Imparting and (Re-)Confirming Order to the World: Authoritative Speech Traditions and Socio-political Assemblies in Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang in the Past and Present

Christian Jahoda

This paper[1] deals with authoritative speech traditions in the Tibetan-speaking areas of Spiti (in Tibetan transliteration [henceforth T.] sPi ti, sPyi ti, and so forth) and Upper Kinnaur (T. Khu nu) in eastern Himachal Pradesh, India, and in Purang (T. s/Pu hrang/hreng, and so forth), an area in the southwest of the Ngari Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region (PR China) (see Fig. 1). In the distant past these areas belonged to Ngari Khorsum (T. mNga' ris skor gsum), a high-altitude region that was more or less congruent with the realm of the West Tibetan kingdom of the tenth to twelfth centuries. To a great extent it was also identical with the areas under the control of the later kingdoms of Purang, Guge (T. Gu ge), and Ladakh (T. La dwags) (see Vitali 1996; Petech 1997; Tshe ring rgyal po 2006 for accounts of the history of these kingdoms). This means that in historical, geographical, political, and cultural terms, Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and also Purang share a lot of common ground. Therefore, in addition to exploring the social and political dimensions of authoritative speeches, I am also including the historical dimension of authoritative speech in these areas. This is also the main reason for referring to authoritative speech *traditions.*

Despite the fact that oral traditions represent a salient feature of the societies of Western Tibet that permeate various cultural spheres and activities, they have not received the attention and scholarly interest they deserve. This is also true of formal oratory in particular and also of the authoritative speech traditions that represent an important element of Tibetan oral culture. Notable exceptions are, for example, works by Charles Ramble (1998) and Berthe Jansen's unpublished M.Phil. thesis (2010). While two earlier important studies of Tibetan speech-making (Tucci 1966; Jackson 1984) were based exclusively on literary sources, the present study is the

result of a combination of textual and fieldwork study that uses both oral and written texts, and primarily draws on social-anthropological and historical methods.
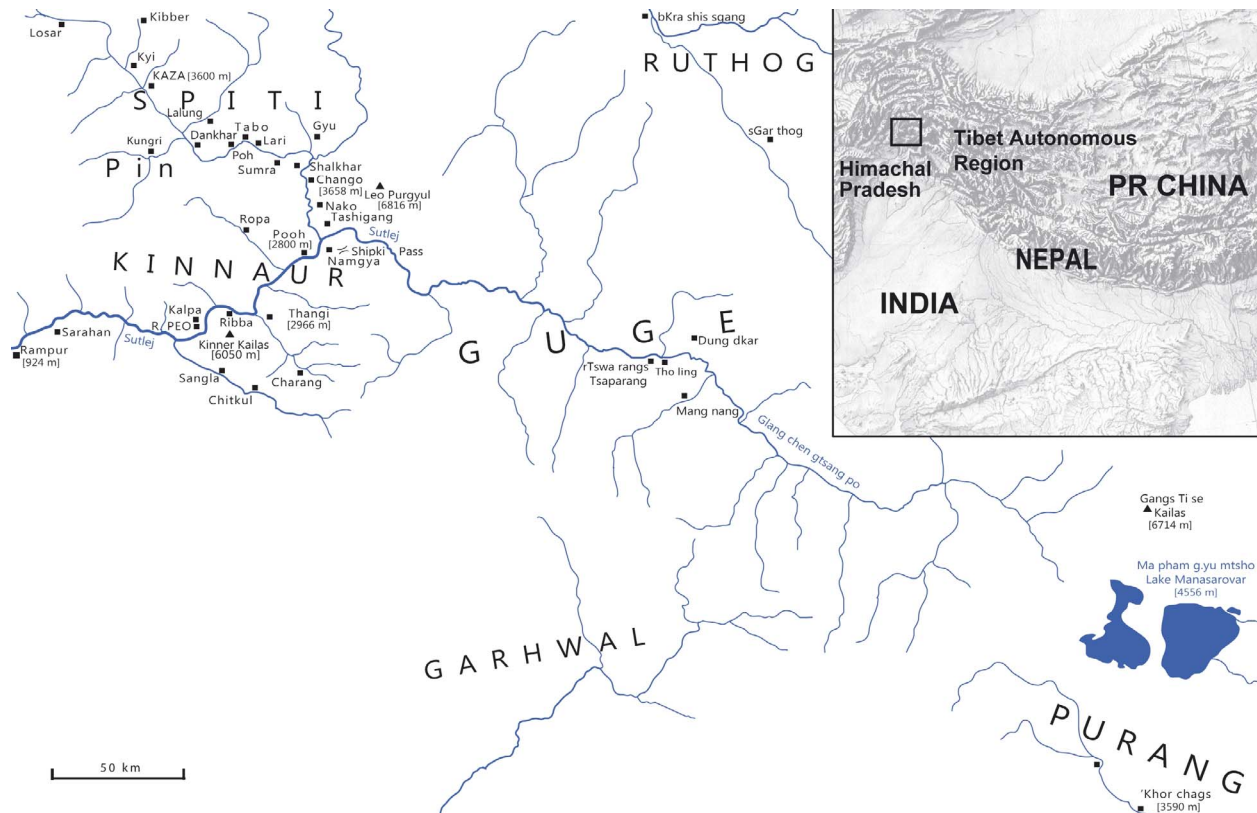

Fig. 1. Map of Historical Western Tibet; drawing by Christian Luczanits, adaptation by Christian Jahoda, 2012.

In the Tibetan-speaking societies of Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang, performances of authoritative formal and ritual speeches usually took and take place within the framework of certain socio-political assemblies, as I would like to call them. These assemblies comprised in the past, for example, more or less regular royal dynastic meetings and assemblies of high-ranking religious and secular figures that took place amongst others on the instance of consecration ceremonies of Buddhist temples. In the present we find examples of such socio-political assemblies in certain religious rituals and festivals, village festivals, wedding ceremonies, and also in performances of religious plays. In accordance with the structural setting, contexts, and functions of these assemblies, different authoritative speech traditions can be identified that were related to these assemblies in the past and present.

In Tibetan literary and colloquial language, there are various words, such as *skad cha*, *bka'* or *mchid* (both honorific forms),[2] that are used in different social or religious contexts to refer to speech or authoritative speech. In Western Tibetan honorific language, authoritative speech is commonly referred to as *molla* (T. *mol ba*, literal meaning: "to say, to speak"), both in

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[2] These were the topic of Charles Ramble's paper given at the same conference. See also the various entries relating to speech in Tibetan dialects in Bielmeier et al. (forthcoming).

historical and contemporary written sources as well as in present oral usages.[3] Authoritative speeches represent an essential feature of various forms of such socio-political assemblies. Therefore, they constitute an essential element in the analysis of the social dimension of these secular and religious speech performances.

In terms of context and function, the speech traditions in the societies of Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang can provisionally be differentiated into a few main varieties: 1) those with a state-related political function that occurred in ancient periods, mainly in royal dynastic contexts; 2) those with a primarily communal political function that is mainly associated with local village contexts; 3) those with primarily mythological and religious functions that appear often in village and monastic contexts.

