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# The monastery in a Tibetan pastoralist context. A case study from Kham Minyag

*Le monastère chez des pasteurs nomades tibétains. Une étude de cas du Kham Minyag*

**Nicola Schneider**

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- 1 Buddhist monasteries can be defined first and foremost as long-term residences of monastics, monks and nuns who have chosen to live a religious life in community. But as Pierre Pichard and François Lagirarde write in their introduction to the book *The Buddhist monastery. A cross-cultural survey* (2003, p. 14): “[...] monasteries may be [also] viewed as human organizations economically and politically dependent on social environments that welcome and enrich them”. What, then, makes the monastery in a nomadic context eventually singular or different compared to other Tibetan Buddhist monasteries?
- 2 We know that, in the past, monasteries played an important role in the formation of urban centres in Tibet<sup>1</sup>. Towns like Lhasa (Tib. Lha sa), Shigatse (Gzhi ka rtse) and Gyantse (Rgyal rtse) in Central Tibet or Labrang (Bla brang), Jyekundo (Skye rgu mdo) and Kandze (Dkar mdzes) in Eastern Tibet have all grown up around important monasteries. Not only did monks form a large part of the population in these “urban-like settlements”, but also much of the economic activity took place inside and around these institutions, with many outdoor markets and permanent shops owned by monasteries<sup>2</sup>. Significantly, all these towns were situated in major agricultural areas and provided a tax base to support the state administration, as well as financial backing to the monasteries<sup>3</sup>.

- 3 Less is known on the contribution of pastoral monasteries to the everyday activities of Tibetan community, with the exception of Robert Ekvall's studies from his experiences in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Ekvall, "Because nomadism appears to require a fixed point of reference, nomadic pastoralists have a special relationship with the monasteries within or nearest to their range"<sup>4</sup>. Ekvall then elaborates on some points that, for him, characterize monasteries during his time: they were seen as a safe place where pastoralists could store their valuables and other belongings; they were a place where pastoralists could find trade partners and craft services; and, finally, monasteries also constituted a neutral ground for intercommunity communication in regions where theft and murder between clans or groups were very frequent<sup>5</sup>. However, above all, religion – in the form of teachings, festivities and blessings – attracted pastoralists in numbers for regular and sometimes prolonged stays as was the case in Mongolian mobile society<sup>6</sup>.
- 4 The aim of this article is to look into the case of a contemporary pastoral monastery in northern Kham Minyag (Khams Mi nyag) with a view to determining in what way it is a product of, as well as an agent in, the world of Tibetan pastoralists. In order to do this, I will draw mainly on fieldwork conducted in a monastic settlement called Mañijango (Mañi rgyal sgo) or Sergyago (Gser rgyal sgo), which is situated at the foot of mount Zharalhatse (Bzhag bra lha rtse), in the grasslands above the rural township Lhagang ([Pal] lha sgang). I will also make some comparisons with the nearby and historically more important monastery of Lhagang, also called Thongdröl Samdrub Ling (Mthong grol bsam grub gling chos sde chen po)<sup>7</sup>, and some other, much smaller, monasteries. All are situated in traditional pastoral areas, at an altitude of 3800 m or higher, where agriculture is no longer viable.

