divinities, personal interviews with the Venerable Thupten Ngodup (*thub bstan dngos grub*), the present medium of Tibet's State Oracle, in Dharamsala, India (2005, 2006, 2008), and information gathered during seven years of ethnographic fieldwork among Nepalese shamans (1999–2006).

Current Understandings of Shamanism and its Association with Tibetan Spirit-Mediums

As historian Ronald Hutton (2001:vii) has pointed out, shamanism was first encountered in Siberia as a practice centered upon eccentric individuals who professed that they could contact supernatural beings through dramatic performances and use their powers to help or harm humans. By the late nineteenth century, the concept of shamanism, which originally applied to beliefs and practices within a geographically limited area, was changed by western scholars into an analytical category to refer to analogous beliefs and practices around the globe (Hutton 2001:vii; Krader 1978:231; van Gennep 2001 [1903]:52). Given such facile usage of the terms “shaman” and “shamanism,” as Price (2001:6) observes,

“shamanism” has latterly come to cover virtually any kind of belief in “spirits” and the existence of other worlds, states of being, or planes of consciousness — a definition that of course encompasses the majority of the world's religions, organized or otherwise, ancient and modern. In this context the term “shaman” has been similarly used to refer to almost any kind of mediator, in any kind of medium, between one perception of the world and another.

Nearly every type of ritual intercessor and magico-religious practitioner has been referred to as a shaman, including Tibetan spirit-mediums (cf. Berglie 1976:86). In his book, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, Samuel (1993:8) not only identifies Tibetan spirit-mediums

as shamans but goes on to create an entire category he calls “shamanic Buddhism.” Samuel (1993:8) defines shamanism as

... the regulation and transformation of human life and human society through the use (or purported use) of altered states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of ordinary experience.

Similarly in his paper, “Notes on the History of the Shamanic in Tibet and Inner Asia,” Gibson (1997:44) categorizes a shaman as follows:

If a person is recognized by his own society as being in direct contact with the divine or extrahuman (however society defines it) by virtue of concrete demonstrations of unusual or unique capabilities, then he or she is a shaman.

Gibson (1997:48) considers Tibetan spirit-mediums *pawo* (*dpa'bo*) and the Tibetan State Oracle as different types of shamans.

A brief overview of these Tibetan ritual intercessors, the paranormal beings with which they interact, the characteristics of these interactions, and their social and political functions is sufficient to underscore the problematic usage of the concept “shamanism” in this context.

Tibetan Buddhism, Indigenous Deities, Oracles, and Spirit-Mediums

Tibetan Buddhism is a highly syncretistic religion (Tucci 1967:79–83). Its pantheon incorporates divinities and other supernatural beings of different types and origins that developed from the clash or encounter between Buddhism and indigenous beliefs and practices centered on local deities and spirits. The latter were part of what Stein (1972:191) referred to as Tibet’s “nameless religion,” and what Tucci (2000:163) called Tibet’s “folk religion.” Dargyay (1988:125) characterizes this encounter as follows:

We might describe the situation as a clash between a timeless and nameless set of religious beliefs mainly designed for the purpose of securing life and prosperity [i.e., folk religion], and an essentially mystic and philosophical religion geared to enable its followers to transcend life entirely [i.e., Buddhism].

While delving into the tumultuous history of how Buddhism was established in Tibet is beyond the scope of this paper, a few key events recounted in legends concerning the miracle-worker and Tantric master Padmasambhava are relevant to the discussion of oracles and spirit-mediums. Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche (“Precious Master”), as he is more commonly known, looms large in Tibetan Buddhism (see Evans-Wentz 2000 [1954]). Although there is a paucity of concrete historical information about this formidable exorcist and subjugator of demons, according to later tradition, Padmasambhava is not only credited with bringing Buddhism to Tibet, but he is also elevated to the status of a second Buddha and a Tantric deity (Richardson 1962:31; Samuel 1993:168; Tucci 2000:6–7).

Legend has it that the efforts by the Tibetan King Trisong Detsen (*khri srong sde bstan*) (755–798)¹ to propagate Buddhism in his domain during the eighth century were blocked by wrathful indigenous deities and demons hostile to the foreign religion. Unable to overcome the fierce magical resistance put up by the recalcitrant divinities, Trisong Detsen sought the aid of Padmasambhava. Arriving from India (Uddiyana, which is either present-day Orissa in India or the Swat Valley in Pakistan) armed with his magical paraphernalia, Padmasambhava scoured the countryside and vanquished the supernatural opponents of Buddhism and compelled them to assume the role of dharma protectors, or “protectors of religion” (Dargyay 1988:125; Tucci 2000:5–7, 168–169).

After successfully taming the wrathful gods, Padmasambhava consecrated the grounds where Samyé (*bSam yas*), the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet was constructed (Kuijp 1984, 1986; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:113; Stein 1972:66). Symbolically, this was a momentous event in the establishment and development of Buddhism in Tibet. As Tucci (2000:168) has put it,

The construction of the monastery of *bSam yas*, which was consecrated in the presence of Padmasambhava, put the seal on the final submission of the gods he had vanquished and converted; *bSam yas* is the symbol of the Buddhist world planted magically and irrevocably in Tibet, superseding what had been there before it.

¹ Various sources give different dates for the reign of this king; see Evans-Wentz (2000 [1954]:25).

Among the supernatural beings Padmasambhava subdued was Pehar, a powerful wrathful deity, whom he appointed as the principle guardian of the treasures of Samyé Monastery and hence of Buddhism in Tibet (Hummel 1962; Kuijp 1986, 1984; Lopez 1998:68–69; Martin 1996; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:99–102; Rinzin 1992). Pehar thus acquired an extremely elevated position in the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhism and would later assume the role of chief oracle of the land (Nebesky-Wokowitz 1956:97–105; Pearlman 2002:94).² In this context, the term “oracle” refers to the numinous being or deity that possesses a human, and the word “medium” refers to the person who is possessed and acts as the mouthpiece of that deity.

In the period following the establishment of Samyé and related developments, various monastic orders and lineages of Tibetan Buddhism with its unique configuration emerged and proliferated (Tucci 2000:9). The events narrated in the Padmasambhava legends, according to Tucci (2000:168–169), account for the configuration that emerged through “the fusion between the new and the old... to the action of a single personality, Padmasambhava.” Thus, local deities were incorporated into the same framework as the gods of the Buddhist heavens and Tantric deities (Samuel 1993:163–165; Tucci 1967:83).

An important point to bear in mind is that this syncretistic and eclectic form of Buddhism, in which local deities are combined with Buddhist transcendental deities, is not a uniquely Tibetan phenomenon. A similar process had already taken place in India from the time of the Buddha himself and through subsequent generations. Buddhism in the context of Indian culture incorporated local deities and spirits and “crypto-tantric” elements, with Brahma and Indra adopted as dharma protector deities. The Buddha himself was the first tamer of indigenous deities who subdued the fire-breathing *nagas* and other members of the hierarchical Hindu pantheon.³ Padmasambhava’s accomplishment was simply a continuation of a tradition of subduing and incorporating indigenous deities developed by Indian practitioners, albeit in the context of Tibetan culture. In other words, as

²) According to the Padmasambhava legends, Pehar was not an indigenous Tibetan deity, but was imported by Padmasambhava from Central Asia, interposing yet another layer of cultural transformation. Robert Thurman, 2008, personal communication.

