



To See a Mountain: Writing, Place, and Vision in Tibetan Pilgrimage Literature

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Abstract

Buddhist thought diagnoses human suffering as the result of a fundamental misperception of reality. As such, Buddhists have developed practices that aim to replace or improve ordinary ways of seeing the world. In Tibet, one such practice is pilgrimage to holy mountains. This dissertation explores this application of the Buddhist project to restructure perceptual experience. Tibetan pilgrimage is structured around the idea that the holy mountain is actually a wondrous palace for an enlightened deity. Of course, most people do not typically see it in that way, but the goal for pilgrims is to learn to see the mountain as a sacred palace through the transformation of their perception. This project asks how Tibetan texts attempted to transform perception, and explores the role of poetic language, as well as the physical landscape itself, in doing so. The project engages a number of different types of pilgrimage texts—songs and letters of advice for pilgrims, founding narratives of pilgrimage mountains, polemics about the nature of pilgrimage, pilgrimage guides to specific holy places, and a pilgrim diary—which span a time period from 1200 to the 1950s. In each case, it asks how these works approach the problem of training people to see the holy place’s theoretically invisible wonders.

This dissertation argues that Tibetan pilgrimage texts treat perception as an active process that is malleable and subject to reframing and reinterpretation, and that they develop techniques whereby the pilgrim works with the material world in order to transform perception. Such

techniques, which I refer to as “practices of seeing,” include specialized forms of reading the landscape for signs, practices of writing and reading, and an imaginative juxtaposition of physical and idealized landscapes. These practices facilitate what I call “co-seeing,” a state in which the pilgrim sees the site in two ways at once; that is, they see it in one way with their ordinary perception and in another quite different way in their mind’s eye. Practices of seeing thereby help the pilgrim to elide the gap between ordinary perception and extraordinary vision, thus creating the conditions for potentially transformative religious experiences.

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Technical Note on Translation, Transliteration, and Tibetan Names

All Tibetan words and names given in the main text of this dissertation have been rendered phonetically according to the Tibetan and Himalayan Library Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan. Upon initial use of a term or name, I give a phoneticized spelling with a Wylie transliteration in parentheses. After that, I may either use the phoneticized term or its English rendering. The bibliography, bibliographical references, and technical terms in parentheses are transliterated using the Wylie system.

The Tibetan authors whose works form the basis of this dissertation may be known by different names and different titles. For the reader's convenience, the most frequently cited authors are given here in both phoneticized form and in the form their works are cited in the Asian-Language Sources bibliography.

Phonetic Rendering

Wylie Transliteration as Listed in Bibliography

Sakya Paṇḍita	Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun 'dga rgyal mtshan
Chödrak Yeshe	Zhwa dmar 04 Chos grags ye shes
Chökyi Drakpa	'Bri gung chung tsang 01 Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa
Khatag Zamyak	Tshong dpon Kha stag 'dzam yag
Pema Karpo	'Brug chen 04 Kun mkhyen Pad+ma dkar po
Jigmé Lingpa	'Jigs med gling pa Mkhyen brtse 'od zer
Jamgön Kongtrül	'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas
Drakpa Gyeltsen	Grags pa rgyal mtshan
Chomden Raltri	Bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri
Kathog Situ	KaH thog Si tu 03 Chos kyi rgya mtsho
Pökhanga	Spos khang pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan

Introduction

The Fault Lies with the Blind Man

The truth about the world is that it is perfectly pure. Why, then, does it appear to be so terrible? This is the problem that the Buddha's disciple Śāriputra confronts in the *Holy Teachings of Vimalakīrti*.

Śāriputra has just learned that the world in which we find ourselves is in fact generated by the Buddha's pristine gnosis. It is for that reason pristine itself: a pure land filled with buddhas and all the beautiful things that accompany them. This revelation comes as something of a shock to Śāriputra. How can one reconcile this authoritative claim with the fact that the world as ordinarily experienced is full of pain, suffering, ugliness, and doubt? He wonders to himself whether Śākyamuni Buddha's mind might actually have been impure, for if the quality of the world depends upon the quality of the Buddha's mind, and the world so clearly appears to be full of suffering... Why, if the world is truly perfect, is it impossible for us to see or feel it that way?

The Buddha, of course, immediately intuitively Śāriputra's sacrilegious thoughts, and turns the question back on his student:

“What do you think, Śāriputra? Are the sun and the moon impure? Is that why the blind man fails to see them?”

Śāriputra replied, “No, Lord. It is not so. The fault lies with the blind man, and not with the sun and moon.

The Buddha declared, “In the same way, Śāriputra, it is the failings of living beings that prevent them from seeing the marvelous purity of the land of the Buddha, the Tathāgatha. The Tathāgatha is not to blame. Śāriputra, this land of mine is pure, but you do not see it.”

At that time one of the Brahma kings with his conch-shaped tuft of hair said to Śāriputra, “You must not think that this Buddha land is impure. Because to my eyes, Śākyamuni’s Buddha land is as pure and spotless as the palace of the highest deities.”

Then Venerable Śāriputra said, “When I look at this land, I see this great earth, with its highs and lows, its thorns, its precipices, its peaks, and its abysses, as if it were entirely filled with shit.

The Brahma king replied, “It is just that your mind has highs and lows and does not rest on Buddha wisdom. Therefore you see this land as impure. Śāriputra, the bodhisattva treats all things and beings, each one of them, with perfect equality. His deeply searching mind is pure, and because it rests on Buddha wisdom, it can see the purity of this Buddha land.”

Thereupon the Buddha pressed his toe against the earth, and immediately it was transformed into a huge mass of precious jewels, a magnificent array of many hundreds of thousands of clusters of precious gems, until it resembled the Buddha Ratnavyūha’s Jeweled Land of Immeasurable Blessings. All the members of the great assembly sighed in wonder at what they had never seen before, and all saw that they themselves were seated on a throne of jeweled lotuses.

The Buddha said to Śāriputra, “Śāriputra, now do you see the marvelous purity of this Buddha land?”

Śāriputra replied, “I see it, Lord! Something I have never seen before, and never even heard of—now all the marvelous purity of the Buddha land is visible before me!”

The Buddha said, “Śāriputra, my Buddha land has always been pure like this. But because I wish to save those persons who are lowly and inferior, I make it seem to be impure and spoiled by many faults, that is all...living beings see the splendors of this Buddha land according to their own degrees of purity.”¹

This passage explores one of the central themes running throughout Buddhist discourse: the way we perceive the world is not the way the world actually is. Oftentimes, this fundamental misperception operates on the level of how we understand the world and our place in it—we take material objects to be permanent and become attached to them, we fixate on our own suffering

1. Translated from *Dri ma med par grags pas bstan pa'i mdo*, in *Bka' 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma)*, TBRC W1PD96682 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009), 472.4-474.20, and adapted from *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*, trans. Robert A. F. Thurman (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 18-9.

but overlook that of others, and we think of ourselves as existing independently. Here, however, Śāriputra's misperception is not merely conceptual but literally ocular; presented with a bejeweled pure land, Śāriputra sees only excrement. The Buddha asserts that Śāriputra's inferior perception is not a reason to question the Buddha's realization, just as a blind man's inability to see the sun is no reason to doubt its existence. Indeed, the Buddha could at any moment reveal this pure land to beings, but chooses not to do so because the world's impure appearance is itself a means of instruction. He attributes Śāriputra's inability to see the world as it actually is to Śāriputra's own impurity. On this understanding, what you see is determined by what you are.

In this episode, Śāriputra's vision is momentarily transformed by the power of the Buddha, specifically by his intentional act to press his toe on the earth and thereby effect a miraculous change in the vision of the students around him. Śāriputra is thereby afforded a perceptual certainty in the Buddha's teachings on the nature of reality that is ordinarily inaccessible. But we can say that the text thus prompts us to ask how, in the absence of this kind of divine intervention, Śāriputra or anyone else might go about trying to transform their own ordinary human perception. How indeed could one learn to see the world of excrement as a Buddha's Pure Land?

It is also fair to ask, however, why someone would *want* to change the way they see the world. Indeed, some Buddhist traditions found more pedagogical value in accepting the world from an unperfected perspective. *The Holy Teachings of Vimalakīrti* does not address this question, and instead treats the goal of transforming one's perception as so obviously justified that it goes without saying.

Nevertheless, the reader can imagine various reasons why Śāriputra desires this change and what the ability to see the pure land *does* for him. For instance, Śāriputra and the Buddha are

speaking because Śāriputra begins to doubt the quality of the Buddha's wisdom and, implicitly, the whole Buddhist path. For if the Buddha's wisdom is imperfect, there is no hope of someone like Śāriputra escaping the morass of suffering. When the Buddha shows Śāriputra the pure land, however, Śāriputra can see with his own eyes something that confirms the legitimacy of the path and the possibility that he too might reach that level. This glimpse of the pure land gives him faith and motivates him to continue the difficult work of practice. Śāriputra might also want to see the pure land because he wants to see the world as the Buddha sees it, to experience one aspect of what it is like to be a Buddha. Such an experience of *seeing* like the Buddha, many Buddhist texts suggest, help in the goal of *being* like the Buddha. Alternatively, Śāriputra may simply want to see jewels instead of thorns. In other words, Śāriputra might want to see something beautiful.

This episode, and the implicit invitation to transform our ordinary, deluded perception of the world, challenges us to reconsider what it means to see. Ordinarily, we think of perception, if we think of it at all, as passive and automatic, and that seeing gives us more or less unmediated access to the world around us. *The Holy Teachings of Vimalakīrti*, however, complicates that picture. The Buddha, the Brahma King, and Śāriputra are all looking at the same thing, and yet they see it in different ways. Looking at a pure realm, Śāriputra sees excrement, a fact that the Buddha attributes to Śāriputra's own impurity. Perception, on this account, is not simply given by the external world. Rather, perception is constructed at least in part by the perceiver herself. What is more, the way in which perception is constructed has the capacity to change. The Buddha holds out the possibility that Śāriputra—and by extension the rest of us—might someday transform that flawed perception so as to witness reality in its true purity and splendor.

Similar challenges to deluded, ordinary perception, and appeals to transform that ordinary

perception, run throughout Buddhist traditions. According to the Buddha's earliest teachings, sentient beings habitually misperceive reality. By virtue of taking ourselves to have a permanent, independent essence, we see the world in terms of what is pleasurable or disgusting to us. This is amplified by previous karma and bad habits, which condition us to continue perceiving in this way. We desire things for ourselves, but fail to notice the sufferings of others. In the end, however, we all suffer. A large part of the Buddhist project, then, is to disrupt this habitually self-centered way of perceiving the world.

Buddhists have developed many practices to improve and transform our ordinary deluded ways of seeing the world. These include meditative reflection in which practitioners focus their attention on particular visual objects or attempt to cultivate certain ways of seeing the world,² as well as visualization practices in which practitioners deliberately cultivate the ability to generate an image of a pure land or of a particular deity in their mind's eye.³ Practitioners also engage with architecture or images,⁴ or with narratives that thematize vision,⁵ and perform rituals that aim to change how they see the world. Finally, much Buddhist philosophical inquiry is oriented

2. For a description of these practices, see Paul Griffiths, "Indian Buddhist Meditation," in *Buddhist Spirituality I*, ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: SCM Press, 1983), 34–66. For an analysis of how they work, see Karl Schmid, "Knowing How to See the Good: Vipāśyanā in Kamalaśīla's The Process of Meditation," in *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy: Freedom from Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 200–218.

3. For description and discussion of these practices, see Chris Hatchell, "Buddhist Visual Worlds II: Practices of Visualization and Vision," *Religion Compass* 7, no. 9 (2013): 349–360, as well as Eric M. Greene, "Visions and Visualizations: In Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century Experimental Psychology," *History of Religions* 55, no. 3 (January 26, 2016): 289–328.

4. For example, Julie Gifford, *Buddhist Practice and Visual Culture: The Visual Rhetoric of Borobudur* (New York: Routledge, 2011), Eugene Yuejin Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), Jacob Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), and Wen-shing Chou, *Mount Wutai: Visions of a Sacred Buddhist Mountain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

5. For example, see Andy Rotman, *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and David McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

towards changing the way people see the world.⁶ The means to change perception, then, are multiple. Though scholarship on the specifically visual aspects of these practices is at a relatively early stage of development, these types of practices have been well explored in scholarly literature.

This dissertation will explore another set of practices whereby Buddhists engage and transform seeing that has not received much notice in the scholarly literature. Tibetan pilgrimage to holy mountains, itself a widespread practice in Tibet both within Buddhist contexts and non-Buddhist contexts, has been considered in terms of its social and ritual dimensions, but not as a response to the basic Buddhist problematic around deluded vision. But when we look at the literature on Buddhist pilgrimage in Tibet, including prescriptive materials, theoretical debates, and autobiographical accounts of the experiences of individuals, we find that this pervasive practice in Tibet connects directly to the usually more formal issues raised in Buddhism around the very phenomenology of perception itself.

This thesis will explore Tibetan pilgrimage in these terms. In what follows I will approach Tibetan pilgrimage as an embodied, ritualized process of re-staging for oneself the realization that the Buddha catalyzed in Śāriputra: the way that the world *appears* is not the way that the world *is*.

To that effect, this thesis will gesture towards the larger question around the very nature of the relationship between appearance and reality. It will thus not be solely focused on the ways in which Tibetans of a particular time and place thought about pilgrimage and perception. Nevertheless, close attention to Tibetan intellectual history, literature, and practice traditions will allow us to reflect on these broader questions. As such, I will ask: what are the structures of

6. For example, Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

human experience that shape perception? How do pilgrimage traditions engage literature and landscape in order to facilitate its transformation? How do texts and literature shape the way people see on pilgrimage? What practices of seeing did they adopt to engender such a transformation? In what ways did the engagement of the physical landscape complicate or facilitate this process, and how did texts confront the stubborn intractability of ordinary perception?

In addition to its ties to old philosophical and soteriological issues in Buddhism, the theory and practice of pilgrimage in Tibet is also grounded in an indigenous idea that the mountain is a wondrous palace for an enlightened deity. Of course, most people do not ordinarily see it that way, but the goal for Buddhist pilgrims is to learn to see the mountain as a sacred palace through the transformation of their perception. This was understood to be a very difficult goal, out of reach to all but the most accomplished. Ordinary pilgrims who did not attain this goal could still have a felicitous pilgrimage experience, but their pilgrimage activities operated within a context that maintained that pilgrimage sites had something *more* there, and that valorized those who came into direct contact with this more-than-real reality. Thus, throughout the corpus of Tibetan pilgrimage literature, including both prescriptive and firsthand accounts, we find evidence of people trying to see that which they understand to be ordinarily invisible. Such a transformation of perception was desirable for pilgrims both because it was thought to be valuable to be able to control perception as an aim in itself, and because learning to see like a buddha is a step towards becoming a buddha. And perhaps they also do it in part for the very simple and very human reason that they want the experience of pleasure: they yearn for the mundane to sublime briefly into a more beautiful version of itself.

In order to explore all of these questions, I engage a range of types of pilgrimage literature. These include songs and letters of advice given to pilgrims, accounts of the founding of pilgrimage mountains, polemics about the nature of pilgrimage and the identity of particular mountains, pilgrimage guides to specific holy places, and finally, a detailed and relatively pilgrim diary. These materials span a time period from 1200 to the 1950s. Each describes, theorizes, or attempts to change pilgrims' vision. Advice texts exhort pilgrims to adopt particular types of seeing and bodily comportment. Accounts of the founding of pilgrimage places describe how the visionary hero saw the site as it really was, and created the possibility for later pilgrims to see the wondrous reality of the mountain. Polemics about the nature of pilgrimage debate whether it is worthwhile to leave one's home in order to try and see the pilgrimage mountain. They even debate whether certain mountains like Kailash⁷ and Tsari actually are sacred, given that they do not look how a sacred mountain *should* look. Pilgrimage guides describe the history and various features of particular pilgrimage sites, and exhort pilgrims to try and see features that lie outside ordinary perception. Finally, the one extant pilgrimage diary available to scholars reflects on its author's experiences on pilgrimage and attempts to see Kailash as it really is.

The diversity of these sources gives a number of different perspectives on a common and pervasive concern about the nature of vision and the possibility of vision's transformation. The various texts that I engage come from different times and places, and reflect a variety of textual projects. As such, it will be necessary to situate them within their relevant social, literary, and historical contexts. They also, however, address issues that transcend those particular contexts and address issues in religious studies and contemporary philosophy that continue to be important today.

7. Kailash is known in Tibetan as Tise (*Ti se*) or Gangkar Tise (*Gangs dkar Ti se*), but as it has become known internationally as Kailash, I will refer to it as Kailash throughout this thesis.

Central Issues

In exploring questions about the transformation of perception, we will see that a number of related themes and issues will come to the forefront.

One primary theme that we will see again and again is the denaturalization of ordinary perception. That is, Tibetan pilgrimage texts frequently suggest that the way ordinary people see the world is not necessarily the way the world really is. Indeed, they take this entirely for granted, and proceed on the assumption that appearance is not identical to truth.

This runs counter to our commonsense assumptions that perception allows us access to the world more or less as it really is. Confronted with some dubious claim (“there’s a monster in my closet!”), we say “let me see for myself” (“nothing there!”). Seeing thus represents a critical intervention that strips away what is false about how something is conceived or presented. Indeed, Buddhism itself frequently employs the metaphor that seeing is knowing, and the Buddha’s insight into the nature of reality is the ultimate example of cutting through ignorance and distortion to get at what is really the case. But Tibetan pilgrimage practice turns this notion on its head. Pilgrimage texts emphasize the *deluded* nature of ordinary perception, and assert that there are other, better ways of seeing.

Pilgrimage texts will, for instance, introduce discourses of ideal perception and describe the way this ideal perception sees the world, even if this is not the way that most ordinary pilgrims see the world. Texts will speak about the wondrous world of jewels and celestial palaces that buddhas and spiritually advanced beings see. They describe pilgrimage mountains as having an outward appearance but an inward or secret reality that is obscured to most observers.

In so doing, they implicitly or explicitly connect perceptual ability with the perceiver’s

level of purity or spiritual realization. Such discourses frame ordinary human perception as just one way of seeing the pilgrimage place, de-centering that ordinary perception. What is more, they suggest that this ordinary perception is not even a very *good* way of seeing the world. Rather, what is *really* real is hidden.

We will further see how some pilgrimage texts connect perception with what might otherwise seem like unrelated qualities of mind, body, and affect. For instance, pilgrimage involves habits of ethical discipline and experiences of physical exhaustion. Texts also emphasize that affective qualities such as faith and devotion change the way pilgrims see the world. They thus treat perception as a dynamic and therefore malleable process. As such, they suggest that a range of qualities of body, mind, and affect are vitally important to the project of transforming perception. While it may be very difficult to change perception directly because people often have little control over how they see, people *do* often have some control over these other factors, and thus can willfully cultivate the emotional or mental qualities that will result in a different way of seeing the world.

Another important dynamic in pilgrimage texts is the tension between internally focused practices and practices that engage the material world. In other words, if someone wants to change the way that they see the world, is it better to focus on internally directed practices such as meditation or philosophy? Or ought one go out into the world and interact with material objects and places? This problem opens up onto broader questions. Is human perception largely the projection of internal ideas and desires, as Buddhist thought has often suggested, or is perception largely a reflection of the external world? Insofar as pilgrimage requires travel to an external destination, it is a practice of engaging the material world *par excellence*. Throughout the history of Tibetan discourse on pilgrimage however, critics often questioned the need to

undertake difficult travel to distant pilgrimage places, and instead advocated that would-be pilgrims were better off cultivating merit or understanding without leaving their homes.

The question of whether perception is a projection of internal states or a reflection of the external world also raises the question of the agency of perception. In other words, does the ability to transform perception lie primarily in the individual's control, or are there certain kinds of special objects that break through and enact changes on individuals that individuals cannot do themselves? Is the point an expression of our capacities or a recognition of our limits? Might it involve both? Practices of envisioning complicate the simplistic notion that human beings are agents and material objects are patients. As Wittgenstein points out in the *Philosophical Investigations*, a person cannot will themselves to see a leaf green.⁸ That is, seeing is an activity that often seems to begin outside conscious control. Insofar as Tibetan pilgrimage is structured around the goal of learning to see the physical mountain as a divine mandala, Tibetan pilgrimage texts face the challenge of giving some account of how it is that a pilgrim can ever learn to see in this way. Is it something that they themselves can will themselves to do, are there actions that the pilgrim can do that indirectly cultivate this way of seeing, or can the mountain itself transform pilgrims' perception?

On the one hand, pilgrimage texts focus on the agency of the perceiver in a variety of ways. They advocate particular techniques of seeing and looking that the pilgrim can undertake in order to transform perception. For example, texts will advocate sophisticated techniques of actively reading the landscape for signs. They will also juxtapose—and lead pilgrims to juxtapose—the ordinary way of seeing the mountain with wondrous descriptions of how the mountain really is. Finally, pilgrimage texts direct and focus pilgrims' attention on certain kinds

8. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The English Text of the Third Edition*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 213. This point will be more fully discussed in chapter two.

of objects and in certain kinds of ways. In these ways, pilgrimage texts draw pilgrims' gaze and ultimately shape the way that they experience the pilgrimage place. All of these practices challenge the practitioner in different ways, engaging different structures of the human person in order to generate meaningful experiences that may be used to propel people along the Buddhist path. One of the main lines of thought I am going to pursue in this dissertation is to figure out in just what ways Tibetan pilgrimage practices manage to juxtapose ordinary physical reality and the wondrous, more-than-real reality that we might call visionary reality.

This notion of multiple realities might strike us as strange, given that we often assume that there is one reality that we all share. We should resist this assumption, however, because at different moments, some authors seem to regard the extraordinary reality as what is really real, and claim that the world of ordinary experience is illusory and dream-like. Others, however, pay close attention to ordinary reality and maintain that ordinary perception grants true knowledge of the world. As we will find throughout this dissertation, what reality *really is* is not at all clear, but rather is open and often contested.

Although pilgrimage texts develop practices that enable the perceiver to transform perception, on the other hand, pilgrimage texts also treat the material world, and the mountain itself, as having a vital agency of its own. In other words, they often seem to think that the transformation of perception is not entirely determined by the agency of the perceiver.

This is partly because pilgrimage texts anticipate that the material world will resist pilgrims' attempts to envision it differently. This is of course to be expected. After all, in one sense, the whole goal of Tibetan pilgrimage practices is to overcome ordinary perception so as to see the wondrous visionary realm described in pilgrimage texts. The nature of this material reality and its ability to resist pilgrims' envisionings is one of the main issues that I am seeking to

explore.

Indeed, and counter to what we might expect, even as pilgrimage texts reject material reality as it is ordinarily experienced, they do not simply ignore or deny the material world. Instead, they make frequent implicit and explicit appeals to ordinary perception or physical reality. As we will see, in disputes over the identity of particular mountains, certain figures make appeals to “the way things really are” (*dnegos po'i gnas lugs*). Other figures argue that “what is known in the world” (*'jig rten grags pa*) is a principle of scriptural interpretation. Various authors, moreover, dwell on the appropriate balance between the world as common perception (*mithun snang*) and the world as perceived differently according to beings' karma (*dnegos gcig yid ni tha dad phyr*). Pilgrimage texts direct pilgrims' attention to the physical world even as they tell pilgrims about the wonders that guides assume pilgrims cannot see. These texts thus treat the notion of physical reality as open and contested. Different ways of seeing are connected to different ways of construing reality, and as such various modalities of seeing are granted more or less authority in particular contexts.

If visionary reality is the ideal, nevertheless, it remains striking how pilgrimage texts that advocate overcoming ordinary perception actively make use of physical reality to do so. Consider, for instance, the hypothetical case of pilgrimage texts which simply ignored ordinary perception, instead directing practitioners to close their eyes and imagine the wonders of visionary reality. Rather than directing pilgrims' attention to a physical mountain and telling them that it is a divine palace, an imagined pilgrimage would involve conjuring the divine palace in front of the mind's eye. Clearly, generating an image of the pure land in one's mind and seeing a physical mountain as a pure land have a different logic and, I would suggest, a different way that they work on the hypothetical practitioner.

Tibetan pilgrimage texts even sometimes treat physical places as having a kind of agency of their own to transform pilgrims. That is, as opposed to being inert backdrops that pilgrims see in better or worse ways, mountains and the landscapes surrounding them act on pilgrims in ways the pilgrim cannot control. Texts speak of pilgrimage places granting purification, blessings, and initiations. Pilgrimage places also seem to hold the power of past masters in such a way that pilgrims coming in contact with the mountain come into contact with those masters and with the blessings they left behind. They are in this sense concretions of the act of pilgrimage itself. In this way, the pilgrimage place gathers up all of the powers and narratives that have happened there, breaking the ordinary laws of space and time. Another of our goals, then, will be to better understand the vital materiality of pilgrimage mountains.

This set of issues resists easy resolution. That said, however, in this dissertation I want to advance two main arguments.

The first is a general claim about seeing and how it comes to have value in religious traditions. Whereas perception is often conceived of as the passive reception of sense data from the external world, I argue we learn from the Tibetan pilgrimage materials that perception is active and malleable, and functions as an important boundary activity that bridges the internal world of language, imagination, and affect with the external, physical world. It is therefore a major site of religious traditions' attempts to reshape human experience of the world. In particular, religious traditions cultivate specific ways of looking at or seeing certain kind of objects that have long-lasting effects for how practitioners experience and operate in the world. The study of perception, and of ways of seeing, is thus a key component of the study of religion. In order to do this, we must recognize that within the generic terms vision, perception, or seeing, there are a variety of activities such as looking, appearing, glancing, or imagining, to name a few,

that differ and interact in important ways.

As such, as part of arguing for greater attention to seeing as a dynamic site of religious activity, the second contribution of this thesis is to give an account of how I see Tibetan pilgrimage texts operating. To do so, I highlight my Tibetan sources' sophisticated differentiation of different types of seeing, and develop a scholarly language to more precisely analyze perception. Specifically, insofar as pilgrimage texts understand perception to mediate between the internal world of imagination and the external material world, they do not ignore or deny the material world. This thesis will uncover the recommended techniques whereby the pilgrim works *with* the material world in order to facilitate concretely felt and transformative pilgrimage experiences. Such techniques, which I refer to as "practices of seeing," include a highly specialized form of reading the landscape for signs, practices of writing and reading, and an imaginative juxtaposition of physical and idealized landscapes. These practices facilitate what I will call "co-seeing," a state in which the pilgrim sees the site in two ways at once; that is, they see it in one way with their ordinary perception and in another quite different way in their mind's eye. Practices of seeing thus facilitate significant and potentially transformative religious experiences that are co-created by the interaction of physical reality, visionary reality, and the pilgrim who adopts these practices.

Practices of Seeing

Because practices of seeing are centrally important to my argument, it is helpful to give an illustration of what I mean by the term, as well as how it leads to the "co-seeing" described above. This example is drawn from Toni Huber's *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, which explores pilgrimage to Tsari. In it, Huber points to a situation of pilgrims performing what I

would call a practice of seeing. In his description, we can say that the pilgrims' ordinary perception and imaginative vision are *conjoined* into what I call co-seeing.

Huber describes the phenomenon of pilgrims to Tsari looking for the so-called “Sexed Rocks of Tibet” (*bod rdo mtshan can*). The “Sexed Rocks” are a rock formation said to look like a stone vulva and phallus. Pilgrimage guides identify the phallus as that of Maheśvara, a tantric deity, and state that the vulva manifested to spiritual masters who first traveled to Tsari.⁹ While it is relatively rare that Tibetan pilgrimage is about trying to see sexual organs in rocks, pilgrimage traditions frequently describe and identify other features of the natural landscape as being symbolically significant objects. This is, furthermore, a particular case of the broader description of pilgrimage mountains as being the residence of tantric deities.

Huber provides testimony from two different pilgrims who visited Tsari in the 1950s which show how these pilgrims interacted with the sexed rocks. Though his two informants are quite different in terms of their social position—one being a high-ranking Bhutanese Drukpa monk and the other an unschooled peasant from Kongpo—their accounts reveal that both are trying to see the sexed rocks in the way the guide describes. Both, however, cannot do so, at least at first. In order to try and see the sexed rocks, then, they actively *look*, trying to make what they are actually perceiving with their physical eyes match the image they are trying to see.¹⁰ It is worth quoting their accounts in full, because they shed light on the very dynamic that I am trying to explore in this project.

The Drukpa Lama's account reads as follows:

On the eleventh day of the ninth month of the water-male-tiger year (1782), I arrived at the Sexed Rocks of Tibet within the né of Tsaritra*, the powerful Khachö. Previously,

9. Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 75, with note on 244.

10. Huber notes this, writing that “both high lama and farm-boy had to put a conscious effort into their acts of interpretation to make the site fit with what was expected.” Ibid, 77.

when Kyewo Yeshé Dorje came to first open the door to this né, he was met here by the five long life sisters. In the middle of a mixed thicket of sang plants there was a flat rock with a checkered pattern. . . . I expected to see the Sexed Rocks as a phallus or a vulva, but instead they appeared to resemble thighs pressed together. I knew there were symbols which look like thighs, explained as the twenty-four symbols, including the symbol that looks like thighs and the symbol that looks like a phallus, in [Tantric] commentaries about the twenty-four countries. Today anyone, the wise and the foolish, going to see the site will all agree it resembles thighs pressed together, no matter how much time you spend above it. From another position it suddenly seems to be placed exactly like a stone phallus. There, it appeared recognizable as Sexed Rocks, and it is only this view that accounts for it as [one of] the twenty-four Sexed Rocks.¹¹

Ngodrup, the peasant from Kongpo, says this:

When my brother and I went to Tsari, our village neighbors had explained the route beforehand; they told us of the Sexed Rocks, saying it was an important place where a lama opened Tsari, the only rocks like this in Tibet, where you made prayers and could get empowerment, and drink the fertility water. When we got there we were disappointed, as we thought the genital shapes would be bigger and more obvious; we couldn't make them out really. My brother thought he found them, but we didn't know if it was correct. Lamas can see them, but none was present. So we left, and went on to Chikchar.¹²

There is a great deal that these accounts share in spite of the differences between the two informants. Both came to the site knowing that the rocks are supposed to look like sex organs: the Drukpa Lama mentions that he “expected to see the Sexed Rocks as a phallus or vulva,” but is somewhat surprised and caught off guard to see that they do not immediately and unambiguously have that appearance. He can make sense of this to some degree in terms of his knowledge of tantric commentaries, but still tries to see the rocks as the sex organs they are reputed to be. The Lama’s use of the phrases “no matter how much time you spend above it” and “from another position” suggests that he was examining the rock from multiple angles. In one of these positions, he can suddenly *see* the Sexed Rocks in a new way. He talks of “this view” of the Sexed Rocks being the one that fits into the textual schema of the twenty-four sexed rocks,

11. Ibid, 76, with note on 244.

12. Ibid, 76-7.

indicating a connection between his ability to see the rocks as sex organs and his ability to make sense of or to fully appropriate the textual schema. Notably, he is not content to take the tradition at its word that these rocks are sex organs. It is not that he is exactly *doubting* the tradition, but he also wants to see it for himself, and spends time moving around the rocks and looking at them from every angle until he finds the “view” of the rocks that comports with what it is expected to be.

Ngodrup, too, has an expectation of what the rocks will look like, and tries to make what he actually sees comport with what he thinks he should be able to see. While the Drukpa Lama explicitly references textual materials, Ngodrup only mentions oral explanations. He hears about the rocks that look like sex organs and of their potency as a site for prayers, empowerments, and fertility. But when Ngodrup and his brother arrive at the site, they are “disappointed” to see that it does not look how they expected. Their ordinary perception prevents them from seeing the rocks as the text describes them. Like the Drukpa Lama, there is a disjunction between the picture painted by descriptions of the site and what Ngodrup and his brother can see with their own eyes. Ngodrup’s account also indicates the same sort of action as that of the Drukpa Lamas in terms of moving around the rocks and trying to see them as sex organs. “We couldn’t make them out really,” he says, and notes that although his brother thought he may have been able to find the position from which they looked clearly like sex organs, the brothers are ultimately unsure. This passage indicates a scene where each of the brothers is moving around the rock and looking closely, and of one calling the other one over when they think they have found “the view” spoken of by the Drukpa Lama. Ultimately, however, they are unsure and while they seem confident that someone more qualified, such as a lama, would be able to see the rocks as sex organs and thereby enable *them* to see it, no such person is around and so they eventually move

on.

In both cases, there is a conscious and active *looking* in order to attempt reconcile the disjunction between descriptions given in guidebooks or oral tradition and that which pilgrims saw with their own eyes. Or, to put it another way, between their ordinary perception and how they have come to imagine the site to be.

Pilgrims' actions of moving around the rocks and looking from various angles trying to resolve this disjunction are an example of what I am calling practices of seeing. In trying to see the sexed rocks, Ngodrup and the Drukpa Lama are both closely examining the material world as seen in their ordinary perception in order to be able to see a deeper reality they believe to be hidden from that ordinary perception. This is just one example of a practice of seeing. Others we will explore involve reading the landscape for signs, particular modes of writing and reading, and juxtaposition of ordinary perception and extraordinary vision. In each case, practices of seeing involve a pilgrim's active visual engagement with the material landscape. These practices of seeing are part of the culturally conditioned set of rituals, imagery, bodily comportment, devotional attitudes, and interpretive practices that make up pilgrimage to holy mountains such as Tsari. They are supported and cultivated in various ways, including by pilgrim guidebooks that describe landscape features such as the sexed rocks.

These practices lead both Ngodrup and the Drukpa Lama to experience what I call co-seeing. Both are looking with their ordinary perception at the site, but they are also imagining the sexed rocks as described in pilgrimage guides or oral histories. In their ordinary perception, they have the stubbornly sexless rocks, but in their mind's eye, they are seeing sexed rocks. What is more, in imagining the sexed rocks as described by the tradition, they are also aware of the narratives and stories about Maheśvara and early tantric masters at the site. These two forms of

seeing do not collapse into one another—as evidenced by the fact that both Ngodrup and the Drukpa Lama have difficulty getting their ordinary perception to match what they imagine that the site should look like—but they are both present in the awareness of the pilgrims simultaneously.

Indeed, it is the tension between these two ways of seeing that is important. It leads the pilgrims to try to resolve that tension, as when Ngodrup and the Drukpa Lama try to make their ordinary perception comport with the guidebook descriptions. Even if that does not work, and a pilgrim like Ngodrup cannot bring these two ways of seeing together, it focuses the pilgrim's attention on the difference between their ordinary way of seeing and some other way of seeing the world. Ngodrup is aware that the way that he sees the rocks is not the way that a lama might see the rocks. In the quotation provided by Huber, Ngodrup suggests that his inability to see the sexed rocks is disappointing, but does not discuss whether this experience motivates him to any particular action. We might speculate, however, that the way that pilgrimage focuses Ngodrup's attention on the difference between his perception and that of a highly realized being might denaturalize his ordinary way of seeing the world, or even motivate him to try to develop more advanced perceptual capacities.

This is just one example of practices of seeing and one way that co-seeing might be experienced—we will see many more over the course of this thesis—but it illustrates the dynamic that I believe is at work in these materials.

Textual Sources

In order to explore the issue of the transformation of vision, I have brought together a variety of textual sources stretching from a dispute about a particular mountain's holiness from the 1230s to

a pilgrim diary written in the 1950s. These sources comprise a variety of genres, perspectives, and historical periods. More will be said about each of these sources, their authors, and the historical contexts from which they emerged in the chapters dealing specifically with these materials, but for now a sense of the general nature of these sources will suffice. Broadly speaking, the sources used fall into three main groups: texts about how pilgrimage should be practiced, guidebooks written for pilgrims as guides to a particular place, and texts written by pilgrims about their own pilgrimage experiences.

First, I examine a few representative texts that make an argument for how pilgrimage *should* be practiced. That is, they articulate and defend a specific vision for how pilgrims should undertake pilgrimage practice and how they should *not* undertake pilgrimage practice. Some even argue against pilgrimage entirely. A great variety of these sorts of texts exist in the Tibetan literature. For instance, there are songs or letters of advice directed at pilgrims written by such figures as Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216),¹³ Taranatha (1575–1634),¹⁴ Karma Chagmé (1613–1678),¹⁵ Jigmé Lingpa (1730–1798),¹⁶ Kathog Situ Panchen (1880–1924).¹⁷ These authors represent a variety of schools of Tibetan Buddhism, with only the Gelukpa school being relatively underrepresented. These texts can be found in their authors’ collected works (*gsung*

13. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Gnas bstod kyi nyams dbyangs*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i gsung 'bum dpe bsdur ma las grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi gsung*, TBRC W2DB4569, 5: 344 - 347 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007).

14. TA ra nA tha, *Las stod kyi gnas skor ba 'dra la gdams pa*, in *Collected Works of TA ra nA tha*, TBRC W1PD45495, 3: 79-80 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2008).

15. Karma chags med, *Gnas mjal ba'i tshul*, in *Collected Works of Karma chags med*, TBRC W22933, 43: 637-8 (Chengdu: Si khron zhing chen mi rigs zhib 'jug su'o bod kyi rig gnas zhib 'jug khang, 1999).

16. 'Jigs med gling pa Mkhyen brtse 'od zer, *Gnas bskor ba la spring ba'i gtam*, in *Collected Works of 'Jigs med gling pa Mkhyen brtse 'od zer*, TBRC W27300, 4: 575-9 (Gangtok: No publisher, 1985).

17. KaH thog si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, “Gnas skor pa rab 'bring mtha' gsum gyi rnam dbye,” in *Gnas yig phyogs bsgribs*, TBRC W20828, 1-2 (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1998).

'bum). We also find instructions about how to do pilgrimage embedded in pilgrimage guides written by known authors, as is the case in texts by Pema Karpo (1527–1592)¹⁸ and Jamgön Kongtrül (1813–1899),¹⁹ as well as in the case of anonymously or pseudonymously written pilgrimage guides. Such texts will tell pilgrims not only what specific objects they should see at a particular pilgrimage site, but will provide general instructions about how pilgrims should comport themselves while on pilgrimage.

We also find normative statements about pilgrimage made in genres that were not directly addressed to pilgrims. For instance, because tantric texts such as the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* or *Hevajra Tantra* instruct tantric practitioners to go practice at certain holy places (Skt. *pīṭha*), commentaries written in both India and Tibet on these tantric texts will often discuss these pilgrimage practices and make arguments for how they should or should not be performed. We find such arguments in texts written by Naropa (~11th century?)²⁰ and Vajragarbha (?)²¹ that are contained in the Tibetan Tengyur, as well as in Tibetan commentaries and sub-commentaries written on these texts.²²

Issues related to pilgrimage also emerge in Tibetan polemics about the value of

18. 'Brug chen Kun mkhyen Pad+ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad*, in *Collected Works of Padma dkar po*, TBRC W10736, 4: 215-82 (Darjeeling: Kargyud sungrab nyamso khang, 1973-4).

19. 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Thugs kyi gnas mchog chen po de bl ko TI tsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, in *Rgya chen bka' mdzod*, TBRC W21808, 11: 489-558 (Paro: Ngodup, 1975-6).

20. Naropa, *Rdo rje'i tshig gi snying po bsdus pa'i dka' 'grel* (Skt. *Vajrapādasārasaṃgraha*), in *Bstan 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma)*, TBRC W1PD95844, 2: 914 - 1137 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008).

21. Vajragarbha, *Rdo rje snying po'i 'grel pa* (Skt. *Hevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*), in *Bstan 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma)*, TBRC W1PD95844, 1: 940 – 1144 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008).

22. See, for example, Rang byung rdo rje, *Dgyes pa rdo rje'i brtag pa gnyis pa'i 'grel pa dri ma med pa'i 'od*, in *Collected Works of Rang byung rdo rje*, TBRC W30541, 8: 497-636 (Zi ling: Mtshur phu mkhan lo yag bkra shis, 2006). There are a number of other Tibetan commentaries on Tantric texts and commentaries, but a full investigation of such sources is outside the scope of this project.

pilgrimage and the identity of particular pilgrimage places. Many such texts were written in response to a text written by the famous scholar Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) in which he rejected pilgrimage to two Tibetan mountains. These mountains, known as Kailash and Tsari, were believed by many to be holy mountains described in Buddhist scripture and named by tantric texts as potent sites of practice. Kailash, in particular, was identified with Mount Himavat and became a site of pilgrimage. Sakya Paṇḍita, however, rejected pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari on the grounds that ordinary pilgrims should not be going to tantric pilgrimage sites unless they had the proper training and initiations. Even worse, Sakya Paṇḍita argued that Tibetans had misidentified these mountains, and so they were not the holy mountains so many Tibetans believed them to be. His rejection of pilgrimage to Kailash set off a centuries-long debate in which a number of Kagyu authors wrote refutations of Sakya Paṇḍita and Sakya authors responded with defenses of Sakya Paṇḍita. In addition to addressing the central question of whether pilgrimage to Kailash or Tsari is legitimate, these texts make arguments about how pilgrimage should be performed.

As such, even within this general body of texts about how pilgrimage should be practiced, there are a variety of genres and textual projects, as well as a variety of visions for what pilgrimage practice ought to entail. By surveying a number of these texts, we can begin to understand the general contours of Tibetan pilgrimage discourse.

Second, I examine texts written for pilgrims about a particular place. Such texts are often classified as *néyik* (*gnas yig*), a term literally meaning writing (*yig*) about a holy place (*gnas*), but may also be called *néshé* (*gnas bshad*, explanation of a holy place), *netö* (*gnas bstod*, holy place

praise, also sometimes *sa bstod*, praise of the place),²³ *lamyik* (*lam yig*, itinerary),²⁴ *karchak* (*dkar chag*, inventory),²⁵ or *logyü* (*lo rgyus*, history).²⁶ These texts generally praise a particular holy place (*gnas*), often a holy mountain or temple complex, relate the site's history, describe the benefits that will accrue to pilgrims who visit the site, and exhort audiences to visit the site on pilgrimage. Pilgrimage guides often adopt the voice of a tour guide (indeed, there is evidence that at least some written pilgrimage guides are derived from the oral traditions of human pilgrimage guides),²⁷ leading the potential pilgrim through the sites and describing individual objects that the pilgrim will see so that the pilgrim will fully appreciate them.

Hundreds of these pilgrimage guides are extant in manuscripts, block prints, or modern reprinted editions, and can be found under the “*gnas yig*” or “*lam yig*” topic tags on the Buddhist Digital Resource Center database. Nevertheless, these guides remain understudied and the history of their composition remains obscure. Part of the difficulty is that, while we do have some guides with clearly identifiable authors and composition dates, a large proportion of guides

23. These texts are not exactly pilgrimage guides, although they may be included in a pilgrimage guide. Rather, they are poetic praises of a particular place, which are often given performatively by specialized reciters or by important people visiting a place and which are not exclusively or primarily for the sake of a pilgrim.

24. This term literally means path text or path writing, although it can be used to refer to an itinerary for pilgrims to follow, a text in which someone writes an account of their travels, or a passport-type document signed by a local official that allows the holder to pass through a particular area. For more on this subject see Sam van Shaik, and Imre Galambos, *Manuscripts and Travelers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

25. These texts are often called tables of contents or inventories, which can be used to list the texts in a particular collected works (*gsung 'bum*), the items held in a library, or in the case of famous places, the texts, images, and other features found at the site. These inventories can range from simple lists of items without any commentary to detailed accounts that not only list the items and where they can be found, but also relates the history and significance of the items.

26. This term literally means account or history, and is more frequently found in historiographical works, but is sometimes used to talk about the history of a particular place.

27. Dkon chog bstan 'dzin Chos kyi blo gros, for example, mentions consulting caretakers at pilgrimage sites when he is compiling his written pilgrimage guide. See *Gangs ri chen po ti se dang mtsho chen ma dros pa bcas kyi sngon byung gi lo rgyus mdor bsdus su brjod pa'i rab byed shel dkar me long*, in Dge 'dun chos 'phel, ed., *Gnas yig phyogs bsgribs*.

are unsigned and undated, making it difficult to say with any degree of certainty when and where they were written, or indeed how and whether they were used. Nonetheless, as in the case of the texts arguing for how pilgrimage should be performed, by examining a number of these texts, we can begin to understand the ways in which these texts imagine a certain kind of audience and then work on that audience.

Third, I explore texts written by pilgrims about their own pilgrimage experiences. Again, there are a number of ways in which this type of writing occurred. Probably the majority of Tibetan writing about one's own pilgrimage experiences exists as part of larger autobiographies. In these cases, authors did not separate these pilgrimage experiences out from the rest of their activities, but rather described pilgrimage in the larger context of their lives. Since most Tibetans seem to have practiced pilgrimage at least to some extent, there are thus descriptions of pilgrimage found in most autobiographical writing.

Sometimes, however, Tibetan authors described pilgrimage practices in stand-alone texts included in their collected writings. For instance, Chökyi Drakpa (1595-1659) has a number of texts in his collected works that record the visions or dreams he had when practicing at a particular place.²⁸ Some authors also have stand-alone texts describing how they “opened the doors” (*gnas sgo phye ba*) of a particular place. This notion of opening the doors of a holy place will be discussed at much greater length in the following chapter, but for now suffice to say that opening the doors of a holy place is analogous to *founding* a pilgrimage place. Such texts record the activities that the author did at the site in order to open it. Examples include texts by Lelung

28. See, for example, Chos kyi grags pa, *Bye ri stag rtser zla gsang gi bsnyen sgrub zhig bgyis pa'i tshe 'khrul snang du byung ba bden par bzung nas bris pa* and *Brag dkar lha chur tshe sgrub bgyis dus mthong snang byung tshul*, in *Collected Works of Chos kyi grags pa*, TBRC W22082, 1: 469-78 and 525-30. (Kulkhan: Drikung Kagyu Institute, 1999).

Shepé Dorje (1697-1740)²⁹ and Chökyi Drakpa.³⁰ Finally, some pilgrims, such as Khatag Zamyak who we will discuss further below, keep diary accounts of their pilgrimage experiences. There are likely many more of these diaries in existence, but thus far only one is available to scholars.

For this project, I analyze two very different accounts by two very different pilgrims, one a high-ranking religious visionary who founds a pilgrimage site in the 1618 and another a relatively ordinary layperson who goes on pilgrimage to Kailash and central Tibet in the 1940s and 1950s. The first text is written by a high-ranking figure in the Drikung Kagyu school named Rigzin Chökyi Drakpa.³¹ The text narrates Chökyi Drakpa's pilgrimage to the holy mountain of Gyangme in the first person, telling the story of how he becomes able to see it directly as the mandala of Cakrasamvara and thus "opens" the mountain for pilgrimage by ordinary people. The second text is the pilgrimage diary of Khatag Zamyak, a Tibetan merchant who went on pilgrimage to central Tibet and Kailash from 1944 to 1956.³² The diary, which was published by Khatag Zamyak's nephew after he found it among his late uncle's effects, records his daily activities, focusing particularly on the sites he visited, the images and special features he saw at those sites, and the various ritual activities or donations he performed at those sites. The diary thus gives a rare glimpse into the social, economic, and religious world of pre-1959 Tibet from the perspective of a layperson.

29. Bzhad pa'i rdo rje, *Ltal chung mkha' 'gro'i dga' tshal gyi gnas sgo gsar du phye ba'i lam yig* and *Gsal dwangs ri bo che'i gnas zhal gsar du phye ba'i lo rgyus*, in *Collected Works of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje*, TBRC W22130, 9: 213-29 and 237-62 (Leh: T. Sonam and D.L. Tashigang, 1983-5).

30. Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*, in *Collected Works of Chos kyi grags pa*, TBRC W22082, 2: 457-77 (Kulkhan: Drikung Kagyu Institute, 1999).

31. Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*.

32. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Bod dang bal po rgya gar bcas la gnas bskor bskyod pa'i nyin deb: Phyi lo 1944 nas 1956 bar: A Pilgrim's Diary: Tibet, Nepal & India 1944-1956*, TBRC W1KG23814 (Dharamsala: Acarya Jamyang Wangyal, 1997).

The heterogeneity of these sources—though they all deal with pilgrimage, they comprise a variety of genres, authors, and time periods—raises the question of why I think that these sources ought to be read together and how I plan to read them productively and responsibly. For this project, the unifying theme is the goal of transforming perception from ordinary to divine, and in particular, the question of how Tibetan pilgrimage practices use literature and landscape in order to facilitate such transformations of perception. For each of the various textual sources described above, I ask how these texts approach the project of training pilgrims to see the invisible wonders of the holy place. Answering this question, however, requires sensitivity to the particularities of different types of text, and in particular the way each text addresses and attempts to work on its imagined audience. A text of advice written for pilgrims, a lama's account of how he founded a pilgrimage place, a polemic text analyzing the ways in which pilgrimage practice squares with Madhyamaka and Yogacara philosophy, a pilgrimage guide written to glorify a minor pilgrimage place as equal to the great Kailash, and a pilgrim's diary are each going to have their own purposes, audiences, and intended effects. As textual projects, none of them transparently records reality or events as they actually happened—were such a thing even possible—but rather participates in a certain kind of construction. These constructions and textual projects, however, are themselves interesting and revealing, and thus each set of texts gives a different angle on our central question.

Theory and Method

I seek to develop an understanding both of how my sources understand the problem of perception and of how they attempt to facilitate the transformation of perception. I attempt to uncover Tibetan self-understandings of pilgrimage practices, as well as to outline an interpretive

reconstruction of the logic of these practices. The diversity of sources that this project engages means that each set of texts requires its own set of reading practices, and as such, each chapter will have its own guiding theory and methods. Nevertheless, there are three main theoretical and methodological approaches informing the project as a whole.

Vision and Culture

In exploring issues of sight and seeing, I take theoretical cues from the academic study of visual culture,³³ as well as from the history and anthropology of the senses.³⁴ Although they draw on different sorts of materials, scholars in both of these fields argue that simple act of seeing or sensing is actually a complex product of practices, sensory objects, ideas, and aesthetic sensibilities, all of which are shaped by history and culture. Scholars of visual culture, for instance, take interest not only in images, but also in how such images are produced, as well as culturally patterned ways of looking and interpreting. They reject the idea that senses or sensory objects are secondary to abstract cognitive ideas. Instead, they point to the ways in which culturally patterned sensory practices shape people's experience of the world. This is not to say that seeing is entirely *determined* by culture, but rather to point out that acts of seeing take place in a culturally conditioned framework. With regard to this project, when Tibetan pilgrims see a

33. See volumes such as Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, ed. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed. *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

34. See, for example, Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Margaret Mullett, *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Trustees for Harvard University, 2017); Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler, *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); David Le Breton, *Sensing the World: An Anthropology of the Senses*, Sensory Studies Series (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Sarah Pink, "The Future of Sensory Anthropology/the Anthropology of the Senses," *Social Anthropology* 18, no. 3 (2010): 331–333. Note also that a recent volume of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* focused on the senses. James Duncan Gentry, "Tibetan Religion and the Senses," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 50 (June 2019): 5–12.

holy mountain, they do not do so in a vacuum, but rather are influenced by culturally patterned ways of looking and ways of interpreting what they see.

I am particularly influenced by the approach of scholars of religious visual culture such as David Morgan and Birgit Meyer.³⁵ Morgan defines visual culture as “what images, acts of seeing, and attendant intellectual, emotional, and perceptual sensibilities do to build, maintain, or transform the worlds in which people live.”³⁶ In other words, visual culture is a way of referring to the circulation of images in a particular social context including, importantly, the institutions, ideas, practices, and attitudes shaping that circulation and the ways in which the circulation of these images functions to construct a certain kind of world. Morgan points out that ways of looking shape how we pay attention, what we see, how we see it, and how we make meaning out of images. Images, in turn, shape the people who view them. For example, Morgan writes that sensory engagement with images “tunes the senses, induces feelings, and structures perception in a specific and selective manner.”³⁷ The scholar of visual culture, then, tries to analyze images, ways of seeing those images, and how those images work on their particular contexts. They see images not as epiphenomenal illustrations of non-visual events (such as philosophical ideas), but rather as media that are important and transformative in their own right.

Insofar as I primarily study texts, this work differs from most scholarship on visual culture, which is generally based on the study of images. I am studying visual culture as described in texts, and am thinking about visual engagement with mountains. There are Tibetan

35. See, for example, Birgit Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Birgit Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible: Visual Culture and the Study of Religion,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 27, no. 4–5 (2015): 333–360, and David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

36. David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 33.

37. Birgit Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible,” 338.

images of holy mountains, and scholars like Wen-shing Chou have explored the visual culture of Wutai Shan.³⁸ There are not many available images of the mountains primarily studied in this project, and a full examination of these images lies outside the scope of the present project. However, I draw on the insights developed by scholars of visual culture in this project.

Following the insights of the scholarship referenced above, I treat pilgrimage as a visual practice. Pilgrimage is clearly not *only* a visual practice, but it does entail visual engagement with the holy mountain in both its ordinary and extraordinary form. As such, I attend to the various practices, sensory objects, ideas, and attitudes involved that shape pilgrims' visual engagement with the holy mountain. That is, I explore how different kinds of pilgrimage texts valorize certain kinds of vision over others, how they direct pilgrims' visual attention in particular ways, how they construct a visual mental picture of the mountain, and how they suggest practices of seeing.

In addition, I draw terminology from philosophers working on perception and the philosophy of mind such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Colin McGinn. The distinctions they make do not always line up neatly with distinctions made in Tibetan, but they give a useful vocabulary with which to approach the possible range of meanings of seeing in the Tibetan materials. They distinguish *bare sensation* or *simple seeing*, in which the perceiver has bare and non-conceptual sensory awareness of some object, such as a greenish field,³⁹ from *seeing-as*, in which the perceiver sees the world as *being* some particular thing, such as a tree.⁴⁰ They also describe

38. Wen-shing Chou, *Mount Wutai: Visions of a Sacred Buddhist Mountain*.

39. Some philosophers, Buddhist and otherwise, have questioned whether there is *ever* a moment of bare sensation that is free of conceptual mediation and instead to suggest that each moment of perception is always already conceptual. Nonetheless, we may still analytically identify a certain state of simple seeing that has at most minimal cognitive engagement.

40. Seeing-as has received a great deal of attention in the scholarly literature because it seems to involve the perception of some object in the external world, but also clearly engages the perceiver's concepts. See Robert Audi,

imaginative seeing, or what is colloquially called in English “seeing in the mind’s eye.”⁴¹

Philosophers like Samuel Todes and Edward Casey have also tried to theorize the imagination, or what we might call seeing in the mind’s eye, which does not involve any visual contact with external objects. Following them, I reject the colloquial notion of imagination as meaning *unreal* or merely fictitious, and have adopted this definition: “To imagine is to represent without aiming at things as they actually, presently, and subjectively are.”⁴² That is, to paraphrase another helpful definition from Samuel Todes, imagination is the form of experience by which we represent to ourselves that which is possible.⁴³ This is in contrast to perception, which he defines as “that form of experience by which we are presented with something actual.”⁴⁴ To put it crudely, imagination deals with possible objects, while perception deals with present objects in the material world.⁴⁵ Imagination can be the faculty of an individual, but we can also speak of the social, cultural, and intersubjective dimensions of imagination, or what some theorists call the social imaginary.⁴⁶ This is the set of symbols, values, narratives, and institutions common to a

Moral Perception (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 11 and Colin McGinn, *Mindsight: Image, Dream, Meaning* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48-51. Ludwig Wittgenstein also refers to this type of seeing as “aspect seeing,” in *Philosophical Investigations*, 197. The notion of a “sensory experience [that] is the joint product of outer eyes and inner eye” is of central concern for this project.

41. McGinn, *Mindsight*, 1-7 develops this notion of the mind’s eye at greater length.

42. I follow a definition outlined in the following article: Shen-yi Liao and Tamar Gendler, “Imagination,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta.

43. Samuel Todes, *Body and World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 130.

44. Ibid.

45. For a phenomenological investigation of imagination, see Edward S. Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), xv-xvi, 1-20, for more on the psychology of imagination, see Gregory Curie, and Ian Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and for a treatment of imagination that engages South Asian materials, see David Shulman, *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 154.

46. For instance, Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987).

particular social group by which that group represents themselves and their world. An individual's imagination, and indeed perception of the world, is always influenced by this social imaginary. Indeed, one important feature of Tibetan pilgrimage is the collective imaginary about what pilgrimage mountains look like, even if the individual herself cannot see it in that way.⁴⁷

Place and Materiality

Another issue that raises important theoretical questions concerns the nature of place and materiality. One of the main questions in this thesis is how Tibetan pilgrimage engages sacred places and the material landscape in order to transform perception. How do these places facilitate such transformations, and how do they resist them? As such, it is helpful to consider the ways scholars have tried to understand the categories of place and materiality. These two categories are of course quite different, and thinking of pilgrimage through the lens of place leads to a somewhat different picture than thinking of it through the lens of materiality. That said, these two categories are related in important ways.

To begin with the category of place, scholars studying the anthropology and phenomenology of place have explored the ways in our experiences of any particular place are always already rich with meaning.⁴⁸ That is, when we encounter a place, we encounter the stories, historical events, social identities, and modes of comportment associated with the place.

47. Tibetans have their own sophisticated accounts of the mind, but do not generally describe a *faculty* analogous to imagination. Instead, we find discussions of things appearing before the mind (*vid la snang ba*, *blo'i 'char*), emanations of the mind (*vid kyis sprul pa*), or other such formulations. During visualization practice, moreover, texts will tell the practitioner not to “imagine” or “visualize”—though translations sometimes add this language—but rather to generate (*bskyed*) or to cultivate (*bsgoms*). Nor do Tibetans invoke anything analogous to the imagination in describing pilgrimage. Emic Tibetan accounts of how vision is transformed do not make use of the imagination. For the purposes of a history of religions project, however, I believe such concepts help us in interpreting these practices.

48. One particularly insightful book in this regard is Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

Edward Casey describes this idea with the phrase “places gather.”⁴⁹ He even suggests that places can collapse time. Visitors to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, for example, are in some sense coming into contact with the historic battle there. Places, according to Casey, are therefore not just mute backdrops for human action and projection. Rather, places and their gathered associations perdure through time in such a way that their meaning precedes the humans who visit them. Places can thus be said to structure human experience. It is certainly right to say that humans construct places—indeed we can understand some pilgrimage texts as participating in the construction of sacred space—but it is also true that places shape humans as well. In encountering a holy mountain, then, Tibetan pilgrims are not simply encountering a pile of rocks and stones, but experiencing the stories told about that place, the events that happened there, and the cultural meaning of that place.

My approach to the issue of place is also influenced by the work of Henri Lefebvre, who argues that we do not experience the bare physical aspects of the place, but rather experience the ideological and cultural dimensions associated with and embedded in that place at the same time. In his 1974 work *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre approaches the question of how people construct and experience place by outlining three *modes* of place that form an ever-shifting trialectic: perceived space (*le perçu*), conceived space (*le conçu*), and lived space (*le vécu*).⁵⁰ Lefebvre’s work is useful because it gives us a way of thinking about how Tibetan pilgrimage texts help construct place and how pilgrims then experience that place. Although Lefebvre’s work is complex and resists easy summarization, these modes can be roughly equated to real or physical space; imagined or conceptual space, which contains ideologies and abstract

49. See Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

50. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

representation; and lived space, which serves as the third pole of the trialectic.⁵¹ Lefebvre argues against the common-sense impulse to say that people experience physical space first, possibly with representations of ideology layered on top. Instead, what people actually experience (lived space) is always already a blend of both perceived space and conceived space—what Heather Blair calls “real-and-imagined” space.⁵² This reflects Lefebvre’s idea that people are not living in a world in which the bare facts of physical existence are perceived directly. Neither, however, are people living in a world where ideology is totally determinative of experienced reality. There is always some aspect of place that escapes total ideological formation.

This brings us to the issue of materiality. Both Casey and Lefebvre thus point to the ways in which places are never merely physical, and that we always experience them as pervaded with social and historical meaning. Their views are representative of a broader tendency in humanities scholarship to point to the ways in which culture and discourse shape the way people experience the world. Indeed, this project participates in that tendency by exploring the ways in which Buddhist traditions generally and Tibetan pilgrimage traditions in particular seek to transform perception. Nevertheless, some scholars have also started to grow uncomfortable with the idea that everything is discursively constructed and that any reference to the physical at all represents a kind of naive positivism.

As such, some scholars are trying to develop ways to understand physical matter not

51. While perceived, physical space is the seemingly the easiest to understand because it seems to simply be there, it not that simple: this physical space almost encodes ideas about the space and the purposes for which it should be used. Think, for example, of a lecture hall with a lectern in the center and desks all around. The classroom was built in this way based on a certain model of what learning and education looks like, and the ways in which the space can be used are limited by the physical configuration of the space, leading to the reproduction of the same practices (i.e. lecturing) for which the room was designed. As such, we might characterize the room—and perceived space in general—as materialized spatial practice. In the Tibetan case, we might say that the circumambulation route (often with *mani* stones or prayer wheels) around a monastery or sacred place is a materialization of certain spatial practices.

52. See Heather Blair, *Real and Imagined: The Peak of Gold in Heian Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015).

merely as a passive backdrop to human activity, but rather to understand the ways in which material objects make a difference in the world. Scholars such as Bruno Latour and Jane Bennet reject the notion that the world is split up into human agents and material patients, and explore the ways in which material objects act as mediators or even agents in their own right.⁵³ Throughout this project, we will see the ways in which the material dimensions of pilgrimage and of holy mountains themselves makes a difference, and we will ask to what extent we can say that mountains act as agents in the process of pilgrimage.

It is difficult to think about non-discursive physical reality as such, particularly in a project engaging primarily textual sources. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost note, “there is an apparent paradox in thinking about matter: as soon as we do so, we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within the space that opens up, a host of immaterial things seems to emerge: language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul; also imagination, emotions, values, meaning, and so on.”⁵⁴ Nevertheless, I do want to carve out space for recognition of the material aspects of pilgrimage and pilgrimage mountains, for it seems to me that to understand pilgrimage, we must find ways of attending to its material dimensions.

One particularly interesting quality of the material for the purposes of this project is that it seems to resist ideological reformation. For example, Tibetan pilgrimage texts tell pilgrims that the mountain in front of them is actually a divine palace, and yet try as they might, pilgrims cannot see it that way. There is something *there* that pushes back against discursive formation. In addition to the intransigence of the material world, this example also points to the intransigence

53. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), as well as Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

54. Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-2.

of the pilgrim's perceptual style. Although culture shapes the way people see and experience the world, it appears that there may be limits to how much it can transform ordinary perception. The ordinary structures of human perception are themselves resistant to radical refiguration. Janet Gyatso points to this intransigence of material reality in her study of empirical trends in Tibetan medicine, calling it the "inchoate intractability of the material world."⁵⁵ Though humans try to contain and classify the material world, it stubbornly refuses to conform to our ideas of how it is supposed to be.

We might also, however, note the opposite quality of the material. That is, there is *something* about the mountain, outside of ideology and culture, that contributes to it being seen as a divine palace. Something about the place elicits certain ideas and perceptions. What that something *is* is difficult to put into words, although it might include features like their height or shape. Nevertheless, we want to track this aspect of pilgrimage mountains' materiality in order to understand how it contributes to the overall pilgrimage experience.

The scholarship on place and materiality suggest a range of ways of thinking about how Tibetan pilgrimage engages holy mountains. Scholarship on place suggests that places are thoroughly enculturated such that they shape the way people experience them, which indicates that we should look to the ways in which these places are constructed and imagined. Scholarship on materiality, however, suggests that there are material constraints on the extent to which religions can reimagine the world, which indicates that we should look to the ways in which places resist human categories and imaginings. One of our goals, then, is to trace how the stubbornly intransigent material world resists Tibetan pilgrimage traditions' attempt to transform perception of it. Another goal, on the opposite side, is to trace how the material world *enables*

55. Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 195.

this attempt.

Texts, Practices, Readers

Another important theoretical issue this thesis raises is the role that texts and writing play in Tibetan pilgrimage. What relationship do these pilgrimage texts have to the practice of pilgrimage, and what is the relationship between texts and readers? Or, since it may very well have been the case that many Tibetan pilgrims heard rather than read pilgrimage texts, what is the relationship between these texts and their aural audiences? Throughout, my presumption is that texts do not necessarily give us transparent windows into what actually happened, but rather that they play an active role shaping pilgrims and pilgrimage practices. One of our goals, then, is to develop a better sense of *how* they participate in and shape the goal of transforming perception.

To that end, I draw on historian Dominic LaCapra's distinction between the "documentary" and "work-like" aspects of texts. LaCapra argued against historians who assumed that documents like tax rolls were legitimate historical sources because they straightforwardly documented the past and that literary works such as novels were illegitimate historical sources because they deal with emotions and aesthetics. Instead, LaCapra suggested that all texts had documentary and work-like aspects. The documentary, he wrote, "situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it," and the work-like "supplements empirical reality by adding to and subtracting from it... bringing into the world something that did not exist before."⁵⁶ To put it simply, the documentary describes how the world is, and the work-like tries to make the world into what it is

56. Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 30.

not yet.

Insofar as pilgrimage texts have both documentary and work-like aspects, there is not an identical relationship between text and practice. These texts do give us valuable information about pilgrimage practices, but not by transparently documenting pilgrimage practices as they actually happened. It is helpful in this regard to consult the work of anthropologists who have worked on Tibetan pilgrimage. Toni Huber, for example, has suggested that scholars are often wrong to understand Tibetan pilgrimage in terms of Buddhist metaphysical imperatives such as karma, merit, and rebirth,⁵⁷ and Katia Buffetrille has argued that textual sources are sometimes irrelevant to what pilgrims actually do.⁵⁸ These accounts do not necessarily delegitimize a textually-based approach to pilgrimage, but they remind us that there is a gap between discourses about how pilgrimage *should* be practiced and evidence about how it is *actually* practiced.

Rather, in recognizing the work-like aspects of pilgrimage texts, I read them as attempting in various ways to transform their contexts and work on potential audiences.⁵⁹ They may or may not succeed in actually effecting such a transformation, but I take them as at least attempting to do so. Our question is *how*, whether through articulating certain ideals, describing the extraordinary reality of the pilgrimage place, or attempting to direct the pilgrim's attention towards certain kinds of objects.

One way of thinking about how pilgrimage texts worked on their audiences is to invoke

57. Toni Huber, "Putting the Gnäs Back into Gnäs-Skor: Rethinking Tibetan Pilgrimage Practice," in *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Toni Huber, (Dharamsala, H.P.: The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1999), 77–104.

58. Katia Buffetrille, "The Great Pilgrimage of A Myes rMa-Chen: Written Traditions, Living Realities," in *Mandala and Landscape*, ed. A. W. Macdonald (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997), 75–132.

59. Toni Huber has already noted some of the ways in which pilgrimage guidebooks aim to work on pilgrims. He writes, "guidebooks are written and styled to direct and evoke certain responses from those who use them." Toni Huber, "Guide to La-Phyi Mandala: History, Landscape, and Ritual in Western Tibet," in *Mandala and Landscape*, ed. A. W. Macdonald, 235.

Umberto Eco's distinction between the model reader and the empirical reader.⁶⁰ We will likely never know how an actual Tibetan pilgrim in the 17th century might have experienced pilgrimage, nor what they did on any given day. Nevertheless, careful attention to pilgrimage texts can still give us insight into how they might conceive of the ideal or model pilgrim, which we can presume had influence on how actual pilgrims acted and what they tried to achieve.

Eco distinguishes the model reader from actual empirical readers who may read a text in whatever way they please. The model reader is the type of reader that the text anticipates and tries to create. Such a reader is attentive to the various aspects of the text and participates in the itinerary of meaning laid out by the text.⁶¹ Eco takes this kind of participation on the part of the model reader to be central to the act of reading and interpreting a text. He takes texts on their own as fundamentally *incomplete* insofar as the text "asks the reader to fill in a whole series of gaps." He continues, "Every text, after all (as I have already written), is a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of the work."⁶² In deploying particular narrative strategies and eliciting this kind of participation, texts *structure* the way in which the model reader respond to them. Again, actual empirical readers may ignore these textual strategies and still get many different meanings from the text, and even model readers can and will interpret texts in different ways, but such responses are still meaningfully structured by the text. In studying these texts, then, we are trying to understand the narrative strategies embedded in the text and how they structure the experience

60. According to Eco, Empirical readers may pick up a text and read it in whatever way she pleases, regardless of how we might say that the text "ought" to be read. By contrast, Eco describes the "model reader" as the type of reader "whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create." Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8.

61. It may seem strange to speak of a text as a kind of agent, but Eco speaks of texts as having model authors that we can distinguish from the text's actual empirical author. The model author, for Eco, is the imagined creator of the narrative strategies embedded in the text. In the case of unsigned and undated pilgrimage guides, for example, we may still speak of the way I which the model author seeks to work on the model reader. Or, for ease of use, we may speak of the way that the text seeks to work on the model reader.

62. *Ibid.*, 3.

of the model reader. Eco develops the analytical terms outlined above for interpreting fictional texts, but we may be able to transpose these distinctions to the realm of pilgrimage, which is similarly structured by texts.

The work of LaCapra and Eco thus suggest ways of thinking about the relationship between text and practice and about the relationship between texts and readers. Following them, I employ a reading strategy in which I attempt to discern what the text thinks of as its model audience and how the text elicits certain participation and reactions from that audience. I ask, for example, what pilgrimage texts seem to assume about their readers, as well as what sorts of participation they seem to require.

Contributions to Scholarship

This project contributes to a number of scholarly conversations taking place in religious studies and the humanities, as well as in Buddhist studies and Tibetan studies. First and foremost, my research contributes to our understanding of vision as a site of human formation and reformation. In this respect, it follows the broader “visual turn” in the humanities⁶³ and religious studies,⁶⁴ which is characterized by an interest in vision and the gaze, culturally patterned ways of looking, and the circulation of images. The visual turn is closely allied with the study of visual culture, which draws on but extends beyond traditional art historical methods, studying images and objects of vision in the context of embodied and habitual practices of looking, representing, displaying, and figuring.⁶⁵ In centering questions about vision and ways of looking, this project

63. See volumes such as Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, ed. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed. *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

64. See, for example, David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze* and Birgit Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible.”

contributes to this small but growing body of work. In so doing, it contributes to our understanding of how textual materials and practices participate in the formation of vision. Furthermore, in this project I develop the notion of “co-seeing” and “practices of seeing” in order to contribute to an analytical language for understanding such practices.

Another related question that I address is the question of how religious traditions make that which is invisible into something visible, present, and real.⁶⁶ Scholars such as Brigit Meyer have advocated for an understanding of religion as a practice of mediation. Religion, she argues, “posits and sets out to bridge a gap between the here and now and something “beyond,”⁶⁷ and engages a wide variety of media in order to do so. Scholars of religion then, ought to focus on these media and the ways in which they mediate. She writes, “One of the advantages of an understanding of religion as a practice of mediation is that it no longer takes the practices, objects, and other forms through which religion becomes manifest in the world as secondary to beliefs, meanings, and values, but as necessary forms through which the ‘beyond’ becomes accessible or the ‘invisible’ is ‘shown.’”⁶⁸ Such an approach focuses our attention not on a disembodied set of ideas understood to be preexistent to our informants, but rather on the chains of mediators through which a certain vision of reality is continually remade as real. It is important, moreover, to take seriously the material, embodied, and sensory nature of these

65. Brigit Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible,” 335.

66. I draw here on Robert Orsi’s definition of religion as “the practice of making visible the invisible, of concretizing the order of the universe, the nature of human life and its destiny, and the various possibilities of human interiority itself, as these are understood in various cultures at different times.” Robert Orsi, “Material Children: Making God’s Presence Real Through Catholic Boys and Girls,” In *Religion, Media and Culture: A Reader*, edited by G. Lynch, J.P. Mitchell, and A. Strahan (London: Routledge, 2012), 147. Cited in Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible,” 334.

67. This definition of religion is very similar to one outlined in Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Both also draw explicitly on the work of Bruno Latour.

68. Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible,” 337.

mediations. Through investigating the relationship between various mediators present in Tibetan pilgrimage, including physical places, texts such as pilgrimage guides, shared visual imaginaries, particular practices of seeing, and the structures of ordinary sense perception, asks how the Tibetan pilgrimage tradition makes the visionary landscape of divine palaces visible and *real* for pilgrims.⁶⁹ It thus offers a case study for thinking through how religious traditions make that which is ordinarily invisible real.

Pilgrimage is a particularly potent site for thinking about cultivating vision and making the invisible real because in pilgrimage, the object of visual experience is, at least from one perspective, a mundane physical place. That is, unlike other methods for cultivating vision in Buddhist traditions, like interacting with art objects or constructing a visualization before the mind's eye, the pilgrim is trying to transform perception of a physical place. As such, my research also contributes to growing scholarly interest in the material world. This interest, sometimes referred to as new materialism,⁷⁰ arises out of a desire to understand physical matter not merely as the inert backdrop of human agency, but to foreground the ways in which it is dynamic and impactful.⁷¹ Scholars interested in materiality highlight the ways in which human and non-human actors are entangled in complex chains that resist the notion that humans have agency and material objects have none.

Insofar as pilgrimage involves practices of traveling across the physical landscape and visiting a physical place, it is already a practice that engages the material world. Even more importantly, however, insofar as Tibetan pilgrimage involves trying to see a physical place as

69. Another analogous work, albeit one that does not use visual materials, is Tanya M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), which tries to understand how Evangelicals make an invisible God real.

70. See, for example, Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms*.

71. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, as well as Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

something other than it appears to our ordinary sense perception, it involves a particular kind of engagement with the material world in which pilgrims are trying to override their ordinary sense perception of the place. As is made clear throughout the textual tradition, however, the material world stubbornly resisted these attempts. I suggest that the Tibetan pilgrimage tradition recognized and understood this resistance, and as such developed practices of working *with* the material world. This project, then, represents an opportunity for understanding ways of working with the material world in order to change one's perception of it.

Scholars in Buddhist studies have already addressed or are beginning to address some of these questions in various ways. For instance, scholars have begun to attend to the visual aspects of Buddhism, including the visual culture around images and architecture,⁷² practices of looking in visualization or meditation contexts,⁷³ the pervasive presence of visual metaphors in Buddhist philosophy,⁷⁴ and visual themes in Buddhist narrative literature.⁷⁵ The present thesis contributes to that growing body of work by introducing a hitherto unstudied arena in which questions about sight and seeing can be posed: pilgrimage texts. Though much work has been done on Buddhist pilgrimage,⁷⁶ relatively little has engaged questions of vision or visual culture.⁷⁷ Furthermore,

72. For example, Julie Gifford, *Buddhist Practice and Visual Culture: The Visual Rhetoric of Borobudur* and Eugene Yuejin Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*.

73. For example, Christopher Hatchell, *Naked Seeing: The Great Perfection, the Wheel of Time, and Visionary Buddhism in Renaissance Tibet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Eric M. Greene, "Visions and Visualizations: In Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century Experimental Psychology," *History of Religions* 55, no. 3 (January 26, 2016): 289–328.

74. For example, Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness*, Jacob Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom*, and David McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism*.

75. For example, Andy Rotman, *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*.

76. Scholars working on pilgrimage in Buddhism include Ian Reader, Heather Blair, Barbara Ambros, James Robson, Toni Huber, and others.

77. Exceptions in this regard are Wen-Shing Chou, "Reimagining the Buddhist Universe: Pilgrimage and Cosmography in the Court of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876–1933)," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 2

existing studies of the visual dynamics of Buddhism have not explored what the Buddhist project to transform perception looks like when it is attempted out in the material world. Scholars have pointed to the importance of materiality in Buddhist traditions in ways that have engaged new materialism.⁷⁸ These studies challenge the notion of Buddhism as solely interested in abstract or other-worldly matters, and focus our attention on the myriad ways in which Buddhist communities and practices are thoroughly entangled with materiality. Thus far, however, such studies of Buddhist materialism have not considered questions of vision. My research thereby enriches Buddhist studies by addressing each of these broad areas of interest, but also by bringing them together.

This project also furthers our understanding of pilgrimage in Tibet. The past twenty-five years have brought an explosion of scholarly writing about various aspects of Tibetan pilgrimage. While there are as yet relatively few monographs dealing primarily with pilgrimage, there have been several collected volumes and a special issue of the *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, as well as other individual articles, that have explored the many dimensions of Tibetan pilgrimage. In particular, the anthropologists Toni Huber and Katia Buffetrille have led the field by documenting and analyzing a variety of pilgrimages, both historical and contemporary.⁷⁹

(2014): 419–445; and Wen-Shing Chou, “The Visionary Landscape of Wutai Shan in Tibetan Buddhism from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century” (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), as well as D. Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

78. For instance, see James Duncan Gentry, *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism: The Life, Writings, and Legacy of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen* (Boston: Brill, 2017), Fabio Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), and Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World*.

79. See primarily the work of Katia Buffetrille, e.g. Katia Buffetrille, “Reflections on Pilgrimages to Sacred Mountains, Lakes and Caves,” in *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, ed. Alex McKay (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998), 18–34, and “The Great Pilgrimage of A myes rMa-chen,” as well as the work of Toni Huber, e.g. Toni Huber, “Putting the Gnäs Back into Gnäs-skor,” and *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in*

My work adds to this growing body of research by introducing new methodological approaches and new theoretical considerations. In focusing primarily on textual sources, this project complements the predominantly anthropological approach that has thus far been taken by scholars. Scholars have considered textual materials about pilgrimage,⁸⁰ but have often criticized naive attempts to use these sources as a way to get at what “really happened.” Indeed, scholars such as Buffetrille have argued that actual pilgrimage practices often have little to do with written accounts.⁸¹ My approach does not assume that texts about pilgrimage tell us what pilgrims actually did on pilgrimage, but it does take seriously the ways in which texts help construct visual imaginaries, cultivate certain practices of seeing, and thus facilitate certain kinds of experiences for the attentive pilgrim. In addition, it contributes to the field by introducing previously unstudied sources, including the writings of Chökyi Drakpa and Chödrak Yeshe, as well as sources that have been treated very briefly, as is the case with the texts involved in the so-called “Tibetan Geography Controversy,”⁸² or with an entirely different focus, such as Khatag Zamyak’s diary.⁸³

Overall, it is my hope that this project demonstrates the riches of visual approaches to

Southeast Tibet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

80. Toni Huber in particular has done this well. For example, see Toni Huber “A Guide to the La-Phyi Mandala,” as well as *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

81. Katia Buffetrille in particular has questioned whether written pilgrimage guides have anything to do with actual pilgrimage practices. See Katia Buffetrille, “The Blue Lake of A-Mdo and Its Island: Legends and Pilgrimage Guide,” *The Tibet Journal* 19.4 (Winter 1994), 2-22, Katia Buffetrille, “The Great Pilgrimage of A-Myes rMa-Chen,” and Katia Buffetrille, “The Pilgrimage to Mount Kha ba dkar po: A Metaphor for Bardo?,” in *Searching for the Dharma, Finding Salvation: Buddhist Pilgrimage in Time and Space* (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2014).

82. These texts are listed in Toni Huber, “Where Exactly Are Caritra, Devikota and Himavat? A Sacred Geography Controversy and the Development of Tantric Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites in Tibet,” *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies* 16, no. 3–4 (1990): 121–64.

83. Lucia M. S. Galli, “The Accidental Pilgrimage of a Rich Beggar” The Account of tshong dpon Kha stag ’Dzam yag’s Travels through Tibet, Nepal, and India (1944-1956),” D.Phil. University of Oxford, 2017.

the study of religion, self-consciously reflects on the methodological issues that arise when doing so, and develops a framework other scholars can adopt and develop in their own future work.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation comprises seven chapters. In the first two chapters, I introduce the main subjects of the dissertation: pilgrimage and perception. In chapter one, I provide a broad introduction to pilgrimage in Buddhism generally and in Tibet specifically. Drawing from a range of sources from the Pali canon to contemporary ethnographical works, I survey the variety of pilgrimage practices across Buddhist traditions, as well as some common themes, in order to contextualize Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage practice. I also distinguish the various phenomena that are particularly salient in Tibetan pilgrimage, including pilgrimage to temples, holy cities, lakes, mountains, and caves, as well as a number of related phenomena, including hidden lands, treasure traditions, and mountain hermitage practice.

In chapter two, I turn to theories of perception by considering the question of what it means to see on pilgrimage. I have framed this project around the goal of pilgrims learning to see a mountain as sacred, but it is not immediately clear what this kind of seeing *is*. Furthermore, given that the tradition assumes that most pilgrims will not in fact be able to see the mountain as a sacred palace, how are they supposed to see? Is seeing something that can be *willed* into existence? I begin the chapter by surveying earlier Buddhist approaches to perception, as well as various Tibetan words for sight and seeing. In so doing, I unpack the variety of ways Buddhists have thought about and attempted to transform perception, as well as the range of terms and meanings grouped together under the general category of seeing. I then move to consider advice texts which devote a great deal of explicit attention to how people should see on pilgrimage.

These texts are often concerned with the relationship between the pilgrim's body and mind—with vision serving as an intermediary between body and mind—and emphasize that seeing correctly on pilgrimage involves actively controlling attention and cultivating faith. These materials also depict the bad pilgrim as one who goes through the physical motions of pilgrimage without mental or affective engagement, and who consequently sees the pilgrimage place only in ordinary ways, in contrast to the good pilgrim who faithfully and actively tries to see the pilgrimage place in an extraordinary way.

Next, in chapters three and four, I explore Tibetan critiques of pilgrimage practice. In chapter three, I explore a number of Tibetan critiques of pilgrimage practice. One of the central issues driving these critiques is the question of whether practices like pilgrimage that engage the external landscape are worthwhile, or whether it is better for practitioners to focus on internally directed practices like meditation or philosophical study. Though pilgrimage seems to have been widespread in Tibetan religious practice, some authors wondered whether difficult travel to distant places is a distraction from the *real* work of self-cultivation.

Then, in chapter four I focus on the gap between fantastic descriptions of the wonders of pilgrimage places and the mundane way those same places appear to ordinary visual perception. I analyze a specific debate over the authenticity of Kailash, a mountain in Tibet considered by most Tibetans to be the famed Mount Himavat, described in glorious terms in various Buddhist scriptures. When the famous scholar, Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251), looked at Kailash, he did not see the wonders of Himavat. Instead, he saw only rocks. His rejection of pilgrimage to Kailash set off a centuries-long debate, one that centered on the question of whether it was possible—and if so, how—to reconcile the fabulous descriptions of scriptural Himavat with humans' mundane perception of Kailash. I focus mainly on two texts by Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) and Chödrak

Yeshe (1453-1524), two high-ranking figures at the head of two rival schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Unpacking their arguments, I ask how these figures' different understandings of vision, material reality, and poetic language shape their competing attempts to describe how to transform perception.

The next section transitions from the *theory* of pilgrimage to the question of how to actually *effect* transformations of perception. The three chapters in this section examine three different types of sources and their approaches to this problem.

In chapter five, I focus on an idealized account of how to transform perception by analyzing a work by the high-ranking Drikung master, Chökyi Drakpa (1595-1659), which purports to be the story of how he “opened the doors” (*gnas sgo phye ba*) of a holy mountain by obtaining a direct perception of the mountain as a divine palace. I examine Chökyi Drakpa's account of how he transformed his ordinary perception of the mountain through skilled practices of reading signs in landscape and cultivating the ability to see past surface appearances. I also theorize how this act of vision is understood to permanently alter the sacred place. I suggest Chökyi Drakpa's visionary activities do so by creating a lasting interpenetration between the primordial realm of the deity and the temporal realm of the present day. This interpenetration allows future pilgrims, even those who cannot see the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's maṇḍala, to benefit from the connection between the worlds, and allows some fortunate pilgrims to reenact Chökyi Drakpa's vision of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's maṇḍala.

In chapter six, I explore the genre of pilgrimage guides (*gnas yig*), which purport to provide practical instructions for how to see the pilgrimage place. I identify the various literary strategies by which pilgrimage guides direct pilgrims' attention. I develop an account of how the language of pilgrimage guides facilitates co-seeing by functioning as a kind of extended

metaphor that creates for pilgrims a fantastic vision of the hidden worlds of the pilgrimage place. Meanwhile, the guides constantly draw pilgrims' attention to their ordinary perception of physical world in front of them, thus juxtaposing that fantastic vision of the site with the pilgrims' ordinary perception of it. In so doing, the texts themselves create the conditions for pilgrims seeing the mountain as the divine palace that such guides say it truly is.

In chapter seven, I consider an ordinary pilgrim's attempts to transform of his own perception. I do so by exploring the pilgrim diary of Khatag Zamyak (1896-1961), a merchant who traveled across Tibet in the 1940s. Focusing on his experience at Kailash, I show how Khatag Zamyak employs a variety of practices of seeing, including what I call close looking, visualizing, reading the landscape, recollecting narratives, and identifying signs. These practices mean that Khatag Zamyak both sees the landscape in its ordinary form with his physical eyes and also sees the wondrous landscape depicted in scriptures, guides, and narratives with his mind's eye. Thus in going on pilgrimage, Khatag Zamyak is constantly drawing his focus back and forth between ordinary perception and imaginative vision, a process I refer to as "interweaving worlds."

Finally, in the conclusion, I draw together the various ways in which place and materiality intersect with perception in Tibetan sources on pilgrimage. I thereby highlight that pilgrimage is not solely about human agents transforming the way they see holy mountains, but also involves the mountains themselves having vital force to change humans. I then reflect on the questions of perception that motivated the dissertation, and argue that modern scholarship has much to learn from Tibetan pilgrimage texts' careful attention to the malleability of perception and to the power of the material world.

Chapter One:

Introduction to Pilgrimage in Buddhism

Prostrating to Lhasa

The 2015 film *Kang Rinpoche*⁸⁴ begins with a shot of two women on a desolate asphalt road. Mountains stretch up behind them, leaving only a corner of gray sky in the frame. White snow covers the tops of the mountains, and there are scrubby greenish patches of vegetation, but for the most part the ground is brown and rocky. The only color comes from the bright red cloth the older figure wears wrapped around her head and a faded pink hooded sweatshirt the younger figure wears under a leather apron. She appears to be no more than ten or eleven. The two figures walk down the road, stopping every few steps to clap the wooden blocks they wear on their hands and lay down in full prostration on the asphalt. It is clearly exhausting, and the older woman lies down for a moment to rest, but the younger girl urges her onward. The camera lingers on these two for almost a minute, which feels like an eternity in a ninety second trailer. The rest of trailer then pulls back to show that these women are part of a larger group of pilgrims all walking and prostrating themselves on the ground. The group continues to walk and prostrate through the falling snow. The trailer ends with the movie's title.

Besides showing a group of pilgrims prostrating down a road though stark landscapes and treacherous weather, the trailer does not indicate anything about the film's plot or subject matter. Nonetheless, these lingering shots of pilgrims raise the question of what these people are doing. Where are they going, and why go there in such a difficult way?

84. Chinese: 冈仁波齐, Pinyin: Gāng Rénbōqí, Tibetan: *Gangs rin po che*, released in English as *Paths of the Soul*.

The film raises these questions by following a group of Tibetan pilgrims for a year as they go on pilgrimage to the holy city of Lhasa and the holy mountain of Kailash (also known as Gang Rinpoche, from which the film draws its title). We could ask these same questions, however, of Buddhist pilgrims more broadly. For while the practice and culture around the visiting of holy sites varies widely across Asia, there is a robust tradition of pilgrimage in Buddhism that dates back to the first centuries after the Buddha's death that is attested to by a broad range of sources.

In this chapter, I will provide a broad introduction to pilgrimage in Buddhism generally and in Tibet specifically in order to provide background and context for the discussions that occur in later chapters. In those chapters, I explore Tibetan pilgrimage texts in terms of how they theorize perception and attempt to transform pilgrim's perception, and will thus be focusing on the perspective of the pilgrim. In this chapter, however, I want to situate those practices more generally. As such, I will draw from sources ranging from the Pali canon to contemporary ethnographies in order to demonstrate the variety of pilgrimage traditions across Buddhist regions.

Pilgrimage in the Pali Canon

As is the case with much about early Buddhist communities, the origins of pilgrimage practice are unclear. Pali Buddhist tradition, however, remembers the Buddha himself as inaugurating the tradition of pilgrimage to important sites from the Buddha's life. Shortly before his death, according to the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, which is preserved in the Pali canon,⁸⁵ the Buddha's

85. There are a number of parallel versions of this text which have similar although slightly different readings. Here I focus on the Pali version, but those interested in slightly different readings in different Sanskrit versions should consult Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, Studies in the Buddhist Traditions (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i

chief disciple Ananda laments the Buddha's imminent passing. He describes how monks used to visit the Buddha after the rainy season in order to see (*dassana*) the Buddha, and expresses sadness that they will no longer be able to see him in this way. In response, the Buddha says to Ananda:

Ananda, there are four places the sight of which should arouse emotion in the faithful. Which are they? "Here the Tathāgata was born" is the first. "Here the Tathāgata attained supreme enlightenment" is the second. "Here the Tathāgata set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma" is the third. "Here the Tathāgata attained the Nibbāna-element without remainder" is the fourth. And, Ananda, the faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers will visit those places. And any who die while making the pilgrimage to these shrines with a devout heart will, at the breaking-up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world.⁸⁶

The Buddha does not command his followers to visit these sites, but he clearly thinks that visiting places associated with his life and teachings—generally interpreted to refer to Lumbinī, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kuśinagar in present day north India and Nepal—is beneficial. As he is preparing to die, the Buddha anticipates a time when his followers will not be able to see or access him directly. Seeing the places where the Buddha once stood, however, is presented as a solution to this problem. Pilgrimage to those places, the text seems to suggest, grants indirect access to the Buddha. By seeing the places at which significant events of the Buddha's life took place, the pilgrim will think to themselves that *here* the Buddha was born or *here* the Buddha gained enlightenment.