Map 1. Geographical situation of Lhagang, Kham Minyag, in Tibet



## On some traditional pastoral monasteries in Minyag

- 5 The northern, mainly pastoralist, area of Minyag where Mañijango is situated hosts several monasteries. The most important and historically significant is Thongdröl Samdrub Ling, from the Sakyapa (Sa skya pa) school, because it houses a famous replica of the Buddha Śākyamuni statue, called Jowo (Jo bo), similar to the one in Lhasa. Legend tells us that it was crafted because the original one had declared its wish to stay in this idyllic place when the Chinese princess Wengcheng spent a night at the spot while on her way to marry the Tibetan sovereign Songtsen Gampo (Srong btsan sgam po, 7<sup>th</sup> century), to whom she was to offer the statue. Today the monastery lies at the heart of the bustling rural township of Lhagang, on the main road running from Dartsedo (Dar rtse mdo) to Lhasa through Kandze. It is not only well served by infrastructure, but has several administrative units, a primary school, an orphanage, as well as two new monastic colleges and a golden stupa built by a local lama, Khenpo Dorje Tashi (Mkhan po Rdo rje bkra shis, b. 1963). In the centre, a multitude of shops are lined up along the main street, selling food as well as other daily necessities. Since the implementation of the “Developing the West” campaign (Ch. *xibu dakaiifa*), the town also developed a tourist industry, mainly around the monastery and its statue. In parallel, its population has increased dramatically, to around 1500 in 2013<sup>8</sup>. Most of the new settlers are pastoralists who have sold their cattle to invest in new houses, but some of them have also come from agricultural areas further south on the road to participate in the tourist business.
- 6 However, Lhagang was not always a busy township. Until the construction of the road by Chinese communist authorities in the early 1950s<sup>9</sup>, the monastery was the only important building in this valley, as known from several foreign exploration teams who visited in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among these visitors were the French explorers André Guibaut and Louis Liotard who, on their way to Golog (Mgo log) in 1940, where the latter was killed, spent two nights in the monastery<sup>10</sup>. In his book *Tibetan Venture*, Guibaut (1987, p. 31) describes the place as follows: “we reached [...] a vast brown plain fringed with mountains, in the centre of which stands the monastery of Lhagong [*sic*], the only human construction in this vast panorama”. A little further (*ibid*, pp. 31-32), he adds that it is: “[...] a typical pastoral temple. It juts up isolated in the plain, without any attendant village, and its devotees inhabit the hundreds of scattered tents which dot the lazy swell of the hills like back-headed pins<sup>11</sup>”. In his diaries, Guibaut notes also that there were several hermitages on the mountainside, among them probably the one where the founder of Mañijango, Lama Sangyé Tséphel (Sangs rgyas tshe ’phel, 1917-1998), spent some time after returning from Lhasa in the late 1950s. Finally, he informs us that the monks of Lhagang monastery used to hold prayer ceremonies in a tent, pitched further up on a hillock. This might be the same place where today horse-race festivals are organized in summertime. The latter are usually attended by Lhagang monastery monks, who organize rituals and blessings in a white tent for the occasion<sup>12</sup>.
- 7 In fact it is not entirely true that there was no attendant “village”. Another explorer, the geographer Eduard Imhof from Switzerland, spent one night in Lhagang monastery a decade earlier, in 1930<sup>13</sup>. His pictures show several houses situated just in front of the main gate<sup>14</sup>, which might correspond to some of the 13 households formerly attached to the monastery mentioned by Sonam Wangmo. Unfortunately, we lack more precise

information on the owners of these rather small houses<sup>15</sup>, their professional occupation and their relation to the monastery. However, we know that Lhagang monastery was a place visited by many Tibetans, pilgrims as well as local pastoralists<sup>16</sup>. Especially during religious festivals, pastoralists used to come from near and far to join the celebrations<sup>17</sup>. Not only that, according to Peter Goullart (1959, p. 206), a Russian-born explorer who visited the place in 1940, the monastery was also renowned for its religious art, in particular the production of scroll paintings (*thang ka*) for which a special studio was set aside. The lamas from Lhagang monastery itself were not widely renowned<sup>18</sup>. However, it did receive visits from several prominent religious masters such as Dezhung Rinpoche (Sde gzhungs Rin po che, 1906-1987) and Jigdral Dagchen Rinpoche ('Jigs bral Bdag chen Rin po che, 1929-2016) from the famous Sakya family, which has its estate and monastery in Central Tibet, during their stay in Minyag<sup>19</sup>.

Photo 1. A prayer ceremony in the tent-monastery of Lhagang monastery in 1940



© André Guibaut (courtesy Daniel Guibaut)

- 8 Besides Lhagang, there are many tiny pastoral monasteries in northern Minyag, locally known as “small monasteries” (*dgon pa chung chung*). Most are situated in the grasslands above Lhagang. Some are old, such as Nyalam monastery (Snyan lam), said to have been founded in 896<sup>20</sup>, or Thangkar monastery (Brag mkhar), built in 1254<sup>21</sup>. Both follow the Nyingmapa (Rnying ma pa) school, like most of the others<sup>22</sup>. Today, they are mainly occupied during summertime, when pastoralists are moving to their summer pastures situated nearby. When the weather gets cold, in October, and everybody descends to their winter houses lying further down in the mountains, the majority of these monasteries are mostly empty; only a handful of monk guardians are staying for the whole year. The same is true for the newly founded monastic college (*bshad grwa*) of Nyalam monastery, which functions just part of the year.
- 9 From this short overview, we can already note that pastoral monasteries do not (and probably did not) always function regularly, that is the whole year around. We can also see that some, like Lhagang monastery, are (and were) central places gathering