³) Robert Thurman, 2008, personal communication.

Thurman has pointed out, there is nothing uniquely shamanistic or anomalous about Tibetan Buddhism, despite assertions to that effect by some anthropologists. Similar processes also shaped the Theravada and East Asian Mahayana traditions, which are usually treated as “normative” in contrast to Tibetan Buddhism.⁴

Indigenous Gods and Buddhist Divinities in the Tibetan Buddhist Cosmology

The subjugated native deities are referred to in Tibetan as *chökyong* or *sungma* (*srung ma*) (Sanskrit *dharmapāla*), meaning “dharma protectors” (Goldstein 1989:140–141; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:3). In the Tibetan cosmological scheme, these subjugated beings are considered to be “gods of this world” (*jig rten pa'i lha*) and are therefore different from and inferior to the transcendental gods of the Buddhist heavens and Tantric deities (*jig rten las 'das pa'i lha*). The latter are considered to be emanations (*sprul pa*) of Buddha and act as personal tutelary deities (*yi dam*) to guide devotees towards the path of enlightenment (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:409; Stein 1972:187).⁵

Tibetan mediums primarily interact with the worldly spirits and deities, who are to be understood as symbols standing for particular supernatural forces and powers operating in the world. These numinous beings are graded into different categories according to their particular spiritual qualities, although a commonly agreed upon classificatory scheme does not exist. Some are connected to specific mountains, rivers, lakes, and other geographical features of the landscape. Some are minor deities known only among local communities (*sa bdag, yul lha*), and some are significant as protectors of particular monasteries and lineages (cf. Samuel 1993:167). Worldly deities are also protectors of individuals; for example, Pehar and Gadong (*dga' gdong*) are the personal guardians of the Dalai Lamas. These deities became oracles of the

⁴ Robert Thurman, 2008, personal communication.

⁵ However, there are some exceptions. Mundane gods that have advanced further along the path to enlightenment for a longer period of time while fulfilling their protective functions may act as personal tutelary deities. Robert Thurman, 2008, personal communication.

State when the Fifth Dalai Lama was given political power in 1642 (cf. Goldstein 1989:140).

Tucci (2000:164) describes the nature and place of the “gods of this world” (*'jig rten pa'i lha*) in the Tibetan Buddhist cosmology:

Local gods were now... “protectors” and “defenders” of the Buddhist Law, since they had obeyed the command of the great teachers such as Padmasambhava and let themselves be converted by them. They possess supernatural powers, they are capable of working miracles, but not without restrictions, nor exclusively in the service of salvation; if they are offended in some manner or are discontented their violent nature wins the upper hand. Many of these *'jig rten pa* gods are, however, benevolent in disposition and ready to fight against evil powers.

Another characteristic of the *'jig rten pa* gods is the limits of their sphere of operation. As Tucci (2000:164) adds:

The field of action of these gods is confined to the various magical operations of pacifying, bringing good fortune, increasing the possibility of good karma, and destroying evil powers; to participate in bringing about the highest goal, that of salvation, is not allowed to them. This task is reserved to the supramundane *'jig rten las 'das pa*. The Buddha himself expressly recommended that one should not have too much to do with worldly deities.

There is therefore a degree of ambiguity and ambivalence regarding *'jig rten pa* gods: while it is permitted to make offerings to them in order to attain worldly objectives, generally they may not be regarded as sources of refuge, which is the exclusive territory of the gods of the Buddhist heavens.

Moreover, although the *'jig rten pa* gods are depicted as protectors of the dharma, their violent and negative aspects are difficult to reconcile with the soteriological goals of Buddhism and its ethos of nonviolence (McCune 2007:17).⁶ For this reason, these beings must be approached

⁶ This is illustrated in the divisive controversy within the Tibetan exile community in connection with Dorjé Shugden (*rdo rje gshugs ldan*), a god of relatively recent origin (see Nebesky-Wojtkowitz 1956:134–144), whom some consider to be the oracle and chief protector of the Gelugpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Although the historical roots of this controversy date back to the 17th century, it reemerged during the 1970s. The controversy turned violent in 1997, with the tragic ritual murder of Geshé Lob-sang Gyamso (*blo bzang rgya misho*), Director of the Dalai Lama's Institute of

with caution, propitiated with offerings, and constrained and kept in check through the power of Buddhist ritual actions.

For the majority of ordinary people, regardless of how devout they are, pragmatic concerns such as economic success, good health, fending off misfortune, and safety in this world often surpass the lofty goals of attaining *bodhicitta* (“the desire to achieve enlightenment”). This is an area where the “gods of this world,” the *’jig rten pa’i lha*, are most efficacious, and this explains why these divinities are worshipped widely. As Samuel (1993:173) has put it,

[people] see local deities and malevolent spirits as beings who have to be dealt with to ensure success within this world, just as a powerful human being or material forces have to be encountered and dealt with. Lay people make regular offerings to the local gods. Lay people rely on the regular rituals performed by lamas in the *gompa* [monastery] and in the village, and on their own regular offerings to the local gods to maintain a workable relationship between these powers. Such a relationship should maintain a condition of good fortune (*lungta*) and auspiciousness (*trashī* [*tashī*]) in this world such that serious mishaps will be averted.

Worldly Deities, Spirit Possession, and the Oracular Phenomenon

The powers of the *dharmapālas* are considered to be more efficacious and immediate in the worldly affairs of humans because these gods are able to do what the transcendental deities usually do not, which is to communicate directly with supplicants through the vehicle of mediums. The possibility of direct contact with these deities is the basis of Tibetan beliefs in spirit possession as well as the conviction in the legitimacy of oracular prognostication. As Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:409) has pointed out,

Buddhist Dialectics (IBD), and an outspoken opponent of Shugden worship (see Sparham 1998). According to rumors among the Tibetans in Dharamsala, the murder of Geshé Gyantso was caused by the vengeful Shugden. According to the Indian authorities, the perpetrators of this crime were some young Tibetans from Kham, who committed the murder at the instigation of the Chinese government in its efforts to undermine the authority of the Dalai Lama. The murderers are believed to have fled back into Chinese held territories, where they were presumably well rewarded for their efforts (see Biema 1998; Clifton 1997; Dreyfus 1998; Kay 2004:44–52; McCune 2007; Mitra 2002; Nau 2007; Sparham 1996).

[these divinities] take at certain times possession of men or women who act then as their mouthpieces; through these persons the deities make their wishes known or give prophetic answers to questions which are submitted to them on such occasions.

Usually, gods seize men and goddesses take possession of women (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:409; Havnevik 2002).

In this context, the various ritual intercessors who are able to serve as the physical conduits through which people can directly access the “gods of this world” acquire a special social and religious role. According to Stein (1972:188):

There are . . . mediumistic specialists who incarnate minor deities and belong, in spite of their Lamaist dress, to the nameless religion of the people. These are shepherds, who have on some occasion been “chosen” by a deity and from then on have been able to embody him. They go into a trance and sing, but they only incarnate local gods . . . gods of the sky (*lha*) and the underworld (*klu*), gods of the soil, etc. From these they get their name: *lha-pa*, *klu-pa*.