The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* suggests that seeing these places will generate powerful emotions on the part of visitors. It describes the sites as being *saṃvejanīyāni*, that is, as arousing *saṃvega*. *Saṃvega* is an important term in early Buddhist literature, and conveys agitation,

Press, 1997), 115-8.

86. Ajahn Sumedho and Maurice Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 263.

excitement, and intensity. In particular, it refers to the shock and dismay when one realizes the reality of one's situation, and is often said to be generated by old age, sickness, death, and suffering. Such powerful emotions are considered valuable because they break people out of the lull of everyday life and motivate them to Buddhist practice. The places where the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, taught, and died serve as a concrete and visible reminder of the Buddha's past presence *and current absence*, and so seeing them generates a powerful sense of agitation and urgency on the part of pilgrims. Implicitly, the Buddha seems to be suggesting that physically traveling to these places and seeing them arouses urgency in a way that merely hearing about or thinking about these places cannot do. Something about *seeing* (Pali: *dassana*) these places and feeling the Buddha's past presence and current absence generates urgency in an especially powerful way. This urgency may then motivate them to redouble their own efforts in practice.

Visiting pilgrimage places seems also to require a sense of faith or devotion.⁸⁷ The Buddha seems aware that not all pilgrims who visit the site will do so with a heart of devotion—otherwise it would not make sense to say that only those who go to the sites with a heart of devotion will then be reborn in heaven—but promises that those who do adopt the appropriate devotional attitude towards the site will gain merit and a good rebirth. Thus from the earliest references to pilgrimage in Buddhist texts, pilgrimage and seeing sacred sites is connected to both an involuntary emotional reaction and to the need to voluntarily adopt a particular devotional attitude. We will see this dynamic continue to play out in Tibetan pilgrimage materials.

87. The text describes pilgrims as *pasādika*, that is, as having *pasāda*, meaning clarity, serene confidence, or faith. We should note that Buddhist texts often pair *pasāda* with *saṃvega*, the term discussed above. *Pasāda* prevents *saṃvega* from turning into despair and hopelessness. With both urgency and clear-eyed confidence, practitioners will be motivated and able to do the work necessary to practice effectively.

The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* also describes how, after the Buddha's death, his body was cremated and his relics were divided into eight portions that were entrusted to eight kings.⁸⁸ These kings promised to erect earthen mounds called *stūpas* to hold the remains, and to hold festivals in the Buddha's honor. The *sutta* does not explicitly state that these *stūpas* will become sites of pilgrimage, but it seems clear that part of the reason why the Buddha's relics are portioned out to different kings and kingdoms is so that the *stūpas* in which the Buddha's remains are held can become places where people can encounter the Buddha. The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* thus suggests two features that we know become important parts of Buddhist pilgrimage practice: pilgrimage to places where important events in the Buddha's life occurred and memorial *stūpas* that are said to contain the Buddha's relics.

Pilgrimage and Holy Places in Early Indian Buddhism

While the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* thus locates the beginning of Buddhist traditions of pilgrimage with the Buddha's death, scholars interested in early Buddhism have tried to better understand the development of various practices we might refer to as pilgrimage from a historical perspective.⁸⁹ To that end, scholars have examined other works in the Pali Canon,⁹⁰ texts like the *Aśokāvadāna*,⁹¹ accounts from Chinese pilgrims who visited India from the 5th to

88. Ajahn Sumedho and Maurice Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 275-7.

89. One particularly useful source in this regard that gathers much of the research on this question is John S. Strong, "The Beginnings of Buddhist Pilgrimage: The Four Famous Sites in India," in *Searching for the Dharma, Finding Salvation*, ed. Christoph Cueppers and Max Deeg, 49-63.

90. As will be further discussed in chapter two, scholars have found at least four versions of the paragraph of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* that discusses pilgrimage, as well as parallels to the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* that do not discuss pilgrimage at all. For discussion of these different versions, see Strong, "The Beginnings of Buddhist Pilgrimage," 50-4.

91. See for example, John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka: A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

7th centuries,⁹² inscriptions dating back to the time of Emperor Aśoka in the 3rd century CE,⁹³ and archeological excavations of old monastic or pilgrimage sites.⁹⁴

Based on these sources, scholars have debated the antiquity of the section of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* about pilgrimage. Some such as André Bareau have suggested that this call to pilgrimage must have been added to the sutta centuries after the compilation of the rest of the Pali Canon. They postulate that pilgrimage practices grew up around Buddhist communities in the centuries after the Buddha's death, and that this passage attempts to retroactively provide justification for already existing pilgrimage practices.⁹⁵ It is difficult to know with any certainty.

It is likely, however, that by the first century BCE, a couple hundred years following the Buddha's death, a number of related pilgrimage traditions developed. There was pilgrimage to *stūpas* believed to contain part of the Buddha's relics, *bodhi* trees and other kinds of sacred tree, shrines, images in monasteries, monasteries themselves, and places important to the life of the Buddha. Somewhat later, Chinese pilgrims describe extended processional rituals by which people venerated the Buddha's "sacred traces."⁹⁶ *Stūpas* in particular were the focus of much Buddhist pilgrimage, and pilgrims would make donations, offerings, or walk clockwise around

92. The most important of these pilgrims were Faxian, who traveled in India from 399-412; Xuanzang, who traveled in India from 629-645, and Yijing who studied at Nalanda in north India from 675-685. For an overview of these pilgrims as well as a list of additional sources, see T. Sen, "The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrims Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing," *Education About Asia* 11, no. 3 (2006): 24-33.

93. For more on these inscriptions, see Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*.

94. A useful source in this regard is Lars Fogelin, *An Archaeological History of Indian Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

95. André Bareau, "La Composition et les Étapes de la Formation Progressive du Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra Ancien," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 66, no. 1 (1979): 45-103. For a source in English, see Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 503.

96. See Todd Lewis, "A History of Buddhist Ritual," in *The Buddhist World*, ed. John S. Strong (New York: Routledge, 2016), 318-37, 332.

these *stūpas*. Some of these practices, particularly those surrounding sacred trees, may even be continuations of pre-Buddhist rituals of honoring spirits or deities believed to live in those trees.⁹⁷

In addition, the network of sites associated with events in the Buddha's life continued to develop and expand far beyond the area of the Gangetic plain where most of the Buddha's teaching likely occurred. We find a variety of formulations about places to go on pilgrimage, including not only the four sites of the Buddha's birth, awakening, first teaching, and death that were discussed above. We also find formulations involving the "eight great places" (Pali: *aṭṭhamahāthāna*), which includes the original four and then four other places where the Buddha is said to have performed miracles. In addition, we find formulations involving ten sites, thirty-two sites, and various other configurations. What is more, the particular sites included in various formulations varied widely, and were different in different times and places. Toni Huber calls this phenomenon "the shifting terrain of the Buddha."⁹⁸ In other words, there is no one fixed set of places or practices that have constituted Buddhist pilgrimage across different eras or geographic boundaries. Rather, Buddhist sacred geography changed over time, and different communities recognized different places as holy.

Alongside practices of traveling to particular earthly places, Indian Buddhists also developed traditions of imagining pure lands where people could hope to be reborn in the next life.⁹⁹ Pure lands are wondrous places of comfort and beauty where a central buddha preaches the

97. For more description of these tree rituals and their existence across Indian culture, see Albertina Nugteren, *Belief, Bounty, And Beauty: Rituals Around Sacred Trees in India* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

98. Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 17-24.

99. The term "pure land" itself was likely coined in China (淨土; pinyin: *jìngtǔ*) rather than in India. The equivalent Sanskrit term is *buddhakṣetra*, but this was not used in the early texts now considered to be the precursors of pure land traditions. However, I follow scholars such as Jan Nattier in using pure land to refer to early Sanskrit texts

dharma continuously, and were thought to be magically emanated by a buddha or bodhisattva (many traditions are connected with Amitābha in particular). Those who are born there live in bliss and comfort, and they attain enlightenment easily. These pure lands thus contrasted with earthly life, which are filled with suffering and where it is difficult to find the time or capacity to undertake the arduous practices thought to bring about enlightenment. By visualizing or praying for rebirth in the pure land, practitioners hoped to be reborn in a place where they would have the support to attain enlightenment quickly. Interpretations of pure land texts varied, with some people thinking of the pure land as a kind of heaven that one could be reborn to after death, others thinking of it as a physical place located in some direction (often the west), and still others arguing that the pure land exists only in the mind, and as such practitioners can learn to see the place where they already live as the pure land. Pure land texts themselves did not become the basis of pilgrimage traditions, but the language and imagery of pure lands became very important for later pilgrimage traditions.¹⁰⁰

Tantric Pilgrimage

One type of pilgrimage in Buddhist India that is particularly important for understanding Tibetan pilgrimage is tantric pilgrimage. “Tantra,” also referred to as esoteric Buddhism, the “Vajra vehicle” (*vajrayāna*), or the “Mantra vehicle” (*mantrayāna*), defies easy definition, as the category groups together a number of diverse ritual and intellectual formations, and it may very

focused on Amitābha, Akṣobhya, and other celestial buddhas. See Jan Nattier, “The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece in the History of Pure Land Buddhism,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 71–102, 73–5.

100. For a useful introduction to pure land, see Georgios T. Halkias and Richard K. Payne, *Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts: An Anthology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019). For more on how pure land texts were taken up in Tibet, see Georgios T. Halkias, *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 30).

well be the case that tantra had ritual antecedents long predating any textual documentation.¹⁰¹

Caveats aside, tantric forms of Buddhism claim to offer a path for advanced practitioners to attain enlightenment and spiritual powers very quickly. Often, tantric texts will claim that practitioners will be able to attain enlightenment in a single lifetime, as opposed to the millions of lifetimes it might take while following exoteric paths. To do so, tantric traditions prescribe a variety of practices, including the use of mandalas, special sounds and incantations known as mantras and *dharanis*, special hand gestures known as *mudras*, deity visualizations, and other rituals, including pilgrimage, and outline a complex system of correspondences between the external world and the bodily components of the individual. By manipulating ritual implements, going to external pilgrimage places, or visualizing themselves as the deity in the mandala, the practitioner can actually change themselves. All of this is undergirded by a philosophy of radical non-dualism which maintains that ultimately there is no difference between the practitioner and the deity. In order to truly understand this, and to realize their own buddha nature, the practitioner uses all of these tantric practices to enact non-dualism, thus rapidly breaking down their conventional dualistic ideas of self and other.

As is the case for so much else in the history of Indian Buddhism, the origin of the phenomena called tantra is unclear. Scholars debate whether Buddhist tantra developed largely in response to Hindu tantra, or whether tantra is a natural development of Buddhist philosophical ideas. They also debate whether tantra emerges from outcaste and tribal communities on the fringes of Indian society, or whether tantra emerged out of the elite monastic institutions.¹⁰²

101. For an overview of the history of the category of tantra, see Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), as well as Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

102. For an overview of the scholarship on the origins of tantra, see Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, especially 17-32.

Scholars believe that forms of Buddhism we might call tantric began to appear in South Asia sometime around the 6th century CE, and continued developing until the decline of Buddhism in India in 1200. During this time, tantric practices that were initially relatively simple developed into highly complex ritual practices and sophisticated philosophical systems. These ideas and practices were systematized in particular textual traditions, such as the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, *Hevajra Tantra*, and *Kalacakra Tantra*. The period of these texts' prominence in Indian Buddhism, from about the 10th to 13th century, was precisely the time when Tibetans undertook massive translation of Buddhist texts into Tibetan. Indian masters traveled in Tibet, Tibetans sought instruction with masters in India and Nepal, and tantric traditions in particular flourished in Tibet. This means that Tibetans were already traveling to what they considered the holy land of India in search of the dharma, and that the tantric Buddhism they found there became particularly influential in Tibet.

Ideas about sacred geography and pilgrimage are included among the wide variety of ritual methods prescribed in tantric traditions. Indian tantric texts describe a network of sacred sites (sometimes twenty-four, sometimes thirty-six, sometimes different amounts) that were believed to be particularly conducive to tantric practice. Though such places were said to be inhabited by fierce spirits and barbarian tribal peoples—indeed, partially *because* such places were filled with danger—they promised difficult but rapid enlightenment.

Such sites were often valorized by both Buddhist and Hindu tantric practitioners, with each side having similar although slightly different accounts for why these places are important. The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, for example, tells of how the Buddhist deity Cakrasaṃvara defeated Maheśvara (also called Rudra or Bhairava) and scattered parts of his body on what are now the twenty-four major and eight minor sites. These texts describe twelve kinds of pilgrimage site:

pīṭha (Tib. *gnas*), *upapīṭha* (Tib. *nye ba'i gnas*), *kṣetra* (Tib. *zhing*), *upakṣetra* (Tib. *nye ba'i zhing*), *chandoha* (Tib. *tsha ndho ha*), *upachandoha* (Tib. *nye ba'i tsha ndho ha*), *melāpaka* (Tib. *'du*), *upamelāpaka* (Tib. *nye ba'i 'du*), *veśma* (sometimes *pīlava*, Tib. *'thung spyod*), *upaveśma* (sometimes, *upapīlava*, Tib. *'thung spyod*), *śmaśāna* (Tib. *dur 'khrod*), and *upaśmaśāna* (Tib. *nye ba'i dur 'khrod*). Texts then identify particular sites as being different kinds of *pīṭha* sites, often with two or three specific places being identified with each type, resulting in counts of twenty-four or thirty-two sites. Sometimes an additional five places—often the four continents and Mount Meru—are added to the total to make thirty-seven. These places generally include familiar names such as Jalendra, Oddiyana, Devikota, or Kalinga, but there is also huge variation, even between texts in the same lineage, about what places are matched with what categories. Notably, these lists of places generally do not include familiar sites of mainstream Buddhist pilgrimage such as Bodhgaya, Amaravati, or Lumbini. Much ink—Tibetan and modern academic—has been spilled trying to arrive at a conclusive list of the South Asian tantric pilgrimage places, but I shall not add to them in this work.¹⁰³

More important for our purposes is the fact that tantric texts often correlate this system of places in the external world with locations in the human body. Tantric texts describe the human body as having a subtle physiology that can be manipulated through advanced tantric practice and that will, when properly harnessed, result in rapid spiritual attainments and ultimately enlightenment. In many cases, each of the external pilgrimage places is correlated with an internal location in this subtle anatomy, which means that sacred places can be seen to exist both

103. For more information about tantric formulations of pilgrimage sites, see Vesna Wallace, *The Inner Kalacakra: A Buddhist Tantric View of the Individual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77-86. See also David Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 68-70, especially 69, no. 2, and Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 206-11.

out in the world and within the body of the tantric practitioner. As such, tantric teachings about pilgrimage can either be interpreted to be about going to these physical places, such as Jalendra, Oddiyana, Devikota and so forth.¹⁰⁴ Such locations would have been considered particularly fruitful places to engage in the internal practices associated with tantric cultivation. Or alternatively, tantric texts can be interpreted to be about internal yoga. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, many tantric commentaries emphasized that the *real* meaning of pilgrimage is about the internal bodily sites, and that practitioners should not make the mistake of over-relying on physical places. Nonetheless, these systems of physical places and ideas about traveling to them to practice there became influential when tantric texts were translated into Tibetan and Tibetans tried to interpret these systems of sacred geography.

Pilgrimage in the Broader Buddhist World

As Buddhism spread from India throughout Asia, pilgrimage networks expanded, both in terms of pilgrims from places like China and Tibet coming to India in search of Buddhist texts, sites associated with the Buddha, and Buddhist centers of learning like Nalanada, and with new centers of Buddhism establishing their own sets of pilgrimage sites. Places like China, Tibet, Japan, and Southeast Asia initially regarded themselves as existing on the edges of the Buddhist world, but as these places developed their own distinctive Buddhist cultures, they often began to see themselves not as existing merely on the margins, but as inhabiting a Buddhist sacred geography, replete with its own set of sacred and powerful sites. Such sites were often places that had long been considered powerful or sacred by virtue of their associations with local deities or

104. While it is unclear what historical practices at these places might have been, anthropologists have studied modern forms of practice at these sites, and have speculated about past practice at them. See, for example, Robert Lewis Gross, *The Sādhus of India: A Study of Hindu Asceticism* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1992).

other religious traditions, but came to be adopted or even “converted” by Buddhist narratives, identities, and modes of veneration. It is important to remember, however, that what we might call Buddhist pilgrimage is actually a diverse set of different practices and meanings, often drawing on or existing alongside local pre- or non-Buddhist forms of engagement. Buddhist pilgrimage, then, encompasses a rich array of different practices, motivations, and understandings.¹⁰⁵

Tibetan Pilgrimage

Kailash is like a king's throne,
With smaller mountains circled around like ministers.
In the eyes of worldly and ignorant,
It has that outer appearance.

To students of the path, however,
Kailash, king of snow mountains,
Is the palace of Cakrasaṃvara,
Like an outer body with a mandala inside.
—Pilgrimage Guide to Kailash¹⁰⁶

Tibetan pilgrimage shares certain features with pilgrimage in the broader Buddhist world, but it also differs from pilgrimage in other regions in important respects. Indeed, much of the scholarship on pilgrimage in Tibet has been concerned with the question of whether it is appropriate to interpret Tibetan pilgrimage practice in terms of Buddhist doctrinal categories or whether it is better to see Tibetan pilgrimage as reflecting Tibetan worldviews that are not

105. For more a general introduction to the varieties of Buddhist pilgrimage, see Kevin Trainor, “Pilgrimage,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), 651-5.

106. *Ti se rgyal po gdan bzhugs la/ ri phran blon pos bskor pa 'dra/ 'jig rten byis pa'i snang ngo la/ phyi ru de 'dra'i rnam pa yod/ lam la slob pa gang zag la/ ti se gangs kyi rgyal po de/ bde mchog 'khor lo'i gzhal yas khang/ phyi nang lus kyi dkyil 'khor bzhin*. Dkon chog bstan 'dzin chos kyi blo gros, *Gangs ri chen po ti se dang mtsho chen ma dros pa bcas kyi sngon byung gi lo rgyus*, in Dge 'dun chos 'phel, ed., *Gnas yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 151. See also Elena de Rossi Filibeck, *Two Tibetan Guide Books to Ti Se and La Phyi* (Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1988), 29.

determined by Sanskritic doctrinal Buddhist ideas.¹⁰⁷ In the following, I will provide a brief introduction to pilgrimage practices in Tibet. While I have thus far referred to “Tibetan pilgrimage” as though it were a single unified phenomenon, it is far more accurate to think of it as a broad category applied by scholars to a set of diverse destinations and practices that share certain overlapping logics, but that differ in meaningful ways. As will become clear, although I focus primarily in this thesis on the visual aspects of Tibetan pilgrimage, this is just one part of a complex and multifaceted set of practices.

In Tibet, the general term for pilgrimage is *nékorwa* (*gnas skor ba*) or *néjelwa* (*gnas mjal ba*). This literally means circling (*bskor*) or meeting (*mjal*) sacred places, or *né* (*gnas*). The term *né* can simply mean place, but in this context indicates a place that is charged with numinous power. These sacred places, which can include sacred mountains, monasteries, lakes, caves, and even holy people, are thought to provide a variety of benefits to pilgrims who visit them.

By all accounts, pilgrimage seems to have been widely popular across all strata of Tibetan society. Pilgrimage required no textual education or elite empowerments, and did not require the mediation of monastic figures, and so was broadly accessible. Pilgrimage was not, however solely a “low” practice that might be contrasted with the “high” practices of monastic study and tantric practice; advanced masters and monks also seem to have engaged in pilgrimage. The specific practices different types of people did at holy places and the ways they interpreted those practices may have varied somewhat, but in general the practice of pilgrimage spanned across social classes.

107. Toni Huber, for example, writes that existing literature on Tibetan pilgrimage has “a tendency to place too much explanatory emphasis on Buddhist doctrines and models rather than viewing pilgrimage in terms of an overall Tibetan worldview, a complex syncretistic religious history, and the observable characteristics of its practice.” *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 7.

The History and Prehistory of Tibetan Pilgrimage

It seems likely that the veneration of holy mountains long predates the arrival of Buddhism, although the lack of written historical records makes it difficult to know anything for sure.

During the time of the Tibetan Empire in the 8th and 9th centuries, Tibetan figures visited Wutai Shan in China and seem to have had a mountain cult related to the emperor.¹⁰⁸ We do not know whether this type of veneration of mountains constituted popular practice, or was confined to elites.

Some have connected pilgrimage and mountain veneration to longstanding Tibetan worldviews. Tibetans have long understood the natural world, and not only pilgrimage places, to be teeming with various powerful beings.¹⁰⁹ For example, Tibetan understandings of their own history involve the notion of the landscape as a large demoness that needed to be “tamed” by placing monasteries over thirteen powerful nodes in the landscape.¹¹⁰ These powerful beings may be hostile or benign, or their conduct may depend on human behaviors, and so humans have developed various ways of cohabitating with these beings, including soothing them or protecting against them. For example, there are water spirits living under the ground (*klu*), earth spirits dwelling that may live in particular fields or in mountains (*sa bdag, bzhi bdag*), deities living in mountains (*yul lha*). There are also various types of demons that can live in various parts of the

108. See Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 25. For more information on the mountain cult at the time of the Tibetan Empire, see Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, “The Cult of Mountain Deities and Its Political Significance,” in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, ed. Samten Gyaltsen Karmay (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 432–50, as well as the essays in Anne-Marie Blondeau, Ernst Steinkellner, and Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, *Reflections of the Mountain: Essays on the History and Social Meaning of the Mountain Cult in Tibet and the Himalaya* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996).

109. A classic source describing many of these beings is René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck-Verlagsanstalt, 1975).

110. See Janet Gyatso, “Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet,” *The Tibet Journal* 12, no. 4 (1987): 38–53.

landscape. These spirits and demons are thought to be sensitive to impurity, and to react jealously to perceived insult, and so there are myriad ritual means through which these spirits may be placated. Practices around holy mountains, then, may be related to these worldviews.

As such, some scholars suggest that what we think of as Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage actually reflects Buddhist appropriation and redescription of pre-existing practices. On this model, as Buddhism spread across Tibet, mountains that were already the focus of indigenous mountain cults and believed to be the residence of local deities were converted (Buffetrille uses the term “Buddhicized,” Huber speaks of “mandalization”) into Buddhist mountains. Those deities were converted into protectors of the dharma, the landscape was reinterpreted in Buddhist terms, and pilgrims’ practices at the mountain were framed as Buddhist, even if those practices had not changed much at all. This is part of the reason why such scholars often reject attempts to read pilgrimage in Buddhist doctrinal terms.¹¹¹

Whatever the situation before or in the early days of the spread of Buddhism, pilgrimage practice as we know it coalesced in the period from the 12th to the 15th centuries. During this time, esoteric tantras of the supreme yoga (*nirūttarayoga*) class had been transmitted to Tibet, tantric yogins like Marpa (11th century) and Milarepa (mid 11th to early 12th century) were developing a following, and schools of practice were growing up around them and their followers. Milarepa in particular was remembered as having practiced at the sacred mountains of Tsari, Lapchi, and Kailash, and tantric masters like Jigten Gonpo (1143–1217) sent his disciples to practice there.¹¹² Later histories and pilgrimage guides describe how pilgrimage mountains

111. See Katia Buffetrille, “The Pilgrimage to Mount Kha Ba Dkar Po,” as well as Huber, *The Cult of Crystal Mountain*, 7-10 and 25-30.

112. See Dan Martin, “Jigten Gonpo Rinchen Pel,” *Treasury of Lives*, accessed December 12, 2019, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jigten-Gonpo-Rinchen-Pel/2899>.

were “opened” during this time, as well. Again, it is not clear what this interest on the part of virtuosic tantric practitioners meant in terms of popular pilgrimage practices at these places, but they were certainly important for the ideological development of the cult of holy mountains.

Destinations in Tibetan Pilgrimage

One important distinction between different forms of pilgrimage practices may be made on the basis of what kind of location is the object of pilgrimage. For example, one of the most well-known forms of Tibetan pilgrimage is to holy mountains and lakes. Often, a holy mountain is also associated with a holy lake, and the lake is imagined to be a female counterpart to the male mountain.¹¹³ Oral and written pilgrimage traditions identify holy mountains as the residence of a god or powerful autochthonous spirits. Indeed, the term *né* (*gnas*) itself, which I have generally translated as holy place, can also be used as an honorific verb meaning to abide or to dwell. The *né* is thus the abode or dwelling place for the resident deity. This deity, moreover, imbues the mountain landscape with numinous power and blessings from which pilgrims can benefit.

There are a range of different types of holy mountains. For instance, there are major mountains that are famous as sites of trans-regional pilgrimage, there are smaller local pilgrimage sites, and there are mountains somewhere in between.

Most well-known are pilgrimages to major holy mountains identified as the seats of the tantric deity Cakrasaṃvara. Three mountains in particular—Kailash (also known as Tise, *gangs dkar ti se*) in south-western Tibet in Purang County (Tib. *Spu hreng*, Chi. 普兰县; Lapchi (*la phyi*) in southern Tibet in Dingri County (Tib. *ding ri rdzong*, Chi. 定日县), and Tsari (*tsA ri*) in southeastern Tibet in Nang County (Tib. *nang rdzong*, Chi. 朗县)—are considered the body,

113. Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 51 explains this at greater length.

speech, and mind of Cakrasaṃvara, respectively. Such mountains would have been known to people from across Tibetan cultural areas as places where famous masters of the past attained realizations and where tantric masters still gathered to practice. Pilgrims traveled great distances to visit these sites and to partake in their power and blessings. Especially large numbers of pilgrims gathered every twelve years according to the Tibetan calendar—the monkey year for Tsari and the horse year for Kailash—on auspicious dates where blessings were said to be multiplied.¹¹⁴

Another important mountain for Tibetans is Wutai Shan in Shanxi province, known to Tibetans as “Five-Peak Mountain” (*ri bo rtse lnga*) or “Mount Clear and Cool” (*ri bo dwangs bsil*). Although Wutai Shan is located outside the Tibetan cultural area, there is a long history of Tibetan pilgrims traveling there that spans back to the time of the Tibetan emperors in the seventh century. Since around the fifth century, Wutai was considered by Chinese Buddhists to be the seat of the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī, and it became an internationally famous site that Indian, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu pilgrims visited. Pilgrims came in hopes of seeing a glimpse of Mañjuśrī, who was believed to appear in various guises to fortunate pilgrims. Wutai Shan became particularly important for Tibet during the period from the 17th to the 20th century under the Chinese Qing dynasty, when Wutai Shan became a cosmopolitan center of multicultural interaction.¹¹⁵

114. Toni Huber’s *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain* is the best source about pilgrimage to Tsari. For more about Kailash (also known as Tise), see Toni Huber and Tsepa Rigzin, “A Tibetan Guide for Pilgrimage to Ti-Se (Mount Kailas) and Mtsho Ma-Pham (Lake Manasarovar),” in *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture*, ed. Toni Huber, 125–53; Alex McKay, *Kailas Histories: Renunciate Traditions and the Construction of Himalayan Sacred Geography* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Elena De Rossi Filibeck, *Two Tibetan Guide Books to Ti Se and La Phyi*.

115. For more on Tibetan pilgrimage to Wutai Shan, see David Germano, ed., “Wutai Shan and Qing Culture,” special issue of the *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 6 (2011), particularly the introductory article by Karl Debreczeny, “Wutai Shan: Pilgrimage to Five-Peak Mountain,” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 6 (2011): 1–133. See also Wen-shing Chou, *Mount Wutai*.

But while much scholarly attention to pilgrimage focuses on nationally famous sites, there are also a vast number of locally important pilgrimage sites to mountains or monasteries that were likely visited mostly by pilgrims from neighboring communities.¹¹⁶ Such mountains may only be known and venerated by a few villages and may be entirely unfamiliar to those outside those areas. However, there are also regionally important mountains such as Amye Machen (*A myes rma chen*)¹¹⁷ in Amdo and Khawa Karpo (*Kha ba dkar po*)¹¹⁸ in Kham that approach the importance of Kailash or Tsari in their respective regions. Furthermore, while any attempt to speculate how many people went on these different pilgrimages is extremely tenuous, it seems likely to me that most instances of Tibetan pilgrimage were to these smaller local sites, rather than to major sites like Kailash.

We should note, too, that different sorts of mountains are identified with different sorts of beings. For instance, we can also distinguish mountains classified as the residence of a territorial god (often a *yul lha* or *gzhi bdag*, terms which translate as “place deity” and “ground lord” respectively) as opposed to those classified as the residence of a world-transcending tantric deity (such mountains are generally called *gnas ri*). In the case of the former, the deity residing in the mountain is understood to be powerful, but deals primarily with this-worldly harms or benefits, such as the ability to grant boons, affect local weather patterns, or ensure the health of local crops. Such a deity may need to be appeased in order to gain these benefits, but is not connected with other-worldly Buddhist goals such as attaining enlightenment. *Néri* (*gnas ri*, literally sacred

116. Anthropologists have studied a number of these local sites. See, for example, Katia Buffetrille, “The rTsib Ri Pilgrimage: Merit as Collective Duty?,” in *Nepalica-Tibetica: Festgabe for Christoph Cüppers*, ed. Franz-Karl Ehrhard and Petra Maurer (Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2013), 1:37–64, as well as Nakza Drolma, “Pilgrimage to Drakar Dreldzong: The Written Tradition and Contemporary Practices among Amdo Tibetans,” (M.Phil., University of Oslo, 2008).

117. See, for example, Katia Buffetrille, “The Great Pilgrimage of A Myes rMa-Chen.”

118. See Katia Buffetrille, “The Pilgrimage to Mount Kha Ba Dkar Po.”

place-mountain), on the other hand, are understood as the residence of a Buddhist tantric deity such as Cakrasaṃvara. Such a deity can grant this-worldly goals as the place deity, but going to such a mountain may also help the pilgrim progress along the Buddhist path to a better rebirth and eventual enlightenment. This difference is correlated with the relative size and importance of the pilgrimage site. That is, major transregional sites are generally identified with tantric deities, and smaller local sites are relatively more likely to be identified with a territorial god. Again, in practice this distinction can become quite blurry, and it is unclear how salient this distinction was to pilgrims, but some have argued that place deity type mountain pilgrimages represent pre-Buddhist pilgrimage practices and that, through more or less complete processes of Buddhacization, some of these mountains have been transformed into Buddhist *néri* type pilgrimage mountains.¹¹⁹

Pilgrims also traveled to elements of the built landscape, such as monasteries and holy cities like Lhasa. People visiting a monastery would look at and prostrate before the holy images held there, make donations in front of images or to the monks living there, or circumambulate the entire structure. Many monasteries had circumambulation routes around which pilgrims could walk to accumulate merit and blessings. Lhasa, for instance, had an inner circumambulation route (*nang bskor*) inside the central Jokhang temple, a middle circumambulation route (*bar bskor*) around the temple, and an outer circumambulation route (*gling bskor*) around the city. Such pilgrimages might happen in greater numbers surrounding a particular holy day or festival, or could take place year-round.

One type of destination that bears mentioning, although it is not exactly a pilgrimage place, are hidden lands (*sbas yul*). The most famous is Pemakö (*pad+ma bkod*), although there

119. One scholar who has theorized these processes of Buddhacization is Katia Buffetrille. See, for example, Buffetrille, “Reflections on Pilgrimages to Sacred Mountains, Lakes and Caves.”

are many others. These hidden lands are earthly paradises located in Tibet, filled with all sorts of beautiful flowers, animals, and waterfalls. They are, moreover, places of safety where people can take refuge in times of danger. Most of the time, however, ordinary people cannot access or even *see* these places. As is the case with pilgrimage mountains, in order to become accessible, they must have their “doors opened” (*sgo phye*) by an advanced tantric master so that people can actually visit them. We find various texts in which tantric masters describe how they found and opened such places, as well as pilgrimage guides (*gnas yig*, *lam yig*) directing people in how to access them. Hidden lands are not sites of regular pilgrimage, but they do figure importantly in Tibetan conceptions of their own sacred landscape.¹²⁰

Another pilgrimage place for Tibetans is India itself. As discussed above, Buddhists in India traveled to a variety of sites, most prominently the site of the Buddha’s birth, awakening, first teaching, and death. We also saw above how Chinese pilgrims wanted to travel to India in order to find the purest and most authentic Buddhist teachings. It is unclear, however, the extent to which Tibetans actually traveled to India to visit these and other sites. As Toni Huber explores in his book about Tibetan imaginations of India, while there were likely trading routes linking Tibet with Nepal and Kashmir, there is little evidence that Tibetans during the imperial period (8th to early 9th) traveled to Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India.¹²¹ Tibetans did translate Sanskrit texts from India (as well as Chinese texts), and these translations often emerged out of a partnership between a Tibetan scholar and a South or Central Asian scholar who knew Sanskrit, but it does not seem that Tibetans traveled to India in any sizeable number during that time.

120. For more on these hidden lands, including analyses of guides written about these places, see Abdol-Hamid Sardar-Afkhani, “The Buddha’s Secret Gardens: End Times and Hidden-Lands in Tibetan Imagination” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2001).

121. Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn*, 45-7.

Later, from the 11th to 12th century, Tibetans do seem to have begun traveling to India to visit pilgrimage sites, Buddhist universities like Nalanda, and obtain teachings.¹²²

This fell off, however, by the end of the 13th century when Buddhism declined and eventually disappeared from India. After that, Tibetans continued to speak of India as a holy land, but very few physically went there, and fewer still went to places where Buddhist pilgrimage sites had been, as they were now controlled by people that the Tibetans considered to be heretics. Huber notes that for the five-hundred-year period from the late 13th to the mid 18th centuries, we have no historical evidence of any Tibetan visiting Indian pilgrimage sites.¹²³ At that point, sites like Bodhgaya were being rediscovered by the Archaeological Survey of India and promoted by Buddhist modernist reformers such as Anagarika Dharmapāla. Meanwhile, Tibet itself was becoming more interested in re-establishing connection with India. As such, pilgrims from Tibet once again began traveling to Indian pilgrimage sites.¹²⁴ This has only been accelerated by the situation of Tibetan exile.

It is worth pointing out that the foregoing variety of pilgrimage destinations indicates a variety of rationales *why* a particular place is holy and worth visiting. For example, monasteries and sacred cities are part of the built environment. Pilgrims visit them because of the teachers living there, rituals that take place there, and in order to see the sacred objects housed there. On the other hand, sacred mountains, lakes, and caves, are part of the natural environment. They are often located far away from human communities, and are sacred because they have been identified as being the residence of a deity, although this is also augmented by the activities of

122. Ibid., 58-84.

123. Ibid., 83-4.

124. For more on the rediscovery of Indian Buddhist pilgrimage sites and Tibetan pilgrimage to them, see Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn*, 251-90.

holy masters there. Such places do often have monasteries or hermitages built around them, but their holiness is largely based around their identification as the residence for some deity.

Pilgrimages to India or to hidden lands involve yet a different logic. Namely, in the case of India, Tibetans visit India to obtain what they consider to be authentic teachings or visit locations important to the life of the Buddha, and in the case of hidden lands, they flee to these places in times of crisis.

As such, the logic of trying to see the pilgrimage place in its divine or pure aspect operates across multiple types of pilgrimage, but is often much more present in discourses about pilgrimage to holy mountains. In accounts of pilgrimages to monasteries or to India, vision is not thematized to as great a degree, and even if the places is said to be a mandala or a pure land, this seems secondary to other reasons for visiting the place. By contrast, because the rationale of why holy mountains are sacred is precisely their identification as the divine palace of a tantric buddha, the question of how to see the mountain is heavily thematized. In this project I will largely be focused on pilgrimage to holy mountains, but it is important to contextualize this in reference to other types of pilgrimage to other types of places.

Tantric Pilgrimage in Tibet

We should say more about tantric pilgrimage in particular in Tibet, because it is especially important to mountain pilgrimage in Tibet. Around the 12th and 13th century, as Tibet was becoming more and more interested in tantric teachings, Tibetans began to see some of the land around them as the *pīthas* described in tantric texts like the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* or the *Hevajra Tantra*. Kailash was identified as Himavat, Tsari was identified as either Caritra or Devikota, and Lapchi was identified as Godavari. Most of the *pīthas* were assumed to remain in India, but

Tibetans began to see Tibet itself as part of broader tantric geography. These identifications, moreover, contributed to the importance of Kailash, Tsari, and Lapchi, even for those pilgrims who were not themselves tantric practitioners.

Tibetan interest in tantric *pīthas* in Tibet was not necessarily indicative of Tibetan interest in traveling to the complete set of *pīthas* in South Asia. As Toni Huber points out, although Tibetans had access to the tantras that advocated travel to the twenty-four *pīthas* in the 11th century, we know of no Tibetan practitioners who actually tried to visit all of these external sites. Figures like Marpa traveled to India to get tantric teachings, but never attempted to go to most the sites identified as *pīthas*.¹²⁵ It is not until the 13th century that wandering Tibetan yogis recorded attempts to visit all of the *pīthas*, and even then, they imagined the *pīthas* to all be located in a relatively small area in northwest India.¹²⁶ Even this was short lived, however, for after the end of the 13th century, we know of no Tibetans attempting to visit these sites in India.

Geographical re-mapping of tantric sacred geography onto Tibet only accelerated over time. This was supported by tantric texts themselves, which treated the *pīthas* as being particular locations in South Asia, but also suggested that the sacred geography of *pīthas* was a moveable map that could exist anywhere. As such, all twenty-four sacred places could exist in Tibet, or indeed inside a single city.¹²⁷ Following this, Tibetans re-mapped tantric sacred geography onto the Tibetan landscape multiple times, to the point that there were at one point at least eight different Devikotas in Tibet.¹²⁸

125. Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn*, 100.

126. Ibid., 100-101.

127. This will be explained more fully in chapter two, but for example see Naropa, *Rdo rje'i tshig gi snying po bsdu pa'i dka' 'grel* (Skt. *Vajrapādasārasaṃgraha*), 979: *rnal 'byor ma rnams kyi rigs sum cu rtsa drug ni grong khyer gcig tu yang gnas*. Huber also discusses this idea in Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn*, 121.

128. Ibid., 121.

Opening the Doors of the Holy Place

Oral and written traditions about pilgrimage places in Tibet describe holy mountains and hidden lands as having had their “doors” (*sgo*) “opened” (*phye*) by a holy master, thus making these places into sites of general pilgrimage. Such traditions maintain that the mountain is the residence of a tantric deity or powerful being, and as such that the place was holy before the advanced master opened the doors of the holy place. This identification is what gives the sacred place its numinous power, and what attracts mythical masters like Padmasambhava to come there to practice. This numinous power, however, also attracts ferocious spirits, demons, and *dakinis*. Such beings are hostile to human visitors, and threaten to devour anyone who comes near the place.

The narratives then describe how an advanced tantric master comes to the holy place and opens the doors. Almost all of these narratives follow the same general pattern. First, the tantric hero uses his mastery of tantric ritual practice to overpower the various hostile spirits residing at the place, often converting them into fierce protectors of the dharma. The tantric master may also have to confront and defeat rival masters from other sects, such as Milarepa defeating Naro Bonchung at Kailash. Second, the tantric hero uses tantric mastery and skilled perception in order to be able to see that the holy mountain is in fact a mandala. That is, beyond merely acknowledging in an abstract way that the mountain is the residence of a tantric deity, the tantric master must be able to directly perceive the mountain as such. This dual act of overpowering the demons and spirits residing at the place and perceiving that the mountain is actually a divine mandala transforms the mountain from a hostile place that will harm visitors into a blessed place that will benefit pilgrims. This transformation is what is meant by the phrase “opening the

doors.”¹²⁹

It is not clear where this notion of opening the doors of the holy place originates. It seems to be a uniquely Tibetan idea,¹³⁰ and is not found in discourse about pilgrimage elsewhere in South Asia.¹³¹ However, the idea of opening the doors is pervasive in Tibetan pilgrimage texts.¹³²

The Power and Blessings of Pilgrimage Sites

I have thus far spoken of pilgrimage sites as having power and blessings that benefit the pilgrim, but it is worth asking exactly what that means. Interestingly, most Tibetan authors writing about pilgrimage do not explicitly spell out exactly how pilgrimage works to benefit the pilgrim. As pointed out by Toni Huber,¹³³ this is probably due to the fact that it largely went without saying—texts do not have to explain what readers already assume to be true. While the opponents of pilgrimage that we will discuss in the next chapter needed to make explicit arguments in order to make their case to a generally unsympathetic audience, proponents of

129. For more on opening the doors, see Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 25-6.

130. One indication that the idea of opening the doors of the holy place is an indigenous Tibetan idea is that there are so many ways in which it is spelled. One finds *sgo phye*, *sgo dbye*, *sgo 'byed*, and *sgo phyed*. The second syllable of these compounds all have similar meanings of “to open,” “to differentiate,” or “to separate,” but the non-standardized spelling may indicate that this is not a concept being translated from Sanskrit sources.

131. One does find the metaphor of the door in South Asian sources, albeit not in relation to sacred places. For example, humans are said to have “three doors” (Skt. *tridvāra*, Tib. *sgo gsum*), that is, the doors of body, speech and mind. These are the three means through which sentient beings interact with the world, and so Buddhist texts will often tell people to closely guard these three doors, lest they fall into negative actions. The five external senses are sometimes referred to as the five doors (*pañcadvāra*), and come with similar warnings about guarding these doors. Perhaps most importantly for the case of pilgrimage texts, mandalas are also said to have doors at their cardinal points. Tantric ritual *sādhana*s that lead initiates through the process of generating these mandalas involve the practitioner generating each of the features of the mandala palace, including the doors and the wrathful deities that guard the doors, before entering into the mandala through these doors. None of these sources, to my knowledge, speaks about the *opening* of these doors.

132. There are mountains such as Amye Machen in eastern Tibet where tradition does not record who opened the door or when, but in the large majority of cases, pilgrimage sites are believed to have been opened, and that this opening of the doors founds the site as a pilgrimage destination. See, for example, Katia Buffetrille, “The Great Pilgrimage of A Myes rMa-Chen,” 89.

133. Toni Huber. “Putting the Gnās Back into Gnās-Skor,” 87.

pilgrimage could count on their audiences' deeply engrained familiarity with the underlying logic of pilgrimage. This does not mean, however, that we are unable to reconstruct this logic.¹³⁴ Indeed, as scholars such as Huber have pointed out, we can think of pilgrimage as having several overlapping logics that pilgrims draw from according to context.

One central logic is that pilgrimage places are charged with a kind of power or *jinlap* often translated as blessings or empowerments (*byin brlabs*). This term is a contraction of the full phrase *jingyi lap* (*byin gyis brlabs*), which literally means flooded (*brlabs*) by *jin* (*byin*), a term that can be translated as power, magnificence, splendor, or blessings. The term *jingyi lap* can render the Sanskrit *adhiṣṭhāna*, which can be translated as “authority,” “power,” “benediction,” “residence,” “basis,” or “abode.” However, the term also appears to have pre-Buddhist connotations, and was used in connection with the royal cult of divine kings (*btsan po*). Such divine kings were said to be characterized by *byin* in the sense of splendor, glory, or power. One also finds the term *jinlap* used in descriptions of tantric visualization practices; the practitioner first generates a visualized image of the appropriate deity, and then visualizes the deity granting the practitioner *jinlap*, which grants efficacy to the whole ritual process. All of this leads Huber to argue for the translation of *jinlap* as “empowerment” rather than the more common rendering of “blessings.” This translation is helpful insofar as it gets at the way in which sacred places are held to be suffused with a kind of sacred power, but may be somewhat confusing given that tantric ritual initiations (*dbang*) are generally called empowerments.

What is the nature of these blessings/empowerments? Again, textual sources almost never spell this out because it simply goes without saying, but Huber offers up a description given

134. This reconstruction is particularly tricky because Tibetan pilgrimage practices seem to involve certain deep Tibetan orientations to place, which are then joined together—more or less seamlessly—with what Huber calls systems of “Indic metaphysical imperatives (*saṃsāra*, *karma*, *nirvāṇa*).” See Huber “Putting the Gnās Back into Gnās-Skor,” 83-4.

orally by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, a Geluk lama:

All objects at power places (*gnas-chen*) have the empowerment (*byin-gyis-brlabs*) of the deities and great practitioners associated with that place. It is like [the effects of] water soaking into things, so it includes rocks, dirt, water, plants, trees; this is also called ‘empowerment of *gnas* (i.e. as residence)’ (*gnas-kyi byin-brlab*), for example a Heruka place (*gnas*) has Heruka’s empowerment, and a Guru Rinpoche place his empowerment. So this empowerment can be collected in the form of rocks, dirt, plant parts, and so on, and due to the Tibetans’ great faith in the power of these things they do collect them.¹³⁵

The blessings—the same word Huber translates as empowerment—of these places thus flow from these places’ connections with certain tantric deities or great masters. We will have much more to say about the relation between pilgrimage places and particular deities, as well as the way in which these blessings *become* available to ordinary pilgrims, in the next chapter, but for the moment it suffices to say that pilgrimage places have blessings by virtue of these associations. Pilgrimage places that have this *jinlap* are teeming with an almost electrical power that can be engaged by the pilgrim, and which grants benefits to the pilgrim both in this life and the next.¹³⁶

Pilgrimage is also believed to have the ability to purify the pilgrim’s defilements (*sgrib*) and to enable them to accumulate merit.¹³⁷ Pema Karpo puts it relatively clearly when he writes in his *Pilgrimage Guide to Tsari* that “Pilgrimage is the best method for purifying sins and defilements. By offering *torma*¹³⁸ and feast offerings, and by focusing on the tantric divinities assembled here, one delights those gods and perfects the accumulation of merit.”¹³⁹ Thus by

135. Ibid., 91-2.

136. Ibid., 91 and 94.

137. See Huber, “Putting the Gnās Back into Gnās-Skor,” 90 for more discussion of *sgrib* and a list of secondary sources that have also explored this concept.

138. Ritual cakes and dough balls usually made from roasted barley flour and butter. They may be dyed or decorated.

139. *'Di bskor ba ni sdig sgrib sbyong ba'i thabs mchog yin pa dang/ 'dir gsang sngags kyi lha tshogs la dmigs te/*

going on pilgrimage, the pilgrim will purify their sins and accumulate merit and blessings. Jigmé Lingpa, who as we will see is somewhat skeptical about pilgrimage, maintains that “Even for beings who have not entered into the path, this [pilgrimage practice], which must be supported by prudence, purifies the obscurations and accumulates merit—it is profound”¹⁴⁰ He suggests that pilgrimage, if it is done well and with care, accrues real benefits to the pilgrim.

Another way sources talk about how and why pilgrimage places benefit pilgrims is by reference to their *tendrel* (*rten 'brel*). The term *tendrel* has multiple connotations. As an abbreviation of the phrase *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*, it refers to the general Buddhist concept of interdependent arising (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*) and thus refers to the fact that all phenomena come into existence based on multiple causes and conditions. Nothing exists independently, but rather all phenomena are connected in this web of causal connections. In more colloquial usage, however, the term takes on a somewhat different sense. Whereas in the more doctrinal Buddhist usage, it does not make much sense to speak of a place as having *tendrel*, in the more colloquial sense, *tendrel* refers to auspicious connections or circumstances, often presumed to have been caused by actions in a prior life.¹⁴¹ For instance, if someone were to meet a friend unexpectedly on the road, they might praise the *tendrel* that led to that moment, or if a person were trying to explain why they picked a particular lama as their teacher, they might say that they have *tendrel* with that person. In both cases, the idea is that some unknown actions in a previous life have led to a present event or connection. In a later chapter, we will see a text in which a visionary figure

gtor ma/ tshogs kyi 'khor lo phul bas/ lha de dag mnyes/ bsod nams kyi tshogs rdzogs pa yin la. 'Brug chen Kun mkhyen Pad+ma dkar po, Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad, 272.

140. *Lam ma zhugs kyi skye bo la'ang/ bag yod shugs la brten dgos pa'i/ tshogs gsog sgrib sbyong 'di nyid zab. 'Jigs med gling pa, Gnas bskor ba la spring ba'i gtam, 579.2.*

141. For a discussion of this term, see Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary: A Translation and Study of Jigme Lingpa's Dancing Moon in the Water and Dākki's Grand Secret-Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 179.

tells Chökyi Drakpa that he will succeed where others had failed because he has the *tendrel* to do so while previous figures had not.¹⁴²

Tendrel enters into pilgrimage discourse because mountains are often held to have these auspicious connections. Pilgrims sometimes speak about establishing auspicious connections with a particular place¹⁴³ or about certain places as having auspicious connections. Taranatha, for example, gave a teaching to pilgrims in which he emphasizes the various karmic connections present in pilgrimage places. He ends by telling pilgrims to “seek out and understand the method for putting together auspicious connections. If you know how to put together (*sgrig*) the inner and outer auspicious connections, everything you need or want, as well as spiritual attainments, will fall like rain.”¹⁴⁴ In discussing this passage with contemporary Tibetan interlocutors, they suggested that Taranatha meant that pilgrims going to the site were establishing auspicious connections with the site, likening it to the planting of a seed that would then bear fruit in a later life.¹⁴⁵ Thus pilgrimage in this life leads to further blessings, purification, and merit in later lives.

Pilgrims who visit these sites benefit from the power and blessings inherent in the site, which bring good things in this life and the next. Tradition offers a number of seemingly contradictory claims about how this works. For instance, do advanced practitioners who are able to see the site as a mandala benefit more than ordinary pilgrims who only see rocks and stones? Do faithful and attentive pilgrims benefit more than distracted and skeptical ones, or is the power

142. 'Bri gung chung tsang Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*, 455-6. This passage is further discussed in chapter two.

143. For example, Chos kyi grags pa frequently speaks of “establishing connections” (*brel pa bzhas*) at holy places example. See 'Bri gung chung tsang Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Rang gi tshul gyi rtogs pa brjod pa'i gtam rang bzhin brjod pa'i rgyan kho nas smras pa gsong po'i dga' ston*, In *Collected Works of Chos kyi grags pa*, TBRC W22082, 1: 19 - 264 (Kulhan: Drikung Kagyu Institute, 1999), for example, 228.

144. *Rten 'brel ba sgrig lugs shes te 'tshal/ phyi nang gi rten 'brel sgrig shes na/ dgos 'dod dngos grub char ltar 'bab*. Tāranātha, *Las stod kyi gnas skor ba 'dra la gdams pa*, 80.

145. Personal conversation with Lobsang Shastri, April 30, 2019.

of the site such that it automatically provides benefits to all? Do the benefits derive from the site itself, or from how the pilgrim *views* the site? On all of these questions, different texts suggest different answers.

Some texts describe pilgrimage texts as providing benefits automatically to any being who goes there. They generally say that even pilgrims who cannot see the true nature of the site benefit from its blessings, but also suggest that those who are able to see it as it really is benefit even more. In pilgrimage places, texts may even tell stories of dogs or pigs wandering unwittingly around these sites and being reborn in heaven. Such stories emphasize how the site is so powerful that even animals—who are assumed to lack intentionality, intelligence, or faith—benefit from it. Other texts, however, suggest that pilgrims will derive benefits are largely dependent on the mental and affective orientation of the pilgrim, with faithful pilgrims deriving more benefit than those who are careless. Indeed, some pilgrimage texts seem to suggest that the benefits of any particular pilgrimage place derive entirely from the faith and devotion of the pilgrim, rather than from the place itself. One finds texts valorizing people like Milarepa or Shabkar who wander aimlessly without having particular places or destinations in mind. Such wandering pilgrims recognize all places as equally holy. For the most part, however, pilgrimage texts and the pilgrimage tradition more broadly regard certain places as being special, and as offering special benefits to pilgrims who go there.

Social, Political, and Economic Dimensions of Pilgrimage

As is the case in any pilgrimage, pilgrimage in Tibet has important social, political, and economic dimensions. These dimensions are often unclear from the pilgrimage texts that form the basis of this thesis, and so it is important to keep them in mind as we approach textual

materials.

For example, pilgrimage is a social and communal affair. Pilgrims often travel together, with groups from a particular village or family joining together to form pilgrim caravans. Groups of lay people often travel with one or two monks or lamas, who provide information along the way. Groups of pilgrims from different areas may interact and pass along news, but do not generally interact extensively. As such, while there is some mixing, the spirit of *communitas* as described by Victor Turner is not generally relevant. Indeed, as scholars have pointed out, pilgrimage often serves to preserve and even re-inscribe differences in social status.¹⁴⁶

One example of this is gender. Pilgrimage to holy mountains is gendered in a number of ways. The mountain itself is often gendered male and is paired with a gendered-female lake. There are, however, fierce female spirits called *dakinis* (Tib. *mkha' 'gro*, literally, sky-goer) and imagery such as the “sexed rocks of Tibet” discussed in the introduction. Scholars have also explored gender and pilgrimage, showing, for example, how certain pilgrimage sites exclude women from certain locations on the pilgrimage mountain on the grounds that their impurity¹⁴⁷ will anger the local spirits,¹⁴⁸ explored the way modern revitalization of pilgrimage in Tibet has

146. See, for example, Katia Buffetrille, “The Evolution of a Tibetan Pilgrimage: The Pilgrimage to A Myes rMa Chen Mountain in the 21st Century,” in *21st Century Tibet Issue: Symposium on Contemporary Tibetan Studies* (Taipei: Taiwan, 2003), 2.

147. Such exclusions reflect a broader cultural assumption that women are lower born (one word for “woman” in Tibet is *skye dman*, literally meaning low birth) and that their bodies are naturally impure. Toni Huber also notes, however, that while all of his informants agreed that women were excluded from certain parts of the mountain, they differed in terms of the explanations that they gave, which he took to indicate that practices of female exclusion are in some sense prior to explanations for why this is the case. Rather than practices of exclusion being the *result* of some ideological or mythical explanation, such explanations are offered after the fact, and as such there are competing discourses about why women are excluded. See Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 121-7.

148. For more on women and pilgrimage, see Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 90-2 and 120-7, as well as Toni Huber, “Why Can’t Women Climb Pure Crystal Mountain? Remarks on Gender, Ritual, and Space in Tibet,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes, 1992*, ed. Per Kvaerne (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), 350–71.

affected gender dynamics,¹⁴⁹ and how female leaders in the past invoked the authority of pilgrimage places to ground their own authority as religious teachers,¹⁵⁰ to give just a few examples. Much more work remains to be done on this subject, however.

Tibetan governments and rulers also sometimes engaged pilgrimage. For many pilgrimages, such involvement was small or nonexistent, but certain pilgrimages involved significant government participation. Most famous is the Tsari Rongkor Chenmo, or the great ravine circuit of Tsari, which took place every twelve years on the monkey year. In this pilgrimage, around twenty thousand pilgrims from across the Tibetan plateau converged to undertake the long clockwise circuit around Tsari. The route took pilgrims through lowland jungle, high snowy passes, and territory controlled by the tribal Löpa people that Tibetans considered barbarians. From the early 18th century to the fall of the regime in the 1950s, the Central Tibetan government known as the Ganden Podrang patronized and organized the Rongkor Chenmo. This entailed providing supplies and logistical support, appointing government officers to direct pilgrims, and negotiating tribute with the Löpa.¹⁵¹ Pilgrimage thus became a site where the government enacted political and symbolic authority.

Pilgrimage also had important economic dimensions. Tibetan pilgrimage is often closely associated with trade networks, rendering any easy distinction between religion and economics unsustainable. As we will see in the exploration of the pilgrim diary of the trader Khatag Zamyak in chapter seven, Khatag Zamyak regularly engages in commercial activities alongside pilgrimage activities. Pilgrims may travel with traders, may bring items of value to trade at

149. Charlene Makley, "Gendered Practices and the Inner Sanctum: The Reconstruction of Tibetan Sacred Space in 'China's Tibet,'" *Tibet Journal* XIX, no. 2 (1994): 61–94.

150. Hanna Havnevik, "On Pilgrimage for Forty Years in the Himalayas: The Female Lama Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche's (1865-1951) Quest for Sacred Sites," in *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, ed. Alex McKay, 85–107.

151. For more on the Tsari Rongkor Chemno, see Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 128-74.

pilgrim markets at sacred sites, or travel to Lhasa for business and also see sacred sites along the way. Pilgrimage sites are often associated with markets at which pilgrims buy materials for offerings, consecrated substances, or souvenirs like the bamboo walking sticks associated with Tsari.¹⁵² Sacred sites, in turn, as well as the monasteries or groups who control them, may generate large sums of money from pilgrim donations and markets.¹⁵³ As such, disputes about pilgrimage like the one explored in chapter four have important economic stakes. In this dissertation, I take it as a given that pilgrimage and trade are inextricable, but resist the impulse to read pilgrimage solely in terms of its economic aspects. As such, I do not read concerns about pilgrimage as epiphenomenal to the *real* underlying concerns about money, but instead take these arguments seriously on their own terms.

Conclusion

Several themes have emerged from this brief overview of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage. First, Tibetan pilgrimage draws on a number of aspects of Indian Buddhist pilgrimage, including an interest in seeing places and relics associated with the Buddha, tantric ideas about holy places, descriptions of pure lands, and practices of circumambulating holy places in a clockwise direction. Tibetan pilgrimage, however, differs from Indian antecedents in many ways. To begin, although Tibetans showed some interest in pilgrimage to India and the holy places there, Tibetans created their own sacred geography by remapping Indic ideas about tantric *pīthas* onto Tibetan places that may have already been considered holy. Tibetan thinkers also developed ideas that lack any clear Indian equivalent, such as hidden lands, an emphasis on

152. See, for example, Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 196-218.

153. W. van Spengen, "On the Geographical and Material Contextuality of Tibetan Pilgrimage," in *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, ed. Alex McKay, 35-51.

pilgrimage to holy mountains, and the notion that places have to be “opened” before pilgrimage there can begin. In addition, Tibetan worldviews about holy places and the various powers that dwell there, as well as notions of blessings, defilement, and purification, often seem more salient than doctrinal Buddhist ideas about merit and rebirth. As such, while we can see Tibetan pilgrimage picking up certain themes and concerns from earlier Buddhist traditions, we should not assume that Tibetan pilgrimage conforms to Indian scriptural or doctrinal models.

Second, rather than there being one unitary phenomenon called Tibetan pilgrimage, there are an array of diverse practices and ideas. These include travel to holy mountains in unpopulated areas and built monasteries in cities, major sites known to people across Tibet and minor sites visited only by local people, and advanced practices undertaken by tantric virtuosos and popular practices undertaken by lay people. Different practitioners, moreover, may give different explanations of what they are doing and why particular places are holy. The phrase Tibetan pilgrimage is thus a convenient way to designate a variety of practices, but there is no one single logic at work in them.

Finally, the lived tradition of Tibetan pilgrimage involves various social, economic, material, and political dimensions. These dimensions, moreover, are not always represented in pilgrimage texts, which tend to focus on the articulation of ideals or on elite practitioners. Pilgrimage texts often reflect the interests of those—often highly educated elite monastics—who composed them, and as such give a particular picture of pilgrimage practices that leaves out much that we might want to know. This does not mean that these texts are irrelevant to the study of pilgrimage. Indeed, the ideals articulated in these texts are an important part of the tradition, even if most pilgrims did not instantiate them in practice. It is entirely possible that, for many pilgrims, the goal of seeing a holy mountain as a divine maṇḍala was not something they

attempted or even considered possible for themselves. Nevertheless, they participated in a tradition that valorized those who could see in this way and that considered such vision critical to allowing pilgrimage to happen at all, especially for those people who were not themselves capable of such seeing. As such, as we focus on pilgrimage texts, it is important to remember that the particular practices and virtues of elevated seeing are but one part of a larger and multifaceted tradition of Tibetan pilgrimage.

One important aspect of Tibetan pilgrimage practice that I did *not* highlight, moreover, are the many critiques of pilgrimage that can be found across the textual tradition. That is, while this chapter presented a general account of how pilgrimage was thought to work in Tibet, various writers and thinkers objected to aspects of the pilgrimage tradition, or even rejected pilgrimage altogether. This even led to centuries-long debates about the nature of pilgrimage and the question of whether it is worthwhile.

Before we can delve into those questions, however, it is helpful to take a step back and consider the background assumptions about perception at work in pilgrimage literature. If Tibetan pilgrimage traditions valorized certain ways of seeing the mountain, what is entailed in these special kinds of seeing? How are they different from ordinary ways of seeing? And how should the pilgrim *see* correctly? Indeed, the answers to these questions will lead us back to debates about pilgrimage in Tibet because, as we will see, many of the issues at stake in debates about pilgrimage are deeply connected with perception.

Chapter Two:

How To See on Pilgrimage

Introduction

How should pilgrims see the holy places they visit on pilgrimage? This may seem like a strange question, particularly if we understand the term seeing to indicate the passive reception of sense data from the external world. Pilgrims go to the holy place and, so long as their eyes are open and healthy, they will see it. However, if we take a step back, we can recognize that seeing is a broad category containing multiple possible *ways* of seeing. Therefore, it is not immediately obvious what it means to see a pilgrimage site.

To use examples afforded by English, we might glance, gaze, glimpse, or stare at some material object, or use seeing to refer to conceptual understanding, as in the phrase, “I see your point.” We might also tie visual perception to certain emotions, such as when we say that we “see red” to indicate anger. We also sometimes talk about seeing images that do not correspond with ordinary material reality, such as when we see images in dreams or see the events of a literary work in the “mind’s eye.” Tibetan (and the Indic languages that influence Tibetan Buddhist terminology) also employs a variety of terms for seeing that cover a wide range of different types of activities. Some of these track differences marked in English, but some do not easily align with categories assumed in English.

In this chapter, I will seek to understand *how* to see on pilgrimage by examining Tibetan

accounts of how pilgrimage should or should not be undertaken. In this, I will try to better understand what the pilgrimage tradition is asking pilgrims to do.

Tibetan pilgrimage tradition holds out the goal that pilgrims will learn to see the physical mountain as a divine mandala, but it is also not clear what that entails. Does the pilgrim have an intellectual understanding that the mountain is a mandala, or that he reacts to it *as if* it is a mandala, or that he literally sees jewels in front of him? Is this vision generated by the mountain or projected by the pilgrim? Does this kind of seeing entirely replace ordinary perception? Since the term seeing can have so many meanings, in thinking about the goal that pilgrims learn to see the physical mountain as a divine palace, we must consider all of these possibilities. What is more, the tradition clearly seems to think that most people will not in fact be able to see the holy mountain as a divine palace. So what are pilgrims supposed to do to induce the correct type of seeing? How do pilgrims see ordinarily, and what factors influence that seeing? Is seeing something that the pilgrim has agency over at all?

To answer these questions, I will take a step back and provide some background about Buddhist approaches to perception historically. In addition, I will discuss the various Tibetan words for seeing, as well as words for related faculties like imagining, sensing, and recognizing. Next, I will move to the question of how a pilgrim *should* see the holy place. In various forms of prescriptive pilgrimage literature, including songs and letters of advice, Tibetan authors highlighted how pilgrims' mental and affective state shape vision, as well as the relationship between seeing and bodily comportment. They thus interrogated the relationship between body, mind, and perception, and asked how best to coordinate them in order to achieve the desired benefits of pilgrimage. One solution that they seem to offer, again and again, is that while it may be difficult to will certain kinds of seeing into being directly, the pilgrim can make such types of

seeing more likely by cultivating certain mental and affective dispositions and by adopting certain behaviors.

Buddhist Approaches to Perception

Interest in perception runs throughout Buddhist traditions. We find, for example, concern about perception evident in doctrinal discourse, narratives, and philosophical debates about the epistemology and phenomenology of perception. Throughout, Buddhist thinkers and writers sought to understand the factors that affect perception and the conditions that lead to direct and true knowledge about reality. It is not necessarily the case that Tibetan pilgrimage literature will draw on these ideas, or even map neatly onto them. Briefly sketching out some of the major themes dealing with perception, however, will help to show that many of the same issues are at stake in the material studied in this thesis.

One consistent theme in Buddhist discourse about perception is the notion that perception is a multi-step process. One of the most fundamental frameworks in Buddhism for thinking about perception, for example, is that of the five aggregates (Skt. *skandha*). According to the earliest sutras and Abhidharma literature, our experience of the world is actually made up of five aggregates that are bundled together in a dynamic process. (1) *Contact* with form generates (2) *feeling* (positive, negative, or neutral) which in turn gives rise to (3) *recognition*, whereby one mentally labels the object with a particular concept, leading in turn to (4) *volition* in the sense of a habituated reaction to that kind of object; and finally (5) a *consciousness* that is aware of the perception.¹⁵⁴

154. Another basic account of perception can be found in the early Buddhist discourses preserved in the Pali canon. It is similar to the account given in the five aggregates, and uses several of the same terms, but also differs in certain respects. In particular, these accounts highlight how the perceiver thinks about (Pāli *vitakka*) the object perceived, then expands (Pali *papañca*) upon it, spinning off conceptual elaborations about the object and eventually leading to

The main point of analyzing the person and perception into its component parts in this way was to demonstrate that a permanent self is nowhere to be found in this process. It also demonstrates, however, that the seemingly simple act of seeing an object actually has multiple intermediate stages, many of which we are not consciously aware. The act of seeing involves emotional tone, conceptual categories, and habits engrained through past actions and experiences.

Later Buddhist thinkers tried to systematize these early accounts and to understand the various stages of perception. Understanding these steps would allow people to intervene and rectify distorted perception, and would provide a foundation for understanding what counts as reliable knowledge. Abhidharma philosophers, for example, compiled lists of the various factors involved in the process of perception, including sense objects, sense faculties, and different sense consciousnesses,¹⁵⁵ and debated the relative importance of various components.¹⁵⁶

One particularly important issue was the question of how perception becomes connected with concepts in order to yield usable knowledge about the world. For if the process of perception involves concepts and past experiences, as is suggested by the schema of the five aggregates, it is prone to the distortion Buddhists hold to be present in conceptual thought, and cannot be trusted. The early Buddhist philosophers Dignāga (~6th century) and Dharmakīrti (~7th century) articulated a notion of perception as non-conceptual. They therefore claimed that

craving and delusion. See Sarachchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception* (Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1958), 4-12.

155. For an overview of Abhidharma approaches to the philosophy of perception, see Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 331-6.

156. For more on controversies over Abhidharma accounts of perception, see Bhikkhu K.L. Dhammajoti, *Abhidharma Doctrines and Controversy on Perception* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007).

perception yielded direct, reliable information about the world.¹⁵⁷ Their account, however, raised the question of how, if perception is non-conceptual and inexpressible, such perception can count as knowledge at all. If we cannot put perceptions into words, how can we have intentional thoughts and beliefs *about* what we perceive?¹⁵⁸

Later Buddhists recognized this problem and offered various solutions. Dharmottara (~740-800), for example, attempts to blur Dharmakīrti's line between what Georges Dreyfus calls distorted conception and unmistakable perception, ultimately arguing that perception is more active and cognitive than it is in Dharmakīrti's presentation. Later Madhyamaka thinkers such as Candrakīrti (7th century)¹⁵⁹ and Śāntideva (8th century)¹⁶⁰ argued that perception was always connected with conventional categories and concepts, but that it was still a reliable means of knowledge. Later yet, in Tibet, Chaba, Sakya Paṇḍita, and Tsongkhapa each offer different

157. See Dan Arnold, Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara on the Intentionality of Perception: Selections from the *Nyayabindu*," in Jay Garfield and William Edelgass, ed., *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

158. This dilemma becomes clearer when we reflect on the phenomenology of perception. That is, when I am perceiving the world, I do not generally take myself to be perceiving a field of orange psycho-physical particulars, but rather to be perceiving a fire. Buddhist Abhidharma thinkers, as well as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, generally maintained that composite phenomena like chairs, pots, and importantly, persons, were not the objects of perception, but if that is not the case, how do we perceive such things as wholes? We might say that the first moment of perception is bare sensation and the second moment is seeing-as, in which the perception is joined with a concept. These two moments would then happen so quickly that I am unaware of them happening. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, however, still need to explain how this is possible, and whether and how seeing fire can be called perception. Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and later Buddhists offer arguments for why this problem can be solved, but their desire to preserve a sharp distinction between perceptual and conceptual awareness makes this a difficult task.

159. Candrakīrti disregards Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's attempt to restrict epistemic instruments solely to inference and perception, and instead suggests that "mundane objects are known by the means of the fourfold epistemic instruments," thus including verbal testimony and analogy. Sonam Thakchöe, "Prāsaṅgika Epistemology in Context," in *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Cowherds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 53-54.

160. Śāntideva follows Candrakīrti's rejection of perception's foundational status, writing, "Even the objects of direct perception, such as visible form, are only established by popular consensus and not by a valid means of knowledge." Śāntideva, *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 9.6, page 115. Tib. *gzugs sogs mngon sum nyid kyang ni // grags pas yin gyi tshad mas min*. Zhi ba 'od, *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa*, In *Bstan 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma)* TBRC W1PD95844. Vol 61: 970 - 1067 (Beijing: krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008), 1017. Skt. *pratyakṣam api rūpādi prasiddhyā na pramāṇataḥ*.

accounts for how perception and conception work together,¹⁶¹ but in each case they maintain that perception is a process that involves multiple steps.

Related to the idea that perception is a process is the idea that perception is an interface between internal aspects of the perceiver and the external world. We can say that many Buddhist sources conceive of perception as a liminal space where one's experiences, concepts, and desires come into contact with the external world, and where the external world in turn can impinge on one's inner life.¹⁶² This can work for both good and ill.

For example, one consequence of the realization that perception is an interface between external and internal is that Buddhist narrative literature often emphasizes that perception must be carefully guarded. The Pali *suttas* liken the person with unguarded sense faculties to a fish able to be caught by temptation's hooks¹⁶³ or to a tortoise with outstretched limbs that makes easy prey for a jackal.¹⁶⁴ Buddhaghosa compares the person with unguarded senses to a poorly roofed house that lets rain inside and destroys the interior.¹⁶⁵ One of the chief objects that monks must guard their perception against is female beauty. The monk who does not control his senses may come across a beautiful woman and, seeing her, arouse lust in his heart and damage his virtue. In each of these cases, the sense faculties are vulnerable places where danger and

161. See George Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality*, chapters 21-24.

162. It is worth noting that some Buddhists did question whether perception interfaces between the internal and external world. Some Buddhist idealist philosophers, for example, argued that mental phenomena are what most directly gives rise to episodes of perception, and as result, there is no need for us to posit an external reality at all, and that all perception might be like perception in dreams. While there is a vast literature on this topic, one useful resource is David Duckworth et. al., *Dignāga's Investigation of the Percept: A Philosophical Legacy in India and Tibet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

163. "The Fisherman Simile," *Samyutta Nikāya* 35.230, Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1228.

164. "The Simile of the Tortoise," *Samyutta Nikāya* 35.240, *ibid.*, 1240-1. See also SN 1.17, *ibid.*, 96.

165. Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, 5th Edition (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 37-8.

temptation can enter from the external material world.¹⁶⁶

As such, we find praises of monks for keeping their eyes downcast (Pali: *okkhitta cakkhu*) or otherwise attaining control over their ordinary perception. Buddhaghosa gives a few examples that are particularly illustrative. One story is of a monk named Cittagutta who lived in a cave for sixty years. At some point, some other monks come to visit him and praise a lovely wall painting on the sides of the cave, but Cittagutta says, “For more than sixty years, friends, I have lived in the cave, and I did not know whether there was any painting there or not. Now, today, I know it through those who have eyes.”¹⁶⁷ Cittagutta has been so disciplined about guarding his vision that he spent sixty years in the cave without once raising his eyes. Indeed, he seems to think of himself as not having eyes at all. Buddhaghosa gives other examples of monks who are able to control their perception such that they see women as only a pile of bones,¹⁶⁸ but the story of Cittagutta suggests that one of the easiest ways to control perception seems to be not to look at all, and to keep one’s eyes downcast. This suggests that, even for monks with a great degree of control over their perception, it is still dangerous to look at certain kinds of objects.

166. One representative passage reads: “And how, friend, does one guard the sense-doors? In this a monk seeing an object with the eye, does not seize hold of either its general appearance or its details. Because anyone dwelling with the eye-faculty uncontrolled could be overwhelmed by cupidity and dejection, evil and unwholesome states of mind, therefore he practices to control the eye-faculty, guards it and gains control over it. So one guards the sense-doors.” From “Sāriputta,” *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 35.120, Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1193-4.

167. Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, 38.

168. Buddhaghosa describes a monk wandering down the road when he comes across a woman dressed up like a celestial nymph. The woman laughs at him, which catches the monk’s attention and causes him to look up. What he sees, however, is not this beautiful woman, but rather her teeth. What is more, he sees those teeth as bones, and thus has the perception of foulness. The woman’s husband comes up the road looking for her, and asks the monk if he has seen a woman, and the monk replies that “Whether it was a man or woman / that went by I noticed not / But only that on this high road / there goes a group of bones.” The monk does not see the beautiful woman as beautiful or even as a woman, but rather sees her as fundamentally the same as a rotten corpse. As such, the sight of her does not cause lust that would undermine his vows, but rather a further revulsion with the body that supports his dedication towards renunciation. The object of his perception is the same, but his reaction—one presumably supported by practices of looking at decaying corpses and meditating on impermanence and foulness—is completely different. *Ibid.*, 39.

But while some texts thus suggest that perception must be guarded against certain kinds of dangerous objects, other Buddhist texts and practices also highlight certain kinds of beneficial objects that are good to see. Here, the fact that perception is an interface between internal and external is a *good* thing—perception becomes a locus in which powerful objects benefit the perceiver.

Numerous accounts show powerful transformations resulting from seeing a buddha, advanced master, or even an image of the Buddha. Gautama Buddha's own path towards buddhahood began millions of lifetimes ago when he saw the Buddha Dīpaṃkara. Immediately upon glimpsing his radiant beauty, the man who would eventually become the Buddha first vowed that he would one day attain awakening. The *Divyāvadāna* contains multiple stories in which characters see the Buddha and immediately develop faith (*prasāda*, *śraddhā*) and a motivation to make donations.¹⁶⁹ In each of these cases, the visible object has the power to generate faith and motivation to action on the part of the viewer. Importantly, this power is not dependent on the intention or agency of the viewer, but rather inherent in the visible object itself. This parallels to some extent the danger of looking at women depicted in the stories above—some objects are just so powerful that they cause an involuntary reaction on the part of the viewer.

In addition, elements of visual and material culture, including statues and paintings of the Buddha, rock-carved scenes depicting narratives, massive *stūpas* and architectural monuments, and painted amulets, played a large role in Buddhist life. These kinds of objects had a variety of uses, but one important reason to make and see objects such as these is that they were thought to elicit powerful reactions on the part of people who saw them.¹⁷⁰

169. See Andy Rotman, *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*.

Buddhists also directed their attention at various sorts of objects that were thought to transform viewers. For example, Buddhist meditation texts exhort meditators to look at objects that are horrible or disgusting, such as decomposing bodies. Directly witnessing such decay was thought to be valuable because the corpse's putrid materiality provides a particularly vivid visual object that demonstrates impermanence in a way that makes a much more lasting impression than verbal description. On the other hand, Buddhist texts have a pervasive interest in beauty and that which is pleasing to the eye. We saw above how beauty, and in particular female beauty was often cast as a threat to (male) monastic virtue. That type of beauty was held to be illusory, and to hide the rot and foulness that would eventually overtake the body. But this did not mean that Buddhist texts rejected or were disinterested in beauty. Far from it—texts go on at length to describe the beauty of the Buddha's body, of the sites where he preached, and the wonders of the heavens and pure lands. In both the case of dangerous beauty and good beauty, that which is pleasing to the eye seems to be regarded as inherently attractive and motivating.

Both in the case of stories telling monks to guard their perception and in the case of Buddhists engaging visual objects believed to have a positive effect, perception becomes a place where the particularly powerful external objects change the way perceivers exist in the world, both for good and ill. These sorts of examples highlight the power of external objects, and suggest that the perceiver is more of a patient than an agent when it comes to these types of objects. Perceivers can do certain actions such as looking down or seeking out corpses to look at that guard against or provide the opportunity for these sorts of objects to work on the person, but the object itself is centrally important for determining perception.

That said, Buddhists did also experiment with ways of altering the perceiver side of the

170. For more on Buddhist visual culture, see Jacob N. Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom* and Cynthia J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

perceptual process. One well-known example is meditation, where practitioners work to change their deluded conceptual frameworks and cultivate better ways of seeing and interpreting the world. One form of doing so involved visualizing objects that are not physically present. For example, in practices of recollecting the Buddha (Skt. *buddhānusmṛti*) practitioners call to mind all of the excellent qualities of the Buddha. There were also related practices of visualization whereby practitioners would try to hold in their minds an image of the Buddha or of the pure land. The more detailed they could make such an image, the better. Sometimes, practitioners used images or material objects (*kasina*, or in the case of Tibet, painted *thangkas*) as supports for this kind of practice, but the goal to deliberately develop the capacity to sustain a mental image before the mind's eye.

We also find practices of experimenting with perception and with cutting off sensory stimulation. For example, Tibetan Buddhists and Bönpos developed practices of dark retreat or sky-gazing in which the practitioner seals himself inside a dark room for an extended period of time or gazes into the empty sky in order to generate (and then analyze) visionary experiences.¹⁷¹ The practitioner thus deliberately cuts off or limits sensory perception so that visual appearances may spontaneously appear before his eyes. Such practices were held to give direct knowledge into the emptiness of visual appearances, and ultimately, into the emptiness of all phenomena.

In these cases, practitioners deliberately sought to cultivate new ways of seeing that were not determined by the external world, but were actively generated by the perceiver. They still treated ordinary perception as being co-created by the perceiver and by the external world, but they focused on cultivating themselves as a way of better perceiving the external world.

Yet one more key theme in Buddhist treatments of perception is that perception takes on

171. For more on these practices, see Christopher Hatchell, *Naked Seeing: The Great Perfection, the Wheel of Time, and Visionary Buddhism in Renaissance Tibet*.

two different kinds of roles. One role for perception, exemplified by the *Holy Teachings of Vimalakīrti* passage we have seen earlier, suggests that ordinary perception is deluded, and emphasizes the gap between appearance and reality. We have already discussed this at length, so there is no need to elaborate here.

The other role for perception, however, is as a model for what true knowledge is like. Indeed, visual metaphors structure much Buddhist thought and practice. For example, the notion of the Buddha being one who is “awakened” arguably entails a visual metaphor insofar as the person who is awake rather than asleep or dreaming has their eyes open. Similarly, early Buddhist texts describe those who hear the Buddha preach as having opened the “dharma eye,”¹⁷² and emphasize advanced sensory powers that can be developed through advanced practice.¹⁷³ Indeed, scholars have noted how much Mahāyāna discourse takes seeing as a model for liberatory knowledge, and how this leads to the valorization of direct and immediate contact with reality unmediated by concepts.¹⁷⁴

Each of these examples demonstrate enduring features of Buddhist concern with perception. Many of them highlight that perception is a multistep process involving not only

172. The Pali suttas often describe people who hear the Buddha’s teachings as having “the dustless, stainless dhamma eye” (Pali: *virajam vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ*) arise within them. In other words, hearing the Buddha’s teachings awakens a person’s ability to see the truth of the dharma, which is to say that they see the truth about reality. In contrast to the ordinary eyes, which are tainted by conceptuality, habitual reactions, and cravings, this dharma eye is clear and undefiled.

173. Alongside these accounts of ordinary perception, we also find descriptions of higher perceptions that can be developed through advanced practice. For example, the Buddha in particular is said to have five eyes, each of which grants a special type of extrasensory perception. Advanced meditators, too, can develop special powers such as the “divine eye” (Pali: *dibbacakkhu*) which grants clairvoyance. For the five eyes: Pali: *pañcacakkhu*, Skt. *pañcacakṣu*, Tib. *spyang lga*. In Pali, for example, one commonly finds the formulation of fleshly eye (*mamsacakkhu*), divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*), wisdom eye (*paññacakkhu*), buddha eye (*buddhacakkhu*), and universal eye (*samanthacakkhu*). See Pali Text Society, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1998), 259-60. One finds other slightly different presentations elsewhere. For example, see Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 216.

174. For more on the root metaphor of “seeing is knowing” and its role in Mahāyāna thought, see David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism*.

external objects but also concepts, emotional tone, and experience. As such, there are multiple points of intervention where the perceptual process might turn out differently. Perception, moreover, is treated as an interface between internal and external such that perception itself is co-created by seers and by the things seen. There are thus certain actions that perceivers can take to change the way that they see, but there are also certain kinds of visual objects that transform the way people exist in the world, whether for good (seeing the Buddha) or ill (seeing a woman). Finally, perception takes on two kinds of roles in Buddhist thought. One emphasizes that perception is often deluded, and highlights the gap between appearance and reality. The other uses perception as a model for what knowledge should be, and highlights the direct and non-conceptual nature of certain kinds of perception. As we will find, each of these ideas that are explored in non-pilgrimage contexts will also play an important role in Tibetan pilgrimage texts. As such, we can say that pilgrimage texts are addressing the same fundamental concerns about perception that arise in other parts of the Buddhist tradition.

Tibetan Terms for Visual Perception

There are a range of Tibetan terms used for visual perception. Some of these terms have direct Sanskrit analogues and are closely tied with the Buddhist philosophical ideas outlined above, but many are drawn from Tibetan colloquial or classical vocabularies. Some of these were deployed to translate Sanskrit Buddhist terms but frequently preserved semantic resonances of their own which do not neatly map onto distinctions made in Sanskrit.

This survey will yield a different picture from the one created by reviewing Buddhist approaches to perception. The philosophical literature is concerned with articulating a coherent and compelling theory of how perception works. In contrast, the range of Tibetan terms used in

writing and speaking are not consistently defined or employed. Nevertheless, such a survey will give us a sense of the range of ways that the act of seeing is understood in the Tibetan Buddhist world and thus help us in interpreting our materials.

As will become clear, many Tibetan words for visual perception share some of the ambiguity contained in the English verb “to see.” That is, they can refer both to seeing as the physical perception of visual forms and seeing as understanding. This ambiguity—sometimes intentional and sometimes not—will be important to keep in mind through the rest of the project.

To begin, let us start with the instrument of visual perception: *mik* (*mig*), or “eye.” The term is defined in the Great Tibetan Chinese Dictionary¹⁷⁵ as “the looker” (*lta byed*), “the leader” (*'dren byed*), or the organ or perception (*snang ba'i dbang po*), and can be further specified as referring to the fleshly eye (*sha'i mig*) or sometimes even the mind's eye (*blo mig*).¹⁷⁶ The *mik* is generally understood to be the instrument of seeing. *Mik* can also mean an aperture (*i khung*) or hole (*bu ga*), which reinforces the notion of the eye as the aperture or orifice through which the external world comes into contact with a person's inner world.

The honorific term for *mik* is *chen* (*spyān*), meaning that when referring to someone of higher status' eyes, such as a high lama or a buddha, one says *chen* instead of *mik*. *Chen* may thus refer to the ordinary eyes of a high-status individual, but it also carries some sense of sharper or deeper perception than ordinary eyes typically afford.¹⁷⁷ For example, one frequently finds references to the *chen nga* (*spyān lnga*), the “five eyes.”¹⁷⁸

175. Zhang Yisun, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1993). Hereafter, *Tshig mdzod chen mo*.

176. The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* in turn defines this term as *sems mig gi gzugs su bkod pa or gnas lugs ji bzhin mthong ba'i blo mig gsal ba*. *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, 1923.

177. *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, 1671.

178. This notion goes back to early Buddhist materials. Lists in the Pali canon vary, but one commonly finds the

Before moving on to verbs involved in seeing, it will be helpful to introduce some Tibetan grammar in order to bring out some of the differences between these terms.¹⁷⁹ Most importantly, Tibetan grammarians divide Tibetan verbs into two broad categories: voluntary (*tha dad pa*, literally meaning differentiated) and involuntary (*tha mi dad pa*, literally meaning non-differentiated).¹⁸⁰ Voluntary verbs are something that an agent does, while involuntary verbs are something that happens without an agent. To give an example apropos to the present discussion, in English, “to look” implies a voluntary action, while “to see” is often understood to be involuntary. This issue of whether seeing is a voluntary or involuntary action will be important throughout this dissertation, and so we should note how different Tibetan verbs for seeing can take voluntary or involuntary meanings.

The first important verb for seeing is *tawa* (*lta ba*), “to look” or “to view.” *Tawa* is a voluntary verb, and generally takes the sense of *looking*. This is distinct from seeing, a point the *Great Dictionary* makes clear by giving the example usage of “In the dark, although I looked, I did not see” (*mun nag gi nang du bltas kyang mi mthong*).¹⁸¹ In other words, the agent is actively looking and is trying to see, but actual seeing does not occur because the darkness prevents the agent from seeing. *Tawa* can also translate as “to investigate” or “to analyze,” indicating that same action of looking, but in a more intense and purposeful way. Many usages of *tawa* involve

formulation *mamsa*, *dibba*, *pañña*, *buddha*, *samantha*. See Pali Text Society, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 259-60. In Tibetan presentations, the five eyes include the *sha'i spyan*, *lha'i spyan*, *shes rab kyi spyan*, *chos kyi spyan*, and *sangs rgyas kyi spyan*. This particular presentation is likely influenced by that of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (Tib. *Mngon rtogs rgyan*). See Maitreyanātha, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, trans. Gareth Sparham (Fremont, CA: Jain Pub., 2006). The trope of the five eyes comes up multiple times, including in Vol. 1, 46-7.

179. Additionally, classical Tibetan verbs have different conjugations in the four main tenses of past, present, future, and imperative. The verbal root often takes different spellings in these different tenses; for example, the root *lta ba* takes the different spellings *blta*, *lta*, *bltas*, *ltos* in the different tenses.

180. This difference has often been thought to mark the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs, but more accurately translates as voluntary and involuntary, and refers to whether the verb involves an agent.

181. *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, 1082.

ordinary physical perception, but the term can also be used in a more general way that might be rendered by the English “to consider” or “to regard.” *Tawa* also functions as a noun meaning “viewpoint,” “opinion,” or “philosophical position.” The connection between *tawa* in the sense of “to look” and *tawa* in the sense of “opinion” is also present in the English terms “point of view” and “viewpoint.”

Another important verb involved in perception is *tongwa* (*mtlong ba*), meaning “to see” or “to perceive.” In contrast to *tawa*, *tongwa* is involuntary, indicating that there is no agent willing the action. It has the sense of ordinary sense perception which sees material forms, and is again distinguished from *tawa* in the example “One who does not see the sun, even though they looked at it, is blind.”¹⁸² *Tongwa* also renders non-visual conceptual understanding, as in the example of “clearly seeing the profound meaning” (*zab don legs par mthong*).¹⁸³ This sense of *tongwa* as relating to non-visual understanding as opposed to visual perception also comes into play in Tibetan renderings of important Buddhist terminology. For example, we find the term *lhaktong* (*lhag mthong*) used to render the Sanskrit *vipaśyanā*, or in English, “insight,”¹⁸⁴ and *tonglam* (*mtlong lam*) used to render the Sanskrit *darśana-mārga*, “the path of seeing,” which is the third of the so-called five paths that characterize an arhat or bodhisattva’s spiritual progress. At this stage, the practitioner has a direct perception of the nature of reality without mediation by concepts.¹⁸⁵ In both of these cases, *tongwa* refers to direct realization of certain abstract concepts

182. *Nyin mor bltas kyang mi mthong long ba yin*. Ibid., 1219.

183. Melvyn C. Goldstein, ed., *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 517.

184. This, along with *samatha*, or calming meditation, is one of two major meditative modes found in Buddhist materials, and indicates a set of practices by which one gains insight into the nature of reality by analyzing Buddhist doctrines and convincing oneself of their validity.

185. For more, see Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 217.

or of the nature of reality that is explicitly non-conceptual, but not to sensory perception.¹⁸⁶

There is also the term *zigpa* (*gzigs pa*), which is an honorific term—that is, a term that shows respect and is used for high-status people, places, and objects—that covers the senses of both *tawa* and *tongwa*. It can thus be used as an involuntary verb meaning “to see” or as a voluntary verb meaning “to look at.” *Zigpa* can also be used as the honorific for “to realize” (*rtogs pa*),¹⁸⁷ indicating that, like *tawa* and *tongwa*, *zigpa* renders both ordinary visual perception and conceptual understanding or realization.

The verb *jelwa* (*mjal ba*), which is an honorific term primarily meaning “to meet,” but can also render “to see” or “to encounter.”¹⁸⁸ This matches the English usage of “to see” as in the phrase, “I went to see the doctor.” The fact that this is honorific indicates respect for the person, place, or object being encountered. In the context of Tibetan pilgrimage, when the pilgrim sees or encounters a holy place or image, they will generally use the term *jelwa* rather than saying that they looked (*tawa*) or saw (*tongwa*) the holy object. *Jelwa* gives the sense of an encounter between two different entities, with the entity being *jelwa*-ed being the object of respect, whereas *tawa* and *tongwa* refer mostly to the person doing the action, without giving more information about the thing being seen. In pilgrimage contexts, one will also find the term *zhip jel* (*zhib mjal*), which pairs *jel* with *zhip*, meaning close or detailed, giving a new term that means a close encounter, a detailed examination, or a careful look. When a pilgrim *zhip jel*-s an image, they look at it closely and carefully from multiple angles, focusing on the object rather than glancing

186. *Tongwa* also translates the Sanskrit *darśana* in terms of “seeing,” or “vision.” *Darśana* is extremely important in Hindu pilgrimage, which are outside the scope of this dissertation, but for more on the notion of *darśan* in Hindu contexts, see Diana Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

187. *Tshigs mdzod chen mo*, 2495.

188. *Ibid.*, 880.

at it quickly and moving on. This, too, implies a voluntary and intentional looking.