nomadic people from different locations. Finally, we get a glimpse of the function of monasteries in some kind of “urbanization” process. Thus Lhagang, which was a loose settlement in the past, has grown into an important rural township (Tib. *shang*; Chin. *xiang*) today, accelerated by the construction of a road, the integration of the region with Sichuan province and, more recently, the implementation of the “Developing the West” campaign. Let us now turn to Mañijango, as of 1999 the site of my fieldwork. Like Lhagang, it has developed over time to become an important village hosting approximately 2000 people in 2015 (compared to ca. 1500 residents in Lhagang). Although this happened at a later period, and so in a distinct social, economical and political context, the questions I would like to ask are: what could have been the driving forces for both of these places? And what do they tell us about the relationships of Tibetan pastoralists to their monasteries, a fixed point in their lives? In other words, what are the “territorial modalities of the communalization of religion” (Hervieu-Léger 2002, p. 99) in the case of Tibetan pastoralists from the northern area of Minyag?

## The founding and development of Mañijango

- 10 Mañijango is one of the monasteries that was founded after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It was first established as a hermitage by a local lama from northern Minyag, Lama Sangyé Tséphel, who had spent two decades in Lhagang<sup>23</sup>. In 1978, he decided to enter a retreat accompanied by two of his close disciples, a nun and a monk. They chose a spot at the foot of mount Zharalhatse where, it was said, a miraculous “milk source had flown”<sup>24</sup> and installed their meditation huts by digging into the cliffs. Because during his time in Lhagang Lama Tséphel had become renowned for his teachings from the *Mañikabum* (*Mañi bka' bum*) – a *terma*-text (*gter ma*) that contains teachings on the practice of Avalokiteśvara, as well as different myths about this bodhisattva – people from the surrounding area came regularly to ask him for initiation. Thus, the lama decided to build a *mañi*-structure or *Mañidobum* (*Mañi rdo 'bum*), literally a “Hundred thousand *mañi* stones”, a religious edifice which consists of schist rocks engraved with the mantra of Avalokiteśvara: *Om mañi padme hum*. These stones are then piled up to form a rectangular structure that local people as well as pilgrims can circumambulate in order to do their religious practice and accumulate merit.
- 11 The lama’s teachings and building had great success, and at the end of the 1980s his disciples, mostly nuns, had increased to more than twenty. Consequently, he decided to create a nunnery by building a little temple or assembly hall, called *gönpa* (*dgon pa*) locally, in order to allow them to gather together for prayers and rituals. In 1990, when the construction was finished, he wrote a set of monastic rules (*bca' yig*) on a scroll (*thang ka*)<sup>25</sup>, which always hangs at the entrance of the assembly hall, thus officially marking the foundation of the nunnery, which from then on was called Tashi Gönsar (*Bkra shis dgon gsar*)<sup>26</sup>.
- 12 Just before his death in 1998, Lama Tséphel appointed the monk Drugdra Gyatso ('Brug grags rgya mtsho, b. 1968), a young and prodigious lama from a local nomad family, as his successor or head of the nunnery. The latter had followed his religious education with some of the most famous Nyingmapa masters of his time, like Khenpo Chödrag (Mkhan po Chos grags, 1916-2005<sup>27</sup>) from Dzogchen monastery (Rdzogs chen), Tshophu Dorlu (Mtsho phu rdo lo, 1933-2004) from Nyarong (Nyag rong) and Pema

Tumpo (Padma gtum po, 1934-2009<sup>28</sup>), from Golog. Moreover, at several occasions, Lama Drugdra Gyatso had been invited to give teachings to the nuns and thus already knew the place well.