Similar to the *la pa* (*lha-pa*) and *lu pa* (*klu-pa*) are mediums known as *pawo* (*dpa'bo*). They, too, are possessed by relatively minor deities associated with local cults (Stein 1972:188). Although traditionally these mediums were marginalized by the Tibetan religious establishment, which had its own highly prestigious and officially sanctioned oracular institution, nevertheless, their social acceptance depended upon confirmation by lamas, who could identify the type of supernatural being involved and were able to intervene ritually if the possessing entity was a malevolent being rather than a divinity (cf. Berglie 1976:89, 91; Diemberger 2005:132–133). Therefore, although relegated to the periphery, these minor ritual intercessors were still constrained by parameters defined by the Buddhist establishment (cf. Diemberger 2005:117).

Berglie (1976:86) differentiates the *pawo* (*dpa'bo*) from mediums who are possessed by gods with “high statuses in the pantheon hierarchy” (cf. Chime 1981; Diemberger 2005:194–195; Mills, Huber, and Pedersen 1998; Rock 1935; Samuel 1993:194–195). Individuals who become the mouthpieces of these high-ranking divinities are incorporated into the Tibetan politico-religious hierarchy (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:409) and are addressed by the honorific *kuten* (*sku rten*). The term

kuten refers specifically to the person whose body is taken over, while the words *sungma* and *chökyong* (“dharma protector”) refer to the deity that enters the body of the *kuten*. However, what makes matters confusing is that sometimes the mediums themselves are honorifically addressed as *chökyong* or *sungma* (Rock 1935). As the Dalai Lama (1999:232–233) has explained,

The word “oracle” is itself highly misleading. It implies that there are people who possess oracular powers. This is wrong. In the Tibetan tradition there are merely certain men and women who act as mediums between the natural and spiritual realm, the name for them is *kuten*, which means literally the “physical basis.” Also, I should point out that whilst it is usual for people to speak of oracles as if they were people, this is done for convenience. More accurately, they can be described as “spirits” which are associated with particular things (for example a statue, people and places).

Oracular Performance and Tibetan Statecraft and Governance

Oracular performance does not have a doctrinal basis in Buddhism, but it has deep cultural roots, and most Tibetans accept it as a genuine transmission from the gods. Such convictions have been reinforced because for hundreds of years, up to the present, members of the politico-religious establishment of Tibet have relied upon oracles to prophesize regarding affairs of state and the religious welfare of the country (Ekvall 1964:268; Smith 2006:304–305). Oracular performance, as Ekvall (1964:274) has put it,

... has had an assured and great part in Tibetan statecraft and policymaking, both ancient and modern. Influenced by such precedents, by the awesome nature of direct communication with deity, and by the pressure to know something about the future, Tibetans of all classes gather whenever and wherever such seizures take place.

The most authoritative Tibetan oracle is *Dorje Drakden* (*rdo rje brag ldan*), an emanation of Pehar, whom Padmasambhava had oath-bound and appointed as guardian of Samyé Monastery. It is said that Pehar incarnated himself in a human host for the first time during the 16th century (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:104–105). However, the establish-

ment of the official institution of the State Oracle dates to the 17th century, when the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) became the political ruler and spiritual head of Tibet in 1642. The Dalai Lama not only created a government in which religion and politics were inextricably intertwined, but he also transferred Pehar to the Nêchung (*gnas chung*) Monastery, near Lhasa, and appointed him principal oracle of the government (Diemberger 2005:151; Goldstein 1989:140; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:105, 448–449; Pearlman 2002:94; Richardson 1962:41–42).

Thereafter known as Nêchung *Chökyong*, or just Nêchung, the prophecies of the State Oracle were indispensable in the task of identifying new incarnations (*yang srid, sku phreng*) of the Dalai Lama, by providing clues as to where the divine child might be found (cf. Diemberger 2005:151; Tucci 1967:202). The institution of the State Oracle was therefore instrumental in dealing with the problematic issue of political succession and ensuring the continuity of the divine rule of the Dalai Lamas. The State Oracle had various other important functions as well. According to Tucci (1967:83, 202), Nêchung “was consulted both at the beginning of the year and at moments of national crisis or anxiety.” The State Oracle was also invoked regarding such matters as the safety of the Dalai Lama and his health, particular political decisions, future events, the weather, and harvest prospects (cf. Diemberger 2005:151; Goldstein 1989:140, 314; Mills, Huber, and Pedersen 1998; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:453).

Since the inception of the institution, the mediums of the State Oracle have had considerable influence both upon the religious and political affairs of the country (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:449; Samuel 1993:292). At the same time, because of the weight of their oracular pronouncements and their position within the religio-political hierarchy, the mediums of the State Oracle were often drawn into factional political intrigues (Goldstein 1989:706; Peter 1978a; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:449), illustrating the thorough politicization of this spirit possession complex.

The institution of the Tibetan State Oracle has a number of distinct characteristics. First, it is embedded within the framework of a sanctioning religious hierarchy and the state apparatus, which recognizes and validates the legitimacy and competence of candidates. Second, the

kuten, who is at the center of this spirit possession complex, is not the master of the divinity that seizes him. The possessing deity compels the medium to go into trance at least once a month (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:421), and he may also become entranced involuntarily at other times. However, with appropriate meditations and ritual preparations, the *kuten* is able to enter into trance upon requests by the Dalai Lama regarding matters of national urgency, which is among the principal roles of the State Oracle. Third, the *kuten* is not exempt from personal accountability, even though it is understood that he is merely the mouthpiece of the divinity. On a number of occasions, the mediums of the State Oracle have been dismissed from their posts because of failed prophecies (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:44). Such occurrences, however, have not detracted from Nêchung's credibility or influence on religious and political affairs.

Numerous noteworthy prophecies have been made by the Nêchung Oracle over the centuries. For example, in 1949 the Oracle, speaking through *Kuten* Lobsang Jigme (*blo bzang jigs med*), predicted the impending Chinese invasion of Tibet. In 1959, when invoked during a public session regarding the Dalai Lama's personal safety from the occupying Chinese military forces, Nêchung, again speaking through Lobsang Jigme, declared that there was no danger and that His Holiness should remain in his residence at *Norbulingka*. However, later in a private meeting, the *kuten* went into a spontaneous trance and Nêchung urged the Dalai Lama to flee from Lhasa, specifying the exact time and route to follow to avoid capture by the Chinese soldiers (cf. Avedon 1997:52; Snellgrove and Richardson 1968:263). *Kuten* Thubten Ngodup explained why the oracle provided two contradictory answers, pointing out that

... the public pronouncement was a deliberate ploy intended to mislead Chinese spies and informants amidst the audience. As a result of the wisdom and accuracy of Nêchung's pronouncements, His Holiness safely reached India, where he eventually set up residence in Dharamsala and formed the Tibetan government in exile.