This provisional grouping of authoritative speech traditions and related socio-political assemblies is based on personal field research in these areas[4] and a considerable body of audio-visual recordings made by the author, Veronika Hein,[5] and other collaborators of research projects at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Moreover, written textual material (most of which was documented within the framework of these research projects), which relates to these speeches and partly underlies them, serves to demonstrate that, to a large extent, authoritative speeches must not be seen as being exclusively representative of oral traditions (if understood in the sense of a detached or independent sphere of orality), at least not in the areas discussed. On the contrary, it can be stated that authoritative speech traditions in Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang show notable interrelationships with written texts and textual traditions.[6]

In the following I will discuss some selected historical and contemporary examples of such authoritative speech traditions in the areas mentioned. This also serves to clarify the questions of how the Tibetan term for speech—*mol ba*—should be understood in the various different and changing historical contexts, and how authoritative speech traditions and socio-

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[3] See Jäschke's entry for *mol ba* in his dictionary: "the usual resp. [respectful] term, esp. in W. [Western Tibet], for to say, to speak" (Jäschke 1987:420). By Western Tibet, Jäschke refers in particular to Ladakh, Lahaul, and Spiti, where he and other Moravian missionaries worked and also carried out linguistic studies (see Jäschke 1987:13 and Taube 1987:110-11). See Jackson (1984:23-24) for a review of entries on *mol ba* in Tibetan dictionaries.

Regarding the question of how to differentiate speech in the sense of authoritative speech from other forms of speaking, I am following Jackson, who stated with regard to Western Tibetan dialects that "The word [*mol ba*] does not signify speaking or talking in general, but refers in particular to public discourse or speech-making" (1984:23), and that "the words *mol ba*, *mol gtam*, and *mol tshig* signified the act of speechmaking, and thus by extension they also signified the manuscripts in which speeches were set down in writing" (*ibid.*:24). In Spiti, the use of *mol ba* in spoken and written language has continued in this form in the present.

[4] Various field trips to Spiti and Upper Kinnaur between 1997 and 2009, and to Purang in 2007 and 2010.

[5] Veronika Hein's recordings are kept at the Phonogrammarchiv (Institute for Audiovisual Research and Documentation) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna. A list of her recordings is accessible through the online catalogue of the archive (see http://www.phonogrammarchiv.at/).

[6] Vice versa, this seems to have certain implications for the question as to who comes into consideration for the function of speechmaker or orator. At least in the case of those speech traditions and contexts where speeches nowadays are closely related to written texts (for example, at wedding ceremonies), literacy (which used to be to a large extent a male domain) seems to be a necessary requirement for such speeches. Among other factors, this can be seen as an explanation of the fact that there are actually no examples of women who act as speechmakers in these areas.

political assemblies were related to each other in historical Western Tibet, so that these oratorical traditions appear to represent a strong and distinctive feature of Tibetan culture across time despite, or perhaps even because of, the numerous different facets they feature.

I. Authoritative Speech Traditions with a Primarily State-Related Political Function (Royal Dynastic Contexts)

In historical sources relating to the medieval history of Western Tibet, authoritative assemblies of members of the royal lineages are consistently mentioned as having taken place, as far as we know, not at regular fixed times but according to need and occasion. In this context, authoritative speeches (*mol ba*) or great authoritative speeches (*mol ba chen po*) are mentioned.

One of the earliest sources that contains evidence for this is Sonam Tsemo's (T. bSod nams rtse mo) *Introduction to Buddhism* (T. *Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*) from 1167 CE (see ST, f. 316a-b). According to Luciano Petech, the translation of a relevant section, which describes an event that happened in a place along the upper course of the Sutlej (T. Glang chen kha 'bab) river in 992 CE, reads thus (Petech 1997:233):

> All the *yab-mched* [that is, members of the royal dynasty; CJ] of the Upper and Lower Areas met
> at sPeg-mkhar of the Cog-la region, and on this occasion a great oration [*mol ba chen po*; CJ] was
> delivered (. . .). The hermitage of Pa(. . .)-sgam in the Rum region was renovated.[7]

Although Petech preferred to translate the Tibetan phrase *mol ba chen po* as "great oration," he also held "a great discussion" as a possible translation. Roberto Vitali, who quoted this passage in his *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang*, translated *mol ba chen po* as "great discussion" and also as "consultation" (Vitali 1996:251 n.361, and 252).

The holding of royal dynastic meetings on the occasion of important temple foundations even before 996 (that is, before the time of the foundation of the three main temples of Guge, Purang, and Maryul [T. Mar yul]/Ladakh in Tholing [T. mTho gling and so on], Khorchag [T. 'Khor chags and so on] and Nyarma [T. Myar ma, Nyar ma, and so on], respectively) is also mentioned in the *Extended Biography of the Royal monk Yeshe Ö*.[8] According to this text, such a meeting was held, in 987 in Purang, where it was decided by Yeshe Ö (alias Khri sde srong btsug btsan) in an authoritative speech or declaration to build one temple (T. *gtsug lag khang*) in the castle of Kyaru (T. sKya ru mkhar) for the protection of the kingdom (GP, f. 9b).

The word *mol ba* appears a few times throughout this text, always in relation to assemblies of leading royal figures and authoritative speeches, discussions, or consultations. As can be seen also from the realization of their results, an important and characteristic feature is

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[7] *chu pho 'brug gi lo la cog la yul sPeg mkhar du sTod sMad kyi yab mched gdan 'dzom pa'i dus su mol ba chen po mdzad / Rum yul Pa sgam gyi dben sa gsar du btsugs pa'i dus su brtsis na / lo* 3125 (cf. ST, f. 316a-b; SP, f. 297b).

[8] *lHa bla ma Ye shes 'od kyi rnam thar rgyas pa*, written by Gu ge Paṇ chen Dragpa Gyaltsen (T. Grags pa rgyal mtshan) at Tholing in 1480 (see GP; and Utruk Tsering and Jahoda, forthcoming).

clearly that these speeches were of a binding nature in legal terms. Or vice versa, one can say that socio-political assemblies of this kind functioned as meetings that were held with the intention to proclaim certain specific authoritative, legally binding statements, or communiqués of probably the highest decision-making body of the kingdom, the convention of the leading members of the royal family.

Therefore, the meaning of *mol ba* may also imply discussion and consultation as connotations, but the central meaning seems to relate to the final definitive proclamation or rather a one-sided form of communication from a high-ranking speaker (or his/her representative) to an assembly of people of more or less equal status (in the case of the royal family) and/or of lower status in other cases.