- 13 Since his appointment, Manijango has been steadily expanding: not only has the monastic community grown from 45 nuns in 1998 to approximately 200 in 2003, and then to 850 in 2015, but also many pastoralists from the surrounding area, known by the name of Goroma (Go ro ma), have started to build their winter houses, previously scattered over a large area, close to the religious complex<sup>29</sup>. Besides, Lama Drugdra Gyatso expanded the *maṇi*-structure and built a new religious courtyard (*chos ra*) to accommodate the many participants to his newly introduced religious gathering, called the “Great religious assembly for peace” (*Zhi bde chos tshogs chen mo*). Twice a year, in summer and in winter<sup>30</sup>, he organizes this religious gathering that is attended by several hundred people from near and far<sup>31</sup>. In order to cater to the many pilgrims, a shop, a restaurant and a guesthouse were also installed. The lama himself confers teachings and initiations most of the time, but other religious masters have also been invited regularly. Many instructions given at this occasion are ethical in nature, explaining and elaborating in particular the difference between good actions (*dge ba*) and bad actions (*sdig pa*). Considered to be of primary importance at a time where violence and quarrels are frequently disturbing society, and in particular pastoralist communities, these teachings have been implemented in a more systematic way in recent years. In 2011, for example, a meeting between different regional religious leaders was called at a hotel in Lhagang in order to discuss a new campaign of “mediation” (*bar ’dum tshogs pa*).
- 14 In the summers of 2002 and 2003, the nomad village around the religious site consisted of approximately 40 to 50 houses. It is interesting to note that locals did not refer to these as “house” (*khangpa*, *khang pa*), the term they would normally use for those inhabited by the nuns, but as “teahouse” or “storehouse” (*jakhang*, *ja khang*), thus referring to their primary function of storing pastoral products like butter, yoghurt, animal skins and so forth. Most of these houses were built as single-storey stone-and-mud structures, and only two had a second floor reflecting their owners’ higher social status. Many were not in use during summertime, their owners having moved with their animals to their summer pastures. Only a handful of these houses were occupied either by elders who spent their time circumambulating the *maṇi*-structure, a typical Tibetan custom during old age, or by sick pastoralists resting and doing their religious practice as well. However, during winter, when pastoralists from Goroma used to come to lower pastures, many of these houses were occupied. Finally, some of the *jakhangs* belonged to farmers from nearby agricultural or semi-agricultural regions or to people from Lhagang; they are only inhabited occasionally when their owners come for religious gatherings or commercial businesses.
- 15 Between 2002 and 2003, Tashi Gönsar saw several major transitions. The first and probably most important change occurred when electricity was introduced thanks to the financial support provided by the lama. Not only were nuns eager to install telephone and other facilities necessitating a power supply, but pastoralists also profited from it by improving their daily life with fridges, televisions, radios and so forth, which hardly functioned with the solar energy that was previously used. Furthermore, the lama hired some Chinese workers in 2003 to build the first path suitable for jeeps and tractors, up from the junction of the main road to the nunnery.

Young nuns were sent to assist them. Even at this time, Lama Drugdra Gyatso's teachings attracted hundreds of people from near and far, and these innovations made it even easier for people to come and join. Finally, the lama started to worry about children's education among pastoralists and planned to build a school, which would adapt better to the seasonal movements than those already existing in town, much to the relief of many parents who objected to sending their children far away from home, but also needed their workforce during summertime.

- 16 All these social welfare projects were made possible because of a rapid rise in income levels. Lama Drugdra is one of those contemporary Tibetan lamas who know how to run a monastic institution self-sufficiently. Most of the fund-raising is carried out during religious gatherings, when many devotees join and leave important donations to the lama and the community of nuns (and now monks). They also have to pay for lodging, food and other daily necessities to the nunnery's guesthouse, restaurant and shop, up to now the exclusive suppliers in Mañijango<sup>32</sup>. Part of the money thus collected is reinvested directly in the religious community and the organization of gatherings, but a substantial part has also contributed to improving the living conditions of the local community. In addition to that, the lama raises funds by selling photos and posters of himself, as well as cassettes and VCDs<sup>33</sup> containing recordings of his religious teachings. Also, in recent years, he has opened several new shops selling monastic garments and other supplies in towns all over Kandze prefecture, namely Lhagang, Ranakha (Ra rгна kha), Bamay (Ba smad), Tau (Rta'u) and Drango (Brag 'go). Small groups of nuns run all these shops in rotation. Furthermore, the lama often confers teachings in other Tibetan places, as well as in Chinese cities, especially in Chengdu, where he also receives important donations from his many disciples.