The Dalai Lama was accompanied in his flight by an entourage of Tibetan dignitaries, including *Kuten* Lobsang Jigme. In the years to come, approximately ninety thousand other Tibetans followed their

spiritual leader into exile. The importance of the State Oracle did not diminish as a result of the diaspora (see Peter 1978a, 1978b). The government in exile continued to make use of the Oracle, and a new Nêchung Monastery was built in Gangchen Kyishong, in Dharamsala. The project started in 1977 and construction of the complex was completed in 1984.

Recruitment and Confirmation of the State Oracle

Kuten Lobsang Jigme served as the State Oracle in Dharamsala until his death in 1984 (Peter 1978b:331). Following his demise, there was no medium for Nêchung. The Dalai Lama wrote special prayers and directed the monks of the Nêchung Monastery to recite them in hopes of a hasty discovery of another *kuten*. As Thupten Ngodup explained, this is because it is the deities who select the individuals to be their mediums, not government officials or religious dignitaries. The candidate can be from almost any sector of society or a monk from any of the religious lineages. Historically, only two of the fourteen mediums of the State Oracle were actually monks from Nêchung Monastery itself. However, as Thubten Ngodup pointed out,

If Nêchung chooses a lay person as his medium then that individual must become an ordained monk because the position of the State Oracle is embedded in the monastic institution.

There was nothing more that could be done, aside from waiting and praying for *Dorje Drakden* to select a new medium. For three years the monastery remained without a medium. The vacancy was exasperating and a matter of great concern for everyone. Then on the 31st of March, 1987, the long-awaited miraculous event took place. As Thubten Ngodup recounts,

Some monks and religious dignitaries from Drepung Monastery in South India, which has historically had close ties with Nêchung, had come to Dharamsala to attend His Holiness's teachings. Afterwards they went to the Nêchung Monastery to perform a ritual summoning of the Oracle, a practice which members of the Drepung Monastery perform on this day every month. They proceeded with the invocation ritual even though there was no *kuten* at the monastery. I was present

during the ritual. When they began reciting the invocation texts, I was seized by Nêchung.

Those present were awestruck. But Thubten Ngodup relates that all he can remember “is losing motor functions, seeing a bright flash, and falling into unconsciousness.” The dramatic event was reported to the Dalai Lama, who summoned the monk for an audience. The candidate related all of his experiences, dreams, and emotions leading up to the possession incident at the monastery. Then, during a trance in the presence of the Dalai Lama, abbots, *geshês* (*dge bshes*), and other high level religious and political dignitaries, Thubten Ngodup convincingly passed the traditional test, said to have been codified by the Fifth Dalai Lama (cf. Avedon 1997:211–212; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:420).

Training and Responsibilities of the Medium of the State Oracle

Afterwards, as Thubten Ngodup relates, he had to go into retreat for specialized ritual training and meditation under the guidance of a Rinpoche (a reincarnated lama and dharma expert) appointed by the Dalai Lama to open his “vein gates” (*rtsa gnad*) and clear his “energy channels” (*rtsa*) of all obstructions. This practice is necessary to enable the deity to manifest himself clearly and prevent malicious spirits from entering the medium’s body (cf. Berglie 1976:89). Through frequent embodiment of the deity during this period of training, the relationship between the divinity and the medium was solidified. Thubten Ngodup was officially recognized as the State Oracle of Tibet later that year. Then, in accordance with tradition, he was also appointed head lama of Nêchung Monastery and given the position of Deputy Minister in the Tibetan government in exile. He is the fourteenth *kuten* of Nêchung in a line of mediums dating back to the 1600s.

The position of State Oracle comes with great responsibilities. As Thupten Ngodup explained,

This is not an easy position or office to occupy. It is physically and mentally strenuous and many *kutens* have died at an early age because of the great stress they must endure. But, I felt that it was imperative for me to accept the position for the sake of Buddha dharma and Tibet, and I will serve in this capacity for as long as I am needed.

When asked why he was chosen by Nêchung, he replied that

although the connection between the divinity and the human selected to be its medium is unpredictable, nevertheless, there is usually a karmic bond between them.

The candidate who has such connections with a deity may display pre-cognitive abilities at an early age, as has been the case with a number of mediums, including Thupten Ngodup himself. Potential *kutens* may also see the deity in dreams. Thupten Ngodup recalled that after the death of his predecessor, he saw Nêchung repeatedly in portentous dreams and visions.

Chosen by the Gods: Transformation into a Medium

The process of becoming a medium has certain similarities with the shaman's initiatory crisis, which may account for why some scholars consider Tibet's State Oracle as a type of shaman. As Thupten Ngodup recalled,

... in the period before I was possessed at the Nêchung Monastery, in March, 1987, I became seriously ill, felt unusual emotions, exhibited odd behaviors. I did things that were out of character for me, but I could not control myself. Then, while on pilgrimage to Bodhgaya [the site where Buddha Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, in Bihar, in eastern India] I started bleeding from the mouth and nose. Doctors were unable to stop the flow of blood, which continued for two days. My colleagues feared for my life. During this time of great difficulty, I lost consciousness and had repeated vivid visions of Nêchung.

The bleeding finally stopped and Thupten Ngodup interpreted this near-death experience as indicative that he would become the deity's medium. Afterwards high lamas told him that the profuse bleeding was the start of a process of clearing his energy channels through which deities enter the human body. His predecessor, Lobsang Jigme, had similar anomalous experiences, such as seizures and sleepwalking, before he became the Nêchung *kuten*.

Lay Mediums: Identification, Confirmation, and Incorporation into the Network of Officially Recognized Mediums

Dharmapālas also select mediums from among the lay population. According to my Tibetan informants, a relatively recent example of this occurred during the 1990s, involving Namsel Donma, a female refugee from Kham (eastern Tibet) who entered into a spontaneous trance whenever she attended the Dalai Lama's teachings. Suspecting the influence of some divinity, the Dalai Lama asked for an official determination. Questioning and investigations showed promise. As a final test, on an auspicious date the young woman was asked to appear before the Nêchung Oracle, who is able to discern the true identity of spirits possessing people.

Traditionally, in this test, the Nêchung *kuten* and the candidate being tested enter into trance at the same time. The Nêchung Oracle will then throw grains of consecrated barley at the candidate. If truly possessed by a *dharmapāla*, the candidate will remain in trance and reciprocate by offering the Oracle a ceremonial scarf, or *khata* (*kha btags*). If the possessing entity is a minor spirit, or a malevolent wandering ghost, the candidate's trance terminates abruptly and the possessing entity flees.

In the case of Namsel Donma, the test was positive. Nêchung *Chökyong* determined that she was possessed by the high ranking goddess Tenma and her emanations. The young woman received official recognition from the Dalai Lama and participates in official ceremonies when oracular performances are needed. However, according to my informants, there was some controversy over this case. Some high lamas were concerned that she could not control her trances. Also, certain members of Namgyal Monastery were displeased by the status conferred upon her, which again illustrates the politicization of the Tibetan oracular phenomenon.⁷

During the late 1990s, the Dalai Lama also officially recognized another medium, an elderly woman named Kelsang Dolma, as the medium of the Youdonma (*g.yu sgron ma*) Oracle. Her recognition came because members of the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics (IBD), the highly regarded establishment for the study of Buddhist philosophy, literature, and language, valued her opinions very highly and con-

⁷ Gareth Sparham, 2008, personal communication.

sulted her twice a year. It was due to her reputation among the *geshés* and monks at IBD that she was incorporated into the network of officially recognized mediums. She also participates in state sponsored functions, as well as working as a prognosticator who gives advice to private clients. In the latter capacity, she works out of her tiny apartment in Dharamsala.