The word *mol ba* could also imply a written form of communication, for example, in cases where oral communication was not possible. This is illustrated in the *Royal Genealogies of Western Tibet*[9] by the example of Chidetsen (T. sPyid lde btsan), king of Guge Byang ngos ("Northern Region") in the mid-twelfth century, who was known as *mol mi mkhyen* ("one who is unable to speak").[10] The actual reason or circumstances for this, for example, whether he was mute, unable to articulate clearly, or something else, are not known. As long as this inability lasted, he is said to have used written notes. In the *Royal Genealogies of Western Tibet* it is said that (Vitali 1996:76):

> At the times of making speeches (*mol ba*) to lamas and ministers, he conveyed written notes for
> (or instead of) holding speeches (*mol ba*).[11]

It is clear from this brief overview that assemblies and authoritative speeches of the sort described were considered as important events that were put into writing at some point in time and preserved in archives. In later periods they were consulted and quoted by authors of royal chronicles and historical texts, such as *Extended Biography of the Royal Monk Yeshe Ö*, and so forth. These examples of *mol ba* drawn from written historical sources clearly indicate the use and understanding of the word *mol ba* in the sense of an oral public discourse. That its contents could be and seemingly were put into writing in certain cases if considered necessary or desired can be seen therefore, in agreement with David Jackson (1984:23) as a "special, restricted sense of *mol ba*. In its wider sense, however, it signifies the giving of a discourse by a speaker, or it signifies the discourse itself."

This aspect of a close interrelationship between Tibetan authoritative speech or *mol ba* and written texts, in particular, "the written texts of speeches whose contents included historical information," was demonstrated long ago by Jackson in *The Mollas of Mustang* (1984:23). As a result of his analysis of speechmaking manuals, Jackson (64) concludes:

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[9]T. *mNga' ris rgyal rabs*, authored by Ngawang Dragpa (T. Ngag dbang grags pa) in the late fifteenth century.

[10] See Vitali (1996:76 and 128).

[11] *bla blon mol ba mdzad pa'i dus su yi ge bsrings nas mol bar mdzad*. Cf. Vitali (1996:76) who has a slightly divergent translation (128): "When he had to communicate with bla.ma-s and ministers (bla.blon), as he wrote messages, he was able to communicate in this way."

> Histories (. . .) had an essential place in Tibetan speechmaking. Whether the history would be religious or genealogical or both was determined by whether the persons in the most important positions of the assembly had a primarily religious or political identity. A religious man at the head of the assembly necessitated a religious history. If a king was present, a history of his lineage was not to be omitted.

In this context, the question of seating positions and status becomes relevant. For late tenth-century Western Tibet, we are lucky that a visual example of such an assembly of secular and religious dignitaries, headed by members of the royal dynasty, together with a depiction of the local aristocratic elite is preserved in paintings in the Entry Hall (T. *sgo khang*) of Tabo monastery (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Wall paintings of rows of deities (upper registers) and historical figures (lower registers), Tabo monastery, Entry Hall, south wall; photo by C. Kalantari, 2009.

The depiction of this assembly shows a strict hierarchical religio-political order, obviously as considered appropriate for such a gathering of religious and lay figures and communities who were responsible for or involved in the foundation of the monastery. In fact, according to a recent re-examination of these paintings (see Jahoda and Kalantari 2016), this gathering took place in this form at the time of the consecration of the monastery. Due to the fact that the paintings as well as the accompanying inscriptions are datable to the late tenth century,

they constitute a quite unique contemporary evidence of such an assembly (see Klimburg-Salter 1997:Figs. 45 and 48-50; cf. Luczanits 1999:103ff).

These paintings cover all four walls of the Entry Hall and also include a depiction of the cosmological order and realm of protective deities on the west and east walls.[12] The south wall depicts the royal monk Yeshe Ö, flanked by his sons, Devarāja (T. De ba ra dza) and Nagarāja (T. Na ga ra dza), seated according to their dominant status in central and elevated positions (Fig. 3). Originally, all figures were identified by title (royal or religious), personal name (religious or secular), and clan or place name. Religious figures are on the left, lay practitioners on the right side, both in rows, again with summarizing captions. On the north wall are again depicted historical figures, structured into various seating rows according to principles of hierarchic secular status (Fig. 4). The precise observation of these principles, in particular, those concerning the highest religious and political positions—at the "superior-middle of the file" (*gral gyi gung*) and at the "head of the file" (*gral gyi dbu*)—seems to correspond closely to the specifications, as noted in speechmaking manuals (such as *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu* by Don dam smra ba'i seng ge) discussed by Jackson (1984:62ff).

Certainly, the consecration of the temple in the presence of its royal founders must have been the occasion of one or more authoritative speeches. Unfortunately, due to lack of evidence, we can only speculate about the form and content. What is evident, however, is that the underlying structuring principles of the religio-political order, as they are depicted in the paintings in the Entry Hall in Tabo monastery, to a considerable degree still play an important role at socio-political assemblies in the present. This can be seen, for example, in the attention given to the spatial arrangement of the various secular and religious dignitaries observed in the seating order practiced at village festivals or public religious ceremonies (see the examples discussed below in sections II and III). This happens, of course, in a modified or updated form, conforming to the development of religious, political, and other concepts, changed conditions, and different contexts.

Fig. 3. Nagarāja (Na ga ra dza), Yeshe Ö (Ye shes 'od), Devarāja (De ba ra dza) and other historical figures, Tabo monastery, Entry Hall, south wall; photo by C. Kalantari, 2009.

Fig. 4. Wall paintings of rows historical figures, Tabo monastery, Entry Hall, north wall; photo by P. Sutherland, 2009.

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[12] See Kalantari (forthcoming) for a study of these, in part, recently uncovered wall paintings.

In the aforementioned fifteenth/sixteenth-century speechmaking manuals discussed by Jackson, speechmaking is treated according to various different aspects. Besides the historical emphasis, which is largely determined by the presence of the most important person, lay or religious, speeches are differentiated according to initial salutations and eulogies for different heads of the assembly. Seven classes of assembly leaders are associated with different typical salutations. From this it is clear that these manuals differentiate various forms of assemblies and that speeches should take this fact into account, in particular with regard to the suitable introductory salutations for addressing the persons sitting at the "head" or "high-center." On the other hand, it is also clear that, at least in the present, in village contexts and not only from the perspective of the participant observer, despite a certain degree of adaptation according to assembly and occasion, there is less variation than one would be inclined to assume, at least on the basis of the information contained in authoritative speechmaking manuals of the past.

II. Authoritative Speech Traditions with a Primarily Communal Political Function (Village Contexts)

I became aware of the existence of such speech traditions and associated socio-political assemblies as an ongoing living tradition among local communities in Spiti and Upper Kinnaur for the first time during a visit to Nako village in Upper Kinnaur in mid-September 2002. The village people of Nako, mainly members and representatives of households with full rights (*khang chen*), had gathered in the evening in the community building to celebrate the Phingri festival (Fig. 5). The exact meaning and spelling of this name—perhaps *bang ri* in Tibetan—is unclear. This festival is celebrated in the Spiti Valley and also in Upper Kinnaur usually sometime after the eldest son's (and/or the eldest daughter's) first or second birthday (according to Western concept). The celebration is organized and paid for by the child's parents, and as a rule the whole village is invited. Gifts of money are given by all participants, and each sum is recorded and read out. Various propitious offerings (such as figures made of yak butter and so forth) are made on this occasion.