Another important term is *nangwa* (*snang ba*), which has a range of meanings and uses, both as a verb and as a noun. Primarily, it takes involuntary verbal sense of “to appear.” One frequently finds the term *nangwa* invoked in philosophical writings because it has the phenomenological sense of “to appear,” without necessarily implying anything about the ontological status or nature of the thing that is appearing. The moon can *nangwa*, bad omens can *nangwa*, and dreams or visions can *nangwa*—the term only indicates that something is appearing to the subject, not necessarily that what appears truly exists. One dictionary definition highlights this gap between appearance and reality in the example it gives for *nangwa*: “It is difficult to be certain about something which merely appears to the eye” (*mig la snang ba tsam gyis blo la nges dka'*).¹⁸⁹ The *Great Dictionary* also gives various ways in which *nangwa* functions as a noun. Such meanings include light rays, appearances, the ways things are on the outside (*phyi'i gnas tshul*), but also refer to internal ways of thinking, ways of thinking, or ways things arise in the mind (*nang gi bsam tshul dang mthong tshul lam/ sems kyi 'char sgo*). *Nangwa* in this sense can include mundane experiences of hunger, but also visionary or meditative experiences.

There are a number of terms related to *nangwa*, including *donang* (*do snang*), meaning “attention,” *nangyul* (*snang yul*), indicating “appearing object” or “visible realm,” *nangtsul* (*snang tshul*), which can mean “appearance,” “phenomenon,” or “to appear.” Most important for our purposes, however, is the term *daknang* (*dag snang*), translated as “pure appearance” or “pure perception.” *Daknang* is a state in which all phenomena appear to the subject in their pure and good aspects.¹⁹⁰ This state of pure perception, and the ability to cultivate such a state, is

189. Ibid., 1589.

190. The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* describes it as a state in which the entire world, animate and inanimate, appears as a pure land, or in which everything appears as the play of wisdom and the bodies of the Buddha. Ibid., 1237: *snang*

highly desirable for pilgrims and for Buddhist practitioners more generally, and as we will find, many pilgrimage texts exhort audiences to have or develop *daknang*.

Similar to *nangwa* are the closely related terms *charwa* ('*char ba*) and *sharwa* (*shar ba*).¹⁹¹ These terms are closely related and *shar* occurs as the past tense of *charwa*. They translate as “to appear,” “to arise,” “to dawn,” or “to shine,” with *charwa* in particular often referring to the arising of thoughts or the arising of sensory phenomena. Hence we find *chargo* ('*char sgo*), literally the *char*-door, as indicating “thoughts” or “perceptual experiences.” *Chargo* also occurs in technical contexts such as in texts about Dzogchen, in which it refers to the locus of the experience of having *nangwa*-s, which is to say, the mind. *Shar* takes the general sense of “to appear” and can apply to mental phenomena (i.e. *snang ba shar*, “an appearance arose”) or physical phenomena (i.e. *nyi ma shar*, “the sun rose”)

There are also many Tibetan words which combine the aforementioned terms into new but related binomes. For example, one finds *tanang* (*lta snang*) meaning “expression,” “look,” or “way of seeing,” *tongnang* (*mthong snang*) meaning “vision” or “visionary appearance,” and other similar combinations.

Another important Tibetan term dealing with Tibetan perception is *ngön sum* (*mngon sum*), which can function as both a noun and an adverb. It can indicate “the way things are without any error” ('*khrul ba min pa'i dngos gnas*), meaning something like “actual” or “real.” In a context where it is understood that humans often misunderstand the way things are, to say that sees *ngön sum* or in a *ngön sum* way (*mngon sum du*) is to say that they see directly, in actuality, or really. Relatedly, it can mean “right in front, without anything hidden” (*lkog gyur min pa'i*

srid snod bcud thams cad dag pa'i zhing du snang ba ste sku dang ye shes kyi rol bar snang ba.

191. Ibid., 861 and 2838, respectively.

thad ka), or in other words, “evident” or “manifest.” Again, this definition shows how *ngön sum* indicates reality without errors or obscuration. Finally, *ngön sum* translates the Sanskrit word *pratyakṣa*, a term which literally renders before or in front of (*prati*) the eyes (*akṣa*), but is generally translated as “direct perception.”¹⁹² As a technical term, it indicates one of the means of knowledge (*anumāna*) recognized by Buddhist philosophers, and indicates a direct and nonconceptual awareness of some object.¹⁹³ One can also find uses of *ngön sum* indicating perception of one’s own mind or yogic perception, but for the most part it refers to sense perception, and in particular sense perception as giving correct and unmediated knowledge of some object.

There are also a number of Tibetan terms which are often translated as “to visualize.” It is important to note that there is no one Tibetan term which translates the English “to visualize.”¹⁹⁴ Rather, the concept of visualization is used as a general term to describe the very widespread practices in Tibetan Buddhism of the controlled construction of images, often of deities, in the mind of the practitioner. Such images of deities are said to be generated (*bskyed*) out of emptiness either within the practitioner (*bdag bskyed*), in front of the practitioner (*mdun bskyed*) or in a vase (*bum bskyed*). At first, the practitioner focuses on generating and maintaining a clear

192. Ibid., 691.

193. Ibid., 691: <*pratyak+Sha*> *blo rig bdun gyi nang gses/ rtog bral ma 'khrul ba'i shes pa/ dper na/ bum 'dzin dbang mngon dang/ gzhan sems shes pa'i mngon shes dang/ 'phags pa'i mnyam bzag ye shes lta bu'o*.

194. Indeed, as Eric Greene has pointed out, no single such term exists in Sanskrit either. Rather, there are a number of Sanskrit verbs that are frequently translated as “to visualize.” When these verbs take an abstract cognitive object, scholars translate the verb as “contemplate,” but when the verbs take an object with visual qualities, scholars translate the verb as “visualize,” thus marking a difference that is not present in the Sanskrit verb. Thus the English translation visualization conceptually unifies what seem to have initially been disparate practices in early Buddhist materials, and introduces distinctions not present in the original language, a fact that leads Greene to question whether the term visualization is appropriate for Buddhist materials at all. I maintain that visualization is a useful term when describing certain Tibetan practices, specifically the controlled construction of images of deities in the mind of the practitioner. See Eric Greene, “Visions and Visualizations: In Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century Experimental Psychology.” *History of Religions* 55, no. 3 (January 26, 2016): 289–328.

and stable image of the deity and the mandala-palace (*rnam pa gsal pa*), often according to canonical descriptions (*mngon rtogs*). Gradually, the practitioner identifies with the generated image of the deity (*lha'i nga rgyal 'dzin pa*) before ultimately dissolving the image inside himself. This whole process is framed in terms of two stages: the generation stage (*bskyed rim*) in which the image is generated, a process that necessarily involves artificial contrivance (*bcos pa*), and the perfection stage (*rdzogs rim*) in which the divine image is made real and uncontrived. As is evident from this description, these are active and deliberate practices in which the practitioner tries, in effect, to *create* what they see.

Finally, there are also terms that, strictly speaking, do not refer to sight or seeing, but are nonetheless often translated as perception. Foremost among these is *dushé* (*'du shes*), a term which, translates the Sanskrit *saṃjñā* and refers to the process of recognizing and mentally labelling some perceived object. That is, there is a moment where a subject comes into visual contact with an object, and then a second moment where the subject recognizes that object *as* something. *Dushé* refers to that second moment. The term occurs in pilgrimage contexts because texts will often tell pilgrims to generate a particular *dushé* of the place. Jamgön Kongtrül, for example, tells pilgrims to “develop the *dushé* that [this place] really embodies the three supports.”¹⁹⁵ In other words, he tells pilgrims to *recognize* that the site is a support for the Buddha’s body, speech, and mind, to see it *as* such a support. One might wonder how much conscious control the pilgrim has over this perception, but it is clear that Kongtrül is telling the pilgrim to see the pilgrimage place in a particular way.

195. *Rten gsum dngos su 'du shes skyed*. 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Thugs kyi gnas mchog chen po de bl ko TI tsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, 538. See also Ngawang Zangpo, *Sacred Ground: Jamgön Kongtrül on “Pilgrimage and Sacred Geography”* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2001), 215.

What Does it Mean to See?

All of this helps us sketch out the semantic range of notions of seeing in Tibetan, and thereby get a better sense of how to understand the goal of seeing the holy mountain.

One clear theme that emerges among almost all of these terms is that, like in English—and also Sanskrit—Tibetan words for seeing can refer to sensory perception or non-sensory understanding, either of a particular concept or of the non-conceptual nature of reality. Seeing thus refers to both sensory and cognitive processes. Indeed, the way terms for seeing are used in these different languages marks the ways in which sensory processes are often deeply interpenetrated with cognitive processes, even if certain usages highlight the sensory or cognitive end of the spectrum. In the case of the cognitive usage, the use of terms for seeing indicate that the subject directly grasps, or has direct access to, the object. To say that someone *sees* the nature of reality, as opposed to saying that someone *understands* the nature of reality, emphasizes the directness of this experience. This manifests, in part, in the deep and pervasive organizing metaphor in Buddhist texts that seeing is knowing.¹⁹⁶ These more cognitive usages of terms for seeing do not, however, displace the sensory meanings of terms for seeing.

One major consequence of the fact that seeing has both sensory and cognitive meanings is that it is not clear what it means when pilgrimage texts talk about *seeing* the holy mountain. Do they mean seeing rocks and stones? Seeing a mandala, with all of the associated deities? Or understanding that the mountain is a mandala, even if it is not exactly seen in that way? Seeing it *as* sacred in a general sense? Considering it to be sacred? There are a whole range of possibilities for how to understand the goal of seeing the mountain as a divine palace.

196. Scholars such as David McMahan have pointed out the ways in which the connection between seeing and knowing is thematized in various Buddhist textual traditions. See David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism*.

This ambiguity, I suggest, is not a flaw on the part of pilgrimage texts. Rather, the fact that the exact meaning of seeing is underdetermined is itself productive of thought and reflection. In other words, it is not only a problem for scholars that we do not understand what it means to see a mountain as sacred. It is also a problem for the pilgrims themselves. The pilgrimage tradition asks them to see a physical mountain of rock and ice as a divine mandala, a task that the tradition itself maintains is fully possible only for a vanishingly small fraction of pilgrims. And yet there are many ways in which pilgrims can attempt to see the mountain as sacred, and thus to make sense of this nearly impossible goal.

In addition to demonstrating that terms for seeing have a range of sensory and cognitive meanings, this survey of Tibetan terms for seeing highlights the *agency* of seeing. Some terms for seeing, like *tawa*, cast seeing as an active, volitional verb, whereas some others, like *tongwa*, depict the passive, receptive, and non-volitional aspect of seeing. Still others, like *zigpa*, can take both senses of seeing. Seeing, in the broad sense, can be both voluntary or involuntary, but within this broad category, there are more specific terms that highlight the active or passive nature of particular acts of seeing. For instance, looking is something that a person *does*, and is a voluntary verb, while seeing is something that *happens* to a person, and is as such an involuntary verb. As such, I will closely track the distinction between voluntary and involuntary types of seeing throughout the dissertation.

The voluntary/involuntary distinction is important for understanding what it means that Tibetan pilgrimage texts ask pilgrims to see a mountain as holy. It makes sense to command someone to *look* at some object, or even to command someone to look at some object in a particular way, but it does not make sense to tell someone to *see* some object. As Wittgenstein points out in the *Philosophical Investigations*, a person cannot will themselves to see a leaf

green.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, visualization practices do involve the deliberate cultivation of a particular kind of image, and thus advanced practitioners can be said in some sense to *will* themselves to see the visualized deity. They do not simply will such a deity into their vision at the snap of a finger—at least not without a great deal of training—but rather follow a prescribed set of practices for generating such visualizations. This is relevant to pilgrimage because Tibetan pilgrimage texts do seem to ask pilgrims to see a mountain sacred. Two questions for us, then, is how this is possible and what *seeing* means in this context.

The final quality highlighted in this survey of Tibetan words for seeing is that there is a range of implications that these terms suggest about the object being seen. For example, a term like *nangwa* emphasizes the phenomenological character of the seeing, using the same word for the objects out in the world that are seen as for perceptual objects arising in the subject's mind, such as dreams or visions. Even when used in reference to external objects, *nangwa* refers to the fact of their appearing, and not necessarily to what they really are. By contrast, *ngön sum* generally implies direct perception of the way things actually are. With *ngön sum*, what you get is what you see. The object may be an external physical object, a concept, or an internal physical state, but when the term *ngön sum* is used, the implication is that the perception is direct and correct. As such, there is a distinction implied between the way objects appear to a particular subject and the way things really are. Sometimes, seeing is taken as the best way to know how things really are, as in the case where *ngön sum* is used in philosophical texts as a valid means of establishing some state of affairs. But sometimes seeing, using terms like *nangwa*, is taken to be subjective and not necessarily indicative of something outside subjective experience (if indeed we can even say that there is some stable state of affairs independent of subjective perception).

197. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 213. For further discussion of this point, see Colin McGinn, *Mindsight*, 48.

Again, this highlights the enduring question of whether seeing gives us direct access to the external world or is a function of our own thoughts and concepts, or some mixture of the two, a dynamic that Tibetan pilgrimage texts are clearly aware of and often reference.

We can thus see from the above that the notion of seeing is represented in a broad semantic range across multiple dimensions. This further highlights that our initial question of how pilgrims should see on pilgrimage is not a strange or idle question. Rather, as will become even more clear over the course of this chapter and the remainder of the dissertation, the tradition itself recognized that there were many ways to see on pilgrimage, and was concerned to make sure that pilgrims adopted certain ways of seeing and not others.

The Body and Mind on Pilgrimage

One aspect of the semantic range of seeing that is not captured in the survey of Tibetan terms above is the extent to which seeing is intertwined with certain modes of bodily, mental, or affective comportment. In giving advice to pilgrims, however, Tibetan authors often emphasized the importance of cultivating appropriate behavior and devotion while on pilgrimage. They marked a difference between going on pilgrimage and simply going through the motions of seeing the holy mountain or holy objects. Often, the difference is whether this seeing is properly connected with reverence and good behavior. Throughout, they demonstrate an understanding of seeing not as a simple receptive process, but as active and connected to mental and affective states. While the question of the agency of seeing is still open, these writers argued that proper seeing on pilgrimage requires the pilgrim to adopt certain mental and affective states such as devotion. Such states can be actively cultivated, and thus provide one way to shape perception, making it more likely that the pilgrim will engage in the right sort of seeing on pilgrimage.

One example of the multiple ways to see on pilgrimage can be found in a poem of advice

Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso (1880-1925) gives to pilgrims:

Without attachment or desire, without fixed or certain plans,
Without selfishness, wandering freely through the country
For the sake of living beings, helping without bias all those to be trained—
These are the activities of the best kind of pilgrim.

Following holy masters without bias or fault,
Requesting holy teachings without preference or contradiction,
Gathering merit at holy places without partiality or grasping—
These too are the activities of the best pilgrim.

Not saddened by fatigue because of faith in the three supports,¹⁹⁸
Gathering merit and pure perception (*dag snang*) without disagreement or irritation
At all of the hermitages, holy places, and monasteries—
These are the activities of the middling pilgrim.

First they promise to circumambulate the whole world,
Then whenever they see (*mtshong*) an uphill, they stay in place.
Finally they fall into a mindset of “been there, done that” (*byas lo song lo*)—
This the situation in which pilgrimage has no real meaning.

Not seeing (*mtshong*) the virtues of the sangha, but seeing (*mtshong*) every flaw,
Not visually encountering (*mjal*) the images and scriptures, but looking from a distance
(*rgyang bltas*),
If someone is watching (*mtshong*), they beg, but if they aren’t watched (*mtshong*), they steal—
This is the second situation in which circling holy places is really circling sin.

When they are tired, they have false views (*log lta*) towards the holy place,
Now they encounter (*mjal*) the temple, and now they forget it,
They consider their anger along the path to be heroic—
Renounce this “pilgrimage” which is a pointless endeavor!

—Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso (1880-1925), “Division of the Three Kinds of Pilgrim”¹⁹⁹

198. The various images and objects at a pilgrimage shrine are often said to be “supports” (*rtan*) for body, speech, and mind. These physical objects give a material basis so that the pilgrim can encounter the enlightened body, speech, and mind of the Buddha.

199. *Chags med zhen med gtad med nges med gnas/ rang 'khris med pas gdul bya ris med la/ phan byed 'gro don rgyal khams phyogs med byed/ gnas skor rab kyi rnam thar pa'o// dam pa phyogs med sel med bsten pa dang/ dam chos ris med 'gal med zhu ba dang/ sgrub gnas phyogs med 'dzin med tshogs bsags pa/ 'di yang gnas skor rab kyi rnam thar ro// rten gsum kun la dad pas ngal dub la/ mi skyo dben gnas dgon sde thams cad du/ 'gras med sun med dag snang tshogs byed/ gnas skor 'bring gi rnam par thar pa'o// dang po khas len steng skor na bsam/ bar du gyen re mthong na gnas re bzhag/ tha ma byas lo song lo'i ngang du thal/ gnas skor mdo don med pa'i ngang tshul gcig/ dge 'dun yon tan mi mthong skyon re mthong/ lha sku gsung rab mi mjal rgyang bltas byas/ mthong na slong zhing ma mthong rku ba de/ gnas skor sdig skor song ba'i ngang tshul gnyis/ dka' chad byung dus gnas la log lta byas/ lha*

In the poem, Kathog Situ contrasts the behaviors of the best sort of pilgrim with that of the worst, and warns of the dangers of a body-mind split on pilgrimage. Throughout, he thematizes the issue of perception as exemplifying the divide between these different sorts of pilgrims.

The best pilgrims' way of seeing regards everything with equanimity; indeed, the pilgrim barely seems to see any difference between holy places and ordinary places. Kathog Situ describes the best pilgrim in terms of what such a pilgrim lacks—attachment, grasping, bias,²⁰⁰ selfishness, and a fixed itinerary—and what such a pilgrim possesses—a connection with holy teachings and teachers, as well as a desire to benefit beings other than the pilgrim herself. Such a pilgrim makes appropriate use of holy places by generating merit at them, but is not overly attached to the physical place, and instead focuses on the teachers and teachings properly associated with those places. All of this gives a picture of a pilgrim whose pure and unchanging internal motivation exactly matches her outward behavior.

Kathog Situ contrasts this way of seeing with that of the bad pilgrim, who is lazy, critical, and sees only opportunities for selfish gain. He connects this inferior way of seeing with the bad pilgrim's negative attitude, and highlights the divide between bad pilgrim's external appearance and internal attitude. The bad pilgrim initially has grand intentions, but when she sees the difficulties of the path, her motivation vanishes and she avoids any hardship. When at a pilgrimage place, she does not see (*mthong*) the good qualities of the monks, but only sees (*mthong*) the bad, she does not visually encounter (*mjal*) the images but rather looks at them

khang da lta mjal ba da lta brjed/ gnas skor lam du khong khro dpa' tu brtsi/ gnas skor nga ba 'bras med ngang tshul dor. "Gnas skor pa rab 'bring mtha' gsum gyi nam dbye," in *Gnas yig phyogs bsgrigs*. Text may also be found in Dge 'dun chos phel, *Rgya gar nang pa'i gnas chen khag gi gnas yig*, TBRC W1KG4528, (Dharamsala: Shes rig dpar khang, 1996), 94-6.

200. Kathog Situ is part of what has been termed the Nonsectarian (*ris med*) movement which emphasized an openness to teachings from all sects. As such we should read the repeated valorization of the pilgrim's lack of preference, partiality, bias, and sectarianism in that context.

from afar (*rgyang bltas*), and even when she does visually encounter (*mjal*) a temple, it makes so little impression on her that she forgets what she has seen as soon as it is no longer in front of her eyes. In each instance, the bad pilgrim's way of perceptually engaging the world is faulty—she fails to focus her attention on the proper objects, seeing the bad but not seeing the good, looking without actually engaging the object, engaging but then forgetting, and looking out for self-gain.

Outwardly, the bad pilgrim may seem to be performing pilgrimage properly, but while she is looking at the various pilgrimage places, she is not really paying attention, and is thus not really *seeing* them. Certainly, she is not seeing them with a sense of devotion or faith. The pilgrim appears to be concerned with maintaining that outward appearance, begging when others can see her, but shamelessly stealing when no one is watching. Each of these contrasts highlights the divide between the pilgrim's outward piety but inner lack of devotion, the root of which is an impure and unstable motivation. This lack of devotion, Kathog Situ suggests, leads the bad pilgrim to see incorrectly and makes pilgrimage a pointless endeavor.

From this poem, it is clear that Kathog Situ expects that, at least to some degree, pilgrims are responsible for what and how they see. Although the pilgrim may be tired, Kathog Situ wants her to do the hard work of cultivating pure perception and not simply let herself focus on the flaws of the monks. This exhortation to pilgrims to not let their weariness or greed affect their perception assumes at least some sense in which pilgrims can *control* how they see or control how they pay attention. The bad pilgrim is bad precisely because they lack this control, or at least the motivation to gain this control. This raises the persistent question of whether and to what degree seeing can be said to be voluntary or involuntary. In some sense, Kathog Situ seems to want pilgrims to recognize that seeing is voluntary and agentive. That is, while they might not have total control over what they see, they can at least try to eliminate certain ways of seeing or

ways of thinking. They can, moreover, cultivate certain dispositions, and they can focus their attention on trying to see in the correct way.

In between the purely selfless ideal pilgrim and the lazy and covetous bad pilgrim, Kathog Situ describes the middling pilgrim as someone who registers the discomforts of pilgrimage, but nonetheless actively overcomes them. The verse describing the middling pilgrim does not use as many words for seeing as the verses describing the bad pilgrim, but we can still note the ways in which Kathog Situ is praising the middling pilgrim for exerting voluntary control over her actions, attitude, attention, and seeing. This middling pilgrim cannot quite live up to the lofty standard of the ideal pilgrim, but nor does she let the difficult conditions on pilgrimage lead her to the negative behaviors of the bad pilgrim. Kathog Situ writes that such a pilgrim is “not saddened by their weariness through faith in the three supports.” Notably, this does not say that the pilgrim does not *feel* the weariness that naturally comes from traveling long distances in extreme conditions—the middling pilgrim faces the same physical difficulties as the bad pilgrim—but rather that the middling pilgrim does not allow the physical tiredness (*ngal ba*) to sadden her. To put it another way, the physical discomfort does not wear the pilgrim down mentally in a way that might weaken her resolve or lead her to commit the sins of the bad pilgrim.

The reason the pilgrim is able to avoid this sadness, moreover, is through her faith or devotion (*dad pa*) to the three supports, that is to the images which are the support of the Buddha’s body, the scriptures which are the support of the Buddha’s speech, and the *stūpas* which are the support of the Buddha’s mind. We will discuss the meaning of *dad pa* further in later chapters, but for now it will suffice to note that this faith provides a bulwark against the negative mental attitudes that afflict the bad pilgrim.

Kathog Situ further characterizes the middling pilgrim as gathering merit and pure perception (*dag snang tshogs gsog byed*). As discussed above, pure perception is usually a phenomenological term indicating how some object appears (*snang*)—as pure (*dag*), in this case—in someone’s perception. *Snang*, the verb for “to appear” is intransitive and thus lacks an agent—it is not something that someone *does*, but rather something that *happens*. Here, however, *dag snang* is paired with an active verbalizer (*byed*) which makes it mean, in effect, to do pure perception. This is highly suggestive for what Kathog Situ thinks that our middling pilgrim should be doing. That is, she should be actively working on their pure perception—on seeing things in their best light, in the way a being with purified perception would see them. Implied in this active verb is that pure perception does not just happen automatically for these pilgrims in the way it might for highly advanced beings, but must rather be pursued with focus, attention, and effort. Good pilgrims do this collecting of pure perception specifically *at* all of the monasteries and hermitages. Of course, exactly *how* they do this remains to be seen, as we will continue to explore in the thesis, but we will hold that thought for now.

Kathog Situ compares this middling pilgrim to the best sort of pilgrim, who wanders aimlessly (*phyogs med*) and presumably considers all places equally holy. Strikingly, Kathog Situ’s verse on the best pilgrim does not mention seeing explicitly at all. Perhaps such pilgrims go beyond the issue of seeing, or perhaps they can have pure perception anywhere they go. The best pilgrim’s way of being seems effortless—such a pilgrim has already somehow attained to a state of regarding everything with equanimity, and consequently does not have to actively *try* to see the pilgrimage place in any sort of way.

Kathog Situ also contrasts the middling pilgrim with the bad pilgrim, who does not see the good qualities of the monks at the places visited, but rather only the bad. Kathog Situ does

not deny that monastic communities have both bad and good qualities, and so in some sense, it makes sense that the bad pilgrim may see monks acting in negative ways. We might say that the bad pilgrim could be harboring negative or jealous ideas about the monks, and thus projecting bad qualities when none exist, or we might say that the bad pilgrim is simply noticing what is right in front of her. Kathog Situ does not specify, but nevertheless, he distinguishes between the bad pilgrim, who focuses on those bad qualities in a way that undermines her practice, and the middling pilgrim, who cultivates an attitude of seeing the pilgrimage place as pure even when there is reason not to do so. The middling pilgrim actively disciplines and controls her perceptual engagement with the world, using faith and devotion to cultivate a pure perception of the pilgrimage site that ultimately makes the exercise of pilgrimage beneficial.

Kathog Situ's poem is representative of many advice texts about pilgrimage in that they emphasize how seeing on pilgrimage ideally involves the coordination of body and mind. Similar language can be found in other advice texts, as well as in pilgrimage guides (*gnas yig*). According to these sources, a good pilgrimage should be more than a set of physical motions, but rather should involve certain mental and affective qualities. The pilgrim who cultivates these mental and affective qualities goes through the same physical motions as the bad pilgrim, but relates to these experiences in a different way.

For example, while the bad pilgrim allows the difficulties of the pilgrimage journey to lead her into laziness and wrongdoing, the good pilgrim sees the difficulties of the trail as advancing her practice. She takes on the difficulties of leaving the comforts of home willingly—ideally for the sake of all beings—and does not shy away from these challenges. Indeed, contra those like Drakpa Gyeltsen who saw the difficulties of pilgrimage as a pointless waste of the comfort conducive to the real work of Buddhist practice, some authors thematize the physical

difficulties of pilgrimage precisely as what makes pilgrimage worthwhile.

One author who explicitly thematizes the difficulties on pilgrimage as being beneficial to pilgrims—provided they have the right attitude towards these difficulties—is Kunkhyen Pema Karpo (1527–92). Pema Karpo highlights the difficulties of pilgrimage in casting pilgrimage as a specifically Mahayana practice. He contrasts non-Mahayana and Mahayana methods for attaining realization. Non-Mahayana practitioners, he argues, generate wisdom through mental cultivation, whereas Mahayana practitioners take the more skilled practice of striding out into the swamp of compassion.²⁰¹ He thus likens the difficult travel through the marshy land surrounding Tsari to the difficult path of the one who is motivated by compassion to help other beings. On this understanding, he valorizes the difficulties of the pilgrimage path as a superior method for benefitting beings and attaining realizations. What is necessary, however, is to take these difficulties as part of the path rather than allowing them to be a cause of wrongdoing. The difficulties are the same, but the pilgrim’s orientation to the difficulties is what has changed.

He emphasizes that the pilgrim must adopt ethical discipline while on pilgrimage, telling pilgrims that they “must go forth from home into homelessness, and maintain ethical perfection by training in the footsteps of the foremost king of the Shakyas [i.e. the Buddha].”²⁰² In using the phrase “going forth into homelessness,” a term which ordinarily describes entering monastic life, Pema Karpo likens the pilgrim to a monk. Pilgrims thus temporarily take on rigorous ethical

201. *Thos bsam gyi shes rab bskyed par bya ba dang/ yid 'du 'dzi ma chags pa rab tu dben pa yid byed kyi ting nge 'dzin dang/ sgom byung gi shes rab skyed dgos pa skyes by 'bring nyan thos dang/ rang sangs rgyas kyi lam thams cad legs par bstan no/ byams pas rab brlan snying rje'i 'dzam rdzab tu/ thabs shes zung gi gom pa 'dor mkhas pa/ pha rol phyin pa'i snying po 'di yin shes/ dgongs nas skal bzang yun ring de la dkris/ de yang rab tu brlan pa'i ne'u gsing la/ gos pa legs par 'dor ba yun ring por bya dgos pa ni/ byams pa'i rlan gyis brlan pa'i snying rje'i 'dam 'dzab tu thabs kyis 'khor bsdud pa dang/ shes rab kyis te mya ngan las zla bar byed pa'i byang chub kyi sems la yun ring por sbyang by chen po'i lam/ pha rol tu phyin pa'i theg pa dang gi snying po'o/ zhes gdams so. 'Brug chen Kun mkhyen Pad+ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad*, 265.*

202. *Sngar gyi grub pa thob pa'i bshul snyeg pa dang/ yid rtse gcig pas skor ba bskor ba ni khyim nas khyim med par rab tu byung dgos pa dang/ de yang shAkya'i rgyal po gtso bo de'i rjes su slob pas tshul khrims phun sum tshogs par gnas te. Ibid.*, 264.

standards as they travel along the difficult path of pilgrimage.

In order to be able to withstand the difficulties of pilgrimage and further, to regard them as part of the Buddhist path, the pilgrim must be able to bring their mind into alignment with the actions of their body—or, to bring their body into alignment with the right kind of mind. One frequently finds in pilgrimage texts the notion that the pilgrim must control the so-called “three doors,” that is, their body, speech, and mind.²⁰³ Texts seem to recognize that the difficulties of pilgrimage mean that pilgrims are liable to fall into wrongdoing and a negative attitude, and so authors writing on pilgrimage exhort pilgrims to cultivate control over their minds in order to ward off these dangers. Jigmé Lingpa, for example, tells pilgrims “Those of you circling the earth and on pilgrimage to holy sites, take care to have steady mindfulness! Master especially the two-fold bodhicitta²⁰⁴ and [know] the difference between a pious person and those [so-called] great meditators who go to the holy places. Be free of the preference for joy and sorrow—they are equal!”²⁰⁵ On these lights, pilgrimage is as much a mental exercise as a physical one.

This mental attitude transforms the difficult conditions on pilgrimage into something good. Jigmé Lingpa, for instance, tells pilgrims to “Withstand travel conditions²⁰⁶ with the armor of forbearance. Even if you get a hundred beatings in a single day, like a stick has pierced through the four elements [of your body], once you can transform that into the assured confidence of carefree yet disciplined action, *that* is what the tantric texts teach as traveling to

203. *'Dul ba dang mthun par sgo gsum sdom pa dang ldan pa*. 'Jam mgon kong sprul, *TsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, 537.2.

204. That is, the aspiration to become awakened and actual application of practices to become awakened.

205. *De bas gnas skor dang sa skor la/ rgyu ba rnams bag yod kyis dran pa brtan/ khyad par chos ldan gyi gang zag dang/ sgom chen gnas skor la 'gro ba'i mtshams/ byang chub sems gnyis la rang dbang thob/ ro snyoms kyi skyid sdug la 'dam ga bral*. 'Jigs med gling pa, *Gnas bskor ba la spring ba'i gtam*, 577.6.

206. Lit. *yul rkyen*, conditions of the area.

the twenty-four holy places.”²⁰⁷ Again we see the emphasis on mental control in spite of physical difficulty, as well as the notion that these difficulties can become fuel for the path.

Let us here take a moment from the general theme of this chapter to note Jigmé Lingpa’s reference to tantric teachings here. While some Tibetan authors, as we will explore more fully in the following chapter, maintained that the tantric dimensions of pilgrimage practice must be restricted to tantric initiates, others adopted the language of tantric pilgrimage even for ordinary people who are not tantric initiates.²⁰⁸ Taking the rest of the letter Jigmé Lingpa writes as context, it is clear that he is addressing ordinary people rather than tantric initiates, and yet he still makes reference to explicitly tantric approaches to pilgrimage, implying that he sees ordinary people as able to participate at least to some extent in tantric pilgrimage.

Faith and Devotion

It is common in pilgrimage literature for texts to exhort pilgrims to cultivate certain mental and affective qualities that will keep them on the straight and narrow. The main quality that promotes the proper attitude and conduct while on pilgrimage is *dépa* (*dad pa*), meaning faith or devotion. *Dépa* does not simply mean cognitive belief in the holiness or legitimacy of the pilgrimage place, although that is certainly involved to some degree. Rather, *dépa* as discussed in a pilgrimage context seems largely to be an affective quality. That is, when a pilgrim has *dépa* towards a holy

207. *Bzod pa'i go chas yul rkyen thub/ nyin gcig la brdungs btags brgya byung yang/ 'byung bzhi la dbyug pas bsnun pa ltar/ ci mi snyam pa'i brtul zhugs kyi/ spobs pa gdeng du gyur pa'i tshé/ yul chen nyi shu rtsa bzhi sogs/ bgrod par sngags kyi gzhung nas bshad.* Ibid., 578.1.

208. Ngawang Zangpo suggests that most people on pilgrimage *are* in fact tantric initiates, and explicitly rejects Huber’s claim that most people went on pilgrimage to places like Tsari for reasons of merit rather than for tantric practice. He speculates that the reason Huber has misunderstood this basic fact is that Huber’s informants in the 1990s were so young in the 1950s that they must not have been very advanced in their tantric practice. I am more inclined to believe Huber as opposed to Zangpo, who seems to have a vested interest in reading most Tibetans as tantric practitioners, but he raises an interesting possibility. See Ngawang Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 114.

place, she *feels* or has an attitude of devotion towards it. This affective orientation shapes the way the pilgrim engages the site—*dépa* does not only affect pilgrim’s mental state, but rather the full range of their conduct. Closely allied with *dépa* is *mōpa* (*mos pa*), a word with a closely allied set of meanings, and which might be translated as faith, devotion, inclination, or interest. Indeed, one frequently finds these two terms together as the binome *démō* (*dad mos*). The pilgrim must generate this affective orientation to the pilgrimage place before even seeing it, but then contact with the place is thought to increase *dépa* further.

While *dépa* powerfully shapes the conduct of the pilgrim, it is also sometimes said to determine the degree to which the site benefits the pilgrim. After describing the benefits of a particular holy place, for example, Kongtrul tells potential pilgrims that they “will attain these benefits according to extent of your faith, devotion, and karmic destiny.”²⁰⁹ Other texts suggest that the pilgrimage place naturally benefits anyone who comes into contact with it, regardless of their attention, but many suggest that the benefits of a pilgrimage place are entirely dependent on the mental and affective orientation of the pilgrim. As such, texts addressed to pilgrims often enjoin them to cultivate faith. Indeed, as we will explore more fully in chapter six, a large proportion of pilgrimage guides (*gnas yig*) contain the term *dépa* in their titles and characterize themselves as generating faith in the pilgrim.

Tibetan writers were certainly aware that misplaced faith could go badly. Drakpa Gyeltsen, for example, warns against blind faith in pilgrimage places by saying that “some people with faith are gullible (*col chung*), some people with faith are heedless (*tho co*), some people with faith are demons,”²¹⁰ then proceeding to poke fun at what these types of people do.

209. *Phan yon de dag rang rang gi dad mos kyi nyer len/ skal pa'i khyad par dang mtshungs ldan tu 'thob par 'gyur ba yin la*. 'Jam mgon kong sprul, *TsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, 543.

210. *Dad pa la la col chung yin/ dad pa la la tho co yin/ dad pa la la 'dre gdon yin*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Gnas*

For the most part, however, discourses about pilgrimage praise faith and encourage pilgrims to develop it.

Closely tied up with faith is pure perception (*dag snang*). Kongtrul, for instance, tells pilgrims, “Do not make judgements about the miraculous manifestations of heroes and *dakinis*. Generate faith and pure perception towards humans, animals, birds, mice, deer, carnivores—whatever you see, good or bad.”²¹¹ Implicit in this is the assumption that people ordinarily go about the world making judgements about how this person is good, that fox is bad, and so on. Kongtrul charges pilgrims, however, to regard all of those things as inherently pure and holy, and even suggests that they may be the magical manifestations of the various non-human beings dwelling in the holy place.

If the pilgrim is able to successfully coordinate body and mind, and to cultivate the appropriate devotion and ways of seeing, advocates of pilgrimage promise that the pilgrim will be able to benefit from blessings at the site. Some advocates of pilgrimage, most prominently Pema Karpo, describe the ways in which the best and most faithful pilgrims will be able to fully transform their perception of the site. In his *Guidebook to Tsari*, he says that on the first circumambulation of Tsari, “Because it is merely the maturation of various causes, conditions, and empowerments, [the pilgrim] perceives (*mtshong ba*) all kinds of mountains and lakes.”²¹² That is, the pilgrim sees the mountain as an ordinary physical object. On the second circumambulation, however, this perception is “matured because of devotion. [The pilgrim]

bstod kyi nyams dbyangs, 345.

211. *Dpa' bo mkha' 'gro'i rnam 'phrul ji ltar ston pa'i tshod mi zin pas mi dud 'gro bya byi'u ri dwags gcan gzan bzang ngan gang mthong yang dad pa dang dag snang bskyed*. 'Jam mgon kong sprul, *TsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, 538.2-3.

212. *Dbang rgyu rkyen pa'i smin* [alternate reading: *dmigs*] *pa tsam du 'gyur bas/ mthong ba yang ri mtsho sogs ci rigs par ro*. 'Brug chen Kun mkhyen Pad+ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad*, 269.

comes to see everything as merely an illusion or a reflection.”²¹³ In contrast to the first circumambulation, where the pilgrim sees ordinary physical objects, and takes them as self-existent, in the second circumambulation, the pilgrim still sees mountains and lakes, but knows that they do not exist in the way that they appear. Like the skilled caravan leader who sees a mirage but knows that there is no oasis giving rise to that perception, the pilgrim on the second circumambulation sees the same thing as the pilgrim on the first circumambulation, but has come to regard it in a different way. Finally, on the third circumambulation, which Pema Karpo titles the “fully perfected view of all,”²¹⁴ the pilgrim develops the correct view of the site. Namely, “seeing the divine faces manifested in [the mountain] just as they are, [the pilgrim] thus develops genuine maturation.”²¹⁵ One finds similar accounts of pilgrims gradually coming to see the site as it truly is scattered throughout this literature—in each of them, the pilgrim’s faith and cultivation of pure perception is eventually rewarded with a transformation of perception.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by asking how pilgrims should see the holy places they visit on pilgrimage. Although this may have initially seemed like a strange question, an overview of Buddhist approaches to perception, as well as Tibetan words for sight and seeing, demonstrates that there are a range of meanings possible within the term *seeing*. Seeing encompasses both voluntary and passive senses, sensory and cognitive meanings, and can indicate that the object of

213. *Bar ma bskor bas mos pas smin pa ste/ thams cad kyang sgyu ma 'am gzugs brnyan tsam du mthong bar 'gyur ro*. Ibid.

214. *Mtha' ma thams cad lta ru yongs rdzogs pas*. Ibid. This “*lta ru*” is strange, and I am not entirely sure how to translate it. The general sense, however, is clearly that by this stage in the pilgrimage, the pilgrim has a perfected vision of the site.

215. *Nang sprul pa'i lha zhal ji lta ba mthong zhing/ des smin pa mtshan nyid par 'gyur te*. Ibid.

perception exists out in the world or that it merely appears to the perceiver. Perception can be said to involve minimal cognitive input and reflect bare sensory awareness or can be said to be deeply intertwined with the perceiver's cognition.

What does this mean for our central question of how to see on pilgrimage? How can pilgrims learn to see in the desired way? To what extent is such a shift in perception deliberate and controllable?

One possible answer that the writers in this chapter suggest is based on their idea that seeing is deeply connected with mental and affective dimensions. Transformations of perception do not happen through cognitive means alone, or through simply physically traveling to the pilgrimage place, but instead, this desirable type of seeing has a central affective dimension. As such, some writers worried that pilgrims would go through the physical motions of pilgrimage but fail to see correctly.

In their estimation—to use Kathog Situ's framing of the best, middling, and bad pilgrims—the bad pilgrim lacks the appropriate mental qualities, and thus sees the holy place in a primarily passive way that allows the pilgrim's underlying greed or anger to dominate that perception. Meanwhile, the middling pilgrim actively generates faith and pure perception of the pilgrimage place, effortfully attempting to see it as pure and holy. The very best pilgrim, of course, just naturally sees all places in this way, but pilgrimage texts seem to recognize that this is out of reach for most people. Instead, they valorize the pilgrim who, in spite of the very real difficulties of the pilgrimage trail, actively disciplines her mind and cultivates pure perception towards the pilgrimage place. Such a pilgrim might have the same physical experiences as she would have if she had not cultivated these qualities of faith and motivation, but she will *relate* to those experiences differently.

The fact that the middling pilgrim generates of pure perception shows one way for the pilgrim to *directly* cultivate a particular way of seeing. The cultivation of pure perception takes energy and focus, and is again tied to affective and mental factors like devotion. Discussions of pure perception and its generation do not occur very frequently in the advice texts examined for this chapter, but we will explore this notion of pure perception and its cultivation in much greater depth in later chapters.

More common in these advice texts, however, is an emphasis on pilgrims cultivating the proper mental and affective dispositions on pilgrimage. These mental and affective dispositions, moreover, do seem to have been considered something pilgrims could actively and voluntarily generate. This thus provides a way to *indirectly* cultivate beneficial ways of seeing. One way to see correctly on pilgrimage, then, is to see with faith. Some commentators suggest, further, that actively cultivating this type of seeing can transform perception in such a way as to lead to the situation of the very best pilgrim, who naturally and effortlessly sees everything as pure. In this way, Tibetan pilgrimage discourse contains the notion that actively and effortfully cultivated ways of seeing the pilgrimage site as pure can lead to the spontaneous arising of a natural and effortless vision of the site as pure.

Nevertheless, while some Tibetan thinkers maintained that it was possible for pilgrims to see correctly on pilgrimage—provided they adopted the proper mental and bodily engagement—others expressed skepticism about the value of pilgrimage practice, or even rejected it entirely. As we will see, moreover, many of these concerns about pilgrimage engage the issues of sight and seeing that we have discussed in this chapter. Such concerns show that the question of how to see on pilgrimage, and how this kind of seeing could benefit the pilgrim, were very much up for debate. With that in mind, let us turn to these critiques.

Chapter Three:

Against Pilgrimage: Tibetan Ambivalence about Engaging External Places

Introduction

There will be great torment during your pilgrimage to meditation regions! Beware your virtuous practice being destroyed by these conditions! You come having awakened a hurricane of bad karma... As soon as you embark on your lengthy path, you will kill beings so you can go, primarily by killing [insects] under your feet. [On the journey,] bandits and battles will blaze with hatred, the armor of patience will be cast to the wind, robbers and hustlers will steal, [and pilgrims] will resort to theft. Your travel companions won't keep their vows, and similarly, they'll commit ethical transgressions. They will adopt the three non-virtuous bodily actions, stop performing prostrations and circumambulations, and tell lies to benefit themselves. They will pull you into divisive speech with dice games. They will spread harsh speech on treacherous paths both wide and narrow and will defile the hardship of the lengthy path with foolish chatter. They will perform "mantra recitation" in the form of the four non-virtuous speech acts. They muddy, chip away at, and break mantra recitation and dharma practice, and they diligently twist [everything] towards perversion. When they see the temple and the three supports, they spread covetous attitude towards the ornamented images and substances offered and spread harm through harsh words about the caretaker. When the hurricane of bad karma arises, in the form of blizzards on the travel path, disputes with enemies, sickness, demons, robbers, and so forth, they walk off into the abyss of wrong view. They are disappointed with the three jewels and dharma protectors. The three non-virtuous mental actions rob them of their thinking, and they arrive at the opposite of concentration and wisdom. Thus, denigrating the six perfections, [those pilgrims are really] on the ten-fold path of non-virtuous action.

— Jigmé Lingpa (1729-1798), "Letter of Advice Sent to Pilgrims: A Bouquet of Sincere Wishes"²¹⁶

216. 'Jigs med gling pa Mkhyen brtse 'od zer, *Gnas bskor ba la spring ba'i gtam*, 576.

Pilgrimage may have been widespread in Tibet, but that does not mean that Tibetans unanimously approved of it. Throughout the written record, we find persistent skepticism about pilgrimage in which writers highlight the dangers of pilgrimage practice, argue that it is pointless, or suggest that *real* practice does not require traveling to faraway pilgrimage places. Tibetan attitudes about the value of pilgrimage consist of a spectrum of positions, with some advocating pilgrimage for all, some supporting pilgrimage for certain kinds of people but not others, some ambivalently supporting pilgrimage but expressing doubts, and some rejecting pilgrimage entirely. Some of the most pointed critiques of pilgrimage, moreover, can be found within texts that ultimately endorse pilgrimage, provided that it is done correctly and with the proper motivation, such as the letter by Jigme Lingpa above.

In the previous chapters, I presented an overview of pilgrimage in Buddhism, including a general account of how pilgrimage was thought to work in Tibet. In this chapter I would like to complicate that general account by surveying critiques of pilgrimage drawn from across the Tibetan tradition and attempting to think through the logic of these critiques. Tibetan writers critiqued pilgrimage in a variety of ways,²¹⁷ but certain concerns occur again and again. By understanding these concerns, as well as the various ways in which Tibetan authors thought pilgrimage could go *wrong*, we will better understand the constellation of features that must be present for pilgrimage to go *right*. This will then help us to better frame the goal of transforming perception on pilgrimage, and to identify the various factors that allow for its possibility.

217. We should note that there are Tibetan ambivalence about pilgrimage is paralleled in a number of other religious traditions. Some representative treatments of debates about pilgrimage in Christianity, for example, can be found in R.A. Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?: Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 3 (1994): 257–71, as well as in Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

In particular, we will examine critiques about pilgrimage insofar as pilgrimage involves external places. One of the central issues animating Tibetan concerns about pilgrimage is the question of whether it is better to focus on internally-directed practices like meditation or philosophical study rather than exerting oneself in difficult travel to faraway places. For those who took internally-directed practices to be primary, pilgrimage is simply a pointless distraction from the real work of self-cultivation. In fact, *because* pilgrimage is so difficult, some authors thought that these difficulties would make pilgrims more prone to ethical lapses and therefore that pilgrimage could undermine their practice. Another central issue is the question of whether external places can be said to have transformative power or whether such power, if it exists, should really be attributed to the pilgrim's mind. For example, whereas some Tibetan pilgrimage texts uphold the notion that certain physical places are endowed with sacred power and blessings, such that visitors to such places *automatically* reap benefits by going there, some writers rejected this notion entirely. Both of these issues raise the question of what power or meditating force the material landscape has.

We should be careful not to overstate the dichotomy of external focus versus internal focus here. While we might want to separate that which is inside persons from that which is outside persons, the two are often deeply connected. The *Kalacakra Tantra*, for instance, says on multiple instances: “As it is outside, so it is within the body” (Skt. *yathā bāhye tathā dehe*).²¹⁸ Contemporary scholars of the anthropology and sociology of religion have made similar points. That is, what we take to be a person's internal life is deeply dependent on their formation by social and material interactions,²¹⁹ and what we take to be the external landscape is produced by

218. For an explanation of this phrase in the *Kalacakra Tantra* and its commentarial literature, see Vesna A. Wallace, *The Inner Kalacakra Tantra*, 65-66.

219. Pierre Bourdieu, among others, has made this point. See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *Reproduction in*

social processes.²²⁰

Nevertheless, it is striking that some authors believed that going on pilgrimage was an important and beneficial practice, and some authors disagreed, and rejected pilgrimage to external pilgrimage places. As such, it is relevant to raise this question of internal and external. How does traveling to external pilgrimage places differ from simply imagining them or doing practices in one's own home? Does travel to external places bring about effects that internally-focused practice does not?

The sources for this chapter will be fairly eclectic, and will include songs and letters of advice written to pilgrims, monastic guidelines advising whether and how monks should go on pilgrimage, tantric texts and commentaries discussing pilgrimage to tantric sites, characterizations of pilgrimage from biographical literature, and eulogies to particular places. I will not be able to exhaustively track all Tibetan thinking about the value of pilgrimage to external sites, but rather to identify a few key arguments that recur across various texts.

Exploring these arguments will help in contextualizing our central question about the transformation of perception on pilgrimage. These arguments against pilgrimage show that pilgrimage was not an incontrovertible good in Tibet, and that people had real questions about the role the physical places play in religious practice. In this we will find that Tibetan writers had questions about how engaging the material world relates to religious cultivation—how do places mediate between internal and external? What role does the difficulty of travel play in pilgrimage? To what extent can we say that places themselves have transformative power?

The chapter will be structured thematically, separating out different representative

Education, Society, and Culture, trans. Richard Nice, 1990 ed., (London: Sage, 1990).

220. See, for example, the introduction of Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon, *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

arguments about pilgrimage. First, I will treat authors who had concerns about pilgrimage, but ultimately endorsed pilgrimage if it was performed correctly, then authors who rejected pilgrimage entirely. Finally, I will outline arguments made about tantric pilgrimage, before concluding with a reflection on the ambiguities and dangers of pilgrimage.

Ambivalence about Valorizing Specific Places

To begin, one critique of pilgrimage articulated by some Tibetan authors is the notion that no one area is any more sacred than any other.²²¹ Such a critique does not reject religious interaction with the external material world, but rather takes issue with identifying any one place as more special than other places. In holding up the notion that some places are inherently special and others are not, some writers argued, the pilgrim is reproducing fundamentally erroneous dualistic thinking, thus undermining the entire Buddhist project. Such writers thus valorized aimless wandering across the land over pilgrimage to specific sites. We might wonder whether such wandering should be called pilgrimage, but several Tibetan authors deliberately connect and contrast this kind of wandering with the directed activities of pilgrims.

Articulating this point of view in a poem of advice that we have already seen, Kathog Situ (1880-1925)²²² writes:

Without attachment or desire, without fixed or certain plans,
Without selfishness, wandering freely through the country
For the sake of living beings, helping without bias all those to be trained—
These are the activities of the best kind of pilgrim.

221. There is a parallel debate in Christian discussions of pilgrimage. That is, if God is omnipresent, how can one particular place be holier than any other? See, for example, R.A. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?” and Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*.

222. Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso is known in contemporary scholarship primarily for his authorship of two accounts of pilgrimages, one to central Tibet and another to Amdo and Kham. So as is the case with many of the authors surveyed here, Kathog Situ is not rejecting the practice pilgrimage wholesale, but is rather lamenting the way in which it is practiced by some pilgrims.

Following holy masters without bias or fault,
Requesting holy teachings without preference or contradiction,
Gathering merit at holy places without partiality or grasping—
These too are the activities of the best pilgrim.²²³

As saw in the previous chapter, Kathog Situ goes on to contrast this best sort of pilgrim with lesser pilgrims who fail to follow their example, but for now we will focus on the ideal of the pilgrim who wanders the land without having a fixed itinerary. Kathog Situ ties the lack of fixed plans or set destinations with an admirable lack of selfish grasping or partiality, suggesting that pilgrims who have specific destinations may be motivated by selfishness ego, or attachment. They may be going to a particular place in order to get merit to benefit themselves, rather than thinking of others. They may also harbor biases about one site being better than another or one school as being better than another. All of this, Kathog Situ suggests, only furthers dualistic thinking, which perpetuates all of the problems Buddhist practice is trying to address. It is worth mentioning here that Kathog Situ is part of the so-called Non-sectarian (*ris med*, pronounced Rimé) movement, which holds up the ideal that Buddhist practitioners expose themselves to teachings from a variety of schools, and that the language of impartiality in this poem has much to do with the sort of language used by Rimé figures.

Other writers echo the notion that pilgrimage to particular places is connected in some way with dualistic thinking. Jamgön Kongtrül, for example, warns pilgrims against committing this error when he writes “The thought ‘this is a sacred place, this is not a sacred place’ is the misconception of an impure mind.”²²⁴ The impure mind imposes these dualities of sacred/not

223. *Chags med zhen med gtad med nges med gnas/ rang 'khris med pas gdul bya ris med la/ phan byed 'gro don rgyal kham phyogs med byed/ gnas skor rab kyi rnam thar pa'o// dam pa phyogs med sel med bsten pa dang/ dam chos ris med 'gal med zhu ba dang/ sgrub gnas phyogs med 'dzin med tshogs bsags pa/ 'di yang gnas skor rab kyi rnam thar ro.* KaH thog si tu chos kyi rgya mtsho “Gnas skor pa rab 'bring mtha' gsum gyi rnam dbye,” in *Gnas yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 1-2.

224. *'Di ni gnas yin no/ 'di ni gnas ma yin no snyam pa ni rang blo ma dag pa'i log rtog yin la.* 'Jam mgon kong sprul, *TsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, 487.2:

sacred on the landscape even when these dualities are not ultimately justified. The practitioner who has an “eye free of dust,” he suggests, recognizes that *wherever he is* is a pure land.²²⁵ In this picture, the notion that some places are particularly special is not something that helps the pilgrim to see better, but rather dust that actually further occludes their vision. On this line of thinking, it is a good thing to wander the landscape, but there is no inherent quality of any place that makes it more holy than anywhere else. The extent to which a pilgrim thinks there is a difference, moreover, reflects their own dualistic thinking rather than inherent qualities of the land.

As such while writers like Kathog Situ and Jamgon Kongtul endorse wandering the land—and indeed, they ultimately endorse pilgrimage as well, for they make these critiques within the context of an overall endorsement of pilgrimage practice—they criticize the idea that any particular place is any different from any other. Furthermore, they valorize the perspective of the best pilgrim who is able to see all places as equally holy.

This is still an endorsement of engaging the external world as a religious practice. Though we might take the argument that all places are fundamentally the same to mean that there is no need to leave home, that is not what Kathog Situ and Jamgön Kongtrül are saying. Leaving home to wander the land is meaningfully different from staying home. Here, the pilgrim is still giving up the comforts of home to wander in unfamiliar and potentially inhospitable lands. It recalls the classic formula in which the Buddha calls disciples to go forth from home life into homelessness. In abandoning the comforts and predictability of home, the wandering pilgrim is committing to see something new every day, without the routines or preoccupations of home and family life.

225. *Su zhig rdul dang bral ba'i mig thob pa/ de yi gang na rgyal ba'i zhing bkod se*. Ibid, 545.

However, this valorization of aimless wandering does seem to invest more significance in the pilgrim's *perspective* than in the material qualities of particular holy places. That the pilgrim is traversing the landscape matters, because they are extracting themselves from the familiarity of home life to embrace what we might call the wild. Nevertheless, they are not visiting particular places believed to have special transformative powers or blessings external to the pilgrim. They may end up visiting the same special places that the ordinary pilgrim visits, but they regard such sites as fundamentally equal to others.

Kongrul and Kathog Situ do ultimately endorse pilgrimage to particular places, but they also see the valorization of particular places as potentially dangerous. Both of them contrast ordinary pilgrimage with the aimless wanderer in order to suggest a hierarchy. Ordinary pilgrimage is acceptable, or even good, but not as good as aimless wandering. Further, it is good only insofar as pilgrims know the dangers of focusing on particular places and try to emulate the aimless pilgrim who regards all places equally.

Ambivalence about Pilgrimage to External Places

If some Tibetan writers were ambivalent about the value of pilgrimage because pilgrimage involves designating certain physical places as more holy than others, other writers were skeptical about the value of interacting with the external landscape at all. They often articulated these concerns in the context of advice to pilgrims, thereby tacitly endorsing the practice and maintaining that it had some value, but nevertheless these critiques do suggest some ambivalence about the value of engaging the external world.

Some of these critiques are tied to the *difficulty* associated with travel to distant pilgrimage places. The material world is not smooth or frictionless, particularly for those

traveling by foot, but rather introduces material difficulties and discomforts that shape the practice of pilgrimage. For some writers, this difficulty is integral to the practice of pilgrimage, because that difficult journey facilitates the desired experience. We will explore the positive aspects of difficulty in greater length in later chapters. Others, however, regarded the difficulty of pilgrimage practice as a negative. Going to a place like Kailash or Tsari involves long travel over difficult terrain in desolate conditions, with pilgrims eating only what they could carry or beg. As Jigmé Lingpa (1729-1798) notes, pilgrims also had to be concerned about bandits or local warfare that made the trail even more perilous. Jigmé Lingpa's descriptions should remind us that the difficulties of pilgrimage were not abstract or theoretical, but rather that the people who went on pilgrimage faced intense physical dangers and discomforts.

These physical discomforts can lead to ethical dangers. Jigmé Lingpa details these dangers extensively in a letter of advice to pilgrims.²²⁶ The karmic perils start from the first step—Jigmé Lingpa notes that travel necessarily involves killing insects under one's feet—and continue over the long and arduous pilgrimage trail. Dealing with these dangers and difficulties leads to the negative emotions of fear and anger, and hungry pilgrims may be tempted to turn to theft themselves. Travel companions, too, can lead the careless pilgrim into idle and foolish chatter or into anger and harsh speech.²²⁷ Jigmé Lingpa mentions what seems to be a dice game²²⁸ that can lead to division among the group of pilgrims.

Even when the pilgrims arrive at their destination and see the images, they may admire the fine work with a covetous rather than a pious eye, and carefully note and exaggerate every

226. 'Jigs med gling pa Mkhyen brtse 'od zer, *Gnas bskor ba la spring ba'i gtam*.

227. See also Tāranātha, *Las stod kyi gnas skor ba 'dra la gdams pa*, 48. *Zhing gnas chen rnams su 'gro ba na/ tho co dang 'khrug long mi 'tshal zhing/ nyams len gyi rtel 'brel sgrig pa zhu*.

228. *Sho sna sda*.

fault among the monks and caretaker. Jigmé Lingpa notes that while pilgrims *should* interpret hardships experienced on the pilgrimage trail as the inevitable ripening of negative karma, weary pilgrims instead take such hardships as reasons to be disappointed with and lose faith in the three jewels. In Jigmé Lingpa's telling, the various misdeeds of pilgrims become the ten non-virtuous actions named by the Buddha²²⁹ and pilgrimage contributes to sin rather than to enlightenment.

Again, as we saw in the previous chapter, Kathog Situ echoes these concerns and worries that improperly motivated pilgrims will allow their weariness to dissuade them from proper conduct. Even those pilgrims who begin with good intentions may be tempted towards quarrelling, laziness, and annoyance by the difficulties of the road.

Given these difficulties, some wondered whether pilgrimage was worth all of this effort, with some suggesting that traveling to external pilgrimage places distracts from the real work of dharma practice. Jigmé Lingpa makes this point by writing “pure dharma consists in the conjunction of the generation stage, which understands the essentials of what is to be purified and the action of purification, and the completion stage which knows what is to be realized and what is to be renounced along the ten stages.”²³⁰ If you do that, you'll get enlightened from your own bed, because the buddha exists in oneself.”²³¹ Jigmé Lingpa thus prioritizes the inner work of generation and completion stage meditative practice over the search for any external pilgrimage place. If the pilgrim properly performs Buddhist practice, he suggests, there is no need to go anywhere else. However, in ultimately endorsing pilgrimage practice, he holds open

229. See 'Jigs med gling pa, *Gnas bskor ba la spring ba'i gtam*, 575-6.

230. This refers to the ten *bhūmis*, or stages, which describe the progression of the practitioner on the path to enlightenment.

231. *Chos dag sbyang gzhi spyod byed kyi/ gnad don go ba'i bskyed rim dang/ sa bcu'i spangs rtogs la rig pa'i/ rdzogs rim zung du 'brel 'gyur na/ sangs rgyas rang la yod pa'i phyir/ byang chub mal gyi nang nas thob*. 'Jigs med gling pa Mkhyen brtse 'od zer, *Gnas bskor ba la spring ba'i gtam*, 578.5-6.

the possibility that travel to holy places somehow facilitates true dharma practice, but as we have seen above, he also sees it as a potential distraction and even as a potential danger.

Embedded in all of these critiques is a rejection of the notion that pilgrimage to a holy place will *automatically* provide benefits to the pilgrim. Pilgrimage guides, which we will consider more fully in a later chapter, regularly promise blessings and merit to pilgrims who go there. They sometimes even describe certain features as “liberating upon seeing” (*mthong 'grol*), meaning that whoever sees this object will be immediately and automatically liberated from bad rebirths.²³² Some authors, however, explicitly reject this logic. Jigmé Lingpa, for example, notes that if holy places had inherent karmic benefits, the shepherds leading their herds through such areas would be close to attaining the rainbow body, a very high level of accomplishment.

For these authors, the potential benefits of pilgrimage depend not solely on the material objects or landscape, but on the pilgrim’s mental state. Ultimately, Jigmé Lingpa does admit that pilgrimage does help purify obscurations and generates merit, but argues that this benefit is not automatic, and so he counsels pilgrims to be careful and to discipline their minds. Pilgrims must focus on virtue and purity, maintain equanimity, and practice patience, for these mental qualities will determine the success or failure of pilgrimage. He ends the letter by addressing those who, in spite of his warnings about pilgrimage, are still set on going, telling them what they must do to guard themselves against temptation and falling into negative behaviors.

Rejections of Pilgrimage

Some writers, however, were not simply *concerned* about the potentially negative aspects of pilgrimage for ordinary people, but rejected pilgrimage entirely. Arguing that pilgrimage was

232. This notion of physical objects having powerful liberative potency has a long and complex history in Tibet. See James Gentry, *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism*.

pointless or even actively harmful, they maintained that Buddhist practice consists in personal transformation cultivated in a relationship with a teacher. Travel to an external pilgrimage place, they maintained, is at best irrelevant to that practice and at worst actively harmful to it.

Some go to Vajrāsana (Bodhgāya), but there are many heretics there; they have no accomplishment. There are many terrifying bandits on the way—when they cut your throat, you’ll repent of having come, dead by a knife.

Others go to the ice field of Tise (Kailāsa), but there are many nomads there. Nomads do all sorts of bad stuff. Having been killed by the glacier of your own perverse views, you’ll repent of having come, dead by a knife.

Others go to Tsari Tsagong, but that area is filled with barbarian Lalo Monpas. You won’t hear the sound of dharma there are all! Having been killed by your own demons, you’ll repent of having come, dead by a knife.

There are so many spots like that, so don’t go running to all the “places of accomplishment.” But in a secluded retreat of conducive conditions, with the raised [banners of] the two meditative processes, engage your discipline.

Then wherever you are is Akaniṣṭha, keeping as company your selected divinity, Whatever you eat or drink is nectar. Not to go searching for some external “place of accomplishment” is the vow of the deep secret spells. So don’t take up this pilgrimage song, but stay where you are and plow the field!

—Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147-1216)²³³

The early Sakya hierarch Drakpa Gyeltsen, for instance, echoes a number of the concerns expressed above, but does not voice these concerns in the context of an overall endorsement of pilgrimage. Instead, he warned followers not to search out external pilgrimage sites, but rather to regard the place where they already are as a heavenly realm and engage in meditative practice right there.²³⁴ He thereby agrees with some of what Kathog Situ and Jamgön Kongtrül will say

233. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Gnas bstod kyi nyams dbyangs*, In *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i gsung 'bum dpe bsdur ma las grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi gsung*, TBRC W2DB4569, 5: 344-7 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007), 346. Translation altered from Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 323.

234. *De la sogs te mtha yas mod/ sgrub gnas mang po mi 'tshol bar/ mthun rkyen 'grig pa'i dben sa ru/ rim gnyis gsengs dang ldan par bsgom/ rang gang du gnas pa 'og min gnas/ grogs su dang 'grogs kyang yi dam lha/ ci za dang ci 'thung bdud rtsi'i zas/ phyi rol du sgrub gnas mi 'tshol ba/ gsang sngags zab mo'i dam tshig yin*. Grags pa

hundreds of years later; namely, that the best sort of practitioner is one who is able to regard whatever place they are at as a pure land. Drakpa Gyeltsen disagrees with them, however, in that they want pilgrims to leave home to do so.

For Drakpa Gyeltsen, his home of Sakya is the perfect place for practice, so why leave it? He contrasts the comforts of his homeland with the difficulties pilgrims will encounter on the road. Proper practice, he suggests, requires favorable conditions (*dal 'byor*, literally meaning leisure and wealth). It is difficult to study the dharma when one is tired from the road, lacking adequate food, and tempted into wrong-doing by the frustrations of travel. Rather, would-be pilgrims should stay where they know they can find all the resources necessary for successful practice. Drakpa Gyeltsen writes, “Don’t go wandering all over the country! Don’t throw away favorable conditions for nothing! Don’t risk life and limb for nothing! If you have enough realizations, stay in solitude! If you don’t have enough realizations, cultivate a lama!”²³⁵ While some Tibetan pilgrimage texts highlight the difficulties of pilgrimage practice as part of what makes pilgrimage valuable, Drakpa Gyeltsen sees it as pointlessly squandering one’s time and resources.

Drakpa Gyeltsen implicitly rejects the notion that these holy places automatically benefit pilgrims who visit them. He notes that Bodhgaya, Kailash, and Tsari are all filled with unsavory people like heretics, nomads, and barbarians. Were those places to benefit whatever beings went there, we might imagine Drakpa Gyeltsen saying, those people would have benefitted. Given that they remain heretics and barbarians, then, it cannot be the case that these places automatically grant blessings and spiritual powers to beings that go there.

rgyal mtshan, *Gnas bstod kyi nyams dbyangs*.

235. *Yul kun tu 'khyams shing ma 'gro bar/ dal 'byor don med ma btang zhing/ lus srog don med du ma btang bar/ rang rtogs tshad yod na dben par sdod/ rtogs tshad med na bla ma bsten*. Ibid., 347.

We should note here that Drakpa Gyeltsen points to solitary retreat practice as having value. That is, he suggests that if the would-be pilgrim has some experience in practice and some level of spiritual realization, they can benefit from solitary retreat practice. These retreats are often located high in the mountains away from human settlements, and so do represent a particular way of engaging the landscape, but Drakpa Gyeltsen clearly thinks that this sort of practice is distinct from pilgrimage. Even that practice, moreover, is not suitable for those who lack the proper training. In order to be able to engage the landscape fruitfully, the practitioner must first train with a qualified teacher and develop experience in practice.

More than being merely uncomfortable, pilgrimage can also be physically dangerous, a point that we have already seen elsewhere. Drakpa Gyeltsen, whose older brother died while on pilgrimage to India,²³⁶ speaks of heretics at Vajrasana, barbarians at Tsari, nomads at Kailash, and robbers along the roads. Describing these places in turn, he thrice repeats the line that Ronald Davidson memorably translates as “having been killed [by dangers particular to each place], you’ll regret having come, dead by a knife!”²³⁷ Given such dangers, the pilgrim is better off staying at home.

Not only do individual teachers reject pilgrimage; it is also institutional policy. For instance, many monastic guidelines (*bca' yig* or *bca' khrims*) often contain language discouraging monks from going on pilgrimage. These monastic guidelines, also called monastic charters or monastic constitutions,²³⁸ outline the rules and regulations governing the often complex life in

236. See Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 338.

237. Ibid., 323. Tib. *La la rdo rje gdan du 'gro/ rdo rje gdan du mu stegs mang/ de dag la yang grub pa med/ lam khar mi rkun 'jigs pa mang/ ol pa bcad nas 'gyod grir 'chi/ la la ti se'i gangs la 'gro/ ti se'i gangs la 'brog pa mang/ 'brog pas mi dge na tshogs byed/ rang gangs log gis bsad nas 'gyod grir 'chi*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Gnas bstod kyi nyams dbyangs*, 345-6.

the monastery, and functioned as a kind of extension of the *vinaya* for the Tibetan context.²³⁹

Such monastic guidelines seem to see pilgrimage as a perfectly legitimate activity for laypeople, but think that monks should refrain from going on pilgrimage. The problems monastic guidelines have with pilgrimage can be clustered into two groups: they see pilgrimage as, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, harmful to scholastic philosophical study and as contributing to the risk of monks improperly mixing with those outside of the monastery.

It is worth noting at the outset that most of the monastic guidelines discouraging pilgrimage are from Gelukpa monasteries; monastic guidelines from Kagyu monasteries generally either mention pilgrimage in a somewhat more favorable light or do not mention it at all.²⁴⁰ This makes sense, particularly given the stereotype of Gelukpa falling on the scholar side of the scholar-adept divide and Kagyupas falling more on the adept side. And while these stereotypes have been overplayed in scholarship, they do contain a certain amount of truth.

The first problem that monastic guidelines have with pilgrimage is that it disrupts scholastic study. One monastic guideline for Sera Monastery, for instance, writes, “[Leaving] scholastic monasteries to exert oneself on pilgrimage to the holy places harms the intellect and studies. So for a monk engaged in monastic study, there is nowhere else to go! (i.e. there is no

238. As Jansen points out, they have also been written in non-monastic contexts such as hermitages, communities of tantric practitioners, and village communities. See Berthe Jansen, “How to Tame a Wild Monastic Elephant: Drepung Monastery According to the Great Fifth” In *Tibetans Who Escaped the Historian’s Net: Studies in the Social History of Tibetan Societies*, edited by Charles Ramble, Peter Schwieger, and Alice Travers (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2013), 111–139, particularly 112. See also Berthe Jansen, *The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

239. They have been studied first by Ter Ellingson in “Tibetan Monastic Constitutions: The bCa’ Yig.” In *Reflections on Tibetan Culture: Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie*, edited by Lawrence Epstein and Richard F. Sherburne (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 1990) 205–29, and more recently by Berthe Jansen, in *The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet*. I am greatly indebted to Berthe Jansen, who first told me that monastic guidelines discouraged pilgrimage for monks.

240. Many of these are collected in *Bca’ yig phyogs bsgrigs*, ed. Bod rang skyong ljongs yig tshangs khang, TBRC W21612 (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001).

need to go anywhere else).”²⁴¹ A similarly worded²⁴² monastic guideline written by the Fifth Dalai Lama discourages pilgrimage on the grounds that “it seems to cause the blunting of the intellect.”²⁴³ Another states that “If one goes from the monastery’s philosophical [education] and exerts oneself in pilgrimage, it blunts the intellect (*blo lad*) and harms your studies (*slob gnyer la gnod pa*), so there is no place [other than the monastery] where monks should go.”²⁴⁴ While the guidelines do not elaborate further, the general point is clear: the aim of living in a monastery such as Sera or Drepung—at least according to those who wrote these guidelines—is sustained philosophical inquiry aimed at sharpening the mind so as to develop penetrating insight into emptiness. Insofar as pilgrimage takes time away from this project, it is potentially damaging. But reading between the lines, the suggestion seems to be not merely that pilgrimage takes time away from philosophical study, such that the activity of pilgrimage is itself just an otherwise neutral waste of time, but rather that pilgrimage somehow *blunts* the intellect. Multiple sources use the term *blo lad*, which seems to draw on the term *lad pa*, which can be used as a non-transitive verb or adjective meaning “weak, faint, exhausted, blunt, dull, rotten, decayed.” Thus the *blo*, a term that can be translated as mind but here seems to mean the intellect or conceptual mind in particular, is somehow made weak, dull, or rotten by pilgrimage.

We might see in these prohibitions, then, a reflection of the longstanding tension between scholars, who focus on philosophical inquiry and are skeptical about undisciplined practice, and

241. *Mtshan nyid grwa sa nas gnas skor la rtsol ba byas na blo lad dang slob gnyer pas chos grwa ba rnams 'gro sa med. Bca' yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 89.

242. Many of these guidelines contain strikingly similar language, suggesting that these guidelines are not entirely independent creations but rather share a general source or have influenced one another over time.

243. *Mtshan nyid kyi grwa sa nas gnas skor la rtsol 'dod byed pa blo lad kyi rgyu yin 'dug gshis chos grwa ba 'gro sa med cing*. From *Chos sde chen po dpal ldan 'bras dkar spungs pa'i dgon gyi bca' yig tshul 'chal sa srung 'dul ba'i lcags kyo kun sel me long*, in *Bod kyi snga rabs khrims srol yig cha bdams bsgrigs* (Lhasa: bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1989), 313.

244. *Bca' yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 89.

adepts, who focus on cultivating experiential realizations and are skeptical about getting tied up in excess conceptuality. In the eyes of the scholars writing monastic guidelines, pilgrimage may be exciting and emotionally compelling, but it does not help develop the capacity to understand the nature of reality. Worse, it harms the very tools by which one develops that capacity.

In addition to hindering the goal of intellectual development, monastic guidelines seem to fear that pilgrimage leads to opportunities for monks to break their vows. One such opportunity is the mixing between monks and lay pilgrims (particularly women) that occurs on holy days. On such festival days, monks may go out into villages or lay people may come onto monastery grounds, thus allowing for intermingling. Multiple guidelines note that female pilgrims who come to the monastery for the day should not be allowed to stay longer than a day, that they should get permission from a monastic administrator, and that they are not allowed to stay in the temple or in the monks' quarters.²⁴⁵ Another monastic guideline worries that monks will use “going on pilgrimage” as an excuse to dawdle pointlessly at a pilgrimage place or their home monastery.²⁴⁶ In either case, the function of the monastery as a place to get away from householder life and gender mixing can be undermined by pilgrimage.

We should recognize that these monastic guidelines do not necessarily describe what is actually happening in monasteries, but rather spell out a set of ideals and fears. Nevertheless, the sense one gets from reading these guidelines is that even when pilgrimage is officially discouraged, it is clearly still a part of monks' lives. The monastic guidelines for Drepung written by the Fifth Dalai Lama follow the admonition against pilgrimage by saying, “For those

245. *Gnas skor ba sogs bud med rnams nyin mo dgon nang du bskyod dgos rigs skabs so sor chos khrims par gnang ba zhu sprod kyis gtong ba las/ dgon nang dang/ grwa zhag la zhabs sdod mi chog.* Ibid., 565-6.

246. *Yul grwa rigs 'ga' zhig yul dang gnas skor du bskyod pa gzhis dgon gtong las/ tsha chu sogs la khag dkris kyis gzhis dgon yul sogs phyogs mthar don med du yun rung bsdad de.* Ibid., 279:

residents who want to go [on pilgrimage]: there are nearby places which are important sites for us (*rang phyogs*), such as Lhasa and Reting. There are no connections for pilgrimage to other places such as Tsari. So do not go [to them].”²⁴⁷ The passage seems to anticipate that many monks will not be satisfied by study alone and will want to go on pilgrimage. It further anticipates that it will not be able to dissuade such aspiring pilgrims, and it seems instead to try to steer them to places associated with “us.” Places like Lhasa and Reting, which the guideline lists, are strongholds of the Gelukpa school, whereas mountains like Kailash and Tsari are associated with the Kagyu school. So the “us” (*rang phyogs*, literally our side) in question seems to have something to do with sectarian affiliation. It could also, however, simply indicate the area around the monastery, since *rang phyogs* can mean “our area,” and Lhasa and Reting are closer to Drepung than Tsari. These pilgrimage places are not purely sectarian places, and certainly many pilgrims went to places associated with various schools indiscriminately. Nevertheless, we see the monastic guidelines at least making a distinction between different types of places, with some pilgrimage places being less problematic than others, whether by virtue of proximity or sectarian affiliation.

Monastic guidelines elsewhere seem to implicitly recognize that monks are going on pilgrimage insofar as they give guidance about *how* to travel. One guideline says that monks should never engage in travel with women, with the exception of needing to do something particular, such as seeing a lama, going on pilgrimage to a holy place, or compulsory service.²⁴⁸

247. *Gzhi ba 'gro 'dod yod pa rnams kyang lha sa dang ra sgrenng sogs rang phyogs kyi skor yul 'gangs can thag nye sar yod bzhin du tsa ri sogs gzhan bskor ba'am [reading 'ang] 'brel chags mdog ma kha bas mi byed.* From *Chos sde chen po dpal ldan 'bras dkar spungs pa' dgon gyi bca' yig*, in *Bod kyi snga rabs khrims srol yig cha bdams bsgrigs*, 313. Many thanks to Liz Angowski for helping me parse this line.

248. *Gzhan yang bla ma mjal ba/ gnas mjal/ 'u lag lta bu'i dmigs bsal gtong dgos kyi rigs ma gtogs bud med kyi 'grim 'grul gtan nas byed mi 'jug.* From *Rgyal mchos bdun pa chen pos chos sde chen po se ra theg chen gling la bstsal ba'i khrims su bca' ba'i yi ge rab gsal nor bu'i me long*, in *Bca' yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 111.

And even monastic guidelines which take a more positive view of pilgrimage, such as one from Taklung monastery (a Kagyu monastery), note that even if the monk has a great purpose such as pilgrimage to holy places or traveling to charnel grounds, he still has to ask the monastic officials for permission and a leave of absence. He will also not receive his daily ration of food and the share of donations until he gives receipts for his travels.²⁴⁹ Pilgrimage is again cast as a potential disruption to the life of the monastery. The monk is part of a community, and as such leaving raises the question of the monk's standing in the community.

All of this seems to show that pilgrimage held an ambiguous position in the view of monastic institutions (or at least scholastic monasteries) insofar as it represented a potential disruption to the scholastic and communal life of the monastery. Nevertheless, we can also see suggestions that despite this ambiguous status, many monks still wanted to go on pilgrimage and so monastic guidelines had to come up with ways of regulating pilgrimage.

While monastic guidelines thus rejected pilgrimage because it threatened monks' vows and undermined their studies, other thinkers rejected pilgrimage on scriptural grounds. This argument is advanced most prominently by Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251), who seems to have inherited his uncle Drakpa Gyeltsen's antipathy towards pilgrimage practice. He argues that there is no sutra support for pilgrimage for ordinary people, and that there is scriptural support *only* for tantric pilgrimage. As such, only practitioners training in a particular tantric lineage who had received the necessary empowerments could go, and not ordinary non-initiates. We will examine tantric pilgrimage more closely in a later section, but for now, we will focus on his argument that

249. *Gal te dmigs bsal gyi brel ba yod nges dang gzugs gzhi ma bde ba bcas kyis yong ma thub pa sogs nas dgongs zhu ring thung bla ma dang dbu mdzad gnyis cha la zhu zhing sku gnyer la brda spyor/ de min gnas skor dang gnyan khrod 'grim pa sogs don che na'ang/ rgyal dbang kun dga' dpal 'byor kyis/ khyod yang na tshe dang sgrub pa snyoms/ yang na phyogs med kyis ldum bu gyis/ zla 'ga' zas 'tshol gyis gnas skor te.* Ibid., 199.

there is no scriptural precedent for ordinary people going on pilgrimage.

In his *Clear Differentiation on the Three Vows* Sakya Paṇḍita writes, “The sutras explain no rituals of going to the great places (*yul chen*).”²⁵⁰ Because Sakya Paṇḍita makes this statement in the context of talking about tantric pilgrimage, it is unclear whether he means to say that the sutras do not describe to tantric pilgrimage to the tantric *pīthas* (*gnas*) and great places (*yul chen*) or whether he is saying that the sutras do not prescribe any pilgrimage practices at all. It may very well be the case that Sakya Paṇḍita would feel differently about people visiting pilgrimage sites in India such as Bodhgaya or Kapilavastu. It is difficult to know for sure, because Sakya Paṇḍita neither explicitly makes a distinction of tantric and non-tantric pilgrimage places, nor admits that there are any kinds of pilgrimage that are legitimate.

Most of his commentators, however, both those who agree with him and those who disagree with him, take him to be referring to pilgrimage more generally.²⁵¹ The Sakya scholar Pökhanga, for example, comments on this verse and elaborates on what he takes to be Sakya Paṇḍita’s point. He writes that the exoteric path prescribed in the sutras is simply that of abandoning self and cultivating compassion, and that there is no practice of pilgrimage which is prescribed in addition to that. He allows that the sutras describe practices of solitude (*dben par*)

250. *Mdo las yul chen de dag tu/ 'gro ba'i cho ga bshad pa med*. Sakya Paṇḍita, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*. Edition contained in Jared Rhoton, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes: Essential Distinctions among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems: The Sdom Gsum Rab Dbye and Six Letters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 310.

251. Khatag Zamyak, a pilgrim whose diary we will examine more fully in chapter seven, says that Sakya Paṇḍita’s arguments “have no point beyond refuting the virtues of pilgrimage to holy places.” *Sa skya'i rjes 'jug 'ga' res rmongs pa'i zhen tshig gis dgag pa 'o tshod smra bar de gnas skor ba'i dge dgag las don tshan gang yang med cing*. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Bod dang bal po rgya gar bcas la gnas bskor bskyod pa'i nin deb*, 170. Chökyi Drakpa, whose pilgrimage account we will consider in chapters four and five, quotes Sakya Paṇḍita’s rejection of pilgrimage for those who have not obtained the correct tantric initiations, which he declares “just incorrect. It [pilgrimage to Kailash] is appropriate regardless of whether one has fully obtained the four initiations or not.” *Yul chen bgrod pa don med yin/ zhes pa'i bar 'di mi 'thad pa 'ba' zhis ste/ dbang bzhi rdzogs kyang rung la ma rdzogs kyang rung*. Chos kyi grags pa, *Gzhan gyi rgol ngal 'joms pa'i legs bshad lung rigs smra ba'i mgul rgyan*, in *Collected Works of Chos kyi grags pa*, TBRC W22082 (Kul Khan: Drikung Kagyu Institute, 1999), 387.

in the forest (*nags khrod*), but argues that this is entirely separate from travel to a specific location.²⁵² This recalls Drakpa Gyeltsen's position that solitary practice outside of centers of human habitation can be positive, but that pilgrimage is something different.

Perhaps surprisingly, none of Sakya Paṇḍita's commentators make reference to the passage from the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* (or the Sanskrit analogue, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra*) now considered in much contemporary scholarship to be the *locus classicus* for Buddhist pilgrimage practice. This passage, located in the sixteenth *sutta* of the Dīgha Nikaya, reads:

Ananda, there are four places the sight of which should arouse emotion in the faithful. Which are they? "Here the Tathāgata was born" is the first. "Here the Tathagata attained supreme enlightenment" is the second. "Here the Tathāgata set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma" is the third. "Here the Tathagata attained the Nibbāna-element without remainder" is the fourth. And, Ananda, the faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers will visit those places. And any who die while making the pilgrimage to these shrines with a devout heart will, at the breaking-up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world.²⁵³

While this passage has often been cited by Tibetans and others in the modern period as a justification of pilgrimage practices,²⁵⁴ the picture seems to be more complex. From a purely historical point of view, scholars have raised the question of whether this passage indicates that the Buddha himself advocated pilgrimage. Some scholars have suggested that this passage itself is a relatively late addition to the Pali canon, and was added in order to promote pilgrimage to

252. *Des nags khrod du dben par nyams su len pa'i tshul mdo las/ bdag 'dzin spong ba dang snying rje chen po bsgom pa'i 'du shes kyis rkyen lam du slongs tshul gsungs pa bzhin byed na tshul dang mthun cing de las lhag pa'i gnas chen 'grim tshul mtshan nyid theg pa las gsungs pa med do.* Spos khang pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan, *Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i gzhung lugs legs par bshad pa*, in *Dpal sa skya'i sdom gsum phyogs bsgrigs*, ed. Si khron bod yig dpe mying bsdu sgrig khang TBRC W3CN5910. (Chengdu: Rgyal khab dpe mdzod khang dpe skrun khang, 2015), 322.

253. Ajahn Sumedho and Maurice Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 263.

254. See, for example, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, *Best Foot Forward: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Sacred Sites of the Buddha* (Boulder: Shambala, 2018), 18-20, as well as Ngawang Zangpo, *Sacred Ground: Jamgön Kongtrül on "Pilgrimage and Sacred Geography,"* 22. Gendun Chopel also cites this passage in his *Guide to India*, see Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn*, 324.

already-established sites.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, as Toni Huber has pointed out, while this passage has often been taken to refer to Lumbinī, Bodhgayā, Sārnath, and Kuśinagarī, the text itself does not mention any particular place names, and there is ample evidence of disagreement between Buddhists about place names and locations.²⁵⁶ Instead of having a stable pilgrimage tradition to four main sites, Huber demonstrates, Buddhists had many different schema for thinking about holy places in India, including formulations of eight places, ten places, and thirty-two places.²⁵⁷ Huber refers to this phenomena as the “shifting terrain of the Buddha.”²⁵⁸ This dynamism continued when Buddhism spread to places like China and Tibet, where new conceptions about sacred landscapes developed over time.

Still, even if we set aside these historical concerns, it is striking that no premodern Tibetan text of which I am aware cites this passage in discussions about pilgrimage.²⁵⁹ We should remind ourselves, however, that the Tibetan received tradition is does is not identical to the cumulative Buddhist tradition. In the case of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* passage about pilgrimage, its absence in the Tibetan received tradition is likely because the Tibetan text parallel to the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* does not exist in the sutra section of the Tibetan Kangyur. There is a sutra in the Kangyur whose name in Tibetan (*mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo*)²⁶⁰ renders Sanskrit *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra*, which would seem like a likely parallel to the Pali

255. Buswell, Robert E., and Donald S. Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 503.

256. Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn*, 18-9.

257. Ibid., 20-24.

258. Ibid., 15.

259. Toni Huber concurs, see *The Holy Land Reborn*, 327.

260. *'Phags pa yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo*, in *Dpe bdur ma Bka' 'gyur*, TBRC W1PD96682, 52: 17 - 802 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-9).

Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta,²⁶¹ but this is actually an entirely different text dealing with *tathāgatagarbha* often referred to as the *Mahayana Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra*.²⁶² Rather, the Tibetan analogue to the Pali *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* is tucked away in a minor Vinaya text called the *Vinayaṣudrakavastu* (Tib. *'Dul ba phran tshegs*).²⁶³ The Tibetan version of this text follows the reading found in the Sanskrit *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra* but absent in the Pali *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* that allows for mentally recollecting these places rather than physically traveling to them.²⁶⁴ Whereas the Pali text enjoins pilgrims to *see (dassana)* the sites, the Sanskrit and Tibetan instead say that these sites should be *recollected* (Skt. *anusmara*, Tib. *rjes su dran par 'gyur bar bya'o*), thus suggesting the possibility of a contemplative or visionary pilgrimage. This fact itself suggests an ambivalence about or resistance to physical practices of pilgrimage, or at least a sense that mental recollections could provide all of the benefits of physical pilgrimages. It seems likely, however, that that this passage went largely overlooked in premodern Tibetan discussions of pilgrimage, which leads Sakya Paṇḍita to make the claim that there is no sutra justification of pilgrimage.

External and Internal in Tantric Pilgrimage

As we have seen above, Sakya Paṇḍita distinguished between pilgrimage for ordinary people, which he thought was pointless, and pilgrimage for tantric initiates, which he thought was

261. For a discussion of different versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, including Sanskrit and Tibetan parallels, see Ernst Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1950).

262. See Michael Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2015).

263. *'Dul ba phran tshegs (da)*, in *Bka' 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma)*, TBRC W1PD96682, 11: 20-822. (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-9). Relevant passage on pages 697-699.

264. Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*, 139-40, note 14, as well as Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, 391, which contains an edition of the Tibetan text as well as a translation from the Chinese.

legitimate, at least in principle. Many important tantric texts, including the *Kalacakra*, *Hevajra*, and *Cakrasaṃvara Tantras*, include pilgrimage to specific sites as part of the set of practices they prescribe. Some texts list twenty-four sacred places (*pīṭha*), whereas others have differing numbers, such as thirty-six, thirty-nine, or forty-eight,²⁶⁵ but in each case, these external pilgrimage places are also held to correspond with the bodily components of the individual. By going to these pilgrimage places, the tantric initiate can manipulate his own subtle body, speeding along the process of self-transformation and, ultimately, enlightenment.²⁶⁶ These practices, however, are regarded as potentially dangerous, and thus are limited to those who are working closely with a qualified tantric master and have the appropriate initiations and realizations.

Sakya Paṇḍita argues that the only legitimate form of pilgrimage is tantric, and thus that the only people who should be going on pilgrimage are those with the appropriate tantric vows. In his *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* (*sdom gsum rab dbye*), he castigates his fellow Tibetans for what he sees as lax adaptation of Buddhist teachings and for allowing the three vows—vows of individual liberation, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows—to have gotten mixed up. One example of this is ordinary people going to places that are believed to be the powerful sites described in tantric texts, such as Kailash and Tsari. Sakya Paṇḍita, however, argues that pilgrimage to such sites is not for ordinary people. He writes that travel to such sites “is taught in

265. The exact number of tantric *pīṭhas* and their precise locations was a source of much controversy. See, for example, David Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra*, 69-70, note 2. Note, however, that his references to the Narthang Kangyur are slightly incorrect: the *Vajrapādasārasaṃgraha* is in Volume 18 and not Volume 17. For more information about the tantric *pīṭhas* and their locations, see David Gray, *The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007), 330-3 and Vesna A. Wallace, *The Inner Kalacakratāntra*, 78-9.

266. See discussion of tantric pilgrimage in chapter one. What is important for our purposes is that these texts outline systems in which places in the external world are categorized and mapped onto locations in the human body. For more information see Vesna Wallace, *The Inner Kalacakra*, 77-86. See also David Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra*, 68-70, especially 69, no. 2.

Great Yoga Tantras and treatises,”²⁶⁷ and is part of a larger set of practices to be undertaken with a qualified teacher.

To correctly perform tantric pilgrimage, the aspiring pilgrim must first obtain the four initiations into the practice and then attain stability in the meditations of the generation and completion stage. Sakya Paṇḍita stresses that this stability must be obtained in one’s own home.²⁶⁸ The implication is that it is relatively easier to practice these meditations in the comfort of one’s own home, and that practice in pilgrimage places (which are identified as cemeteries and the like) is a more advanced stage that should only be approached once the relatively easy preliminary practices have been mastered. If the tantric practitioner performs these steps in the correct order, Sakya Paṇḍita says that he will attain enlightenment in this very life. But if people perform pilgrimages to tantric pilgrimage sites without having first mastered the preliminary stages, they will do themselves more harm than good.

Embedded in this emphasis on pilgrimage as a tantric practice that must be performed by properly initiated adepts is a rejection of pilgrimage as a practice for ordinary people. As we saw above, Sakya Paṇḍita wrote that sutras do not describe pilgrimage to the great places, but he also writes that “The Buddha did not teach that the thirty seven major sites are to be visited if one is not performing the meditations of both processes.”²⁶⁹ That is, the exoteric Buddhist tradition as contained in the sutras does not describe rituals of visiting the great places (*yul chen*), and to the extent that the Buddha does recommend visiting those sites in the tantras, he does so *only* if practitioners are doing so after having practiced the generation and completion stage meditations.