Thus, unlike the *pawos*, *la pas*, and *lu pas*, who are more or less marginalized, lay mediums of high ranking deities undergo what could be called a form of certification by the state and are integrated as auxiliary functionaries into the religio-political hierarchy, thereby confining their field of activities within boundaries set by the religious establishment.

Manifestation of the State Oracle during Public Performances

When asked to perform officially, the Nêchung *kuten* wears an elaborate colorful costume that weighs nearly seventy pounds and resembles the outfit worn by the deity in traditional art work (Avedon 1997:192; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:410; Pearlman 2002:94–95). The *kuten* also wears on his chest a circular polished metal mirror that is adorned with turquoise and amethyst and has the name *Dorje Drakden* inscribed on it in sacred Sanskrit letters. Accompanied by assistants, who must physically support him because of the weight of his ritual garb, the *kuten* arrives at the designated place, which, depending on the occasion, is usually packed with monks, dignitaries, and other spectators. The *kuten* is then seated on a throne. Some monks begin playing horns, cymbals, and drums, while others recite the invocation mantras. The *kuten*'s entry into trance depends upon these invocations of mantras by the monks.

Thupten Ngodup describes a feeling of “unimaginable intensity” as he becomes entranced, characterizing the sensation as “both distressful and exhausting.” As he enters into trance, his facial expression, mannerisms, and even his stature begin to change, and he physically assumes the features and attributes of the wrathful *Dorje Drakden*. His voice changes as well, indicating that it is the divinity occupying the *kuten*'s body that is speaking. The transformation is extremely forceful, and initially the *kuten* must be restrained by his assistants. It seems, as the Dalai Lama (1999:233) has put it,

[that] the volcanic energy of the deity can barely be contained within the earthly frailty of the *kuten*, who moves and gestures as if his body were made of rubber and driven by a coiled spring of enormous power.

Here we shall provide an abbreviated description of the public performance of the State Oracle to highlight particular aspects of this spirit possession complex (for a detailed account of the ceremony see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:429–432). After preliminary procedures and recitations, the seated *kuten* appears to go into a mild convulsion, while assistants keep him restrained. Meanwhile, some monks wave incense, blow horns, pound drums, and play cymbals, while others recite mantras. The *kuten* then begins to breathe more loudly and heavily and starts making hissing sounds, which is taken as an indication that he is now in deep trance. The monks then begin reciting a second series of mantras, while assistants put on the *kuten's* helmet, which is estimated to weigh over thirty pounds, and is tightly secured with a heavy knot. Tibetans believe that only a person possessed by a god, and therefore endowed with superhuman strength, can move about with great ease as the Oracle does while wearing the heavy outfit and without being choked to death by the helmet (Tung 1980:200; Schüttler 1971). As Stein (1972:187–188) put it, that “the trance is genuine is proved by the medium’s . . . superhuman strength, supporting extremely heavy headgear, twisting swords, etc.” This is the miraculous moment and the tangible and awe inspiring evidence of the presence of the divinity.

Charged with the prodigious strength of the fierce god, the *kuten* wields a sword and bow held by an assistant and engages in a ceremonial dance. He bows to the four directions in reverence to the Buddhas and Guru Rinpoche and pays homage to and blesses the Dalai Lama, offering him a ceremonial scarf. The Dalai Lama, in turn, personally welcomes Nêchung. It is said that this deity has very close bonds with and great affection for the Dalai Lama. The Oracle also blesses the heads of the different lineages and government officials in attendance. Questions are then put to the incarnated numinous being. The Oracle dances some more and then gives his answers out loud or sometimes whispers them into the Dalai Lama’s ear. The oracular language is poetic, vague, and cryptic, but many pronouncements are clearly understood. In the past, a monk standing by wrote down and recorded the utterances for

later clarification and interpretation. These days, videotapes and digital recordings of the oracular prophecies are made for the same purposes.

The Oracle dances again to remove all obstacles and obstructions as he tosses blessed grains of barley to the monks and others in attendance. Then the Dalai Lama reminds Nêchung of his oath to Guru Rinpoche to protect Buddhism and its institutions. Upon completion, exhausted, the *kuten* collapses, marking the end of the oracular session. His assistants hastily untie the helmet to prevent asphyxiation and physically carry the medium's motionless body at shoulder height to a recovery room (cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956:420–432).

These complex public ritual performances, which are sponsored by the government, and which bring into play numerous religious symbols and intense theatricality, not only validate the extant religio-political hierarchy but are also awe-inspiring and tangible demonstrations of miraculous and eternal religious truths. Such direct communication with the gods resonates deeply in the consciousness of the massive crowds that always attend such events.

Smith (2006:305) has observed that the Nêchung's manifestation is a highly ritualized and predictable type of spirit possession event. The general sequence, as Berglie (1976:105) has shown, is similar to that of the minor spirit-medium, or *pawo*, involving “invocation — possession — the god is asked for help — the god leaves and the ‘spirit-medium’ has some kind of collapse.” However, Berglie (1976:105) also points out significant differences:

The “oracle” does not sing the invocations himself, which the *dpa'bo* [*pawo*] always does. Furthermore, the initial phase of the possession is more violent and is connected with greater motor agitation among the “oracles” than the *dpa'bo*. Moreover, the “oracle” seems to be in a much deeper trance than the *dpa'bo*. This is of course hard to measure, but the different ways of behaving during the séances, the *dpa'bo* with agility and motor control, the “oracle” under great physical strain and with the need for one or more assistants to keep him under control, indicate a difference in the depth of the trance.

A number of observers have noted that there appears to be a complete replacement or displacement of the *kuten's* “self and identity” during the possession event (Stein 1972:187). As Ekvall (1964:273–274) observes,

... the substitution of identity which occurs during a seizure — the personality of the medium gives place to the personality of the god. The possessed one loses his character as an intermediary. Like a good interpreter, he speaks, he speaks [*sic*] in the first person, with the voice — often hoarse and strange — of the god. With particular reference to the processes of communication, he has become the god himself. His hearing is the hearing of the god; and his speech is the speech of the god.

It is for this reason that the *kuten* afterwards cannot remember what transpired during the oracular session. Thupten Ngodup stated emphatically that he remembers nothing of what transpires once he is seized by the god. As Peters (2008) has observed in connection with *pawos* in Nepal, the medium's amnesia is considered to be an indicator of authenticity. What happens to the *kuten*'s "self" or "identity" during the trance is unknown, although some of my informants suggested that it is temporarily projected to an alternate realm of existence, where it remains in a state of limbo until the god departs.

Is the Medium of Tibet's State Oracle a Shaman?