Fig. 5. Assembly of village people, Nako, Upper Kinnaur; celebration of Phingri (Bang ri?) festival; photo by the author, 2002.

The climax of the celebrations is the appearance of a speaker (*mollawa*, T. *mol ba pa*) (Fig. 6) who holds a ceremonial speech expressly referred to as *molla* (*mol ba*). This is followed by singing and dancing. The main function of these celebrations, which take place in autumn time all over Upper Kinnaur and Spiti, seems to be to present the first child and potential heir to the

village community. It is therefore quite different from Western annual birthday celebrations (although they are sometimes explained as such). Actually, the presentation of a new member and successor in a former tax-paying household belonging to the next generation who would guarantee the continuation of the family and household duties, also vis-à-vis the local village community, seems to be the customary historical basis underlying present-day Phingri celebrations.

Fig. 6. Speaker (*mol ba pa*) at celebration of Phingri festival, Nako, Upper Kinnaur photo by the author, 2002.

A speech performed by a *mol ba pa* is considered as an indispensable obligation on such occasions. On the occasion of the event observed in 2002, the function of speaker was fulfilled by a village teacher, and his "speech," which only took five minutes, consisted mainly of salutations and a few words of congratulation addressing primarily the parents and their child in whose honor the celebration was held. Before starting his speech, the speaker was awarded a ceremonial scarf (T. *kha btags*) by the village headman.

More important than the length of the speech and the rhetoric qualities of the speaker was the subsequent collection of huge sums of donations, which were noted down accurately and then read out loud for approximately 20 minutes to the assembled guests.[13] At first sight, this speech and others on similar occasions, which were recorded during a project aiming at the documentation of oral traditions in the area (cf. Jahoda 2006b), appeared to be part of local oral traditions, or at least rudimentary remains thereof. In the course of further research in adjacent Spiti Valley from 2008 onward,[14] it turned out that speeches of this kind actually are not representative of an oral tradition as such but usually seem to be related to or sometimes even based on written texts. While research in this respect is still ongoing, it can be stated that so far in all observed and documented cases of authoritative speeches performed in the context of village assemblies belonging to this grouping, we did not find an exception to this rule.

The written versions of such speeches are nowadays kept in simple notebooks. The texts contained there are usually written down by the speakers themselves who also keep them, and, except for occasional borrowing to relatives and friends or new adepts, usually are the only ones to use them. In previous times, and in the case of manuscripts dating before the first half of the

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[13] The money is repaid on the occasion of reciprocal invitations or visits at a low rate of interest.

[14] This research was carried out together with Veronika Hein, who made several field trips to Spiti and Upper Kinnaur and contributed a large amount of field recordings and, based on this, phonetic transcriptions and translations of oral texts.

twentieth century, also in accordance with the prestige associated with these performances, the texts that were passed on only within a limited number of families were kept as a kind of treasure (and usually kept away in locked boxes). The same high value is also accorded to wedding songs, to the knowledge of the texts and the skills to perform these songs and the respective rituals. Not surprisingly, these speech traditions are exclusively a male domain.[15]

In the present the texts used for these speeches, which are usually written in "headed" (T. *dbu can*) script, are passed on with much less restriction than previously (up to the 1990s) and circulate within a wider sphere of households that consists not only of the dominant houses with full rights,[16] but also includes households of lower social status. This development is certainly a reflection of a more general process of transformation in the socio-economic order.

One example of a text of an authoritative speech that is delivered at wedding ceremonies was recorded in 2008 by Veronika Hein in Pin valley. Based on interviews and a draft translation of the speech established by Veronika Hein in collaboration with Dechen Lhundup and additional information collected in Pin valley by the author in 2009,[17] a shortened translated version of the oral text (original translation by Dechen Lhundup in collaboration with Veronika Hein, revised and shortened by the author) is presented below. This is preceded by a few words about the owner of the text, a man from Khar village in Pin valley, at that time in his late thirties, who had started to act as speaker or *mol ba pa* a few years prior to this.

According to information provided by the speaker, he is the head of a household belonging to the dominant social class of *khang chen* houses in the village. His career as a *mol ba pa* started as member of the *gnya' bo*, the group of expert singers of wedding songs. First, he went with the elder people who were *gnya' dpon*, or leaders of the singers, and started singing with them. Then he learned the text from the book (a notebook in his possession containing the text) and from the elders. Eventually, he became himself a *gnya' dpon* and now goes to places all over Spiti, Lahaul, and Upper Kinnaur. As regards the question of how he learned the *mol ba*, that is, the text of the speech and its performance, he said: "The *mol ba* I learned from the book, the songs from the elders."

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[15] The prestige accorded to the possession of written text books—which at least nowadays seems to be strongly related to oral speech performances (in some cases perhaps even representing a precondition)—should be understood also in terms of the still ongoing historical process of writing down orally performed and transmitted texts of great esteem that were considered in danger of being lost or forgotten in the eyes of local people. Scripturalization of oral texts—understood as "the process by which a text becomes "scripture" and the powerful interests that this authorizing of text reflects and secures" (Wimbush 2015:193)—and their subsequent treatment as treasures seems to be inextricably related, at least historically, to highly valued (skilled) oral performances.

[16] These households are known as *khang chen*, literally "great house," and are to a large degree identical with the former "tax-payer" households (*khral pa*) See Jahoda (2008:9ff.) for a discussion of this type of household and see Spiti and Jahoda (2015:159ff.) for information on the historical development of these households in Tabo.

[17] On the occasion of a joint field research including, among others, Veronika Hein, Christian Jahoda, and Christiane Kalantari, a notebook containing a written version of the speech was also photographed.

The text he keeps in his notebook (Fig. 7) has 18 pages. This seems to be the average length of such texts.[18] To his knowledge, his text (which is without title) is a nearly complete copy of a manuscript kept in another place in Pin Valley. He said that the duration of the recitation of his *mol ba* would usually be around 30 minutes. An explorative recording of a recitation of this text actually took only 10 minutes.

The general structure of the recited oral text is quite similar to that of an example of a celebration speech mentioned in the fifteenth/sixteenth-century speech manual discussed by Jackson (1984:62ff.). It starts with the salutation, but in comparison to the examples given in Jackson's manual that relate to royal or high-ranking heads of assemblies, this is done in a simple form, in accordance with the village context and actual assembly present on this instance. The gathered guests are referred to collectively as a crowd of people (*khrom*).

Fig. 7: Beginning of a *mol ba* text, Spiti valley; photo by C. Kalantari, 2009.

Then follows the opening, which consists of a formalized description of the gathered assembly. According to the manual, the presiding ecclesiastics heading the row would be mentioned first. This agrees with the *mol ba* text from Pin Valley where the lama's top central position is mentioned (*bla ma tho dbus na*), and then follows the monks. In the manual the monastic assembly is mentioned. Next in position and status follow men of high position in the manual, and in the *mol ba* text the local leader or lord (*dpon po*) is mentioned .