267. *Lugs 'di rnal 'byor chen po yi/ rgyud dang bstand bcos rnams las gsungs*. Rhoton, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*, 310, verse 300.

268. *Dang por rang gi khyim du bsgom*. Ibid., 310, verse 297.

269. *Yul chen sum cu so bdun du/ 'gro ba sangs rgyas kyis ma gsungs*. Ibid., 310, verse 301.

As such, the practice of pilgrimage to places like Tsari and Kailash is just “a sham observance of this mantric tradition” and is not a legitimate practice in its own right.²⁷⁰

Those who ignore these facts and go on pilgrimage to the tantric *pīthas*, Sakya Paṇḍita argues, will not be able to realize the benefits of such places. At best, the pilgrimage will simply be pointless, with neither harm nor benefit resulting, which Sakya Paṇḍita takes to be the case for nomads, barbarians, and animals who wander through these places. But for those pilgrims who go to these places imagining themselves to be advanced meditators when they have not actually attained great realizations, traveling to the *pīthas* will be actively harmful, and the fierce deities which inhabit these powerful places will cause problems for the arrogant pilgrim.

There is, however, another issue. Though Sakya Paṇḍita recognizes the legitimacy of tantric pilgrimage in theory, he still does not approve of the way Tibetans do tantric pilgrimage. Specifically, he argues that his fellow Tibetans have incorrectly identified the various tantric pilgrimage sites, and are thus doing pilgrimage at the wrong places. This is a part of his broader argument in the *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* that Tibetan reception of Indian Buddhism has involved errors and distortions that must be corrected for authentic Buddhist practice to thrive in Tibet. Sakya Paṇḍita’s arguments will be more fully fleshed out in chapter four, but for the moment it suffices to say that he thought that Tibetans had lost the ability to do even tantric pilgrimage correctly.

The other main source of ambivalence about tantric pilgrimage concerns the status of external pilgrimage places. While the tantric texts discussed above advocate pilgrimage to a particular set of places, later tantric commentaries, both Sanskrit and Tibetan, often seem wary of

270. *Sngags kyi lugs su 'chos pa mthong*. Ibid., 310, verse 301.

overreliance on external pilgrimage places. For example, many tantric commentaries argue that these external pilgrimage places are taught for the sake of foolish or childish people (*byis pa rnams*) who wander about the country.²⁷¹ The implication here is that the wise should recognize that the set of external pilgrimage places is a way of talking about the internal landscape of one's own body. As one commentary on the *Hevajra Tantra* states, “Externally, there are goddesses that chase after blood and flesh and live in towns who dwell in external holy places. [However] it is taught, ‘As [it is] externally, so [it is] internally,’ and so internal holy places are taught exist in the body in the form of the channels. Do not look elsewhere for them!”²⁷² On this interpretation, the internal holy places are just as important—if not more important—than the external holy places, and so the commentator wants to ensure that readers do not mistakenly assume that the external pilgrimage places are primary.

We should note that some commentators interpret these same passages about how external pilgrimage places are taught for the sake of foolish or childish people (*byis pa rnams*) in precisely the opposite way: to *justify* pilgrimage practice. Kunkhyen Pema Karpo (1527–92), for example, makes this approach explicit in his *Guidebook to Tsari*; he directly addresses those who reject tantric pilgrimage for non-initiates and refutes them in order to argue that tantric pilgrimage is open to all. Quoting the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kalacakra Tantra*, Pema Karpo argues that “Commonly, the holy places such as Jalendra are taught so that childish beings (*byis pa*) may wander to the [24 sacred] areas.”²⁷³ He also cites Naropa's commentary on the

271. “These places, Jalendara and so on, are mentioned for the benefit of simple fools who wander about the country”: ‘*Dir thun mong gis byis pa rnams yul du 'khyam pa'i don du dzA landara la sogs pa'i gnas la sogs par gsungs te*. Naropa, *Rdo rje'i tshig gi snying po bsdu pa'i dka' 'grel* (Skt. *Vajrapādasārasaṃgraha*), 979.

272. *De bas na phyi rol du ni sha dang kharg la rgyug par byed pa grong la brten pa'i lha mo rnams ni phyi'i gnas pa yin la/ji ltar phyi rol de bzhin nang/ zhes gsungs pa'i phyir nang gi gnas ni lus la rtsa'i gzugs kyis gnas par gsungs te de las gzhan du mi bla'o*. Vajragarbha, *Rdo rje snying po'i 'grel pa* (Skt. *Hevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*), 918.

273. ‘*Dir thun mong du byis pa rnams yul du khyam pa'i don du dzA landha ra la sogs pa'i gnas rnams gsungs*

Hevajra Tantra making the same point.²⁷⁴ In each case, he takes the term “childish beings” (*byis pa*) to refer to ordinary people without high levels of spiritual realization, and thus for these texts to be advocating pilgrimage for precisely those beings.

Against those who understood the notion that pilgrimage is “taught for the sake of childish beings” to indicate that it is a lower level of practice to be discarded, Pema Karpo takes “childish beings” to refer to ordinary, non-tantric initiates and thus sees tantric pilgrimage places as open to everyone. Further, he does not take external pilgrimage’s association with “childish beings” as a negative mark on external pilgrimage places, but rather a reason that everyone should go to these places. Indeed, Pema Karpo’s description of the different places of Tsari is shot through with the language of tantric practice. He even analogizes various actions taken at the pilgrimage place to various elements of tantric practice. For example, he writes that:

Descending into the four valleys and ascending the four mountain passes, one is throwing many tantric feasts. This, moreover, is the descent of the Bhagavat’s semen—the Bhagavat being inseparable from the lama—and the Bhagavati’s menstrual drops into the valley; i.e. of the four cakras, through the 1,072 channels. And it is the ascent of that [semen and blood] into the mountain pass, i.e. of the four cakras of each disciple. This secret substance is experienced as the five ambrosias.²⁷⁵

Traveling through the four valleys and four mountain passes at Tsari, then, is akin to the tantric manipulation of the subtle body. Pema Karpo, however, does not say that pilgrimage is *like* these

shing/ zhes 'byung la. 'Brug chen Kun mkhyen Pad+ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad*, 271. This quotation can be found in Rigs ldan Pad+ma dkar po (Skt. *Puṇḍarīka*), *Bsdus pa'i rgyud kyi rgyal po dus kyi 'khor lo'i 'grel bshad rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rjes su 'jug pa stong phrag bcu gnyis pa dri ma med pa'i 'od* (Skt. *Vimalaprabhā*), in *Bstan 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma)*, TBRC W1PD95844, 6: 706 - 1482 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008), 1079.

274. *Khyam pa zhes yang/ nA ro 'grel chen du/ spyir btang du/ byis pa rnam kyis bskor ba'i don du dzA landha ra la sogs pa'i gnas gsungs pa zhes 'byung bas so*. Pad+ma dkar po, “Pad dkar legs bshad,” 271. Original quote from Naropa, *Rdo rje'i tshig gi snying po bsdus pa'i dka' 'grel*, 1079.

275. *Rong chen po bzhiir babs nas/ la chen po bzhi la 'dzeg la/ de deg tu tshogs kyi 'khor lo du ma bskor ba 'di yang bla ma dang gnyis su med pa'i bcom ldan 'das kyi khu ba dang/ bcom ldan 'das ma'i rdul rtsa stong phrag bdun cu rtsa gnyis nas 'khor lo bzhi'i rong du 'bab pa dang/ de nyid slob ma rang rang gi 'khor lo bzhi'i lar 'dzeg pa/ gsang ba'i rdzas bdud rtsi lnga khar myong bas te*. Pad+ma dkar po, *Pad dkar legs bshad*, 266-7.

various elements of tantric practice, but rather that it *is* these various elements of tantric practice. He does not restrict these practices to tantric initiates, but rather seems to think that this practice is appropriate for all pilgrims, so long as they have the appropriate attitude.

Returning to the commentators who rejected what they saw as over-reliance on external pilgrimage places, however, many commentators treat the set of external pilgrimage places as a kind of movable framework that can be mapped onto any location. As such, there is not one particular location for Jalendra that is itself inherently important. Rather, “Jalendra” is a relative point in a conceptual schema that can be mapped onto many different locations. Scholars have noted the way in which, as Buddhism moved to areas outside India, sacred landscapes were re-mapped onto new geographical areas,²⁷⁶ but this idea is also discussed explicitly in Buddhist tantric texts. The *Vimalaprabhā*, for example, states that the entire set of external pilgrimage sites exists in Tibet, China, and other countries.²⁷⁷ Naropa’s commentary on the *Hevajra Tantra* argues that they are present even in a single city.²⁷⁸ According to these texts, while the childish practitioner reifies the set of external pilgrimage places and takes them to exist in a particular place, the advanced practitioner recognizes the inherent non-duality of all places, and recognizes the entire world—including the practitioner’s own body—as a holy site. This resonates strongly with Kathog Situ and Jamgön Kongtrül’s writings about pilgrimage insofar as the transformation of perception is more important for the tantric practitioner than any one external place.

None of these sources *reject* pilgrimage to tantric pilgrimage sites. Indeed, many people

276. For a nuanced discussion of the transposition of Buddhist sacred geography into other areas that focuses particularly on China, see James Robson, “Buddhist Sacred Geography,” in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220-589 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, vol. 21/2, Early Chinese Religion (Boston: Brill, 2010), 1353–98.

277. See Vesna A. Wallace. *The Inner Kalacakratāntra*, 76-77.

278. *Rnal 'byor ma rnams kyi rigs sum cu rtsa drug ni grong khyer gcig tu yang gnas*. Nāropa, *Rdo rje'i tshig gi snying po bsodus pa'i dka' 'grel*, 979.

who refuted Sakya Paṇḍita's rejection of Kailash and Tsari did so on the grounds of their identification of particular tantric pilgrimage sites as such. However, they do also seem to express some discomfort with the entire notion of external pilgrimage. Or, to put it another way, they express concern that careless tantric practitioners will reify external pilgrimage places while forgetting that they are meant to correspond to an internal system, and ultimately to an internal transformation. Most of these commentators would probably agree that engaging the material world, whether through ritual implements, images, consecrated substances, or physical landscapes, is a valuable means for advancing one's practice. Many tantric commentators spent a great deal of time and energy writing polemics about the correct list of tantric pilgrimage places, indicating that they did care deeply about getting that right. However, there is certainly the sense that pilgrimage to external pilgrimage places ideally involves engagement with one's own internal landscape, and that it hopefully results in a transformation of perception.

Ambivalence and the Dangers of Pilgrimage

As we have seen above, Tibetan scholars had a variety of concerns about pilgrimage. I suggest that we can group them into several overlapping concerns. First, there seems to be a general anxiety about potential overreliance on external pilgrimage places. This concern takes a number of different forms. For instance, we have seen that tantric commentaries worried that pilgrims would reify tantric pilgrimage places and forget their internal correlates in the human body. Jamgön Kongtrül worried that pilgrims would take some places to *really be* more holy than others, thus reinforcing their dualistic habits of mind and forgetting that all places equally partake in Buddha nature. Jigmé Lingpa poked fun at those who assumed that certain material places automatically provide benefits, writing that if this were the case, shepherds living near

holy places would be enlightened by now. He maintained that external places were not necessary at all, and that dedicated practitioners could get enlightened from their own beds. All of these authors worried that practices of pilgrimage to external places could lead people to forget that *real* practice—as they understood it at least—was inner work, as opposed to outer work.

We should not make the mistake of overstating this case. Tibetan religious and especially ritual practices make use of the material world in a wide variety of ways, and many of these critiques were framed in terms of an overall endorsement of pilgrimage practice, so it is not the case that Tibetan writers rejected practices of interacting with the external world *tout court*. Nevertheless, there is a clear thread of worry about reifying these external practices and forgetting that they are meant to be tools used in a broader project of self-cultivation and are meant to be connected with certain mental states.

Several of these authors also shared the concern that pilgrimage was difficult. That is, in traveling across the mountainous Tibetan landscape to get to holy places, pilgrims could expect to face cold, hunger, danger from bandits, group squabbles, and all variety of unpleasant circumstances. Moving across the landscape is difficult, these authors asserted, and while we might tend to focus on the destination rather than the journey, they did not want anyone to forget these difficulties. Nor did they necessarily assume that these difficulties redounded to the benefit of the pilgrim. As Drakpa Gyeltsen suggests, dharma practice is already difficult enough, so why make it more so? He echoes the Buddhist idea that to be born a human in a Buddhist country is a rare gift, and seems incredulous at the notion that some might throw away that precious gift on a dangerous path with no real benefits. Jigmé Lingpa also highlights that the travails of the pilgrimage route make it more difficult to behave correctly. He sees the material difficulties of pilgrimage as making it more likely rather than less likely that the pilgrim will engage in sin.

In all of this we do see a distinction being drawn between ways of engaging the external world. Kathog Situ valorizes wandering the land aimlessly over going to particular pilgrimage places, and Drakpa Gyeltsen thinks that isolated retreats in mountain hermitages are positive while traveling to distant pilgrimage places is not. In both of the case of the aimless wanderer and the hermitage meditator, the practitioner is deliberately abandoning the comforts and sociality of home life in order to engage the landscape in some way. Kathog Situ and Drakpa Gyeltsen, however, seem to distinguish this from a pilgrimage journey, whether because the pilgrim is headed to a particular place believed to be holy or because the pilgrim is traveling a great distance, respectively.

All of these factors highlight some of the elements that distinguish pilgrimage in these authors' minds. That is, among other elements, pilgrimage seems to involve a difficult journey to a distant place. Such a place is often wild rather than an area of human settlement, and is held to be special or different from other places in some way, even if there is also a discourse about not reifying that place.

Finally, underscoring what we saw in the previous chapter, there is a clear concern that runs throughout these arguments about the pilgrim's mental engagement with these pilgrimage places. When Kathog Situ valorizes the pilgrim who considers all places to be equal and Jigmé Lingpa lambasts the lazy pilgrim who assumes that benefits come automatically from visiting a place, they are highlighting that the pilgrim's physical presence at the holy place is not necessarily the most important part of pilgrimage. Rather, the pilgrim's *attitude* towards the site matters a great deal. As such, many of these authors explicitly reject the notion that pilgrims will benefit simply from physically going to holy places, but rather insist that the pilgrim's body and mind must be working in harmony in order to facilitate a beneficial pilgrimage practice.

Conclusion

What do these different concerns about pilgrimage—and the more basic fact that so many Tibetan authors criticized pilgrimage—tell us about the broader concerns motivating this dissertation?

First of all, they demonstrate that pilgrimage was not an unquestioned practice in Tibet, and that people disagreed about whether and how to engage the external world on pilgrimage. While pilgrimage seems to have been very popular across Tibet, and a great deal of the pilgrimage literature seems to endorse the notion that pilgrims will *automatically* benefit from visiting holy places, we have seen a number of different ways in which various Tibetan writers questioned that idea. This shows that there was no single understanding of pilgrimage and how it worked. Certainly, there are identifiable patterns of thinking about blessings, merit, place spirits, and the power of certain kinds of places that seem to be widespread across the Tibetan literature, but people still seem to have real questions about the role physical places play in religious practice. Rather than assuming that practitioners had some fixed answer to that question that scholars simply have to uncover, we should recognize that these were open, live questions for our interlocutors.

It is important to keep these doubts about pilgrimage in mind as we move through subsequent chapters. Almost all of the named authors whose texts we will examine in this dissertation explicitly engage the question of whether and how pilgrimage is efficacious, and many pilgrimage guides also seem to anticipate or respond to doubts about pilgrimage. As such, the various texts thinking about how pilgrimage transforms perception and texts aiming to effect such a transformation are attempts to work out the relationship between perception and

pilgrimage places rather than applications of some pre-existing Tibetan understanding. It is thus not the case that Tibetans have figured out how to do pilgrimage and how to transform perception, and our job is simply to uncover that understanding. Rather, in some sense both we and our interlocutors are trying to figure out how to transform perception on pilgrimage, and what role the material world might play in such a transformation.

Chapter Four:

Not Even Elephants:

Scripture, Language, and Perception in the Controversy Over Kailash

Opening Questions

In this chapter, we will continue our inquiry into the goal of seeing a physical place as holy by exploring another set of objections to pilgrimage. Specifically, we will examine texts from a contentious debate about the legitimacy of the holy mountain known to Tibetans as Kailash. Kailash, a mountain located in far western Tibet, was held by most Tibetans to be the sacred mountain called Himavat in Buddhist scriptures. It became famous in Tibet as a place where advanced masters like Milarepa performed great deeds, and eventually became a pilgrimage destination, both for advanced meditators and for ordinary people. Its legitimacy as a sacred site, however, was questioned early in the history of Tibetan Buddhism when the prominent scholar Sakya Paṇḍita attacked pilgrimage to Kailash. When Sakya Paṇḍita looked at Kailash, he did not see Himavat. Instead of seeing wonders, he saw only rocks. His condemnation of pilgrimage to Kailash launched a five-hundred-year long debate in which dozens of commentators debated Sakya Paṇḍita's claims about the authenticity and the value of pilgrimage more generally.

This debate touched on many issues, including scriptural interpretation, the difference between poetry and “describing things the way they actually are,” and the extent to which people without tantric vows can undertake tantric practice. It centered, however, on perception. Sakya

Paṇḍita and his followers argued that Kailash is not Himavat because it does not look like Himavat should. Sakya Paṇḍita's detractors, on the other side, gave explanations for why present-day Kailash looks different from scriptural descriptions of Himavat. As such, it provides a valuable resource for beginning our investigation into the questions of perceptual difference and the possibility of visual transformation.

I will focus in particular on a rebuttal to Sakya Paṇḍita's critique by the 4th Sharmapa of the Karma Kagyu, Shamar Chökyi Drakpa Yeshe Pal Zangpo (1453-1524), entitled *Settling the Issues Around Himavat, Anavatapta, and the Four Rivers: The Scholar's Earring*. (I will refer to him as Chödrak Yeshe to keep him separate from the Drigung Chungtsang Chökyi Drakpa, whose writings will be examined later in the dissertation). While various responses to Sakya Paṇḍita focus on different aspects of the debate, Chödrak Yeshe's rebuttal directly takes up the issue of perceptual difference, and so he is a valuable interlocutor as we pursue questions about how to perceive and identify a holy mountain.

My goal in this chapter will be to draw out the epistemological logic undergirding Chödrak Yeshe's argument that Kailash is Himavat, in order to understand how he approaches the issue of perceptual difference. How do we make sense of the fact that scriptures describe Himavat one way, but our ordinary senses tell us something else? I will suggest that Chödrak Yeshe mainly makes the case that scriptures describe Himavat from the perspective of non-human beings—most frequently gods or *nagas*, beings which are generally held to perceive the world differently than humans—rather than from the perspective of humans. As such, he reasons, it makes sense that humans cannot see Himavat as it is described in scripture. However, he also allows for the possibility that scriptures are functioning poetically to educate the mind's eye. He also suggests that ordinary human perception can tell us important and true—if only

conventionally true—things about the mountain, and can help in interpreting and confirming scripture. He also suggests that this ordinary human perception is malleable, and that it one day might be transformed so as to attain divine perception.

In exploring the way Chödrak Yeshe makes his case, we will focus in particular on three larger issues with implications for the rest of the dissertation. These will be fleshed out over the course of the chapter, but it is worth highlighting them now in summary.

First is the idea that Chödrak Yeshe explicitly develops for much of his work; namely, that the way beings see the world is determined by their perceptual capacities. Such capacities are related to what kind of being they are (i.e. human, god, or animal), but may also vary within these categories. On this model, gods have higher perceptual capacities than humans, and as such can look at the same object and see it in an entirely different way. The way that a human could access the perceptual world that the god sees is by acquiring merit equal to that of the god, or by being reborn as a god in the next life. If what beings perceive is determined by their level of spiritual attainment, this does not seem to allow for the possibility of seeing-as-ordinary and seeing-as-wondrous to exist in the same perceiver. However, as we will see, Chödrak Yeshe also qualifies this general argument, suggesting that there are ways to transcend this difference in perception so that humans might eventually develop divine perception.

Second is the theme of material reality. Chödrak Yeshe's ideas about material reality are not the same as a modern scientific notion of the physical world. However, Chödrak Yeshe does seem to be developing some notion of ordinary material reality, often making reference to that which is common (*thun mong*), known in the world (*jig rten grags pa*), or established in common perception (*mthun snang du grub pa*). His use of this category in defending the identity of Kailash suggests that, in tension with what we might expect from the above idea that humans

and gods perceive the world in entirely different ways, that ordinary sense perception of the material world can tell us important and true things about the world, and can help in interpreting and confirming scripture. Our concern will be to understand how Chödrak Yeshe develops this idea, what work it is doing in his argument, and the implications this has for the goal of seeing the mountain's invisible wonders.

Finally, we will focus on the question of religious language. One point of contention for Sakya Paṇḍita and Chödrak Yeshe is the question of whether scriptures employ poetic language, such that the differences between scriptural descriptions of Himavat and ordinary perceptions of Kailash can be reconciled by pointing out that such descriptions are poetic rather than literal descriptions. Sakya Paṇḍita is generally against the notion that scriptures—and in particular texts like the *Abhidharmakośa*—employ poetic language, but Chödrak Yeshe suggests that the whole function of descriptions of wondrous places like Himavat may be poetic. We will thus explore the ways in which each of them sees scriptural language functioning, and how it might relate to the issue of multiple visions of Himavat/Kailash.

Examining these debates will by no means answer all our questions about perception, but will provide an opportunity to get a handle on the ways in which our informants discuss perception and the stakes of these questions. If, as I hope will become clear in the course of this discussion, Sakya Paṇḍita and his detractors largely agree on the idea that there is no way for an ordinary human to look at Kailash and see the wonders of Himavat, we will move into future chapters not with a ready-made “Buddhist” response to the question of how a transformation of vision might be effected but rather with a heightened sense of the difficulties of transforming vision and with renewed motivation to find out how such transformation might become possible anyway.

My aim will be to unpack Chödrak Yeshe's complex approach to the relationship between perception, language, and material reality. Chödrak Yeshe primarily addresses the problem of perceptual difference by arguing that scriptures describe Himavat and Anavatapta from the perspective of gods or *nagas*. As such, it is no surprise that humans cannot see these places in the ways they are described in scripture. However, he does not embrace the seemingly logical conclusion of such an argument. Namely, that ordinary human perception has no access to the world described in scripture and that ordinary humans thus cannot play any role in confirming scriptural descriptions. Instead, he allows for the possibility that scriptures are functioning poetically to educate the mind's eye, thus troubling the clearly defined separation between human and divine vision he had previously outlined. He also suggests that ordinary human perception can tell us important and true—if only conventionally true—things about the mountain and can help in interpreting and confirming scripture. Thus, even as he holds open the goal of ordinary humans developing divine perception, he does not thereby denigrate ordinary perception as completely worthless, but rather maintains its usefulness for learning about the ordinary physical world.

Textual Sources

Let us begin by discussing the specific texts to be examined, as well as the broader context in which they were produced.

We will start with the work that inaugurated the debate over Kailash and Tsari: Sakya Paṇḍita's *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows*.²⁷⁹ The issue of pilgrimage takes up only a small part of the *Clear Differentiation*, which is instead focused on the different vows Buddhists

279. Tib. *Sdom pa gsum rab tu dbye ba*.

might take. These three vows, which might also be called codes of conduct, are associated with the three paths recognized in Vajrayana Buddhism—the *prātimokṣa* vow found in the vinaya associated with the sutra vehicle, the bodhisattva vow associated with the exoteric great vehicle, and the tantric vows associated with the *vajra* or *mantra* vehicle. Sakya Paṇḍita wrote the *Clear Differentiation* because he felt that inappropriate Tibetan doctrinal innovations had muddled the practice of Buddhism in Tibet, and he wanted Tibetans to return to more authentic and authoritative Indian Buddhist practices. Specifically, he disapproved of Tibetans mixing up the three vows or claiming, as some Tibetans did, that these seemingly different vows were actually of one nature. Against this idea, Sakya Paṇḍita argued that they must be clearly differentiated and maintained. Someone maintaining the *prātimokṣa* vow, which involves celibacy, for instance, cannot undertake certain practices contained within the *mantra* vehicle. And, importantly for this discussion, someone without tantric vows cannot undertake tantric pilgrimage practices.²⁸⁰

The other main source for this discussion is a work written as a refutation of the *Clear Differentiation*'s criticism of pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari, entitled *Settling the Issues Around Himavat, Anavatapta, and the Four Rivers: The Scholar's Earring*²⁸¹ and written by Chökyi Drakpa Yeshe Pal Zangpo (1453 -1524). Chödrak Yeshe, as I will refer to him, was the fourth Sharmapa (*zhwa dmar pa*) of the Karma Kagyu and was a prominent religious, scholarly, and political figure of his time. He studied with the seventh Karmapa, Chödrak Gyatso, founded a number of monasteries, including most famously Yangpachen Monastery near Lhasa in 1504, and maintained a priest-patron relationship with Donyö Dorje, a powerful prince from the

280. The *Clear Differentiation* has been most thoroughly studied by Jared Rhoton. In the following, I have mostly followed his edition of the text, as well as most of his translation choices, although I have altered the translations themselves for the sake of clarity and consistency of terminology. See Jared Rhoton, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*.

281. Tib. *Ri bo gangs can dang mtsho ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*.

Rinpungpa dynasty. He wrote extensively on a wide range of subjects, including Mahamudra, Madhyamaka, and tantra. He was also interested in pilgrimage and sacred places, and in the role they played in Buddhist practice.

Chödrak Yeshe composed *The Scholar's Earring* in 1504 at the request of Lowo Chodzé, the nephew of Lowo Khanchen.²⁸² As was discussed in the introduction and will be more fully explored below, Sakya Paṇḍita's 1232 *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* set off a centuries long debate about the identity of Kailash and Tsari and their legitimacy as pilgrimage sites. Lowo Chodzé clearly refers to this debate when he asks Chödrak Yeshe to compose something that might “clear away the doubts and expel the objections about Kailash and Mapham, about which there are various opinions and constant doubts.”²⁸³ Chödrak Yeshe takes up this challenge and uses the text to respond directly to Sakya Paṇḍita, even quoting verbatim the pilgrimage sections of Sakya Paṇḍita's text.

In studying this work, I have consulted the three editions that I can find. First, a block print of the text from Tsurpu Monastery's printing house that was later scanned in India, which comprises twenty-two folios.²⁸⁴ Second, a much later handwritten version that was put together

282. Indeed, the family trees reconstructed by Roger Jackson on the basis of royal genealogies and histories of the Lo family show a figure named “rje blo gros rgyal mtshan” as the nephew of Lowo Khenchen (Glo bo mkhan chen). See Roger Jackson, *The Mollas of Mustang: Historical, Religious, and Oratorical Traditions of the Nepalese-Tibetan Borderland* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1984), 120, 127, and 133. This figure is moreover said to be a monk and said to have “ascended the religious throne of his uncle” (149). This accords with Glo bo chos mdzad blo gros rgyal mtshan's name and period of activity. Jackson also apparently concurs with this identification; Jowita Kramer footnotes him as saying that this Blo gros rgyal mtshan figure is “known to have posed questions to the fourth Zhwa-dmar.” See Jowita Kramer, *A Noble Abbot From Mustang: Life and Works of Glo-bo mKhan-chen (1456-1532)* (Wein: Universitat Wein, 2008), 26, footnote 103.

283. *Ti se ma pham la/ sa dkar [B: bkar] grub mtha'i 'dod lugs mi gcig pa du ma zhig snga phyi bar gsum ru byung snang ba'i 'di la/ dog sel rtsod spong mkhas pa rnam kyi rna ba'i rgyan du byed pa zhig bya bar rigs so zhes rgyang ring po nas bskul ba la bsten te. Chos grags ye shes, Ri bo gangs can dang mtsho ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa mkhas pa'i rna rgyan* (Henceforth *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*), TBRC W1CZ886 (Mtshur phu dgon, No date), 19b.

284. *Zhwa dmar 04 Chos grags ye shes, Ri bo gangs can dang mtsho ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, TBRC W1CZ886 (Mtshur phu, No date).

and published in 1984 in Dharamsala.²⁸⁵ My assumption is that this version is based off of the block print, but it does contain a number of variant readings, some of which are helpful, particularly when the block print scan is blurred. Third, a computer-input version that is contained in Chödrak Yeshe's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)* published in 2009 in Beijing.²⁸⁶ The computer-input version differs from the other two in a number of minor readings, and also because it leaves off an appendix that has been added to the first two texts. Apparently, after Chödrak Yeshe wrote the text and sent it to Lowo Chodzé, Lowo Chodzé had two follow-up questions which he sent back to Chödrak Yeshe, which then prompted Chödrak Yeshe to write several more folios in response. This appendix, which offers a more explicitly philosophical defense of pilgrimage practices and some of the statements he made in defense of Kailash and Tsari, is not contained in the Beijing edition of Chödrak Yeshe's *Collected Works*.

Chödrak Yeshe was one of the earliest figures to respond directly to Sakya Paṇḍita's attacks on pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari, but he was certainly not the only one. As such, this chapter also draws on other commentaries and responses to the *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows*. These fall primarily into two camps: Sakya commentators and Kagyu refutations, with the former largely approving of Sakya Paṇḍita's arguments and the latter objecting to his statements about Mahamudra and pilgrimage, among other issues.

Within the Sakya tradition, it became a central pillar of monastic training, and as Rhoton notes, the Sakya philosopher Gorampa (1429-1489), himself the author of a famous commentary on the *Three Vows*, likened Sakya Paṇḍita's work to a "fourth pitaka."²⁸⁷ Commentaries started

285. Zhwa dmar 04 Chos grags ye shes, *Ri bo gangs can dang mtsho ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, TBRC W00KG09824 (Dharamsala: Mnga' ris gzhung gces skyong khang, 1984).

286. Zhwa dmar 04 Chos grags ye shes, *Ri bo gangs chen dang mtsho ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, in *Collected Works of Chos grags ye shes*, TBRC W1KG4876, 6: 440 – 463 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009).

appearing in the 14th century, including four later cited by Shakya Chokden by Lhatsün Samyépa (Lha btsun Bsam yas pa), Pökhanga Rinchen Gyeltsen (Spos khang pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan), Gadongpa Chögyal Pelzang (Dga' gdong pa Chos rgyal dpal bzang), and Léchen Zhönnu Senggé (Las chen Gzhon nu seng ge).²⁸⁸ Shakya Chokden (1428-1507) wrote several texts in the mid-15th century which posed difficult questions about the *Three Vows* and then provided his own answers to those questions, many of which were critical of Sakya Paṇḍita's arguments. Shakya Chokden's contemporary Gorampa wrote an extensive commentary on the *Three Vows* itself and also responded to Shakya Chokden's questions in order to defend Sakya Paṇḍita from what he saw as Shakya Chokden's attacks. To this day, the *Three Vows* continues to be studied in the Sakya and Gelukpa traditions.

If the *Three Vows* generated a great deal of favorable commentary, it also gave rise to myriad critical responses. Rhoton notes that early on many scholars from the traditions attacked in the *Three Vows* “chose dignified silence as the best reply,”²⁸⁹ but that written treatises began to appear in the mid-15th century. Indeed, one of the first was the response by Chödrak Yeshe which will be explored in more detail in this chapter. Many more followed by Gampo Jennga Trashi Namgyal (1513-1596?), Drukchen Pema Karpo (1527-1592), and Drikung Chungtsang Chökyi Drakpa (1595-1659). These written responses took the form of independent treatises responding to the whole of the *Three Vows*, texts such as Chödrak Yeshe's that respond to a particular section of the *Three Vows*, or indirectly in works focusing directly on the specific practices or traditions

287. Jared Rhoton, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*, 26.

288. See David Jackson, “Commentaries on the Writings of Sa-skya Paṇḍita,” *The Tibet Journal* 8.3 (Autumn 1983): 14. Shakya Chokden also mentions these commentators by name. See Shākya mchog ldan, *Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i bstan bcos kyi 'bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad gser gyi thur ma*, in *The Works of Pen-chen Shakya mchog-ldan*, TBRC W00EGS1016899, 7:7-244 (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006).

289. *Ibid.*, 27.

criticized by Sakya Paṇḍita, such as commentaries on the *Single Intention* of Jigten Gampo or pilgrimage guides to the places attacked. In such texts the author would bring up the comments made by Sakya Paṇḍita and rebut them in the process of commenting on the original work. At other times, authors might make references to *The Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* in what might seem like an entirely unrelated context. One prominent example is a section of Chomden Raltri's commentary on the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* entitled *Flower Ornament of the Abhidharmasamuccaya*.²⁹⁰ It contains what may be the very first response to Sakya Paṇḍita's rejection of pilgrimage to Kailash, one which was likely composed within seventy-five years of *The Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* itself.²⁹¹

The full body of commentarial literature on the *Three Vows* is much too large to be treated comprehensively in this chapter, so for the most part I will focus on Chödrak Yeshe and his response to and differences from Sakya Paṇḍita, but I will also make recourse to these other commentaries when it is helpful to clarify a point or where a commentator takes a notably different approach to Chödrak Yeshe.

Methodological Approach

Our goal in this chapter is to explore the possibilities and difficulties associated with changing perception. In reading each author, then, I will try to reconstruct a broader theory of perception from the various statements they make in the text, but I will also not assume that each author has an entirely logically coherent account. That is, when possible, I will try to reconstruct Chödrak

290. The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* itself does not discuss Himavat or Manasarovar. It does mention the fact that humans live on Jambudvīpa, and so this may be the reason why Chomden Raltri brings up this issue in his commentary.

291. See Bcom ldan ral gri, *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa'i rgyan gyi me tog*, TBRC W24700. (No publisher, No date).

Yeshe's overall theory of perception, but I will also take seriously the fact that he at times seems to be equivocating and arguing for two different things. I take these differences as themselves interesting and reflective of the difficulty of the philosophical problems at hand.

Tibetan Buddhists, including, prominently, Sakya Paṇḍita,²⁹² wrote a great deal on the philosophy of perception. As discussed in chapter two, Tibetans inherited and added to the long Buddhist legacy of philosophical writing about perception. Key issues under deliberation included the extent to which perception accurately reflected the external world, was influenced by the perceiver's cognition, or constituted reliable knowledge. Philosophical debates on these topics, however, generally took place in the context of philosophical texts about reliable means of knowledge and can be highly abstract and technical. Reading such debates, it can be hard to understand how the various philosophical arguments about perception cash out in terms of how we see the world on an everyday basis. What is more, outside the philosophical literature, it is difficult to find places where people explicitly reflect on perception and how it works.

Fortunately, the debate about pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari represents another way into Tibetan debates about perception. In these works, Sakya Paṇḍita and Chödrak Yeshe are not making abstract arguments about the theory of perception, but rather are making arguments about concrete places and specific activities. This makes it easier to understand how their different approaches to perception lead to different kinds of practices.

Historical and Political Context for These Debates

Even as I read these texts as interlocutors in contemporary discussions of perception and pilgrimage, it is important to understand these texts' projects and historical contexts on their own

292. For more on Sakya Paṇḍita's philosophy of perception, see Georges Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality*, 389-99.

terms.

Sakya Paṇḍita's *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* is motivated by a desire to establish correct protocols for tantric practice, interpret Buddhist scriptures, and ultimately, to attain enlightenment, a process in which vision plays at most a minor role. As discussed above, Sakya Paṇḍita wrote the text because he felt that the Tibetan adoption of Buddhism was marred by spurious Tibetan innovations. Sakya Paṇḍita's main reason for bringing up the issue of pilgrimage at all, then, is because he sees Tibetan pilgrimage as confusing authentic Indian Buddhist practices. Specifically, he takes issue with ordinary people going on pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari on the assumption that these are the sacred places (Skt. *pīṭha*, Tib. *gnas*) spoken of in certain tantric systems. His primary argument, as discussed in the previous chapter, was that people without the necessary tantric vows should not undertake tantric pilgrimage, and only secondarily that the Tibetan mountains of Kailash and Tsari are not really the sacred places described in the tantras.²⁹³

Chödrak Yeshe, by contrast, writes a stand-alone text specifically directed at Sakya Paṇḍita, and thus focuses more on Sakya Paṇḍita's rejection of pilgrimage to Tise and Tsari. He does so on the direct request of Lowo Chodzé, a member of a prominent family from Mustang, who likely had his own set of reasons for being interested in this question.²⁹⁴

293. It is also worth pointing out that Sakya Paṇḍita criticizes a number of practices which are, like pilgrimage, primarily associated with the Kagyu school. See, for example, the debate over the "white panacea." See Michael Broido, "Sa-skye Paṇḍita, the White Panacea and the Hva-shang Doctrine," in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10, no. 2 (1987), 27-68.

294. He does not seem to have composed any texts that have survived, but his position within one of Mustang's most prominent families is itself of some relevance to this entire debate and context in which it occurred. In particular, we should note that Lowo Khenchen wrote several commentaries on the work of Sakya Paṇḍita, including a text which responded to Sakya Chokden's critical questions addressed to defenders of Sakya Paṇḍita's work. Indeed, the connection between Sakya Paṇḍita and Lowo Khenchen was so strong that Lowo Khenchen was later considered an incarnation of Sapan. From this fact alone, we might suspect that Glo bo chos mdzad was a partisan of Sakya Paṇḍita and therefore disinclined to agree with Chödrak Yeshe, but the situation appears to have been somewhat messier than that, for there seems to have been tensions in the Glo bo family about Sakya Paṇḍita. Lowo Khenchen studied with Sakya Chokden and apparently considered him one of his main teachers, but the two

But why does Chödrak Yeshe—and a number of other mostly Kagyu authors—care enough to do so? Toni Huber points out that most of the Kagyu rebuttals to Sakya Paṇḍita were written in the 16th and 17th centuries,²⁹⁵ a time “when the various bKa’-brgyud-pa lineages had established strong positions of temporal power in Tibetan and begun to seek a greater doctrinal influence and maturity.”²⁹⁶ That is, when Kagyu traditions were more localized in terms of their power, they largely ignored Sakya Paṇḍita’s critiques, but when they started to gain more temporal power, they defended the various practices Sakya Paṇḍita and his Sakya followers had attacked. What is more, it would be remiss not to point out that pilgrimage is an economic activity, and that Kagyu schools, especially the Drukpa and the Drikung, largely controlled monasteries around these prominent pilgrimage routes, and thus might stand to lose resources if people stopped going on pilgrimage to these places.

I say all of this not to suggest that the debates about pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari were epiphenomenal or instrumental to these authors’ real concerns of money and power. Such a position would be reductionist and would fail to take the arguments seriously in their own right. However, it is also important to be aware that philosophical and doctrinal debates do not take place in a vacuum, but are always conditioned by the social and historical circumstances from which they arise.

later had a falling out, and Lowo Khenchen criticized Sakya Chokden. This, however, caused tensions with Lowo Khenchen’s older brother, Tshang pa bkra shis mgon, who was then the ruler of Lo, and who was a supporter of Shakya Chokden. Tshang pa bkra shis mgon also seems to have been Glo bo chos mdzad/Blo gros rgyal mtshan’s father. On what side might Blo gros rgyal mtshan have fallen in this dispute, with his father or with his uncle? Without writings of his own, it is difficult for to tell where Blo gros rgyal mtshan stands, or what lies underneath his questions for Chos kyi grags pa. Still, this discussion does give us some insight into what Blo gros rgyal mtshan means when he refers to the widespread “doubts” about Kailash. Though Sakya Paṇḍita wrote his *Sdom gsum rab dbye* in 1232, in the late 15th and early 16th century, it was still at the center of a vigorous debate. See Kramer, *A Noble Abbot of Mustang*.

295. Huber writes 15th and 16th centuries, but this is surely a mistake as the first text he cites appears in 1504, and a number come from the 1600s. Cf. Huber, “Where Exactly are Caritra, Devikota and Himavat?,” 133.

296. Ibid., 133.

For the most part, however, these political, sectarian, and economic disputes have not influenced my interpretations of these texts. That is, I have not had to make recourse to context to make sense of the arguments contained inside the texts, but have instead found the arguments made in the texts legible in their own terms.

One Thing, Many Appearances

The heart of Sakya Paṇḍita's critique of Kailash's identification as Himavat, and subsequent rejection of pilgrimage there, is that the Tibetan mountain Kailash does not look like scriptures say Himavat should look. That is, because Kailash does not look like scriptural Himavat, it must not be Himavat at all. In response, Chödrak Yeshe accepts the charge that Kailash does not look like descriptions of Himavat but argues that this is not evidence for Kailash not being Himavat. Instead, he argues that scriptures such as the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* and *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* describe the world from the perspective of gods and *nagas* rather than from the perspective of humans. As such, it is no surprise that Sakya Paṇḍita's perception of Kailash does not match the wondrous descriptions of Himavat. They also each make similar arguments about the identification of Tsari, another pilgrimage mountain in Tibet as Caritra, which is another holy mountain mentioned in Buddhist scriptures. However, since each spends much more time on Kailash/Himavat, I will mostly focus on their arguments about Kailash.

I will start by fleshing out Sakya Paṇḍita's argument. As indicated above, he bases his case primarily on the fact that Kailash does not possess the characteristics (*mtshan nyid*) described in scriptural sources. Or, to put it another way, it does not look like it is supposed to look, given the descriptions found in the scriptures and important scholastic treatises, including the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, the *Lokaprajñāpti*, the *Viśeṣastava*, the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, and the

Avataṃsaka sutras. Such treatises describe Himavat as having rose-apple trees, having a golden canopy, and having five hundred elephants and arhats, as well as a golden canopy known as “Asura’s Flank.”²⁹⁷ They often describe Lake Anavatapta as being fifty *yojanas* long and wide, with banks made of jewels. The four rivers are supposed to flow from animal mouths near the lake, carry jeweled sands, and circle Himavat seven times. Speaking of Kailash, Sakya Paṇḍita writes that Mount Himavat in the scriptures “is described as a snowy peak possessed of a gold canopy and rose-apple trees, where five hundred elephants encircle Airavata and five hundred arhats dwell...not even elephants are found there—how much less a canopy of gold or rose-apple trees!”²⁹⁸ It is a straight-forward argument: Himavat is said to have rose-apple trees, Kailash lacks rose-apple trees, so Kailash is not Himavat.

It is likely that Sakya Paṇḍita did not himself go to see these sites,²⁹⁹ and his rejection of Kailash is not explicitly based on his own perceptions there, but the visual nature of the argument is clear. Implied within this is the assumption that others besides Sakya Paṇḍita share a common perception of Kailash, such that Sakya Paṇḍita’s visual experience of the site is basically the same as anyone else’s, and moreover that this common sense perception of the world is legitimate grounds for deciding that Kailash is not the Himavat spoken of in the scriptures. Sakya Paṇḍita’s critics will attack these assumptions, arguing that Sakya Paṇḍita’s common sense visual perception is really an impoverished and deluded perception that cannot be held up against the spiritually advanced perception described in the Buddhist scriptures. That is, just because Sakya Paṇḍita does not see any rose-apple trees, that does not mean that they are not there. But

297. Skt. *āsuraṇḍīśva*. See Siglinde Dietz, “A Brief Survey on the Sanskrit Fragments of the Lokaprajñaptiśāstra,” in *Annual Memoirs of the Otani University Shin Buddhist Comprehensive Research Institute* 7 (1989), 84.

298. Rhoton, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*, 136-7.

299. I have found no reference in any of Sakya Paṇḍita’s biographies of him traveling to Kailash.

we should not get ahead of ourselves.

He also argues that ordinary humans cannot travel to Himavat, so that Kailash cannot be Himavat since ordinary humans can travel there. This point is based on prophecies in the *Kalacakra Tantra* about Shambala, which is supposed to be in the vicinity of Himavat, and which the text foretells will be attacked by barbarians using magical powers. He also bases it on a quotation from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*³⁰⁰ that humans without magical powers cannot reach Himavat.³⁰¹ However, the majority of his argument is clearly visual in nature, and is based on the fact that present-day Kailash does not look like scriptural Himavat.

Chödrak Yeshe clearly sees himself as addressing this issue of perceptual difference. At the beginning of the *Scholar's Earring*, he writes that he has composed the work in order to answer the following questions: “Where do the four great rivers come from? Are Himavat and Kailash identical or different? Are Anavatapta and Manasarovar identical or different? Since

300. Sakya Paṇḍita cites a Tibetan translation of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* that reads “Those without magical powers cannot travel there” (*der ni rdzu 'phrul mi ldan pas/ bgrod par bya ba min*). However, many of his critics argue that the passage really says, “It is difficult for people without magical abilities to go there” (*der ni rdzu 'phrul dang mi ldan pa'i mi 'gro bar dka'o*), and they point out that *difficult* is very different from *impossible*. The latter is indeed how most Tibetan translations read (See for instance the *Dpe bsdur ma* edition), but both are fair translations for the Sanskrit, which reads *durgamanaṃ ca manuṣyāṇāṃ anrddhimatām*. The term in question here, *durgamanaṃ*, is from the roots *dur-gam*, literally meaning difficult to go, but as the Monier-Williams dictionary points out, *durgam* and the noun form *durgamana* is often used contextually to mean “impassable, inaccessible, unattainable.” And so Sakya Paṇḍita would not be wrong to interpret the Sanskrit in this way. Indeed, he is not alone—Xuenzang's Chinese translation renders *durgamana* as impassible (無由能至), and Zhendi's translation also says that only magical people can go there (非人所行處。若有通慧人乃可得行). Louis de la Vallée-Poussin's translation into French also has this reading. See Vasubandhu, *L'abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, trans. Louis de La Vallée Poussin (Paris: Geuthner, 1923), 233.

301. There are indeed other scriptural sources that do make it clear that non-magical beings cannot travel to Himavat. Sakya Paṇḍita's commentator Spos khang pa, for example, does not discuss how Sapan's interpretation of *durgamana* as meaning impassible differs from the canonical Tibetan translations into *'gro bar dka'o*, but, as though he knows Sakya Paṇḍita is on shaky ground here, points to the *Sman gyi gzhi* (Skt. *Bhaiṣajyavastu*), a vinaya text that clearly supports Sapan's position. The relevant passage reads: “The Ganga, Sindhi, Vaksu, and Sita flow thus [in the four directions] to the waters of the great sea. No people apart from those who have obtained strong magical powers goes there.” *De las rgya mtsho dug can dag tu 'gro ba yi/ chu bo chen po bzhi po 'di dag phyogs bzhir 'bab/ gang gA sin du de bzhin pa kSha dang/ si ta de la rdzu 'phrul stobs thob pa/ ma gtogs mi rnams kyis ni mi bgrod pa/ der ni thub pa dge 'dun bcas par bzhugs*. From *'Dul ba bzhi*, in *Bka' 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma)*, TBRC W1PD96682 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-9), 656-7.

there are all sorts of inconsistent appearances (*snang ba*)³⁰² of that holy place where there are said to be rose-apple trees, elephant border guards, and Siva's residence, what should be trusted?"³⁰³ Accordingly, Chödrak Yeshe sets out to answer certain specific factual questions, but also to address the underlying issue of perceptual difference. That is, given that Himavat and Anavatapta are portrayed in so many different ways in Buddhist scripture, and that contemporary people perceive it in yet other ways, what can people trust about the site and its identification?

His central argument is that the seeming conflict between ordinary perception of Kailash and scriptural descriptions of Himavat is not evidence for the idea that Kailash is not Himavat, but rather is a natural result of the fact that a single thing looks different to different kinds of perceivers. Scriptures, he suggests, often describe places like Himavat from the perspective of gods or *nagas* rather than humans. His central thesis in the text is "One thing, many minds."³⁰⁴ That is, different beings with different minds, karma, and perceptual abilities can look at the same thing and see it differently. Thus, differing appearance is thus not necessarily evidence that there are different material things underlying various perceptions.

He gives a classic Buddhist example of a human, a god, and a hungry ghost looking at the "same" river and seeing something totally different. The god sees the river as full of ambrosia,

302. As discussed in chapter two, this term *snang ba* can be translated with a number of English terms ranging from appearance to perception.

303. *Chu bo chen po bzhi gang las 'bab ces pa dang/ gangs can dang ti se/ ma dros pa dang ma bam [B: paM] gcig gam tha dad yin shes dang/ phyogs de dag tu shing 'dzam bu dang/ glang po che sa srung gi gnas dang/ lha dbang phyug chen po sogs 'khod pa'i gnas la mi mthun pa ci rigs su snang ba las [B: /] yid rton du 'os pa ni gang yin.* Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 1b.

304. His actual statement, translated literally, is somewhat more elliptical: "One thing, because of many minds." (*dnagos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir*), Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 1b. Though this brief phrase may be puzzling at first, its meaning becomes abundantly clear over the course of the text as Chödrak Yeshe develops his account of perceptual difference. The Tibetan phrase "one thing, because of many minds" includes the separative particle *ni* after the word for mind (*yid*), emphasizing the fact that individual mental difference is the key factor for differing perceptions. As such, the difference between scriptural presentations of Himavat and contemporary perceptions of Kailash are not evidence that Kailash is not Himavat.

the human sees it as full of water, and the hungry ghost sees it as full of blood and pus. In this case there is one thing (Skt. *dravya*, Tib. *dnag po*), but because of the different kinds of minds looking at it, the human, god, and hungry ghost perceive the river in very different ways. Certain humans can train themselves or acquire enough merit to develop the perceptual capabilities of gods or other advanced beings—indeed we might see Tantric visualization practices as undertaking this very sort of training—but for the most part humans simply do not have access to all of the wonderful things gods and buddhas can see.

Implicit in this idea is the very Buddhist notion that there is no single physical reality that is the same for all beings. Rather, all accounts of how the world are accounts of how it *appears* to a particular being or class of beings. None of these appearances—whether the god seeing ambrosia, the human seeing water, or the hungry ghost seeing blood and pus—is the ultimate view, because each of these appearances is a kind of conventional reality. Humans often make the mistake of thinking that the world as it appears to them is the world as it really is, but from the perspective of Buddhist philosophical thought, they are mistaken in doing so. To give an oft-cited simile, they are like travelers crossing the desert who think that they see a lake, but are really seeing a mirage.

The fact that appearances are often illusory, however, does not mean that every sort of appearance is equally good or equally delusory. In the case of the river, the god's view of the river as full of ambrosia is superior to that of the hungry ghost's view of the river as full of pus and blood in the same way that a person with glasses can see a movie screen better with her glasses on than with her glasses off. What various perceivers see is not ultimately real, but there are still better and worse ways to perceive the world. Ambrosia, after all, is much tastier than pus. We might think of these in terms of *levels* of conventional reality. Even the most perfected

version of conventional reality is still not ultimate reality, but the differences between these levels of conventional reality are important.

In arguing that the differences between scriptural descriptions of Himavat and ordinary perceptions of Kailash are due to differing perceptions of the same object, Chödrak Yeshe rejects certain other possibilities that could be used to explain these perceptual differences. In so doing, he lays the groundwork for his argument that scriptures describe the world from the perspective of different kinds of beings.

For instance, we might wonder if *time* might have something to do with why present-day perceptions of Kailash do not look like scriptural descriptions of Himavat. Following the common Buddhist idea that the world is generally degenerating, perhaps it is the case that the jeweled wonders of Himavat may have also declined. Particularly since Buddhist scriptures described Himavat during a time when the Buddha was alive and visiting the mountain, the descriptions in those texts may reflect the way they looked when the Buddha's overflowing blessings made the Himavat particularly glorious. Alternatively, even if the age of degeneration is not the main factor, the mountain may simply have changed over time. Impermanence affects mountains, too, after all.

On this model, although ordinary humans cannot see wondrous Himavat *now*, if an ordinary human were somehow transported back to the time of the Buddha, they could look at Kailash and see Himavat. And indeed, this was the argument that several Kagyu commentators

such as Jigten Gompo³⁰⁵ and Chökyi Drakpa made.³⁰⁶

Sakya Paṇḍita also considers this possibility in the *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows*, but ultimately rejects it on the basis that, while there might be some slight difference in appearance owing to degeneration over time, the differences between the present Kailash and the scriptural Himavat are simply too large to attribute merely to change over time. As he writes, “It is possible that these could have deteriorated slightly through the full impact of this Age of Decline, but how could the descriptions be totally wrong?”³⁰⁷ Change over time does not explain the radical differences between the bejeweled Himavat and the desolate, rocky Kailash. On this point, at least, Chödrak Yeshe and Sakya Paṇḍita can agree.

Chödrak Yeshe also rejects attempts to resolve the differences between ordinary

305. Jigten Gompo is an important person in the history of Tibetan pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari, because he is remembered as one of the first major figures to send disciples to practice there. Chödrak Yeshe considers Jigten Gompo's writings on Kailash, which predated Sakya Paṇḍita's *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows* but clearly anticipates some of Sakya Paṇḍita's concerns, in a section where he reviews what other scholars and practitioners have said about Kailash. Jigten Gompo thus makes a kind of hybrid argument: the difference between contemporary perceptions of Kailash and scriptural descriptions is both due to the fact of different perceptual realms existing at the same time (i.e. a god and human might look at the same mountain and one would see Himavat and the other would see rocky and un-miraculous Kailash, regardless of when they were looking at the mountain) and because of change over time (i.e. a human looking at Himavat in the past and Kailash now see them differently, but if the present-day human was somehow transported to the past, they would see Himavat in the way scriptures describe it.) See Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 11a.

306. Chökyi Drakpa, who will be discussed at greater length in chapter five, also wrote a polemic text about Kailash. He makes an argument based largely on decline over time. He writes, “At present, Himavat, Anavatapta, and so forth lack the [exact] qualities that they had previously because [previously such] blessings arose at the time that the Buddha magically left footprints and so forth [on the earth], but at present there is a lack [of the Buddha's presence]. Furthermore, it is explained that--whatever qualities arose at the time when the Buddha was speaking the dharma--since all beings, such as gods, asuras, altruistic *nagas*, ghouls, and so forth, went to listen to the dharma when the Buddha spoke it. If that [i.e. the Buddha coming] happened at this time, [and] if present lamas did the same [as] when the dharma was spoken, then it would be necessary that the qualities of *Ti se*, *Manasarovar*, and so forth would be just like [they were] previously.” *De deng sang med la ri bo gangs can dang mtshos ma dros pa sogs kyi yon tan yang sngar yod pa de sangs rgyas kyi rdzu 'phrul gyis zhabs rjes bzahag pa sogs kyi tshe byin rlabs byung ba yin la/ deng sang med pa'i phyir dang/ yang sangs rgyas kyis chos gsung pa'i tshe yon tan gang byung ba de deng sang 'byung na/ sangs rgyas kyis chos gsung pa'i tshe chos nyan pa po la lta dang lha min byang sems klu dang grul bum sogs 'gro ba miha' dag 'byung bar bshad mod/ deng sang bla ma rnams kyis chos gsung pa'i tshe'ang de nyid 'byung bar gyur na gangs can ti se dang mtsho ma pham pa sogs kyi yon tan yang sngar kho na ltar yod dgos la. Chos kyi grags pa, Gzhan gyi rgol ngal 'joms pa'i legs bshad lung rigs smra ba'i mgul rgyan*, 408.

307. *Snyigs ma'i dus kyi shugs brtas pas/ cung zad ngan par 'gro srid kyi/ thams cad 'khrul par ga la srid*. Sakya Paṇḍita, *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows*, ed. Jared Rhoton, 312, verse 340. Translation by Jared Rhoton.

perceptions of Kailash and scriptural descriptions of Himavat in terms of physicalist compromise. He cites one unnamed “Rinpoche” as saying “If one objects that the width of Anavatapta, which is said to be fifty *yojanas*, is not seen in this [Ma pham], that is not a problem. Below the small lake which is visible, there is a larger one underneath.”³⁰⁸ In other words, this Rinpoche tries to reconcile what scriptures say with ordinary perception by saying that there is a larger fifty *yojana* lake just underneath the smaller lake on the surface. This larger underground lake is at least in principle visible to ordinary perception but is blocked from vision by virtue of being underground. Chödrak Yeshe does not overtly denigrate this position. Nevertheless, he subtly but clearly distinguishes his own position by saying “In this matter, I say...”³⁰⁹ and reiterating the idea that ordinary perception routinely misses things seen by those with more highly skilled perception. As such, there is no need to bend over backwards arguing about underground lakes or other such compromises.

Both of these arguments—the decline over time argument and the underground lake argument—try to preserve the idea that things spoken of in scripture can, at least in principle, be seen in ordinary perception. Chödrak Yeshe, however, rejects the idea that ordinary humans can see everything that is described in scripture. As such, we should not let our failure to see what is described in scripture count as evidence that Kailash is not Himavat.

Instead, having established the point that a single material entity can give rise to multiple appearances and rejected various attempts to resolve the issue of perceptual difference, Chödrak Yeshe then argues that Buddhist scriptures provide accounts of the world in terms of particular

308. *Rje spyan snga rin po ches grub mtha' chen mor/ ma dros pa'i rgyar dpag tshad lnga bcu mnyam par bshad pa 'di la mi snang ngo snyam na [B: /] skyon med de mtsho'i mthong rgya chung ba 'di'i 'og tu rgya che ba yod pa yin zhes gsungs pa ni.* Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 18b.

309. *'Dir smras pa.* Ibid.

sorts of beings' perspectives, and that this can resolve some of the apparent contradictions in terms of how scriptures describe places like Himavat, as well as the difference between ordinary perception of Kailash and scriptural descriptions of Himavat.

In making his case that Kailash is Himavat, Chödrak Yeshe begins his text with a section containing extensive quotations from at least eighteen Buddhist texts and treatises about Himavat and Anavatapta.³¹⁰ Chödrak Yeshe is fully aware that these different textual citations provide at times conflicting accounts, and yet he maintains that they are true and useful.

He argues that one way to resolve these scriptural differences is by understanding that they do not all describe the world from an ordinary human perspective. He writes of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* in particular:

The distinguishing features of the Lake Anavatapta and the four rivers are [that they are] huge and have sands of jewels, foundations of precious gems, are adorned with lots of flowers of divine trees, and so forth. However, [such features] are not seen by different kinds of human beings. Rather [they] are pronounced in the *Avatamsaka* according to what appears in the realm of direct perception of the Lord of *nagas*, his retinue, and those with equal merit.³¹¹

In this interpretation, scriptural descriptions of Himavat and other places are accurate, but they describe the world from a godly perspective rather than from a human perspective. He writes that the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, for example, describes Himavat and Anavatapta as it appears to the king

310. These texts include the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, *Vinaya* (he does not specify which text within the larger category of *Vinaya*), *Smṛtyupasthāna*, *Mahāmāyūrī*, *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, *Hevajra Tantra*, a commentary on the *Mahāmāyūrī*, the *Avatamsaka*, *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Sutra of the Questions of King Anavatapta*, *Aryasanghata*, *Abhisamayalamkāra*, *Lokaprajñāpti*, *Karamaprajñāpti*, *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, *Viśeṣastava* and its commentary, *Sutra of Maitreya's Prophecies*, and *Kalacakra Tantra*. As can be seen in this long list, Chödrak Yeshe draws from the classic three baskets of *Sutra*, *Vinaya*, and *Abhidharma*, but also from Mahayana sutras, tantric texts, *stotra* poetry, commentaries, and philosophical treatises. All of them are (at least theoretically) Indian in origin and available in Tibetan translation in the Kangyur or Tengyur.

311. *Mtsho ma dros pa dang chu bo bzhi tshad rgya che ba rin po che'i bye ma la gnas pa dang/ rin po che'i sa gzhi dang shing ljon pa lha rdzas kyi me tog du mas mdzes pa la sogs pa'i khyad par gyi chos rnams/ mi'i 'gro ba ris mi mthun gyis mthong bar ma gyur mod/ klu'i bdag po 'khor bcas dang skal ba mtshungs pas mngon sum gyi yul du snang ba de ltar phal po che las bka' stsal te*. Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 17a.

of the *nagas*, the *Lokaprajñapti* describes them as it appears to the king of elephants Supratistha, and the *Abhidharmakośa* describes them as they appear to gods or humans with magical powers.³¹² All of these are accurate accounts of conventional reality, or perhaps it might be better to say different *levels* of conventional reality. None of them, however, are the level of conventional reality that ordinary humans can see, and so it is not surprising that ordinary humans cannot see these places as the scriptures describe them. With the exception of a few highly realized humans who have merit equal to that of the gods or *nagas*, then, humans only have access to this vision of Himavat through scripture.

Following this idea, scriptures describe the world *just as it is*, albeit from a particular perspective.³¹³ The world they describe is different than the world to which ordinary humans have perceptual access, and the only way of bridging this perceptual difference is for humans to acquire magical powers or attain merit equal to gods and *nagas*.

While this account is a plausible response to Sakya Paṇḍita's argument against Kailash's legitimacy, it also raises a whole other set of issues. In particular, what does Chödrak Yeshe's argument mean for the very *existence* of pilgrimage places?

After Chödrak Yeshe completed *The Scholar's Earring*, Lowo Chodzé, the person who had originally requested that Chödrak Yeshe write a text to settle the issue of Kailash/Himavat, wrote back to Chödrak Yeshe with a few follow-up questions that had been raised by Chödrak Yeshe's initial work. In response, Chödrak Yeshe will lay out an even more explicitly

312. See Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 17a and 17b.

313. One might ask how this accords with Chödrak Yeshe's previously discussed position that there is not one way that things are. Chödrak Yeshe does not address this issue, and so it is unclear if he sees these two positions as reconcilable or whether he is advancing a number of distinct arguments to undermine Sakya Paṇḍita's critique.

philosophical account of how it is that different beings can see the same thing differently, and further, how the practice of pilgrimage can be effective when there are ultimately no external objects to be seen at all.

Lowo Chodzé opens his response to Chödrak Yeshe's initial text with effusive praise that belies the challenging questions he will eventually ask. He writes, "If anyone hears this *Scholar's Earring*, which is your good explanation, their mind will be charmed as if by the song of a celestial musician. If anyone experiences the meaning, it is like tasting ambrosia. So it is an amazing object (*gnas*) which delights scholars!"³¹⁴ After this flattering opening, however, his tone quickly changes. He continues, "Having said that, however, a detailed analysis of your text, completely clears away [both Sakya Paṇḍita's] three vow treatise and the holy places (*gnas*) whose doubts are loudly proclaimed by most people these days."³¹⁵ That is, he thinks that Chödrak Yeshe has been effective at taking down the threat posed by Sakya Paṇḍita's *Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows*, but that, in doing so, Chödrak Yeshe has ultimately undermined the very pilgrimage places he set out to defend. For in defending Kailash/Himavat, Chödrak Yeshe has raised a number of problems in Lowo Chodzé's eyes, leading him to question what the doctrinal and philosophical foundations of pilgrimage practice actually are.

The specific issue that concerns Lowo Chodzé is Chödrak Yeshe's thesis statement "One thing, many minds" and its implications for the status of external objects. Does the notion of there being one thing (*dnagos gcig*) that is being perceived differently by different sorts of being imply that there is some actual object that is causing each of these perceptions? While this may

314. *Khyod kyi legs bshad mkhas pa'i rna rgyan 'di/ thos na dri za'i dbyangs ltar yid 'phrog cing/de don myangs na bdud rtsi thob nges pas/mkhas rnams dga' ba bskyed byed ngo mtshar gnas*. Ibid., 19b.

315. *Shes brjod nas/ 'on kyang de nyid la zhib tu dpyad pas/ bstan bcos sdom pa gsum dang/ deng sang gi phal mo che sgrogs pa'i 'dogs pa'i [B: dogs pa'i] gnas rnams ni legs par sel [B: sol]*. Ibid.

seem like a commonsense statement about perception, it does create an issue for someone with Chödrak Yeshe's philosophical commitments.

The two horns of the dilemma, as spelled out by Lowo Chodzé, are that Chödrak Yeshe either must maintain that external objects exist, which would bring him in conflict with Yogacara idealism that maintains that there are no external objects,³¹⁶ or Chödrak Yeshe must maintain that external objects do *not* exist, which would undermine the practice of pilgrimage, for there would be no pilgrimage places at all. He writes:

Are you asserting or not asserting that the snow mountain does not exist, as is taught in the context [of the *Mahāyānasamgraha*]? If you are asserting [that the mountain does not really exist], then there are no sacred sites which can be used [to train] in the system of the best inner secret tantra. If you are asserting [that the mountain does exist], what is the meaning of that scripture [i.e. the *Mahāyānasamgraha*]?³¹⁷

In writing this, Lowo Chodzé appeals to the argument, made in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and other Yogacara texts, that differing perceptions of the same “thing” actually demonstrates that there is no “thing,” or object (Tib. *don*, Skrt. *artha*) at all. Lowo Chodzé interprets the *Mahāyānasamgraha* to advocate for the position that there are no external objects, but rather assert that what humans take to be external objects are actually representations (*ākāra*) produced by one's own mind and the fruition of the various karmic seeds which have been planted there. In asking whether or not the pilgrimage mountain exists or not, he is asking whether Chödrak Yeshe

316. He makes this argument with specific reference to the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, a 4th century Yogacara text by Asanga, the elder brother of Vasubandhu. This is interesting in itself because the *Mahāyānasamgraha* has received very little attention in Tibetan writing. It may speak to the text's relative popularity in the time and place where Lowo Chodzé was writing, but this is still quite mysterious. The *Mahāyānasamgraha* itself does not discuss pilgrimage or holy places, nor do any of the major commentaries I have consulted reference these topics. The issue for Lowo Chodzé, at any rate, seems to be the *Mahāyānasamgraha*'s position on whether or not objects exist externally and whether there is any common basis for different beings' perceptions.

317. *Zhes pa'i skabs gnas [B: nas] bstan pa'i don la ma grub pa'i gangs ri bzhed dam mi bzhed/ bzhed na gsang sngags nang gi dam pa dang sbyor rgyu'i/ gangs ri'i rnam bzhag med par 'gyur/ mi bzhed na lung gi don du gang du btsal*. Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 20a.

thinks that the pilgrimage mountain exists external to human minds or not, or whether it is merely a representation within human consciousness. If it does exist outside human minds, then that contradicts the *Mahāyānasamgraha*.

On the other hand, if it does not exist outside of human minds, then the whole premise of tantric pilgrimage is baseless. For if there are no external objects, the whole goal of going to some distant location in order to purify oneself is futile. It is not clear whether Lowo Chodzé wants to preserve pilgrimage practices or whether he wants to reject them, but in either case, he wants Chödrak Yeshe to clarify the logical consequences of his argument.

Lowo Chodzé further inquires why Chödrak Yeshe's defense of Kailash as Himavat drew from both Mahayana and non-Mahayana texts, because this also raises questions over what Chödrak Yeshe's underlying account of reality is.³¹⁸ Lowo Chodzé sees texts like the *Abhidharmakośa* as following an ontology which posits that things actually exist externally, whereas he sees Mahayana texts often questioning and rejecting that sort of ontology in favor of one that questions whether objects are truly established at all.

Chödrak Yeshe responds to Lowo Chodzé by clarifying what he means by “One thing, many minds” and argues that external objects are not ultimately established but that they do exist conventionally. He maintains, moreover that “one thing is seen differently because of different minds” is perfectly “in accord with secret mantra, Madhyamaka, and Yogacara.”³¹⁹ As such it is

318. “Furthermore, if you explain [the nature of Kailash/Himavat] having posited the nature of things in the way of the small vehicle [i.e. as actually existent], it is difficult to consider a scripture such as the *Mahāyānasamgraha* as authoritative (*tshad ma*). In that case, if one establishes [the nature of things] on the basis of the *Abhidharmakośa* along with the commentary [because you do not consider Mahayana scriptures authoritative], it seems to me that the classification of Himavat and the lakes is a topic which is still difficult to explain.” *Yang theg pa chung ngu'i tshul la dngos po'i gnas lugs sor gzhag nas 'chad pa'i tshe/ theg bsdus kyi lung de lta bu tshad mar 'gyur ba dka' zhing/ de ltar na/ mdzod rtsa 'grel gzhir gzhag na/ gangs ri mtsho gsum gyi rnam gzhag da dung 'chad pa dkar ba'i gnas su bdag gis dgo bas* [B: go bas]. Ibid.

319. *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan zhes bya las/ dngos gcig yid ni tha dad phyir/ don ma grub par 'dod ces pa'i/ 'phags pa thogs med bzhed pa ltar/ brjod 'di theg chen phyogs la ni/ 'thad par thugs la bab pa'i tshe/ gsang sngags dbus* [B: dbus] *sems dang mthun phyir/ bla med dgongs par ga la 'gal*. Ibid.

an acceptable way to deal with the issue of perceptual difference raised by Sakya Paṇḍita.

In response to the question about whether or not the pilgrimage mountain truly exists, Chödrak Yeshe responds by parsing the question of what it means to exist, and by offering an account of how the mountain exists in terms of the two truths. Specifically, he says that “the entire presentation of the holy places, such as the twenty-four [holy places] in the impure human body, is in terms of conventional truth,”³²⁰ but also that “there is no ground (*gzhi*) for conventional truth.” That is, the mountain *does* exist conventionally, but it is important to be clear about what that means. In the Yogacara terms Chödrak Yeshe seems to be following, the mountain does exist conventionally as an object, but it does not appear external to human consciousness. Furthermore, in ultimate terms, the mountain does not exist. However, the fact that such objects do not exist in an ultimate sense does not negate the fact that they appear to beings, nor that they are causally effective in the conventional reality that beings perceive. Thus it is not contradictory to say that these places possess the purifying powers attributed to them by tantras (as well as the blessings left by figures like Milarepa) even though they do not exist in an ultimate sense.³²¹ After all, *nothing* exists in an ultimate sense, so there is no reason that mountains or holy places should be any different.

Even as Chödrak Yeshe emphasizes that these holy places and their purifying effects are totally conventional, he also asserts that conventional truth and ultimate truth are fundamentally indivisible, and that the ultimate truth of self-arisen gnosis (*rang byung ye shes*) pervades conventionally real objects such as the holy places. This self-arisen gnosis represents a positive account of reality—the sort Yogacara attempts to articulate and Madhyamaka consistently

320. *Gnas kyi rnam gzhas kun tshang ba/kun rdzob bden pa'i dbang du mdzad*. Ibid., 20b.

321. Chödrak Yeshe writes: *Des kyang bla med dag sbyor gyi/ gnas dang phyi don bden grub dag/ 'gal ba med par 'chad nus tshe*. Ibid., 20a.

attempts to reject—one which Chödrak Yeshe says “is inborn, blissful, endowed with supreme qualities and emptiness, and takes on the form of the animate and inanimate [in] the three realms.”³²² The essence of the holy places, he argues, is a division (*dbye ba*) of this self-arisen gnosis, and the holy places themselves “are taught as the embodiment of the four bodies, ten grounds, and five paths.”³²³ The holy places are thus conventionally real in the sense that they appear to beings and are causally efficacious in the world they experience, and ultimately unreal in the sense that there is no ultimately existing ground for that appearance. Nevertheless, they are part of in the self-arisen awareness that pervades all of reality.

This account will be familiar to those who investigate the philosophical foundations of tantric practice, which, as many have noted, have their roots in Yogacara ideas about emptiness and non-conceptual gnosis (*mūla-nirvikalpa-jñāna*). That what appears in conventional reality is empty—in the Yogacara sense that there is no duality between perceiver and perceived—allows for the possibility of tantric visualization practice in the first place. The mandalas and deities envisioned in tantric *sadhanas*, after all, are generated out of emptiness, stabilized in the mind’s eye to be used as tools of mental transformation, and then finally dissolved back into emptiness. None of it is ultimately real, but it is still a powerful tool for effecting transformation in one’s consciousness. While Tibetan doxographies often present Yogacara as inferior to Madhyamaka, which is held up as the highest interpretation of the Buddha’s teaching, the reality is much more complex than this simple hierarchy would imply, and even within Tibetan philosophical contexts, theorists of tantric practice drew heavily on Yogacara’s positive descriptions of the nature of

322. *De yi rang bzhin dri ma med/ lhan skyes 'gyur med bde chen dang/ stong nyid rnam kun mchog ldan pa/ khamsum brtan g.yo'i rnam pa can*. Ibid., 20b.

323. *De nyid sa bcu lam lnga dang/ sku bzhi'i bdag nyid can du bstan*. Ibid.

reality.³²⁴

Chödrak Yeshe goes further to suggest that the way the holy places are taught is “free of the conceptual elaborations of the causal path and fruit and in terms of the types of individuals—low, middling, and supreme.”³²⁵ That is, far from Sakya Paṇḍita’s account of the tantric holy places as being sites of elite practice for highly trained and realized tantric initiates, the holy places are for all sorts of beings, perhaps precisely because they work on people without all of the conceptual complexities of the causal path and are therefore easier to understand. Interestingly, he does not say that the holy places are taught just for the sake of childish beings in the way many later theorizers of pilgrimage will do (although one could argue that this is somewhat implied), but rather includes supreme beings alongside the middling and lesser sorts of people who can benefit from these holy places.

In response to Lowo Chodze’s second question about the viability of quoting from both Mahayana and Hinayana sources, Chödrak Yeshe affirms that Mahayana texts such as the *Mahāyānasamgraha* are held to be superior to non-Mahayana texts such as the *Abhidharmakośa*,³²⁶ but argues that the so-called Hinayana works are not necessarily *wrong*, but rather simply need more interpretation. As such, their being quoted by scholars, whose job after all is interpretation and commentary, is perfectly legitimate.³²⁷ Therefore he argues that he is

324. For more discussion of the place Yogacara has in relation to Madhyamaka, tantra, and Tibetan thought more broadly see Yaroslav Komarovski, *Visions of Unity: The Golden Paṇḍita Shākya Chokden’s New Interpretation of Yogacara and Madhyamaka* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

325. *Rgyu lam 'bras bu'i spros dang bral/ de tshul gang zag dman pa 'bring/ mchog gi dbye bas gnas rnams kyang*. Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 20b.

326. Chödrak Yeshe does point out that the auto-commentary of the *Abhidharmakośa* is critical of the root text, indicating that the commentary is probably Vasubandhu in a more developed stage of his thinking and therefore that the commentary is more reliable. See *Ibid.*, 20b.

327. “Since commentary is the method of scholars, there is nothing unreasonable in this method.” *'Chad pa mkhas rnams lugs yin na/ tshul 'dir mi rigs yod ma yin*. *Ibid.*, 20b.

justified in taking the *Abhidharmakośa* as a basis for knowing about the layout of Himavat, Anavatapta, and the rivers.

Having addressed Lowo Chodze's two questions directly, Chödrak Yeshe continues to elaborate on the idea of how it is possible that different kinds of beings can see the same “thing” differently, even when there is ultimately no “thing” to be seen. He cites a variety of Indian treatises, including Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, Vasubandhu's *Viṃśatikā*, Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and Nāgarjuna's *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, to explore the example of the human, god, and hungry ghost all looking at the same river.³²⁸ What underlies these perceptions, which are of course different according to the type of being, but also similar in that they feature liquid-like substances occurring in roughly the same location. Chödrak Yeshe argues that this example proves that “consciousness has no objective support”³²⁹ but rather that all conscious experience is akin to that of someone dreaming, in that all that is experienced is a function of one's own mind rather than indicative of externally existing objects.

Specifically, Chödrak Yeshe denies both the existence of a *dmigs pa* and a *don*, terms which correspond to the Sanskrit terms *ālambana* and *artha* respectively, both of which have technical meanings in Buddhist philosophical discourse. The term *ālambana*, which literally means support but is often translated as percept in the context of philosophy of perception,³³⁰ indicates that which is the cause of perceptual cognition.³³¹ The term *artha* also has many

328. *Chu klung gi dngos po lar rang gi las kyi rnam par smin pa'i dbang gis/ yi dwags kyis rnag khrag la sogs pas gang bar mthong ba dang/ de nyid la dud 'gro nya la sogs pas gnas kyi blos gnas par byed pa dang/ mi rnams kyis ni mngar ba dang dang ba dang bsil ba'i chur rtog cing khros byed do/ 'thung ngo/ der 'jug go/ nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched la snyoms par zhugs pa'i lha rnams kyis ni nam mkhar mthong ste gzugs kyi 'du shes rnam par gshig go. Ibid, 21a-b.*

329. *Des na rnam par shes pa dmigs pa med pa nyid du 'gyur ba yin no. Ibid., 21a.*

330. For a fuller examination of this idea, see Douglas S. Duckworth, et. al., *Dignāga's Investigation of the Percept*.

331. It also indicates that which *appears* to perceptual consciousness, and as such there was debate about whether the percept was external or internal, but that need not concern us here as Chos grags ye shes is using it to refer to

meanings, but in the context of philosophy of perception generally means the intentional object of perception, the (external) object that we take ourselves to be perceiving. In denying the existence of both an *ālambana* and an *artha* as the support of consciousness, Chödrak Yeshe is affirming the general Yogacara point that what we consciously experience is produced by our own mind and not necessarily externally existing objects.

Chödrak Yeshe concludes by repeating a statement from the original text of *The Scholar's Earring* about the relationship between appearance and emptiness, then elaborating on how the appearance of pilgrimage places affects the mind which experiences them. He writes, echoing the same lines from the first text:

Having contemplated these intentions, [it is clear that] although phenomena (*chos*) have no essential nature and are of one essence (*ro*), just like illusion-like misleading conventions, they are experienced as inseparable appearance and emptiness. They [i.e. the snow mountain, lake, and four rivers] exist as wondrous works³³² which show the dharma (*dam chos ston par mdzad rnams ya mtshan gnas*).³³³

Having repeated this passage, he immediately continues, writing:

Although it is taught in both Yogacara and Madhyamaka that mind and external objects (*phyi don*) have no essential nature, conventional reality, in the eyes of the deluded one, [appears] like an illusory delusion. Here's how it should be put: from the very moment something appears, it is empty of truly established essence, and the dawning of an

external objects as being percepts.

332. The phrase “the actions of teaching the dharma are a wondrous topic,” however, is somewhat strange, however. In addition to seeming unconnected to the previous sentence, it is not entirely clear what the subject of the sentence is because the term *mdzad rnams* is not the way one might expect to see “the actions” or the “deeds.” Who is performing these deeds? We might take it to be saying “those who do,” but again this is not how one would expect that to be written. The end of the sentence, too, is strange because it is unclear to what the term *gnas* refers. The term has a wide semantic range, meaning anything from “holy place,” “topic,” “situation,” or “existence,” among other possibilities. It is tempting to take it to mean “holy place,” since after all this text is about the holy place of Kailash, but other usages are also attested in the text. If it were acting as a noun, moreover, we would expect the adjective “wondrous” to be placed after the noun, but here *ya mtshan* occurs before *gnas*. In that case *gnas* may be acting as a verb, meaning “to exist,” but in that case one would still expect something like *ya mtshan du gnas*.

333. *Dgongs pa 'di rnams la bsams nas/ chos rnams rang bzhin med par ro mnyam yang/ kun rdzob 'khrul pa sgyu ma ji bzhin du/ snang stong dbyer med legs par thugs chud nas/ dam chos ston par mdzad rnams ya mtshan gnas*. Ibid, 19a.

illusion-like appearance, in accord with emptiness, is experienced. [When, for instance, one sees Kailash,] the mind becomes faithful with regard to the teaching of the true dharma of conjoined emptiness and interdependent arising.³³⁴

The passage itself is somewhat ambiguous as to the subject—we might interpret it as discussing phenomena generally—as indeed it seems to me that the initial passage was doing. In this line of thinking, Chödrak Yeshe is simply talking generally about the way in which phenomena, although there are in fact no objects perceived which are separate from the perceiver, appear to humans as though they were some external object. Just as a magical illusion of an elephant confuses people by making them think that there really is an elephant instead of just the image of an elephant, deluded humans make the mistake of thinking that things which appear in their experience are caused by material objects outside of their own minds. Ultimately these appearances are empty of inherent existence—indeed appearance is only possible because of emptiness³³⁵—but the human mind still habitually experiences the world in terms of appearance.

Up until this point, this is a fairly standard restatement of Mahayana doctrine. Towards the end of the statement, however, comes a sentence which does not make much sense if we are still interpreting the paragraph as being a general account of how phenomena appear. After saying that appearance dawns in the mind and is experienced like an illusion, the text says, “The mind becomes faithful with regard to the teaching of the true dharma of conjoined emptiness and interdependent arising—that’s what should be said.” What is confusing here is that the text does not say explicitly what causes the mind to become faithful. Given that the sentence occurs in the context of talking about appearances being experienced in the mind, we might suspect that

334. *Shes phyi don rang bzhin ma grub par dbu sems gnyis gar gsungs yang/ kun rdzob 'khrul ngor 'khrul pa sgyu ma bzhin/ snang dus nyid nas rang bzhin bden grub pas stong la/ stong bzhin du sgyu ma lta bu'i snang ba shar ba thugs su chud de/ stong dang rten 'byung zung 'jug gi dam chos ston pa la sems dad par gyur zhes smros so.* Ibid, 21b.

335. *Kun rdzob stong pa nyid du bshad/ stong nyid kho na kun rdzob yin/ med na mi 'byung nges pa'i phyir/ byas dang mi rtag dag bzhin no/ zhes sogs kyi gsung rab las mthong ba yin no.* Ibid, 22a.

appearances are what causes the mind to become faithful, but what kind of appearances? It would be highly strange in a Buddhist context to talk about most appearances causing faith.

What seems likely is that Chödrak Yeshe is referring specifically to the appearance of the pilgrimage mountain and the ability of this appearance—even though it is empty and illusion-like—to generate faith in the minds of pilgrims. This whole explanation, after all, is an attempt to prove that his initial defense of pilgrimage to Kailash did not, as Lowo Chodzé feared, “clear away” the justification for pilgrimage entirely. To the contrary, Chödrak Yeshe argues that seeing Kailash, even though it is not ultimately separate from the pilgrim’s mind, has incredible power to purify the pilgrim and to generate faith. None of it is ultimately real, but then again nothing is ultimately real and established. It is instead a highly powerful conventional reality that works on people of all ability levels.

As we can see, Chödrak Yeshe’s account of how ordinary people see Kailash/Himavat, as well as what that implies about the identity and existence of the mountain, is very complex. In addressing Sakya Paṇḍita’s argument that Kailash does not look like scriptural Himavat, and thus that Kailash is not Himavat, Chödrak Yeshe does not do what many other commentators do and try to explain away the difference in appearance. He rejects the idea that Kailash/Himavat’s appearance has changed over time or that there are underground lakes, but rather fully embraces the notion that ordinary people do not see Kailash as scriptures describe Himavat. This difference in appearance, he argues, is not evidence that there are two different mountains, but rather that there is one mountain that appears differently to different kinds of beings. What is more, scriptures describe Himavat from the perspective of gods, and since gods have higher perceptual capacities than humans, what a god sees when looking at Kailash/Himavat is more wondrous than what an ordinary human sees. He maintains this position even when Lowo Chodzé suggests

that it implies either that external objects exist or that pilgrimage is pointless. In doing so, Chödrak Yeshe argues that each of these multiple appearances of the mountain are conventional appearances that do not actually imply that the mountain exists in any ultimate way. These conventional appearances, moreover, are still causally effective, and they purify those people who come into contact with them.

Stepping back from the specific details of Lowo Chodzé's question and Chödrak Yeshe's response, we can see that this debate raises important questions for this project. That is, what relation is there between ordinary human perception and the external world? With specific reference to the questions about Kailash, what can ordinary human perception tell us about the mountain and its identity? In the argument outlined above, Chödrak Yeshe argued, in essence, that ordinary human perception of Kailash can tell us little to nothing about whether Kailash is or is not Himavat. Because the same object appears in different ways to different perceivers, and because scriptures describe Himavat from the point of view of gods or *nagas*, humans cannot see wondrous Himavat.

However, as we will see in the next sections, Chödrak Yeshe goes on to complicate this initial account.

Material Reality

We might think, reading the argument outlined above, that it looks like Chödrak Yeshe is heading towards a position that humans, by virtue of their inferior perception, have no way of confirming scripture or adjudicating between various claims, and must simply accept the picture scriptures give of the world. A cynic might even read this argument as a roundabout way of telling ordinary beings to shut up and accept what they are being told. This, however, is not the direction

Chödrak Yeshe goes with this argument.

That is, even as Chödrak Yeshe argues that ordinary human perception is an unreliable guide for seeing Kailash/Himavat as it truly is, he also uses the category of ordinary perception to defend the mountain's identity. In so doing, moreover, Chödrak Yeshe develops a notion we might refer to as ordinary material reality. Thus, even as he argues that human perception is inadequate, he also maintains its usefulness for interpreting scriptures and for gaining correct knowledge about the world.

Chödrak Yeshe's first step in making this argument is introducing a distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of things described in scripture. He then argues that that while humans do not have perceptual access to everything described in scripture, neither do they *not* have perceptual access to *anything* described in scripture. He defines the ordinary (*thun mong*) aspect of things described scripture as that which is within the realm of direct perception (*mngon sum gyi yul du gyur pa*) for ordinary beings and the extraordinary (*thun mong ma yin pa*) aspect of things described in scripture as that which is beyond the realm of direct perception (*mngon sum gyi yul las 'das pa*) for ordinary beings. In the sections above, I have made reference to different "levels" of perceptual ability, but here, Chödrak Yeshe seems to group together most humans as having ordinary perception and does not discuss differences in perceptual ability between them. The one exception is for highly realized masters, who can acquire extraordinary perception.

What, then, is the difference between ordinary and extraordinary perception, and who counts as having extraordinary perception? As discussed above, this likely refers to non-human beings like gods or *nagas*, but also refers to humans who have acquired magical abilities (Skt. *ṛddhi*, Tib. *rdzu 'phrul*). Such abilities have been discussed since the earliest Buddhist and even

Upanisadic literature, and are said to result from advanced meditation practice. These powers may include the divine eye (*lha'i spyan*), the divine ear, the ability to fly, the ability to walk through solid objects, and other such powers. There are also lists of the higher perceptions (Skt. *Abhijñā*, Tib. *mngon shes*), that include the “divine eye.” This kind of vision allows one to see the world as a god might see it. There is also the Tibetan notion of “pure perception” (*dag snang*), a state that an individual generates in which he or she sees an object in its totally pure and perfected form. The latter, however, is not here being referenced by Chödrak Yeshe, who appears to be speaking mostly of the magical abilities and the divine eye. These types of vision are not about anything soteriological, but rather about higher powers of vision. Those without such abilities, then, are said to have ordinary perception.

As an example of scriptures describing the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of a single thing, Chödrak Yeshe brings up the River Ganga, which he says is both described in scriptures and visible to common people.³³⁶ Scriptures do give descriptions of the Ganga that are not visible to ordinary people, but they also describe the Ganga in ways that ordinary people can see and confirm. Chödrak Yeshe argues that different scriptures at different points are describing either the ordinary or extraordinary aspects of the Ganga. Chödrak Yeshe maintains that one material thing (*dngos po'i rdzas gcig*) underlies these different perceptions of the Ganga, and whether one sees it in its extraordinary aspect or ordinary aspect is a function of the viewer's perceptual capacity.

He argues that the same is true for Himavat, Anavatapta, and the four rivers. He writes,

336. *Chu bo de rnams kyang rdzu 'phrul med pa'i mis mngon sum gyi yul las 'das par brjod na/ lung sman gyi gzhi ganga gang las 'bab pa'i mtsho de nyid ma dros pa yin par gsungs pa'i gleng gzhi dang mthun pa'i chu bo de'i sgru bcwa brgyad yod pa'i 'gram du yul dbus dang/ sindhu 'bab pas de'i yul dang/ si ta'i byang du sham bha la yod ces mdo sngags las bshad pa thams cad rdzu 'phrul med pa'i mis mngon sum du mthong ba dang shes par mi rung ngo.* Ibid, 14a. He also gives the example of Shambala, which he says is described in scriptures and yet entirely invisible to ordinary people.

“The four rivers and their surroundings, which are [both] ordinary and extraordinary, are actually one substantial, physical thing (*dnegos po'i rdzas gcig*). But because of superior and inferior ways of seeing [that one substantial thing], each individual being, [depending on] whether they have or do not have magical powers, it is either said, conventionally speaking, to be within the realm of direct perception or to be beyond the realm of direct perception.”³³⁷ As such, the fact that people see ordinary Kailash is not reason to reject that Kailash is Himavat, because Kailash is merely the ordinary aspect of Himavat. The extraordinary descriptions of Himavat are still correct, but only certain kinds of beings can directly see the extraordinary aspect of Himavat. Ordinary beings seeing things in ordinary ways is not sufficient evidence to say that Kailash does not have extraordinary qualities visible only to perceptually skilled beings.

Chödrak Yeshe asserts that this is true, moreover, not only in the case of Kailash and other distant pilgrimage places, but also in seemingly mundane everyday reality. Chödrak Yeshe writes:

On this point I say: if one does not see the noble beings, gods, asuras, and *nagas* who live in each individual area, how could one see the noble beings, gods, king of *nagas*, and great elephant of Himavat and Anavatapta? Wise people do not say that the things seen by purified people, the divine eye, or beings of the same class are lies because they themselves do not see the wealthy homes and possessions of yaksas, gods, *nagas*, and asuras, but only [see] the trees, springs, cliffs, and mountains which are labelled as the dwellings of non-humans. Intelligent people on the side of honesty, take note of this!³³⁸

The argument is that gods and *nagas* and other wondrous things do not exist only at Kailash—

337. *De 'dra'i thun mong dang thun mong ma yin pa'i chu bo bzhi po 'khor bcas rnams dnegos po'i rdzas gcig la/ mthong tshul mchog dman gyis/ rdzu 'phrul ldan mi ldan so sos mngon sum gyi yul las 'das pa dang/ mngon sum gyi yul du gyur pa'i tha snyad 'jog pa yin...* Ibid, 14a.