Having described the central features, functions, and institutional context of Tibet's State Oracle, I shall now return to the question posed at the beginning of this paper: Could one classify a practitioner such as the *kuten* of Nêchung as a shaman? One approach to the study of shamanism has been to extricate it from its ethnographic context by looking at it in terms of the shaman's "altered states of consciousness" (ASC). This has resulted in the creation of what Jones (2006:7) calls "spatiotemporally free" theories in which anyone who uses ASC to commune with spirits for the benefits of their clients or community can be termed a shaman (e.g., Winkelman 2000:71–75; 2002:1837). From this point of view, which has been adopted by many scholars, the *kuten* of Nêchung is indeed a shaman. For example, Goldstein (1989:140–141) characterizes the *kuten*'s possession as a "shamanistic trance." Both Gibson (1997:48) and Samuel (1993:8) consider the *kuten* to be a type of shaman. As noted earlier, the problem here is that the criteria in question could be applied to almost every conceivable type of magico-religious practitioner around the world. Such facile usage of the concept is one reason for the lack of consensus among scholars on how to

define shamanism (see Gibson 1997:44; Gilberg 1984; Hultkrantz 1989; Hutton 2001:vii, 126; Jolly 2005; Klein et al. 2002; Klein and Stanfield-Mazzi 2004; Klein et al. 2005; Lewis 1984; Lewis-Williams 2004; Rank 1967; Reinhard 1976; Siikala and Hoppál 1992; Sidky 2003:544–546; 2008; Townsend 1997:430; Voigt 1984).

Those who have adopted the highly problematic model proposed by Mircea Eliade (1964:3), in which soul journeying is the defining criterion of genuine shamanism and spirit possession is excluded, would not classify Tibetan mediums as shamans (cf. Berglie 1976:86). Peter (1978b:238) expresses this point of view in his brief article, “Tibetan Oracles in Dharamsala”:

I have . . . some doubts concerning the identification of Tibetan [mediums] with shamanism. . . . With shamanism, the soul leaves the shaman and travels to the gods. But with mediums . . . possession takes place by the god or spirit. This is closer to what we see in India, rather than to what occurs in Central Asia, and, for me, it should be enough to point to India for the origins of Tibetan [mediums].

Gellner (1994:29–30) also makes a distinction between shamans, as practitioners who “go” to the gods (i.e., soul journey), which he associates with a “Himalayan and Central Asian shamanic tradition,” and mediums, adepts who are possessed by gods, ancestors, and ghosts that “come” to them, which he links to a South Asian tradition.

In other words, Tibetan mediums and shamans are differentiated in terms of the experiential and phenomenological aspects of their trance or altered states of consciousness. Le Quellec (2001:148), who also accepts the distinction between spirit possession and genuine shamanism based on soul journeys, points out that the shaman “is capable of narrating his travels contrary to what occurs in the case of the possessed.” In these terms, Tibetan oracles are not shamans because their souls do not leave their bodies, but rather their bodies are overtaken by spirits, and afterwards, unlike shamans, they claim that they cannot remember what was uttered during the trance event.

Ioan Lewis (1971:55; 2003:34) expresses an altogether different perspective, considering spirit possession as the key element and the control that practitioners exercise over the spirits incarnate in their bodies as the defining feature of shamanism, which he describes as an “ecstatic religion.” For Lewis (1984:9),

a shaman is an inspired prophet and healer, a charismatic religious figure, with the power to control the spirits, usually by incarnating them.

Although Lewis's construal might seem to apply to the Nêchung *kuten*, who incarnates a divinity, such an association is misleading. A brief explanatory note is helpful here. Anthropologists have used different terms when discussing various types of spirit/deity possession. For example, Jones (1976) characterizes the possession event of spirit-mediums as "oracular possession," while Bourguignon (1974, 1976) refers to the same phenomenon as "possession trance." Both writers are referring to a possession event that involves the displacement of the individual's identity and speech by an embodying spirit in which afterwards the possessed individual does not recall the event. In contrast to the spirit-medium, Jones (1976) characterizes the shaman's experience as "tutelary possession," in which the practitioner calls spirits at will, embodies, controls, and puts their powers to use. This corresponds to Lewis's construal of the shaman as a master of spirits.

The *kuten* is clearly not the master of the spirit/deity that possesses him. On the contrary, he is mastered by the divinity that overtakes his body and consciousness. He is simply a flesh-and-blood conduit between the natural and supernatural worlds, a receptacle through which the gods relay directives and receive messages. Or, as Tucci (2000:204) has put it, the deity needs a "human support" so that it can "act and speak." The *kuten*'s experience approximates Jones's category of "oracular possession" and Bourguignon's concept of "possession trance."

The lack of agreement regarding shamans and shamanism is clearly illustrated in the various positions briefly reviewed here. In fact, because of such ambiguities many writers find it impossible to differentiate between various ritual intercessors and magico-religious practitioners. Some see no distinctions whatsoever between the terms shaman, oracle, or medium and use them interchangeably (e.g., Srinivas 1998:178). Smith (2006:63) classifies all South Asian practitioners who have contact with spirits while in altered states of consciousness as "deity mediums."

The research I have conducted among Tibetan communities in Nepal and Dharamsala, India, has provided ample evidence that there are fun-

damental differences between shamans and mediums. Based upon our findings, it would be incorrect to categorize the Tibetan State Oracle as a type of shaman. The oracle is regularly possessed by a particular identified god and its emanation (Pehar and *Dorje Drakden*). The oracle's possessions can be spontaneous, i.e., brought on by the divinity, or they can be induced through invocation texts that are recited, accompanied by the music of horns, cymbals, and drums played by monks. These features link the *kuten* to the religious hierarchy and the official pantheon of Tibetan Buddhism.

In contrast, shamans are rarely part of any ecclesiastical hierarchies, do not need the validation of some higher religious authority, hold no offices, and act as free agents. In terms of their performances, the Tibetan medium's enactments are almost always similar and mostly predictable, while the shaman conducts a variety of dynamic and flexible ceremonies for which he possesses specific oral texts that are memorized through years of training. For the shaman, no two rituals are alike, although the same underlying principles are being played out (Sidky 2008:25–40, 57–78).

The primary role of the shaman is healing illnesses caused by supernatural beings or forces and mending rifts in interpersonal relationships (Sidky 2008:191–204). This is not the case with all Tibetan oracles. For example, the Youdonma Oracle, whose performances I have attended numerous times, dispenses advice but never undertakes therapeutic rituals. According to *kuten* Thupten Ngodup, from time to time people do come to him for healing, but he emphatically pointed out that this has nothing to do with his position as *kuten*. He tends to the needs of such people through religious dialogue and prayers in his capacity as a Buddhist monk, rather than through the use of ASC. In the minds of ordinary people, it is the residual aura of godhood from having come into contact with the divinity that bestows innate healing powers to such practitioners.