Most often, neither a real lama, in the sense of a spiritual teacher (*bla ma*), nor monks will be present at such festive gatherings. The lord or *dpon po* referred to definitely belongs to the distant past. It is clear that the *mol ba* text presents, in many ways, a social order that does not correspond to the present social reality. Actually, in terms of an idealized historical context, there are references to the period when the area was under the king of Ladakh.[19] Interestingly, the *mol ba* text also contains references to ancient concepts such as *mi chos* and *lha chos*, meaning the religion or ethical codes of men and religious (in particular, Buddhist) doctrines, respectively, which also appear in the fifteenth/sixteenth-century manuals (see Jackson 1984:76ff.).
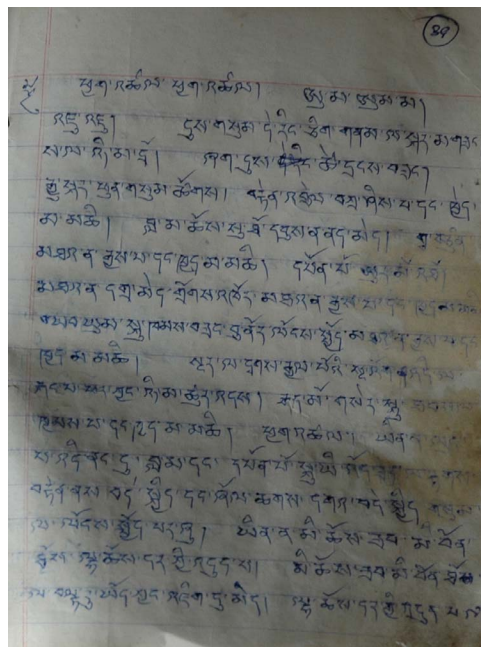
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[18] Another written version of such a *mol ba* text from lower Spiti valley has about the same length. This text bears the title *Mol ba rin chen phreng ba*, and thereby provides evidence for the literary use of *mol ba* in the sense of authoritative speech. See also Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po (2012:186-97). These examples of written texts in the case of authoritative speeches delivered at wedding ceremonies are further evidence for the interrelationships between the spheres of orality and writing or literacy.

[19] As a matter of fact, this period ended in 1842 when all the territories that had formerly belonged to the kingdom of Ladakh, including Spiti, were annexed to the territory ruled over by Gulab Singh, the Rāja of Jammu. After this change of political supremacy—which had already made itself felt since the mid-1830s (and was also manifest in the administrative and taxation system)—as a consequence of the Treaty of Amritsar (1846). Thus, Spiti was detached from Ladakh and became a part of British India. In 1947 it joined the Indian Union (cf. Jahoda 2009:48-49).

After the opening follows a more detailed characterization of the main figures (ideally) present at the before-mentioned normative assembly (Lhundup et al. 2009:2):

"We have a very good head lama
Because of his good knowledge
There is no disease in our valley.
Because he is so knowledgeable
We will have more and more lamas
Who will assemble here.

(Our) lord (*dpon po*) is a very good person
That is why surrounding us
We have no enemies
Around us are all friends
And the friends will increase
And never get less."

A bit later on he says (*ibid*.: 2):

"Now listen to the speech (*mol ba*):
Meme (*mes mes*, person of highest respect) is head lama (*bla ma khri pa*) and our lord (*dpon po*) is
Rinpoche (*rin po che*)
Who will take the place of Buddha
They are the ones who will
Solve all our problems
They are the ones who will
Take us into the light from the darkness
They are the ones who will
Show us the way to enlightenment."

Then the *mol ba pa* requests (*ibid*.):

"Chant master (*dbu mdzad*) and you all,
please, take your seats
according to the proper seating order (*gral la bzhugs*)."

Subsequently, the young girls are addressed (*ibid*.:3):

"To the young girls gathered in the house,
they are like the noble Queen Kongjo.[20]

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[20] Queen Kongjo (*rgyal mo* Kong jo) refers to a Chinese princess (*gongzhu*) who got married to a Tibetan ruler during the time of the Tibetan monarchy (see also Kapstein 2000:26, 215 n.23 and n.25). This event is also performed in the wider area in the form of a play carrying the same title.

> Like the reincarnation of Queen Kongjo
> they are very good workers
> serving the gathered people well.
> They receive the guests well.
> With smiling faces to the visitors from outside
> they offer nice food to them.
> The boys are gathered around them like birds and
> they are like mother providing equally to all the children.
> The girls who have such qualities and are sitting in good order,
> I prostrate to all of you!"

Next, the old people are addressed later within the framework of royal law (*rgyal khrims*) and wedding rules (*bag khrims*), and also the leaders of the local communities (*zhang blon*, *rgad po*). Then, the local astrologer (*jo ba*), doctor (*a mchi*), artisans making jewelry, wood carvings, and carpets (*lha bzo ba*), boys who are characterized as tigers (*stag*), and kind mothers' daughters (*ma bzang gyi bu mo*) are characterized. The children are also mentioned (*ibid.*:4):

> "The small kids are like precious stones of god.
> They are the traders of needles thread.
> They are the thieves of radish and barley pop.
> The beloved children of the parents,
> They are the wealth of the village
> I prostrate to you!"

Finally, the guests named as having come from all the four directions and making the celebration very enjoyable are honored. Like in this case, in a number of passages of this speech, similarities and congruences with songs performed at weddings are recognizable in terms of topic, language, and symbolism.

The next part of the speech deals with cosmology and geography, which are also treated in the *mollas* in Mustang. Besides visits to the first (that is, most important) monastery and village, also the first pilgrimage is named—which is the one to Mount Kailas (Gangs dkar ti se).

After mentioning various other holy places, devotion to Buddhist deities and teachings is expressed. This section dealing with *lha chos* is followed by a short one dealing with topics related to *mi chos* (*ibid.*:6):

> "The best wealth is gold
> The best food is digested well
> Rain is very precious in summer
> Sun is very precious in winter
> Our best partner is beer (*chang*) and liquor (*a rag*)."

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Then the jewels of the sky, the middle realm (thunder and lightning), and the earth (rainbow) are named and praised. Finally, "a very good speaker is praised as the jewel of the seating row (*gral*)."

As a conclusion, the teachings of Buddha, the history of Tibet and the kings of Tibet, and the diffusion of the *dharma* are praised, and prayers are offered to the lineage of past Buddhas, kings, lamas, deities, and bodhisattvas to the ten directions and the world, Mount Kailas, and Lake Manasarovar (T. *mtsho* Ma 'pham), and with joined hands, the speaker addresses all of them.

According to the informant, this *mol ba* text is basically used for five different forms of assemblies or celebrations where it would be delivered in slightly different oral versions. Thus, there would be two different forms of *mol ba* for wedding ceremonies, depending if it is a patrilocal or matrilocal marriage (*bag ma*, *mag pa*), a different one for Phingri festivals, and different ones as a closing speech of Kanjur (T. *bKa' 'gyur*) recitations and as a closing speech of the performance of mask dances (T. *'cham*) in Pin Valley.