Photo 2. Nomad houses or *jakhangs* in Mañijango (2003)



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Photo 3. View from the hill above the old temple on the *mañi*-structure and the nomad quarter in Mañijango (2003)



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- 17 All the income of the last couple of years has permitted further improvements in Mañijango. The road has been renewed with asphalt paving. Many pastoralists have extended or rebuilt their houses, contributing to significant growth of the site. The school, situated formerly at the entrance of the site, lying now in the middle, has also made important progress: a Chinese nun has been hired to teach Chinese language to the children, and several new Tibetan teachers have been employed, making it possible for 120 nomad children to receive a wide range of primary education<sup>34</sup>.

Photo 4. The site of Manijango with the old and the new temple in the foreground and the village stretching down the valley (2013)



© Nicola Schneider

- 18 In addition to the nunnery, the lama built a monastic college for monks in 2007. In 2015, around 200 mostly young novices were housed in this new religious complex, surrounded by a wall and situated on the opposite of the nunnery's mountainside. Shortly after, the construction of a new assembly hall for the nuns was started as well; since more than a decade, the old one had become too small to house the growing number of nuns.
- 19 Finally, Manijango has opened its own medical clinic. The project was started in 2003, when the lama invited a retired monk-doctor from Dartsedo, Dr Jamyang Dragpa ('Jam dbyangs grags pa, born 1942<sup>35</sup>), to teach the nuns traditional Tibetan medicine. Some already had rudimentary notions of medical plants and medicine making thanks to a nun from a well-known local lineage of traditional medical practitioners who had transmitted her knowledge to several of her companions. After a systematic training course with the monk-doctor, it was decided to build a clinic, partially sponsored by a foreign NGO, Winrock International. Today, 50 trained nun doctors are running the place. With its two floors for consultation, the manufacture and commercialization of its own medicine, it is an impressive enterprise not only for nuns themselves who consider this professional skill as complementary to their religious careers, but also very useful in this remote pastoral land where medical facilities were nearly non-existent before. Thus pastoralists and monastics no longer need to go as far as Dartsedo to get medical attention.

## Is the monastery an ideal settling place for Tibetan pastoralists?

- 20 In recent years, the topic of enforced settlement implemented by the Chinese authorities among Tibetan pastoralists has gained much attention among researchers<sup>36</sup>. Growing numbers of pastoralists have been dislocated, often to artificially-built villages with poor quality houses, deprived of their pastures and livestock. Rarely well prepared and compensated less than promised according to several studies, they find no way to meet their needs and thus face difficulties in adapting to the imposed lifestyle. It has been suggested that the lack of religious structures in these villages worsens the situation of Tibetan pastoralists<sup>37</sup>. This is not the case in Mañijango where, I would suggest, because of the monastery, pastoralists have found their own way to reinvent or adopt new lifestyles without facing major disruption and marginalization in their daily lives.
- 21 As we have seen, the monastery and the local economy it generates have permitted the introduction of a kind of “modernity” to Tibetan pastoralists. Not a “modern” life in a Chinese sense of consumption, extensive building, luxury goods and so forth, but a more Tibetan-orientated modernity, which caters to the needs and wishes of the local population. New infrastructure has been created and facilities like electricity, water pumps, shops with daily necessities and a school have been introduced. Local pastoralists and devotees from far and near are the main financial backing for these developments through their continual donations. History already tells us that pastoralists used to be very generous to lamas and monasteries in the past<sup>38</sup>. Today, this seems still to be the case<sup>39</sup>. However, as we have seen, the lama of Mañijango also reinvests part of the money provided to the monastery. Like taxes that are paid to the state and used partly to finance social projects, the donations circulate through the monastery, before being given back through forms of social service. The monastery thus functions like an independent local administration, run by Tibetans and for Tibetans. This, in turn, has pushed many pastoralists to build their houses and settle down on this religious territory, not entirely, but to a certain extent; some pastoralist families have split in fact, in order to keep their cattle in the vicinity of their previous winter house situated closer to the pastures<sup>40</sup>. The younger generations have begun to look for alternative professional activities like carpentry, traditional wood painting, driving and trade, often involving moving back and forth from Mañijango to other places like Lhagang, Dartsedo and so forth. The school promises to allow future generations to engage in an even wider range of occupations.
- 22 In recent years, since 2010, some pastoralists in Mañijango have benefitted from the new Nomadic Settlement programme<sup>41</sup>. According to Jamila Ptackova (2012, p. 209), the government launched this programme in 2009 as a reaction to widespread riots throughout Tibetan areas during 2008. Being the third of its kind, its main aim is the relocation of pastoralists from their grasslands. But unlike the others, it has a slightly different agenda: it does not require participating pastoralists to abandon the grasslands or to reduce the livestock<sup>42</sup>, a fact that is much appreciated.