338. *'Dir smras pa/ so so'i yul du bzhugs pa'i 'phags pa dang/ lha dang lha min klu rnams ma mthong na/ gangs can ma dros gnas kyi 'phags pa dang/ lha dang klu rgyal glang chen ji ltar mthong/ mi ma yin pa'i gnas su gdags pa yi/ shing dang chu mig brag dang ri rnams las/ gnod sbyin lha klu lha min longs spyod dang/ khyim gyi 'byor pa ci yang ma mthong bas/ de rnams ris mthun tshogs dang lha yi mig/ rnam dag mi yis mthong ba brdzun pa zhes/ 'di na shes dang ldan pas mi smra ltar/ gzu bo'i blo can rnams kyi mkhyen par mdzod.* Ibid, 18b-19a.

although they may exist there in greater concentrations—but rather exist all around us. Ordinary humans with ordinary perception do not see these beings around their own towns and villages, and so why should they expect to be able to see them at Kailash? He points to the existence of places in towns and villages, such as trees or mountains, that are said to be the dwellings of gods, *nagas*, or demons, saying that people can see these homes but not the beings themselves. He takes as uncontroversial—and clearly expects his reader to do so also—the idea that these kinds of beings exist alongside humans even though ordinary humans cannot always see them.

So far, this appears to further and confirm the picture Chödrak Yeshe gives above in which different kinds of beings see the same reality in different ways, which might seem to suggest that ordinary perception has no role to play in investigating or confirming scripture. However, when arguing that Kailash is indeed Himavat, Chödrak Yeshe makes use of the ordinary aspects of the mountain described in scripture that he *can* see in order to argue for Kailash's legitimacy. That is, although Chödrak Yeshe recognizes that ordinary perceptions of Kailash do not match scriptural descriptions of Himavat, he argues that comparing ordinary perception to extraordinary description will obviously lead to such a result and is therefore pointless. Instead, although he cannot confirm the extraordinary aspects of Himavat at Kailash, he can use his perception of ordinary aspects of Kailash to argue that it is Himavat.

Indeed, a large part of Chödrak Yeshe's argument that Kailash is Himavat relies on the evidence provided by ordinary perception. In outlining this evidence, Chödrak Yeshe keeps making reference to ordinary human perception of some common material reality.

It is important to be clear about what I am saying when I say that Chödrak Yeshe is developing the categories of ordinary perception and material reality. It would be tempting to equate the ordinary perception and material reality Chödrak Yeshe is referring to with our

“common sense” view of reality. However, we should hold off from making this assumption, and instead focus on the categories Chödrak Yeshe is developing.

Chödrak Yeshe develops the category of ordinary, common human perception in bits and pieces, not necessarily setting it out overtly as a thesis to prove. But I see him as developing the idea through his use of certain terms. Specifically, he makes reference to that which is known in the world (*jig rten du grags pa*), that which is established in common perception (*mtshun snang du grub pa*), and that which is ordinary (*thun mong*), that is, exists in the direct perception of people in the world.

It is clear that Chödrak Yeshe maintains the Buddhist doctrinal position that humans systematically mis-perceive the world, and so the commonsense material world as perceived by most humans is not something that can be relied upon. It reveals more about the merit and skills of the perceiver than the thing being perceived, and is inferior to reality as perceived by beings like gods and bodhisattvas. And even what is seen with the divine eye is still not *real* in an ultimate sense, but rather remains purely conventional. All of this would seem to speak to Chödrak Yeshe rejecting any idea of some stable material reality.

And yet he does keep coming back to certain phrases that seem to refer to *something* that ordinary humans perceive in common. For example, he writes that “the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* explains how the other three rivers flow from [Anavatapta], and that is a common perception (*mtshun snang*) for most worldly beings (*‘dzam gling pa phal cher la*),”³³⁹ indicating that the three rivers besides the Ganga which flow from Anavatapta do not appear totally differently to each being based on their individual karma, but rather, *for the most part*, human beings are similar enough that the rivers appear to them collectively in roughly the same way. In another passage he refers

339. *Lung sman gyi gzhi las/ chu bo gzhan gsum de las 'bab par bshad cing/ 'dzam gling pa phal cher la mtshun snang du gyur pas so*. Ibid, 14a.

to the Ganga as it is generally perceived as “this one which is known to ordinary and worldly people.”³⁴⁰ Again, he seems to assume that this is a category that will make sense to the reader, and that said reader assumes the way he or she perceives the Ganga is the same way most ordinary, worldly people do.

In addition to making use of the categories of ordinary, worldly, or common perception—even as he seems to denigrate them—Chödrak Yeshe also takes the direct perception of ordinary people seriously and uses it as evidence for various claims and arguments that he makes.

For example, at one point Chödrak Yeshe approvingly quotes the well-known Tibetan philosopher Chomden Raltri defending Kailash who argues that the Ganga comes from Ma pham because people who have gone there have seen it.³⁴¹ If ordinary beings’ perception is utterly flawed and unreliable, such testimony would be completely irrelevant, but both Chomden Raltri and Chödrak Yeshe agree that is it a key point of evidence in Kailash’s favor.³⁴² Chomden Raltri, and by extension Chödrak Yeshe who approvingly quotes him, makes this point in using the technical term “means of knowledge” or “proof” (Tib. *tshad ma*, Skt. *pramāṇa*). Chomden Raltri here seems to be deliberately invoking the validity of conclusions made on the basis of direct perception. He writes that Kailash is proven (*grub pa*) to be Himavat, “because of the proof (*tshad ma*) of people who have gone there together along the north-south route, and because of the proof (*tshad ma*) of people who have gone to where the Ganga flows from Ma pham.”³⁴³ In

340. *'Jig rten pa dang thun mong du grags pa 'di*. Ibid, 17b.

341. *Gangā yang ma pham las 'bab par der phyin pa'i mis tshad mas grub pa'i phyir*. Ibid, 13a.

342. Chomden Raltri does, however, seem to think that the Himavat of the Abhidharma is not the same as the Himavat of the Kalacakra, and that they have been wrongly conflated, a position which leads Chödrak Yeshe to refer to Chomden Raltri as “perpetuating the problem.” *Bcom ldan ral gris... skyon gzung zhing*. Ibid, 13a.

343. *Mnyan yod dang ti se ni lho byang thad mnyam du phyin pa [B: omits phyin pa] der phyin pa'i mi'i tshad mas*

approvingly quoting Chomden Raltri's argument, Chödrak Yeshe prefigures a recurring touchstone for his argument, one he will come to again and again: whatever Kailash may look like, its connection to the river Ganga, which is shared in common perception by all people in the world, cannot be denied. This connection renders untenable any attempt to say that the differences between present perceptions of Kailash and scriptural descriptions of Himavat are due to it being an entirely different mountain, and thus forces scriptural interpreters to come up with an alternate explanation for this difference.

At another point, Chödrak Yeshe concedes a point for the sake of argument to his imagined interlocutor, saying “Let us allow that people without magical abilities cannot travel the seven hundred *yojanas* [to Himavat] and so do not see the rivers circling the lake clockwise seven times and so forth.”³⁴⁴ Even then, he writes, “Since we are certain that the four rivers flow through Jambudvīpa from there, and at a time when it is universally known to people these days and [Kailash and Himavat] are recognized as a single [mountain], all of this debate is entirely pointless. That's it!”³⁴⁵ Again, he is pointing not to the visual perception of a highly realized person or even of a single individual, but rather a kind of common reality about which most people agree. To put it bluntly, Sakya Paṇḍita can argue that Kailash does not look like Himavat as described in scriptures, but he still has to account for the fact that everyone can see that the Ganga comes from the area around Kailash.

Finally, he offers up his own perception as evidence for making a point. In this part of the

grub pa dang/ gangA yang ma pham las 'bab par der phyin pa'i mis tshad mas grub pa'i phyir. Ibid, 13a. See also Bcom ldan Ral 'gri, *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa'i rgyan gyi me tog.*

344. *Ji ltar zhe na/ gangs mtsho dang chu bo bzhis mtsho la g.yas su lan bdun bdun bskor ba sogs kyi gnas dpag tshad brgya phrag bdun lhag pa de/ rdzu 'phrul dang mi ldan pas mi bgrod cing mi mthong du chug.* Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 13b-14a.

345. *De las chu bo bzhi gling 'di'i phyogs so sor 'bab par ni nges na/ ding sang gi skye bo rnams yongs su grags pa dang ngos 'dzin gcig par byas pa'i tshe/ rtsod pa thams cad don med pa 'ba' zhig tu zad do.* Ibid, 14a.

text, Chödrak Yeshe takes aim at the decline-over-time argument by saying that the differences between the mountain and rivers as described in scriptures and the mountain and rivers as seen in direct perception are so different that they cannot be written off by saying that the changes are due to decay over time. For if the issue was decay over time, we would expect to see something that is basically the same but slightly worse, and not the total reversals Chödrak Yeshe argues that there are. As such, the differences between Kailash's present day appearance and scriptural descriptions of Himavat must be due to something else. To make this point, Chödrak Yeshe highlights the differences between scripture and his own direct perceptions of the site,³⁴⁶ writing that the idea of gradual change over time:

is contradicted by direct perception (*mngon sum*). [For example], the Ganga is said to flow east, but it flows to the west, the Sindhu is said in the *Lokaprajñapti* to flow south, but it flows west. [Also] Himavat [and] Gandamandana are mixed up [in terms of] north and south, and although it says according to the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* and the *Lokaprajñapti* that the four rivers all flow from Anavatapta itself, here [in the present world], three of the rivers flow from mountain ridges which are some distance from the lake.³⁴⁷

In this passage, he contrasts what the scriptures say and what is seen in direct perception. For example, the scriptures say that the Ganga is supposed to flow east, but direct perception tells him that it actually flows west. That kind of difference is not the kind of thing that would happen if the site had deteriorated over time, but instead indicates that something else is happening when scriptures provide these kinds of distinctions. Chödrak Yeshe takes the fact that his direct perception disagrees with what scriptures say not as evidence that his own perception is worthless (and he also does not take it as evidence that the scriptures are wrong). Rather, he takes

346. Chödrak Yeshe does not explicitly say that he went to Kailash and looked, but it is framed in that way.

347. *Ces gsungs pa ltar/ gangs can spos ngad ldang lho byang go log pa dang/ gangA shar du 'bab par bshad pa la nub tu 'bab pa dang/ gzahag par sindhu lhor 'bab par bshad pa la nub tu bab pa dang/ lung sman gyi gzhi dang mdzod las chu bo bzhi ga ma dros pa nyid las 'bab pa ltar byung yang/ 'dir chu bo gsum po mtsho las rgyang ring ba'i ri sul gzhan nas 'bab par mngon sum dang 'gal ba'i tshul.* Ibid, 15b.

the evidence of his own visual perception seriously, and uses it as evidence that he needs to come up with some other explanation for why this difference between scripture and direct perception exists.

Thus direct perception—even that of an ordinary person—has a role to play in interpreting scriptures and understanding the world. As Chödrak Yeshe writes after arguing that humans can see some of the things described in scripture but not all of the things described there, “Thus it is necessary to make great effort [to combat] that which is contradictory to both scripture and what is known in the world.”³⁴⁸ Worldly knowledge and perception is thus generally not enough to completely overturn things said in scripture, but it does play a not-insignificant role in correctly interpreting scripture.

So alongside the idea of multiple perceptual realms, in which ordinary human perception is generally maligned, there is this idea of a baseline reality as it is generally perceived by humans. Chödrak Yeshe and Sakya Paṇḍita both take this ordinary perception—the fact that Kailash looks like a big snowy rock rather than a divine palace—as the common basis for the whole debate. Sakya Paṇḍita uses ordinary perception to say that Kailash is not scriptural Himavat, and even though Chödrak Yeshe has ready-at-hand the idea that ordinary human perception is deluded and therefore of little relevance to such matters—an idea which he does make use of in his defense of Kailash—he also does not completely discount ordinary perception or say that those perceiving Kailash or the Ganga as ordinary are wrong. Of course, on one level they would be wrong, for they cannot see these places in their extraordinary aspects that these writers valorize, but Chödrak Yeshe still takes ordinary perception seriously and tries to explain why commonly held ordinary perception differs from extraordinary perception. The distinction

348. *Zhes lung dang 'jig rten du grags pa gnyis ka dang 'gal ba lhur len dgos par 'gyur ro*. Ibid, 14a.

here is subtle—Chödrak Yeshe is far from an empirical realist—but real.

It was clearly too close to a kind of realism for Lowo Chodzé. As discussed above, Lowo Chodzé wrote his further questions to Chödrak Yeshe demanding to know if Chödrak Yeshe has suddenly started to think that external objects are real or if Kailash actually exists.

Chödrak Yeshe writes back saying that “if you know the intention, the *Scholar’s Earring* does not repudiate [the idea that] external objects (*phyi don*) are not truly established and [the idea that] external objects (*phyi don*) [exist] merely in conventional terms.”³⁴⁹ Thus, all of this debate is about conventional reality, and does not suggest anything about the ultimate nature of the way things are.

Notably, however, the fact that the mountain only exists conventionally does not mean that it does not exist at all, and the fact that Chödrak Yeshe thinks that the mountain exists conventionally does not preclude him from engaging in a long and detailed debate about the mountain. Nor does it stop him from thinking that it is important that we get our account of conventional reality correct. For him, the question of Kailash’s identity and its status as a pilgrimage place is not something that can be glossed over because the mountain only exists conventionally, but rather something that it is worth spending time and ink in getting right. For indeed, it is the conventional mountain that supports and facilitates pilgrimage practice.

Here again, Chödrak Yeshe seems to be thinking about the difference between the scriptural vision of Himavat and ordinary perception of Kailash, and looking for ways to bridge that gap. Scripture is one way we know about how places like Himavat “really” are because human perception is flawed. Nevertheless, he does maintain that his and others’ perceptions of

349. *De ltar shes na mkhas pa'i rna rgyan gyi tshigs su bcad pas phyi don bden par ma grub pa dang/ tha snyad tsam du phyi don mi 'gog pa dang*. Ibid, 22a.

the mountain do tell us something worth knowing, and that pilgrimage practice based on conventional reality and ordinary perception is worth preserving.

Why is this notion of ordinary material reality important for the project at hand? Insofar as the central question of this dissertation asks how people transform perception, it is important to distinguish the particular kind of seeing being discussed. This would be a very different project if I were asking how people can entirely *replace* their ordinary perception of Kailash with a perception of the jeweled palace of Himavat. Rather, I am asking how pilgrims who look at Kailash somehow see the mountain both in its ordinary material form *and* its extraordinary form. To put it a different way, I am interested in how the practice of pilgrimage stands in relation to ordinary perception of material reality. Does it involve a full-scale rejection of ordinary perception, or does the practice of pilgrimage engage and affirm ordinary perception even as it tries to cultivate alternative ways of seeing? The co-seeing that this dissertation is interested in asks how it is possible that Tibetans can see a physical place *as* holy, not because ordinary perception has been totally eliminated, but rather how this special perception of physical places are possible *alongside* or even *because of* ordinary perception. To that end, it is important to think about how people like Sakya Paṇḍita and Chödrak Yeshe addressed the issue of conventional perception of pilgrimage mountains as well as the conventional material reality of the mountains themselves.

Religious Language

One more major issue that comes up in the context of the debate about Kailash is the function of religious language. In the course of responding to difference between scriptural descriptions of

Himavat and ordinary perception of Kailash, both Sakya Paṇḍita and Chödrak Yeshe consider issues around the language of Buddhist scriptures as such. Sakya Paṇḍita considers but ultimately rejects the idea that the apparent difference between Kailash and Himavat is due to the fact that scriptural descriptions of Himavat are actually poetic and therefore somewhat exaggerated. Chödrak Yeshe, however, is more open to the possibility that the descriptions of Himavat are poetic, and that this poetic language works on audiences in order to effect a certain kind of goal. Our question, then, is to what extent religious language—in particular the language of Buddhist scriptures—is related to poetic language, and further, how these uses of language might affect perception.

In fact, the issue of how certain uses of language might affect perception is as central to this dissertation as is the question of the nature of perception itself. For if the goal in Tibetan pilgrimage practices is to gain the capacity to see the pilgrimage place as the divine mandala that it really is, it is important to understand how such a transformation might be facilitated. Does the language in Buddhist scriptures facilitate a certain kind of seeing? Or do only particular ways of using language do so? If language does have this kind of ability, what are the proper limits of its use? In order to answer these questions, let us turn to Sakya Paṇḍita and Chödrak Yeshe's attempts to understand why scriptural descriptions of Himavat differ so radically from ordinary perceptions of Kailash.

In *The Clear Differentiation of the Three Vows*, Sakya Paṇḍita asks whether a viable solution to the difference of appearance of Kailash and Himavat is because scriptural descriptions of Himavat are poetic (*snyan ngag*) and not literal. Were such descriptions to be poetic, we might interpret scriptures describing Himavat as covered in jewels as merely a poetic way of saying that Himavat is beautiful.

The term Sakya Paṇḍita uses to refer to poetry is *snyan ngag* (literally, “melodious speech”), a term which translates the Sanskrit *kāvya*. *Kāvya* in India is a highly sophisticated tradition of courtly poetry and dramas, and was highly theorized by literary theorists like Daṇḍin. This tradition was transmitted to Tibet as part of the large-scale translation of Buddhist texts, and had a massive impact on Tibetan literary sensibilities. At the time of Sakya Paṇḍita, the major Indian treatise on *kāvya*, Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa*, “*The Mirror of Poetics*,” had not yet been fully translated into Tibetan. Sakya Paṇḍita himself, however, was the first major writer to introduce some of its contents to Tibetan readers. He did so via a translation-paraphrase in his work *Gateway for Scholars*.³⁵⁰ Besides the Indic form of *snyan ngag*, Tibetan literature also contains other, earlier forms of verse and poetics such as songs (*glu*) and songs of experience (*mgur*, *nyams mgur*).

Sakya Paṇḍita rejects the idea that scriptures describe Himavat in poetic terms. He does so on the grounds that there are two kinds of description—“describing things as they actually are” (*dngos po'i gnas lugs 'chad pa*)³⁵¹ and “exaggerating faults and good qualities” (*skyon yon bsgnags pa*), which he also refers to as “the tradition of poets” (*snyan ngag mkhan gyi lugs*)—and that only the former is appropriate in the case of Buddhist scriptures describing Himavat.³⁵²

350. For more on the reception of Sakya Paṇḍita’s work on Daṇḍin, see Leonard van der Kuijp, “Tibetan Belles-Lettres: The Influence of Daṇḍin and Ksemendra.” In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1996) 393–410.

351. I have given the first mode of description the admittedly clunky translation of “describing things the way they actually are,” rather than Jared Rhoton’s more straightforward rendering of “factual description,” in order to highlight the term *dngos po*. The term *dngos* has the sense of real, actual, concrete, or manifest—the term *dngos gnas* is still used by Tibetans to mean “really?”—and the addition of the nominalizing particle *po* only amplifies this sense. Other translations might be “substantial entity,” “real thing,” or “phenomenon.” My goal, however, was to bring out the sense of contrast between poetic exaggeration—making things sound better or worse than they actually are—and the persistent material reality that seems to have driven the debate about Kailash.

352. It is not clear specifically where Sakya Paṇḍita gets this distinction, and none of the commentaries I have seen give a source. Chomden Raltri takes issue with it, saying “There is no reason whatsoever for that kind of statement!” (*gcig ni sgro btags pa snyan dngags mkhan gyi lugs dang/ gcig ni dngos po'i rang bzhin brjod pa'o/ zhes zer ba de yang mi 'thad de/ de 'dra'i rgyu mtshan ci yang med pa'i phyir*. Bcom ldan ral gri, 403). I believe that Sakya Paṇḍita

That is, he asserts that scriptures describe Himavat in literal terms rather than poetic terms, and that it would be *inappropriate* for scriptures to describe Himavat in poetic terms.

He is not necessarily saying that poetic language generally, or even that poetic language in Buddhist scriptures is bad. If Sakya Paṇḍita thought that was the case, he would not have emphasized the study of the *Kāvyādarśa* in the *Gateway for Scholars*. In that text, moreover, he recommends that Buddhist scholars master the art of poetics as part of developing mastery over the major domains of knowledge. In refuting the idea that scriptural descriptions of Himavat are poetic, moreover, he provides a number of examples of poetic language of which he seems to approve. And, as the later Sakya commentator Pökhangpa points out, most of these examples of poetic language are taken from *jātakas* and other Buddhist texts.³⁵³ He stops short of voicing approval of this kind of language—the closest he gets is a terse admission that “to the poet, such exaggerated praises are not forbidden” (*bsngags pa ni/ snyan ngag mkhan la bkag pa med*)—but he seems to think it has its proper time and place.

Sakya Paṇḍita is concerned, however, that overzealous poets will distort reality, that unskilled scholars will mistake poetic language for language which describes the way things are in material reality, or that foolish scholars will take delight in the wrong kind of poetry. In Sakya

draws this distinction from the *Kāvyādarśa*, which says that “Literature is divided into two: *svabhavokti* and *vakrokti*.” That is, between speaking of things the way they are and crooked speech. The former is particularly associated with treatises (*śāstra*), though it may occur in *kāvya*, whereas the latter is particular, and indeed central, to *kāvya*. Although *svabhavokti* is ordinarily translated into Tibetan as *rang bzhin brjod pa*, in his *Gateway for Scholars*, Sakya Paṇḍita translates the term *svabhavokti* as *rang bzhin brjod*, but explains it by saying that it is “stating without error the way things actually are” (*dnogs po'i gnas lugs skyon med par brjod pa yin*). *Mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo*, 410.15.

353. For example, praising a cow by saying that she might be either the fallen fragment of a cloud or a snowy mountain that knows how to move is allowed because it praises the qualities of whiteness and grace of movement that the cow possesses. According to Pökhangpa, this example occurs in the *Six-Tusked King of Elephants Jataka*. See *Skyes rabs: Ston mchog thams cad mkhyen pa thub pa'i dbang po'i skyes rabs gsal bar brjod pa brgya lnga bcu pa nor bu'i phreng ba*, edited by 'Jam dbyangs blo gter dbang po TBRC: W29903, (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003). The other examples Sakya Paṇḍita gives are all exaggerations of a quality already present in the object of the praise, but one that has been amplified for poetic effect.

Paṇḍita's opinion, poetry goes wrong when it makes errors in terms of an object's defining characteristics (*mtshan nyid*). Pökhangpa gives the examples of saying that horses have dewlaps, that humans are cool, and that water is hot.³⁵⁴ Those familiar with Indian philosophical traditions will know that it is the classic defining character of cows, not horses, to have a dewlap, that humans have the defining characteristic of warmth, and that water has the defining characteristic of coolness. Poetry, then, does not need to get everything exactly right, but it should not get basic facts wrong. Learned scholars (*mkhas pa*), Sapan suggests, should be able to tell the difference between basic facts and poetic license, and should not make the mistake of delighting in poetry that gets basic facts wrong.

This is especially true, moreover, in the context of treatises and other texts whose primary purpose is to describe things the way that they are. In articulating the proper place for poetic language, Sakya Paṇḍita differentiates between different kinds of texts. Specifically, he seems to accept the notion that sutra texts have at least some poetic language, but rejects the idea of there being poetic language in the Abhidharma texts that describe Himavat.³⁵⁵

He develops this distinction through discussing the example of Vulture Peak (Skt. *gr̥dhrakūṭa*), an example brought up by his imagined opponents. Sutras such as the *Ratnakutasutra* describe Vulture Peak as a wondrous mountain where the Buddha preached the dharma to his followers. As in the case of Kailash/Himavat, the mountain's present-day appearance does not match the glories of the scriptural descriptions, but unlike the case of

354. Spos khang pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan, *Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i gzhung lugs legs par bshad pa*, in *Dpal sa skya'i sdom gsum phyogs bsgrigs*, 333.

355. See also Jonathan Gold's *The Dharma's Gatekeepers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), which discusses a similar issue with reference to Sapan's *Gateway for Scholars* (*mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo*). He writes of "Sa-pan's interesting distinction between "treatises of scripture and reasoning" on the one hand (where the meaning is the thing) and "poetry" on the other (where the sound or wording is the thing)" (133). He continues, "Sa-pan recognizes that not all Buddhist texts are poetry, but some can be" (133).

Kailash/Himavat, it seems that nobody doubted that the location called Vulture Peak in Sakya Paṇḍita's time is the same place described in the sutras. As such, Sakya Paṇḍita's imagined interlocutor offers Vulture Peak as an example of a place whose present-day appearance does not affect its identification as a place discussed in the sutras. If the problem of Vulture Peak's modern-day appearance can be resolved by means of explaining how Vulture Peak has changed over time or by means of explaining how scriptural descriptions were made in poetic language, why could the same not be true of Kailash/Himavat? The example of Vulture Peak forces Sakya Paṇḍita to articulate how the case of Kailash is different from that of Vulture Peak.

Sakya Paṇḍita argues that descriptions of Vulture Peak in sutras were indeed poetic descriptions. Sakya Paṇḍita characterizes the descriptions of Vulture Peak found in the sutras as following “the tradition of poets” (*snyan ngag mkhan gyi lugs bzhin du*), as opposed to being written in the mode of a “description of the way things actually are.” As such, the descriptions given in the sutras are *exaggerations* of how things actually are, and thus not the standard against which the actual landscape of Vulture Peak should be held. Sakya Paṇḍita goes on to explain that the traditional descriptions of Vulture Peak as being lofty and round must be taken in context. Vulture Peak is a foothill by Tibetan standards, but it is a great peak in India where the sutra was preached. And so while the sutra descriptions of Vulture Peak do not accurately depict the world exactly as it is, their descriptions are exaggerations of qualities that do exist.³⁵⁶

For Sakya Paṇḍita, all of this means that descriptions of Vulture Peak are legitimate uses

356. Sakya Paṇḍita's commentator Pökhangpa adds that the poets are employing the ornament (*rgyan*, Skt. *alamkara*) of perfection (*phul byung*, Skt. *atiśa*); that is, describing everything in the setting as perfect and wonderful. He notes earlier in his commentary that this use of poetic ornaments, and of similes (*dpe*, Skt. *upamā*) in particular, is for the benefit of audiences, in order to help them be able to wrap their minds around the setting where these sutras were preached, and hopefully to be better able to understand the content. “*Tshul 'di blo yul du mi shong ba rnams la snyan dngags mkhan gyi dpe dang sbyar ba yin no.*” See Spos khang pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan, *Sdom gsum rab dbye'i 'grel chen*, in *Sdom gyi skor*, TBRC W3JT13300 (Kathmandu, Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2007), 1128.

of poetic language, and the fact of these descriptions being poetic means that the apparent problem of the difference of Vulture Peak's appearance in the sutras and in the present is not actually a problem.

But while this argument accounts for why modern Vulture Peak is scriptural Vulture Peak, it does not really address the issue of how the case of Vulture Peak is different from the case of Kailash/Himavat. After all, would it not be possible to make the same arguments made on behalf of Vulture Peak for Kailash/Himavat? Such an argument would run like this: scriptural descriptions found in the *Avataṃsaka*, *Kalacakra*, *Abhidharmakośa*, and others describe Himavat in poetic terms. Describing Himavat as filled with flowers is a way of saying that it is beautiful, saying that the rivers are each a *yojana* wide is saying that they are powerful, and listing the various elephants and creatures that live there is saying that it is auspicious. One could even take this line of reasoning a step further and say that all of these descriptions of Himavat and the source of the four rivers is a poetic way to say that the world where we live and suffer is truly beautiful.

Because Sakya Paṇḍita does not directly take up this argument, we do not know how he might respond, but we can try to reconstruct a response that would account for this possibility. For example, he might say that the poetic descriptions of Vulture Peak took an underlying quality of height and exaggerated it to say lofty, but that this is different in kind from saying that there are flowers at Himavat when there are no flowers. That is, we might imagine Sakya Paṇḍita allowing poets to exaggerate qualities of Vulture Peak like having perfect fragrant flowers and a lofty, rounded mountain, but only if there are actually some flowers and some sort of hill, but drawing the line at imagining a whole landscape of wonders at Himavat just to highlight the underlying quality of beauty. To put it another way, some poetic exaggeration is acceptable, but

when it goes to the point of actually inventing new kinds of entities, it has gone too far. But where is the line of acceptable poetic invention? What stops the poet from going too far and inventing ridiculous or potentially harmful things out of whole cloth?³⁵⁷

Again, for Sakya Paṇḍita, one relevant distinction seems to be the kind of text being considered. That is, poetry is acceptable for sutra texts like those that describe Vulture Peak, but it is a different matter entirely when discussing treatises like the *Abhidharmakośa*. Buddhist literature can and does at times make use of poetic figures, emotions, and tropes, and this is part of the reason why Buddhist scholars must study poetics in order to help determine when Buddhist texts are being poetic, and when they are not.³⁵⁸ But treatises should not indulge in language that might introduce ambiguity.

For Sakya Paṇḍita, the *Abhidharmakośa* is a treatise written by a scholar rather than a sutra text that is *buddhavacana*, and it is as such held to a different standard. If the Buddha sees fit to use poetic language in order to reach out to beings, that is his prerogative, and indeed one of the reasons scholars should learn poetry is to be alert to these features of the language when interpreting such texts, but a scholar like Vasubandhu should be writing about things as they actually are, and should not be using poetic language. It is this distinction which ultimately separates the case of Himavat/Kailash from the case of Vulture Peak in Sakya Paṇḍita's eyes.

357. Some of Sakya Paṇḍita's commentators, and indeed perhaps Sakya Paṇḍita himself, if we accept that the purported self-annotations (*rang mchan*) are indeed written by him, recognized that there were rules and guidelines limiting the potential danger of this form of language. (For a discussion of these annotations and their authenticity. See David Jackson, "Several Works of Unusual Provenance Ascribed to Sa Skya Paṇḍita," in *Tibetan History and Language: Studies Dedicated to Uray Géza on His Seventieth Birthday*, edited by Ernst Steinkellner (Wien: Universität Wien, 1991), 233–54.) Gorampa, for example, describes the examples Sakya Paṇḍita gives as not being forbidden "because they are in the context of praising the qualities according to the texts of kavya" (*snyan ngags kyi gzhung*), and the purported self-annotations on verse 337 amend the statement "not forbidden to the poet" to read "not forbidden to the poet according to the kavya treatises" (*snyan ngag gi bstan 'chos* [reading *bcos*]). Rhoton, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*, 191. There is thus the recognition of some alternate basis of evaluating and controlling poetry besides that of holding it accountable to how things actually are. Nevertheless, Sakya Paṇḍita clearly seems somewhat wary of poetry, not least because it has caused such confusion about Kailash.

358. See Gold, *The Dharma's Gatekeepers*, 117–144.

Sakya Paṇḍita would agree with the broader Mahayana tradition that the content of the *Abhidharmakośa* is not ultimately true—its analysis of concepts such as *dharma*s is rejected by later philosophical developments (and indeed in Vasubandhu’s self-commentary)—but he treats it as a definitive account of conventional truth.

Sakya Paṇḍita does not spell this out explicitly, but the balance of evidence suggests that Sapan thinks that *buddhavacana* may use poetic language but that treatises like the *Abhidharmakośa* should describe things the way they actually are. However even this reading leaves questions unanswered, such as why Sakya Paṇḍita cites the *Kalacakra Tantra* and *Avataṃsaka Sutra* as laying out the defining characteristics (*mtshan nyid*) of Himavat. Does Sakya Paṇḍita not consider them *buddhavacana*? It also raises the question of why Vasubandhu, the author of the *Abhidharmakośa*, is being held to the standard of knowing how to describe things as they actually are. In the *Three Vows*, Sakya Paṇḍita taunts would-be scholars who make errors in terms of describing the way things actually are. How could anyone who commits such errors be omniscient, Sakya Paṇḍita asks. But is Vasubandhu supposed to be omniscient?

Chödrak Yeshe, for his part, rejects this distinction between “describing things as they actually are” and “the tradition of poets.” He approvingly quotes Chomden Raltri, who writes, “Saying [as Sapan does] that [there are two ways of speaking]: one which is the exaggerating style of poets and one which describing how things actually are is illogical (*mi 'thad*), because there is no reason whatsoever for that [statement].”³⁵⁹ Neither Chomden Raltri nor Chödrak Yeshe seem to have any idea where Sakya Paṇḍita gets this distinction, and they reject it out of hand.³⁶⁰

359. *Gcig ni sgro btags pa snyan dngags mkhan gyi lugs dang/ gcig ni dngos po'i rang bzhin brjod pa'o/ zhes zer ba de yang mi 'thad de/ de 'dra'i rgyu mtshan ci yang med pa'i phyir*. Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 13b.

360. Chökyi Drakpa, in rejecting Sakya Paṇḍita’s distinction, argues that “Genuine poetry is an expression of the

Chödrak Yeshe does not deny that some descriptions are more literal and some are more poetic, but he does not draw as firm a distinction between these two ways of speaking. Instead, he seems to think there is a difference of degree rather than difference in kind. These two different ways of speaking, moreover, are not specific to different kinds of texts. Rather, individual texts can switch from one mode to another depending on the message they are trying to convey. For example, when discussing the various contradictions between scriptural texts describing the specific directions in which the rivers flow, Chödrak Yeshe writes: “You can see many incompatibilities. So how could anyone determine that there is a single model that can say how things really are? Therefore, instead of that [i.e. instead there being one fixed account of the world], [descriptions in scriptures] should be considered either as poetry or as giving the definitive characteristics. It depends [on the context].”³⁶¹ Buddhist scriptures then, can speak in various modes and use language in different ways, and it is up to the interpreter to understand the context and read the text in light of that context.

Differences between the scriptural descriptions of Himavat and ordinary perceptions of Kailash, then, might be resolved by seeking to more fully understand the context of such descriptions and the overall purpose of those texts.

Chödrak Yeshe argues that scriptural texts are spoken for a particular purpose and in a particular context, and that needs to be taken into account when interpreting these texts. He assures the reader that “it is impossible in every way for [scripture] to be deceptive through errors in meaning, contradictions, or false exaggerations when [that scripture is] establishing

way things actually are, just in a beautiful way.” *Snyan ngag tshul ldan ni dngos po'i gnas lugs la brjod pa legs pa tsam du smras pas*. Chos kyi grags pa, *Lung rigs smra ba'i mgul rgyan*, 411.

361. *Chu bo gnyis lho dang nub gzhag pa las bzlog ste 'bab pa sogs mi mthun pa cher mthong bzhin du [B: /] de rnam dngos po'i rang bzhin brjod par gcig ces zhal tshon [B: chon] (zhal chod? zhal tshad?) ji ltar gcod/ des na de dag las kyang gang rung cig snyan dngags mkhan gyi lugs dang/ gang rung cig mtshan nyid gtan la dbab par bzhed la rag go*. Chos grags ye shes, *Mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 15a.

actual reality,”³⁶² but argues that certain parts of scriptures are designed to reach a particular audience rather than to be one hundred percent literally true. As he says, “[Scriptures] uproot the faults of illusion and confusion, together with their habitual tendencies,”³⁶³ a process that does not necessarily involve specific and literal descriptions of world geography. Although Chödrak Yeshe does not use the term “skillful means,” his argument is clearly recognizable as a version of skillful means. That is, the Buddha teaches expediently, giving beings what they need *now* even if it is not ultimately true. As such apparent discrepancies between different sutras can be resolved in terms of the deeper unity of helping beings progress towards realization.

He suggests that descriptions of the world must be interpreted in this light—they occur in discourses where the goal is to help beings, not to give precise accounts of the specific dimensions of the world and its features. He supports this point in three ways.

First, he gives the example of the *Lokaprajñāpti*, which he argues is “faultless in terms of helping beings understand,”³⁶⁴ but “doubtful in terms of its use for finding the extraordinary Himavat and the rest.”³⁶⁵ The descriptions of the world in this text give the audience a general sense of their place in the world, but it is not an exact map to finding where these places are because it is not *trying* to be an exact map to these places. Such knowledge would does not help beings attain enlightenment, and since the purpose of the text is precisely that, the literal accuracy of the geographic descriptions is not really the point.

Now, one might ask why these texts could not get these details right. After all, the

362. *Dngos gnas gtan la 'bab [B: 'bebs] pa la/ don 'khrul pa'i [B: pa'am] 'gal ba [B: bar] ston pa'am/ sgro 'dogs pa'i zo la [B: zol] gyis bslu ba ni rnam pa nas rnam pa thams cad du mi srid de.* Ibid, 16a.

363. *'Khrul pa dang sgyu'i skyon bag chags dang beas pa rtsad nas spangs pas so.* Ibid.

364. *Go bar byed pa la 'khrul pa med pas thun mong pa dang 'grig gi.* Ibid, 15a.

365. *Thun mong ma yin pa'i gangs can sogs rnyed pa la phan bar mi 'gyur du dogs so.* Ibid.

Buddha is supposed to be omniscient, so why would he err on things that he could just get right? Perhaps anticipating this objection, Chödrak Yeshe points out that the much of the *Lokaprajñapti* is placed in the mouth of Maudgalyāyana rather than the Buddha, who only speaks briefly at the beginning, opening up the possibility that while the Buddha is omniscient, Maudgalyāyana probably is not. But even more than that, Chödrak Yeshe argues that the descriptions of the world “conform with that which appears in direct perception to each being who is to be tamed.”³⁶⁶ That is, they conform to the way beings already think the world is. Were scriptures like the *Lokaprajñapti* to give beings what Chödrak Yeshe holds as the ultimate truth—namely that the world lacks any fixed geographical dimensions—they might be bewildered, a state which would not prime them to listen to the actual message of the sutra.

Second, Chödrak Yeshe argues that the *way* in which scriptural descriptions of Himavat differ from one another demonstrates that these geographical descriptions are not very important. Having extensively quoted various texts discussing Himavat, Anavatapta, and the rivers, Chödrak Yeshe is well aware that they not only seem to contradict ordinary perception, but also to contradict one another. Of course, this is somewhat to be expected if different scriptures describe the world from the perspectives of gods or *nagas* or other beings—there are differences of perception between these classes of beings, so perhaps the differences are due to that. But Chödrak Yeshe seems to think that not all differences can be attributed to this scriptural perspectivalism. Rather, he goes out of his way to point out that the differences between scriptures are not what you might expect from switching from *naga*-view to god-view:

Although the geographies (lit. arrangements, *bkod pa*) of Anavatapta in the *Lokaprajñapti* and the *Abhidharmakośa* agree with one another, in the *Lokaprajñapti*, the four rivers circle clockwise and the Sindhu flows south and the Paksu flows west, each with its five

366. *Gdul bya rang rang la mngon sum du snang ba'i sgo dang bstun pa yin pa*. Ibid, 16a.

hundred attendant streams. Those [descriptions] do not appear in the *Abhidharmakośa* or its commentary. In the *Avatamsaka*, [it describes] the spaces between where the [rivers] circle seven times clockwise, the mouth doors of the four rivers, the size of each, that the earth is made of jewels, and their color. But the rivers for south and west are mixed up [compared with the arrangement given in the *Lokaprajñapti*], and there are seen many incompatibilities about [the direction of] flow and so forth.³⁶⁷

That is, there are these basic sorts of contradictions and mix-ups that do not seem to come from the fact that they are being described from different perspectives, but rather from the fact that sometimes texts get these sorts of minor details wrong. He seems to think that the specific details of these descriptions are not particularly important.

Third, he further drives this point home by making the case that the descriptions given in scripture do not seem literally possible. He writes:

According to the *Lokaprajñapti* and the *Abhidharmakośa*, the shape of Jambudvīpa is like a wind horse: three sides each 2,000 *yojanas* long and one short side 3.5 *yojanas* long. All around, it is 6,003.5 *yojanas*. Within this, Shambhala and such areas are 3,000 *yojanas*. And in the *Avatamsaka* and *Lokaprajñapti*, the Himavat, Anavatapta, and their surroundings are over 700 *yojanas*. After giving the thesis (*dam bcas pa*) [that the above is] the way things are in reality, which is beyond the realm of direct perception for non-magical beings, what is the size of the remaining area? The *Smṛityupastāna* agrees (reading *bstun*) here with the extraordinary way [of describing Himavat]. Himavat itself is said [in that texts] to be 1,000 *yojanas* in size. And according to the *Jñānavaipulya* sūtra, it is explained that it is 3,064 *yojanas* from the far side of the virtuous cities on the shores of the southern great ocean to Kosala and Himavat are to the north. I pray that the scholars who are on the side of honesty once again investigate the ways of making this [i.e. these sūtras] free of the fault of contradiction!³⁶⁸

367. *Gzhag pa dang mdzod kyi ma dros pa'i bkod pa mthun na'ang/ snga ma chu bo bzhi g.yas skor dang chu klung lnga brgya'i 'khor so so la yod pa'i sindhu lho dang/ pakshu nub tu 'bab par byung ba rnams mdzod 'grel pa dang bcas par mi snang zhing/ phal po cher [B: /] g.yas skor lan bdun bdun gyi bar mtshams/ chu bzhi'i kha sgo dpag tshad re re thams cad rin po che'i sa gzhi dang kha dog can/ chu bo gnyis lho dang nub gzhag pa las bzlog ste 'bab pa sogs mi mthun pa cher mthong.* Ibid, 15a.

368. *Gzhag pa dang mdzod las/ 'dzam gling 'di'i dbyibs shing rta 'dra ba'i ngos ring ba gsum ni dpag tshad stong phrag gnyis gnyis [B: /] ngos thung ba la dpag tshad phyed dang bzhi/ mtha' skor du dpag tshad drug stong dang phyed bzhi las ma gsungs pa'i khongs 'dir sham bha la sogs pa'i yul dpag tshad sum stong dang [B: /] phal chen dang gzhag par byung ba'i gangs mtsho 'khor bcas dpag tshad brgya phrag bdun lhag tsam rnams/ mi rdzu 'phrul med pas mngon sum gyi yul 'das pa don la gnas par dam bcas pa'i rjes su/ yul lhag ma rnams kyi khyon ji srid cig tu 'gyur/ dran pa nyer gzhag thun mong ma yin pa'i lugs 'dir bsdu/ gangs can nyid la'ang dpag tshad stong gi tshad*

In this passage, he describes the standard circumference of Jambudvipa, then goes through the standard sizes for all the things that are supposed to fit inside that, wondering if there is any space left for the world as seen by ordinary beings. In other words, he is saying that those figures in those texts cannot be literally accurate.

All of this demonstrates, for Chödrak Yeshe, that specific scriptural descriptions of Himavat are not particularly important and are not to be taken too seriously in their literal form. This is not to say that that passages describing Himavat are pointless—recall that one of Chödrak Yeshe’s founding assumptions is that it is impossible for scriptures to err in terms of their goal of uprooting the faults of illusion and confusion—but that the *specific details* are less important than the *overall presentation* of some kind of geography for Jambudvipa.

So what *is* the purpose of describing the geography of Jambudvipa? Chödrak Yeshe argues that it is twofold: “This method is for the fortunate ones, so that they can know that what some non-Buddhists say, in terms of the size of Brahma’s egg and so forth, are false, [and so they can] properly understand the human body, which is made of six elements, as well as the concordance of internal and external phenomena and the human body’s six elements.”³⁶⁹ In other words, Buddhist scriptures give their own accounts of how the world is arranged to displace the presumably more harmful accounts given by non-Buddhists, and to teach about the body and how internal and external phenomena are in accord with one another. Teachings about how the external world is laid out, then, instruct people about their own internal processes. This is why the specific details given in different texts—which as Chödrak Yeshe points out are often

du gsungs pa dang/ ye shes rgyas pa las lho phyogs rgya mtsho'i 'gram grong khyer dge ba'i pha rol du 'gro ba nas/ ko sa la gangs ri dang bcas pa byang du yod pa'i bar la dpag tshad sum stong drug cu rtsa bzhi bshad pa sogs 'gal 'du skyon med du bya ba'i thabs/ mkhas pa gzu bor gnas pa rnams kyis slar yang dpyad du gsol lo. Ibid, 15a-b.

369. *Phyi rol pa kha cig tshangs pa'i sgo nga dpag tshad bye ba'i khyon du smra ba sogs brdzun par shes nus shing/ kham drug ldan gyi mi'i lus dang/ phyi nang chos mthun rtogs su rung ba'i skal ba can rnams ky'i dbang du mdzad de. Ibid, 16a.*

contradictory—are not overly important. Rather, the point is to give an account that is comprehensive enough to provide a convincing alternative to Brahmanical accounts of the world and to understand how humans’ inner world and the external world are connected.

The details are shown to be even less important when Chödrak Yeshe makes the argument that the universe actually *has* no fixed size. As he writes, “Ultimately, the world region lacks a measured size because [it changes according to] the merit and sin of beings.”³⁷⁰ This constant fluctuation means that it would be impossible to give a definitive account of the world and how it is laid out. He offers an example from the *Kalacakra Tantra*:

For example (lit. here, '*dir*'), a bodhisattva who is free from desire dwells in a cave that is five cubits in size. And in that [same] cave, a Wheel turning king and his retinue [can] enter because of the power of magical illusion and the force of adhering to merit and wisdom. No one enlarged the cave, but the wheel turning king and his retinue were not crowded in the cave.³⁷¹

Although the cave is initially five cubits, seemingly too small to allow the king and his retinue to enter, their vast merit makes the cave expand. Similarly, Chödrak Yeshe maintains, the world has no fixed size but is rather constantly fluctuating. But this, too, is only a conventional truth.

Ultimately, Chödrak Yeshe argues, external objects are not established, and there is only the various appearances of conventional reality, and none the various measurements given for the size of the world are ultimately real. Here he quotes Haribhadra’s *Abhisamayālamkāra*, which makes the same point:

...Its three sides that reside within waters of the great ocean are each 2,000 *yojanas* long,

370. *Don dam par ni 'jig rten gyi khams la tshad gzhal du med de sems can rnams kyi bsod nams dang sdig pa'i dbang gis so.* Ibid, 17a.

371. '*Dir phug khru lnga pa'i tshad gang du 'dod chags dang bral ba'i byang chub sems dpa' gnas pa'i phug der/ bsod nams dang ye shes bsten pa de'i mthu dang rdzu 'phrul gyis stobs kyis 'khor los bsgyur ba sde dang bcas pa 'ongs shing rab tu 'jug ste/ de sus kyang ma bskyed cing phug der zhugs pa'i 'khor los bsgyur ba'i sde yang dog pa nyid ma yin no.* Ibid, 17a.

and the one [remaining] size is 3.5 *yojanas*. That is the measure of the circumference [of the shoreline]. All of that is taught according to one Abhidharma [text]. According to other Abhidharma [texts], it is different, and dissimilar measures [of the great ocean] are taught. The Mahayana sutras say very different things said about the world-container and so forth, [such as] the measures of what is established [in it]. This is the meaning of what is said. If someone raises the question of how it can be, if that is true, that [Buddhist scriptures] are not contradictory, [we] respond: Because material external phenomena are not ultimately established, [phenomena] appear as various [things] in conventional reality. That being the case, continents are posited. Just as [phenomena] appears as discrete things, in that way, they are posited as discrete things. And so there is no contradiction [because there is no ultimate reality that is being contradicted].³⁷²

Haribhadra, writing about four hundred years before Sakya Paṇḍita, notices the problem of seeming contradiction in the scriptures regarding the size of Jambudvīpa. Invoking the theory of the two truths, he says that external phenomena are not ultimately established. However, because it appears to beings that there are external objects in conventional reality as it appears to them, scriptures talk in terms of external objects. Insofar as scriptures do not make the mistake of taking conventional reality as what is ultimately real, this is not a problem, but is rather a tool for communicating with ordinary beings for whom external objects are an everyday reality.

Because he maintains that the world has no fixed size and that scriptural statements about that size can be resolved in terms of the texts' propaedeutic purposes, Chödrak Yeshe rejects as unnecessary the various physicalist compromises proposed by other scholars, such as saying that Kailash has degenerated over time or that there is a fifty *yojana* lake underneath Ma pham.

Instead, he seems to be gesturing towards a view of scripture not as a literally true description of the world, but rather as a rhetorically designed to work on the audience receiving

372. *Rgya mtsho chen po'i chu'i nang na gnas pa'i ngos kyi cha sogs kha'i ngos gsum la ni stong phrag gnyis gnyis [B: /] gcig la dpag tshad phyed dang bzhi dang bcas pa ni chu zheng gi tshad de/ de thams cad ni chos mngon pa gcig nas bstan to/ mngon pa gzhan dang gzhan las ni gzhan te tshad mi mthun par bstan to/ 'dzam bu gling la sogs pa snod gzhas pa theg pa chen po'i mdo rnam las rnam par gzhas pa'i tshad shin tu mi 'dra ste/ 'dir zhes bya ba'i don te [B: to/] de ltar na ji ltar gzhan dang mi 'gal zhe na/ smras pa/ gang gi phyir phyi'i chos dngos po yongs su ma grub pas kun rdzob so sor snang ba la gling rnam par gzhas ste/ ji lta ji ltar so sor snang ba/ de lta de ltar rnam par gzhas pas 'gal ba med do. Ibid, 16b.*

the scripture. We might even speculate that laying out such wondrous descriptions of these places works on audiences by leading them to imaginatively enter this world that is so different from our own. The world of the scripture and the world of ordinary perception then, are separate, but the boundaries are somewhat more fluid than they would be according to Chödrak Yeshe's first model of scripture as describing the world from a literal but godly perspective that is totally separate from a human perspective.

Why Go on Pilgrimage to Kailash?

Before concluding this chapter, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider how the issues discussed in the foregoing arguments relate to the practice of pilgrimage. Both of the texts explored here are about whether pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari is appropriate, and yet both focus much more on the putative identification of Kailash with Himavat than on the actual practice of going to on pilgrimage to sacred mountains.

It is clear that Sakya Paṇḍita thinks that pilgrimage to Kailash is wrong both because it is not really a proper holy site after all and because ordinary people without advanced tantric vows should not be going on pilgrimage to tantric pilgrimage places anyway.

Chödrak Yeshe, on the other hand, clearly approves of pilgrimage practice. And yet, Chödrak Yeshe clearly seems to think that ordinary people going on pilgrimage cannot expect to see the mountain in its extraordinary aspect. We might ask, then, why should they go on pilgrimage at all? This is further complicated by the fact that Chödrak Yeshe spends very little time addressing Sakya Paṇḍita's attack on *pilgrimage* to Kailash, instead focusing on defending Kailash's identification with Himavat. He does not explicitly take up Sakya Paṇḍita's claim that only advanced tantric initiates should go on pilgrimage to places like Caritra and Himavat. It

seems clear that he thinks that people of all levels should be able to visit Kailash from the fact that he talks about tantric pilgrimage places being taught for the sake of all different types of individuals. However, he does not make this case explicitly.

His implicit argument for why people should go on pilgrimage to Kailash even though they cannot expect or even hope to be able to see it in the extraordinary way is that it is described in scriptures is that it these holy places are “unsurpassed purifiers.”³⁷³ That is, they have the power to purify those who come in contact with them, regardless of how the pilgrim sees them. In this account, pilgrimage is not primarily a visual practice. The pilgrim knows that the site has an extraordinary aspect that lies beyond their perceptual capacity, but they do not go out of their way to try and see this extraordinary aspect, nor does it matter to the success of the pilgrimage whether or not this extraordinary aspect is glimpsed. The place *qua* place has power, regardless of how the pilgrim sees it.

Against those critics of pilgrimage from the previous chapter the, Chödrak Yeshe asserts that certain physical places have the power to act on pilgrims *regardless of the pilgrim's perception or intention*. Chödrak Yeshe might still want pilgrims to cultivate faith and devotion, and might think that those qualities could amplify the effects of coming into contact with holy places, but he thinks that the places themselves have inherent purificatory powers.

Chödrak Yeshe argues, furthermore, that going to these pilgrimage places increases the pilgrim's faith (*dad pa*) in the dharma,³⁷⁴ a process that does seem at least somewhat tied to seeing the pilgrimage mountain. As discussed more extensively in chapter six, the term *faith* has

373. *Bla med dag sbyor gyi/ gnas*. Ibid, 10a.

374. The previous sentence begins, “From the very moment something appears,” and ends with a continuative particle (*de*) rather than a terminal particle, indicating that the next sentence may also be governed by this notion of appearance. *Stong dang rten 'byung zung 'jug gi dam chos ston pa la sems dad par gyur zhes*. Ibid, 21b.

the sense of confidence and clear-hearted devotion in the Buddhist teachings, not merely belief in some unseen quality. The sentence about pilgrims' faith does not have a clear subject, but it occurs in the context of talking about how appearances are experienced by the perceiver even though they are ultimately without essence. In that context, the appearance of the mountain in the consciousness of the pilgrim is what causes them to develop faith in the dharma.³⁷⁵ But why? And how? If the mountain is just a heap of rocks in its ordinary appearance, why would this cause pilgrims who see it to develop faith? Does their knowledge that it also has these extraordinary aspects lying just outside their perceptual capacities affect this? This question of the relationship between pilgrimage, appearances, and faith will be a question that we will carry into future chapters.

Conclusion

The long debate over pilgrimage to Kailash touches upon many issues and resists easy summarization, but I have here identified three key issues.

First, we considered the notion that one thing appears in different ways to different kinds of perceivers, and the subsequent claim that scriptures describe the world from the perspective of different sorts of beings, and not necessarily from a human perspective. Chödrak Yeshe argued therefore that the scripture-based claim that Kailash is not Himavat does not stand.

Second, we explored ideas of material reality, and specifically Chödrak Yeshe's continual references to the external world as it is ordinarily perceived. He argued that features of Kailash which could be seen by everyone, such as the fact that the Ganga flows from the area near Kailash, inarguably established that Kailash is Himavat even though other scripturally described

375. *Snang dus nyid nas*. Ibid, 21b.

aspects of Kailash could not be seen by ordinary people. He further asserted that there was one sort of thing (*dnegos*) that underlies both ordinary and extraordinary perceptions of Kailash. When someone sees Kailash in its extraordinary aspect, they see some aspects of the mountain in a new way, but certain basic material facts remain the same. The divine vision of Kailash, as such, is not just superimposed arbitrarily on ordinary Kailash. In addition, he affirmed that Kailash does have special powers to purify beings regardless of how those beings see it.

Finally, the issue of religious language and the question of how the language of scriptures describing Himavat is functioning. Sakya Paṇḍita attempted to draw a firm line separating poetic uses of language from language describing the way things really are, and argued that scriptural descriptions of Himavat would not exaggerate to the point that Kailash would look so radically different than scriptural Himavat. By contrast, Chödrak Yeshe rejected a division of language into poetic and literal. He was also more open to the idea that the language in scriptures was working in other ways. He suggested that language was functioning poetically to convey some larger purpose rather than to literally describe the world as it is. He stops short of suggesting that these descriptions might have the ability to change the way people see the mountain, but he certainly imagines a much more active role for religious language when compared to Sakya Paṇḍita. But now that we have explored these three issues in some depth, what do they all mean for our larger questions about perception and the potential for its transformation?

Sakya Paṇḍita and Chödrak Yeshe are both clearly working with the problem of perceptual difference. Why do scriptures describe Himavat one way, but our ordinary senses tell us something else? Sakya Paṇḍita uses the difference between scriptural Himavat and ordinary perceptions of Kailash to argue that Kailash is not Himavat, but Chödrak Yeshe develops a different argument.

Chödrak Yeshe's primary argument is to say that scriptures describe Himavat from the perspective of gods or *nagas*, that is, not what humans can see. But these scriptures are still for humans. This raises the question, then, why do scriptures tell people about what they cannot see?

Setting that question aside, however, I also noted that Chödrak Yeshe offers multiple, potentially contradictory, ways of dealing with the problem of why Kailash looks different than scriptural Himavat. In reading this text, I initially tried to resolve Chödrak Yeshe's various arguments into a single unified argument that coherently addressed the problem of perceptual difference. As I continued, however, I began to wonder if trying to force Chödrak Yeshe's various lines of thinking into one unified project was an artificial imposition. Reading the *Scholar's Earring*, what I saw was a thinker grappling with a very difficult problem and exploring various possibilities for resolving it. As such, I have chosen to render the complexity of Chödrak Yeshe's thought by allowing the various responses to the problem of perceptual difference to coexist in a kind of tension.

So while Chödrak Yeshe's main argument is that scriptures describe the world as it is from various perspectives—an argument that would seem to imply that scriptural language is primarily descriptive and does not serve as a means by which humans can acquire the divine perspective of Himavat—elsewhere, Chödrak Yeshe *does* allow for the possibility that scriptures are functioning poetically to educate the *human* mind's eye. In other words, perhaps scripture is acting poetically so that humans can have the divine vision that gods have. The question of *how* scripture-as-poetry could transform vision in that way is a interesting one Chödrak Yeshe does not explore explicitly, leaving us only able to speculate about how he thinks this might happen. In other chapters, I will explore the ways in which other texts have thought about how language might change perception, but for now we will set that question aside.

But we still might ask the question apropos to what I have shown today about Chödrak Yeshe's appreciation of ordinary vision. That is, how does this divine vision facilitated by or described by scriptures relate to ordinary vision?

Given Chödrak Yeshe's argument that scriptures describe how Himavat looks from a godly perspective, and thus that everyday human perceptions of the mountain have no standing to argue that Kailash does not match scriptural descriptions of Himavat, we might see this as part of a general denigration of ordinary human perception. We might even think that Chödrak Yeshe's valorization of divine vision means that he sees no role for ordinary perception. However, that is not the case. By continually drawing on the evidence of his own and others' human eyes in making the case for Kailash's legitimacy, Chödrak Yeshe suggests that ordinary human perception can tell us important and true information about the mountain. Such information is only conventionally true, but to say that it is only conventionally true is not to say that it is false or totally unreliable. Furthermore, ordinary human perception can play a role in interpreting and confirming scripture. For instance, for Chödrak Yeshe, the common perception of ordinary humans confirms that the Ganges flows from Kailash. So if Chödrak Yeshe thinks that the ultimate goal is that humans cultivate divine perception, he does *not* seem to think that abandoning ordinary perception is the way to do so. Rather, ordinary perception, particularly correct ordinary perception, has an important role to play in our knowledge of the world and of scriptures. Ordinary and extraordinary visions of Kailash or of the Ganges are not totally distinct—they share important features.

This is, of course, perfectly legible in terms of Buddhist philosophical discourse. Buddhist philosophers such as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti maintained that direct perception was one of the main sources of reliable knowledge, and later Buddhist philosophers spent much time

investigating the way in which people perceive the world (and in particular what role language and concepts played or did not play in perception). Chödrak Yeshe does not reference those philosophical lines of thought directly, but he was likely very familiar with them or informed by them.

Chödrak Yeshe also emphasizes that appearance—in the sense of what ordinary people perceive and what gods perceive—is inseparable from emptiness. They are two sides of the same coin, and so it does not make sense to deny that things appear, even if only in conventional forms. He writes:

That which is actually one thing appears in many ways because of the various habitual tendencies of beings' minds. He who grasps the meaning, however, pacifies all of the elaborated characteristics because there is from the very beginning no objective support. Having fully understood the inseparability of appearance and emptiness, [namely, that], like how the misleading illusion of convention [appears] even though phenomena (*chos*) have no essential nature and are of one essence (*ro*), those who teach the true dharma are a site of wonders!³⁷⁶

Chödrak Yeshe thus reiterates the common Buddhist idea that various phenomena have no individual essential nature, and actually all share the same fundamental nature of emptiness. Out of that emptiness (and indeed made possible by emptiness), various appearances arise. Such appearances can be misleading because humans often mistake appearances for stable, permanent, externally real entities, but so long as people can see an appearance without letting their conceptual mind run wild with various conceptions about that appearance, there is nothing wrong with the appearance itself.

All of this is to say that, on the one hand, it is not all that surprising that Chödrak Yeshe

376. 'Gro ba'i sems kyi bag chags sna tshogs las/ dngos po gcig nyid du mar snang gyur kyang/ don dang 'dzin pa gdod nas mi dmigs pas/ spros pa'i mtshan ma mtha' dag nye bar zhi/ chos rnams rang bzhin med par ro mnyam yang/ kun rdzob 'khrul pa sgyu ma ji bzhin du/ snang stong dbyer med legs par thugs chud nas/ dam chos ston par mdzad rnams ya mtshan gnas. Ibid, 19a.

devotes so much time to ordinary perception and the evidence that it provides for Kailash's legitimacy. Likewise, given the existence of discourses in Buddhist traditions about the unreliability of human perception, it is not surprising that he says that ordinary human perception does not have the standing to say that Kailash does not look like Himavat. And yet, I cannot help but be struck by the way that these two discourses are colliding in this dispute about Kailash's legitimacy. In particular, I am struck by the way that Chödrak Yeshe both maintains that human vision is deeply flawed and that human perception tells us true things about the empirical world. He seems to point to an understanding that incorporates both perspectives, and to an understanding that there are true things about the material world.

My goal, in this chapter and in the dissertation more broadly, is to think about how people thought that ordinary human perception could be transformed into divine perception. I read Chödrak Yeshe as saying that both divine perception—which humans can access through scripture and also potentially develop themselves—and ordinary perception are important if our goal is to see Kailash/Himavat correctly. These two ways of seeing the mountain are as different as a heap of jewels and a pile of rocks, but they work together to give the right account of the world. So to see Kailash/Himavat correctly is to somehow hold these two ways of seeing the mountain together. The kind of seeing to be cultivated is a kind of seeing that can hold two different visions together at once, like the bodhisattva who can see both that persons are illusory and that persons are suffering, and can thus work to alleviate that suffering. On this account, vision is not simply seeing what is in front of you in a one-to-one kind of way. Rather, there's the possibility of a kind of simultaneous, dual vision that can see both ways at once.

Chapter Five:

Perception Opening Doors: Chökyi Drakpa's Visionary Transformation

Enough with these abstract discussions about how pilgrimage should be performed and whether it is worth it. In the next three chapters, we will shift focus from works describing the theoretical dimensions of pilgrimage practice to works actually engaged in the transformation of perception. To do so, I will examine three different sorts of works and their approaches to the goal of transforming perception.

In this chapter, I will consider a work by Rigdzin Chökyi Drakpa (1595-1659) entitled *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra's Feast* (*rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*), which purports to tell how a holy mountain had its “doors opened” (*sgo phye*) for the first time, thus making it a site of pilgrimage. This account of how the doors of the holy place were opened is also an account of how Chökyi Drakpa's perception of the site was transformed such that he is able to obtain a direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's mandala. Indeed, as we will see, the transformation of Chökyi Drakpa's perception is the key factor that causes the doors of the holy site to open. Our question, then, will be *how* Chökyi Drakpa's perception transforms, and further, how this act of perception transforms both Chökyi Drakpa and the mountain itself.

As has been previously discussed in chapter one, this notion of pilgrimage mountains as having doors (*sgo*) that need to be opened (*phye*) by a religious virtuoso runs throughout Tibetan pilgrimage literature, and almost every pilgrimage place is described as having been opened at some point in history. By telling the story of how the doors of Gyangme have been opened, and

by using such a story to tell future pilgrims to visit Gyangme, Chökyi Drakpa is in a sense founding Gyangme as a site of pilgrimage. On this account, Gyangme was always already a palace of the tantric deity Cakrasaṃvara, and so was already holy, but ordinary pilgrims were blocked from accessing the place by hostile demons. Chökyi Drakpa's direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara makes its fierce power accessible for later pilgrims. Such pilgrims will obtain blessings and benefit from accelerated results to tantric ritual practice, and may even achieve their own direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's mandala.

In the beginning of Chökyi Drakpa's pilgrimage, no one has seen the true nature of the mountain and the site itself is hostile and guarded by various supernatural beings. By the end however, he attains a direct perception of the site as the sixty-two deity mandala of Cakrasaṃvara, thus opening the site as a pilgrimage place for ordinary people. The narrative thus traces the dual transformations of Chökyi Drakpa's perception from ordinary to extraordinary and of the site's status from hostile to beneficial to ordinary pilgrims.

In examining this account, we will focus on two sets of questions pertaining to the logic of the work. First, how does the work imagine this transformation to have taken place? How does Chökyi Drakpa come to see Gyangme as the mandala palace of Cakrasaṃvara? What role does vision play—is Chökyi Drakpa's vision an agent, instrument, or result of the "opening" of the holy place? What mediates this transformation of perception? Second, how does Chökyi Drakpa's direct perception of Gyangme as the mandala of Cakrasaṃvara make it a pilgrimage place for later pilgrims? Has Chökyi Drakpa's vision of the site changed it in some meaningful way, for others as well as for his own benefit, and if so, how?

I read *Vajradhāra's Feast* not as a transparent account of what actually happened, but rather am interested in the internal logic of the world depicted in the work. That is, how does the

work depict Chökyi Drakpa's vision as having transformed, and how does the work depict this as being both facilitated by and transformative of the mountain landscape? This shows us the way *Vajradhāra's Feast* imagines, for lack of a better term, an answer to the questions that have driven this dissertation. I am thus not primarily concerned with whether Chökyi Drakpa's perception *actually* transformed or whether and how this work effects transformations in later readers.

My goal is to show that *Vajradhāra's Feast* depicts the transformation of Gyangme as predicated on the transformation of Chökyi Drakpa's vision. It does so, moreover, by portraying Gyangme as having two aspects—one ordinary and temporal and one extraordinary and primordial. In the first, Gyangme is a mountain of rock and snow that can be perceived in ordinary perception. In the second, Gyangme is Cakrasaṃvara's divine palace. The ultimate reality of the mountain would still be emptiness, Chökyi Drakpa would surely assert, but this does not mean pilgrims cannot productively engage with the mountain in its ordinary or extraordinary forms. This extraordinary aspect, moreover, is what makes Gyangme a holy place and gives it its spiritual potency. Ordinary pilgrims are blocked from accessing this sacred power, however, until someone like Chökyi Drakpa comes and opens the doors of the holy place.

What bridges these two worlds is Chökyi Drakpa's direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's mandala. He obtains this perception through a progressive dialectic of vision and interpretation. Chökyi Drakpa recognizes the ways in which these two worlds are already interpenetrating, and skillfully engages with both the ordinary material aspect of Gyangme and the extraordinary primordial world of Cakrasaṃvara. This allows him to obtain a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara that establishes a bridge between worlds. This perception is fragile and temporary, and is dependent on Chökyi Drakpa's actively working to maintain it.

These two worlds, moreover, are not collapsed into one another—even though Gyangme is asserted to be Cakrasaṃvara’s mandala, Chökyi Drakpa believes that most pilgrims will not be able to see it as such—but Chökyi Drakpa’s direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara’s mandala opens a door between these planes. This permanently alters the nature of the place and marks Gyangme as a site of the interpenetration of realms. This interpenetration allows future pilgrims, even those who cannot see the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara’s mandala, to benefit from the connection between the worlds, and allows some fortunate pilgrims to reenact Chökyi Drakpa’s vision of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara’s mandala.

In this account, we should note two dynamics of particular interest to our central question of how to effect the transformation of perception. The first is related to the material world. We have already seen, and will continue to see, how works about pilgrimage have often exhorted pilgrims to learn to see past gross material reality in order to see the true nature of the pilgrimage place. Meanwhile, they have maintained a robust notion of ordinary physical reality and made use of pilgrims’ ordinary perception of the physical world. There is thus an almost paradoxical sense in which pilgrimage discourses both draw pilgrims’ attention to ordinary material reality and tells them to look past this ordinary reality to a deeper and often more “real” reality beyond ordinary perception. One goal of this chapter will thus be to unpack the ways in which *Vajradhāra’s Feast* both valorizes the ability to see beyond the material world and yet pays so much attention to the physical features of the mountain and the ways in which they are already imbued with sacred power.

Second, insofar as Chökyi Drakpa’s perception of the mountain permanently transforms Gyangme into a pilgrimage site, we are presented with a form of vision that makes a difference in the world. I have already contested the notion that vision is passive and receptive, but this type

of vision goes even further. That is, Chökyi Drakpa's activities at Gyangme do not merely affect himself, but actually bring about a change in the world.

Background

Textual Source

The main source for this chapter is Chökyi Drakpa's *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra's Feast*, a text of twenty folio sides that is included in Chökyi Drakpa's *Collected Works*.³⁷⁷ The work narrates Chökyi Drakpa's pilgrimage to the holy mountain of Gyangme in the first-person, and tells the story of how he becomes able to see it directly as the mandala of Cakrasaṃvara and thus "opens" the mountain for later pilgrims.

On his own account,³⁷⁸ Chökyi Drakpa wrote *Vajradhāra's Feast* to exhort future pilgrims to visit Gyangme. He does so, he says, so that they can take advantage of its benefits. Part of his case for why pilgrims should believe that the site offers blessings is his account of his own journey, which highlights the many features of the site and describes wonderful phenomena that occurred there.

By using the title *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra's Feast*, Chökyi Drakpa identifies the work as a pilgrimage guidebook (*gnas yig*). This genre will be discussed further in the next chapter, but usually guidebooks are works about a holy place (*gnas*) that are written for future pilgrims to that site. The *Guidebook to Gyangme* exhibits many of the features of pilgrimage

377. 'Bri gung chung tsang Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*.

378. Chökyi Drakpa titles his work a *gnas yig*, indicating that it is a guide for pilgrims. This genre will be discussed further in chapter four. He also mentions that he intentionally wrote it for it to be easy to understand, indicating a general audience, and describes the benefits for future pilgrims in detail. See 'Bri gung chung tsang Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*, 469.

guides, including identifying the various features of the site, characterizing it as a mandala, and telling pilgrims the benefits that they will gain from going there. Chökyi Drakpa's work, however is somewhat unusual in the genre of pilgrimage guides for the ways it emphasizes his own first-person perspective. The narrative voice of the work is primarily "I did this" rather than the implicit voice of "you should do this" that characterizes most of the pilgrimage guides. The work clearly maintains elements of dynamic, but that is not the works' dominant mode. It engages its audience primarily through the narrative of Chökyi Drakpa heroic discovery and experience of the place, and consequent establishment of Gyangme as a pilgrimage place open to ordinary people.

He gives the secondary title of *Vajradhāra's Feast*, indicating that the work and its contents are to be enjoyed by other tantric practitioners. *Vajradhāra* literally means "one who holds a *vajra*," and can refer to a specific tantric deity named Vajradhāra, or it can be respectful term for tantric practitioners. Whether he is referring to himself as a tantric practitioner, potential readers engaged in tantric practice, or the deity Vajradhāra is unclear.

This work is notable because it is one of a relatively small set of purportedly first-person descriptions of opening the doors of a holy place by a historical figure. Most descriptions of how the doors of holy places were opened are contained in pilgrimage guides (*gnas yig*) or different historical texts (*lo rgyus*), but these are most often third person accounts written by others long after the time that the opening is believed to have happened. Chökyi Drakpa's work is the earliest example I have found of a first-person account written by someone who claimed to have personally opened the doors of a holy mountain.

I have consulted the only version that seems to be available. The text is computer-input, and was published by the Drikung Kagyu Institute in India in 1999. It seems likely that the

computer input version is based on a block print or manuscript version of the text, but I have thus far been unable to acquire a copy of this text.

The text's colophon does not mention a date of composition, but in the body of the text, he does mention the horse year and clearing away the upcoming obstacles of his twenty-fifth year,³⁷⁹ which suggests that the pilgrimage to Gyangme likely happened in the earth-horse year of 1618, when Chökyi Drakpa was twenty-four.³⁸⁰ This date is supported by Chökyi Drakpa's autobiography, which briefly mentions the pilgrimage to Gyangme. The autobiography describes "seeing many wondrous signs" while there,³⁸¹ and refers readers to the *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra's Oral Instructions*.³⁸² This is a slightly different title but clearly the same text. This passage in the autobiography is not clearly dated, but occurs not too long after a mention of the fire-snake year of 1617.³⁸³

About Chökyi Drakpa

Chökyi Drakpa (1595-1659), also known as Kunkhyen Rigzin Chödrak, is an important figure in the history of the Drikung Kagyu, a lineage founded by Jigten Sumgön (1143-1217) and based around Drikung Thil Monastery north of Lhasa. His father, Chogyal Rinchen Phuntsok (1547-1602) was the lineage holder of Drikung, but when he passed away, the single line of lineage holders branched into two lines. Chökyi Drakpa became the first Chungtsang of the Drikung

379. 13th, 25th, 37th years are all often considered "obstacle years" which are unlucky for Tibetans.

380. Note that Tibetans consider themselves one year old on the day of their birth.

381. *Ya mtshan kyi ltas mang du mthong ba*. Chos kyi grags pa, *Rang gi tshul gyi rtogs pa brjod pa'i gtam rang bzhin brjod pa'i rgyan kho nas smras pa gsong po'i dga' ston*, 147.

382. *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i zhal lung*. Ibid., 147.

383. Ibid., 139.

Kagyü, and his elder brother Gyalwang Konchog Rinchen (1590-1654) became the first Chetsang.³⁸⁴ Chökyi Drakpa is thus remembered as the founder of the lineage of Drikung Chungtsangs that continues to this day.

Chökyi Drakpa wrote voluminously on a variety of subjects, including philosophy, medicine, ritual, hagiographies of other masters, and a long autobiography. One recurring theme, however, is place and pilgrimage. The Drikung Kagyü school of which Chökyi Drakpa was a part is particularly associated with pilgrimage traditions because of its founder Jigten Sumgön's particular affinity for the practice. Jigten Sumgön is remembered in Tibetan tradition as one of the first masters to send his disciples to practice in the mountains of Kailash and Tsari. Chökyi Drakpa inherits a liking for pilgrimage (according to his autobiography, he went to Kailash and Tsari many times) and consequently the topic figures frequently into his writings. As discussed in the previous chapter, he penned a polemical response to Sakya Paṇḍita's attack on Kailash's legitimacy, and he also wrote works about the visions he has at various holy places, praises to specific holy places, and guidebooks to holy places.

About Gyangme

Chökyi Drakpa's work is a pilgrimage guide to Gyangme, and of the site Sarma Yangzo located within Gyangme. Perhaps surprisingly, not much is known about this site beyond what Chökyi Drakpa writes about it. He writes that it is in eastern Tibet in upper Dokham, in the valley of Ngö (*rngod*). There is a valley by this name about midway between Kongpo and Chamdo in Kham, so this seems like a likely site. Ngö is the site of at least one monastery, and is cited in some works as the location of a village called A la rong that is the birthplace of the fourth Karmapa Rolpé

384. *Che* and *chung* mean large and small respectively.

Dorje, but it is not well known as a place of pilgrimage. In Kathog Situ's *Pilgrimage Guide to Central Tibet*, written in the late 1918 to 1920, Kathog Situ describes visiting Ngö. He mentions a lake island (*rngod rgya mtsho gling*) and a monastery named A re Monastery (*rngod a re dgon*), but does not describe them in detail and does not mention a place named Gyangme or Sarma Yangzo.³⁸⁵

It is possible, then, that Gyangme and Sarma Yangzo did not become important pilgrimage places in the wake of Chökyi Drakpa's work. I have found no other works written about any place called Gyangme. There are works about a site named Sarma Yangzo that is at Tsari, but these seems to be entirely unrelated to the place discussed in this text. Indeed, at one point when describing the site, Chökyi Drakpa compares it to Kailash, Tsari, and India, which does not make sense if it is actually at Tsari. It seems likely that this work and the place it was written about was largely forgotten, or was only a locally important pilgrimage site.

We can only speculate about why this is so, but one guess might be that only a generation after Chökyi Drakpa opened the doors of Gyangme, the Gelukpa sect headed by the Fifth Dalai Lama became ascendant, leading to the conversions of many monasteries in the area. It is possible that a Kagyu-affiliated site like Gyangme did not survive this rise of Gelukpa power, particularly since the Gelukpas are generally less interested in pilgrimage than Kagyus.

Opening the Doors of the Holy Place

Vajradhāra's Feast participates in the broader Tibetan phenomenon of "opening the doors" (*sgo phye*) of a holy place. Though we have already briefly discussed this notion in chapter one, it is worth discussing it in more depth, because without such an understanding, much of the logic of

385. KaH thog si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do*, TBRC W27524 (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 40.

Vajradhāra's Feast will be unclear. Chökyi Drakpa never explains what it means to open the doors of the holy place because for him it largely goes without saying—he assumes that readers will possess the relevant cultural knowledge and interpret the text accordingly. For our purposes, however, this implicit context must be made explicit if we are to understand what Chökyi Drakpa is doing.

In particular, knowledge of what it means to open a holy place supports the idea that Chökyi Drakpa's activities at Gyangme are not merely a change in his own perspective, but something that has a lasting causal effect on the mountain itself. That is, when Chökyi Drakpa obtains a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara at Gyangme, this is not merely a shift in perspective that benefits Chökyi Drakpa but leaves the place itself as it was originally, but rather makes the pre-existing holiness of the place *accessible* to later pilgrims. Thus Chökyi Drakpa's perception has a causal efficacy that lasts even when he himself is gone.

Chökyi Drakpa is not alone in using the notion of a holy place having doors without explaining the what that means—for most Tibetan accounts, it simply goes without saying. I have as of yet been unable to locate any source that analyzes or explains this concept in an abstract or theoretical way. As such, scholars must deduce the underlying logic from the ways in which the concept is used in our materials. The following, then, is my own understanding of what it means to open the doors of the holy place. It is not drawn from any single source text, but instead is based on my experience reading many works that have made use of the concept.³⁸⁶ I should add, moreover, that this account is not meant to indicate the actual temporal sequence of the founding of Tibetan pilgrimage mountains, but rather to unpack the temporal sequence

386. Other scholarly descriptions of opening the doors of a holy place can be found in Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 25-6; Katia Buffetrille, "The Pilgrimage to Mount Kha Ba Dkar Po," 198; and Katia Buffetrille, "The Great Pilgrimage of A Myes rMa-Chen," 89.

imagined according to the logic of these concepts as suggested in these works.

Before doing that, however, I first want to emphasize that this discussion is about holy mountains (and sometimes lakes), but that the following is not necessarily the case for pilgrimage to monasteries or cities like Lhasa. How and why those places are holy is a somewhat different matter, because they are already established built places. I also want to note that the logic of opening the doors of holy places is largely coextensive with the logic of opening the doors of hidden lands (*sbas yul*), but for the most part I will leave hidden lands aside and focus on holy mountains.³⁸⁷

The notion that a holy mountain must be opened in order become a pilgrimage destination is pervasive in Tibetan pilgrimage literature.³⁸⁸ Most accounts of how the doors of a place were opened, moreover, follow a standard logic. There are sometimes exceptions to this standard logic, such as mountains for which tradition does not record a specific door-opener.³⁸⁹ We also find examples of a single holy place such as Tsari having multiple doors associated with different cardinal directions, such that the mountain is opened at several times. As is often the case, scholarly attempts to uncover a singular logic to a complicated, internally diverse, and ever-evolving set of practices result in a simplified model that may be more or less useful when analyzing a particular exemplar. Nevertheless, there is a pattern that can be reconstructed.

According to this standard logic, holy mountains are holy by virtue of prior associations

387. Those interested in *sbas yul* should consult Abdol-Hamid Sardar-Afkhami, “The Buddha’s Secret Gardens: End Times and Hidden-Lands in Tibetan Imagination” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2001).

388. Traditions of holy mountains being opened are particularly tied to Nyingma and some Kagyu traditions, and the openings of holy mountains are often attributed to Nyingma and Kagyu figures. However I do not want to overemphasize the sectarian nature of these practices, both because Tibetan lay people seem to have gone to pilgrimage sites without much concern for sectarian affiliation and because we do find figures such as Lelung Shepé Dorje (1697-1740, *sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje*) who are considered masters in both the Gelukpa and Nyingma traditions who open the doors of various pilgrimage sites.

389. For one example, see Katia Buffetrille, “The Great Pilgrimage of A Myes rMa-Chen,” 89.

with tantric deities or religious masters. We might analytically separate these two aspects. First, the mountain is sacred because of its status as the residence (*gnas*) of a primordial tantric deity. The three major pilgrimage mountains of Tsari, Kailash, and Lapchi, for example, are often said to be the body, speech, and mind of Cakrasaṃvara. Such identifications draw on practices and narratives found in Indian Buddhist tantras, especially the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, which talk about certain places being the sites of epic battles between tantric deities and evil demons. Cakrasaṃvara's triumphs in these battles and consequent residence at the site is held to imbue the site with great potency. Chökyi Drakpa draws on in this logic insofar as he asserts that Gyangme is also the palace of Cakrasaṃvara. He does not explicitly discuss Cakrasaṃvara fighting demons at the site, but he clearly draws on the broader cultural idea.

Second, the mountain is sacred because religious virtuosos like Padmasambhava, Yeshe Tsogyal, or Milarepa practiced there. Such figures exist in the historical past, but it is a past which has been mythologized.³⁹⁰ The past presence of a master like Padmasambhava confirms and reinforces the prior sacrality established by the identification of the mountain with a tantric deity, rendering it even more potent.

This potency, however, is believed at this stage to be inaccessible to pilgrims. Part of what blocks them from accessing the site and its blessings is the fact that the mountain's potency attracts fierce spirits and demons that are hostile to visitors. There is also, however, a sense in which the metaphor of the opening of doors seems to be connected to the inner/outer distinction often attributed to holy places in Tibetan discourse. That is, it is common to read or hear that a particular holy place outwardly appears to be a pile of rocks but *inwardly* is the mandala of Cakrasaṃvara or something to that effect. These types of descriptions contrast the outward

390. Much in this typical account parallels the Tibetan Treasure tradition as described in Janet Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition" *History of Religions* 33, no. 2 (November 1, 1993): 97–134, 112.

appearance of the place with an inner nature. Before the doors of the site are opened, the ordinary pilgrim is blocked from accessing this inner nature and benefitting from the holy site.

In order for people to be able to access the holy mountain, the doors of the sacred site must be opened by an advanced tantric master like Chökyi Drakpa. In so doing, the tantric master removes the obstructions and creates an opening between the outward nature of the holy place and the inner nature of the holy place.

That these mountains are already considered holy makes them candidates for a figure like Chökyi Drakpa to come open them—the sources never depict someone opening the doors of a place that was not already holy. As such, it is not the case that a tantric master could open the doors of any random rock or hill, because such places lack the pre-existing holiness assumed by the logic of opening the doors of the holy place. To put it another way, if there is nothing holy on the other side of the door, there is no point in opening it. Thus the tantric master who opens the doors of the mountain does not make it holy—it was already holy by virtue of its associations with tantric deities and previous masters—but they make that holiness *accessible* to ordinary pilgrims.

Just as not every place can be opened, not every person can open the doors of a holy place. Almost always, the person who opens the doors is a highly skilled tantric ritual master. This ritual mastery enables them to convert the powerful but dangerous site into one whose benefits can be accessed by ordinary pilgrims. The qualifications for opening a site are not merely ritual mastery, however, but often also destiny (*skal*) or karmic connections (*rten 'brel*). The master is depicted as being foretold in prophecy or being connected across lifetimes to the place. This connection makes it such that *only* one person is meant to open the doors of the holy place. The tantric master may at times express doubts that he is really the one who is qualified to

do so, and may face great difficulties as part of their journey, both of which are present in Chökyi Drakpa's account, but they eventually succeed.

This tantric master is portrayed as having a variety of motivations for opening the doors of the holy place. Prominent among these is compassion and a desire to benefit sentient beings, but the action of opening a holy place also materially benefits the tantric master. For example, Chökyi Drakpa mentions that opening the doors of Gyangme will clear away obstacles, lengthen his lifespan and provide benefits for his next life, but also emphasizes that he is motivated by compassion.

There are two related means by which the tantric master removes obstacles and opens the doors of the holy place. First, the tantric master must ritually gain control over the mountain by taming (*'dul ba*) the fierce local spirits, place protectors, demons, and *dakinis* and converting them into dharma protectors. Such beings would ordinarily pose a threat to pilgrims seeking to visit the holy place, but the ritual master tames them, thus allowing ordinary pilgrims into the site. Narratives of opening the sacred place may also involve the tantric master establishing dominance over representatives from rival sects or religions. This element is largely absent from Chökyi Drakpa's work, but we find, for instance, stories of Milarepa defeating the Bon master Bonchung and clashes between various sectarian masters in pilgrimage guides about Kailash and Tsari respectively.³⁹¹

Second, the tantric master must recognize the physical landscape of the holy place as the divine mandala of the presiding tantric deity. Using skillful perception and sometimes ritual aids, the tantric master is able to see past the surface level appearance of the mountain as a pile of rocks and snow and see that it actually is the palace of Cakrasamvara.

391. Sources available in English where such stories can be found are Elena De Rossi Filibeck, *Two Tibetan Guide Books to Ti Se and La Phyi* and Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*.

It is not entirely clear how these two aspects of opening the doors of the holy place are related. Some accounts of opening the holy place, especially those by Lelung Shepé Dorje, focus mostly on taming the local spirits, while others, like that of Chökyi Drakpa, focus more on obtaining a direct perception of the mountain as mandala. Others, like the legends of opening the doors of Tsari studied by Toni Huber, have both elements mixed together. I am inclined to see them as sequential, with the taming of the demons as a first step that allows for the perception of mountain as mandala to be obtained, but this is not necessarily the case.³⁹²

Why, we might ask, is this activity characterized as the opening of doors? Sometimes, when asking Tibetan informants what “opening the doors” means, they would gloss it as starting or founding the pilgrimage site. Pushing further, I would ask people: what were the doors, exactly? What were they made of? And what *exactly* opened them? They would invariably laugh, with some commenting on my foreigner’s way of thinking (*phyi rgyal pa’i bsam blo*).³⁹³ It is possible that the notion of mountains having doors may be connected to the notion of mandalas having doors and door-guardians, but it may also be a general metaphor for some physical place or numinous potency becoming newly available.

Once the tantric master opens the doors of the holy place, this has a lasting effect on the pilgrimage place, even once the tantric master himself is gone. Future pilgrims are able to visit the site and benefit from its numinous power in perpetuity. This is quite different than many

392. On this issue, Huber writes in *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 26: “At all stages in the openings of néri sites as they are depicted in the narratives, one witnesses a dramatic struggle to gain power on multiple but connected levels, that is, power over outer unruly autochthonous forces, over present religious and political rivals, and, not least, over the practitioner’s own inner weaknesses, doubts, and impurities. The Tantric lama (from a particular sect) always emerges as ritually superior here. The opening hero’s technologies of power for gaining access to, taking control of, and ordering these mountains as places of ritual performance all derived from Indian Tantric traditions. These included an array of minor rituals, paranormal abilities, and meditative states. But the most important was the method and skill to perceive and locally realize there within the very terrain of the place itself the mandala*, a type of three-dimensional cryptogram or psycho cosmogram, complete with its array of divine inhabitants.”

393. Lobsang Shastri, personal conversation, March 12, 2019.

other ritual systems across Asia, where the ritual needs to be continually performed and re-performed for the effects to be maintained. As such, when Chökyi Drakpa obtains a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara, this is not just him changing his own perspective of the mountain. Rather his perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara alters the site itself in an important and lasting way, turning it into a site for general pilgrimage and making its preexisting potency available to future pilgrims.

Summary of *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra's Feast*

A full translation of *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra's Feast* can be found in the appendix. A brief summary, however, will help to frame our analysis of the work.

Chökyi Drakpa begins *Vajradhāra's Feast* by locating Gyangme within Tibet and praising some of its good qualities. He relates how he resolved to go there and how, despite some initial obstacles, he ultimately traveled there. Upon arriving at Gyangme, Chökyi Drakpa extensively describes the physical features of the site, often noting their geomantic significance. The land is both menacingly filled with demons and pervaded by signs of the dharma, including images of deities, auspicious syllables, and hidden treasures. Chökyi Drakpa and his companions pass through various lakes and caves before reaching Turquoise Lake beside the holy mountain.

At Turquoise lake, the group supplicates to Padmasambhava, and the local gods and demons seem to signal discontent by making the earth around them quake. In the midst of this intense fear, Chökyi Drakpa is able to withdraw from the chaos assaulting his senses, and manages to calm himself. He passes into what seems to be a visionary state and sees a monk who identifies himself as Padmasambhava. Padmasambhava tells Chökyi Drakpa that it is his destiny to come to this holy place and open it for future pilgrims. It is the only way that he can free

himself of the influence of students who have broken their vows and are consequently hindering his spiritual progress. Chökyi Drakpa demurs, fearing that he is too weak to succeed where others have failed, but Padmasambhava assures him that if he relies on Padmasambhava's compassion and recognizes that external difficulties are projections of his own mind, he will succeed. Chökyi Drakpa accepts, and resolves to open the doors of the holy place. This delights Padmasambhava, who gives Chökyi Drakpa landmarks and directions for how to reach the top of the mountain.

The next morning, Chökyi Drakpa and his companions set out, following Padmasambhava's landmarks across boulders and through caves. Throughout, the rocks and cliff faces are covered in images of gods and auspicious symbols, which Chökyi Drakpa takes to be a good sign. They reach a cave with a three-dimensional mandala and ornate decoration and Chökyi Drakpa performs rituals and uncovers treasures that had been hidden there in the past. They continue traveling upwards, finding more caves and images. Some of the group have a vision of Padmasambhava, but Chökyi Drakpa notes that those among them who still had impurities were unable to see the vision. They continue searching for another cave Padmasambhava described, but it is getting dark and they cannot find it, and so return to their campsite by Turquoise Lake in disappointment.

Chökyi Drakpa performs a number of rituals, however, and the group sees two white boulders—which he takes to represent the wisdom and method of Cakrasaṃvara and his consort—moving to and fro atop the lake. He declares that this makes it into a holy place called Sarma Yangdzo, and describes how the holy place will benefit pilgrims who go there.

The group begins to leave the holy place, but on the way, Chökyi Drakpa has dream about *dakinis*, Manjuśrī, and Padmasambhava in which he is given empowerment and initiation

into the *Summary of the Guru's Intention* lineage. The group performs dedications and mantras, and have another vision of Padmasambhava. Right then, Chökyi Drakpa has a direct perception of Gyangme as the sixty-two mandala of Cakrasaṃvara. He specifies that this vision is possible by virtue of his careful examination and analysis (*bdag gis legs par brtags shing dpyad pas ri de nyid 'khor lo sdom pa lha drug cu rtsa gnyis kyi dkyil 'khor du mjal*), and asserts that all of the rocks and stones of Gyangme have the essences of deities.