In conclusion, the main concern of this kind of authoritative speech is the order of the cosmos, the normative religio-political order of the society, and different religious, political, and social functions, all of which is presented in terms of an integral hierarchical structure. This is explicitly expressed and even referred to on the occasion of assemblies through the spatial arrangements of the seating order. The strict observance of vertical and horizontal hierarchies is most notable.

III. Authoritative Speech Traditions with Primarily Mythological and Religious Functions (Village and Monastic/Buddhist Contexts)

There are various different forms of speech, including certain authoritative recitations and speech songs that belong to this grouping. Examples of such forms and associated assemblies appear in the framework of the performance of plays (*rnam thar*) by groups of Bu chen ("Great Sons," ritual performers adhering to the tradition of the Tibetan saint Thang stong rgyal po) (Fig. 8) that are still very popular in Spiti and also in Upper Kinnaur.[21] Also full recitations of such stories (for example, *Gling bza' chos skyid* and *'Gro ba bzang mo*) and also of *'das log* stories (accounts of "those who return from death") by Bu chen performers can be included here (Fig. 9). In both cases, the popularizing effect, also in terms of language (strong or prevailing use of local colloquial language instead of the standard Tibetan of the written texts), is a highly important aspect that is enlightening for the interrelationship between written textual or literary and oral traditions.

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[21] Among the plays and rituals performed by the Bu chen from Pin Valley are *Chos rgyal Nor bzang*, *sNang sa 'od 'bum*, *rGyal mo Kong jo*, *Gling bza' chos skyid*, and others. The tradition of performing these plays (of which literary texts in the form of printed books and manuscripts are kept in a number of households in the area) is also known in Purang and is still practiced there in Khorchag village. See Tshe ring rgyal po (2015d:264ff.).

Fig. 8. *Mes mes bu chen* during the performance of a play (*rnam thar*), Pin valley, Spiti photo by C. Kalantari, 2009.

Fig. 9. *Mes mes bu chen* during the recitation of a *rnam thar* story, Tabo monastery, Spiti photo by C. Kalantari, 2009.

It is also possible to classify certain forms of speech song as belonging to this category. An example of such a speech song or hymn (also related to a written version) that is recited more than sung is constituted by the performances of a lay village priest in Pooh in Upper Kinnaur on the occasion of the Sherken festival (see Jahoda 2011a for an account of this festival) (Fig. 10).[22] The lyrics of these "songs," or more precisely, the text of *one* written version (in standard Tibetan) of them was first edited, translated, and analyzed by Giuseppe Tucci (1966:61-112). Many of the themes, which inform the speeches described before, and the hierarchical order of religious, social, and cosmic levels, *lha chos*, *mi chos*, and so on, are also found here. In contrast to the aforementioned occasions, the performance of these speech songs takes place within a twofold wider framework, first outside in various ritual places within the sacred landscape of the village area, and second, as an explicit assembly of human beings and, in particular, also of gods. The latter are present in various forms, including by way of trance mediums (Fig. 11; see Jahoda 2011b for an analysis of these aspects in relation to the meaning of the festival).

Fig. 10. Performance of ritual speech songs by a lay village priest; manuscript detail, Sherken festival, Pooh, Upper Kinnaur; photos by the author, 2002 and 2009.

Fig. 11. Dabla (dGra lha) trance medium, *dog ra* ground, Sherken place, Sherken festival; photo by C. Kalantari, 2009.

[22] The exact relationship between this written version (dating from the last few decades, presumably a copy of an older written version) and the one performed orally in 2009 still needs to be clarified in detail. An explorative recording of a small part of the speech songs made in 2002 in the home of the priest by Dietrich Schüller and Veronika Hein together with the author showed that, at least without prior rehearsal of the songs (which he seems to do before the oral performance during festival time), he tried to adhere to the written text as much as possible.

The speeches of such trance mediums are also known as *mol ba* and, until today, constitute one of the main authoritative speech traditions that we find in Spiti and Upper Kinnaur, and in the past, also in Purang. I would like to briefly illustrate this form of speech tradition with reference to the speeches held by the trance medium of the female protective deity of Tabo monastery, Dorje Chenmo (T. rDo rje chen mo) (Fig. 12 and 13).

Fig. 12. Dorje Chenmo (rDo rje chen mo) trance medium performing a ritual speech (*mol ba*), Tabo, lower Spiti valley; photo by the author, 2000.

Fig. 13. Trance medium of the protectress Dorje Chenmo (rDo rje chen mo), Namkhan Festival, Tabo; photo by P. Sutherland, 2009.

This deity speaks to smaller or larger assemblies of the village people, including sometimes monks as well, on various occasions and in various places, also in the old temple (*gtsug lag khang*) of the monastery. The function of the trance medium or speechmaker is fulfilled has long been fulfilled by an illiterate man. Between 1997 and 2009 I was witness to a number of such speeches and performances by this trance medium. The performances and the speeches are of considerable length, usually at least some 30 minutes, sometimes up to one hour. As far as I know, no written texts exists that underly the speeches of this trance medium or are produced thereafter.

Contrary to what one might expect, these speeches are characterized by a stable sequence. Also, in terms of content, the main themes do not vary to a great extent although a certain variation according to assembly, festival, or demand is recognizable. To some degree, the

speeches also take up recent events, for example, matters that relate to the Dalai Lama or Lochen Tulku, that is, the present incarnation of the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo (T. *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po). Often, the behavior of monks in the monastery and the behavior of the village people is heavily criticized. Most of the problems occurring in the village or affecting the village people, like diseases, inauspicious rain, and so on, are seen as the outcome of their morally bad behavior.

Interestingly, as in the case of the *molla* tradition in Mustang and elsewhere, also in the case of the speeches of this trance medium, history plays a considerable role. As was stated by Jackson (1984:76ff and *passim*), the importance of histories in the *molla* relates to the origins of the institution with which the important personage is identified. In our case this is the foundation of Tabo monastery, and the important personage is, on the one hand, the protective deity, and on the other hand, the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo, who is said to have brought her from India and, according to local oral traditions and texts, installed her as protectress in Tabo monastery in Spiti as well as in Khorchag monastery in Purang, another early Buddhist temple in Western Tibet (cf. Jahoda 2006a).

The *mol ba*-s of Dorje Chenmo's trance medium usually contain several references to the origin of Tabo monastery and Rin chen bzang po's and Dorje Chenmo's function in this. In one speech on the occasion of an offering ritual to local divinities (*lha gsol*), Dorje Chenmo, speaking through her (male) trance medium, said: "You should act well with respect to the owner of the *gtsug lag* (*khang*). Which I am of ancient times, isn't it? I am the owner of the *gtsug lag* (*khang*)."[23] In the same speech, the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo was referred to as the chief religious personage with respect to Tabo monastery. It was also stated that "our *gtsug lag* (*khang*'s) name was also given by him," and in this context Rinchen Sangpo was also named as "owner of the *gtsug lag* (*khang*)."