The shaman enters into an altered state of consciousness by pounding his drum and is “the musicant of his own entry into trance” (Rouget 1985:126). He does not need monks or specialists to recite invocation mantras to shift into altered states of consciousness. The shaman interacts with supernatural beings and spirits belonging to a variety of classes on his own terms and is able to summon and dismiss them at will

(cf. Maskarinec 1995:106). These include protective beings, tutelary spirits, gods, harmful beings, and numerous other nonspecific paranormal entities. He deliberately incarnates these entities and uses their powers for strategic purposes to help clients. His repertoire includes therapeutic rituals involving water, smoke, and fire, among other techniques and procedures. This leads me to conclude that some of the magico-religious practitioners Berglie (1976:105) describes as *dpa'bo* (*pawo*) in Nepal are in fact shamans and not spirit-mediums.

A major difference between the *kuten* and the shaman is in the phenomenological and experiential dimensions of their altered states of consciousness. Comparing our video footage of the Nêchung's oracular performance in Dharamsala (2004), the oracular performances of Youdonma (2005, 2006), with the 47 all-night shamanistic healing ceremonies I have recorded in Nepal (1999–2006), it is clear that we are looking at very different kinds of ritual intercessors. The shaman's interactions with the paranormal world vary considerably in intensity and duration at various points throughout any given performance. At times he is oblivious to everything around him, drumming, shaking and bouncing, as he brings numinous agencies under his command. At other times he projects his soul into the supernatural world to find missing souls or to negotiate with the gods. The shamans may then quickly shift out of that modality and fully engage with his surroundings, again, reciting mantras, singing songs, and directing assistants to undertake various tasks (Sidky 2008:163–190). Thus the shaman's repertoire, which includes projecting his soul into the spirit world, i.e., soul journeying, as well as the embodiment of spirits, is far more complex, ethnographically speaking, than the views espoused by either Eliade (1964:3) or Lewis (1984:9).

More importantly, as noted above, while the *kuten's* personality is completely displaced by the embodying entity, the shaman's identity and personality remain intact, even as he absorbs various numinous entities and speaks with their voices. Mitrani (1992:154) is correct in his observation that

Even in those cases where ethnologists speak of the incorporation of the spirits by shamans . . . the spirits neither replace the shaman's will nor act in his place; rather they confer special powers that allow him, when necessary, to become a spirit himself.

Thus, the shaman's control over spirits includes control over the altered state of consciousness itself (cf. Baumer 2002:49; Böckman and Hultkrantz 1978:25; Riboli 2000:61; Torrance 1994:138). This is something that the medium of the Tibetan State Oracle is unable to do.

I have suggested that the term “spirit adhesion” better describes what happens to the shaman than “spirit possession,” which more aptly depicts the *kuten*'s experiences (Sidky 2008:95). However, a more appropriate designation for the medium of the Tibetan State Oracle, who is an integral part of a sanctioning hierarchical religious establishment, functions as the mouthpiece of a major god that belongs to a formal pantheon, and occupies an officially designated office, is “oracular priest,” a term used by Schüttler (1971). This does not imply that the person himself has oracular powers but rather that he is a priest with special characteristics that allow him to function as a physical conduit through which supernatural entities communicate with the human world. This is much closer to the actual connotation of the Tibetan word *kuten*, which means “the physical basis.”

If our findings are correct, there are tangible differences between shamans, Tibetan spirit-mediums, and the medium of the State Oracle. Determining the different attributes that separate these magico-religious practitioners is possible only if one pays careful attention to concrete ethnographic details within and between cultures. Otherwise, there is the danger of needlessly mingling otherwise distinct ritual intercessors and distorting the ethnographic and historical records.

References

- Arnott, Geoffrey. 1989. “Néchung: A Modern Parallel to the Delphic Oracle?” *Greece and Rome* 26:152–157.
- Avedon, John. 1997. *Exile from the Land of Snows: The Dalai Lama and Tibet since the Chinese Conquest*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Baumer, Christoph. 2002. *Tibet's Ancient Religion, Bön*. Trumbull, CT: Weatherbill.
- Berglie, Per-Arne. 1976. “Preliminary Remarks on Some Tibetan Spirit-Mediums in Nepal.” *Kailash* 4:85–108.
- Biema, David van. 1998. “Monks vs. Monks: Devotees of a Ferocious Buddhist Deity are Seeking to Put a Dent in the Dalai Lama's Aura of Sainthood.” *Time* 151: 70–71.
- Bourguignon, Erika. 1974. *Culture and the Varieties of Consciousness*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.

- . 1976. *Possession*. San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp.
- Böckman, Louise, and Åke Hultkrantz. 1978. *Studies in Lapp Shamanism*. (Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 16.) Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.
- Chime Radha Rinpoche. 1981. "Tibet". In *Oracles and Divination*, ed. Michael Loewe and Carmen Blacker (eds), Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 3–37.
- Clifton, Tony. 1997. "Murder in a Monastery: Who Killed Three of the Dalai Lama's Inner Circle?" *Newsweek* 129:43.
- Dalai Lama, HH (Tenzin Gyatso). 1999. *Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Dargyay, Eva. 1988. "Buddhism in Adaptation: Ancestor Gods and their Tantric Counterparts in the Religious Life of Zanskar." *History of Religions* 28:123–134.
- Diemberger, Hildegard. 2005. "Female Oracles in Modern Tibet." In *Women in Tibet*, ed. Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik, New York: Columbia University Press, 113–169.
- Dreyfus, Georges. 1998. "The Shuk-Den Affair: Origins of a Controversy." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 21:227–270.
- Ekvall, Robert. 1964. *Religious Observances in Tibet: Patterns and Functions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1964. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Evans-Wentz, Walter Yeeling. 2000 (1954). *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation, or, The Method of Realizing Nirvāna Through Knowing the Mind, Preceded by an Epitome of Padma-Sambhava's Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gellner, David. 1994. "Priests, Healers, Mediums and Witches: The Context of Possession in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal." *Man* 29:27–48.
- Gennep, Arnold van. 2001 (1903). "Shamanism is a Dangerously Vague Word." In *Shamans Through Time: 500 Years on the Path to Knowledge*, ed. Jeremy Narby and Francis Huxley, London: Thames & Hudson, 51–52.
- Gibson, Todd. 1997. "Notes on the History of the Shamanic in Tibet and Inner Asia." *Numen* 44:39–59.
- Gilberg, R. 1984. "How to Recognize a Shaman among other Religious Specialists?" In *Shamanism in Eurasia*, ed. Mihály Hoppál, Göttingen: Herodot, 21–27.
- Goldstein, Melvyn. 1989. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Havnevik, Hanna. 2002. "A Tibetan Female State Oracle." In *Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet: Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the 9th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden, 2000*, ed. Henk Blezer, Leiden: Brill, 259–287.
- Hoffmann, Helmut. 1979. *The Religions of Tibet*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Hultkrantz, Åke. 1989. "The Place of Shamanism in the History of Religion." In *Shamanism: Past and Present*, ed. Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadovszky, Budapest: Ethnographic Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 43–52.
- Hummel, Siegfert. 1962. "Pe-har." *East and West* 18:209–216.