As they continue their descent away from Gyangme, Chökyi Drakpa continues to note features of the landscape and their resemblance to geomantically significant animals. He describes the very landscape as celebrating his achievement. He ends by describing the benefits that will accrue to pilgrims who visit Gyangme. In particular, he says that those who practice there will quickly achieve their goals, and that those with the correct karmic connections may obtain their own direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's palace.

Dharma and Danger: Physical Features of Gyangme

Chökyi Drakpa spends a great deal of time in *Vajradhāra's Feast* describing the physical features of Gyangme. He notes that it is circled on all sides by snow-capped peaks, has a round shape, and is filled with rocky crags, waterfalls, boulders, lakes, pits, grassy fields, and caves. He describes the way the holy place looks from various cardinal directions, the sound of water flowing that resounds around Gyangme, and even notes the shape and texture of the rocks. These physical features of the landscape affect how Chökyi Drakpa and his companions can move around the site. Steep rock faces, narrow passageways, and snowy trails are often difficult to traverse, and at various points the group is terrified by an earthquake, has their planned ascent of the mountain delayed by snowfall, and witnesses an avalanche. All of these details highlight

the ways in which Chökyi Drakpa's journey to Gyangme involves difficult engagement with a material landscape.

Intertwined with these descriptions with these physical features are descriptions that portray the land as thoroughly pervaded with dharma and spiritual potency. For example, at multiple places in the work, Chökyi Drakpa describes Gyangme as being filled with treasures (*gter ma*). This characterization begins from the first few sentences of the work, when Chökyi Drakpa describes Gyangme as “containing hidden bundles of sutras.”³⁹⁴ This description is borne out later in the work when Chökyi Drakpa uncovers a number of treasure texts or objects, including one vibrating box filled with treasures and a cache of Mahakala tantras.

In describing Gyangme as full of treasures, Chökyi Drakpa connects Gyangme with the Tibetan treasure tradition.³⁹⁵ According to the standard logic of Tibetan treasure narratives, a treasure is a physical object or text that was concealed at some time in the past so that it can be uncovered at a later time. Often, treasure texts were originally preached by some primordial buddha. This act of preaching the dharma occurs in an atemporal dimension of reality—indeed, it is always occurring—but at some point in history, the great master Padmasambhava received a version of this particular text and hid it away, whether in the ground, a rock, or even in a mental dimension, so that it could be revealed by a predestined Treasure discoverer at the appropriate time when it would most benefit sentient beings. These traditions are deeply connected with a sense that the Tibetan landscape itself contains and produces dharma.

In addition to concealing treasures, Gyangme is studded with images of gods, protector deities, and sacred syllables that appear in the rocks. Chökyi Drakpa does not seem to regard

394. *Mdo dog pa sbas pa'i lung la*. Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*, 451.

395. For a more detailed explanation of the treasure tradition, see Janet Gyatso, “The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition.”

these images as trail markers carved by previous visitor. Rather, he specifies for a few of them that they are self-arisen (*rang byon*), and have thus appeared of their own accord, indicating the generative potency of the land itself.

The sense that Gyangme is thoroughly imbued with dharma can also be seen in the various wondrous phenomena that happen to Chökyi Drakpa and his companions. At one point, for instance, rainbows swirl around Chökyi Drakpa, and he vanishes for a few moments, temporarily becoming part of the site itself, rather than a mere visitor to it. Chökyi Drakpa emphasizes that “everyone saw me disappear and be encircled by a rainbow,”³⁹⁶ indicating that it was not a function of his own perception or imagination, but rather visible to all and therefore attested to by all. At another point, a magical ladder appears so that the group can climb to the uppermost chapel of a protectors’ temple. They also witness boulders floating to and fro above Turquoise Lake. Gyangme, in other words, is a place where seemingly impossible things can and do happen.

While Chökyi Drakpa thus depicts Gyangme as a place where the dharma is clearly visible in the landscape, he also suggests that it is dangerous and forbidding. To begin, he says that not everyone can freely travel there, writing that “Those who are destined (*skal ldan*) may travel there easily, but those who are not are blocked from traveling there by their wrong views (*log ltas bsgribs*). Those who have not planted the seed of their own liberation are few among the travelers there.”³⁹⁷ He thereby suggests that those who have the appropriate destiny or karmic lot (*skal*) can travel there, as can people who have undertaken certain actions in the past, but that those without such a destiny (*skal med*) are prevented from doing so by their wrong views (*log*

396. *Bdag gar song bar 'ja' tshon gyis bskor ba sogs kun gyis mthong bar gyur to*. Ibid., 453.

397. *Skal ldan rnams kyis bgrod pa bde zhing skal med rnams ni log ltas bsgribs te thar pa'i sa bon mi sgrub pas der bgrod pa nyung la*. Ibid., 451.

ltas). The term “wrong view” generally indicates incorrect philosophical or doctrinal “views,” but here it seems to have the literal sense that such people cannot even see Gyangme, because it is hidden or obscured—both alternate translations of *bsgribs*—from their view.

Even for those who do manage to reach Gyangme, Chökyi Drakpa asserts that those without the appropriate karmic destiny are risking their lives. After describing the benefits that will accrue to people who practice at a certain protectors’ temple, he writes that “those without the appropriate karmic destiny have incorrect views, and so will have their life-veins cut instantly by wisdom *dakinis* and karma protectors just for going there.”³⁹⁸ This again highlights the fierce and dangerous nature of the site—while some will benefit massively from going there, those with unlucky karmic destinies risk losing their lives.

Part of what makes Gyangme so dangerous is the presence of fierce demons, *dakinis*, and dharma protectors. Chökyi Drakpa writes that “*Gri* demons in the shape of camels live there guarding the doors [of the holy place] and there are countless other protector spirits.”³⁹⁹ Chökyi Drakpa does not explicitly say whether these doors that the demons are guarding are the same doors of the holy place that he is opening. This is not the only mention of demons, however: their menacing presence runs throughout the work. Chökyi Drakpa mentions how demons at one point cause an earthquake and describes the many places that their fearsome images can be seen in the landscape. Sometimes the demons seem to be putting their ferocious nature in service of the dharma. At several points, Chökyi Drakpa mentions that certain treasure texts have been entrusted to particular demons that he names. In these cases, the demons are protecting the

398. *Skal med rnam log lta skyas pa'i mthus der phyin pa tsam gyis ye shes kyi mkha' 'gro dang las kyi mgon po nas srog rtsa skad cig nyid la gcod par byed pa*. Ibid., 454.

399. *Sgo sring rnga mo'i dbyibs lta bu la gri btsan gnas pa dang/ gzhan yang sgo srung dpag tu med pa yod pa*. Ibid., 452.

treasure texts from unworthy people, and are thus not necessarily going to hurt Chökyi Drakpa, but they still seem to be a somewhat hostile force.

This dual sense of Gyangme as being rich with dharma but potentially hostile to visitors is developed throughout the work. That is, while Chökyi Drakpa sees the land as marked by dharma in that it has self-arisen images, texts, and treasures, he must navigate demonic forces that threaten his journey. These features both make Gyangme an alluring place that promises spiritual benefit, but also a frightening place. Most of all, however, they make it into a *liminal* place. At Gyangme, ordinary distinctions between the ordinary human world and the extraordinary world of gods and demons seems to break down, and aspects of those divine and demonic forces become more visible than usual, even to ordinary perception.

Reading the Landscape

Chökyi Drakpa describes the physical features that he sees as he travels through this liminal place. However, Chökyi Drakpa does not merely describe these features, but rather is constantly interpreting what he sees. That is, he is constantly moving from visible phenomena in the landscape to what those phenomena *mean*. Indeed, Chökyi Drakpa's skill in "reading" the landscape in this way seems to be part of what makes Chökyi Drakpa uniquely qualified to open the doors of Gyangme. It is this skill that will allow him to directly perceive that Gyangme *really is* the palace Cakrasaṃvara, even though this is not visible to anyone at the outset. Chökyi Drakpa builds up to that climactic moment, however, by engaging in a variety of practices of reading and interpreting the landscape.

To begin, Chökyi Drakpa connects the relatively new and unknown pilgrimage site of Gyangme with other well-established sacred sites. He writes that Gyangme is "no different"

(*khyad par med pa*) from the holy land of India, and “indistinguishable” (*dbyer med*) from the holy mountains of Tsari and Kailash. Later, he describes a mountain near Gyangme as having the form of Tanaduk, king of mountains (*ri rgyal blta na sdug gi tshul*), thus invoking a well-known mountain associated with the Tibetan medical tradition.⁴⁰⁰ In claiming that Gyangme is connected with these holy places, Chökyi Drakpa locates Gyangme in terms of a familiar and meaning-laden sacred geography, and suggests that Gyangme shares something of their essence and sacred potency.

Throughout *Vajradhāra's Feast*, Chökyi Drakpa both describes the landscape features at Gyangme and what things they look like. For example, in one passage, he writes:

To our east, the unending chain of rivers and snow-capped mountains were like a great rocky tiger bridge. To our south, the central river looked like a turquoise thunder dragon. To our west, the red cliffs looked like a red she-bird. To our north, there was a great rocky edge at the peak of a forested mountain which looked like a dark turtle flipped on its back. What is more, all the mountains, forests, and rivers in the plain seemed to be prostrating and praying.⁴⁰¹

What does it matter, we might ask, that one mountain looks like a turtle and another looks like a bird? Chökyi Drakpa suggests an answer in that he follows this passage by writing, “The geomancy of the site was very auspicious, and had many wonderfully auspicious signs.”⁴⁰² In other words, his analysis of the landscape in terms of shapes and resemblances is connected with geomantical analysis (*sa dpyad*), in which the various features of the landscape are taken to indicate something about the nature of the site and whether or not it is conducive for certain

400. Todd Fenner, “The Origin of the rGyud bzhi: A Tibetan Medical Tantra,” in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson, 458-469 (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1996), 462.

401. *Chu dang gangs rgyud rgyun mi chad pa shar du brag zam stag rgya bo'i tshul lta bu/ lhor gzhung chu g.yu 'brug sngon mo'i tshul can/ nub kyi gad pa dmar po bya dmar mo'i tshul can/ byang du nags ri de'i rtse mor brag mchu chen po gab nyug byed pa 'dra ba rus sbal rgya bo'i tshul can dang/ gzhon yang thang de la ri dang nags dang chu thams cad kyang 'dud cing bstod pa ltar yod pa.* Ibid., 467.

402. *Sa'i dpyad kyang shin tu bkra shis shing ya mtshan gyi dge ltas du ma dang ldan pa.* Ibid., 467.

purposes, such as dharma practice or building a house. In reading the landscape in this way, Chökyi Drakpa is trying to see whether it really is an auspicious place for pilgrimage and practice.

He also notes resemblances that do not necessarily seem to be tied to formal geomantic analysis. For example, he notes demons in the shape of camels and a mottled rock shaped like a helmet. He does not further specify what these things mean, but the fact that he notes these resemblances does suggest that he is on the lookout for significant resemblances. Sometimes, he notes resemblances that have clear dharmic resonance, as when he notes “a far-off mountain that looked like a stack of books”⁴⁰³ or “the mountain crags in front of us [that] looked like wish-fulfilling jewels.”⁴⁰⁴ He does not spell out what he thinks that these resemblances mean, but it seems reasonable to suspect that this is connected to the notion of the land being pervaded by dharma. That is, if even the surrounding mountains and landscape looks like objects associated with the dharma, that means good things about the holy place itself.

Elsewhere, Chökyi Drakpa explicitly interprets landscape features as signs (*rtags*). For example, at one point he sees deep pits and interprets them as symbolizing (*mtshon du phyir*) the six realms (god, *asura*, human, animal, hungry ghost, hell being) where beings are born. Pits are not merely pits, they are in some sense *communicating* the Buddha’s teachings. Chökyi Drakpa also writes:

This holy place has a round shape that is encircled by snow-capped mountains—that is a sign of the blessing of pacifying. There are many streams of vermillion that have a square shape—this is a sign of increasing. There are many red crags shaped like half-moons—this is a sign of magnetizing. All of the rocks are rough and triangular in shape—this is a sign of subjugating.

403. *Pha ri brag po ti brtsegs pa 'dra ba*. Ibid., 460.

404. *Mdun ri brag nor bu dgos 'dod stsol ba'i tshul can*. Ibid., 467.

When Chökyi Drakpa encounters the landscape described in these passages, he sees it in terms of shapes: squares, circles, triangles, and half-moons. He takes these different shapes to be the signs (*rtags*) of the four types of tantric ritual activities: pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and subjugating.⁴⁰⁵ Here again, he sees the landscape as closely connected with the dharma. The sacred place is thus not merely the backdrop to advanced tantric practice, but is *itself* actively pointing to and signifying tantric practice.

This skillful reading of the landscape allows Chökyi Drakpa to access what is hidden to others. For example, at one point he recognizes that a particular lake is being the spirit-lake of a protector deity and decides to perform a tantric feast ritual there. This leads to him uncovering treasures that had been hidden nearby. Later, he identifies seals and the sacred syllable “HUM” marked on a box. He opens the box to reveal treasure texts to his companions. He mentions in both cases that these treasures had been previously entrusted (*gtad*)—presumably by Padmasambhava—to particular demons for safekeeping.

In each case, the interpretation of signs involves Chökyi Drakpa looking at the landscape that is visually available to all of his companions, and seeing that landscape as having a deeper meaning that is not visible to ordinary and surface-level perception. Indeed, sometimes he does not see the landscape as merely containing meaning, but as literally containing hidden treasures. This dynamic of moving from the visible landscape to invisible meanings or objects is repeated and further developed throughout the pilgrimage guide, continually building up the idea that Chökyi Drakpa’s skills as a perceiver and interpreter allow him to break through surface level appearances.

405. These are the four functions of an enlightened being’s activities, and correspond to the four types of goals pursued in tantric rituals. Pacifying refers to calming disturbances and obstacles, increasing refers to bringing wealth or long life, subjugating refers to gaining control over opposing forces, and wrathful refers to destroying confusion or obstacles.

Indeed, in the case of Chökyi Drakpa revealing treasures, Chökyi Drakpa is breaking through the planes of ordinary time and space. As discussed above, standard treasure narratives frame treasure texts as having been originally preached in the timeless realm of primordial buddhas and then hidden by Padmasambhava in order to benefit the Tibetan people in the future. In revealing such texts, then, Chökyi Drakpa is bringing a piece of the primordial and mythic realm into his own day and age.

Gyangme is already a place where ordinary and extraordinary seem to interpenetrate, but Chökyi Drakpa portrays himself as particularly able to perceive both ordinary and extraordinary aspects of the landscape, to move from one to the other, and ultimately to break through the barriers separating these planes. This is what will allow him to achieve a direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's mandala. Let us hold that thought for now, though.

Denaturalizing Ordinary Perception

One of the central themes developed in *Vajradhāra's Feast* is that ordinary perception does not necessarily give access to reality. While we might be inclined to take the physical world as it appears to our ordinary sense perception to be the guide to what reality is, Chökyi Drakpa does not act as though this is the case. Instead, he seems to skillfully interact with a world that lies outside of ordinary sense perception, and indeed, sometimes treats that as more real than the ordinary material reality. It is not necessarily the case that he argues that the ordinary world is entirely unreal or delusory, although at points he gets very close to saying this. After all, it is his skillful and observant perception of material reality that will ultimately allow him to open the doors of Gyangme. However he does seem to want to de-naturalize ordinary perception.

This idea is fundamental to the entire framing of *Vajradhāra's Feast*. Part of what makes

Gyangme into a candidate for someone like Chökyi Drakpa opening the doors of the holy place is the idea that Gyangme is actually the sacred mandala of Cakrasaṃvara, even though this is invisible to ordinary perception. The entire endeavor, then, is centered around uncovering the true nature of the mountain that is concealed from ordinary perception.

Besides this basic framing, there are a number of ways in which Chökyi Drakpa questions whether the world as it appears to ordinary sense perception is real. One episode occurs when he and his companions have arrived at Turquoise Lake at the base of the mountain. Though the group hopes to ascend the mountain in order to open the doors of the holy place, the local demons and place spirits seem to resent their incursion, and cause a terrifying earthquake. The lake waters rise up, and all of the rocks and stones shake back and forth. It would be reasonable to be terrified at such a display, and Chökyi Drakpa hints that he was at least on the verge of such terror, but then says, “I made a resolution in my own mind, and thereby calmed myself.”⁴⁰⁶ Rather than responding to the frightening external events, Chökyi Drakpa instead turns inward to calm himself.

This act of withdrawing from the world of his ordinary senses catapults him into a visionary state in which he seems to be in a place he calls Trolung (*spro lung*).⁴⁰⁷ There, he meets a monk who initially introduces himself as Lama Rabgye, and then as the great master Padmasambhava. Padmasambhava tells Chökyi Drakpa that he must open the doors of the holy place and that he is destined to do so. Chökyi Drakpa, however, doubts whether he can fulfill this destiny, saying “It seems like I cannot get through to the peak of this [mountain]. The path is

406. *Rang sems kho nar thag chod pa'i mthus rang zhir song ba*. Ibid., 455.

407. It is not clear what Chökyi Drakpa means by this term. There is a monastery called 'Bri gung spro lung, and there is a Spro lung village near 'Bri gung yang re sgar monastery, there is a hidden land (*sbas yul*) called Spro lung that Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697-1740) opens in the late 1720s. The term can also be translated to mean emanated valley, so it is possible that he is not referring to a specific physical location.

difficult, there is so much snow, and I am weak and inadequate.”⁴⁰⁸ In other words, though he has spent much of the guidebook implicitly or explicitly highlighting his own good qualities, here he tells Padmasambhava that he is afraid he cannot complete the task assigned to him. He compares himself to a slightly older contemporary named Jetsun Rabjampa⁴⁰⁹ who apparently tried to open the holy place but was unable to do so. Chökyi Drakpa seems to consider this figure to be more highly realized than himself, for he laments that if even Jetsun Rabjampa was unable to open the pilgrimage place, he will surely fail.⁴¹⁰

Padmasambhava, however, reassures Chökyi Drakpa, that he is indeed destined to open the doors of this pilgrimage place. Padmasambhava grants the fact that Chökyi Drakpa is weak, and acknowledges Chökyi Drakpa’s concerns about the difficulties of the path and the heavy snows, but draws the distinction that such obstacles only *appear* to be blocking the way. He tells Chökyi Drakpa, “Although the path *seems* difficult and full of snow, in reality, [the difficulty] depends on the ease or dis-ease of your own mind. So don’t concern yourself with external stones and earth!”⁴¹¹ The real blockage, according to Padmasambhava, is not rocks and snow, but rather is Chökyi Drakpa’s own mind. As such, Padmasambhava tells Chökyi Drakpa not to be

408. *Bdag gis nga ni 'di'i phur mi thar ba 'dra/ lam sdug cing kha che ba dang rang 'khos ka zhan pa*. Ibid., 455.

409. It is not entirely clear who this is, but it may be referring to Zhe chen rab 'byams Bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1650-1704, TBRC P661). He stayed at 'Bri gung, was a somewhat older contemporary of Chökyi Drakpa, and was given the title of Rabjampa. However I could find nothing about him associated with this site, or of opening doors of holy places in general.

410. It is worth pointing out that this kind of humility and self-abnegation is a common trope in much Tibetan literature. As Gyatso points out in her work on Treasure discovery narratives—which as previously suggested have much in common with the stories of great masters opening the doors of pilgrimage places—the leitmotif of self-doubt on the part of Treasure discoverers serves to depict the Treasure discoverer as honest and thus conveys a sense of accuracy and legitimacy on the Treasure itself. This performance of humility, moreover, is generally combined with assertions by the Treasure discoverer of his own advanced level of realization. The combined effect of the show of self-doubt with the assertion of advanced realization is to depict the discoverer as a legitimate and trustworthy source of Treasure revelation. See Gyatso, “The Logic of Legitimation,” 115-20.

411. *Lam sdug cing kha ba che ba ltar 'dug kyang don du rang sems bde mi bde la rag las pa yin pas phyi rol gyi sa rdo la mi ltos*. Ibid., 456.

concerned with the external stones and rocks that appear in his ordinary perception, and to recognize that the world of ordinary perception as a function of his mind. Chökyi Drakpa has already shown some degree of facility with this—recall how he just cultivated a visionary state in the midst of an earthquake—and so just as Chökyi Drakpa used his mind to withdraw from the terrors of the earthquake, so too can he navigate the apparent obstacles on the way to opening the doors of the holy place.

To do so, however, he will also need to rely on and have faith in Padmasambhava. Chökyi Drakpa's eventual opening of the holy place, then, is attributed to a variety of factors both internal and external to Chökyi Drakpa himself. That is, Chökyi Drakpa has high levels of realization, and is faithful and determined, but he is also fulfilling a destiny that seems preordained. His success, too, will come not from drawing on his own strength, but from relying on Padmasambhava.

Another way in which Chökyi Drakpa calls our ordinary perception of the world into question is that *Vajradhāra's Feast* pays careful attention to who can see what. In so doing, it seems to suggest that what is real is not always publicly available to ordinary perception.

As the group travels through Gyangme, *Vajradhāra's Feast* is not merely interested in the ways in which Chökyi Drakpa sees the site, but also in how his companions see it. Often, they fail to see what Chökyi Drakpa sees. At one point during the ascent, for example, Chökyi Drakpa describes how one rock face they encounter has an image of Padmasambhava surrounded by eight of his different manifestations. He writes that “Although this vision was shown to all, because of the darkness some seemed unable to see it,”⁴¹² suggesting a contrast between the image being shown to all but not everyone being able to see it. He notes that some of those who

412. *Mjal ba yang kun la bstan kyang mun pa nag pas mi mthong bar 'dug pas*. Ibid., 460.

were initially unable to see the image managed to do so by “stopping their minds,”⁴¹³ an action that he associates with purifying their karma (*las dag par*), but that others still could not manage to see the image.

This episode highlights that not everyone sees the world in the same way. Some people, primarily Chökyi Drakpa, but also sometimes his companions who are able to control their minds or happen to have good karma, see *more* or see *better* than others. This in turn demonstrates that those who cannot see what skilled perceivers like Chökyi Drakpa see are not in fact seeing ordinary reality correctly. The effect is to both emphasize Chökyi Drakpa’s particularly skilled perception and to suggest that those with ordinary perception cannot trust it to be a guide to reality.

Skillfully Perceiving Reality

While it might seem like Chökyi Drakpa thus rejects ordinary material reality—remember Padmasambhava saying, “Don’t concern yourself with external rocks and stones!”⁴¹⁴—this is not the case. He does seem to want to denaturalize ordinary perception, and to suggest that the way the world *appears* is not always the way the world *is*. However, he continues to make use of ordinary perception and to engage with material reality.

For example, even as Chökyi Drakpa highlights the way in which some of his companions’ ordinary perception prevents them from seeing things that he can see, he also enlists their ordinary perception as a witness to the extraordinary nature of Gyangme. For instance, Chökyi Drakpa notes that “everyone saw” (*kun gyis mthong bar gyur*) him being engulfed in

413. *Blos bcad*. Ibid.

414. *Phyi rol gyi sa rdo la mi ltos*. Ibid., 456.

rainbows.⁴¹⁵ Elsewhere, when Chökyi Drakpa and his companions are returning down the mountain to the camp alongside Turquoise Lake, Chökyi Drakpa and his companions have another visionary experience.⁴¹⁶ In front of their eyes, the lake manifests as the abode of Cakrasaṃvara, with two white boulders moving back and forth across the water in the form of Cakrasaṃvara and his consort. Chökyi Drakpa seems to be aware that the notion of rocks moving unsupported across the surface of a lake seems impossible, but he emphasizes that some of his companions also see the lake in this way, indicating that he is not alone in this otherwise incredible vision. He refers to it as a “shared vision” (*mtshong bar mthun snang byung*), and writes that it made the lake a site (*gnas*, literally holy place) of wonder and amazement.⁴¹⁷ Such statements serve to illustrate that Chökyi Drakpa’s engagement with the place is not merely a function of Chökyi Drakpa’s imagination. Rather, the site’s power—and Chökyi Drakpa’s special ability to navigate it—is entirely real, with effects that are visible to ordinary perception.

In addition, as we have already seen, *Vajradhāra’s Feast* pays a great deal of attention to the physical features of Gyangme and to the various images, objects, and treasures that Chökyi Drakpa encounters. He takes these physical features to be meaningful, and demonstrates an ability to move between surface level appearance, a deeper, otherwise-invisible level of significance, and back again. Reading the landscape correctly also allows him to uncover treasure texts concealed in the land.

As such, we may characterize Chökyi Drakpa’s position with regard to ordinary material reality not as one of rejection, but as one of skillful perceptual engagement. On this

415. Ibid., 453.

416. It is possible that this passage is merely re-describing the earlier assertion that the Lake is the *yabyum* form of Cakrasaṃvara or whether this is an entirely new visionary experience. I am inclined to think the latter.

417. *Mthong bar mthun snang byung bas shin tu ya mtshan zhing ngo mtshar che ba'i gnas su gyur to*. Ibid., 462.

interpretation, Padmasambhava's advice to disregard external rocks and stones—and to regard difficulties as projections of his own mind—is not necessarily an idealism that sees the ordinary material world as fundamentally unreal. Rather, in order to successfully open Gyangme, Chökyi Drakpa must be able to skillfully navigate ordinary material reality. Doing so requires a variety of skills, including the ability to access visionary states where he can communicate with Padmasambhava, the ability to read signs in the landscape, and the ability to assess the presence of protector deities, demons, and treasures. He must also be able to know when to interpret aspects of ordinary reality as revealing aspects of deeper realities outside of ordinary perception and when to recognize its illusory nature.

Nevertheless, we can say that for Chökyi Drakpa, there seem to be multiple *levels* of reality. That is, on one level, Gyangme is the residence of the primordial Buddha Cakrasaṃvara who preaches the dharma in a timeless and placeless dimension, on another level it is the site of Padmasambhava's activities in the mythic past, and on the third level, it exists as a mountain in the temporal world of everyday reality. Chökyi Drakpa interacts with all of these levels. He perceives the ordinary world with his everyday perception, he speaks with Padmasambhava in a visionary state, and he will ultimately obtain a direct perception of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's mandala. He does not treat the visionary-dream encounter with Padmasambhava or Cakrasaṃvara's mandala as any less real than ordinary reality. If anything, he treats ordinary reality as the most suspect. Chökyi Drakpa, like most humans, has easiest access to ordinary reality because that is what his ordinary perception most readily engages with, but he does not treat it as stable or ultimately existent. Instead, he demonstrates an ability to interact with the extraordinary reality present at Gyangme. This skill will be crucial to his ultimately obtaining a direct perception into the reality of Cakrasaṃvara's mandala.

Seeing Cakrasaṃvara in Direct Perception

The climax of *Vajradhāra's Feast* occurs towards the end of the work. Chökyi Drakpa and his companions successfully climbed to many of the caves of Gyangme, but had to turn back before finding one final cave, leaving them disappointed. They begin to leave Gyangme, and it seems that the pilgrimage guide will be drawing to a close, but as they are leaving, Chökyi Drakpa has a dream in which *dakinis* provide blessings and Vaishravana is mounted on a lion atop a cliff named “Treasure of the Hundred Thousand *Dakinis*.” Following the dream, he decides to lead his companions to the top of this cliff, where they have one final visionary experience.⁴¹⁸

Chökyi Drakpa and his companions hold a tantric feast ritual and begin to see apparitions appearing in the sky. First they see Manjusri, who reveals himself twice, each time surrounded by a host of attendant gods. Then Padmasambhava appears at the peak of Gyangme and grants them empowerment and initiation into the tantric practice of *The Summary of the Guru's Intention*, sending forth rays of multicolored light. The group, amazed, recites mantras and Padmasambhava reappears, this time dissolving into Chökyi Drakpa's heart. This awakens in Chökyi Drakpa memories of Padmasambhava giving him teachings in past lives, indicating that the connection between the two spans across lifetimes, and that Chökyi Drakpa's experience at Gyangme was indeed foretold. His experience of suddenly connections with Padmasambhava in his past lives recalls the Buddha's memory of his past lives on the night he attained

418. Much in this section is unclear to me. To start, the cliff “Treasure of the Hundred Thousand *Dakinis*” has not been mentioned thus far, and it is not clear what it is, where it is, or why it has that name. Chökyi Drakpa does not introduce it. It seems to be an elevated place from which Chökyi Drakpa can see the mountain of Gyangme, for Chökyi Drakpa will go on to describe seeing the mountain from atop the cliff. Second, it is also not entirely clear when (or if) Chökyi Drakpa's dream ends and yields to waking reality, for the end of the dream is not clearly marked. Indeed, it might well be argued that this section is deliberately ambiguous on the point of whether it is a dream or waking reality. I have taken the dream portion to end when Chökyi Drakpa uses the verb “to see/encounter” (*mjal*) followed by the terminating particle *lo*, and for the following section to describe non-dreaming events.

enlightenment, and evinces deep realization on Chökyi Drakpa's part.

Having received this empowerment, Chökyi Drakpa looks at the holy mountain of Gyangme and sees it anew. He writes, "I saw that mountain [i.e. Gyangme], which is Cakrasaṃvara's palace, as the palace of Glorious Cakrasaṃvara in actuality."⁴¹⁹ This contrasts his general acknowledgement of the idea that the mountain is the palace of Cakrasaṃvara with his sudden ability to see it, *in actuality* (*dnegos su*), a phrase that might equally be translated as "in reality" or "in material reality." Gyatso notes that in Treasure traditions, the term *dnegos*, although it directly translates "reality," often describes visual signs experienced in waking reality, as opposed to meditative experience (*nyams*) or dreaming (*rmi lam*).⁴²⁰ That is, where before he *knew* that Gyangme was the palace of Cakrasaṃvara, now he can see it directly *as* the palace of Cakrasaṃvara. His knowledge of the mountain and its true nature, then, is rendered more direct and immediate by his newly emerging ability to directly perceive it as such.

The word Chökyi Drakpa uses to say that he sees the mountain as the palace or mandala of Cakrasaṃvara is *mjal*, a term which ordinarily means to meet or encounter, but also can be translated as "to see." The sense of *mjal*, as opposed to if Chökyi Drakpa had used other terms for seeing, such as *mtshong* or *gzigs*, is that this visual perception of Cakrasaṃvara is also in some sense a meaningful *encounter* with the deity. By seeing Cakrasaṃvara, Chökyi Drakpa is coming into contact with him in a powerful way.

The visionary experience continues as rainbow lights flash and manifest a dizzying array of bodily forms, including the eight different manifestations of Cakrasaṃvara, but amidst all of this visual activity, Chökyi Drakpa says, "I was carefully examining and analyzing, and so I saw

419. *Bde mchog pho brang gi ri de yang dpal 'khor lo sdom pa'i pho brang dnegos su mjal zhing*. Ibid., 466.

420. See Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation," 109, especially note 27.

(*mjal*) the mountain as the sixty-two deity mandala of Cakrasaṃvara.”⁴²¹ Note here the relationship between “carefully examining and analyzing” (*legs par rtags shing dpyad pas*), which is in the instrumental, and the resulting vision of the mountain as the mandala of Cakrasaṃvara. The sense is thus that Chökyi Drakpa is able to have this vision of the mountain *by means of* his examining and analyzing. The mandala does not simply present itself to him, but rather he has to scrutinize the visual array in front of him in order to be able to secure this vision of Cakrasaṃvara’s mandala. In other words, even this radical connection Chökyi Drakpa establishes between his own temporal world and the timeless realm of Cakrasaṃvara is not stable and self-perpetuating. Rather, it must be maintained through Chökyi Drakpa’s active efforts.

Chökyi Drakpa thus describes his visual encounter with Cakrasaṃvara both as direct perception, implying that he simply sees Cakrasaṃvara without any special effort to do so, and as seeing Cakrasaṃvara through carefully examining and analyzing, implying that his vision of Cakrasaṃvara is not as direct, but rather predicated on active effort on his part. We might assume that these two aspects of seeing are mutually exclusive, but Chökyi Drakpa does not treat them in that way, but instead sees them as coexisting in this climactic moment.

Vision as Transformative

In obtaining a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara, Chökyi Drakpa breaks through the multiple layers of reality present at Gyangme. We have already discussed these multiple levels of reality existing at Gyangme and the ways in which they interpenetrate. We have also already seen Chökyi Drakpa’s special ability to move between realms in a way most people cannot by communicating with Padmasambhava in a visionary state, by uncovering hidden treasures, and

421. *Bdag gis legs par rtags shing dpyad pas ri de nyid dpal 'khor lo sdom pa lha drug bcu rtsa gnyis kyi dkyil 'khor du mjal zhing*. Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig*, 466.

by reading the landscape. This allowed him to skillfully navigate the landscape of Gyangme, allowing him to access hidden caves in the mountain where Padmasambhava practiced. This direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara, however, is particularly significant. This breaking of planes because as we will see, it permanently alters Gyangme, making its pre-existing sacredness available to future pilgrims.

Chökyi Drakpa's vision of Cakrasaṃvara does not collapse the realm of Cakrasaṃvara and the realm of ordinary reality into one another. For while Chökyi Drakpa does directly perceive Cakrasaṃvara's mandala, he also has to actively exert effort examining and analyzing in order to maintain that perception even for a short period of time. One way to think about this, then, is to say that Chökyi Drakpa's activities and perception makes a connection between these two worlds. This connection is what opens the door between realms.

One analogy we might draw here is between the logic of opening the doors of the holy place and the logic of the Treasure (*gter ma*) tradition. Janet Gyatso describes Treasure narratives as constructing a bridge between the primordial origin of the Treasure and the historical present where the Treasure is being revealed.⁴²² Chökyi Drakpa, too, is attempting to build a bridge between the realm of Cakrasaṃvara and his own temporal present. The way in which he constructs a bridge between these two realms differs from Treasure narratives in that—the incidents of him finding Treasure texts aside—Chökyi Drakpa does not recover some item or text that originates in the atemporal buddha realm. In the case of the Treasure tradition, the Treasure revealer produces a textual or material object that in some sense *materializes* the bridge between the Treasure revealer's present and the primordial buddha realm, providing a means for later practitioners to participate in the heirophany between realms. In Chökyi Drakpa's case, however,

422. Gyatso describes it as two bridges—one between the primordial realm and mythic Padmasambhava and one between Padmasambhava and the historical present. See Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation," 132.

his direct perception of the holy mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's mandala does not produce an *object*, per se, but rather makes the place itself into a door between realms.

Once that connection has been established, Chökyi Drakpa sees that Cakrasaṃvara's essence pervades the entire holy place, filling even the rocks and stones. This, he writes, is what will be realized by those with the proper karmic destiny to come to the holy place and see it as it truly is.

Chökyi Drakpa's activities on Gyangme, and especially him obtaining a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara's mandala, thus permanently change the place. By virtue of its being a dwelling place of Cakrasaṃvara and a place where Padmasambhava practiced, it was always already holy in some sense, but by opening the doors of the place, Chökyi Drakpa makes it a holy place for ordinary pilgrims. It will now give material benefits to pilgrims who go there, even those who cannot see what Chökyi Drakpa was able to see. That is, even though to ordinary pilgrims, the place's appearance will not have changed at all, pilgrims will be able to interact with the site in new ways.

As Chökyi Drakpa leaves Gyangme, the work describes the site in ways that mirror his descriptions when approaching the place, but also describes the place as very different in mood. For example, as he did when approaching the mountain, when he is leaving the mountain, Chökyi Drakpa analyzes the landscape for signs and geomantic meanings. Whereas the land was initially hostile, it has been transformed into joyous welcome. He notes that the landscape itself seems to be bowing and prostrating in recognition of Chökyi Drakpa's opening of the site, and describes how the protector spirits sent down rain, snow, and an avalanche because they were delighted. This interpretation of snowfall as the welcome of the place spirits is very different from his interpretation of snowfall while staying beside Turquoise Lake prior to ascending

Gyangme, and reflects Chökyi Drakpa's sense that his visionary encounter with Cakrasaṃvara has changed the place from threatening to welcoming.

This change affects the way future pilgrims will be able to interact with the place. Switching from the mode of describing his own experience to describing what future pilgrims can expect when they come to the holy place, Chökyi Drakpa warns pilgrims that they will be terrified upon encountering and understanding the site. This fear, however, will bring out certain kinds of mental states—specifically, a focused or “one-pointed” mind—and provide opportunities to obtain spiritual boons. In other words, the place itself has become more conducive of certain mental or meditative states, and will more readily yield spiritual benefits than the same practices performed at other places.⁴²³ He promises at minimum that the potency of the site will make the accomplishment of various tantric practices go more quickly than they would at other sites. For those with the proper karma and dedicated practice, however, he says that they too will directly perceive (*mngon sum du mthong*) the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's palace, thus re-enacting Chökyi Drakpa's originary vision of the site.

One question we might ask here is why the act of Chökyi Drakpa seeing Cakrasaṃvara affects later pilgrims' practice, even for who cannot see what Chökyi Drakpa saw. The work itself does not precisely spell this out. For our purposes, however, it is worth drawing out the logic of this substantial transformation, for it has implications for our understanding of the

423. There is a longstanding notion in Tibetan Buddhism that certain places are more conducive to spiritual or meditative practice than others. In his *Trilogy of Rest* (*ngal gso skor gsum*), for example, Longchen Rabjampa (1308–1364) describes how the practitioner is to choose a good location in which to practice meditation, explaining that successful realization is based on the proper conjunction of person, place, and the dharma to be practiced (*gnas dang gang zag nyams su blangs bya'i chos/ rnam gsum rang bzhin dag las 'grub par 'gyur*). He goes on to explain that the practitioner must choose a place, food, and clothing that is appropriate to the person and to the season, and describes various places such as forest hermitages, lake islands, towns, and cemeteries in terms of the type of mental states they tend to produce. For an English translation of this text, see Klong-chen-pa Dri-med-'od-zer, *The Trilogy of Rest*, trans. Padmakara Translation Committee (Boulder: Shambhala, 2017). For Tibetan, see Dri med 'od zer, “Bsam gtan ngal gso'i rtsa ba,” in *Klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer gyi gsung 'bum*, TBRC W00EGS1016299. 4: 901 - 918. (Derge: Sde sge par khang chen mo, 2000).

categories of place.

In seeing Cakrasaṃvara's mandala, Chökyi Drakpa opens the door between the temporal realm and the world of Cakrasaṃvara, and this door remains open in Chökyi Drakpa's absence. Before, there had been a general identification of the mountain as Cakrasaṃvara's mandala, but Chökyi Drakpa transforms that general identification into a direct connection between realms. The mountain is thus a place that has an especially strong connection to Cakrasaṃvara and his potency, and by virtue of this connection, later pilgrims are able to benefit from the enhanced potency it provides. Those skilled pilgrims who are able to obtain a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara, moreover, can do so more easily than they otherwise might have because Chökyi Drakpa did it first and opened the door. To switch metaphors, Chökyi Drakpa pioneered a path directly connecting the mountain with Cakrasaṃvara's mandala. Blazing such a path does not mean that later pilgrims will be able to traverse that same path (i.e. obtain a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara) without any difficulty, but their task is much easier for Chökyi Drakpa's having first established the path.

It is worth noting that Chökyi Drakpa's activities at Gyangme do not merely change Gyangme; instead, the mountain also has an effect on Chökyi Drakpa. Chökyi Drakpa mentions that his trip to Gyangme has the effect of clearing away obstacles,⁴²⁴ increases his lifespan, and provides various blessings.

Conclusion: Visionary Seeing and the Transformation of Place

Vajradhāra's Feast is alone among the sources for this dissertation in that it depicts a successful

424. Tibetans, who use a twelve-year calendrical cycle, commonly treat the ages of thirteen, twenty-five, thirty-seven, and so on as "obstacle" years, and as Chökyi Drakpa approaches the age of twenty-five, he wants to clear away potential obstacles and threats to his lifespan.

transformation of perception. The pilgrimage guides we will turn to in the next chapter attempt to effect transformations in future readers but does not describe how such a transformation happened, and Khatag Zamyak largely fails to obtain a vision like Chökyi Drakpa's. What, then, does it tell us about our central question of *how* transformations of perception occur?

Vajradhāra's Feast suggests that Chökyi Drakpa's ability to see Cakrasaṃvara in direct perception is at least partially based on his high degree of spiritual realization and karmic destiny. It matters that Chökyi Drakpa is a highly realized ritual master. If what a person sees is connected to that person's level of realization, Chökyi Drakpa is a prime candidate for being able to attain visionary transformations. He is largely able to direct his attention, control his perception, induce visionary states, and perform rituals. He is, moreover prophecied to be the one that will open the doors of Gyangme.

As such, it is noteworthy that obtaining a perception of Cakrasaṃvara is still so difficult. Even though Chökyi Drakpa is in many ways a heroic figure that succeeds in seeing the mountain as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara, the work does not claim that this was in any way easy or guaranteed. We have seen in the previous chapters that the goal of learning to see the divine aspects of the holy place is out of reach for most pilgrims. Through much of the narrative, Chökyi Drakpa is unsure whether he can actually open the doors of the mountain and expresses doubts to Padmasambhava. Even in narratives where a transformation of vision successfully occurs, then, it is still very difficult, fragile, and easy to miss.

Vajradhāra's Feast also suggests, however, that there are certain ways of looking at the landscape that facilitate Chökyi Drakpa's eventual vision of Cakrasaṃvara. In particular, Chökyi Drakpa is constantly reading the landscape and moving between the surface appearance of the place to the unseen deeper meaning. We will encounter these same techniques fleshed out in

more detail in both pilgrimage guides and in Khatag Zamyak's diary, so we will not analyze these techniques more deeply here, but I do want to point out that they help facilitate Chökyi Drakpa's eventual vision.

It is also worth pointing out that the material world itself facilitates Chökyi Drakpa's vision. The status of the material world in *Vajradhāra's Feast* is complicated. The work contains a seemingly paradoxical dynamic—Chökyi Drakpa is valorized for his ability to see past the surface-level appearance of the mountain to see it as the mandala of Cakrasaṃvara, but at the same time, *Vajradhāra's Feast* pays a great deal of attention to the physicality of Gyangme. The work is full of descriptions of the physical attributes of the place, Chökyi Drakpa himself closely analyzes many of those attributes, often interpreting them as signs. What is more, the whole work centers on the opening of a holy place, a physical place where pilgrims go to gain access to a localized sacredness not available in other places. Chökyi Drakpa thus does not reject the external material world as fundamentally delusory, but rather skillfully interacts with it.

The main point that I want to make about *Vajradhāra's Feast*, however, concerns the notion of Chökyi Drakpa's actions as permanently altering the place. This, I argue, is important for thinking about the nature of place and space in general. The notion that past events—and the ongoing memory of them—participate in the construction of sacred space is not a particularly novel idea—we will see in our exploration of pilgrimage guides that such guides almost always tell pilgrims about the spiritual masters who have practiced there. They pointed out specific marks left by prior spiritual masters, described the blessings they left at the holy place, and how pilgrims could benefit from those blessings contained in the holy site. In visiting a pilgrimage site, pilgrims are encountering a place rich with meaning and populated by all the people who had been there before.

This notion of past actions shaping a place does get at something important about places and the way they structure experience. It suggests that physical places are not merely the passive and mute backdrops we often take them to be. Rather, places have the ability to gather together histories, narratives, actions, and culture, embedding them in the landscape itself. When people encounter a physical place, then, they also encounter the rich meaning and set of associations that make up that place. On this logic, Chökyi Drakpa's actions, and the text which tells the story of those actions, inscribe those actions into the landscape, changing the place itself and shaping the way later pilgrims encounter it. Particularly given Chökyi Drakpa's written account of his pilgrimage to the place, later pilgrims to the place will bear his descriptions in mind, imagining what Chökyi Drakpa saw even as they try to see it for themselves.

The importance of place is further highlighted when we compare Chökyi Drakpa's account of opening the place with accounts of Treasure discoverers revealing Treasure texts. These two kinds of texts have many similarities in that they both involve the breaking of planes of reality whereby someone in the historical present forges a connection with a primordial Buddha with the mediation of Padmasambhava. However while Treasure texts are only tangentially concerned with the place at which the Treasure text is revealed, Chökyi Drakpa's narrative of opening the pilgrimage place centers around the physicality of Gyangme. In order to obtain a direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara, Chökyi Drakpa first must travel to a remote place in the mountains, then must interpret the various signs contained in the landscape and physically climb up through the various hidden caves. After he obtains the direct perception of Cakrasaṃvara, the benefits of his act of perception are localized at the site, with future pilgrims having to physically travel there to get the blessings of the site for themselves. The place itself is what holds the different realms of reality—Cakrasaṃvara's realm, Padmasambhava's legendary

meditative practice, and Chökyi Drakpa's story of opening the holy place—together so that pilgrims who go there encounter all of these things.

It is important, too, that the transformation of Gyangme is effected by an act of perception. This dissertation as a whole is in many ways a challenge to the notion of perception as a passive process of receiving sense data from the external world. I have thus pointed to the ways in which texts, practices, ideas, and attitudes can shape perception, even as I have also pushed back on the opposite notion that perception is entirely a function of culture and ideology. Perception, in that account, is a boundary category that bridges the external world of material objects and the internal world of language, culture, and imagination, and is as such active and malleable. That said, even on the relatively active account of perception that I have been developing, I have imagined the effects of perception as largely redounding on the perceiver, rather than altering the world itself. This matches how many of our informants seem to have conceptualized perception as well. For example, in the debate about Kailash, Chödrak Yeshe argues that those with extraordinary perception or the divine eye see the extraordinary reality that is really present at Kailash rather than suggesting that their extraordinary perception creates something new in the world. Here, however, we are presented with an account of a perception that permanently alters the world, opening a holy place to future pilgrims.

Chökyi Drakpa's perception of the mountain is clearly atypical and rare, and is different from that of later pilgrims who will come to the site, the types of pilgrims imagined as the audience of pilgrimage guides, and pilgrims like Khatag Zamyak, who we will meet in a later chapter. It is different, too, from the "inferior" pilgrims chastised by Kathog Situ and Jigmé Lingpa, who merely go through the motions of seeing without adopting the proper bodily and mental comportment.

One question, however, is whether these different types of seeing are different in kind or merely different in degree. Our analytical language in English for distinguishing types of perception is relatively impoverished, leading us to label all of these different types of perception as seeing or vision. I suggest, however, that we might think in terms of a range or spectrum of types of perception. Perception may more intentionally effortful or more passively receptive, actively world-changing or having no effect on the world. Our Tibetan texts might tell us that perception may be more or less skilled, with some having extraordinary perception and some having ordinary perception. We might map all of the different types of seeing explored in this project in terms of this framework, with Chökyi Drakpa, for example, having an active, skilled, effortful perception that changes the world he perceives.

We might further characterize Chökyi Drakpa's seeing as that of a visionary or seer. The terms seer and visionary have a rich range of meanings and associations, but for the moment I will take those terms to mean someone who has a unique ability to see that which is not ordinarily encountered by most people in the present. This is often a vision of the future, but also includes visions of figures from the past or other sorts of trans-spatial, trans-temporal, or trans-dimensional experiences. This vision then opens up new possibilities in the present. I follow Ann Taves here in placing the seer or visionary "alongside the artist alongside the artist as the creator of things that, in Martin Heidegger's sense (1971:43-44), open up new worlds."⁴²⁵ The artist sees something no one else can, and then makes it real in a way that opens up new possibilities for how to live in the present or how to imagine the future. In that sense, Chökyi Drakpa is a visionary because he sees something no one else can. This act of seeing in a sense opens up the world of Cakrasaṃvara (and in Tibetan literally opens the doors of the place), thus creating the

425. Anne Taves, "History and the Claims of Revelation: Joseph Smith and the Materialization of the Golden Plates," *Numen* 61, no. 2-3 (2014): 182-207, 186.

possibility for future pilgrims to engage with this world.

Chapter Six: Faith and Figuration in Pilgrimage Guides

“Scratch a rock
and a legend springs”
—Arun Kolatkar, *Jejuri*⁴²⁶

Introduction and General Question

In this chapter, I will be focusing primarily on pilgrimage guide literature, texts written *for* pilgrims. Whereas the chapters immediately before and after this one deal provide first person accounts of someone attempting to change the way they see, these pilgrimage guides are addressed to some future audience that lies in front of the text. My aim will be to explore how these texts engage—and seek to transform—pilgrims’ perception of the holy mountain. What sort of audience do they anticipate, and how do they go about describing the pilgrimage place to that audience? How do texts guide pilgrim’s eyes, and are there specific patterns in terms of how they do so? How might we understand how these textual descriptions work on the text’s anticipated audience? Finally, what seems to be the desired outcome that pilgrimage guides seek to engender?

The chapter will proceed by first introducing the genre of pilgrimage guides and discussing their typical features, attending carefully to the theoretical issues involved in reading pilgrimage guides—a genre that by nature is more often prescriptive than descriptive—to try to investigate questions of perceptual experience. I develop an account of how the language of

426. Arun Kolatkar, *Jejuri* (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2005), 22.

pilgrimage guides functions as a kind of extended metaphor that creates for pilgrims a fantastic vision of the hidden worlds of the pilgrimage place. In so doing, they train pilgrims to see the mountain *as* a wondrous divine palace, a state that I refer to as co-seeing. I flesh out this account with a list of the various recurring features of pilgrimage guide texts that work on the imagined pilgrim audience, providing examples and discussion of each particular device. I conclude by reflecting on how these kinds of literary devices might accomplish pilgrimage guides' stated desire of engendering faith on the part of pilgrims.

What are Pilgrimage Guides?

Before developing an account of the language in pilgrimage guides and discussing particular examples from those guides, it is first important to get a sense of what the group of texts I am calling pilgrimage guides *are*. Why should the different texts I am grouping under this label be read together? Would this way of grouping these texts together have been recognizable to a premodern Tibetan, or is it a grouping created by modern scholars? What were these texts called in Tibetan? What separates a pilgrimage guide from a text that is merely about a place, but that does not call for pilgrimage? Do they anticipate readers taking them on physical pilgrimages, or do they lead readers along a literary journey that stands in for a physical pilgrimage? What are the typical features of a pilgrimage guide? What sorts of audiences do these texts anticipate? Finally, while most of my analysis will be based on textual evidence from the pilgrimage guides themselves, do we have any evidence from anthropologists or from other sorts of texts as to how they were actually used?

Pilgrimage Guides as a Genre

I will begin by making the case for the existence of a group of texts that I am calling the genre of pilgrimage guides.⁴²⁷ These texts share elements of content, style, and organization that suggest that they are participating in a common discourse about place and pilgrimage, and as such might profitably be read with one another. Specifically, the texts I call pilgrimage guides praise a particular holy place (*gnas*), often a holy mountain or temple complex, and invite audiences to go on pilgrimage to that place. Indeed, the texts often position themselves as showing the pilgrim the various features of the pilgrimage site, describing individual objects that the pilgrim will see so that the that the pilgrim will fully appreciate them.

That these texts are about particular holy places is generally clear from the titles, which always include the name of the holy place, but what grounds are there to say that these texts are about *pilgrimage*? One might reasonably wonder, for example, whether Tibetan texts about holy places might be praising that place or recording information about it without any expectation that those reading the text would then physically go to that place, like *sthalapurāṇa* (narratives of places) the South Asian context or *difangzhi* (地方誌, local gazetteers) in the Chinese context.⁴²⁸

To start, the texts I am calling pilgrimage guides all invite pilgrims to visit the holy place, use the optative to say that pilgrims *should* go to the holy place, or describe the benefits that will accrue to pilgrims who do go there on pilgrimage. To give a few examples, a guidebook to Tsari says, “This practice of circumambulation is the best method for purifying sins and defilements.

427. Genre is a complex idea about which much has been written, and it is difficult speak of Tibetan literature in terms of genre, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I take genre to be a way of grouping together texts based on common attributes of form and purpose.

428. For more on these texts, see David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Shaiva Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), and Peter K. Bol, “The Rise of Local History: History, Geography, and Culture in Southern Song and Yuan Wuzhou,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (61.1, 2001): 37–76.

By means of focusing on the deities of secret mantra at this place, and offering *torma* and tantric feasts to them, it delights these gods and fully matures the accumulation of merit.”⁴²⁹ The same text also directly addresses the audience, saying, “you should delight in respectful acts of worship” at the site.⁴³⁰ Another pilgrimage guide to Drak Karpo says “If you do a hundred prostrations [here], even if you are sinful, you will obtain a meaningful human rebirth.”⁴³¹ Yet another guide to Sekhar Guthog tells audiences, “All beings who worship here collect merit that is conducive to enlightenment.”⁴³² In each of these examples, which are representative of pilgrimage guides generally, the text clearly is not merely describing the holy place, but invoking the pilgrim to travel to visit the site.

This kind of text-internal evidence is also buttressed by evidence from later textual sources and the work of anthropologists. For example, Khatag Zamyak’s pilgrimage diary from 1944-1956, which will be more closely examined in the next chapter, mentions him seeking out and consulting pilgrimage guides for various sites that he was traveling to on no fewer than thirteen times. Anthropologists of Tibetan pilgrimage such as Toni Huber and Katia Buffetrille also describe pilgrims to various sites as consulting pilgrimage guides.⁴³³ Huber in particular

429. *'Di bskor ba ni sdiḡ sgrub sbyong ba'o thabs mchog yin pa dang/ 'dir gsang sngags kyi lha tshogs la dmigs te/ gtor ma/ tshogs kyi 'khor lo phul bas/ lha de dag mnyes/ bsod nams kyi tshogs rdzogs pa yin la.* Pad+ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad*, 272.

430. *Bkur sti rim gros mnyes par bya ste.* Ibid., 273.

431. *Bskor ba brgya thon na/ sdiḡ can yin yang mi lus don ldan thob.* “Brag dkar po'i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho'i sprin phung,” in Tshe ring dpal 'byor, ed., *Bod kyi gnas yig bdams bsgrigs* (Lhasa: bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2012), 381.

432. *Sems can thams cad kyis yan lag bdun ldan gyi sgo nas thar pa cha mthun gyi bsod nams dam pa gsog par rigs so.* Author unknown, “Sras mkhar dgu thog gtsug lag khang sogs kyi gnas yig,” in *Sras mkhar dgu thog sogs bod kyi gnas yig khag cig* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1985), 10.

433. See especially Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, and Katia Buffetrille, *Pèlerins, Lamas et Visionnaires: Sources Orales et Écrites sur les Pèlerinages Tibétains*, (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2000). Each also has a number of articles that are listed in the bibliography.

notes that many laypeople could recite, even years later, verse sections from the Pema Karpo *Guide to Tsari* mentioned above. Though these pilgrims had not necessarily come into contact with a written or printed form of a guide, the prevalence of these guides was such that they were commonly passed around, heard, recited, and memorized.⁴³⁴

As is common in Tibetan literature, there is no single term that is used for the genre that I am calling pilgrimage guide texts.⁴³⁵ Instead, there is a complex, shifting, and often inconsistent set of genre terms used in texts' titles that can indicate what the text is about. For pilgrimage guides, the most general term is *néyik* (*gnas yig*, place guide or pilgrimage guide), a term formed from combining the honorific word for place, *né* (*gnas*), which is often used to refer specifically to holy places, with *yik* (*yig*), a word meaning writing or written syllables. As such, a more literal translation might be "text about the holy place." Such texts generally provide audiences with an explanation of the history, significance, and important features of the holy place. Other related genre labels that are used for texts related to place and pilgrimage include *néshé* (*gnas bshad*, explanation of a holy place), *nétö* (*gnas bstod*, holy place praise, also sometimes *sa bstod*, praise of the place),⁴³⁶ *lamyik* (*lam yig*, itinerary),⁴³⁷ *karchak* (*dkar chag*, inventory),⁴³⁸ or *logyü* (*lo*

434. "In pre-1959 Tibet, many people such as laypersons with no written literacy could hear, memorize, and recite these types of texts accurately without ever having contact with a written or printed version." Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 60.

435. Turrell Wylie does suggest a four-fold typology of registers (*dkar chag*), guidebooks (*gnas bshad*), passports (*lam yig*), and global descriptions (*go la'i kha byang*). See "The Tibetan Tradition of Geography." *Bulletin of Tibetology* 11, no. 1 (1965): 17–25.

436. These texts are not exactly pilgrimage guides, although they may be included in a pilgrimage guide. Rather, they are poetic praises of a particular place, which are often given performatively by specialized reciters or by important people visiting a place and which are not exclusively or primarily for the sake of a pilgrim.

437. This term literally means path text or path writing, although it can be used to refer to an itinerary for pilgrims to follow, a text in which someone writes an account of their travels, or a passport-type document signed by a local official that allows the holder to pass through a particular area. For more on this subject see Sam van Schaik, and Imre Galambos, *Manuscripts and Travelers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

438. These texts are often called tables of contents or inventories, which can be used to list the texts in a particular

rgyus, history).⁴³⁹ It is important to note, however, that these genre terms are not pure or totally distinct; two texts with the same genre label may be very different, and two similar texts may have different genre labels. Sometimes, the same text can be found in different versions using different genre terms, and other times, the text itself will refer to itself using genre terms different than those that are used in the title. Given the shifting nature of these genre terms, it is worth pointing out that I am not considering every text whose Tibetan title includes these genre terms as pilgrimage guides for the purposes of this chapter. Rather, this chapter considers the body of texts that use said genre terms, praise a particular holy place, and invite people to go on pilgrimage there.

What is the Intended Audience?

Although it is difficult to come by any direct evidence of reader reception for these kinds of materials, a close reading of the texts themselves can give some idea of who the texts imagine their audience to be.⁴⁴⁰ Such a reading allows us to reconstruct what Umberto Eco calls the “model reader,” a kind of ideal reader who actualizes the textual strategy embedded in the text. Actual “empirical readers” may or may not accord with the “model reader,” and may use the text in ways not envisioned by the text itself, but it is still worth asking what kind of reader the text anticipates and creates for itself.⁴⁴¹

collected works (*gsung 'bum*), the items held in a library, or in the case of famous places, the texts, images, and other features found at the site. These inventories can range from simple lists of items without any commentary to detailed accounts that not only list the items and where they can be found, but also relates the history and significance of the items

439. This term literally means account or history, and is more frequently found in historiographical works, but is sometimes used to talk about the history of a particular place.

440. In speaking of a text’s “imagining” anything, I am using a convenient shorthand to designate the intent of a text’s implied author.

441. See Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*.

One way of thinking about pilgrimage guides' imagined audience is asking what the text assumes that the audience knows and does not know. In terms of what they know, while pilgrimage guide texts often make reference to religious figures and Buddhist doctrine, they rarely discuss abstract philosophical doctrine or esoteric tantric material, which suggests that an audience that is not limited to tantric specialists, but instead includes ordinary people. In his pilgrimage guide to Gyangme, Chökyi Drakpa even writes that he has deliberately composed text “so that the entire meaning can be easily understood by all, without much proliferation of words, and without obscuring the meaning with prosody and versification.”⁴⁴² Moreover, these texts anticipate general knowledge of Tibetan religion and culture, as references to figures like Padmasambhava and Milarepa are made without explanation, presumably assuming that people already know about these figures.

These texts also tell us something important about what the imagined audience lacks that will get further developed later on in the chapter: they anticipate an audience that will not be able to fully see or understand the pilgrimage place without the help of some kind of direction or aid in interpretation, which the guide purports to provide. For now, however, we will hold off on delving further into this point.

How Were Pilgrimage Guides Actually Used?

While the primary method used in this chapter is textual analysis, with a focus on the ways in which literary aspects of the text work on the model reader, it is helpful to situate this project in the larger context of scholarship on Tibetan pilgrimage. Specifically, while we have seen that anthropologists of Tibetan pilgrimage attest to the continued use and importance of pilgrimage

442. *Ldeb sbyor dang snyan ngag gis ma sgrib par thams cad kyis go bde zhing tshig gi spros pa nyung la don tshang par byas te. Rig 'dzin Chos kyis grags pa, Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*, 469.

guides as part of pilgrimage practices, different anthropologists disagree on the extent to which guides influence actual pilgrimage experiences.

Of the two anthropologists discussed above, Huber retains a relatively important role for guides when he speaks of them as acting like a kind of “narrative map” that allows pilgrims to understand and navigate the site⁴⁴³ and as “popular vehicles for the creation and maintenance of a specific magical view of reality.”⁴⁴⁴ But he also warns that textual study of pilgrimage guides should be “combined with the results of field investigations at pilgrimage sites.”⁴⁴⁵ Buffetrille, on the other hand, is somewhat more skeptical of the value of studying pilgrimage guide texts. She agrees with Huber that pilgrimage guides do *try* to change the way pilgrims experience the pilgrimage site, specifically by giving them a Buddhicized mental model of the site that changes how they conceptualize it.⁴⁴⁶ However, she questions how effective guides are at changing pilgrims’ experiences and influencing their behavior, and explores examples of sites at which the pilgrimage guides have little to nothing to do with pilgrims’ behavior at that site.⁴⁴⁷

The work of Huber and Buffetrille is important to bear in mind as we go through the textual materials examined in these chapters. Specifically, they provide both a question and a caution. The question is that of *how* pilgrimage guides work on pilgrims. Both Huber and Buffetrille agree that this is a major goal of pilgrimage guides, but it is unclear how this process

443. Ibid., 61.

444. Toni Huber “A Guide to the La-Phyi Mandala,” 235.

445. Ibid., 235.

446. In Katia Buffetrille, “Reflections on Pilgrimages to Sacred Mountains, Lakes and Caves,” she writes that Pilgrimage guides embody a typically “Buddhist” understanding of the world, and “lead the ordinary pilgrim from simple perception of the physical landscape to conception of the place as sacred [Buddhist] landscape” (21).

447. See Katia Buffetrille, “The Blue Lake of A-Mdo and Its Island,” “The Great Pilgrimage of A-Myes rMa-Chen,” and “The Pilgrimage to Mount Kha ba dkar po.”

works. This is the key problem this chapter is trying to explore. The caution, on the other hand, is about the distance between what pilgrimage guides say and what actual pilgrims do. This is not to say that a project like this one that is based in textual analysis is doomed, but simply that we must be very explicit about theoretical and methodological approaches of how we are reading our texts.

After all, there are still many things we do not know about the actual use of pilgrimage guides, and especially about any one particular pilgrimage guide. Anthropologists are able to provide insight to things in living memory, but it may well be the case that pilgrimage to Kailash in 1600 was different from pilgrimage to Amye Machen in 1980 or pilgrimage to Tsari in the 1940s. There are also many different pilgrimage guide texts that were composed in different places for different reasons and at different times, making any one model of how guides were used difficult to generalize broadly. It may be the case that pilgrimage guides themselves were not read by most people—which, given the relatively low literacy rates of pre-modern Tibet, would not have been likely anyway—but rather the texts are “notes” of a class of people who provided in-person guidance on pilgrimage, or perhaps they were the result of writing down the account of one of those whose job it was to physically guide pilgrims. Perhaps they are akin to the scholarly monographs of today, with many being written but almost none having much readership. Perhaps each text we have is an individually composed work, or perhaps they are compilations of many previous pilgrimage guides. None of these questions can be easily answered.

Typical Features of Pilgrimage Guides

Pilgrimage guides generally follow a similar pattern of describing the place and its myriad

wonders. The guide tells some of the history of the site, focusing in particular on the activities of highly realized masters who visited the site and may have “opened” it to pilgrimage by ordinary people. They also point out each of the various features that the pilgrim should see while visiting the site. Such features often but not always include “self-arisen” phenomena at the site attesting to its generative power, the natural beauty of flora and fauna, handprints or other marks associated with spiritual masters, and other visible traces of the site’s power. Guides may also tell pilgrims about what the site *truly* looks like, which often does not match what the ordinary pilgrim sees when looking at the place—guides use various devices, including the trope of describing what the site looks like outwardly, inwardly, and secretly, in order to describe how the site looks to someone with the enhanced vision of a buddha, bodhisattva, god, or other spiritual master. The guide often ends by describing the benefits of going to the site and by dedicating the merit of composing a text such that all pilgrims may be able to visit it. We will explore each of these features at length, providing textual examples and analysis, later in the chapter.

Before doing so, it is worth pointing out two striking features of guides that may run counter to expectations.

First is the degree to which almost all pilgrimage guides reproduce these same features, filling in the particular details associated with the particular pilgrimage place being described. Each site, no matter how seemingly insignificant, seems to have been visited by Padmasambhava, to be beautiful and surrounded by self-arisen phenomena, and to be “equivalent to Tsari and Kailash.” That pilgrimage guides have this kind of patterned structure has led some scholars to describe them as “formulaic,”⁴⁴⁸ a reputation that has led to the genre being relatively

448. Charles Ramble, for example, in his article “The Complexity of Tibetan Pilgrimage” writes that pilgrimage guides (*gnas bshad*) are “largely formulaic, and differ from one another mainly in matters of local detail.” That is, the structure of these texts is often very similar, with only the specific place names seeming to change. See Charles Ramble, “The Complexity of Tibetan Pilgrimage,” in *Searching for the Dharma, Finding Salvation*, ed. Christoph

understudied. However, we might ask what these texts are doing, why they have so many repetitive and seemingly formulaic aspects, and what that means for how scholars should read them. Indeed, their very similarity may give us clues for understanding how they work on their audiences.⁴⁴⁹

The second striking feature is something that we might expect to be present, but that almost never is: practical information about how to get to the pilgrimage place. While we might be tempted to see pilgrimage guides as the Tibetan analogue to modern travel guides such as the *Lonely Planet*, we should pause before making that assumption. There are certain ways in which this comparison is helpful—both try to capture the wonder and excitement of traveling to the place in book form, and both give information about the place and about particular things to see there—but closer investigation reveals a major way in which the two types of texts are different. Although the *Lonely Planet* is in some senses a promotional book written to convince people to travel to the featured location, it is mostly a practical travel guide, and as such contains information about hotel phone numbers, museum hours, city maps, and recommendations about the best restaurants. Pilgrimage guides, by contrast, do not devote any attention to the practicalities of lodging, food, or directions. Whatever these guides are doing, they are not exhaustive compendia of everything the pilgrim needs on pilgrimage. Instead, it seems likely that pilgrims relied on trade routes and person-to-person knowledge about where to go and how to

Cueppers and Max Deeg, 194.

449. This bears similarity to what scholar of Daoism Thomas Hahn has termed “standard Taoist mountain” characterized by certain features that appear again and again. Basing his account on multiple mountains (he points to about “fifty-odd” that he has been to), Hahn notes that these mountains share markedly similar layouts and sets of features. Addressing the reader as though he or she were approaching this “standard” Taoist mountain, Hahn guides them through the features, built into the landscape both physically and discursively, that occur on their journey. For instance, as the pilgrim approaches the mountain, she will notice that the surrounding areas start to have religiously significant toponyms, then she will find a grand walled temple at the base of the mountain, a certain kind of gate, a tablet describing the mountain as the “first under heaven,” streams in which the pilgrim must purify himself, a mid-mountain temple associated with a cave... and so on. See Thomas Hahn, “The Standard Taoist Mountain and Related Features of Religious Geography,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 4 (1988): 145, 148-150.

survive, and that pilgrimage guides are serving a somewhat different function.

Examples of Pilgrimage Guides

While it is difficult to make any selections be totally representative,⁴⁵⁰ I have decided to give brief descriptions of two pilgrimage guides in order to give a sense of their structure and content. One is a well-known guide about the famous mountain of Tsari and one is a lesser-known guide about a smaller local site that nonetheless claims to encompass all the blessings of Tsari. The goal here is to give a sense of the overall composition of pilgrimage guides, and to demonstrate that different guides—while each having somewhat different emphases and particular features—utilize recognizably similar strategies for describing the pilgrimage place.

Probably one of the most well-known pilgrimage guides to modern academics, owing to the fact that one of its chapters was translated by Toni Huber,⁴⁵¹ is the *White Lotus of Good Explanation: Showing the Wonders of the Great Holy Place of Tsaritra* by Pema Karpo (1527-1592), the fourth head of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. Written between 1570 and 1575, the guide is relatively long for the genre at sixty-seven folio sides.⁴⁵² It seems to have been written by compiling elements of previous guides along with new writing by Pema Karpo, and seems to have been relatively widely read by pilgrims to Tsari.⁴⁵³ The guide contains five chapters: the first describes Tsari as the single basis (*gzhi*) from which multiple wondrous appearances arise,

450. For other examples, see other translated pilgrimage guides. For example, see Katia Buffetrille, “The Blue Lake of Amdo and Its Island: Legends and Pilgrimage Guide,” or Toni Huber, “A Guide to the La-Phyi *Mandala*.”

451. Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 62-71.

452. Ibid, 239-40. “Despite an often clipped colloquial style, Pema Karpo was a gifted author. His little guide to Tsari, written around 1570-75, is a classic example of the later “synthetic” style of longer Tibetan pilgrimage guidebooks. Based on the skeleton of his verse eulogy... it is a pastiche of prayer, polemic, cosmology, esoteric geography, anecdote, narrative history, and more, some from his own hand but much of it cut and pasted from earlier sources.”

453. Ibid., 60.

the second cites various Buddhist tantras describing Tsari and its significance for tantric initiates, and the third describes various particular features at Tsari, including lakes, valleys, hills, and caves, as well as their significance in terms of correspondence to religious concepts, being the residence of *dakinis*, having the power to give *siddhis*, miraculous happenings, or images located there. The fourth chapter then describes the how the mountain was “opened” to general pilgrimage by various advanced spiritual masters, and of the challenges they faced in doing so. Finally, the fifth chapter gives “Signs of Progressing on the Stages of the Path,” meaning that it gives instructions about the mindset with which pilgrims should approach Tsari, and describes in stages what happens to pilgrims at Tsari in terms of their increasing merit and changed perception—with each circumambulation, the mountain looks progressively different to them. Also contained in this section is Pema Karpo’s response to Sakya Paṇḍita’s rejection of pilgrimage to Tsari, that I explored in Chapter one, indicating that the debate about the legitimacy of pilgrimage to Kailash and Tsari was not a matter known only to elite scholars, but was addressed in popular pilgrimage guide texts, as well.

At the other end of the spectrum in terms of the fame of the author and site is the *Ocean of Clouds Register: The Pilgrimage Guide to Drak Karpo*.⁴⁵⁴ Drak Karpo, located in modern-day Paro, Bhutan, is considered to be a place where Padmasambhava meditated. The text is shorter than the Pema Karpo Tsari guide at only sixteen folio sides, has no colophon, and is unsigned, so it is difficult to know when and where it was written. That said, it provides a good example of the ways how what might seem to be minor holy sites are praised as being just as important and

454. Tib. “Brag dkar po’i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho’i sprin phung.” Scans of block print can be found in “Brag dkar po’i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho’i sprin phung,” in *Sras mkhar dgu thog sogs bod kyi gnas yig khag cig*, 123-38. Computer-input version can be found in Dge ‘dun chos ‘phel, ed., *Gnas yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 304-315 and Tshe ring dpal ‘byor, ed., *Bod kyi gnas yig bdams bsgrigs* (Lhasa: bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2012), 373-82. My numbering will follow the *Bod kyi gnas yig bdams bsgrigs* pagination.

wondrous as holy places like Tsari. The Drak Karpo text lacks the explicit organization into sections that the Pema Karpo Tsari guide offers, but does have a clear implicit structure. It begins by stating the need for the composition of a pilgrimage guide; namely, that people are terrible at seeing the wonders in front of them. Even if the Buddha walked in front of them, the text suggests, they would just see a wandering beggar. As such, people need their delusions removed so they will be motivated to take up practice. And although the author humbly states at the outset that he knows nothing of composition—a claim undermined by his elegantly written verses—he wants to tell of the deeds Padmasambhava did at Drak Karpo and the traces he left there. The text then proceeds into a description of the good qualities of the holy place. In general, Drak Karpo has all of the good qualities of Kailash, Tsari, and Lapchi put together, and will yield good results if pilgrims pray, prostrate, or make offerings there. The text then adopts the perspective of a pilgrim walking through the site and describes specific features as they are progressively seen, as well as the images, marks, and associations with spiritual masters at each feature. Sometimes it prescribes particular activities to do at the different features. The text finishes by exhorting people to undertake pilgrimage and transform their minds. He states that those with deluded vision can look upon even great sites like Tsari and just see rocks, so pilgrims should confess impure sight and cultivate confidence in scriptures and the testimony of masters.

Although these texts are quite different in certain respects, they also share key similarities that are representative of the genre as a whole, and which justify reading them together. To start with the differences, these texts discuss different sorts of holy places. Tsari is one of the most well-known pilgrimage place in Tibet, and would likely have been known to Tibetans even from far-away places. It is reputed to be one of the three major sites associated with Cakrasaṃvara, has long associations with tantric pilgrimage, and a well-documented tradition of high-ranking

adepts going there. By contrast, Drak Karpo seems to have been much more of a regional pilgrimage site located on the outskirts of the Tibetan cultural area. It does have connections to the famous master Padmasambhava, but it does not seem to have been particularly well-known across Tibet. The two pilgrimage texts reflect this difference in fame and audience, with Pema Karpo's text being made into block prints, having a longer and more intricate structure, and seeming to be have a potentially much larger audience, while the Drak Karpo text exists only in manuscript form and is much shorter. Finally, Pema Karpo's text, as befits its longer length, goes into much greater detail on a number of aspects, and also addresses certain topics that the Drak Karpo text does not mention at all. For instance, Pema Karpo's text spends much more time recounting stories about how the pilgrimage site was "opened" for general pilgrimage, whereas the Drak Karpo text mentions Padmasambhava's activities relatively briefly, Pema Karpo is more explicitly philosophical in that he discusses Tsari as the single basis (*gzhi*) from which various appearances arise, whereas the Drak Karpo text simply describes the various appearances at the site, and Pema Karpo also explicitly addresses critics of pilgrimage such as Sakya Paṇḍita, whereas the Drak Karpo text does not address possible doubters of the site except in passing.

Nevertheless, the texts share key structural and rhetorical aspects that support the notion of them pursuing similar projects of describing the pilgrimage site as wondrous, of pointing out the various features pilgrims will see when they visit the site, and of effecting a certain kind of pilgrimage experience. In this respect, they both deal with seeing and with the training of perception. Despite the differences in their respective pilgrimage sites and audiences, both describe a need for a pilgrimage guide to make clear to pilgrims the features of the site that they will otherwise miss. They thus suggest that key features of the pilgrimage site, including stories about its history, traces that have been left there, and certain wondrous phenomena are *hidden* to

the ordinary pilgrim. Both suggest that the pilgrimage site in its true wonder is only visible to highly realized masters, but both purport to help pilgrims see at least some of the hidden wonders. The reasons they give for why the pilgrimage place is special are similar—both Tsari and Drak Karpo were the sites where past masters practiced, and have visible traces of those masters’ activities, “self-arisen” phenomena, and beautiful natural features. Both texts progressively describe the various things that the pilgrim will see when he or she visits the site. And finally, both sites yield great merit and blessings to those who practice there. The Drak Karpo guide even emphasizes that Drak Karpo, if seen correctly, looks like Tsari and encompasses the structure and blessings of the three major holy sites of Kailash, Tsari, and Lapchi.⁴⁵⁵ All of this shows that both texts engage in some of the same textual practices that I argue are part of a project of shaping how audiences see and experience the pilgrimage site.

Theoretical Approaches: How Language Works to Shape Vision

I have now made several references to the idea that pilgrimage guide texts “shape” audiences and the way they see and experience the pilgrimage place. But how does this happen? It is not enough, I would suggest, to say that pilgrims view certain places as special or as sacred simply because some text tells them to do so. Rather, if this idea that pilgrimage guides are attempting to shape pilgrims’ vision is correct—and I believe that it is—we might try to identify the particular mechanism through which this process occurs, and to look for nature of the structures—human persons, vision, literature, culture—that allow for it.

In particular, I see these pilgrimage texts as not merely documenting pilgrimage practices, but as actively *working* on audiences to change the way in which they see the

455. *E ma ho/ ngo mtshar che ba'i gnas/ stod la bltas na gangs dkar ti se 'dra/ smad la bltas na tsa ri (tsA) gong 'dra/ bar la bltas na la phyi chu bar 'dra/ gangs chen gsum gyi bkod pa tshang.* “Brag dkar po'i gnas yig,” 375.

pilgrimage place.⁴⁵⁶ Such changes are possible because—as both theorists of place and space and Buddhist philosophy of perception argue—humans do not have access to the bare physical particulars of a place.⁴⁵⁷ Instead, what they experience is a complex mixture of ideologies, cultures, habits, and constructed physical spaces.⁴⁵⁸ Pilgrimage guides, insofar as they contribute to this ideological-cultural mode of place, shape how pilgrims experience that place. This does not necessarily mean that pilgrimage guides and other forms of cultural discourse *determine* how pilgrims see or experience a place, but rather that we should not assume that people experience the physical world prior to or separate from culturally-inflected *ideas* about the place.

Additionally, I understand the language of pilgrimage guides to follow the logic of Ricoeur's analysis of metaphors in that it *figures* the pilgrimage place. In his book *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur develops an account of how metaphors train readers in "seeing-as."⁴⁵⁹ He considers the metaphor "Achilles is a lion," and asks what it would mean to say that this metaphor is *true*. He rejects the idea that the truth of metaphor should be evaluated in ontological terms (is Achilles a lion or is he not?), and instead suggests that the truth of metaphor is phenomenological. When exposed to the metaphor "Achilles is a lion," the reader first tries to make sense of it in literal terms and fails. However, she continues trying to make sense of the statement, which opens up the realm of metaphorical truth. The reader arrives at the metaphorical

456. An extended discussion of this issue can be found in the introduction. See also Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 130.

457. See, for example, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

458. Lefebvre approaches the question of how people construct and experience place by outlining three modes of place that form an ever-shifting trialectic: perceived space (*le perçu*), conceived space (*le conçu*), and lived space (*le vécu*). What humans experience is a blend of all three.

459. This idea of "seeing as" is drawn from Gestalt psychology, and describes the fact that humans do not see the world in terms of discrete particulars or color fields, and then later interpret that as particular objects out in the world, but rather that they are always seeing the world *as* something. Seeing as, in this view, is not merely passive seeing, but rather "it is an experience and an act at one and the same time." Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2003), 213.

truth of the statement “Achilles is a lion” when she brackets the literal truth of the statement and learns to see Achilles *as* a lion. In so doing, she sees Achilles both as the same as a lion, which may involve seeing Achilles’ courage, pride, tawnniness, or ferocity, and as not the same as a lion. That is, the reader does not think that Achilles *really is* a lion. Ricoeur argues that the power of metaphorical truth is that, during this phenomenological experience of seeing-as, Achilles both is and is not a lion. The metaphor plays with the tension between those statements, and thus preserves the “is not” within the “is.”⁴⁶⁰ The reader thus learns to see Achilles in a new way. Again, this does mean that she no longer sees Achilles as a man, but rather that her seeing has been enriched such that she can see Achilles both as a lion and as a man, even though those two statements seem to be opposed to one another.

Building on his analysis of this metaphor, Ricoeur argues that poetic language affects readers by cultivating the ability to see the world differently. I refer to this process as *figuration*. Using this language, the metaphor “Achilles is a lion” *figures* Achilles. The text does not make Achilles into a lion, per se, but through engagement with a text in which this metaphor occurs, a reader may find a new world opening up before her in which she sees Achilles as a lion.

Ricoeur directly relates this kind of thinking to religious texts in an essay entitled “Naming God,” in which he argues that biblical texts function in a way analogous to the individual metaphor, but in an expanded and potentially even more meaningful way.⁴⁶¹ Instead of saying “Achilles is a lion,” biblical texts say “God is...XYZ.” It is in that sense that Ricoeur describes biblical texts as *naming* God. Ricoeur is careful to say that religious language cannot be fully reduced to poetic language, but does suggest that they make use of the same figurative

460. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 213.

461. Paul Ricoeur, “Naming God,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 217–35.

capacity of metaphors. This is true even when there are no identifiable individual metaphors. Rather, the text as a whole makes a predication about the nature of God—it breaks with everyday understandings, discloses a new world to the reader, and invites the reader to imagine that kind of world.

We might then think of these pilgrimage guide texts as figuring the pilgrimage place in a similar way to how these biblical texts figure or “name” God. That is, in describing the pilgrimage site in a particular way, pilgrimage guides make a predication about the site that breaks with ordinary ways of seeing, discloses a way of seeing, and invites the pilgrim to imagine seeing the site in that way. This does not necessarily mean that the pilgrim sees the site exactly in the way that the pilgrimage guide describes any more than the reader who encounters the metaphor “Achilles is a lion” thinks that Achilles is a big cat, but figuration does meaningfully transform their perception of the place. To use Ricoeur’s language of “seeing-as,” the pilgrim learns to see the pilgrimage place *as* a mandala.

I refer to this state of seeing the holy mountain both in way that it is seen in ordinary perception and in the wondrous way the text describes it as “co-seeing.” For Ricoeur, we should remember, the seeing-as brought on by metaphor is a phenomenological experience that preserves both the “is” and “is not” (i.e., Achilles is a lion and Achilles is not a lion) and holds them together. Because literature in the philosophy of perception understands “seeing-as” in a very different way than Ricoeur does, I have avoided directly adopting Ricoeur’s terms. Co-seeing, as I understand it, is a phenomenological state involving seeing a single object in two different ways at once. Metaphor is not the only way to bring about co-seeing—indeed, in the next chapter we will explore a whole host of practices of seeing that I argue cultivate co-seeing—but it is a particularly potent tool for generating this co-seeing, and it is one of the ways

in which pilgrimage guides reshape pilgrims' perception of the holy place.

Recurring Features of Pilgrimage Guides

How Texts Draw the Eye

And then, [we arrived at] that mansion palace of Cakrasaṃvara called Gangkar Tise [Kailash], praised by siddhas, the dwelling place of 500 arhats. There was no obscuring cover of clouds or darkness. I worshipped and recited the guru *sādhana* for Jetsun Milarepa and so saw his face. I thought, “what good karmic connections!” and immediately prostrated three times in a state of joy. I stayed at the edge of the lake that night.⁴⁶²

—Tsongpon Khatag Zamyak, *A Pilgrim's Diary: Tibet, Nepal, and India 1944-1956*

It is time to dig into the particular features by which these guides construct the sacred site so as to cultivate experiences like the one above. The rest of this chapter will thus consist of selections from various pilgrimage guides—including but not limited to the Tsari and Drak Karpo texts discussed above—that identify common tropes that pilgrimage guides use to characterize the site. Throughout, I will ask how these recurring features change the way pilgrims might experience the pilgrimage place.

I suggest that they do so via three related modes: describing the site as wondrous, inviting the pilgrim to reflect upon and interpret what he or she sees at the site, and using metaphor to figure the pilgrimage place.

First, pilgrimage guides describe the site as beautiful, as bearing visible marks of extra-human forces, and as ultimately being a mandala. Such descriptions do more than merely promote the site as being wonderful, but actively *shape* pilgrims' experience of the site itself by

462. *Gnyis pa thub pas bsngags pa'i gangs dkar ti se zhes 'khor lo bde mchog gi pho brang gzhal yas khang/ dgra bcom pa lnga brgya yi bzhugs gnas/ sprin dang nag sogs kyis sgrib g.yog med pa de/ rje btsun mi la'i bla sgrub kha 'don bya skyabs mchod pa'i 'go nas zhal mjal bas/ rten 'brel legs snyam de ma thag phyag gsum btsal yid spro ba'i ngang de dgong mtsho 'gram der zhag 'dug byas.* Tsongpon Khatag Zamyak, *A Pilgrim's Diary*, 166.

constructing what Lefebvre terms *le conçu*, that is, the conceived or imagined mode of space. Insofar as pilgrims encountering the lived space of the pilgrimage place experience a complex blend of the perceived, physical space and the conceived, imagined space, pilgrimage guides' construction of a wondrous imagining of the space affects how pilgrims experience that space.

Second, these devices invite the active participation of the audience. That is, guides do not merely tell pilgrims about the various sights at the pilgrimage place, but ask them to reflect upon how *they* see the site and to interpret what it means. This is made explicit in devices that tell the pilgrim "If you see X, it means Y, but if you see A, it means B," but is also implicit throughout. Even third-person descriptions such as "there is a clear self-arisen image of a lotus on the rock," are presented in an overall context that highlights how different sorts of beings see a single object differently, and so the pilgrim is implicitly led to reflect on whether and how he or she sees the feature described. The pilgrim is as such not a passive spectator, but recruited to be an active participant in making meaning by being asked to constantly interpret what he or she is seeing.

Third, even as the guides suggest that the true wonders of the pilgrimage site are hidden from the ordinary pilgrim's eyes, they assert that the site is actually a mandala. In a similar way to how the metaphor "Achilles is a lion" works on the reader of poetry to teach them to see Achilles *as* a lion, the assertion "the pilgrimage site is a mandala" works on the pilgrim to train them to see the pilgrimage site *as* a mandala. I suggest that this, in combination with drawing the pilgrim in and describing the wondrous features of the site, thus *figures* the site in such a way as to create the conditions for powerful pilgrimage experiences and ultimately to cultivate the pilgrim's faith in the site. These proposals will be unpacked further, but let us first introduce selections from pilgrimage guides in order to anchor any discussion in concrete examples.

Interpreting Landscape Features as Signs

When I, an aimless wandering beggar,
arrived here at this holy place of *Nya*,
This sort of wondrous vision appeared in my mind,
and I understood this as a holy place which teaches the dharma of signs...⁴⁶³

The mountain in front which is like a heap of treasure
is a sign of the complete provision of necessities.
These grasses adorned with forests
are a sign of spontaneously arising experiences.
The mountain behind with a great cave shelter
is a sign of the lama's blessings.
—*Guide to Sekhar Guthog*⁴⁶⁴

Rising high a hundred-fold above,
The mandala of lands around its base,
A sign leading on to untainted freedom,
Those who wander throughout their lives.

A mountain of five lovely jeweled peaks,
Blazing with splendor that chases the midnight sky,
A sign that the work of five wisdoms,
Is protecting beings without end.

On turquoise meadows and on glittering fields,
Are wildflowers, one hundred different hues,
A sign that virtue, goodness deep and certain,
Will give birth to joy in each thinking person.
—Chankya Rolpé Dorje, *Praise of the Holy Place upon Seeing Five-Peaked Mountain*⁴⁶⁵

463. This term *brda chos* is not particularly common, but reading them together is supported by the fact that the meter is 1+2+2+2+1.

464. *Nga brya bral sprang po rgyal khams pa/ gnya' gnya'i gnas su 'dir slebs pa'i tshe/ yid ngo mtshar snang ba 'di ltar shar/ 'di brda chos ston pa'i gnas su go/...mdun na rin chen spungs 'dra'i ri/ dgos rgyu rang la tshang ba'i brda/ rtsi shing nags kyis brgyan pa 'di/ nyams myong shugs kyis 'byung ba'i brda/ rgyab ri brag skyibs che ba ni/ bla ma byin gyis rlob pa'i brda.* “Sras mkhar dgu thog gtsug lag khang sogs kyi gnas yig,” 49. Note that the author seems to be quoting/paraphrasing Dpa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba's song about the site here.

465. *Phyi gnas kyi 'og gzhi dkyil 'khor kun / phyogs gzhan las rgyar phrag du mas mtho / de srid par 'khyams pa'i skye bo'i tshogs / zag med kyi thar par 'dren pa'i brda / ri rin chen mtshar sdug lhun po lnga / dgung mkha' la bsnyegs 'dra gzi byin 'bar / de ye shes lnga yi 'phrin las kyis / mtha' yas pa'i 'gro ba skyob pa'i brda / g.yu'i spang*

Let us begin with the case of pilgrimage guides pointing out features of the natural landscape and interpreting them as signs (*brda*) or symbols (*mtshon*) of some deeper message about the dharma working through the site. Mountains and wildflowers, which might otherwise seem to the pilgrim like pretty but otherwise neutral features of the landscape around the holy place, are revealed to be full of hidden meaning. Signs play an important role in Tibetan culture, and the ability to interpret such signs is the mark of advanced religious practitioners such as treasure finders.⁴⁶⁶ By describing and interpreting these signs, the text suggests that the pilgrimage place is a particularly potent area that gives rise to all sorts of potentially meaningful signs.

Even more importantly, by pointing out signs and interpreting them, the guide implies that such signs exist in a broader semiotic system in which the pilgrimage site is reaching out to pilgrims in order to teach them about the dharma. The sheer abundance of features identified and interpreted as signs suggests to the pilgrim that there are possibly more signs to be interpreted at the site than are included in the guide itself, and leads pilgrims to think about what kind of deeper meaning might underlie the various sights they encounter.

Inviting Pilgrims to Interpret Their Own Visual Experiences

In the neck of the mountain is a great banner of light that appears by itself. As it changes color due to the sustaining power and total presence of the Awakened Ones of the three times, and you can see this right away, this is a sign that karmic obscurations are decreasing. If you are not yet able to perceive these phenomena, this is a sign that there are still some karmic and emotional afflictions. It is important to pay respect and recite the hundred syllables (mantra) and so on. Also, if you see white, this is a sign that you will achieve a peaceful karma, a long life, free of illness. Later you will be born in the Pure Land. If you see yellow, you will realize a very expansive karma with much merit and a very comfortable lifestyle. If you see red, you will have great power. If you see

ljongs ne'u gsing bkra ba la / tshon sna brgyas phye ba'i me tog rgod / mngon mtho dang nges legs yon tan gyis / yid can kun spro ba bskyed pa'i brda. Translation by Schaeffer, "Tibetan Poetry on Wutai Shan," 215-42.

466. For discussion, see Janet Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition."

green or dark (black) mantras this is a sign of intense karma.