These are interesting historical details, as the name of the monastery (dPal ldan bkra shis bde gnas), which is only found in the so-called Renovation Inscription at Tabo describing major renovation works carried out in the 1030s by Jangchub Ö (T. Byang chub 'od), is nowhere mentioned in relation to Rinchen Sangpo (see Steinkellner and Luczanits 1998:16ff.). Actually, none of the inscriptions in Tabo mention him at all. The only evidence that he was active in Tabo at some time is contained in a short reference in the so-called middle-length *Biography of the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo* (T. *Lo tsha tsa ba rin chen bzang po'i rnam thar*) by Pal Yeshe (GK, f. 44a2-3).

In addition, this speech also contained references to debated religious questions and touched worldly and even political matters, for example, the political position taken by the present incarnation of the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo (as member of a political committee in the central government at Delhi).

As usual, the appearance of the deity and the speech of her trance medium took place on invitation by a representative of the assembled villagers—"(We) worship (you), come knowing god (*lha*)!"—and actually in the form of a dialogue, although the village representative hardly added more than "(We) worship (you)" (*phyag 'tshal*) from time to time. The villagers who were

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[23] *gtsug lag gi bdag mor khyed rang tshos yag po byas dgos /   gna' snga mo'i red /   ma red / gtsug lag gi bdag po nga red*/ (unedited transliteration of the speech by Dechen Lhundup, Tabo, based on a sound recording by the author in February 2000).

usually addressed as "you worldly people" (T. *khyed rang 'jigs rten tsho*) were characterized as not understanding how to behave properly according to Buddhist rules and no longer adhering to the main purpose of living from a Buddhist view, that is, to help others. Another reason for the villagers' present problems as identified by the deity/trance medium, was that "For many years now Dachang (T. *zla chang*), New Year (T. *lo gsar*) and Lhabsöl (T. *lha gsol*) [that is, the three main village festivals] were not celebrated at the right time." The villagers were also reminded to give appropriate offerings to one local deity (Gangs sman) residing in Tabo who occupies a central function in the Lhabsöl rites.

Throughout the deity's speech, self-descriptive declarations were given followed by augural statements[24]:

> You worldly people, if you perform in a beneficial way for others like in former times, you have to perform in a good way for others at the three times [past, present and future].—(We) worship (you).—You worldly people, if you believe in me or not, for me it makes no difference. If I go inside the trance medium (T. *lus g.yar po*) or not, it makes no difference (to me). If I enter into his body, it is of no benefit (to me) and if I do not enter, it is no loss (to me) either. Now, you worldly hell beings (T. *'jigs rten dmyal ba can*), you will not understand this. Now, you are going to meet a very bad kalpa.

Furthermore, the villagers were constantly reminded and admonished to hold the present incarnation of the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo in high esteem (notwithstanding the fact that he had married and become a political figure):

> Now, our monastery's chief, always acting for the purpose of others is the Tulku (*sprul sku*) of the Great Translator (*lo chen*) Rinchen Sangpo. You should not distrust Lochen Rinchen Sangpo. He was given a position in India. He will now become a worldly being, although you should not talk like that. What happened to him, this is due to his former lifes' karma. It depends on his mind. Wherever he goes it is okay. If he stays with lay men or women, it is okay. There is no desire in him. You worldly people, do not talk like this. Do not distrust him. If you have mistrust, it will not be good for you. One year, water does not always come (from the river), rain does not alway fall. Concerning this, I am not alone. All of the gods (literally "bodyless beings," T. *gzugs med*) of Spiti say like that. You should confess (your sins) to Spiti's Lochen Tulku. Relationships with him are not good [implying that this caused the problems with water, rain, and so forth in the village]. He is a powerful owner of the ten stages (T. *sa*, S. *bhūmi*; that is, a bodhisattva). Nowadays, whatever you do, the head is the Dalai Lama (T. *dbu chen rgyal ba gong ma*). Whatever I say or not say about him it is not appropriate. Below him, the Tulku, nobody is equal to him. His name is popular.

Also (at that time) debated heterodox religious practices were addressed in the speech:

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[24] Translations are author's unless otherwise noted.

Right now, I am able to help you but due to other gods' influence it happens that I cannot help you. If I speak like this there are also those gods [like Shugs ldan according to local informants] with different ways as that approved by Lochen Tulku and His Holiness the Dalai Lama: these are the *lha*, *klu*, many different kinds of these. Now, you will not understand this. What I tell is not an explanation, it is the time [characteristic] of an old (meaning: bad) kalpa. If you lay people listen I will do good for you. If you do not listen it makes no difference to me." (. . .)⸻(We) worship (you). We do not understand, that is why we are offering to these gods (*lha*). You are the protectress of Tabo monastery, protectress of the teaching (of the Buddha). You are the chief protectress of Lochen Rinchen Sangpo's religious teachings.⸻"If you call him in front of you, it is okay. Even if you go in front of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (rGyal ba gong ma) all day and your mind is not good, it will be of no benefit. Nowadays, some people say: I did this, I did that. The main thing is to have a good mind, this is very important. If one does not have a good mind even if one goes into retreat year after year there will be not much benefit. Having a good mind, even if one does a little work, there will be big merit. What one will do or not do, it mainly depends on the mind, isn't it? It is like that. This is what I say. Now you, some will be happy with what I said, but some will not be happy. What you will do or not do, it is yours. The lady sovereign (*bdag mo*) of the gTsug-lag(-khang) has spoken.

Similar historical information relating to Dorje Chenmo and the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo as in Tabo, that is, the foundation of the monastery being related to the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo who installed Dorje Chenmo as protectress of this institution, also turned up at the Namtong festival in Khorchag monastery in Purang in 2010. This festival is celebrated in Khorchag on the twelfth day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar, which is the time, according to oral tradition, when Rinchen Sangpo performed the consecration ritual of Khorchag monastery, and the day when the female protective deity Dorje Chenmo was appointed by him as protectress of the monastery.

The various ritual performances by monks and lay people during the Namtong festival not only serve to celebrate and recall the foundation of the monastery but also the original establishment of a certain religious, namely Buddhist, order of the local society. In fact, in key scenes (such as the ritual appearance of Dorje Chenmo; see Fig. 14) they can be seen as a re-staging of the founding of the monastery (see Jahoda 2011b: 389-91, 394; Jahoda 2012:42f. and Tshe ring rgyal po 2015c:212ff. for accounts of this festival).

Until forbidden some 40 years ago,[25] there used to be a trance medium of Dorje

Fig. 14. Protectress Dorje Chenmo (rDo rje chen mo), Namtong festival, Khorchag monastery, Purang; photo by P. Sutherland, 2010.

[25] The actual reason for this ban was (as elsewhere in the Tibet Autonomous Region) most probably "because of laws against 'feudal superstition' (Ch. *fengjian mixin*)" (Diemberger 2007:92), *rmongs dad* in Tibetan (see also Diemberger 2005:157-58).