- Hutton, Ronald. 2001. *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination*. London: Hambledon and London.
- Jolly, Pieter. 2005. "On the Definition of Shamanism." *Current Anthropology* 46:127–128.
- Jones, Peter. 2006. "Shamanism: An Inquiry into the History of the Scholarly Use of the Term in English Speaking North America." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 17:4–32.
- Jones, Rex. 1976. "Spirit Possession and Society in Nepal." In *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, ed. John Hitchcock and Rex Jones, Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, 1–20.
- Kay, David. 2004. *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain: Transplantation, Development and Adaptation*. New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Klein, Cecilia, et al. 2002. "The Role of Shamanism in Mesoamerican Art: A Reassessment." *Current Anthropology* 43:383–419.
- Klein, Cecilia, Eulogio Guzmán, and Maya Stanfield-Mazzi. 2005. "On the Definition of Shamanism." *Current Anthropology* 46(1):127–128.
- Klein, Cecilia, and Maya Stanfield-Mazzi. 2004. "On Sharpness and Scholarship in the Debate on 'Shamanism.'" *Current Anthropology* 45:404–406.
- Krader, Lawrence. 1978. "Shamanism: Theory and History in Buryat Society." In *Shamanism in Siberia*, ed. Vilmos Diószegi and Mihály Hoppál, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 181–236.
- Kuijp, Leonard. 1984. "Miscellanea to a Recent Contribution on/to the Bsam-uas Debate." *Kailash* 11:149–184.
- . 1986. "On the Sources for Sa skya Pandita's Notes in the Bsam yas Debate." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9:147–153.
- Le Quellec, Jean-Loïc. 2001. "Shamans and Martians: The Same Struggle?" In *The Concept of Shamanism: Uses and Abuses*, ed. Henri-Paul Francfort, Roberte Hamayon, and Paul Bahn, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 135–159.
- Lewis, Ioan. 1971. *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- . 1984. "What is a Shaman?" In *Shamanism in Eurasia*, ed. Mihály Hoppál, Göttingen: Herodot, 3–12.
- . 2003. "Trance, Possession and Sex." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 14(1):30–39.
- Lewis-Williams, J. David. 2004. "On Sharpness and Scholarship in the Debate on 'Shamanism.'" *Current Anthropology* 45:404.
- Lopez, Donald. 1998. "Two Sides of the Same God." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 7(3):67–69.
- Martin, Dan. 1996. "The Star King and the Four Children of Pehar: Popular Religious Movements of the 11th- to 12th-century Tibet." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 49:171–195.
- Maskarinec, Gregory. 1995. *The Rulings of the Night: An Ethnography of Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

- McCune, Lindsay. 2007. *Tales of Intrigue from Tibet's Holy City: The Historical Underpinnings of a Modern Buddhist Crisis*. MA Thesis submitted to the Department of Religion, Florida State University. http://etd.lib.fsu.edu/theses/available/etd-04092007003235/unrestricted/lgm_thesis.pdf.
- Mills, Martin, Toni Huber, and Poul Pedersen. 1998. "Ecological Knowledge in Tibet." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4:783–786.
- Mitra, R. 2002. "Politics and Religion: The Worship of Shugden Among Tibetans." *Indian Anthropologist* 3:47–58.
- Mitrani, Phillippe. 1992. "A Critical Overview of the Psychiatric Approaches to Shamanism." *Diogenes* 40:145–164.
- Nau, Michael. 2007. "Killing for the Dharma: An Analysis of the Shugden Deity and Violence in Tibetan Buddhism." Miami University Honors Theses, College of Arts and Sciences. http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd/view.cgi?acc_num=muhonors1178300733
- Nebesky-Wojkowitz, René de. 1956. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*. 's-Gravenhage: Mouton.
- Pearlman, Ellen. 2002. *Tibetan Sacred Dance: A Journey into the Religious and Folk Traditions*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Peter, Prince of Greece and Denmark. 1978a. "Tibetan Oracles in Dharamsala." In *Proceedings of the Csoma de Korös Memorial Symposium: Held at Mátrafüred, Hungary, 24–30 September 1976*, ed. Louis Ligeti, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 327–334.
- . 1978b. "Tibetan Oracles." In *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*, ed. James F. Fisher, Paris: Mouton, 287–298.
- Peters, Larry. 2008. "Tibetan Shamanism in Exile: Vicissitudes of the Soul." (in press).
- Price, Neil. 2001. "An Archaeology of Altered States: Shamanism and Material Culture Studies." In *The Archaeology of Shamanism*, ed. Neil Price, New York: Routledge, 3–16.
- Rank, Gustav. 1967. "Shamanism as a Research Subject." In *Studies in Shamanism*, ed. Carl-Martin Edsman, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 15–22.
- Reinhard, Johan. 1976. "Shamanism and Spirit Possession: The Definitional Problem." In *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, ed. John Hitchcock and Rex Jones, Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, 12–22.
- Riboli, Diana. 2000. *Tunsuriban: Shamanism in the Chepang of Southern and Central Nepal*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.
- Richardson, Hugh. 1962. *A Short History of Tibet*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Rinzin, Tsepak. 1992. "Néchung: The State Oracle of Tibet." *Tibetan Bulletin* 17–32.
- Rock, Joseph. 1935. "Sungmas, the Living Oracles of the Tibetan Church." *National Geographic* 58:475–486.
- Rouget, Gilbert. 1985. *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Samuel, Geoffrey. 1993. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Schüttler, Günter. 1971. *Die letzten tibetischen Orakelpriester*. Wiesbaden: Steiner.

- Sidky, H. 2003. "Shamanism, Islam." In *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Mills and Peter Clause, New York: Routledge, 544–546.
- . 2008. *Haunted by the Archaic Shaman: Himalayan Jhākris and the Discourse on Shamanism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Siikala, Anna-Leena, and Mihály Hoppál (eds.). 1992. *Studies on Shamanism*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado.
- Smith, Frederick. 2006. *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Snellgrove, David, and Hugh Richardson. 1968. *A Culture History of Tibet*. New York: Fredrick A. Praeger.
- Sparham, Gareth. 1996. "Why the Dalai Lama Rejects Shugden." *Tibetan Review* (June).
- . 1998. *Memoirs of a Tibetan Lama (Blo-bzan-rgya-mtsho)*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.
- Srinivas, Smriti. 1998. *The Mouths of People, the Voice of God: Buddhists and Muslims in a Frontier Community of Ladakh*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Stein, Rolf. 1972. *Tibetan Civilization*. London: Faber.
- Torrance, Robert. 1994. *The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion, and Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Townsend, Joan. 1997. "Shamanism." In *Anthropology of Religion: A Handbook*, ed. Stephen Glazier, Westport, CT: Praeger, 427–469.
- Tucci, Giuseppe. 1967. *Tibet, Land of Snows*. New York: Stein and Day.
- . 2000. *Religions of Tibet*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Tung, Rosemary. 1980. *A Portrait of Lost Tibet*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Voigt, V. 1984. "Shamanism: Word or Person?" In *Shamanism in Eurasia*, ed. Mihály Hoppál, Göttingen: Herodot, 13–20.
- Winkelman, Michael. 2000. *Shamanism: The Neural Ecology of Consciousness and Healing*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.
- . 2002. "Shamanism as Neurotheology and Evolutionary Psychology." *American Behavioral Scientist* 45:1873–1885.