—Minyak Gonpo, *The Seed of Devotion: A Pilgrim's Guide to Gangkar with a Synopsis of Benefits Found at Sacred Sites*⁴⁶⁷

If you see the world as impure and lack faith and devotion, you will ever and always see the essence of rocks. Although “Tsari” is said, you see Shingrong Lungtong. Although “Kailash” is said, you see a heap of snow. Although “Lapchi” is said, it seems to be of the nature of water. Even for the four great lakes, when you see them, they are just lakes.

—*Guide to Drak Karpo*⁴⁶⁸

A different but related recurring feature of pilgrimage guide texts is asking pilgrims to interpret what they see at the pilgrimage site. As in the situations above, the underlying idea is that various visible phenomena are signs pointing to some deeper unseen meaning. But whereas in the case of explicitly interpreting external landscape features as signs, in this case the signs to be interpreted are phenomenological encounters between the place and the pilgrim. In the former case, the signs carry the same meaning for all pilgrims, but in the latter, the sign to be interpreted is what appears to the individual pilgrim. Thus the text reaches out to the pilgrim and directs them to reflect upon their own phenomenological experience, leading them to become an active participant in the play of signs and their interpretation. Each visible experience becomes a sign for some deeper and less readily visible state, such as the individual's karma or future state. In directing the pilgrim to interpret his own visual experiences, the text thus works upon the pilgrim by causing him to reflect upon his own perception and the way that it does not give transparent access to the external world. Rather, what the pilgrim experiences in perception is dependent on various factors that lie outside the immediate control of the pilgrim.

Insofar as this is framed in the second person and tailored to individual perspectives, it is

467. Translation by S. Brinson Aldridge, “The Seed of Devotion: A Pilgrim's Guide to Gangkar with a Synopsis of Benefits Found at Sacred Sites,” in *The Incarnation from White Glacier Mountain: A Biography of Gangkar Rinpoche* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2008), 89.

468. *Rang snang ma dag dad mos med gyur na/ kun nas kun kyang sa rdo'i rang bzhin mthong/ tsa ri zhes kyang shing rong lung stong mthong/ ti ser gsung yang kha ba phung zhig mthong/ la phyi zer yang/ chu yi rang bzhin 'dra/ mtsho chen bzhi yang mjal tshe de rang tsam.* “Brag dkar po'i gnas yig bkod pa rgya mtsho'i sprin phung,” 380.

somewhat different than general third person descriptions of the site that are given independent of the pilgrim's perceptions. Of course, even those third person descriptions exist in a framework that emphasizes that different sorts of beings will see the site differently, so there is always an implicit comparison with the perspective of the individual pilgrim (and thus between the pilgrim's level of accomplishment and that of the ideal viewer of the site). Nevertheless, there is an important difference between a guide saying "this site is a mandala" and "if you see this site as a mandala, it means you have good karma." The latter explicitly invokes the perception of the pilgrim, calling on them to reflect on what they see and what it means. The text thus actively recruits the pilgrim to see herself as in some sense *about her* and not merely about the place.

Although this trope centers upon individual perception and reflection, it is important to remind ourselves to not fall into the trap of interpreting pilgrimage in solely individualistic terms. Many scholars of Tibetan pilgrimage have pointed out that Tibetan pilgrimages are generally social affairs, with groups of pilgrims from a particular village or family joining together for a journey, in which pilgrims generally aim to accumulate merit and rejoice in the accomplishments of advanced practitioners rather than cultivate their own individual religious experiences. Nevertheless, while we must be careful not to overemphasize the individual perspective, neither should we abandon it entirely, for it can help us understand how these pilgrimage texts construct a certain kind of pilgrimage experience and contribute to the possibility of seeing the world differently.

Geomancy

From the perspective of the geomancy (*sa dpyad*) of this holy place [it is like this:] The mountain behind is like a lion jumping upwards. The mountain in front is like an elephant entering into a manger. The eastern mountain is like a chieftain in agreement. The western mountain is like eight two-layered white silk curtains. All the springs and pools

are as if lifting up offering water. All the streams five off a melodious burbling sound, and drops of water bubbles pop languidly like white flowers. The mountain in front is adorned with forests and brightened by flowers. The grassy hills are like a turquoise mandala, shining with clusters of different flowers. Groups of birds make pleasing sounds, and various animals wander carefree. In brief, all kinds of good signs of a full geomantic analysis, which are mentioned in all of the sutras and tantras, are found here.
—*Guide to Sekhar Guthog*⁴⁶⁹

The mountain behind that field was surrounded by forest in the manner of Mount Sumeru, and mountain crags in front [of the field] had the aspect of a wish-granting jewel. To the east, the water and the unending chain of snowy mountains were like a *brag zam stag rgya bo* (?). To the south, the central river had the aspect of a turquoise thunder dragon. The red cliffs of the west... Furthermore, all the mountains and forests and water in that plain seemed to be bowing and praising. The geomancy was very auspicious and it had many wonderful auspicious signs. If you look from the east, the plain has a round shape. If you look from the south, it is square. If you look from the west, it is crescent-shaped. If you look from the north, it is triangular. It is established as the unobstructed four activities. If you practice towards enlightenment or practice the tantric activities such as cutting off the enemies and obstructions of the ten spheres in other places, it will go slowly. But if you practice at Gyangme, it will be accomplished swiftly! Gyangme is wondrous in that and other ways.
—Chökyi Drakpa, *Guide to Gyangme*⁴⁷⁰

In both of these examples, the text of the pilgrimage guide systematically describes the topography of the surrounding area as it appears to a person standing at the sacred place, noting the way that the various features of the landscape resemble the shapes of animals or geometric

469. *Gnas 'di'i sa dpyad kyi dbang du byas na/ rgyab ri seng ge gnam du mchongs pa lta bu/ mdun ri glang chen bres su zhugs pa lta bu/ shar ri gtso bo gros su mthun pa lta bu/ nub ri dar dkar gyi yol ba nyis rim brgyad pa lta bu/ chu mig lteng ka thams cad mchod yon bsgreng ba lta bu/ 'bab chu thams cad lhung lhung snyan pa'i sgra 'byin zhing/ chu thigs zil ba me tog dkar po'i rnam pa lang long du 'thor ba/ mdun ri nags kyi brgyan par me tog bkra zhing/ spang ri g.yu'i maNDala lta bur me tog sna tshogs kyi tshom bu bkra ba/ 'dab chags bya tshogs snyan pa'i skad 'byin zhing/ ri dwags sna tshogs bag yangs su rgyu ba sogs mdor mdo rgyud thams cad nas gsungs pa'i sa dpyad thams cad legs pa'i mtshan nyid ji snyed bas yongs su 'byor zhing.* Author unknown, “Sras mkhar dgu thog gtsug lag khang sogs kyi gnas yig,” in *Gnas yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 46-7.

470. *Gnas de'i srung ma rnams dbyes pa'i tshul du kha char mang du byung zhing thang de'i rgyab ri nags kyi bskor ba ri rgyal blta na sdug gi tshul dang/ mdun ri brag nor bu dgos 'dod stsol ba'i tshul can/ chu dang gangs rgyud rgyun mi chad pa shar du brag zam stag rgya bo'i tshul lta bu/ lhor gzhung chu g.yu 'brug sngon mo'i tshul can/ nub kyi gad pa dmar po... gzhan yang thang de la ri dang nags dang chu thams cad kyang 'dud cing bstod pa ltar yod pa/ sa'i dpyad kyang shin tu bkra shis shing ya mtshan gyi dge ltas du ma dang ldan pa/ thang de'i dbyibs kyang shar nas bltas na zlum zhing/ lho nas bltas na gru bzhi pa/ nub nas bltas na zla gam/ byang nas bltas na gru gsum pa'i dbyibs kho nar yod pas las bzhi'i phrin las kyang thogs med du 'grub cing/ gang dag byang chub sgrub pa dang zhing bcu'i dgra bgegs tshar gcod pa sogs kyi phrin las gang sgrub kyang/ gnas gzhan du bsgrub na bul bul 'dra yang gnas der bsgrub na myur du 'grub par 'gyur pa sogs ya mtshan du ma dang ldan zhing.* Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*, 467-8.

shapes. In the first example, the significance of such resemblances is merely implied, but in the second example, these resemblances are tied to the four types of ritual activity, and used to suggest that rituals performed at that place are accomplished especially swiftly. Scholars have pointed to the importance of geomantic analysis, or *saché*, literally meaning “analyzing the earth,”⁴⁷¹ in Tibetan culture.⁴⁷² Such geomantic analyses, which often focus on how certain mountains or rock formations look (for instance, like a scorpion, or a half moon, or various other animal or geometric shapes) from the perspective of someone standing at the site, reveal the potent forces already present in the landscape, and as such give insight into whether the site is conducive to Buddhist practice or whether it is besieged by autochthonous demonic forces that would hinder such practice. Underlying this analysis is a logic of visual resemblance in which outer forms are scrutinized on the assumption that they correspond to the underlying qualities of the area. Again, the guide is building up the imagined mode of the space by describing the land as full of meaning that can be interpreted by the qualified viewer.

“Self-arisen” Phenomena

There, there are the eight self-arisen forms and a self-arisen *stūpa* made from precious gems. There is a lake called Churi Munta. Southwest of that, there are wondrous images of worldly gods.

—Pema Karpo, *Guide to Tsari*⁴⁷³

471. Tib. *sa dpyad*. One also sees *byung rtsis*, what Mills calls “elemental calculus.” See Mills, “Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness,” 39.

472. For more on geomancy see Martin A. Mills, “Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness: Royal Buddhist Geomancy in the Srong btsan sgam po Mythology,” in *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 3 (2007): 1–47 and the article to which it responds, namely Janet Gyatso, “Down with the Demoness.” See also Elizabeth Stutchbury, “Perceptions of Landscape in Karzha: “Sacred” Geography and the Tibetan System of “Geomancy,”” in *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Toni Huber (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2007).

473. *De na rang byung mchod rten rin po che las grub pa dang/ ki'u rim brgyad kyi gzugs rang byung yod cing/ chu ri munta zhes pa'i mtsho/ de'i lho nub na 'jig rten pa'i lha'o rten ngo mtshar can*. Pad+ma dkar po, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad*, 236.

There is also a treasure of seed syllables. There are many images of *dakinis* of the four families. There are many cliffs of the lords of the three families. Inside the opening of the well of Yama, there is the trunk of a wish fulfilling tree. There is a flowing river of ambrosia. There is a self-arisen stone mandala. There is a self-arisen *vajrakilaya*.

—*Guide to Drak Karpo*⁴⁷⁴

Another recurring feature that plays on the idea of the pilgrimage place as an especially potent and blessed place is the description of “self-arisen” (*rang byon*) images. Such features, which might also be translated as could easily be translated as “naturally formed” or “spontaneously arisen,” are miraculous and worthy of the pilgrim’s attention because they are not the product of human fabrication and are instead a natural bubbling-up of the site’s power. While objects made by artists and craftsmen are of course highly valued in Tibet, human-made objects bear the marks of effort and intentionality, qualities that are often denigrated in comparison to qualities of spontaneity and non-conceptuality. Self-arisen objects, by contrast, recall the self-arisen or intrinsic wisdom (*rang byung ye shes*) valorized in tantric philosophy, and indicate a place where the non-conceptual and ever-creative ground underlying reality has made itself visible in the world of ordinary perception.

Incidentally, these passages also demonstrate the style in which pilgrimage guides describe the various features of the site. These selections are taken from sections of pilgrimage guides in which the guide simply starts to list the important features of a particular site in a way that might strike the modern eye as boring and repetitive. The guide gives little information about each particular feature and only the most general information in order to locate it. Rather than focusing on any one of these features at length, the guide effectively overwhelms the pilgrim by the sheer number of important sites, each of which serves as a visible sign for the

474. 'Bru yi gter kha gcig kyang yod/ rigs bzhi mkha' 'gro'i sku mang yod/ rigs gsum mgon po'i brag mang yod/ gzhi rje'i dong kha'i ma'i nang du/ dpag bsam shing gi sdong po yod/ bdud rtsi'i chu rgyun 'bab pa yod/ rdo yi maNDala rang byon yod/ rdo rje phur pa rang byon yod/ ang khang na. “Brag dkar po'i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho'i sprin phung,” 379.

invisible qualities of the site.

Already, we are starting to see a theme running through many of these recurring features: the interplay of the visible and the invisible. At times, the pilgrimage guide points to something that the pilgrim can plainly see, whether it is various landscape features or rocks with “self-arisen” images, and is told, whether explicitly or implicitly, that the visible object is a sign of some invisible underlying meaning about the site’s potency. At the same time, the guide does not merely tell pilgrims what to look at and what it means, but reaches out to the pilgrim and asks them to consider their own perceptual experience, and then to interpret it as a sign of some otherwise invisible truth. This play of visible and invisible, as well as of superficial appearance and underlying meaning, creates a kind of depth metaphor about the site, suggesting to pilgrims that the real wonders of the pilgrimage site are not immediately visible on the surface.

Inner, Outer, and Secret

Emaho! Wondrous pure gnas!
Outwardly, it’s like a *tsitta*⁴⁷⁵
Inwardly, it’s the realm of Pema Kō⁴⁷⁶
Secretly, it’s the realm of Manifest Joy⁴⁷⁷
—Guide to Drak Karpo⁴⁷⁸

Homage to Vajra Dakini! This is the best of holy places, glorious outside, inside, and in secret.

—Chödrak Yeshe, *Praises to Tsari*⁴⁷⁹

475. Tsitta, the Tibetan transliteration of the Sanskrit *citta*, is imagined as an octahedronal palace. See Herbert V. Guenther, *Meditation Differently: Phenomenological-psychological Aspects of Tibetan Buddhist (Mahāmudrā and Snying-thig) Practices from Original Tibetan Sources* (Delhi: Motilal Benarsidass Publishers, 1992), 84.

476. Hidden land (*sbas yul*) associated with Padmasambhava that is considered a place of refuge in turbulent times.

477. Skt. *Abhirati*, the name of the buddha field in the east presided over by Akṣobhya.

478. *E ma ho/ gnas dam pa ngo mtshar can/ phyi ltar tsitta'i dbyings dang 'dra/ nang ltar padma 'od kyi zhing/ gsang ba ltar na mngon dga'i zhing*. “Brag dkar po'i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho'i sprin phung,” 375.

479. *Na mo badzra dA ka Da ki nI ye/ dpal ldan phyi nang gsang ba mchog gi gnas*. Chos grags Ye shes, “Dpal tsa ri tra la sogs pa'i gnas chen rnams la bstod pa,” 244.

This depth metaphor is further developed when pilgrimage guides describe places in terms of the framework of “outer, inner, and secret.” This hermeneutic is fairly common to Tibetan religion, and it is common to see this framework to describe outer, inner, and secret teachings; outer, inner, and secret offerings; and so on. In these cases, the category of “outer” is used to describe things that are for the general public, whereas that which is “secret” is the more essential or true version that is reserved for the select few. It is striking in the pilgrimage context, however, insofar as the outer, inner, and secret aspects of the pilgrimage place describe how it exists in relation to various types of perception. Those with coarse perception will see the outer aspect, those with more refined perception will see the inner aspect, and those with perfected perception will see the secret aspect of the pilgrimage site. The lower perceptions are not wrong, exactly, but they are still in some sense not as good as the perfected perception of advanced beings. In ranking certain teachings or certain appearances according to the scale of outward, inward, and secret, the goal is to move past the external and perhaps somewhat superficial appearance and get to the good stuff that is closer to its real nature. As such, though most pilgrims will only be able to perceive the outward dimension of the pilgrimage place, they are nonetheless made aware that it will appear differently to someone with the capacities to see the deeper, and by implication better or even more real, existence of the pilgrimage place. This multi-perspectivalism is built into the text itself, and leads pilgrims to place their own visual experience of the site in terms of a broader context of varying levels of perception.

Supernatural Beings

It is a gathering place for heroes and *dakinis*! It is a palace of Cakrasaṃvara. It is a dwelling place of the dharma protectors. It is an abode of the field protector! It is a place where yogis dawn realizations! This sort of holy place is especially eminent—staying

here turns curses to dharma!
—Chödrak Yeshe, *Praises to Tsari*⁴⁸⁰

Furthermore, all the mountains and rocks of this holy place of Gyangme are the essence of the gods and goddesses, and all the water exists as the pure roar of recitation of profound secret mantras.
—Chökyi Drakpa, *Pilgrimage Guide to Gyangme*⁴⁸¹

Along with making pilgrims aware that there are many ways to see the pilgrimage site, pilgrimage guides depict sacred sites as populated by the sorts of beings who might be able to see the pilgrimage place as it truly is, such as *dakinis*, *nagas*, dharma protectors, and gods. Although these beings do not live exclusively at pilgrimage sites, pilgrimage guides describe these holy places as sites where such congregate and can be most easily seen and accessed. Pilgrimage places, in this conception, are not just holy and powerful to human beings, but rather are powerful enough that even gods and *nagas* gather there to partake of the site's blessings. The beings who live at these sites can be fierce, and guides sometimes warn of *dakinis* that will devour the flesh of the unfortunate pilgrim. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, “opening” a holy mountain for general pilgrimage involves a tantric master overpowering the holy place's local deities and converting them into being protectors of Buddhism. Even when such beings have been tamed, however, there is always a sense that they remain dangerous and might cast off their Buddhist allegiances. Other times, however, beings are seen as potential sources of blessings or *siddhis*. All of this demonstrates the power of the pilgrimage place itself

480. *Dpa' bo mkha' 'gro'i tshogs khang yin/ 'khor lo sdom pa'i pho brang yin/ chos skyong srungs ma'i bzhugs gnas yin/ zhing skyong yongs kyi gnas sa yin/ rnal 'byor rtogs pa 'char ba yin/ 'di 'dra'i gnas 'di khyad par 'phags/ 'dir bzhugs zhal kha chos la sgur*. Zhwa dmar 04 Chos grags ye shes, *Dpal tsa ri tra la sogs pa'i gnas chen rnam la bstod pa*, in *Collected Works of Chos grags ye shes*, TBRC W1KG4876, 4: 269 – 274 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009).

481. *Gzhan yang rgyang me'i gnas 'di'i ri brag thams cad lha dang lha mo'i rang bzhin dang/ chu thams cad kyang gsang sngags zab mo'i 'dzab kho na'i sgrar yod pa*. Bri gung chung tsang Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston*, 466.

as having powers that attract even gods and *dakinis*.

It also contributes to the idea of the pilgrimage place as the kind of place where the ordinary order of things breaks down and the supernatural world normally inaccessible to pilgrims interpenetrates with the empirical world. This recalls what we have seen in Chökyi Drakpa's *Pilgrimage Guide to Gyangme*, which casts Chökyi Drakpa as constructing bridge of sorts between the primordial realm of Cakrasaṃvara and the pilgrimage mountain of Gyangme. In casting the pilgrimage place as one where the normal rules governing ordinary reality break down, and supernatural beings wander around, pilgrimage guides thus further denaturalize pilgrim's ordinary perception and sense of what to expect.

Flora and Fauna

Clusters of sweet hundred-flavored fruits
Ripened well and heavy bow the trees
A sign that the glorious fruit of liberation
Is filled with blissful joy of contemplation.

Flocks of sweet-voiced, finely feathered birds
Fly everywhere, melodies like sitars playing:
A sign that those observing the Four Truths
Are given assurance with momentous advice.

Oblong eyed and handsome deer in herds
Traverse the peaks and valleys so relaxed
A sign the joyous path to full nirvana
Is rich with every kind of joyous thought.

—Chankya Rolpé Dorje, *Praise of the Holy Place upon Seeing Five-Peaked Mountain*⁴⁸²

482. Ro brgya phrag mngar ba'i 'bras bu'i tshogs / smin legs pa'i lcid kyis dud cing spa / rnam grol gyi 'bras bu rmad byung ba / ting 'dzin gyi bde dgas gang ba'i brda / lus spu sdug skad snyan 'dab chags tshogs / dbyangs rgyud mangs 'khrol bzhin phyogs bcur lding / chos bden pa bzhi yi blang dor rnams / don lhug par 'doms pas dbugs 'byin brda / mig dkyus ring mdzes sdug ri dwags tshogs / bag phebs bzhin ri klung kun tu rgyu / lam bde bas rdzogs byang bgrod pa la / blo dga' bde ci yang rgyas pa'i brda. Translation by Kurtis Schaeffer in "Tibetan Poetry on Wutai Shan." *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 6 (2011): 215–42. Text may be found at: A kya yongs 'dzin dbyangs can dga' ba'i blo gros. Gnás mehog ri bo rtse lngar mjal skabs kyi gnás bstod dang 'brel ba'i mgur 'jam dpal dgyes pa'i mehod sprin zhes bya ba dang dus chen khyad par can gyi rnam bshad. In *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 2, 4 folios. Sku 'bum: Sku 'bum par khang, 1997.

The trees with their abundant leaves dance when stirred by the wind, and some bloom with all kinds of flowers—utterly beautiful! The rivers burble sweetly and there are lakes and pools. Animals move about lazily in groups or sit about, and there is the resounding music from the flapping of birds’ wings.

—Chödrak Yeshe, *Praises to Tsari*⁴⁸³

Pilgrimage guides depict their subjects as places of natural beauty where animals wander carefree and birds sing melodiously. Such descriptions often consist of multi-sensory descriptions of babbling brooks, sweet-tasting spring waters, and fragrant flowers blooming. Sometimes, these beautiful elements of the natural landscape are taken to signify aspects of the Buddha’s teaching. For example, the first selection above interprets various features of the natural world as signs about the nature of the dharma. It describes the holy place as ripe with sweet fruits, and further argues that the presence of such fruits is a sign that the state of liberation is full of blissful and joyful contemplation. Proceeding through a number of analogous description and interpretations, the poem thereby imagines a world in which the dharma reaches out to through the natural world to communicate with and reassure the pilgrim.

This natural effervescence also signifies the good qualities of the particular site being described. In Chödrak Yeshe’s *Praises to Tsari*, for example, he highlights the lovely flowers and contented wildlife at Tsari as a way of praising Tsari. That is, Tsari’s beauty is not incidental to its greatness as a pilgrimage mountain. Rather, the site’s beauty and the site’s spiritual potency are intimately connected, whereby the surface beauty of the site signifies that the place itself is ripe for spiritual practice. It might even be taken to suggest that the holiness of the site gives rise to this kind of abundant beauty.

483. *Indra nI la'i phung po dag dang utpala 'dab ma lta bu yi/ rdo rje'i brag ri che rnams rab 'bar gzings ba'i bkod pa can/ lo 'dab lhun stug rkang 'thung rnams ni rlung gis bskyod pa'i gar/ rnam par mdzas shing la lar ni bsing me tog sna tshog bkra/ lung lung snyan sgrogs 'bab chu rnams dang mtshe'u dang lteng kar bcas/ bag phab rgyu ba'i ri dwags khyu ang 'khod cing gnyis skyes tshogs rnams kyang/ 'phur ba'i gshog sgra las kyang rol mo du ma sgra rnams 'byin. Chos grags ye shes, Dpal tsa ri tra la sogs pa'i gnas chen rnams la bstod pa, in Collected works of Chos grags ye shes, TBRC W1KG4876, 4: 269 – 274 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009) 242.*

Such descriptions bring to mind sutras' descriptions of deer parks and pleasure groves in which the Buddha taught. Whether the Buddha chose beautiful sites to give teachings or whether his very presence enhanced sites' beauty, there is a clear association of the Buddha's teachings—often described as beautiful in the beginning, middle, and end—and physically beautiful places. Buddhist interest in physical beauty also extends to the human body, where as a number of scholars have pointed out, the physically beautiful body is closely associated with the virtuous or spiritually perfected body.⁴⁸⁴ We can thus see pilgrimage guides' interest in the beauty of pilgrimage sites as part of a long Buddhist tradition of interest in beauty and in beauty's connection to spiritual virtue.

We may also, however, read these descriptions of flowers, brooks, and bird-song not solely as signifying something important about the nature of the dharma or about the site itself, but rather as self-evidently pleasurable. In other words, pilgrimage guides might highlight the natural flora and fauna of the pilgrimage place simply because they are beautiful. They might want to heighten the aesthetic experience of pilgrimage places' natural beauty for pilgrims through these sorts of literary descriptions. In any case, however, pilgrimage guides' descriptions of these natural aspects of the pilgrimage site directs pilgrims' attention on these features. Pilgrims may have noticed the various flora and fauna of the site anyway, but by directing attention on them through literary description and interpretation, pilgrimage guides amplify the salience of such features in pilgrims' imagination and experience.

Associations with Previous Masters and Advanced Practitioners

To the right of Drakkar, there is the practice cave of Namkhai Nyingpo. there is the self-

484. See, for example, John Powers, *A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) and Susanne Mrozik, *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

arisen image of the great master. there is the flow of a river of ambrosia. There is the self-arisen [image] of Namkhai Nyingpo. And in the inner building of this temple, there are seven body prints of the great master.

—*Guide to Drak Karpo*⁴⁸⁵

According to the great Jetsun Milarepa's vajra songs...

—Chödrak Yeshe, *Settling the Issues Around Kailash, Anavatapta, and the Four Rivers*⁴⁸⁶

Pilgrimage guides often take particular care to note the yogis or masters who have practiced at that site. Said practice serves as both recognition of the site's already-existing good qualities and that it also augments the site's qualities, leaving blessings in which future pilgrims can partake. The place, then, becomes a point to access the powers of the place in a way that the absent master did. Although practitioners can always access masters through studying their teachings, listening to their hagiography, or interacting with their lineage or reincarnations, by connecting a particular physical place with particular advanced practitioners, we might speculate that the pilgrimage site (and the guide that in some sense constructs it) grounds an absent master's presence in the physical landscape so that the pilgrim can come into direct encounter with the place, and by extension, the master himself. We will explore this more in the next chapter, in which we will consider an episode where Khatag Zamyak claims to see Milarepa's face while he is traveling at Kailash.

As is seen in the first selection above, this connection between a particular place and an advanced practitioner is often made materially visible because the master is said to have left behind handprints, footprints, and even body prints in the rock. Such physical traces provide for the pilgrim an immediately visible connection to the masters who once practiced at the

485. *Brag dkar de'i g.yas phyogs na/ nam mkha'i snying po'i sgrub phug yod/ slob dpon chen po'i sku rang byon/ bdud rtsi'i chu rgyun 'bab pa yod/ nam mkha'i snying po'i rang byon yod/ lha khang 'di yi nang khang na/ slob dpon chen po'i sku rjes bdun.* "Brag dkar po'i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho'i sprin phung," 379.

486. *Rje btsun chen po mi la'i rdo rje mgur las.* Chos grags ye shes, *Ri bo gangs can dang mtsho ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa mkhas pa'i rna rgyan*, 11a.

pilgrimage place.

Guides also commonly talk about the advanced practitioners who “opened the doors” of the holy place for the first time and made it accessible for ordinary pilgrims. We have already seen this aspect of pilgrimage guides in the previous chapter, when we explored Chökyi Drakpa’s account of opening the holy mountain of Gyangme in *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra’s Feast*. That text describes a common aspect of pilgrimage mountains; that is, that holy sites often need to be “tamed” or “opened” in order to convert them from wild sites too powerful and dangerous to be of use to ordinary pilgrims into a place where the powers and blessings of the place are made available to all.⁴⁸⁷ The master thus serves as a pioneer for the holy place, in some sense founding the tradition of pilgrimage even if the site itself was holy before the master got there. These stories of opening the *né* bear great resemblance to narratives of taming or converting wild areas—like that of Tibet prior to the arrival of Buddhism—such that they can become suitable for Buddhist practice. Indeed, this type of narrative is so common in the pilgrimage guide genre that scholars like Buffetrille have pointed to guides’ activity of Buddhicizing the landscape as one of their main *raison d’être*.⁴⁸⁸

The importance of masters practicing at a particular pilgrimage place became a factor in the debate about whether Kailash was or was not Himavat, which was explored in chapter four. As we can see in the second selection above, for example, Chödrak Yeshe defends the authenticity of Kailash in part by making recourse to the authoritative testimony of a spiritual master like Milarepa who was said to practice there. He also points out that Jigten Gonpo exhorted his followers to practice there. These sorts of statement are echoed in other texts that

487. See also Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 62-71.

488. See Katia Buffetrille, “The Great Pilgrimage of A myes rMa-chen.”

similarly point to how various masters have practiced at the site and have exhorted their followers to do so as well. Although the texts avoid making this suggestion explicitly, we might read this line of reasoning to say that while Chödrak Yeshe's *main* point is that texts such as the *Māhamayurī* and *Abhidharmakośa*—if properly interpreted—support the notion that Kailash is *Himavat*, but that *even if* his interlocutors do not accept this point, they cannot deny that important masters recommended practicing there or did so themselves. Such history serves as authoritative testimony for the efficacy of practice there. For if someone like Milarepa practices at a particular holy place, denying its efficacy is tantamount to questioning Milarepa's judgement or denying that a place where Milarepa has practiced is itself made potent through that association. By pointing out the various Kagyu masters and disciples who have practiced at Kailash, then, Chödrak Yeshe is arguing that it probably always was a potent site for religious practice, but that the legacy of Tibetan masters practicing there means that by now it is incontestably a place of special potency.

Narrative Framing

If you want to hear a little more explanation of the origin of this very Precious Castle here, including the place and its residents...

—*Guide to Sekhar Guthog*⁴⁸⁹

[The story of] Ling shu ha shi. During the time of the Sui, a man from Hunan had a great desire to see Manjusri. He circled all of the holy places which were famous for blessings, and then arrived at last at the five peaked mountain. He thought, "right after I arrive, I will see wondrous signs," and went into the forest. He saw a strange monk he'd never seen before, so he prostrated and asked, "I heard that Manjusri lived on Wutai Shan, but although I've searched and searched all around, I still haven't seen him..."

—Chankya Rolpé Dorje, *Guide to the Pure Land of Mount Clear and Cool*⁴⁹⁰

489. *Dir sku mkhar rin po che 'di nyid rten brten pa dang bcas pa'i byung ba'i 'bros [reading 'phros] don mdo tsam zhig gsan par spro na.* "Sras mkhar dgu thog gtsug lag khang sogs kyi gnas yig," 2.

490. *Ling shu hA shi ni/ su'i gur gyi dus su/ hu nan sa cha'i mi zhig/ rje btsun dang mjal 'dod che bas/ byin rlabs can du grags pa'i gnas thams cad bskor nas mthar ri bo rtse lngar sleb bo/ sleb ma thag tu ngo mtshar ba'i mtshan ma mthong bar 'gyur ro snyam du bsam nas nags gseb tu phyin pa dang/ sngar mthong ma myong ba'i hwa shang khyad*

Another important feature of pilgrimage guides is that they tell stories about the pilgrimage place, the things that have happened there, and the people (often but not always famous religious figures) who have been there. This is clearly similar to the above category of pointing out connections the place has to particular spiritual masters. Where that method of describing the place merely *implies* a certain kind of narrative, however, and assumes the pilgrim knows enough about the relevant figures to understand why they are important, at other times pilgrimage guides actively tell stories about the people relevant to a particular place. This feature—which I refer to as narrative framing of the pilgrimage place—does not occur in every pilgrimage guide. Many guides instead have the brief references to important people and events discussed above.

Nevertheless, this device is worth discussing at length because it demonstrates in particularly clear form how the other devices—and thus guides as a whole—work on readers. There is a large and growing body of scholarship exploring the ways in which narratives gather together heterogeneous elements into a cohesive whole, draw readers into experiencing the world constructed by the narrative, and ultimately contribute to subject formation. Although guides contain much more than narratives, I suggest they act in similar ways to narratives in that they gather heterogeneous elements into one coherent world and invite readers to engage in that world, something that ultimately affects how they exist in the world even after finishing the text.

The narratives found in pilgrimage guides fall into two broad categories: stories that are unique to the particular pilgrimage place and retellings of well-known stories about famous

mtshar can zhig dang mjal nas phyag btsal te dris pa/ rje btsun 'jam dpal ri bo rtse lngar bzhugs so zhes kho bos thos te/ da lta khor khor yug tu btsal yang gtan ma mthong. Lcang skya 03 rol pa'i rdo rje, "Zhing mchog ri bo dwangs bsil gyi gnas bshad dad pa'i pad+mo rgyas byed ngo mtshar nyi ma' snang ba," collected in Sras mkhar dgu thog sogs bod kyi gnas yig khag cig (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1985), 268.

masters. In the first category fall stories that took place at a particular pilgrimage site and are usually associated with the “opening” of the site. Several examples can be found in the fourth chapter of Pema Karpo’s *Guide to Tsari* which gives an account of how the doors of the site were opened. In one, a master named Lawapa has his disciple fetch a dancing girl, but when he does, the girl turns into a radish in his hand. Lawapa tells the disciple to cook the radish into soup and eat it, but the horrified disciple gives the soup to a nearby dog instead, whereupon the master and the dog fly off to heaven leaving the faithless disciple wailing behind, a story that reiterates the importance of obeying one’s teacher.⁴⁹¹ In another, three disciples of Jigten Gampo named Nyö, ‘Gar, and Chö attempt to open the doors of Tsari and face various challenges. And in yet another, the great Tsongkhapa himself goes to Tsari and is told to drink an offering of beer. As someone famous for upholding monastic discipline, Tsongkhapa wonders if it is inappropriate for a monk and refuses the drink. Soon after however, he gets horrible bamboo splinters so bad that he almost dies, a fate the guide ties to his clinging to discursive thoughts while at Tsari.⁴⁹² As is clear from these examples, not all of these stories are always *about* pilgrimage per se, but they insofar as they are believed to have happened at the pilgrimage site, pilgrimage guides to the site become occasions to tell all kinds of stories. Such stories are often entertaining and funny, but also have clear messages about the potency of the site and the importance of faith and devotion.

In other cases, pilgrimage guides relate stories about well-known figures such as Milarepa, Padmasambhava, or Yeshe Tsogyal. It is unlikely that guides are doing so in order to tell pilgrims these stories for the first time—to invoke the famous saying about the Ramayana, no one in Tibet ever hears the Milarepa story for the first time. So why do guides retell these

491. Pema Karpo, *Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad*, 233.

492. *Ibid.*, 234.

stories?

One helpful case study is the *Pilgrimage Guide to Sekhar Guthog*, which spends nine folio sides telling the part of the life story of Milarepa. This retelling makes some sense because the pilgrimage site in question is one that plays an important role in Milarepa's story—it is the site of the nine-storied tower Marpa has Milarepa build over and over again. Still, it seems likely that almost all visitors to Sekhar Guthog would be familiar with Milarepa's story. Nevertheless, even pilgrims who know the general story might enjoy hearing the details.

One way to think about why the pilgrimage guide tells the story of Milarepa building the nine-storied town is to see *how* the *Pilgrimage Guide to Sekhar Guthog* retells this story. What parts does it focus on? How might that relate to or further the overall goals of the text? The guide frames this section by promising to elaborate the “meaning” (*don*) which happened in connection with this site. It introduces Marpa as the powerful disciple of Naropa and Milarepa his aspiring disciple. It describes how Milarepa laboriously builds towers at Marpa's command, only to have Marpa knock them over and tell him to rebuild them over and over, to the point that Milarepa develops horrible sores and despairs of ever receiving teachings. Marpa's kind wife Dakmema intervenes to help Milarepa, and Milarepa ends up fleeing and meditating in caves at Zangphug and Lhaknya (also sites covered by the pilgrimage guide), where he has a vision of Marpa going through similarly arduous tasks in order to get teachings from his own teacher Naropa. This vision makes Milarepa realize that Marpa was helping him burn through his bad karma, and so he returns to Marpa and finally received teachings from him. The episode that the pilgrimage guide focuses on, then, is one of pain, doubt, and eventual triumph.

This version of the Milarepa story clearly leaves a great deal out as compared to the

version told in the *Life of Milarepa* as written by Tsangnyon Heruka,⁴⁹³ but what it leaves out and what it focuses on may suggest ways we can think about narratives in pilgrimage guides working more broadly. The story as told in the pilgrimage guide, for example, mentions almost nothing prior to his arrival at Marpa's estate, including his childhood, mistreatment at the hands of his aunt and uncle, studying black magic, and killing thirty-five people, nor his religious career or adventures after leaving Marpa. This makes sense that the guide would focus on an episode that takes place at the pilgrimage site the guide is about, but the guide does not merely recount the events that took place there. Rather, it spends time developing the agonizing story of Milarepa building the towers and doubting whether he will get to study with Marpa. By focusing on one episode of Milarepa's broader life story, the guide focuses in on the drama and emotions of that particular episode, and thus frames the rest of the guide—and the features of the pilgrimage site the guide will highlight—in terms of these emotions.

These emotions of pain and doubt, moreover, that are likely similar to those pilgrims might experience in their travels, and so by highlighting those aspects in the Milarepa story, the guide reaches out to the prospective audience, drawing them into the narrative and priming them for an interpretation of their experience as ending in triumph that validates all of the pain and doubt along the way.

The guide anchors the narrative, moreover, to the physical place of Sekhar Guthog.

Towards the end of the story, the guide reads:

All the work that Milarepa did building the seven storied castle, complete with a central temple, dormitories, and courtyards, out of stone, earth, and wood, in order to follow his guru's instructions, the great magician Milarepa himself built it properly. And after he built it, he opened up the face of the inconceivable mandala of the secret mantra taught by Marpa himself. He constructed something that was actually no different from the chief deity of the mandala, and so this very place, which ripens and liberates infinite fortunate

493. For a full translation of this text, see Tsangnyön Heruka, *The Life of Milarepa*, trans. Andrew Quintman (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

beings, is indivisible with Gandavyuha Akanistha.⁴⁹⁴

The guide here refers to “this place” as though pointing out of the text and towards the physical tower that is presumably near the reader. This kind of textual reference to something out in the ordinarily perceived world serves to bridge the world of the narrative and the empirical world of the pilgrim and, we might speculate, to invite the audience to imagine themselves as inhabiting the world of the narrative.

While the Sekhar Guthog example is more developed than most, similar dynamics take place in other pilgrimage texts that make use of narrative. Such narratives give life and dynamism to the features of the pilgrimage site, stirring emotions and encouraging pilgrims to imagine these things taking place in the setting around them. They create a narrative frame for the entire pilgrimage experience, shaping pilgrims’ experiences. Finally, the kind of construction demonstrated at the end of the Sekhar Guthog narrative; that is, telling a story and then saying “even now X is visible” and pointing to a particular landscape feature, is common in pilgrimage texts, because it helps to blur the distinction between the past, where great deeds are done, and the present, where ordinary pilgrims visit the site.

Mountain as Mandala

Although it appears as many different phenomena, the way things really are (*chos nyid gyi tshul*) is never changing. That is proven by the vision of buddhas... since the essence is like that, it is a great mandala entirely on one base.

—Pema Karpo, *Guide to Tsari*⁴⁹⁵

494. *Rje mi las bla ma'i bka' sgrub phyir sku mkhar bdun thog/ dbu rtse gzims khang mdo khyams dang bcas pa'i sa rdo shing gsum bzo bo las byed thams cad mi la mthu chen kho nas legs par bsgrubs shing/ bsgrubs nas kyang mar pa nyid nas gsang sngags kyi dkyil 'khor bsam gyis mi khyab pa zhal phye ste/ dkyil 'khor gtso bo dang tha mi dad par mngon sum du bzhengs nas skal ldan gyi gdul mtha' yas pa smin grol du mdzad pa'i gnas 'di nyid 'og min stug po bkod pa dang gnyis su med cing/ 'dzam bu gling na rmad du byung ba'i mchod rten yin par pha ma sems can thams cad kyi yan lag bdun ldan gyi sgo nas thar pa cha mthun gyi bsod nams dam pa gsog par rigs so.* “Sras mkhar dgu thog gtsug lag khang sogs kyi gnas yig,” 9.

495. *Chos can gyi ngo nas du mar snang yang/ chos nyid kyi tshul nam yang 'gyur ba med pa sangs rgyas rnam kyi*

Furthermore, there are inconceivable faces of gods. It is the complete mandala of secret mantra.

—*Guide to Drak Karpo*⁴⁹⁶

All mandalas are contained in this rock...

—*Guide to Drak Karpo*⁴⁹⁷

We will finish our examination of the tropes pilgrimage guides use to work on pilgrims by examining one that is in a sense fundamental to all the others. That is, the idea of the pilgrimage place as a mandala, a celestial palace in which the central deities of tantric texts preach the dharma. This idea occurs in almost every pilgrimage guide, even when describing a fairly minor site. As noted by scholars, this is not particularly uncommon. The mandala is a widespread feature of Tibetan religious geography, and various places of religious significance are identified as mandalas, including, most famously, the area surrounding Lhasa.

But what does it mean for a pilgrimage guide text to describe a mountain as a mandala? Again, I see this as part of the work-like rather than part of the descriptive mode of these pilgrimage guide texts. That is, they are trying to work on the pilgrim. So what work is describing the site as a mandala doing?

I will propose that there are several possibilities, all of which may be operating at the same time. One possibility is that such identifications underscore the site's importance and sacrality, thus providing another example of the ways in which pilgrimage guides construct the imagined mode of the pilgrimage site so that pilgrims experience it in a different way. Another

gzigs pas grub pa'i phyir ro/ ngo bo de ltar yin pas/ gzhi gcig steng du ma lus dkyil 'khor che. Pad+ma dkar po, Gnas chen tsa ri tra'i ngo mtshar snang ba pad dkar legs bshad, 209.

496. *Gzhan yang lha zhal bsam mi khyab/ gsang sngags dkyil 'khor ma tshang med.* “Brag dkar po'i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho'i sprin phung,” 376.

497. *Rdo 'dir dkyil 'khor thams cad tshang.* Ibid., 379.

possibility is that this is another expression of the outer/inner distinction whereby the mountain *outwardly* looks like a heap of rocks and snow, but *inwardly*, it is really a marvelous palace centered around a tantric deity continuously teaching the dharma. This reiterates the play, seen in many of the above examples, between what is visible to the pilgrim and what is not visible to the pilgrim, in which the pilgrim can see certain things that are glossed as signs pointing to some deeper reality that is outside their perceptual reach. It suggests that behind the solid, physical, ordinary appearance of the mountain, there exists a whole other world constantly overflowing with the activity of the dharma, priming pilgrims to try to see the traces of this activity overflowing into the world they can perceive and experience.

The final possibility takes us back to Ricoeur's work on metaphor. In his key example, the reader is confronted by the metaphor "Achilles is a lion," and tries to make sense of it in literal terms, but is unable to do so. This failure opens up the possibility of the second-order *seeing-as*, in which she both sees Achilles *as* a lion and sees him *not* as a lion. These two images are in tension with one another, but it is a productive poetic tension, and not a logical fallacy. This is the model on which, according to Ricoeur, poetic language functions to train people in seeing-as, and biblical texts "name" God. We might see the pilgrimage guide's assertions that the pilgrimage site is a mandala not as an expectation that ordinary pilgrims will be able to directly see the mountain as a celestial palace made of gems and populated by various gods, but as a metaphor that works precisely because the pilgrim *does not* see the mountain as a literal gem-encrusted palace.

Indeed, it is hard to describe what it would even mean to see the mountain as a mandala. What would that even look like? Is the mandala inside individual rocks, or the whole mountain? Is it inside the practitioner? It is not at all clear what the pilgrim is supposed to see. This seeming

confusion, however, is not necessarily a flaw. For it is also the case that it is not at all clear what it would be like to see Achilles as a lion. In some sense, the metaphor “Achilles is a lion” depends on cognitive failure; it depends on readers not knowing how to put these two things together, and on those readers then scrambling to figure out a way to rectify this cognitive failure. Similarly, the pilgrimage guides’ claim that the mountain is a mandala is hard to parse—again, what *exactly* does that look like? This disconnect, however, drives the metaphor forward.

The text clearly does not expect the ordinary pilgrim to be able to directly see the mountain as a mandala; while advanced practitioners meditating in caves might someday attain to this level of perfected perception, that is clearly considered to be out of reach of most ordinary pilgrims. Identifying the mountain as mandala, then, assumes a disconnect between what the pilgrim sees and what other, more advanced, beings might see, but also creates the possibility of the kind of phenomenological experience Ricoeur suggests that metaphors can create, one that could possibly bridge this gap in perception. In other words, it *figures* the pilgrimage place, such that in this phenomenological encounter, the pilgrim may come to see the mountain *as* a mandala.

Cultivating the Eye of Faith: Understanding the Goals of Pilgrimage Guide Texts

Whatever happens, if you take refuge wholeheartedly and think it’s true, light radiates from stones, like the dog’s tooth [that gave off] relics. The great holy places are even more special than that...

—*Guide to Drak Karpo*⁴⁹⁸

There is a popular story in Tibet of the old lady and the dog’s tooth. In this story, the origins of

498. *Ci mdzad bden bsam snying nas skyabs mchis na/ rdo las 'od 'bar kyi so ring bsrel dpe/ de bas lhag par gnas mchod khyad par can*. “Brag dkar po’i gas yig,” 381.

which are unclear, an old lady tells her merchant son to bring back a relic⁴⁹⁹ of the Buddha from his travels. The son cannot find an authentic relic of the Buddha but, not wanting to disappoint his mother, presents her with the tooth of a dead dog he had found along the side of the road. The old lady is overjoyed, and places the dog's tooth on her shrine, where she circumambulates it, prostrates to it, prays to it, and makes offerings to it. To the surprise of the son, the dog's tooth actually begins to give off relics of its own, and the old lady reaps the benefits as if it were actually the Buddha's tooth. This story is encapsulated in the popular saying⁵⁰⁰ "even a dog's tooth can give off relics." This story, which is often cited by Tibetan lamas explaining the importance of faith in one's teacher and faith in the dharma more broadly, highlights the power of faith, and suggests that the "actual" qualities of an object of devotion are less important than the way in which that devotion orients the relationship between the person and the object.

Though this story may seem to have little to do with pilgrimage, a closer look reveals that it can help us understand the what pilgrimage guides are trying to do. Up until this point, we have examined the genre of pilgrimage guides and the various tropes they use to shape the way the pilgrim experiences the holy site. In this section, I will focus on the outcome envisioned by pilgrimage guides, and how it might help answer the question of how pilgrimage guides cultivate pilgrims' ability to see the holy place's hidden wonders. In particular, I will suggest that pilgrimage guides themselves are primarily concerned with the cultivation of faith (Tib. *dad pa*, Skrt. *śraddhā*),⁵⁰¹ and that this issue of faith is central to the issue of seeing.

499. Relics are remnants of the Buddha's body or pearl-like objects found among his ashes, and were said to be distributed to various parties after the Buddha's body was cremated. They are reputed to have considerable power.

500. The story of the old woman and the dog's tooth can be found in many places. For one example, see Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher: A Complete Translation of a Classic Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 174.

501. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, I do not have evidence as to how actual readers used and interpreted this text. In absence of what Umberto Eco would call "empirical readers," I instead rely on his notion of the "model

By faith, I am specifically referring to faith in the pilgrimage site—an idea that already presupposes that the wonders of the pilgrimage site are largely hidden from ordinary eyes—and to the idea that the pilgrimage guide can provide merit (*bsod nams*) and blessings (*byin brlabs*) as well as clear away obscurations (*sgrib*). Pilgrimage guides, however, clearly see the faith in the pilgrimage site as closely tied with faith in the Buddhist teachings more generally. This still leaves open the question, however, of what I mean by the term *faith*. The term is somewhat vexed, given that it is often taken in colloquial English to mean something along the lines of blind faith, or credence in something not proven by logic, but scholars of Christianity and Buddhism alike have demonstrated that the term has a complex set of valences.

Faith is an old category in Buddhist thinking, and Buddhists have highly developed accounts of the role faith plays in Buddhist practice. Various classical formulations contain *śraddhā*, giving us insight into the ways early Buddhist literature conceptualized faith. It is, for example, the first of the ten major omnipresent wholesome factors (*kuśalamahābhūmika*) and the first of the five spiritual faculties (*indriya*) said to be conducive to enlightenment. The list of *indriya*-s is later expanded in Abhidharma literature into a list of twenty-two faculties that Bhikku Bodhi translates as “phenomenological faculties,” tying it in some sense to perception. As pointed out by Robert Buswell, “faith also has important conative and affective dimensions.”⁵⁰² That is, faith is not merely cognitive, but rather tied to emotions and to volition. The person with faith does not merely mentally accept a propositional statement, but rather *feels* a sense of awe and devotion and is motivated to *do* something about it.⁵⁰³ This is further

reader,” a kind of ideal reader imagined by the text and which may be reconstructed through careful attention to the ways in which the text anticipates and creates a certain kind of audience. See Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*.

502. Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez Jr., “Śraddhā,” *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 847.

503. In his book *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*, Andrew Rotman argues for the

exemplified by the fact that in the Abhidharma literature, faith is opposed not to doubt (*vicikitsā*), but to ill-will (*pratipakṣa*).⁵⁰⁴

In Tibetan contexts, authors often refer to the so-called “three faiths,” which commonly consist of confident faith (*yid ches pa'i dad pa*), longing faith (*'dod pa'i dad pa*), and sincere faith (*dang ba'i dad pa*). One also sees formulations of the “three faiths” which leave out longing faith and include irreversible faith (*phyir mi ldog pa'i dad pa*), or the phrase “four faiths,” which include all four.

Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* discusses the three kinds of faith when he unpacks a statement from the *Abhidharmakośa* that reads “What is faith? It is trust, longing, and clarity regarding cause and result, truths, and the Three Jewels.”⁵⁰⁵ He interprets the confident/trusting faith to refer specifically to trust and confidence in “cause and result.” That is, trusting in the basic idea of karma: suffering is the result of non-virtuous action and happiness is the result of virtuous action. Though the workings of karma are obscure and generally impossible to see directly, confident faith allows the person to have trust in this unseen reality. This is perhaps closest to the colloquial English sense of faith as assenting to some belief about things

conception of *śraddhā* as a bridge between seeing and giving (*dāna*) in the *Dīvyāvadāna*. My thinking here is greatly indebted to his work.

504. Ibid., 847-8.

505. 'O na dad pa zhes bya ba de ji lta bu zhig yin zhe na/ dad pa la dbye na gsum yod de/ yid ches pa'i dad pa dang/ 'dod pa'i dad pa dang/ dang ba'i dad pa'o/ de la yid ches pa'i dad pa ni/ yul las dang 'bras bu dang sdug bsngal gyi bsen pa dang kun 'byung gi bden pa la brten nas skye ba yin te/ de yang dge ba'i las kyi 'bras bus 'dod kham s kyi sdug bsngal 'byung bar yid ches/ kun 'byung gi bden pa zhes bya ba/ las dang nyon mongs pa spyad pas/ sdug bsngal gyi bden pa zhes bya ba zag bcas kyi phung po lnga thob par yid ches pa'o/ 'dod pa'i dad pa ni/ bla na med pa'i byang chub de nyid khyad par can du mthong nas/ de thob pa'i ched du gus pa dang ldan pas lam la slob pa'o/ dang ba'i dad pa ni/ yul dkon mchog gsum la brten nas skye ba yin te/ lam ston par byed pa sangs rgyas dkon mchog dang/ lam du gyur pa chos dkon mchog dang/ lam sgrub pa'i grogs su gyur pa dge 'dun dkon mchog la mos shing gus la sems dang pa'o/ de ltar yang chos mngon pa las/ dad pa gang zhe na/ las dang 'bras bu dang/ bden pa dang/ dkon mchog la mngon par yid ches pa dang/ 'dod pa dang sems dang ba'o/ zhes gsungs so. Chos rje sgam po pa zla 'od gzhon nu, *Dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*, TBRC W1KG5451 (Kathmandu: Gam-po-pa Library, 2005), 26.

unseen. Longing faith then refers to the longing to attain the state of enlightenment. This kind of faith, while it implies belief in the idea that such a state is possible, has a much more emotional sense. The person with this kind of faith yearns for or aspires to the state of buddhahood. Finally, sincere or clear faith arises out of dependence on the three jewels, although it seems likely that other things besides the three jewels could be the objects for this kind of faith. When one apprehends the good qualities of these objects, one develops this kind of inspired or enthusiastic faith, or indeed an awe in response to their power.

We might then say that faith, according to the Tibetan scheme of the three faiths, involves a *trust* of unseen realities, an *aspiration* to reach a certain kind of state, and an *awe* at the power, glory, and good qualities of the object of faith. This accords with the above idea that faith is not a kind of static state, but incorporates a kind of forward motion in that it involves the commitment, intent, or aspiration to certain kinds of action.⁵⁰⁶

This discussion of faith is pertinent to our study of pilgrimage guides because pilgrimage guides often frame themselves in terms of the project of cultivating faith. In titles, introductory verses, and colophons, the term faith comes up frequently, suggesting that faith is important to these texts self-conception of their function.⁵⁰⁷ This line of interpretation is further supported by following the metaphors about faith which occur in these titles of pilgrimage guides. Such titles

506. Jamgön Kongtrül's *Treasury of Precious Instructions* contains this formulation as well. "If faith is lacking, there is no basis for the virtues. There are three kinds of faith. Sincere faith is faith drawn out by special objects. Longing faith is desiring to abandon samsara, achieve nirvana, and to act for beings' welfare. Confident faith is knowing that bad rebirths are because of non-virtue, high rebirths are because of virtue, and buddhahood results from putting into practice the secret mantra of the greater vehicle." *Dad pa med na yon tan gyi gzhi med pas/ dad pa la gsum/ dang ba'i dad pa yul khyad par can la drangs shing dad pa/ 'dod pa'i dad pa 'khor ba spong zhing mya ngan las 'das pa sgrub pa ste 'gro ba'i don bya bar 'dod pa/ yid ches pa'i dad pa mi dge bas ngan song/ dge bas mtho ris/ theg pa chen po gsang sngags nyams su blangs nas sangs rgyas par shes pa'o.* 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Gdam ngag mdzod* (Delhi: Shechen Publications, 1999) 7:13, 482.

507. Those familiar with Tibetan literature may object that this is not unique to pilgrimage texts. And indeed it is true that various other genres, particularly hagiographies, also often include *dad pa* in titles, but this does not mean that the term is any less important for our understanding of pilgrimage guide texts, but rather that they may share certain goals and strategies as hagiographies.

include *Seed of Faith*,⁵⁰⁸ *Arising the Sun of Faith*,⁵⁰⁹ *Summer Drum which Delights the Peacocks of Faith*,⁵¹⁰ *Sun of Wonders that Grows the Lotus of Faith*,⁵¹¹ or *Chariot of Faith*,⁵¹² as well as many others. Beyond merely giving lovely images about lotus and peacocks, these metaphors suggest the ways in which these texts foster faith. In the example of the “seed of faith,” for instance, it suggests that the text is the seed that is planted in the audience and blossoms into faith. Other title metaphors suggest that the text delights, nurtures, or supports faith. That is, it suggests that these texts are constructed in order to increase the audience’s faith in, devotion to, or confidence in the holy site.

Pilgrimage guide texts themselves also develop the idea that faith is central to pilgrimage as an endeavor. The *Seed of Faith: Register of Drak Yerpa, the Supreme Holy Place of Accomplishment* goes so far as to say that pilgrimage without faith is actually not pilgrimage at all:

One! Seeing holy places without faith
Two! Is the desire for the wonders of entertainment
Three! Such circling has no benefit
It’s like pilgrimage, but it’s not.⁵¹³

508. *Sgrub pa'i gnas mchog yer pa'i dkar chag dad pa'i sa bon*, TBRC W3CN5243 (No publisher, No date).

509. Kun gzigs chos kyi snang ba, *Tsa ri tra ye shes kyi 'khor lo'i gnas yi ngo mthar cha shas tsam gsal bar brjod pa'i yi ge skal ldan dga' bskyed dad pa'i nyin byed 'char ba*, in *Collected Works by Gyalwang Drukpa 08 Kunzik Chökyi Nangwa*, TBRC W10754 (Rewalsar, Zigar Brukpa Kagyud Institue, 1985).

510. Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu, *Gangs chen brgyad kyi ya gyal rong phu rdza yi gnas yig dad pa'i mdongs ldan dga' skyes dbyar gyi rnga sgra*, in *Collected Works by Nyingma master Ngawang Tenzin Norbu*, TBRC W29036, 5: 401 – 426 (Kathmandu: Ngagyur Dongak Choling Monastery, 2004).

511. Rol pa'i rdo rje, *Zhing mchog ri bo dwangs bsil gyi gnas bshad dad pa'i pad mo rgyas byed ngo mtshar nyi ma'i snang ba*, TBRC W2CZ6238 (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe mnying skrun khang, 1992).

512. *Sras mkhar dgu thog gtsug lag khang, gro bo lung, zangs phug stag gnya' bcas kyi gnas yig rna ba'i bdud rtsi dad pa'i shing rta*, TBRC W15649 (No publisher, no date).

513. *Dad pa'i med pa'i gnas mjal gcig/ ltad mo blta ba'i mtshar 'dod gnyis/ phan yon mi shes skor ba gsum/ gnas skor 'dra ste gnas skor min*. Zhi ba'i snying po, “Sgrub pa'i gnas mchog yer pa'i dkar chag dad pa'i sa bon,” in *Gnas yig phyogs bsgrigs*, 5.

Anticipating contemporary debates about the differences between pilgrimage and tourism, this guide argues that the physical movements associated with pilgrimage, then, are not what makes pilgrimage pilgrimage, and that seeking entertainment and novelty by visiting new places is also not the point of pilgrimage. Rather, a certain devotional orientation to those actions is what renders them effective. So even as these guides seek to grow faith, they also expect that pilgrims have a certain amount at the beginning for the whole process to work.

What is more, pilgrimage guides also regularly tie faith and visual perception together. In other words, guides are constantly calling attention to the fact that there are many ways to see the pilgrimage site, and saying that how pilgrims see the site is based on their relative level of attainment, but also on their level of faith. For example, the *Guide to Drak Karpo* tells pilgrims, “If your perception is impure and you lack faith, you will always and ever see the essence of rocks... Although Kailash is said, you see a heap of snow.”⁵¹⁴ Although the guide has just spent several pages telling audiences the wonders they can expect when going to Drak Karpo, the guide also tells them that if they lack faith, they will simply see it as a pile of rocks. Faith is thus, on this conception, part of the interplay of visible and invisible that we have seen in the tropes used by pilgrimage guides.

Connecting this to the texts described in chapter four, Chökyi Drakpa makes a similar point in his polemic text defending pilgrimage to Tsari and Kailash from attacks by Sakya Paṇḍita. In response to questions about whether the Tsari in Tibet matches the descriptions given in scriptural texts, Chökyi Drakpa rejects the idea that there is one single place out in the world that can be definitively identified as Tsari. He writes: “In general, there is a Tsaritra in India. There is also [a Tsari] in Tibet. Tsaritra exists, moreover, in the respective situations of gods,

514. *Rang snang ma dag dad mos med gyur na/ kun nas kun kyang sa rdo'i rang bzhin mthong/ ti ser gsung yang kha ba phung zhig mthong*. “Brag dkar po'i gnas yig dkod pa rgya mtsho'i sprin phung,” 380.

men, and hell beings, so it must be known that there exists a Tsaritra in the perception of each faithful trainee.”⁵¹⁵ While this statement is mainly directed at refuting Chökyi Drakpa’s opponents, it is also revealing of how Chökyi Drakpa thinks about pilgrimage. The glorious pilgrimage place is not out there in the world to simply be found, but rather is a function of the perception of various kinds of beings. With faith, there are many places that can be Tsari, but without faith, there is no Tsari to be seen. To see Tsari, then, is to see something *as* Tsari, a kind of seeing that is facilitated by faith.

In facilitating faith, then, these guides are facilitating vision. We may wonder, however, which comes first. The guides themselves seem to suggest that faith precedes truly seeing the pilgrimage place. After all, several of the sources discussed above suggest that faith makes all the difference in how a person sees something, such that even something small and insignificant like a dog’s tooth can give benefits equal to the Buddha’s relics. I wonder, however, whether the reverse might also be true, and whether we might understand the kind of seeing cultivated by pilgrimage guidebooks as *resulting* in faith. This faith, which as I have demonstrated was not generally regarded in Tibetan thought as simple belief, but rather as a combination of trust, awe, and aspiration, both supports and is reinforced by the broader Buddhist project of self-cultivation.

Conclusion: A Glimpse of the Mandala

What is god
and what is stone
the dividing line

515. *Spyir 'phags pa'i yul du yang tsA ri tra yod do/ de ni bod du yang yod la/ lta dang mi dang dmyal ba'i gnas su yang tsA ri tra yod pas/ gang dag gdul bya mos pa can re re'i snang ngor yang tsA ri tra re re yod par shes dgos pa'i phyir ro*. Note that the term used for faith here is *mos pa* and not *dad pa*, but the two are closely related. Chos kyi grags pa, *Gzhan gyi rgol ngan 'joms pa'i legs bshad lung rigs smra ba'i mgul rgyan*, in *Collected Works of Rigs 'dzin Chos kyi Grags pa* (Kulkan: Drikung Kagyu Institute, 1999), 431.

if it exists
is very thin
at jejuri
and every other stone
is god or his cousin
—Arun Kolatkar, *Jejuri*⁵¹⁶

This chapter opened with a passage from Arun Kolatkar's 1974 series of poems *Jejuri*, which imagine a narrator's visit to a temple town in Maharashtra. The particular poem from which the selections are taken, "A Scratch," depicts the strange feeling the narrator has when walking through the half-toppled monuments at Jejuri that each rock bursts with the potentially divine. In exploring pilgrimage guides, I have tried to understand how they contribute to this sense of charged activity underlying particular sites of Tibetan pilgrimage, and what this has to do with the guides' self-stated goal of cultivating faith.

The answer, I suggest, is the combined force of the various devices used by guides to describe the pilgrimage site. Although the guides highlight the idea that humans will not be able to see the site as it truly is, and indeed anticipate that the pilgrim will not see the wondrous world described in the guide, the guides also—though their figurative language—provide a means of potentially overcoming this barrier. Each of the features described above shape how pilgrims see and experience the place, but they also, when placed next to one another in the pilgrimage guide, make the pilgrimage guide a kind of extended metaphor of the pilgrimage place. The world represented by the guidebook is strikingly different than the world of ordinary experience. Each square inch of the place seems packed stories of people who have come before, each boulder bears the visible mark of a past master, every flower and bird sends coded messages about the dharma, and even ordinary rocks and stones are merely the outward manifestation of the true mandala invisible to ordinary eyes. All of this contributes to form the sense of a place where new

516. Kolatkar, *Jejuri*, 22.

connections become possible, and where even things not in the guidebook might be wonders of their own. The guidebook draws the eye from feature to feature, focusing the pilgrim's attention on vision, all the while implying that there are untold marvels lying just out of reach of ordinary perception.

But while much of the world described by the guides lays out of reach of the pilgrim, guides also, through their use of these literary devices, and in particular metaphor, give pilgrims a *glimpse* of the world just out of reach.⁵¹⁷ Such a glimpse is unstable and momentary, but it is enough to give pilgrims a taste of the world as they might someday experience it, and enough to cultivate in them an affective and aspirational faith. It starts in the imagination, but may then be experienced in a powerful way at the site itself. This faith, then, is not a blind faith, but a faith strengthened by experiences of the pilgrimage place.

The way in which these pilgrimage guides describe pilgrimage places allows them to construct a certain kind of pilgrimage experience for the attentive reader (or listener), one in which faith is the desired result. Of course, there are as many individual experiences of pilgrimage as there are individual pilgrims, and it is highly probable that many pilgrims' experiences of the holy place differ from that envisioned by the pilgrimage guide. The influence of these guides, however, remains significant, both because these guides articulate influential ideals, and because they shaped—if not definitively determined—pilgrimage experiences. For the ideal reader, in collaboration with the guide, could be led through a series of striking descriptions, stories, and metaphors that had the power to shape the pilgrim's ability to see the mountain as a holy mandala and, furthermore, to cultivate meaningful and transformative pilgrimage experiences.

517. For more on the phenomenology of the glimpse, see Edward Casey, *The World at a Glance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 384 and 388-91.

Chapter Seven: Khatag Zamyak's Co-Seeing

Introduction

In this chapter, we examine the pilgrimage diary of Khatag Zamyak, a Tibetan merchant who went on pilgrimage to central Tibet and Kailash from 1944 to 1956. Beyond the rare and intimate picture it gives of Tibetan society on the eve of 1959, the diary is valuable to this dissertation because it provides the reflections of someone who went on pilgrimage and attempted to transform his perception. It thus provides a new way to explore our central questions about how pilgrims adopted particular practices of seeing and how those practices of seeing engaged literature and landscape.

Whereas the materials explored in previous chapters theorized or attempted to induce transformations of perception in pilgrims, Khatag Zamyak's diary is an account of someone who actually tried to bring about this transformation. Of course, Khatag Zamyak's diary does not necessarily give a transparent account of his actions and experiences. Rather, his diary is a literary artifact that reflects complex practices of self-disclosure and self-construction, and as such must be read carefully and self-reflexively. We also cannot assume that Khatag Zamyak's diary represents the experiences of all pilgrims. While Khatag Zamyak's account is valuable in that it gives a layperson's account of pilgrimage—most of our other premodern sources are written by high-ranking lamas—he is also much wealthier and more educated than most Tibetan pilgrims. Nevertheless, Khatag Zamyak's pilgrimage diary does provide a new perspective on the central problematic of working with the space between ordinary and extraordinary perception.

This chapter will be a balancing act in that it will attempt show how Khatag Zamyak's diary directly responds to issues raised in previous chapters—namely, on the authenticity of Kailash in the wake of Sakya Paṇḍita's critique (which Khatag Zamyak cites directly) and on the role of pilgrimage guides in shaping pilgrims' vision of the pilgrimage place—while also making a stand-alone argument about the practices of seeing in the diary, and, ultimately, about how Khatag Zamyak as an individual navigates the gap between ordinary and extraordinary views of the pilgrimage place.

My main question will be how Khatag Zamyak sees on pilgrimage. What is he trying to see? How does he try to see it? How does he interpret what he does see? To put it another way, what are Khatag Zamyak's *practices of seeing*?

I suggest that Khatag Zamyak enacts a variety of practices—such as reading pilgrimage guidebooks, performing circumambulations, cultivating “pure perception” (*dag snang*), and looking closely (*zhib mjal*)—that construct what I call “co-seeing.” By co-seeing, I mean that Khatag Zamyak is not simply seeing the landscape in front of him, but rather is always seeing with. He sees with knowledge of the land's history, with a sense of how a master like Milarepa would have seen the land, and with an imagined vision of the land as described in guidebooks. In other words, he proceeds with a kind of double vision. Samuel Todes' distinction between perception and imagination is useful here insofar as it helps us to detect how he moves back and forth between his ordinary perception—the mode of experience by which he is presented with actual things in the world—and his imagination—the mode of experience by which he represents to himself that something is possible.⁵¹⁸ He both sees the landscape and holy sites in front of him in their ordinary form with his physical eyes and also sees in his mind's eye the wondrous

518. See Samuel Todes, *Body and World*, 130. This distinction will be further unpacked below.

landscape depicted in scriptures, guides, and narratives. Khatag Zamyak continually tries to bridge the disjunction between what he sees with his physical eyes and what he sees in his mind's eye, often looking for signs in his ordinary perception that might point to the reality of what he sees in his mind's eye.

In order to start making this argument, however, I should first introduce Khatag Zamyak's diary and reflect on the reading strategies I will use to approach this text.

Textual Source

Scholars are lucky to have access to Khatag Zamyak's diary, because Khatag Zamyak himself never intended that it be published. After he passed away in India in 1961, the scrolls of the diary sat untouched among his effects for about three decades before Khatag Zamyak's nephew discovered them by chance. The nephew brought the diary to a lama named Jamyang Wangyal⁵¹⁹ and asked if he thought publishing the diary might be useful to the Tibetan community. He agreed that it was, particularly since so many Tibetans in exile would likely never have the chance to see these pilgrimage sites for themselves. Jamyang Wangyal then edited the text,⁵²⁰ which was published in 1997 as *Phyi lo 1944 nas 1956 bar bod dang bal po rgya gar bcas la gnas bskor bskyod pa'i nyin deb, A Pilgrim's Diary: Tibet, Nepal & India 1944-1956*.⁵²¹ It contains two introductions—one by Jamyang Wangyal and one by Khatag Zamyak's nephew—that tell the story of how the text was brought to publication.

519. 'Jam dbyangs dbang rgyal. See also TBRC P1KG23823.

520. The introduction says that he makes small edits, but we should be aware of the possibility that he made major emendations.

521. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Bod dang bal po rgya gar bcas la gnas bskor bskyod pa'i nyin deb: Phyi lo 1944 nas 1956 bar: A Pilgrim's Diary: Tibet, Nepal & India 1944-1956* (Hereafter, *Nyin deb*), TBRC W1KG23814 (Dharamsala: Acarya Jamyang Wangyal, 1997).

Khatag Zamyak's nephew also mentions that we do not have all of the diary. When fleeing to India in 1959, Khatag Zamyak apparently left scrolls covering the years 1956-1959 behind at Shigatse. Khatag Zamyak's nephew holds out hope that they might someday be recovered. The loss of these scrolls, and of the stories they told, is a stark reminder of how fortunate we are to have the rest of the diary, for it could have easily been lost as well.

Thus unlike all of the other works studied in this dissertation, Khatag Zamyak's diary was not written for some external audience, whether for pilgrims, polemical opponents, or disciples.

Khatag Zamyak's diary has received little scholarly attention since its publication in 1997.⁵²² This may be changing, however, for in addition to this study Lucia M. S. Galli has also recently focused on the text for her D. Phil. dissertation.⁵²³ The genre of diary to which it belongs (*nyin deb*), or literally "day book," is also understudied because there are very few readily available examples of the genre for scholars to study.⁵²⁴

522. Though the published version of the diary mentions that Karl-Heinz Everding gave a donation to support publishing the diary, (*Nyin deb*, 10) as far as I can tell, Everding never discussed the diary in his scholarship. Charles Ramble discussed it in an essay entitled "The Complexity of Tibetan Pilgrimage," in *Searching for the Dharma, Finding Salvation*, 187.

523. In this dissertation, which has not yet been released to the public, she uses "two different heuristic devices, i.e. narratology and socio-economic analysis, in an attempt to capture the multi-layered and complex essence of 'Dzam yak's journal.'" She focuses in particular on the political, cultural, and social history of 'Dzam yak's ancestral land of Nang chen, what the information contained in the diary can tell us about practices of trade at the time, the interconnections of Khatag's pilgrimage practices and economic activities, and the power of religious communities at the time given the large sums of money involved in pilgrimage. Galli deliberately focuses on socio-economic analyses of the text, going so far as to question whether we should term Khatag Zamyak's travels as "pilgrimages." My work takes the approach, which I see as complementary to Galli's rather than in opposition to it, of foregrounding questions of religious practices and experiences. See Lucia M. S. Galli, "The Accidental Pilgrimage of a Rich Beggar: The Account of tshong dpon Kha stag 'Dzam yag's Travels through Tibet, Nepal, and India (1944-1956)," *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines* 48, 1-5. See especially: "In the fourth and last section of the chapter, questions are raised concerning the real factors that motivated the author's wanderings, and whether they may be correctly considered as "pilgrimages", as he himself suggests." (4).

524. One of the few treatments of the genre, written by Janet Gyatso, relates her attempts to understand Tibetan diary-writing practices. Many of her informants are diffident and sheepish about the fact that they keep diaries, and some even deny it outright, considering the practice as pointless as "counting crows' teeth." And yet as she probes further, she realizes that, whatever their feelings about whether they ought to keep diaries, many Tibetans do in fact keep diaries. See "Counting Crows' Teeth: Tibetans and Their Diaries," in *Les Habitants Du Toit Du Monde*, edited by Samten Karmay and Phillip Sagant (Paris: Société d'Ethnologie, 1997), 159-78.

Methodological Approach

While it might seem like diaries rank among the most reliable sources—who lies in their own diary?—the reality is not so simple. One initial question is whether Khatag Zamyak accurately documents his practices, or whether he uses the diary to construct an image of himself that does not actually match reality. Even that question, however, frames the discussion in what strikes me as an unhelpful way. By contrasting “what actually happened” with the literary misrepresentation of “what actually happened,” it suggests that the goal is getting at what Khatag Zamyak *actually* did while on pilgrimage, and that the written text is merely a lens to see what actually happened. At best, the language is transparent and says what happened as it happened, or at worst, the language distorts what happened, obscuring it from our view. Any “work” that the language does can only be to warp reality. This way of approaching texts, of seeing them as documents from which we can extract useful information about the past and discard the more parts that do not lend themselves to this purpose, has been common in historical studies.

My approach in this chapter, however, has not been to view Khatag Zamyak’s diary as a document from which to extract information about what actually happened, and instead to treat the literary aspects of the text as themselves interesting. Following LaCapra’s observation that texts have both “documentary” and “work-like” modes,⁵²⁵ I read the diary as both describing how Khatag Zamyak sees the world and as a vehicle through which he tries to effect in himself the transformations sought on pilgrimage. In this way, the diary is an example of a “technology of the self” as theorized by Michel Foucault;⁵²⁶ that is, a technique by which Khatag Zamyak

525. Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 30.

526. See Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

works on himself, in order to effect a certain kind of transformation.

I read certain aspects of the diary as having an aggregate work-like function, particularly when those aspects are repeated frequently or exist in recognizable patterns. For instance, the diary records certain daily details and passing thoughts, but also often focuses particularly on activities and experiences oriented towards enlightenment (often, the accumulation of merit). In focusing on and recording dharma activities, the diary focused Khatag Zamyak's attention on these religious goals and on the means to achieving them. Though such activities may take up a relatively small part of his day, in narrativizing his own activities in a way that highlights dharma-related activities, Khatag Zamyak underscores the centrality of dharmic activities in his life. In writing down elements of his own life, he re-presenting his life to himself in ways that amplify certain elements.

Khatag Zamyak in the diary turns his attention to particular aspects of his experience—seeing holy images, making donations, interpreting karmic signs, similarities between himself and Milarepa, and the suffering of animals—that underscore certain affective modes, such as devotion, generosity, compassion, and emulation of holy exemplars. In inscribing these events and observations in his diary, Khatag Zamyak directs his attention towards them in a way that makes them more salient to himself. Thus keeping a diary is not merely a transparent recording of events but rather shapes Khatag Zamyak's pilgrimage experience by continually directing his attention to certain objects.

Recognizing these work-like aspects of the text, I approach the text's descriptions of Khatag Zamyak's travels, including the places he goes, the people he meets, and, importantly, his practices of seeing, as operating in a documentary mode. That is, I read Khatag Zamyak's account as descriptive of his activities on pilgrimage. Some might object that more skepticism is

warranted, and that I should read Khatag Zamyak as presenting himself and his pilgrimage according to some narrative about how he thinks pilgrimage should go or how he wants people to think of him. However, having spent a great deal of time working with the diary, I continue to feel like the diary includes random details that seem unrelated to any broader theme or message. They are simply included because they caught the attention of Khatag Zamyak while he was writing. Khatag Zamyak records episodes of being chased by and escaping bandits, a funny story about a horse, his encounter with an elderly Bon practitioner, encounters with Americans, his thoughts on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the prices of train tickets in India, and his thoughts on the tax policy of the Tibetan state.

As such, I read Khatag Zamyak as documentary insofar as it documents his activities and certain things about the world he lived in and as work-like in that it directs his attention towards certain kinds of actions, events, and emotions. That is, I read his writing not necessarily as an after-the-fact recording of events, but instead as a way of focusing and directing his attention, of shaping his memories, and of drawing out certain patterns.

This understanding of Khatag Zamyak's project is supported by evidence from the diary itself. Early on in the diary, Khatag Zamyak explains why he is keeping the diary: he will write down a little of what he sees on pilgrimage "in order that the encounters (literally faces seen, *zhal mjal ba*) and circumambulations of the three supports may be fixed (*'jags*) in my mind (*vid*).” So in some sense, Khatag Zamyak thinks of the diary as having both documentary and work-like aspects. He sees it as recording what he did while on pilgrimage, but also as performing some kind of work, specifically of helping him remember the things he sees and the places he goes.

Introducing Khatag Zamyak

Khatag Zamyak briefly describes himself at the very beginning of the diary, writing:⁵²⁷

As for myself, the one with the nickname ‘Zamyak’ and the dharma name Ngawang Dargyay, the one who is constantly intoxicated by the afflictive emotions, I was born in the middle of the area of Rabshi, which is considered part of Ga, in Kham. Up until my 49th year, there has been success and failure, happiness and suffering, a mood inclined and disinclined to dharma—if I wrote it down, it would be like ripples on the water. Some [of these stories] give rise to compassion, some of them inspire renunciation, some show faults, some are funny, and so forth. Since there are many such [stories], I will not write them down. Now, in my 49th year, because of fortunate circumstances, I wandered alone without a leader, relying on friends from home, into all of the areas of the three regions of Tibet. And so, in order that the encounters (literally faces seen, *zhal mjal*) and circumambulations of the three supports and holy places may be fixed (*jags*) in my mind, I will write down a little [of what I saw on pilgrimage].⁵²⁸

Khatag Zamyak gives almost no information about himself beyond this brief sketch—he does not elaborate on what he means by his successes and failures, discuss anything prior to his setting off on pilgrimage in 1944. At times, he mentions that he knows a place or a person from having met them previously, but for the most part, he focuses on his daily experiences on pilgrimage.

Much of the background information that we know about Khatag Zamyak, then, comes from the two introductions to the published version of the diary written by the monk Jamyang Wangyal and Khatag Zamyak’s nephew. They describe Khatag Zamyak as one of the seven children—three boys and four girls—born to parents named Khatag Dranga Rabten (*kha stags*

527. It may strike us as strange that Khatag Zamyak includes an introduction of any sort to his diary, for an introduction would likely only be practically useful for an outside reader who is not familiar with Khatag Zamyak. However, Khatag Zamyak apparently never tried to publish the diary, and it remained in his effects until after his death. It would be interesting to know if other diaries contain this kind of introduction, or whether this is peculiar to Khatag Zamyak.

528. *Nyon mongs pas rgyun du myos pa'i gces ming 'dzam yag dang chos ming ngag dbang dar rgyas sogs thogs pa'i rang nyid ni/ mdo khams sga yi phyogs su brtsi ba'i rab shis zhes pa'i yul de'i dbus su skye ba blangs nas/ lo ngo zhe dgu bar 'byor rgud song ba dang/ bde sdug blo kha chos la phyogs ma phyogs chu yi gnyer ma lta bu yod cing bri na/ la la ni snying rje skye/ la la ni nges 'byung skye/ la la ni mtshang la phog. Kha stag 'dzam yag, Nyin deb, 11.*

drangs ga rab bstan) and Droza Tsomo (*gro bza' mtsho mo*) in Rabshi in Kham. Lama Jamyang Wangyal paints a lovely picture of Khatag Zamyak's homeland through extended and poetic descriptions of the various mountains, waters, and carefree animals that lived there. Young Khatag studied dharma as a child, getting a basic education at a nearby monastery, but also inherited his family's profession of trade and livestock rearing, and seems to have grown into a wealthy and important trader who patronized local Buddhist monasteries.

Everything seems to have gone well until he was accused of the murder of a member of the local ruling family, a charge he strenuously denies in a hand-written statement to the judges that is transcribed in Lama Jamyang Wangyal's introduction. In Khatag Zamyak's account, the lord of Rabshi, named Thuthob Namgyal (*mtshu stobs rnam rgyal*), passed away in Chamdo. Amidst the resulting turmoil about who would be in charge after the death of the lord, Thuthob Namgyal's eldest son, Kardor (*kar rdor*), passed away suddenly at Lüng Monastery (*klung dgon*). Khatag Zamyak claims he was unjustly accused of poisoning Kardor because of the ruling family's bias against Khatag Zamyak and desire to seize his extensive assets. Khatag Zamyak tells the audience how the deceased man's family sent troops to Lüng Monastery on the 12th day of the iron male dragon year of the 16th Rabjung (1940), killed a number of monks, including Tulku Jamseng (*'jam seng*), accused of being one of Khatag Zamyak's co-conspirators, and led Khatag Zamyak away in chains. He was bound to a post and then kept in solitary confinement for six months. All of his wealth and property was stripped away. Though he adamantly denies any wrongdoing and maintains his innocence, the letter is framed as a plea to his captors in which he begs them to look on him with compassion.

It is not clear how Khatag Zamyak ultimately secured his release, but he must have done

so, for soon after, he started describing himself as a “new-born beggar and vagabond.”⁵²⁹ It is in this state that he begins his pilgrimage.

Life on Pilgrimage

Khatag Zamyak’s pilgrimage begins, in his telling, when Khatag Zamyak approached a lama in 1944 with a request to know about his future. The lama performs various rituals and supplicates his tutelary deity, which leads him to prophesize that Khatag Zamyak must undertake pilgrimage to central Tibet (*dbus tsang*) and Kailash in the next three months. Khatag Zamyak accepts the prophecy, makes a great offering to the lama and the monastery, and then sets off with a companion named Ba yan in the tenth month of 1944.⁵³⁰

Khatag Zamyak continued his business dealings while on pilgrimage, and frequently mentions buying and selling or visiting markets, so his pilgrimage does not fit the popular notion that religious pilgrimage and worldly business should be kept separate. As many scholars have pointed out,⁵³¹ however, this opposition between purely spiritual pilgrimage and worldly activity, is based on problematic and outdated assumptions of religious activity as somehow separate from daily or economic life. Khatag Zamyak’s mixing of the religious and the material are more noticeable insofar as his means allow for significant economic activity, but this is merely a difference of degree, and not difference in kind from the majority of Tibetan pilgrims who also funded their travels through trading activities.⁵³²

529. *Gsar sprang 'khyam po*. Ibid, 5.

530. Ibid, 12-13.

531. See, for example, Simon Coleman and John Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-4.

532. See, for example, Chapter 11, “Culture, Nature, and Economy Around a Holy Mountain” in Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 196-218. Lucia Galli’s aforementioned dissertation, “The Accidental Pilgrimage of a

Soon after Khatag Zamyak sets off, his diary entries start to take on a recognizable pattern. First, Khatag Zamyak arrives at a particular site, usually giving the name of a temple or describing its relationship to a famous practitioner. He then describes the main “supports” (*rten*) that he has seen at that site. This term “support” refers to a material support of Buddhist practice, a focal point for faith and veneration. This can include various kinds of shrine objects, statues, paintings, objects of worship, or holy texts such as the Buddhist canon. Khatag Zamyak then describes the various actions he undertakes at the site, including prostrations, worship, circumambulations, purifications, pure vision, and aspirations. Sometimes, the list of actions performed are accompanied by a description of his affective or emotional state—often devotion, faith, or rejoicing—while performing said actions. Descriptions of his visits to sites inevitably end with a description of the donations he makes to the monastery or to the monks living there. Such donations may include a donation of tsampa⁵³³ or daily tea⁵³⁴ to the monks, but mainly consist of silver currency.⁵³⁵

Over the course of the diary, Khatag Zamyak travels throughout Tibet, visiting major sites in Kham in eastern Tibet, around Lhasa and other places in central Tibet, and Kailash in western Tibet, as well as visiting Buddhist sites in India and Nepal, and smaller sites on the path between the major sites he visits.

Rich Beggar” also focuses particularly on this aspect of Khatag Zamyak’s activities.

533. *Rtsam pa bre gsum dang srang bcu tsam gyis zhal 'debs*. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Nyin deb*, 102.

534. *Mang ja dang sku 'gyed srang gang re bcas phul*. Ibid., 213.

535. The published diary also includes an unpaginated appendix containing scans of various Tibetan coins and paper money as examples of what Khatag Zamyak uses. See Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Nyin deb*, appendix.

Practices of Seeing

For the rest of this chapter, we will focus on one key theme that runs throughout the diary: namely, Khatag Zamyak's engagement with his visual perception. It is not surprising that sight and seeing are an important part of Khatag Zamyak's pilgrimage diary, given that pilgrimage is about being at and seeing the holy place for oneself. A closer investigation of the role of perception in Khatag Zamyak's pilgrimage, however, shows that vision is a rich and dynamic site mediating the encounter between Khatag Zamyak and the places and objects he encounters on pilgrimage. In the pilgrimage, vision is not merely a passive process whereby Khatag Zamyak receives visual impressions from the objects around him. Rather, we see him adopting a variety of ways of seeing the pilgrimage place, many of which involve highly active modes of visual engagement. Seeing, for Khatag Zamyak, does not involve solely receiving sense data from the objects immediately present, but rather creatively draws on a combination of imaginative and sensory resources to construct a particular kind of experience of the pilgrimage place.

My analysis here is informed by work done by scholars of visual culture who have shown that visual perception is not solely a passive process of receiving sense data from the external world, but also an active process mediated by a variety of cultural forms and practices.⁵³⁶ In the case of Tibetan *thangka* paintings, for example, such paintings were not hung up on white museum walls with bright lighting to be seen by the general public. Rather, *thangka*-s may have been displayed in monasteries illuminated by butter lamps or may have been used for tantric visualization practices by a tantric initiate, obscured by a silk cover until certain appropriate times. That initiate might have used the painting as a support for his own visualizations, and have had the visual competence to "read" the painting in terms of the identities of figures and

536. For example, the work of David Morgan and Birgid Meyer.

significations of various compositional elements. In other words, there are many ways of looking at a *thangka*. The scholar studying such *thangka*-s, then, must not only be attuned to the features of form and color in the painting itself, but the broader cultural system in which that painting existed.

Exploring the visual culture of pilgrimage is somewhat different than the study of fixed images like *thangka*-s—Tibetan pilgrimage does involve seeing paintings and statues in monasteries, but also involves travel through landscapes and circumambulations around sites such as mountains—but it still involves culturally conditioned ways of looking and seeing.

In reconstructing Khatag Zamyak's practices of seeing, I have sought to understand the ways in which Khatag Zamyak looks at the things he encounters on pilgrimage. How does he generate particular visual experiences? How does he interpret them? Throughout, I treat visual perception as an active process. As I will show in the case of Khatag Zamyak, moreover, there are specific and repeated actions he undertakes to better see the holy places he encounters on pilgrimage.

Khatag Zamyak at Kailash

In order to explore Khatag Zamyak's practices of seeing, I will provide an extended translated section from Khatag Zamyak's diary in which he engages with these practices. This particular section comes from when Khatag Zamyak visited Kailash. This is clearly one of the most important sites for Khatag Zamyak—not only was Kailash specifically mentioned in the prophecy that led Khatag Zamyak to undertake pilgrimage,⁵³⁷ but his writing in this section goes into much more detail describing his activities than in most other sections. All of this indicates

537. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Nyin deb*, 12.

that Khatag Zamyak is especially engaged with sites near Kailash and provides richer material for analyzing our central questions.

The passage reads:

[We arrived at] the mansion palace of Cakrasaṃvara which is called Kailash, is praised by the Buddha, and is the dwelling place of five hundred *arhats*. There was no obscuring cover of clouds or darkness. I worshipped and recited the guru *sādhana* for Milarepa, and so saw his face (*zhal mjal bas*), so I thought, “What good karmic connections!” and immediately prostrated three times in a state of joy. I stayed at the edge of the lake that night.

The next day, we went to see and worship at the small monastery founded by Ngor Evam Konchok Lundrup⁵³⁸ known as the “South-East Cleansing Gate.” I offered a mandala of three *zho*,⁵³⁹ and did prostrations, circumambulations, and prayers. The next day, [we went to the] monastery [known as] the “Southern Gate of the Thaw,”⁵⁴⁰ which is a delightful mountain of unmatched essence. The three supports were swept, clean, and pure, and whatever mandala or butter lamp you looked at, it seemed as if it were trimmed with pure gold. So I thought “who is like master Losang Drakpa,⁵⁴¹ that being who holds the teachings and whose blessings are most extraordinary?” I made an offering of seven *zho* to the Southern Gate of the Thaw monastery, which brings about spontaneous growth of faith. I did prostrations, circumambulated, and made prayers. At this real Gate of the Thaw, which is to the south of Lake Anavatapta, my friends and I, together with horses and mules, washed and cooked food, then settled up a little further for the night.

The following day, [we crossed] a mountain pass. According to the sacred Songs (*mgur*), the precious Jetsun Milarepa crossed here previously when arriving at the holy place of Lake Manasarovar and Kailash, and was welcomed and feasted by *dakinis* and place spirits. And I thought, “Since this is the mountain pass the precious Jetsun mentioned in the Songs, this really is the place from the Songs in reality.” There were, moreover, visible (*mjal rgyu*) footprints in the stone.

Having crossed over that mountain pass, we stayed and rested for two days a household

538. Tib. *Ngor evam dkon mchog lhun 'grub*.

539. Silver coins.

540. Kailash has eight “doors” on the cardinal and sub-cardinal directions. For more information on the specific doors, their names, and their histories, see the notes in chapter 11 “At Mount Kailash,” in Matthieu Ricard et. al. *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 275-348.

541. Tib. *rje blo bzang grag pa*.

called Gongmo Baro Butsang.⁵⁴² Then we went straight, via Purang Zam,⁵⁴³ and spent a week at a village near Jangchub Gompa.

The next day, we saw the Korchag Jowo (*'khor chags jo bo*), the lord of the three buddha families. I made a mandala by replenishing the butter lamps and offered a *zupchi* scarf⁵⁴⁴ and three *srang*. I endeavored in doing extensive prostrations and circumambulations.... [Gives story of how the Korchag Jowo image was discovered]⁵⁴⁵... This story is clear from the inventory (*dkar chag*) of that place.

Nearby, there was a small Sakya monastery. In the innermost part of the monastery's temple, there was [an image of] precious Maitreya. To the left corner of that, there was a meeting hall where there was a Mahakala in the form of Panyjaraṇātha, together with a goddess. In a temple near that, there were the seven buddhas [before Shakyamuni]. I prostrated, circled, and respectfully paid reverence to the supports that contained there, then returned.