Chenmo also in Khorchag who appeared on this and other occasions. From interviews with old people in Khorchag conducted by Tsering Gyalpo and the author in 2007, it became known that on the occasion of the Namtong festival, the trance medium also used to deliver a speech (*mol ba*). As in Tabo, Dorje Chenmo⸻or Dorje Yudön (T. rDo rje g.Yu sgron) in the Ngor school tradition to which Khorchag belongs⸻is conceived as the owner (*bdag po*) of the monastery. According to the informants, this was also stated previously by the trance medium in the *mol ba*.

Deviating slightly from the socio-political assemblies discussed above (mainly on account of their improvised, often outdoor setting) there are assemblies that take place in response to natural calamities as a result particular and urgent demand. Assemblies of this kind are closely related to what might be called "religious engineering," and in the past are recorded to have taken place in case of great economic or life-threatening dangers, for example, flooding.[26] In the present, assemblies were recorded to have taken place, for instance, on the occasion of landslides, which often block roads and endanger the lives of human beings. An example of modern religious engineering was documented in 2002 by the author together with Veronika Hein, Dechen Lhündup, Dietrich Schüller, and Sonam Tsering near Nako village in Upper Kinnaur. At the center of a large assembly of lay people and high-ranking local religio-political figures was the ritual consultation of Rarang *devī* speaking through a trance medium, as well as the ritually staged public appearance of the reincarnation of the Great Translator Rinchen Sangpo (a native of Shalkhar village). The social, spatial, and ritual order defining this gathering followed "traditional" models (that is, known from the recent and more distant past to have been practiced in the area on the occasion of public speeches by religious leaders or public appearances by trance mediums). While the speeches per se did not impart a new order, the whole setting and political framework of the assembly was no longer local (for example, non-Tibetan origin of the speaking deity, religious and communal leaders of local Himachal Pradesh descent, or even from the central government in Delhi) clearly part of a wider, even national, socio-political order. In this case⸻characterized by a changed overall political and socio-economic context but at the same time by a continuing vitality of long-established religious concepts, such as the cult of local deities and reincarnation lineages⸻certain forms of socio-political assembly and related forms of authoritative speech were adapted to the modernizing conditions and utilized within an ongoing process of transformation and integration of the old order into a new one.

IV. Conclusion

As a conclusion to this brief overview and based on the material discussed, I would like to indicate some main aspects that appear to be relevant for a theoretical consideration of authoritative speech traditions in areas of historical Western Tibet.

In my view the degree of authority accorded to a speech is, first of all, a question of status, either of the one who speaks (self-evident in the case of royal or leading religio-political

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[26] Such instances, including authoritative speeches by famous statues, are reported to have taken place, for example, in Khorchag (Purang) in the sixteenth century. See Tshe ring rgyal po (2015a:18 and 2015b:60).

figures, as discussed in section I) or of the one on whose behalf someone (for example, a trance medium or *mol ba pa*) speaks, who can also be a local protective Buddhist deity (such as Dorje Chenmo) or a social group who shares the same belief system.

A second point that seems of importance to me in this context is visibility, in particular, visibility of social structure. This becomes essentially manifest on regular and/or formalized socio-political assemblies, which are the usual occasions for delivering authoritative speeches. The visual setting and spatial structure of the assembly where a speech performance is delivered is often a better indicator for its authoritative nature than what is said in terms of content. The reason for this lies conversely again in the order of the speech that is clearly and predominantly characterized by a sequential expression of a hierarchical normative structure. Therefore, although the speaker himself is part of the actually present assembly, he can be seen at the same time as mouthpiece of an ideal assembly structured according to an ideal normative order. The speech serves to represent, and in case they are missing at this point in time, to add and complement, in a formal way, all ingredients regarded as constitutive of such an ideal assembly. In this way, authoritative speeches also serve to highlight social hierarchy.

Content or what is said in authoritative speeches in terms of symbolic or metaphoric description of particular social groups often seems to be accorded comparatively lesser importance by the audience than status or structure-related aspects *per se*. This becomes apparent, in particular, on the instance of speeches or speech songs where the performance of the text is based on a written text that is well known to the audience and repeats more or less performances of the same or a slightly different text heard before. In addition, not seldom, speeches performed, for example, on the occasion of wedding ceremonies as well as speech songs (for example, in the case of the Sherken festival in Pooh) are often so low in volume that only a few people can even hear them. In other cases, due to the specific language of the speaker, the audience does not fully or only fragmentarily understand what is said or meant. This seems to be true in the case of trance mediums whose language, besides using local dialects, often, at least in part, reflects the presumably local origin of the deity speaking through them and, together with certain idiomatic expressions, is referred to as "god's language" (*lha skad*).

I agree with what David Jackson (1984:87) stated many years ago with respect to the mythological, historical, cosmological, and geographical passages of the *mollas* in the case of Mustang, that in many respects, the function of authoritative speeches is that they re-confirm or "impart order to the world." As this element also pervades all major aspects that appear to be constitutive for the authoritative speech traditions in Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang, such as history, mythology, cosmology, geography, and society (that is, the social structure of the local community, in particular, also as it is present in the framework of certain socio-political assemblies, and as it is represented in the formalized introduction of the assembly during the speeches), the validity of this statement seems to apply in much the same way as well to these areas.

Thus it is established that in a number of areas belonging to historical Western Tibet (mNga' ris skor gsum) and other areas where Western Tibetan dialects were/are spoken, such as Mustang, the most common word used to refer to authoritative speeches in the sense of oral public discourse was *mol ba*. This usage is found in historical sources related to different historical periods. Field research in Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang brought to light that the

use of this word and the practice of speechmaking continued to play an important role on different social occasions and is based on the same basic meaning, that is, the sense of a one-sided proclamation from an authority figure to equals and subordinates that takes place within the framework of different socio-political assemblies.

Royal dynastic meetings, assemblies of high-ranking religious and secular figures, and religious rituals and festivals figured among the various public contexts where such authoritative speeches were held in the past. In the present, village festivals, wedding ceremonies, and performances of religious plays are important occasions for speechmaking. Consonant with these different historical contexts and occasions, it becomes evident that speechmakers belonged to different social strata (political leaders such as kings; members of the dominating landowning households) and that their speeches were legitimated by different political, social, or religious powers, the latter as in the case of authoritative speeches by trance mediums who are considered to be the mouthpiece of a divine bodiless speechmaker.

Regarding the interrelationships of these authoritative speech traditions in Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang with written texts and textual traditions, it is evident that there is a certain range of interaction, transition, and mediation between the oral and literary spheres, although in many cases, the historical processes of that interaction need to be clarified. It is clear that this interaction, transition, and mediation, wherever it took place in the recent past (speeches by trance mediums for which no written form was found to exist represent an exception), was in the hands of literate men belonging to the dominant stratum of landowning households (largely identical with the former tax-paying sector of the society).

Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

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