I saw a Kagyu temple called "Bodh Gompa." Their main images were a Jetsun Milarepa with a self-arisen "A" on the heart, and [images] of the excellent fathers of the Kagyu [lineage]. I prostrated, circled, and offered a mandala of eight *zho* to the assembly hall containing them, then went via Chö, and arrived at Dongmo Zamkar Tsongral. I stayed there for two days.

In general, it is said that Purang is surrounded by mountains, Ruthok is surrounded by lakes, and Guge is surrounded by rust, so the name Ngari Khorsum (*mnga' ris bskor gsum*) was formed. Previously, here in Purang, it was asserted that it was a place which was attached to the demon Lanka, so it was known as Lanka Purang (*lang ka spu hrangs*). It was known, too, as being the place which was spoken of in the precious Buddha's Lankavatara Sutra. [It was also reputed to have] the palace of Prince Norzang, the cave of the 2,000 queens, a rocky overhang where a beautiful woman flew in the sky called a Surnam Phuk, and a self-arisen visible spring that is beautiful and deep. [There is] water which was previously tamed by Brahma. It exists as a practice place where sages dwell. [There are] the palaces of four *naga* kings and [there] is the Manasarovar lake where the hunter Phalaka rested, having eaten the fish.⁵⁴⁶

542. Tib. *gong mo ba rod bu tsang*.

543. Tib. *Spu hrengs zam*.

544. Tib. *zub phyi*, a medium quality of silk scarf.

545. For a version of this story, see note 86 on page 347 of Zabs-dkar Tshogs-drug-rañ-grol, *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin*, trans. Matthieu Ricard, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). I have excluded it here for reasons of space.

546. This story is often called the *Sudhāna Jātaka* or the story of Sudhāna and Manohāra, and can be found in

Although there are *jambu* trees growing there, one [either sees or] does not see them because of the purity or impurity of one's defilements. There are, moreover, many supports and scriptures where these distinctive features are described.

According to the stories told by the Buddha and by Jetsun Marpa and Jetsun Milarepa, the snow mountain Kailash and the lake Manasarovar are praised by the buddhas as being source of the four flowing rivers. Jetsun Milarepa, moreover, overpowered Naro Bonchung with his magical power, and thus made Lake Manasarovar and Kailash his own.

Having seen Kailash directly as the Buddha described it, Milarepa sported and scattered flowers of praise in all directions. After that,⁵⁴⁷ when Atisa came to upper Ngari, the sound of drumbeats arose from Kailash right when it was time for the five hundred arhats' noon meal. [Hearing that,] Atisa said "We too should make preparations, because it's time for lunch!" The *Gathered Intention of Padmasambhava* also says that some distance to the east of Kailash, there are chicks of the *shang shang* bird. After that, the Drikung and Drukpa Kagyus praised Kailash and gave many reasons why it is [Himavat]. Later, the first Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen (1569-1662), praised this very Kailash.

Furthermore, it is clear some authentic Indian *mahasiddhas* have said that that this very Kailash is real (*dnegos*). Sakya Paṇḍita shot an arrow of words [saying that] Manasarovar and Kailash, which are spoken of in the sutras, are not [really] the medicine mountain described in treatises of medicine and other scriptures,⁵⁴⁸ and so smeared all beings with uncertainty. This is probably a sign that detailed analysis of sutras and tantras is necessary. Sometimes, Sakya followers use biased and ignorant words to refute [the authenticity of Kailash], [but] there is no point to those guesses [by the Sakyas] apart from refuting the virtue of pilgrimage to holy places.

In reality, the perfected buddhas and bodhisattvas directly perceive Kailash as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara. Also, the signs (*rtags*) of it being a dwelling place of buddhas and the 500 arhats are unchanging nails (*gzer bu*) all around. if one names the rocks and earth that are self-arisen marks of accomplishment, one cannot count them. Even now in the present, the time of their diminishing has not come. I myself do not analyze it deeply. In actuality, the four great rivers flow from the four directions around Kailash and

multiple versions across the Buddhist tradition. See Padmanabh S. Jaini, "The Story of Sudhana and Manoharā: An Analysis of the Texts and the Borobudur Reliefs," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29, No. 3 (1966): 533-558.

547. This timeline seems to be confused because Atiśa (980-1054) should come before Milarepa (1052-1135).

548. It is unclear what Khatag Zamyak is referring to here, because Sakya Paṇḍita does not mention any medical texts. It is possible Khatag Zamyak is thinking of Tanaduk (*lta na sdug*), the mountain mentioned in the *Rgyud bzhi*, a medical text.

Manasarovar. They flow from four hills which are like animals. To the east, a river flows from the mouth of a great horse towards Drogshog. The river flowing from the mouth of the peacock goes to Purang. The river flowing from the mouth of the lion goes towards Dakyul. The river flowing from the mouth of the elephant goes towards Guge. All of that remains visible to all.

Furthermore, as for the benefits and levels of this holy place, according to Tsangpa Gyare (1161-1211):

If one circumambulates one time
at the great palace of Kailash,
one purifies the defilements of one life.
Similarly, if one does ten circumambulations,
one purifies an aeon's worth of rebirths.
If one does a hundred circumambulations,
having purified the ten signs and eight qualities,
one will attain buddhahood in one lifetime.

Thus it is said according to the old inventories (*dkar chag*). Accordingly, I think that that really is the value of a circumambulation. The present oral tradition says that the most valuable number of circumambulations is thirteen.

The reason for that is because there was once a Khampa woman who was carrying her son on her back at the small lake atop Tara pass. Her body was hunched over, and so when she bent to drink water, she killed her son. She was accumulating pilgrimages as penance. It is said that after she did thirteen circumambulations, there were footprints in stone as a sign that she had purified the obscurations. The guides to the holy place (*gnas 'dzin*) say that it is wise to do the full measure of circuits [the thirteen circumambulations and look] for signs of if the defilements are purified or not.

The established route for pilgrimage is from Purang Zam [to] Bugda. We went via the peacock-mouthed hill, which is the source of the great river, and then crossed a pass to the upper central valley. Then we cooked hot food at the Tsongral market, and stayed three nights at Khargog Tshora. The path [normally takes] about three days, [but we took longer] since we went at a leisurely pace.

Then, after coming through Karleb Chuka, we saw the Dharmakaya cave. We made mandalas [i.e. donations], prostrations, circumambulations, and purifications of sins in front of the many holy images, such as the main image of Choku Ö.

We moved along gradually, endeavoring in the protectors' practice together with supplications. We did prostrations and circumambulations, and made donations at the three self-arisen divine images, Drilung, Daggyü, and Rabuk. We continued upwards, and we spent the night at the slope of Tara pass.

The next day, at the cave in which twenty-one Taras had dissolved, we did extensive prostrations and circumambulations. Then we crossed that pass and headed down. The purifying lake at which the Khampa woman had lost her child had been closed. This year, however, it was opened, right at the time for us to be able to purify ourselves and worship there. I thought “the karmic connections are extremely good!” and went down. When we arrived at Magical Powers Cave, we cooked hot food and saw the cave. I generated devotion and pure perception (*dag snang*), and made a mandala, did prostrations, circumambulated, and purified defilements.

Then, on the fourteenth day [of the seventh month] in the winter, were at Gyangdrak (*rgyang grags*) Monastery. On the fifteenth day, I polished a few silver butter lamps which were clean and beautiful, as well as a few copper and brass cups. Then I worshipped the main image, which was about the size of twelve fingers of the buddha, and was called “Rippled Water Sage.” It had been offered by the great Nagas of Lake Manasarovar, and there were also many other supports of body, speech, and mind. I endeavored in terms of whatever I could see of the focal object (*dmigs rnam ci shes la 'bad*). I made prostrations and circumambulations.

I left behind most people and horses and mules and, carrying just a few things with me, I one again looked closely (*zhib mjal*) at the holy place and went on a circumambulation.

I went via Gyangdrak. I saw the Serlung gumpa, then I prostrated to the mountain pass and went down. I saw the great gold prayer flag and circled it.

I went atop a cliff that was like a mandala. There, there were the footprints of the 500 *arhats* and 500 *dakinis*. That cliff peak is known as the charnel ground of the 500 *arhats*, [and it is said that] the place spirit there abandoned all of his hair and nails and took on the appearance (*stabs*) of a sleeping lion and meditated on death. I visualized it (*gsal btab*) as the buddhafield of Amitabha.

Then I got up, and in the lower valleys to the right of that cliff, there was a cave. Inside that cave, there are traces left behind of Naro Bonchung’s practice. In the high awning of the western cliff on the other side of that, the Jetsun master [Milarepa] dwelled. Since Milarepa magically trod there, I saw the rocky cliff where Bonchung lived, along with the Jetsun’s footprints on the side. Bonchung also walked in that way, but he couldn’t reach any farther than the lower bank of the water, so the gods and demons let out a great horse-laugh from the sky. Thus I recognized (*ngo 'phrod*) the place where Bonchung’s walking happened.

I was there in Dharmakaya Hollow for a day and prostrated and circled. I went up in the morning then offered a mandala at night to the precious snow mountain [Kailash]. Then I went through Drilung valley. I cooked hot food at Drira hollow. And at Kailash I did prostrations and made a mandala offering one-pointedly (*phur tsug*).

Once again, I went up to Tara Slope. On top of Bonchung's giant stone, I did devotion and pure vision (*dag snang*). It was the stone which was carried by Mila after he doubled Naro Bonchung's stone.

Once again, at the top of the pass where we had traveled up to, I prostrated and circumambulated the stone where Tara is dissolved. In a state of reverence, I gave a *ganachakra* and offered the merit to pilgrims.

Then I went down to Tara Lake to wash and worship. At the cliff where Milarepa and Naro Bonchung took up ablution water and debated about Bon and about Dharma, there were many footprints. And I recognized (*ngo 'phrod*) the crag where Milarepa, through the potency of the precious Jetsun, taught the Bonpo about dharma. Then we went down, and at the peak of the pass, and at the top of a rocky cairn, I saw that there were footprints of the Buddha.

Then, on the slope of the side of the lower medicine valley where the sun mostly shines, I stayed for a day in a Magical Illusion Cave. At the monastery there, there were good images of Jetsun Milarepa and so forth, and there was a cache of treasures [and] fruit of the *jambu* tree. Two lineage gurus from Ü did *ganachakras*. And I subsequently made my own donation because I was rejoicing.

The next day I went to Gyangdrak and stayed for two days to rest. I saw the single footprint of the Buddha that was there at the monastery. In general, there is a footprint of the Buddha on each of the four sides of Kailash. I was unable to go in order to see two footprints [i.e. on two of the sides].

Then on the nineteenth day of the seventh month, I did a proper universal incense-offering ritual. And then I offered a mentally emanated mandala as a thanks for kindness at the snow mountain Kailash, the palace of the sixty-two deity [mandala of] Cakrasaṃvara, the dwelling place of the five hundred arhats such as the *sthavira* Angiraja, the perfect field of the gods, images, and dharma.

I cooked and bought a little food and drink from the market. At the great holy place, I retrieved the things I had left temporarily with others. It was the beginning of returning to my own country.

The Authenticity of Kailash

One striking feature of this section is Khatag Zamyak's discussion of the dispute over Kailash's authenticity. Even though Khatag Zamyak is writing about seven hundred years after Sakya

Paṇḍita, he clearly knows about the dispute.⁵⁴⁹ Khatag Zamyak cites him by name as having maligned Kailash, and then offers his own opinion on the matter. How does he weigh the various arguments for and against Kailash’s legitimacy, and how relevant is Kailash’s visual appearance in making his judgement? Although Khatag Zamyak is not a philosophically trained monastic elite like Sakya Paṇḍita or Chökyi Drakpa, he is nevertheless approaching similar questions about learning to see beyond the world of everyday experience.

On the whole, Khatag Zamyak’s arguments are largely similar to Chödrak Yeshe’s. He largely takes for granted the value of pilgrimage in general, suggesting that the ignorant, biased words (*rmongs pa'i zhen tshig*) with which some Sakya followers have slandered Kailash “have no point beyond refuting the virtues of pilgrimage to holy places,” a goal he appears to take as so ridiculous it is not worth addressing. For Khatag Zamyak, the value of pilgrimage to holy places is so obvious it needs no explanation—as he demonstrates elsewhere in the diary, he values pilgrimage for the opportunities for him to see special sites where famous religious heroes practiced, to benefit from the blessings of such places, to accumulate merit through prostrations, circumambulations, and pure vision, and to make meritorious donations at those places. He also rejects the argument from appearance that Kailash is not Himavat on the basis that ordinary beings cannot see the mountain as it really is, cites the testimony of advanced practitioners that it is indeed the palace of Cakrasaṃvara, and looks to traces of the mountain’s identity visible in common perception. It is also worth clarifying that for Khatag Zamyak, Kailash being Himavat, the mountain described in the *Abhidharmakośa*, is the same as being the palace of Cakrasaṃvara,

549. We can only speculate about how Khatag Zamyak might have known about Sakya Paṇḍita’s rejection of pilgrimage to Kailash. One possible way is from having read a pilgrimage guide entitled *Gangs ri chen po ti se dang mtsho chen ma dros pa bcas kyi sngon byung gi lo rgyus mdor bsdus su brjod pa'i rab byed shel dkar me long* written by 'Bri gung chung tsang 06 Bstan 'dzin Chos kyi blo gros (1868-1906). This guidebook seems to have been popular and circulating during Khatag Zamyak’s travels. For more information about this text, including a critical edition and summary translation, see Elena de Rossi Filibeck, *Two Tibetan Guide Books to Ti Se and La Phyi*.

something associated with tantric practice.

Khatag Zamyak's Practices of Seeing at Kailash

In reading Khatag Zamyak's description of his time at Kailash, we can see that he seems to employ a variety of what I have called practices of seeing. These different practices of seeing engage both his ordinary sensory perception and what we might call his mind's eye, thus affecting the way he encounters the physical landscape of Kailash.

Engaging with Pilgrimage Guides, Monastic Caretakers, and Oral History

While on pilgrimage at Kailash, Khatag Zamyak alludes to various ways in which he learns about Kailash and its history. We might understand this as educating Khatag Zamyak's perception—because of his engagement with these sources of information, he does not see rocks and valleys, but rather the rock where Milarepa defeated Naro Bonchung or the valley where the Buddha once walked. He cannot see Milarepa or the Buddha with his ordinary perception, but he now sees the landscape as meaningful by virtue of its connection to these figures.

In particular, Khatag Zamyak refers to people, texts, or oral traditions that provide information about the places he is visiting. For instance, at one point, he cites “the sayings of guides to the holy place” (*gnas 'dzin*), which seems to indicate that he is referring to people who guide pilgrims around the site. Elsewhere, he seems to be referring to oral tradition, such as when he reports a folk etymology for why Ngari Khorsum has the name that it does.

He also discusses written pilgrimage guides of the sort discussed in the previous chapter. For instance, when discussing how many circumambulations of Kailash will yield particular benefits, he quotes a stanza saying what a pilgrim will receive if she circumambulates once, ten

times, or a hundred times and says that this verse comes from old inventories (*dkar chag*), a genre term used for pilgrimage guides. He also cites an inventory (*dkar chag*) when recounting the history of the Korchag Jowo images, copying or paraphrasing a long story into his diary.

In all of these cases, these guides and oral traditions provide Khatag Zamyak with context for interpreting the “text” of what he is seeing. In “reading” the landscape in light of the narrative, historical, or identifying information given in these guides, Khatag Zamyak sees the place in a different way. Absent these sorts of sources, Khatag Zamyak would see the rocks and mountains around Kailash, but they would lack any additional significance. With the stories and oral traditions, however, Khatag Zamyak sees the landscape in terms of a rich set of interconnections: he sees one place *as* the land spoken of in the *Lankāvatārasūtra*, another place *as* the place where the Khampa woman lost her son, and yet another place *as* the place where a hundred circumambulations means achieving Buddhahood in this lifetime. Such connections link the physical landscape he sees with his ordinary perception with various other ideas and stories that are in his mind but are not otherwise immediately present to his senses. These connections render the landscape in which Khatag Zamyak travels into a richly meaningful one, thus shaping the way he experiences it on pilgrimage.

That Khatag Zamyak discusses pilgrimage guides in this section provides an opportunity to reconsider the discussion in chapter six in light of the Khatag Zamyak’s diary. This will take us somewhat afield of the main argument of this chapter, and involve discussion of sections of the diary outside of the selection given above. In that chapter, I suggested that pilgrim guides constructed a vision of the pilgrimage place’s wonders, pointed out that those wonders would be hidden from the eyes of the ordinary pilgrim, and then noted the mention of visible signs or traces of these wonders the even ordinary pilgrims could see. This functioned as an extended

metaphor that trained pilgrims to see the ordinary physical place as a divine palace, or at least to prime them to look at every rock as a potential sign or wonder. But now that we have the diary of a Tibetan pilgrim, we can return to some of the questions posed in that chapter. Did Khatag Zamyak have these experiences? Was he reading pilgrimage guides? Did he try to see the wonders they describe? Was he able to see them, and either way, how did he feel about it? Did his engagement with these texts and places result in faith?

Many of the answers to these questions remain unclear, for Khatag Zamyak does not name the particular pilgrimage guides he is reading nor dwells on what they say or how he reacts to them. However, the diary does describe Khatag Zamyak as frequently consulting and referring to pilgrimage guidebooks and inventories. He mentions reading pilgrimage guidebooks (*gnas yig*) five times⁵⁵⁰ and inventories (*dkar chag*) eight times,⁵⁵¹ nine if we count one time where he mentions in disappointment that a particular place *lacks* an inventory for him to consult.⁵⁵²

How does he use these pilgrimage guides? Often it seems that these guides tell him stories about or histories of the particular place that he copies into his diary. As discussed above, when Khatag Zamyak is at Korchag Jowo in Purang, he writes down the story of how a dharma king came to build the central image of the temple, concluding the retelling with “the history of the construction is clear from the inventory.”⁵⁵³ Elsewhere guidebooks tell what specific practices to do at a site and the potential karmic rewards for doing so. While at Kailash, for

550. Ibid., 76, 93, 110, 126, 156.

551. Ibid., 36, 43, 83, 91, 95, 99, 168, 171.

552. Ibid., 90.

553. *Bzhengs pa'i lo rgyus dkar chag nas gsal*. Ibid., 168.

instance, Khatag Zamyak copies down a song that tells the value of different numbers of circumambulations. “‘If one circumambulates one time at the great palace of Kailash, one purifies the defilements of one life. Similarly, if one does ten circumambulations, one purifies a kalpa's worth of rebirths. If one does a hundred circumambulations, having purified the 10 signs and 8 qualities, one will attain buddhahood in one lifetime.’ Thus say the previous inventories.”⁵⁵⁴ And finally, it sometimes seems that he uses the guides in order to identify the particular images at a site. For example, he writes “I borrowed manuscripts of the pilgrimage guide of the holy place of Mabo Chok (*smra bo lcog*) in Lhodrak (*lho brag*) and of Ngadak Nyang (*mnga' bdag myang*) and so forth,⁵⁵⁵ and did the identifications.”⁵⁵⁶ This is somewhat terse, but the upshot seems to be that he used the pilgrimage guide to point out or identify particular features of the site.⁵⁵⁷

It also shows Khatag Zamyak frequently interacting with the caretakers (*dkon gnyer*) of temples and holy places. Recall that certain anthropologists have questioned whether written

554. *Pho brang chen po ti se la/bskor ba lan gcig skor gyur na/ skye ba gcig gi sgrib pa dag/ de bzhin rim pa bcu bskor na/ bskal pa gcig gi sgrib pa dag/ bskor ba brgya rtsa song ba na/ rtags bcu yon tan brgyad rdzogs nas/ tshe gcig sangs rgyas thob pa 'gyur/ zhes dkar chag sngon ma'i gsung bzhin bskor tshad dngos yin par sems/ deng sang ngag sgros su ni bskor tshad bcu gsum yin zer la.* Ibid., 170-1.

555. I have not been able to find a pilgrimage guide to these places, but Kathog Situ visits them in his pilgrimage to central Tibet. See KaH thog si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do*, 260-2.

556. *Lho brag smra bo lcog gnas dang/ mnga' bdag myang sogs kyi gnas yig phyag dpe g.yar te ngo sprod mdzad.* Kha stag 'dzam yang, *Nyin deb*, 110.

557. It is also worth pointing out that Khatag Zamyak has many other references to reading texts while on pilgrimage. To give a few examples, he reads the *Vessantara Jataka*, Milarepa's *Mgur 'bum* (which appears several times), Marpa's *Mgur 'bum*, the *Abhidharmakośa*, Padmasambhava's *Bka' thang shel brag ma*, Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, “the best path that combines Mahamudra and Dzogchen,” the *Legs bshad shel gyi me long*, Phagmodrupa's *Rnam thar*, the *Prajñāpāramitā in 8000 verses*, Milarepa's *Rnam thar*, and the *Mani Kabum*. At various points, he even copies down quotations from these texts into his own diary as a way of working through his own thoughts. He quotes passages from Mipham (192), Sakya Paṇḍita's *Elegant Sayings* (193), Drakpa Gyeltsen (218), the *Mahayanasutralamkara* (219), several passages from different pilgrimage guides (83, 122, 126, 170-1) and several songs from Milarepa's *Hundred Thousand Songs* (116, 130, 205).

pilgrimage guides were primarily circulated in written form, and suggested that they may have been memorized or summarized and conveyed to pilgrims by caretakers and other people who guide pilgrims around these sites. Khatag Zamyak often mentions caretakers in a way that suggests that these figures were leading him around sites and into the otherwise locked temples where important images were kept. Khatag says that the caretakers “point out” features for him (*ngo sprod gnang ba*).⁵⁵⁸ It seems that caretakers also provided information about the images and what their special stories, powers, or qualities were. Occasionally he mentions that because he could not find a caretaker, he was not able to get into the temple of a particular site in order to see the images.⁵⁵⁹ These caretakers generally seem linked to specific temples and are not depicted going, for instance, to sites outside of the temple or on larger circumambulations. However he also references “the sayings of the pilgrimage guides” (*gnas 'dzin rnams kyi smra la*) in a way that suggests he is talking about people who guide pilgrims around the pilgrimage site.⁵⁶⁰

The diary, thus, marks an informal reception history for pilgrimage guides. The diary shows him reading pilgrimage guides and talking to caretakers and provides evidence to say that they affect his behavior. On the question of whether Khatag Zamyak tries to see the supposedly hidden wonders of the pilgrimage place, we may look at his description of the time spent at Kailash, which is the place about which he writes the most. It will be analyzed more fully later on in this chapter, but for now it suffices to say that he does describe trying to see the mountain as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara. He does mention that it is actually the palace of Cakrasaṃvara

558. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Nyin deb*, 128.

559. *Ibid.*, 106.

560. *Ibid.*, 171.

when describing the mountain and its good qualities, and the fact that the mountain is actually a divine palace does seem to contribute to his thinking of the place as a whole as particularly special. He also praises Milarepa for being able to see the mountain in direct perception exactly as it is in the Buddha's words, so it is clear that it matters to him the mountain really is wondrous and that he admires beings who can see it directly for what it really is instead of having to infer its true nature as has to do.⁵⁶¹ Khatag Zamyak clearly does act, moreover, as though he has a sense of the reality of Kailash beyond that which he can see, and seems constantly to be looking intently at the things he *can* see as a way of getting at the reality he cannot see. And this does, as we will see in the upcoming sections does occasionally facilitate moments of breakthrough where Khatag Zamyak seems to experience some connection with a reality beyond that which ordinarily has direct perceptual access.

Reporting Others' Perceptions

Another way that Khatag Zamyak educates his own perception of Kailash is by citing how other people—particularly highly realized masters—see the pilgrimage place. This occurs most notably when he is refuting Sakya Paṇḍita's claim that Kailash is not holy, but is also present in other situations. For when Khatag Zamyak describes the various sights of Kailash, Khatag Zamyak frequently invokes the superior perception of figures like Milarepa. He values his own perception of the mountain, but sees it as part of a hierarchy of possible perceptions of the mountain, whereby buddhas and bodhisattvas can see the mountain in a different way than he can. Thus in looking at Kailash, Khatag Zamyak is always aware, implicitly or explicitly, of other possible perceptions of Kailash, and particularly that more highly realized beings perceive

561. *Rje btsun mi las bon chung rdzu 'phrul gyis dbang du bsdus nas mtsho ma pham gangs ti se dang bcas bdag gir mdzad/ rgyal ba'i bka' bzhin mngon sum gzigs nas bsngags pa'i me tog phyogs kun 'thor zhing rol.* Ibid., 169.

it as it *truly* is—the palace of Cakrasaṃvara.

This is part of the reason that Sakya Paṇḍita's critique that Kailash does not look like it should does not seem to bother Khatag Zamyak—he thinks that whether or not one sees the features of the mountain described in scripture is a function of one's own merit and obscurations rather than the legitimacy of the mountain. For instance, he writes “Although there are jambu trees growing there, one [either sees or] does not see them because of the purity or impurity of one's defilements.”⁵⁶² His own inability to see Jambu trees, then, is chalked up to his own obscurations, rather than, as Sakya Paṇḍita would have it, to a decisive argument against Kailash.

Immediately after describing how Sakya Paṇḍita rejects the legitimacy of Kailash, Khatag Zamyak writes that, “In reality, perfected buddhas and bodhisattvas directly perceive (*mngon sum gzigs*) Kailash as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara.”⁵⁶³ That is, while Khatag Zamyak himself cannot see Kailash as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara, he argues that there are beings who *can* directly perceive it as such, and that he trusts their testimony.

Khatag Zamyak also points to specific (and mostly Tibetan) religious virtuosos who give testimony that the mountain is indeed worthy of praise. He cites that Atisa, Padmasambhava, various Drikung and Drukpa Kagyus, and the first Panchen Lama as all recognizing the mountain as legitimate. Most importantly, however, he cites that Milarepa has “seen it directly (*mngon sum gzigs*) in accordance with the Buddha's speech,” and has consequently praised the mountain.

In addition to citing advanced masters' perceptions of Kailash, Khatag Zamyak also points to features of the mountain which can be seen like ordinary people like himself. For

562. Ibid.

563. Ibid., 170.

instance, after arguing that advanced masters perceive Kailash directly as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara and pointing to the various signs (*rtags*) which indicate its legitimacy, Khatag Zamyak deferentially says “I myself do not analyze it deeply.”⁵⁶⁴ Immediately after, however, he points to the fact that the four major rivers flow from the area immediately surrounding Kailash, concluding, “All of that remains visible to all.” That is, much like Chödrak Yeshe, Khatag Zamyak maintains that—regardless of the discordances between Kailash and Himavat—it is undeniable that everyone can see that the four rivers flow from Kailash. This fact, which is clearly visible to everyone, is the final argument in favor of Kailash’s legitimacy.

One of the most striking things about this whole passage is the way in which Khatag Zamyak balances a humble deference about such weighty epistemological matters and the desire to see the evidence with his own eyes. The deference to others more qualified than he is a standard trope in Tibetan literature, where even highly advanced masters are expected to perform humility, but that such deference occurs even in his private journal indicates that it is likely not just for show. He writes that the question needs more analysis from sutras and tantras, and says that he himself “do[es] not analyze it deeply.” In the very next sentence after saying he does not analyze it deeply, he switches to another quasi-proof statement: “In actuality...,” he writes, and then goes on to describe the rivers and how they are visible to everyone, implicitly arguing that this undeniable fact supports the identification of Kailash as Himavat from which the four rivers flow.

Doing “Pure Perception” (dag snang byas)

In reading guidebooks and reporting others’ perceptions of Kailash, Khatag Zamyak educated his

564. Ibid.

perception so that his experience of the various sites at Kailash was not informed merely by his own ordinary visual perception, but also by a sense of history and an awareness that others saw it differently. This does not necessarily radically alter his ordinary perception, for he still sees the same rocks and stones he would otherwise have seen, but it does shape the *way* he sees these sites. There are also practices of seeing, however, by which Khatag Zamyak investigates or tries to alter his everyday perception.

One of the most important ways he tries to do this is by cultivating “pure perception” (*dag snang*) at Kailash. Khatag Zamyak twice describes himself as doing pure perception at sites at Kailash, once at a particular cave and once at a stone where Milarepa is said to have performed a miracle. As discussed in the introduction, the term pure perception is made up of the adjective *dag*, indicating “pure,” “clean,” “holy,” or “correct,” with the word *snang*, which generally has the sense of “to appear,” “to perceive,” “to illuminate,” or “appearance.” It might also be translated as “pure appearance,” but I have used the term “pure perception” to emphasize that it is pure appearance to some perceiver. Both times in the selection above, Khatag Zamyak pairs the phrase “pure perception” with a verb for “to do” (*byas*). The term occurs frequently elsewhere in the diary as well, generally being paired with the verbs “to do” (*byas*), “to generate” (*bskyed*), or “to train” (*sbyong*), indicating that Khatag is actively cultivating or generating pure perception, something which perhaps has to do with purifying his ordinary, and implicitly impure, perception.

Khatag Zamyak does not give detail as to what it means to cultivate pure perception, but we can draw out the meaning both by contextualizing the term in terms of its use elsewhere in Tibetan culture.

The term “pure perception” occurs in various contexts in Tibetan, but generally indicates

the kind of perception that a tantric deity would have, in which the perceiver experiences phenomena purely in their true nature without delusion or grasping. In other words, they perceive everything as *good*. Achieving this kind of perception is a goal for ordinary humans, who tend to see things in terms of desire, revulsion, or ignorance, and can be cultivated through tantric practices such as reciting mantras and performing visualizations. Such practices enable the practitioner to become the deity and to see like the deity.

Elsewhere, pure perception is associated with the visionary encounters, particularly of treasure finders. In these cases, pure perception indicates the realm from which treasure finders receive textual transmissions from important masters in the past.⁵⁶⁵ However, the term can also refer to other sorts of visionary experiences. For example, the 5th Dalai Lama wrote a text in which he recorded his visions and dreams that is called the “Cycle of Extensive Pure Perception” (*dag snang rgya chen skor*).⁵⁶⁶ Several other prominent teachers have texts like these that have “pure perception” in the title.

We also find the term pure perception figuring in to the so-called “three appearances” (*snang gsum*) of the Sakya school. In this formulation, and following the translations generally given for these terms, pure perception is part of a trio consisting of karmic appearances (*las snang*), experiential appearances (*nyams snang*), and pure appearances (*dag snang*), which correlate to respectively to the desire realm and the realm of coarse physical appearance, the form realm and the realm of the semi-appearances of speech, and finally the formless realm and the intangible appearance of mind. This list conveys a hierarchy of least-subtle to most-subtle, and suggests that as the practitioner advances on the Buddhist path, he or she will become less

565. See, for example, Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997), 90.

566. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Dag snang rgya can skor*, TBRC: W2PD17424 (No publisher, no date).

concerned with the coarse physical appearance of things, and progress to the rarified pure realm of perception.

Each of these cases opposes pure perception to the everyday world of common-sense perception and associate *dag snang* with discovery of treasures or high degrees of realization. Thus in trying to cultivate pure perception, Khatag Zamyak is trying to reach a state where he perceives things not merely in terms of their coarse physical appearance, but rather in a more subtle and purified way.

Intriguingly, at one point not contained in the passage above, Khatag Zamyak pairs “pure perception” with the verb “to appear” (*shar*), indicating that pure perception spontaneously arose for him after he has performed five thousand circumambulations of the *stūpas* at Ngor Monastery.⁵⁶⁷ For the most part, however, he is always actively trying to generate pure perception.

What does it mean for Khatag Zamyak to generate pure perception towards an object? Is he doing formal generation stage cultivation under the direction of a particular teacher, or is he doing this practice on his own? Are his eyes open or closed? The specific details of what he is doing and how are unclear. What is evident, however, is that Khatag Zamyak is focusing on holy objects or sites that he encounters on pilgrimage and is using them as supports as he tries to cultivate a new way of seeing the world.

Visualizing (gsal btab)

Another way that Khatag Zamyak tries to alter the way he sees Kailash is to actively visualize the mountain as being a pure land. While atop a particular cliff, Khatag Zamyak starts describing

567. *Chu sbrul zla 6 tshes 13 bar ngor la 'gor bas/ de'i bar nangs nub rnams la bde gshegs mchod rten sogs sa yi 'bum pa bcu drug byin can la bskor ba 5000 grub pas blo bde dag snang shar*. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Nyin deb*, 229.

the signs visible on that cliff, the activities of a place spirit there, and ultimately says that he visualized (*gsal btab*) it as the pure land of Amitabha. The term joins the word for clear or radiant (*gsal*) with a verbalizer (*btab*), rendering meanings such as to make radiant, to visualize, to make clear, to imagine, to picture, or to make clear in one's mind. He uses this technique on an area that he clearly thinks is special, based both on its reputation and on the footprints and signs he can see, in order to try to visualize it—to imagine it in his mind's eye—as the pure land of Amitabha. Here again, we see him looking at the physical landscape and attempting to imagine it in its purified form. Given Khatag Zamyak's position that Kailash *really is* the palace of Cakrasaṃvara, even though he as an ordinary person cannot see it as such, the visualization practice he engages in here is a way of trying to see the holy place as it really is. Khatag Zamyak cannot presently see this landscape as the pure land of Amitabha with his physical eyes, but he can and does use his imagination to visualize it as such in his mind's eye. In other words, since his perceptual capacity is such that Amitabha's pure land does not *present* itself to his ordinary physical perception, he uses his imagination to *re-present* Amitabha's pure land to himself. Following the logic of *sadhana* practice as it is outlined by figures like Jamgön Kongtrul, these kinds of practices can actually help to bridge that gap between Khatag Zamyak's ordinary perception of the landscape and his imaginative visualization of it as Amitabha's pure land.

Looking for Signs

In addition to educating his perception and trying to radically alter his perception through visualizing or cultivating pure perception, Khatag Zamyak also closely examines what he sees. He then frequently seems to interpret what he sees as connected to something he cannot see.

One way in which this dynamic manifests is when Khatag Zamyak looks for signs (*rtags*)

while at Kailash. In particular, he looks for signs that Kailash is indeed the palace of Cakrasaṃvara in spite of the fact that Sakya Paṇḍita argued that it was not. In the section where he discusses Kailash's legitimacy, immediately following the sentence in which he says that perfected buddhas and bodhisattvas can see Kailash as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara in direct perception, Khatag Zamyak goes on to say that there are signs (*rtags*) of the descriptions given in the sutras. He does not in this passage elaborate overmuch on that the signs consist of exactly, but one likely candidate is the footprints he consistently reports seeing while in the area. The rocks and earth, moreover, manifest self-arisen marks that great deeds were performed there. Such visible traces point to the world lying just out of Khatag Zamyak's visual reach. He speaks of these signs as nails or points (*gzer bu*), suggesting that these signs mark places where two realms—Khatag Zamyak's ordinary visual perception or Kailash and extraordinary perceptions of the mountain—interpenetrate.

In addition to this brief mention of signs in the section on Kailash, Khatag Zamyak mentions looking for signs frequently elsewhere in the diary. Such signs are invariably visible events or objects that he interprets as pointing towards important but invisible facts. In the case above, he is concerned about Kailash's legitimacy, but elsewhere, he looks for signs that can tell him about himself and his place in the world. In particular, he frequently notes occasions where something happens that he then interprets as telling him about his degree of realization, amount of merit, or level of spiritual attainment. The English word "sign" can be rendered by a number of Tibetan words, including *rtags*, *brda*, or *mtshan ma*, all of which convey the same sense of a sign, mark, indication, or symbol, although each has a semantic range that also includes other potential meanings. Sometimes Khatag Zamyak explicitly uses these terms when pointing out or interpreting signs, but other times he does not explicitly use any of these terms. He looks for

these signs in the external landscape of his pilgrimage journey because the qualities he really wants to know about—his karmic connections and his level of realization—are not immediately self-transparent to Khatag Zamyak, and must instead be inferred through external signs.

For example, as discussed above, upon arriving at Kailash, Khatag Zamyak starts praising Milarepa and does a guru *sadhana* for him and reports that he has a brief vision of Milarepa's face as result. He writes, "I thought, 'what good karmic connections!,' and immediately prostrated in a state of rejoicing."⁵⁶⁸ He is delighted by this visionary experience, and not only for the experience itself, but for what it reveals about his own karmic connection (*rten 'brel*) to Milarepa and to Kailash. Such karmic connections, if they are indeed good, might prove to be the basis of particularly fruitful practice at that location. On a different occasion, Khatag Zamyak interprets the fact that they arrive at a particular lake right when the frequently-closed lake is open to visitors as a sign of good karmic connections.⁵⁶⁹ And on yet another occasion, Khatag Zamyak sees the practice cave of Rechungpa and the thought occurs to him "I wonder if Precious Rechungpa was the lama I relied upon in a previous life?" and he is delighted.⁵⁷⁰ In each of these examples, we see Khatag Zamyak interpreting some external stimulus—the sight of Milarepa's face, the fortuitous timing of their arrival at the lake, entering Rechungpa's cave—as reflective of his own karmic entanglements.

Elsewhere, Khatag Zamyak tries to influence events and read the results as reflective of his level of realization. This happens, for example, when a member of Khatag Zamyak's

568. *Rje btsun mi la'i bla sgrub kha 'don bya skabs mchod pa'i 'go nas zhal mjal bas/ rten 'brel legs snyam de ma thag phyag gsum btsal yid spro ba'i ngang de dgong mtsho 'gram der zhag 'dug byas.* Ibid., 166.

569. Ibid., 172.

570. *Phyi nyin ras chung phug la rang nyid gcig pu lam gzhan zhig nas yar bskyod pas/ ras chung phug gi sgo ru slebs 'dug cing/ ras chung rin po che rang gis sngon bsten bla ma yin nam snyam yid spro bar byung.* Ibid., 104.

traveling party falls ill. Khatag Zamyak writes “[the sick man] was like a bird hit by a stone, so I gave him a large amount of blessings and medicine. All night long, the sick man did nothing but cry out and weep. So I felt ashamed to be a leader of others, since I lacked any experience or realizations.”⁵⁷¹ Another time, he finds himself in a terrible and dangerous storm and tries to pacify it by chanting mantras.⁵⁷² When this does not work, he is left feeling depressed, and writes, “I resigned myself to the fact that I have no experiences or realizations.”⁵⁷³ In each case, Khatag Zamyak interprets a negative external event and his inability to fix it as a sign that he lacks the realizations he either wishes he had or thinks that he should have.

Not all of the signs Khatag Zamyak interprets are directly about him. He mentions, for instance that the geomantic signs of a particular place seem good (*rtags*),⁵⁷⁴ and that the crowds gathered to see the Panchen Lama all observed wonderful signs such as rainbow lights in the sky (*rtags*),⁵⁷⁵ and that the footprints around Kailash are signs (*rtags*) that it is a dwelling place of the Buddha and five hundred arhats. In these cases, the signs point to the auspicious nature of the place, the virtue of the Panchen Lama, and the authenticity of Kailash respectively and not to Khatag Zamyak’s karmic connections or spiritual attainments, but these moments do show this same movement from an externally visible sign to some seemingly invisible but important quality.

Khatag Zamyak’s constant lookout for signs shapes his visual engagement with the places

571. *Byi’ur rdo phog pa ltar ’dug pas/ rang gis byin rlabs dang sman bcas ci drags byas/ nad pa de ni de’i nub mo mtshan nam du o rgyang dang ngu ba kho na byed ’dug pas/ rang la nyams rtogs med pas gzhan gyi lam sna byed pa ngo re tsha.* Ibid., 129.

572. Ibid., 166.

573. *Bdag la nyams rtogs med pa kho thag chod.* Ibid., 166.

574. Ibid., 164.

575. Ibid., 216.

he visits on pilgrimage. Because he is constantly interpreting the landscape, himself, and the relationship between the two in terms of such signs, he is often particularly attentive to the landscape in hopes of spotting these kinds of signs. Signs are another way in which Khatag Zamyak connects the world of his ordinary perception to unseen realities that lie outside of his perceptual grasp. As such, his experience of the landscape is colored by the belief that there is another world just outside of his vision.

Looking Closely (zhib mjal)

Related to this practice of looking for signs is when Khatag Zamyak looks closely at something, or studies something in detail (*zhib mjal*). The term combines *zhib*, a word that can refer to anything finely ground, like barley flour, or something that is detailed, fine, accurate, or close together, and *mjal*, a term that translates to “to meet,” “to encounter,” or “to see.” It has the honorific sense of meeting or encountering some high-status person or object. Combined into one phrase, the term *zhib mjal* indicates something beyond simply seeing, looking, or glancing, but rather a close and detailed visual inspection. In the passage describing his experiences at Kailash, Khatag Zamyak has already seen the holy place of Gyangdrak Monastery, but he leaves behind most people and animals and returns to look at it closely. One way to interpret this is to think that Khatag Zamyak thinks that he might miss something if he looks quickly or cavalierly, and instead focuses intently at the object of his attention in order to make sure that if there is any trace of the thing he is looking for, he will not miss it. At another point in the diary, he writes that “if pilgrims to the holy place and images, which are the dawning of the sun of Kadam teachings in Phen, look closely (*zhib mjal*), purify themselves, and perform prostrations and circumambulations, the entirety of the great essence [of the place] will necessarily enter into

their hearts.”⁵⁷⁶ Looking closely, then, is a way of engaging with the site or the images there. It is more intense and sustained than quickly looking and moving on. Successfully performing this kind of visual engagement, moreover, is tied to the pilgrim’s full appropriation of the site and its various benefits.

Focusing (dmigs rnam)

Again closely related to the idea of closely examining what one sees is *dmigs rnam* or other phrases with the term *dmigs*, which Khatag Zamyak uses several times while at Kailash. The term *dmigs* comes up a great deal in philosophical writing, where it translates the Sanskrit word *ālambana*, and means “object of awareness,” “percept,” or “cause” depending on the context. In less technical contexts, it can be used as a verb meaning something like “to be aware of” or “to observe,” in nouns meaning “aim,” “intention,” “mental object.” The term *dmigs rnam* is a bit strange, and particularly as Khatag Zamyak uses it in the selection above and one other time in the diary in the sentence *dmigs rnam ci shes la ‘bad*. To start with *dmigs rnam*, some dictionaries suggest that it is a compound of the focal object (*dmigs pa*) and the aspect (*rnam pa*), specifically of the mental aspect, whether pure or impure, of the observer. The *Great Tibetan Dictionary* defines the term as, “The aspect which appears and is experienced in the mind of the perceiver, having focused on an object in terms of its form and so forth.”⁵⁷⁷ The sense, then, is of the phenomenological meeting of subject and object, with a particular focus on how the object *appears* to the subject.

Khatag Zamyak seems to use it in the sense of actively focusing on some holy image. In

576. Ibid., 41.

577. *Yul gzugs sogs la dmigs nas yul can sems la myong ba shar ba'i rnam pa*. Zhang Yisun, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1993), 2143.

the passage above, his object is the images (“supports of body, speech, and mind”) at Gyangdrak temple, and on his phenomenological experience of those images. He appends the term *dmigs rnam* with the words *ci shes la ‘bad*, indicating something like “I endeavored as best as I knew how” with reference to the object of focus, and giving the sense that he is really trying to focus on the object and how it appears to him. As in the case with the terms discussed above, this is not a simple *looking* at the objects he sees on pilgrimage, but an active, and reflexive kind of seeing, in which he tries to have focused attention on the attributes of those objects.

Here as well, Khatag Zamyak appears to be trying to get beyond ordinary visual perception of an object in which the eyes passively receive sense data from the outside world. Instead, he is actively looking in a way that maintains an awareness that visual perception involves both a subject and an object, or a perceiver and an object of awareness. This kind of practice might well be interpreted as an exploration or even an implicit critique of ordinary visual perception. For in attempting to look at the images in the monastery in this way, Khatag Zamyak recognizes that there are multiple modes of visual perception, and that an ordinary surface view of an object is not the only way to see it.

Recognition (ngo ‘phrod)

One way in which Khatag Zamyak relates to the things he sees is to say that he “recognized” some aspect of the landscape as the place where Milarepa performed a great deed. In each case, his recognition concerns the connection between some physical place in the landscape in front of him and an episode from Milarepa’s life story. The logic is thus similar to that of looking for signs in that he is moving between that which is physically present before him to some reality that is not immediately present.

The term *ngo 'phrod*, also spelled *ngo sprod* or *ngo sprad*, might also be translated as “to introduce” or “to point out.” Elsewhere in the diary, we also find the use of the word *ngos 'dzin*, which has a similar meaning. As Matthew Kapstein writes, “in its technical sense [the term *ngo sprod*] refers to instruction that, if skillfully delivered to an appropriately receptive disciple by an appropriately qualified master, catalyzes an immediate intuitive grasp of the instruction’s content.”⁵⁷⁸ He illustrates this admittedly technical definition with the example of a tennis pro who points out a flaw in the student’s serving technique. The student immediately realizes this flaw, and is able to fix it “and then deliver one that screams past Martina.”⁵⁷⁹ Thus the term implies both an instruction by a qualified teacher, and then the student’s recognition of the object taught, not merely in a way of hearing and understanding what the teacher said in a surface-level way, but of directly and deeply understanding the point of the instruction.

As is the case with many of the terms discussed in this section, it is not clear whether Khatag Zamyak is using “recognition” in the technical sense explored above or in a more everyday sense. For instance, a guide may have pointed out to him that a particular place was associated with a particular episode from Milarepa’s life story.

Regardless, Khatag Zamyak’s way of connecting the physical landscape to the narrative map of Milarepa’s *Life* is still striking. In translating *ngo 'phrod*, I have chosen to render it as “to recognize” instead of more neutral choices like “to introduce” or “to point out.” Identification, for example, might occur on the basis of being told by a sign or a local guide, whereas recognition points to a deeper kind of affinity. The sense of recognized seems merited, however,

578. Matthew Kapstein, “The Amnesic Monarch and the Five Mnemonic Men: “Memory” in Great Perfection (rdzogs-chen) Thought,” in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Janet Gyatso, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 239-68, 242.

579. Ibid.

insofar as he does not offer any evidence that might serve as the basis of recognition, but instead simply says that he recognizes them in the context of retelling the stories that supposedly occurred there, suggesting that the basis of his connection with these places is that he somehow senses a connection between the place he sees and the story he has read.

Again, in traveling to the various holy places around Kailash, Khatag Zamyak is holding multiple visionary landscapes in his mind at the same time. One is the physical landscape in front of him that is visible to his ordinary eyes, and the other is the narrative landscape created by Milarepa (and other highly realized practitioners) and their life stories. The physical landscape is present to all travelers, and the narrative events exist in the shared imagination of Tibetans telling the story. In “recognizing” one aspect of the physical landscape as being part of the narrative landscape, then, Khatag Zamyak is identifying places where those two landscapes interpenetrate. Khatag Zamyak thus sees the physical landscape in a new way, and locates the narrative landscape in such a way that the stories, figures, and miraculous deeds are made ever more real. The way in which Khatag Zamyak sees the landscape in front of him involves him holding two places in mind—the physical landscape present to his ordinary senses and the narrative landscape represented in his imagination—and seeking out ways in which they interpenetrate.

Seeing/Meeting Face to Face (zhal mjal)

The final practice of seeing relevant to Khatag Zamyak’s pilgrimage experience at Kailash is the notion of seeing or meeting face to face (*zhal mjal*). At the beginning of Khatag Zamyak’s visit to Kailash, he reports a striking visionary experience of seeing Milarepa’s face. It comes right after Khatag Zamyak says he recited a guru *sādhana* for Milarepa. He interprets this experience as a very good sign—it means that there are good karmic connections, whether between himself and

Milarepa or for the pilgrimage itself.

Seeing and encountering faces is an important part of Khatag Zamyak's pilgrimage. In the beginning of the diary, he explains that the whole reason for keeping the diary is "in order that the face to face encounters (*zhal mjal ba*) and circumambulations of the three supports may be fixed in my mind."⁵⁸⁰ So clearly these kinds of encounters are particularly meaningful to him.

The term for seeing or meeting face to face combines an honorific term for "face" (*zhal*) with a word we have already seen means "to see," "to meet," or "to encounter" (*mjal*). It is an honorific verb form that indicates respect and can be used when encountering either people or holy objects. Thus in addition to Khatag Zamyak using the phrase as above to indicate seeing the face of a figure like Milarepa, we also find him saying elsewhere after meeting a lama named Karma Tashi, "I said a prayer that I might see his face once more in this life."⁵⁸¹ Or when he visits a temple, he writes "Inside the temple, as soon as I saw the face of the main image, the precious Jowo, my mind rejoiced."⁵⁸² At a few points, he even uses the term towards things we might not think of having faces, such as the great Derge printing house, about which he writes "Then I saw the face (*zhal mjal*) of the great treasury of dharma printing house there."⁵⁸³ Such usages show that *zhal mjal* does not always involve literal faces, but rather with the outer surface of some object.

What does it mean for Khatag Zamyak to write that he sees Milarepa's face when he is approaching Kailash? He is not in a temple or a place where there are paintings or statues of

580. *Gnas khyad par can dang rten gsum rnams bskor zhing/ zhal mjal ba yid la 'jags pa'i ched du dbu tsam 'bri bar bya*. Kha stag 'dzam yag, *Nyin deb*, 12.

581. *Lan cig skye ba 'di la da dung zhal mjal ba'i smon lam zhus nas*. Ibid., 14.

582. *Lha khang nang la rten gtso jo bo rin po che zhal mjal ma thag yid spro zhing 'ong ba*. Ibid., 174.

583. *De nas par khang chos mdzod chen po zhal mjal nas*. Ibid., 21.

Milarepa, so it seems unlikely that he is talking about a physical image. An encounter with a physical image, moreover, would not prompt the joy and surprise of saying that this was a sign of good karmic connections and then falling into three prostrations. It seems, rather, that the action of reciting a *sadhana* to Milarepa at a place that is particularly associated with Milarepa triggers a kind of visionary experience. Here, then, we see a moment where the gap between Khatag Zamyak's ordinary and imagined seeing breaks down for a small while, allowing a pilgrim like Khatag Zamyak to have a fantastic and moving visionary experience.

Conclusion: Co-Seeing

Throughout this chapter, I have pointed to how Khatag Zamyak's specific practices of seeing whereby he attempts to bridge this gap and transform his own perception. For example, when Khatag Zamyak looks closely (*zhib mjal*), visualizes (*gsal btab*), or focuses on how the object appears to him (*dmigs rnam*), he is implicitly questioning his ordinary way of perceiving the world, and actively adopts some other way of seeing, one that attempts to attend to every visual detail or tries to see the world in its pure form. When Khatag Zamyak reads pilgrimage guidebooks about Milarepa's exploits at a site and recognizes (*ngo 'phrod*) particular places in terms of how they figure into that narrative, he is interpreting his ordinary sense perceptions in terms of the imaginative landscape constructed by the narrative. When he reports highly realized beings' perceptions of Kailash, tries to cultivate pure perception (*dag snang*), or visualizes (*gsal btab*) a particular site as the pure land of Amitabha, he is engaging alternate modes of perception. In the case of reporting how Milarepa can directly perceive Kailash as the palace of Cakrasaṃvara, this perception becomes evidence for him to believe that the mountain is holy in spite of the fact that he cannot directly perceive it as such. In cultivating pure perception or

visualizing, Khatag Zamyak is attempting to “try on” alternate ways of perceiving objects. He effortfully engages in these practices for short periods of time in hopes of cultivating a disposition that can effortlessly and permanently see the world in this way. Finally, when Khatag Zamyak looks for signs (*rtags*), he is trying to connect his own perception with that which he cannot perceive.

All of these practices of seeing constitute a way of paying attention. That is, by constantly interrogating, comparing, and reimagining his ordinary perception, he is continually directing his attention to the nature of that ordinary perception, and to the idea that this ordinary perception is not the only way to see the world. Because he believes that there is a world just outside his ordinary perception, he is always looking for signs of that world, and is consequently paying more attention than he normally would to that which he is trying to see. These encounters of seeing bring into sharp focus the issue of perception, and the ways in which his ordinary perception might be different. As is the case with other elements of the diary, moreover, the fact that he writes these activities in the diary amplifies their impact.

The cumulative effect of all of these practices of seeing is that Khatag Zamyak has a kind of double vision—or what I will call co-seeing—with respect to the landscape in front of him. He sees it in terms of his ordinary perception but is always aware of another way of seeing. That is, he sees ordinary reality present to his ordinary sense perception and thinks about, searches for evidence for, visualizes, or imagines the elevated reality that lies just outside his ordinary perception.

It may help here to draw on language developed by the philosopher Samuel Todes, who develops what he calls a phenomenology of the imagination. In so doing, he contrasts perception with imagination. Perception, he writes, is “that form of experience by which we are presented

with something actual.”⁵⁸⁴ In other words, perception is the process by which physical objects in the world are seen by our eyes. Imagination, on the other hand, is “that form of experience by which we represent to ourselves that something is possible.”⁵⁸⁵ Where perception involves objects that are directly present to the senses, imagination involves *re-presentation* of objects to ourselves by means of the creative imagination. The objects represented in imagination may be of objects we have previously seen, or they may be of things we have never seen, such the classic Buddhist example of a horned rabbit. However, we cannot imagine that which is impossible, such as the round square Todes gives as an example. Thus while our perceptions provide evidence about what is in the world, imaginations provide “proxy-evidence” about what is *possible* in the world.

Todes argues that humans are characterized by (and indeed according to Todes, simply *are*) the ability to move between these two modes of perception and imagination. In the perceptual mode, humans *are* their bodies, and gain non-conceptual but objective perceptual knowledge as they move about the world trying to satisfy their needs. In the imaginative mode, humans use their imaginations to engage abstract categories, and can gain objective conceptual knowledge. As such, he writes, “we are individuals who belong to two worlds.”⁵⁸⁶

This account of the imaginative and perceptual modes, and of humans shifting from being the subject of the perceptual mode to the subject of the imaginative mode, will help in thinking about Khatag Zamyak’s practices of seeing. For indeed, Khatag Zamyak seems to move back and forth between perception and imagination while on pilgrimage at Kailash. He sees the landscape

584. Samuel Todes, *Body and World*, 130. Many thanks to Aaron Reich for pointing me towards Todes as a resource.

585. *Ibid.*, 130.

586. *Ibid.*, 132.

with his ordinary perception, but imagines what highly realized people perceive, narratives of Milarepa's exploits, and descriptions of Kailash as the wondrous palace of Cakrasaṃvara. While on pilgrimage to Kailash, he "sees" Kailash in both of these ways, such that he has a kind of co-seeing.

Part of the difficulty of describing Khatag Zamyak's practices of seeing on pilgrimage is that scholars of religion have not developed a set of terms that can handle multiple types of "seeing" while maintaining clear distinctions and definitions. This is compounded by the fact that English (and Sanskrit) use seeing as a base metaphor for knowing. Thus in English a person can say that she *sees* someone's point, even though there is nothing literally being seen.

Similarly, I can say that Khatag Zamyak *sees* Kailash as Himavat and mean several different things, including that he directly perceives Kailash as Himavat, that he accepts the proposition that Kailash is Himavat regardless of what he sees in his ordinary perception, that he can imagine or dream about Kailash as Himavat, and so on. In my usage, I follow Todes in using perception to refer to the form of experience whereby we are presented with actual objects in the world and imagination to refer to the form of experience whereby we represent to ourselves that something is possible. I use "seeing" as a broader term that can encompass both of those modes.

In seeing Kailash, Khatag Zamyak constantly moves back and forth between his ordinary perception and imaginative representations of Kailash as wondrous Himavat, giving him a double vision of the place. This sets up a productive tension between the two visions of the site, and leads him to constantly attempt to bridge the gap between the world he perceives and the world he imagines. Or to put it another way, he attempts to bridge the gap between the world he perceives and the world he wants to be able to perceive.

Not all of Khatag Zamyak's attempts to bridge the gap between the world he sees and the

world he wants to be able to see fail, but neither do all of them succeed. He sometimes has breakthrough moments, such as the occasion where he has a vision of Milarepa's face as he approaches Kailash, after which he falls to the ground in amazement. Much of the time, however, he finds himself disappointed.

In either case, however, we might say that the pilgrimage “works;” when Khatag Zamyak fails to see what he hopes to, he is led to reflect on perception, and about the gaps between his perception and the perception of divine beings, and on the other hand the way Khatag Zamyak is led to juxtapose two “visions” of the landscape and constantly moves between them helps facilitate moments where does have these experiences of bridging the gap.

An analogy that might be helpful is that of the spark plug. A spark plug works by building up a voltage—a difference of electric charge—between two electrodes separated by a precisely calibrated gap. The voltage over the electrodes, when high enough, allows for a spark to pass from one electrode to the other, igniting the mixture of gas and oxygen in the engine and allowing the engine to start working. If the gap between the two electrodes is too small, the plug will provide only a weak spark and the engine will not function correctly, but if the gap is too large, the electrodes will not spark, and the engine will not start at all. The gap must be precisely right so that the electrodes are far enough apart that the difference in voltage produces a big enough spark, but also that the electrodes are not so far apart that they will not spark at all.

In the case of Khatag Zamyak's pilgrimage, the two electrodes are his perception and his imagination. His perception of the pilgrimage place is not the wondrous vision, which is constructed in large part by pilgrimage guides and oral tradition, that he imagines. The disjunction between his perception and his imagination does not represent a failure on Khatag Zamyak's part to internalize tradition. Rather, the logic of Tibetan pilgrimage practices involves

setting up this productive tension between ordinary perception and extraordinary imagination. This process is mediated by various other factors, including belief, narrative, and training, but pilgrimage organizes these various factors to support this juxtaposition. These two ways of seeing the mountain are different enough that they are very difficult to reconcile, but close enough that it is possible, if only momentarily. The various texts and traditions around pilgrimage build up a kind of charge across this gap, allowing it to spark if the conditions are just right. Notably, pilgrimage does not necessarily work on the disengaged pilgrim, but the energy of someone like Khatag Zamyak, who has the drive and attendant visual practices to attempt to close that gap, creates a situation in which the necessary spark occurs.

Conclusion

I began this thesis asking how it is possible to change the way we see the world. Reading through Buddhist texts, I kept finding statements suggesting that the reality as we ordinarily experience it is not the way reality actually is. People's perception of the world as impure said less about the nature of the world itself and more about the person doing the seeing. Buddhist texts held out the possibility of another way of seeing, and of seeing past the ugliness and pain of the ordinary world to an extraordinary world that lies just outside our ordinary perception. They suggested that people could transform the way they see, but that to do so, they would have to transform themselves. Participating in a broader Buddhist discourse about vision, Tibetan pilgrimage texts also describe a wondrous extraordinary world that lies just beyond ordinary perception. Rather than merely challenging people to see the world differently, they invite pilgrims to visit a particular sacred mountain and invite them to see that physical mountain as the divine palace the text claims that it really is. They presumed that pilgrims would see this mountain as an ordinary pile of rock, but also asserted that another way of seeing was possible.

My question, then, was how this transformation of vision could be attained. What are the factors conducive to such a transformation, and what are the obstacles that might prevent it? These questions led me to larger questions both about vision and the material world itself. In regards to vision, is seeing an active activity or a passive one? In what ways does perception grant objective knowledge about the world, in what ways does it reflect subjective states, and

how do these two aspects of seeing sit with one another? To what degree is seeing subject to conscious control? Are there different types of vision, and how are these related to one another? Regarding the material world, how it is possible that the same place can be seen differently by different people? Is matter simply an inert backdrop on which humans project subjective meanings? If that is the case, why does the mountain seem to resist human attempts to see it as a divine palace? Can we think of the mountain as an active participant in the process of pilgrimage and vision? To put it another way, how does the material nature of places like mountains facilitate or hinder the attempt to envision it differently?

Some of these questions may seem technical or abstract, but the question of how to transform how we see the world is a vital question for today. It may seem like these texts come from a cultural context where it made sense to claim that a mountain was really a god, and that they have nothing to say to us today. I argue, however, that this is not the case. We live in a world where the problems of climate change, racism, sexism, war, poverty, and refugee resettlement demand massive structural changes, but also require individuals to break out of habitual ways of seeing the world. As such, the question of how people can transform the way that we see the world is not only a question for Buddhists or Tibetans, but one for us as humans generally.

In order to better understand how transformation of vision might occur, I approached the problem from a variety of angles. After general introductions to the history of perception and pilgrimage in Buddhism more generally, I explored Tibetan debates about engaging the external world that asked whether spiritual development is best pursued out in the world through engagement with the physical landscape or through internally focused practices of learning and mental cultivation. I then considered advice texts that emphasized the various mental and bodily factors connected to seeing. They suggested that while seeing itself is not subject to direct

control, there are related qualities that pilgrims can and should control. I then moved to examine debates about the authenticity of particular holy mountains, which raised the issue of language and scripture, and the effects of scriptural discourse on perception. Next, in a section that asked how to actually effect transformations of perception, I explored three different sources that dealt with the transformation of perception. In each of these three cases, texts engaged issues that had been raised in previous chapters, such as faith, scriptural language, and the agency of perception. In addition, these very different sorts of texts described similar techniques for achieving the transformation of perception. In particular, they described practices of active looking such as reading the landscape and juxtaposing ordinary and extraordinary visions of the place.

In the process, I offered provisional answers to some of the questions I posed at the outset of this project. In particular, I offered a model for understanding how the transformation of vision can occur that I believe both adequately represents the Tibetan texts studied and offers productive ways of thinking about other religious traditions and about ethical problems for ourselves in the present. Specifically, I suggested that Tibetan pilgrimage texts denaturalized ordinary perception, re-contextualized that perception in terms of the site's extraordinary wonders, invited pilgrims to reflect on their own perception, and use language to re-describe the site. They thereby focused pilgrims' attention both on how the site appears in ordinary perception and on the extraordinary vision of the site that the pilgrim cannot see. They thereby facilitate a state that I called "co-seeing" in which the pilgrim sees the site in two ways at once, a state that facilitates transformative pilgrimage experiences. Pilgrimage texts thus revealed a sophisticated set of literary strategies for working with the material world.

In addition, I highlighted the importance of perception as a category of analysis in religious studies. Perception, as we have seen, involves a large variety of states classified under

the larger rubric of seeing, including looking, watching, understanding, imagining, glimpsing, and more. Perception mediates between material and immaterial, present and possible, external and internal, and active and passive. Being connected with ideas, imagination, affect, emotion, and bodily comportment, perception breaks down the duality of body and mind. Attention to perception thus raises questions about agency, about constructivism versus materialism, and about faith, imagination, literature, and the material world. Recognizing that perception is an active and therefore malleable process, religious traditions have long used perception as a site to reshape human experience of the world. For all of these reasons, perception merits increased attention in religious studies scholarship.

Nevertheless, many questions remain unanswered and much work remains to be done. The sources studied in this dissertation represent a fraction of the total body of Tibetan thinking about pilgrimage, and a more comprehensive project might come to somewhat different conclusions, particularly if such a study also included evidence from art history or material culture. In addition, increased engagement with scholarship in contemporary philosophy and psychology of perception and imagination might help us to better understand the mechanisms underlying the process of co-seeing that I have outlined. Additional study of pilgrimage materials after 1959 would shed light on how Tibetan relationships with the landscape changed in the modern period, particularly when some Tibetans were legally prevented from going on pilgrimage for many years and other Tibetans were exiled into other lands. How did these ruptures affect practices of pilgrimage and perception?

One major set of unresolved questions is around the issue of materiality. The material world is always abundantly present around us, but we often ignore this aspect of our world because it is so abundant and so consistently present. One of my goals in this project was to

highlight the material dimensions of pilgrimage and of the goal of transforming perception. My premise was that it is one thing to close one's eyes and imagine a pure land, and it is another thing to look at a mountain and see it as a pure land. In the second case, the practitioner is led to attend to a physical place, and to the intractable mass of *matter* that makes up the mountain. This matter, moreover, resists attempts to see it as other than what it is. It pushes back against human envisioning. Pilgrimage forces pilgrims to engage with the material world in other ways as well. Pilgrims often travel long distances over difficult terrain to see the pilgrimage site, and the difficulties of traversing the material world force them to attend to the material. Nevertheless, the popularity of pilgrimage practices both in Tibet and elsewhere suggests that traveling long distances to visit particular places is meaningful for people in ways that are not easily replicated by other forms of practice. The material dimensions of the mountain thus seemed to both frustrate and facilitate the success of pilgrimage.

In order to understand the role of materiality in pilgrimage and perception, I pointed to the various ways in which the material made itself present. I noted, for example, the long Buddhist tradition surrounding pilgrimage to a physical place, and the idea that visiting and seeing certain kinds of places would naturally arouse certain kinds of emotions in the pilgrim. The material world was laden with meaning that impressed itself on people who came into contact with it. I also noted pilgrimage texts' concerns that arduous travel to pilgrimage sites would wear out their bodies and prevent their minds from seeing pilgrimage sites in the right way. They seemed to fear the underdetermined nature of the places pilgrims would visit—looking at them, pilgrims might be reminded of the heroic deeds spiritual heroes performed there, or they might see a pile of rocks. Certain Tibetan commentators went so far as to reject pilgrimage as a religious practice because they questioned whether there was anything special to

be gained by engaging the material world. They saw pilgrimage as no better than practices of philosophical study or merit making, and potentially even worse given the dangers of travel. Others saw value in engaging material objects, even when those objects resisted attempts to see them in a particular way.

Throughout, I also considered how pilgrimage texts considered the material, or what we might call ordinary physical reality. While the Tibetan pilgrimage tradition is in many ways founded on the idea that the ordinary world that we see with our ordinary sense faculties obscures the deeper reality that the pilgrimage mountain is actually a divine mandala, they do not therefore treat ordinary reality as *unreal*. Indeed, part of the reason these texts spend so much time describing the wondrous reality that lies just beyond ordinary human perception is *precisely because* most people cannot see this wondrous reality. They see the ordinary physical world. Pilgrimage texts, moreover, do not treat this ordinary material world as unreal; they simply treat it as ordinary.

As such, they granted epistemic authority to the ordinary (*thun mong*), that which directly perceptible (*mngon sum gyi yul du gyur pa*), that which is established in common perception (*mthun snang du grub pa*), and that which is known in the world (*'jig rten la grags pa*). They thus maintained that ordinary perception of material reality gave important knowledge about how to interpret scripture.

In addition, these texts paid a great deal of attention to material reality, and described aspects of that material world in pilgrimage texts. Pilgrimage guides direct pilgrims' attention from one landscape feature to another, and Chökyi Drakpa's founding narrative of Gyangme contains rich descriptions of the various physical features of the landscape. Though both are focused on the extraordinary reality that lies beyond the ordinary material world, they do not

thereby ignore the material world, but draw pilgrims' attention to it again and again. We can see this same dynamic at work in Khatag Zamyak's diary, where he is constantly looking at features in the natural landscape as a way of getting in contact with the extraordinary reality he cannot yet see. In these texts, engagement with the material world facilitated pilgrims' engagement with the immaterial and transcendent. This material mediation enables this connection with the wondrous reality.

Nevertheless, the nature of this material remains unclear. Though I have tried to note when the material makes itself known, I have done a much better job describing the discursive strategies pilgrimage texts used to change the subjective side of the way people perceive the mountain. The material world itself, however, that is, the *objective* side of the perceptual encounter, seems to escape our thinking and writing about it. Historians have tools to analyze the subjective and discursive, but we have fewer conceptual resources to talk about the material. We might speak of the mountain as a kind of agent, mediator, or actant. These terms, used by contemporary scholars working on materiality, point to the ways in which material objects make a difference in the world, and participate in networks with human, animal, material, and other sort of actors.

In researching the textual record, however, I found it much easier to use these subjective and discursive modes of analysis to talk about how people have tried to change the way they see the world. My central terms, co-seeing and practices of seeing, both focus on the subjective side of perception, and on the human agents involved.

Part of the reason the role of the material remains underdeveloped in this project stems from the fact that I take texts as my main sources, and that I focus on pilgrimage across the Tibetan culture area rather than on a single site. As such, my work lacks the specificity of

focused ethnographic research.

Still, part of the issue is conceptual. It is difficult to think of the material in a way that is detached from human conceptions and projections. What, after all, would it mean to see a mountain on its own terms? It is difficult to imagine, even more so to put into words. Perhaps Dōgen comes closest: “Mountains’ walking is just like human walking. Do not doubt mountains’ walking even though it does not look the same as human walking.”⁵⁸⁷

587. Dōgen, *Mountains and Waters Sūtra*, trans. Carl Bielefeldt, Soto Zen Text Project, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/scbs/sztp3/translations/shobogenzo/translations/sansuikyo/sansuikyo.html>.

Appendix

Full Translation of *Guidebook to Gyangme: Vajradhāra's Feast*

'Bri gung chung tsang Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, “Rgyang me'i gnas yig rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dga' ston,” In *Collected Works of Chos kyi grags pa* (Kulhan: Drikung Kagyu Institute, 1999), 2: 449 – 469. TBRC W22082.

I prostrate to my lama and exalted deity!

The youthful sun of highest compassion
plays in sky of purified minds,
atop the wind-horse of mighty prayers.
I prostrate to my illuminating lotus teacher!

The great method “E” of limitless great bliss
and the great wisdom “VAM” of superior union
weave the net of innate nonduality.
I prostrate to the ever-present heruka!

Illusory stones and earth do not block
the gods and goddesses in my body's channels.
Here I will write a presentation of the holy place
which is an emanation-center in the external world.

This is the condensed general presentation of the holy place of Gyangme and an extensive explanation and guidebook to the holy place of Sarma Yangzo.

Within greater Tibet, in upper Dokham, there is a valley called Ngö (TBRC G4880) which is no different from the holy land of India. On the right side of the upper part of the valley, there is another valley called Gyangme. The valley is limitless, with a wide upland, and contains hidden bundles of sutras. It is made up entirely of snow-capped mountains, and encircled by ranges of snow-capped mountains in all sides. It is no different from Mount Kailash!

Those who are destined may travel there easily, but those who are not are blocked from traveling there by their wrong views. Those who have not planted the seed of their own liberation are few among the travelers there. It is a holy place which is no different from the wisdom mandala Tsari!

I had a firm resolve to go to such a place. There were also some prophecies that if I did go, and open the doors of exceedingly holy places, my lifespan would grow longer. Furthermore, if I took up the burden of the mountain and stayed there for a day, there would be good fortune in my next life. So I undertook to go to this holy place

At first, the karmic connections for traveling there were not suitable because I did not have the right travel companions. But recently, I renewed my desire to go, and so undertook to do so with great effort. Although there were some small difficulties in terms of the karmic connections for going, I arrived there without obstacle. I will tell [the story] of our travels step by step.

This holy place has a round shape that is encircled by snow-capped mountains—this is a sign of the blessing of pacifying. There are many streams of vermillion that have a square shape—this is a sign of increasing. There are many red crags shaped like half-moons—this is a sign of magnetizing. All of the rocks are rough and triangular in shape—this is a sign of subjugating. The only [sound] is the self-resounding fierce sound of all the water flowing forth.

Gri demons in the shape of camels live there guarding the doors [to the holy place], and there are countless other protector spirits. If you wish to know about those, or the mountain faces which were there previously, you should consult other pilgrimage guides.

As we continued on to see the previously unseen mountain faces, there was a great waterfall to the left of a rainbow cave. Below that, there were clearly self-arisen images of the four enemies: Yama Raja, Arya Marpo, Ralpa Tsalgu, and Nyoche Barwa. There were deep pits (*rba dong*), moreover, which I understood a symbolizing the six realms where the six classes of beings are born.

Moving gradually ahead, there is the Blissful Protector's (*bde mgon*) spirit-lake, and below that there is a protectors' temple no one has ever traveled to before. If you go below the protectors' temple, you can see a clear "HUM" syllable, as well as the special arrangement of a charnel ground [meditation site], including a mat made of human skin, a tiger skin, and so forth. [Nearby], there is a waterfall, and in a small cave below the waterfall, there is an image of Lodan Chogse (one of the eight incarnations of Padmasambhava). When we went there, everyone [in the group] saw me disappear and be encircled by a rainbow.

We returned and performed a tantric feast ritual at the Cakrasaṃvara and Mahakala spirit-lake, then went back to the uppermost chapel at the protectors' temple. It was a little difficult to reach it, so we went to put up a ladder as a way to climb up, but then all of a sudden, a magical ladder appeared effortlessly. We went inside, and there was a great cache of treasures! These included many Mahakala tantras and *sadhana* texts. The task of protecting that treasure had been entrusted to the demon Rahula.

Furthermore, there were very clear [treasures], including a mandala of the *Gathered Intention*, an image with Mahakala's head and a brahmin's body, a black Manjusri, the goddess Remati, and images of black Hayagriva, who protects the teachings of the Gathered Intention.

My nephew Konchok Drakpa said that we should make handprints there like the ones in Kharak. Although I generally see making modern handprints and miracles as a cause of vow-breaking and abuse, so that my nephew did not lose face, we made clear marks there with our own hands.

Each time someone goes to that uppermost chapel of the protectors' temple, they clear away obstructions and create favorable conditions for achieving ordinary and extraordinary goals. This *stūpa* is no different than the fortress of Chozang Trin, and so those of our group who had the proper karmic destiny acted without any doubts, and so achieved ordinary and extraordinary boons. The unlucky, however, have incorrect views, and so have their life-veins cut instantly by wisdom *dakinis* and karma protectors just for going there. But all those who act without doubts will become wise.

Then, moving on, we arrived at a protectors' temple in a cave on the far side of a mountain by Hunchback Palace Lake. Outside the door to the cave, there was a cliff face with a very clear image of black Zhambala.

Next, we reached Turquoise Lake. That night, we made a supplication to the great master Padmasambhava. We intended to go to sleep afterwards because it was after sunset, but local gods and demons magically made the lake waters roar up. The earth, rocks, and stones all shook back and forth as if a great earthquake was happening.

I made a resolution in my own mind, and thereby calmed myself. Immediately, right at that very moment, I had a vision that I was at Trolung. In my vision, a monk spoke to me, saying "I am Lama Rabgye."

"Where did you come from?" I asked.

"I am Master Padmasambhava." He said. "At present I live at Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, so I have come from there."

"What have you come to do?" I asked.

"It is you who have needed to come here since last year," he said, "You have fallen into the power of your vow-breaking students and their wrong views, so now you need to go to the peak of this [mountain]."

I responded, "But it seems like I cannot get through to the peak of this [mountain]. The path is difficult, there is so much snow, and I am weak and inadequate. Besides, even Jedrung Rabjampa did not have the proper karmic connections for opening the doors of this holy place at the peak of the [mountain, so how could I?] In any case, all of my dharma companions seem to be pure. Tonight I will supplicate to Padmasambhava—I am at a loss for what to do, so it would be good if you came. How could there be the proper karmic connections for me opening the doors of this holy place?"

He said, "Although you are weak, rely on the help and guidance of Padmasambhava's compassion. Although the path seems difficult and full of snow, in reality, [the difficulty] depends on the ease or dis-ease of your own mind. So don't concern yourself with external stones and earth! Jetsun Rabjampa didn't have the karmic connections for opening the doors of this holy place. Consider how all of your companions have given up their lives and traveled [with you] across the highest reaches of the sky and the lowest depths of the oceans just for the sake of food and drink. So what is your problem with coming here? It is for the sake of your own liberation!"

I said, “Well, if it’s important and there’s no option but to go, what way should I take to get there? What sort of holy place is it?”

The monk was delighted, and said, “Even though there is no difference between Padmasambhava and myself, and there is no difference between myself and beings’ minds, it is difficult for people to truly understand this. Leave here early tomorrow. Although you will have difficulties traversing the lower part, the hardship won’t be too great. This holy place is extremely powerful and sensitive, so generate faith and devotion towards Padmasambhava, and go with loving compassion for sentient beings. At the door to the holy place, there will be a boulder with the four *Śvana* sisters acting as protectors.

Continue on from there. Be aware that there are many forms of gods on the mountain faces, and they will show you the crossing points. Continue on, and there will be a cave where the great master [Padmasambhava] attained [identity with] many gods of secret mantra. The journey will become difficult for ordinary people. Climb up a rock face that is like a sky-city. You will need to keep going, and inside [that rock face], there will be a clear three-dimensional mandala. Climb into the entrance of a small cave above that, and at the peak, you will find a pleasant flat area. The name of this cave is “Durgākāshagrāmanam,” or in Tibetan, “Dröka Namkhé Drongkhyer” (Difficult to Traverse Sky City).

Continue up from there, and in the middle of a ringed enclosure of snow, under a mottled rock, there will be a cave of lapis lazuli. In it, there will be the mark of Guru Rinpoche’s golden vajra, the mark of his hat, a mantra from the *Eight Pronouncements* written by Padmasambhava’s own hand, Mandarava’s handprint, and the syllable “A” made by Yeshe Tsogyal’s thumb. Padmasambhava did a long-life ritual in that cave, and so its name is “Amarasiddhidhāna,” or in Tibetan, it is called “Chimé Drupjin” (Granting the Boon of Deathlessness). This new holy place above where the *Śvana* sisters are door-guardians is generally known to people as “Sarma Yangdzö” (New Treasury).”

He also said that if the karmic connections were actually not correct, then obstacles would appear. He told me at length how to pacify such obstacles, but I will explain that below.

The next morning, I intended that we set off at dawn. The protector of the holy place, however, welcomed us with a great snowfall, so we were temporarily blocked. A few of my companions, however, led the way and we set out. Just as the monk [from the vision] had said, there was a boulder with clear images of the four *Śvana* sisters acting as door guardians. We continued on, and on another boulder, there was the oath-bound protector Tiger-Mounted Lord who was guardian of the inner door.

As we went, there was great rock face to our right. On it, there were clear images of the Buddha Dipamkara’s palace, Padmasambhava, Vajrapani holding an arrow, the great *yaksa* demon Tsi Marpo, and a right-coiling conch shell. We went upwards, and on the rocky face of the mountain nearest to us, there was a cave that was a practice place for Yamantaka. On the innermost part of what seemed like a door, there was an image of a seal affixed above Yamantaka.

There was also a treasure chest marked with the syllable “Hum.” On it was the sign of treasures—the outline of a six-spoked wheel. Inside the chest, there were many dharmic teachings, including cycles of *sādhana*s for Yama. The protection of that Treasure had been entrusted to naga demons and black *candālas*. I showed [the Treasures] to my companions.

On the rock face to our right, there was a boulder. Hidden within that boulder was a cave that was extremely difficult to get into. The entire rock face was narrow and well-formed, in the shape of a wish-fulfilling jewel. There was only a single set of steps up. I was terrified, but I along with two or three companions led the way and we went on. It was like the dream.

The door to the three-dimensional mandala and everything was extremely clear. It was realistic, and the inner part of the three-dimensional mandala was huge, with a covered gateway. It had a square column which seemed to flow out of a wishing vase, and which was not resting on anything. It had a very handsome four-cornered pillar ornament. The threshold had many layers of eaves. The walls were made of five layers, including one of wood from blue Bakuli trees, studded with white precious pills. There were pictures of blooming lotuses on the white parapets, and a layer of black wall hangings on which white wall hangings hung.

Behind the pillar ornaments on one side of a wall, there was a four-sided treasure chest in which I found a stone box that was vibrating. Inside, there were Treasures—many profound dharma teachings called *The Treasury of the Lama’s Pronouncement*, which is in the class of Atiyoga. I had been entrusted to *nagas*, demons, and spirits as protectors of that holy place. It goes without saying that each time a person goes there, all of their ordinary obstacles will be pacified.

The great Padmasambhava, who pacifies obstacles, promised that it would definitely clear away the obstacle of casting away one’s own life for a full year. I myself would have had a very harsh obstacle in my twenty-fifth year, but because I discovered this cave, it was clear that I had met the requirements of the prophecy, and was able to clear away this obstacle by doing a minor ritual.

We continued climbing up from atop a small cave, eventually arriving at grassy field above the cave called “Wondrous Turquoise Leaf.” There was an obstacle because someone had committed a minor violation of their vows, so we did a tantric feast ritual and did a confession, and so pacified the obstacle.

Right then, on the side of a far-off mountain that looked like a stack of books, we saw Vairocana surrounded by bodhisattvas of the four families.

We traveled on gradually, hoping to find the “Granting the Boon of Deathlessness” cave [Padmasambhava had described in the vision]. But the sun was slipping away, and it was starting to get dark, so we rested for a little while. As we were resting, on a mottled rock face to our left, we saw a perfect buddha that was surrounded by the sixteen *sthavīras*.

Furthermore, on a rock face to our right, we saw Padmasambhava surrounded by his eight emanated forms. Although that vision was shown to all, because of the darkness, some in our group seemed unable to see it. One or two of them to whom this vision was not shown stopped

their own minds, and then the vision occurred for them. It was clear that their karma had been purified.

Eventually we found “Granting the Boon of Deathlessness” cave. The rear part of the cave was surrounded by ice, so we sat happily on top of a mottled rock that was shaped like a helmet. Those caves, which appeared clearly in our perception, were pleasant to travel through. Inside, as well, they were comfortable and nice. Inside the cave there was a handprint made by the five-pointed vajra of Padmasambhava’s hand, the mark of She’u Nyanzhu, thirty-seven mantras from the *Eight Commands: Assemblage of Sugatas* written in Padmasambhava’s own hand, the handprint of Mandarava’s left hand, and the syllable “A” written by Yeshe Tsogyal. There were also various symbols and many images of gods. Their protection was entrusted to Conch-Crowned Brahma.

Padmasambhava had promised that if I found [another particular] cave, I would extend my lifespan by three years, and each person who went there with me would also extend their lifespans by a year, since the night had gotten dark, we couldn’t find it. So we returned down to our camp by Turquoise Lake. We tried later to go back and find the cave, but there was a great snowstorm, and there were no signs that we would find it. Because of that, I felt very unsatisfied.

There was a prophecy that my own lifespan would be diminished by a year, so to clear away this obstacle, in the first month of the this horse year, I should perform an offering ritual: I offered a hundred *tormas* in an enriching fire pujas to a mandala of Amitayus with his nine-fold retinue, a hundred *tormas* in a wrathful fire pujas to the mandala of Manjusri Yamantaka, four monks marked a hundred thousand *tormas* with the name of Amitayus, seven monks performed a hundred thousand Long Life Rituals of the Northern Continent, a thousand rituals of the supreme wisdom body, a hundred tantric feast rituals, a thousand benedictions, a thousand mending and confession rituals, a thousand *tsatsa* images, an expiation rite in front of the mandala of *The Summary of the Guru’s Intention*, and many more rituals of expiation. It was prophesied that if I did all that, it would correct the diminishment of my lifespan, that my lifespan would be increased again, and that I would clear away the obstacle of my twenty-fifth year. That was the prophecy which the emanation of Padmasambhava pronounced very clearly [in the vision I had] alongside Turquoise Lake.

Then Turquoise Lake truly manifested itself as the dwelling place of Cakrasaṃvara in the *yab yum* form. For in the lake, there were two round white boulders that symbolize wisdom and method of the *yab yum* form of Cakrasaṃvara. Those boulders were not resting on anything, whether earth, rock, mountain, or cliff, but rather they were moving back and forth on top of the lake.

I and a few others had a shared vision (*mtshong bar mthun snang byung*), so it became a holy site (*gnas*) of extreme astonishment and wonder.

This new holy place is called “Sarma Yangzo.” Its general dharma protector is Yamaraja, the lord of karma, but each cave and treasure site has its own particular protector. The mountain faces of the holy place of Sarma Yangzo are simply much brighter and purer than others. Apart

from that, there are no shapes of heads, hands, and legs, in bright white, dark blue, or brilliant red. There is no need to make oneself have devotion.

Everyone who reaches the point where the four *Śvāna* sisters guard the doors to this holy place of Sarma Yangzo are cheerful, with light and happy hearts. Then, when clearly understand [the holy place], they are struck with fear, and instantly even ordinary people are led to realize one-pointed mind. If such pilgrims recite mantras and supplicate to Padmasambhava, there is no doubt that they will obtain boons. If the complete the rituals explained above on the first month of the year, moreover, any year-long decline in their lifespan will be reversed.

Furthermore, I will find the “Boon of Deathlessness” cave again before my thirty-seventh year. If I hadn’t completed those rituals on the first month, my lifespan would have deteriorated and many obstacles would have come, but since I found the cave, this will not happen. Still, there weren’t any special features of a holy place, such as self-appearing images or syllables, above the “Boon of Deathlessness” cave.

The benefits of going to see (*mjal*) the holy place Sarma Yangzo that naturally come to whoever goes on the tenth day of each of the twelve months are in accord with condensed mantra at the end of the fierce holy place of the Profound Intention of the Holy Dharma.

Then, gradually we returned down. On the path down, I had a dream that I was in an auspicious valley. I dream that a group of *dakinis* encircled some vow-breaking beings and liberated them, then gave me the blessings. I saw a cliff face of the Treasure of a Hundred Thousand *Dakinis*, and the great king Vaishravana was posed majestically on top, mounted on a lion.

Then we went on top of the Treasure of a Hundred Thousand *Dakinis* and performed a tantric feast ritual. While all of us were on top of the Treasure of the Hundred Thousand *Dakinis*, Manjusri revealed himself twice, and on the second occasion he was the shining central figure among 2,800 glorious gods. Then Guru Padmavajra appeared at the peak of the mountain, surrounded by eight attendants. He gave us the empowerment and initiation into the *Summary of the Guru’s Intention*, and five-colored rays of light emanated from his heart. At the ends of the rays of light, Padmasambhava appeared brandishing a golden vase in his right hand and sounding a silver-white bell in his left hand. He placed a vase on the crown of each of our heads and performed an ablution. I was struck with wonder.

We did a dedication, then recited a mantra from the *Summary of the Guru’s Intention*. Then a manifestation of Padmasambhava appeared—he was gently swaying in a dancing pose surrounded by his retinue. And it appeared that the manifestation of Padmasambhava and his retinue dissolved into me. In that instant, I felt limitless great joy. I had countless memories of when Padmasambhava had given me many empowerments and prophecies in the Turquoise Room at the central chapel of Samye long ago in past lives. But have not written [these accounts], for fear of putting them down in writing.

All of our group were gathered atop the Treasure of a Hundred Thousand *Dakinis*, but the great master Padmasambhava only manifested himself to those who has the karmic destiny to receive the empowerment.

Right then, I saw that mountain [i.e. Gyangme], which is Cakrasaṃvara's palace, as the palace of Glorious Cakrasaṃvara in actuality.

At that time, there was no obscuring cover of mist. Then, from the midst of rainbow lights, there appeared that god who nobody had recognized before. For a long time, many miraculous bodily forms—great and small, thick and thin—appeared. At that time, I was carefully examining and analyzing, and so I saw the mountain as the sixty-two deity mandala of Cakrasaṃvara.

Cakrasaṃvara manifests himself at different times as the eight heroes of the Underground Realm: Ratnavajra, Hayagriva, Akashagarbha, Sri Heruka, Padma lord of dancers, Vairocana, and Vajrasattva.

Furthermore, all the rocks and stones of this holy place of Gyangme are the essence of gods and goddesses. All of the waters there exists solely as the chanted mantras of profound secret tantra. This will be realized by all those with the correct karmic destiny.

I will not truly complete [this guide] by writing more on this [topic]. This little [text] briefly gives the general layout of the holy place of Gyangme. In particular, it mainly gives a pilgrimage guide to the holy place of Sarma Yangzo.

Afterwards, we gradually went down, staying for a day at a pleasant spot between [rocks shaped like] a camel's face and a conch. While we stayed there, the place spirit Gyanglha Mugbe sent down an avalanche as a welcome. There was also a great deal of snow and rain as though the protectors of the holy place were delighted. The mountain behind the field where we were staying was surrounded by forest, like the king of mountains Tanaduk, and the mountain crags in front of us looked like wish fulfilling jewels.

To our east, the unending chain of rivers and snow-capped mountains were like a great rocky tiger bridge. To our south, the central river looked like a turquoise thunder dragon. To our west, the red cliffs looked like a red she-bird. To our north, there was a great rocky edge at the peak of a forested mountain which looked like a dark turtle flipped on its back. What is more, all the mountains, forests, and rivers in the plain [where we were staying] seemed to be prostrating and praying. The geomancy of the site was very auspicious, and had many wonderfully auspicious signs.

If you looked at it from the east, the plain was round in shape. If you looked from the south, it was square. If you looked from the west, it was half-moon shaped. And if you looked from the north, it was simply triangle shaped. Thus we determined easily that it embodied the four tantric activities.

Practicing there, a person can attain enlightenment, destroy the ten kinds of enemies, or whatever other activities. If that person practiced at another holy place, it would go slowly, but if they practice at this holy place, they will quickly accomplish [their aims]. [Gyangme] has many such wonders. He who makes it their special residence will, in general, realize the precious teachings of the Buddha.

In particular, if sees some of the signs of karmic connections which are connected to the supreme teachings of the Victors of the Drikung, the holy crown jewel of the entire practice lineage, then that very night, there will be a great rainstorm, and he will see Potalaka island, the foundation of the supreme vehicle emerge. In the field [where he practices], the flowers of auspiciousness will bloom and he will directly perceive the palace of great compassion of the noble lord of the world. The protectors of that great holy place, Potalaka, the continent of the supreme vehicle, are the planetary demon Rahula and the naga demon black Candala.

[Colophon]

This is the condensed pilgrimage guide to Gyangme. It explains in detail the story of the previously unseen mountain faces at the old holy place, some new caves there, and the arrangement of the holy place of Sarma Yangzo.

There are also pure perception *dakini* Treasures which are a supplement to that, but although those Treasures are very detailed and pure, I was not able to write them down, out of fear of putting them into writing.

Not even the smallest part of the meaning has been misunderstood, so understand this amount. I have written the full meaning so that it is all easy to understand, without too much proliferation of words, and without it being obscured through metrics and verse. Let that much explanation be sufficient.

Mangalam!

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