Photo 5. The new administrative building of the Nomadic Settlement programme in Mañijango (2013)



© Nicola Schneider

- 23 Some pastoralists from Mañijango profited from the Nomadic Settlement programme by directly buying houses that were constructed by the authorities; others preferred to build their own houses, but received government grants to purchase the materials needed. The result is that Mañijango has expanded significantly, mostly around the entrance of the site, further down the valley from the school towards the main road. However, during my visits in 2013 and 2015, many of these brand new houses were unoccupied and some even totally empty. According to pastoralists I asked, the reason behind this is that these houses were not adequate for living, because they lacked sanitary facilities; even the water pumps and public toilets installed by the lama close to the nuns' quarters, the guesthouse and shops are too far to be convenient for regular use. Another problem is the distance to the monastery itself: especially the elderly and sick, those who used to stay all around the year in their previous *jakhangs*, feel that it is too complicated to come and go for their daily religious practices. Some therefore preferred to stay in their old dwellings. Last but not least, some pastoralists might face problems for reimbursing the loans they have taken out to supplement the construction costs; the "traditional" *jakhangs* were more economical than their new "settlement" houses, because they were built with local materials, using a mutual aid system where several families pooled their labor resources. Nonetheless, some pastoralists also say that they are happy to own a residence that will last several years, compared to the makeshift dwellings previously used. Moreover, by buying these new houses, they secure the ownership of the land attached to it. It is too early to draw any conclusions; only time will tell how these new houses will fit into the pastoral life, and also with the community installed around the monastery.

24 As elsewhere, the Nomadic Settlement programme in Manijango includes an administrative building, generally used to enable the government to be present and have closer control over Tibetan pastoralists. However, during my last stay in 2015, this building was always empty, with the exception of some young artists who occupied a side room for scroll painting. It remains to be determined how exactly this public unit built in the middle of the new “settlement” houses will be handled in future. Up to 2015, the lama was the sole leader not only for the monastics, but also more generally for local pastoralists<sup>43</sup>. He himself did not feel that this was his role or function. His objections notwithstanding, pastoralists used to come to his residence daily to consult him on all kind of problems and inquiries related to their lives. The question therefore is whether the government will continue to permit him to represent the community or if they will try to obstruct his authority as a trusted religious leader who assumes social responsibility. Some attempts have already been made to undermine his influence. Thus, for example, the government has recently sent a state official from Lhagang to make sure that there are no nuns of minor age. However, being Tibetan, the person in charge of this mission did not dare to report any case<sup>44</sup>. It is interesting to note also that shortly after this official control, the lama founded a school for teen girls who wish to become nuns. The latter is only one of his many new projects, which include also the construction of a library and classrooms for nuns who want to engage in higher Buddhist education<sup>45</sup>, a public bathroom and a teahouse to cater to the locals’ wishes. Thus if the pastoralists’ relationship to the local lama and monastery is not compromised, Manijango might continue to undergo an urbanization process and become an even more important cultural center for local people as well as for visitors from far away.

## Conclusion

- 25 Manijango and Lhagang monastery are both examples of pastoralist monasteries, which have, over time, attracted a large population of pastoralists wishing to settle down, albeit only partially, because many families remain working as herders and thus continue to follow seasonal movement. Although both seem to be exceptions in the Tibetan landscape – further research is needed to confirm the extent of this kind of religious institution – they show that settlement without social disorganization and marginalization is not only desirable, but also possible. Monasteries as cultural and moral centers have always played an important role in Tibetan community lives, and both monasteries show that they can continue to do so even within a politico-religious framework that has changed considerably.
- 26 Manijango is particularly salient here because it was founded only after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) by a religious group with pastoral origins, and without any external help as was the case for Lhagang. Since then, it has continually provided new opportunities for pastoralists who wish to expand their professional occupations, and of whom some look to live in a community with “modern” facilities. This in turn has encouraged the authorities to sponsor those wishing to rebuild better houses within the frame of its new Nomadic Settlement programme. Although it is too early to draw any conclusions, the situation in 2015 seems to indicate an on-going urbanization process without dismantling substantially the basic mobility patterns of pastoralists.

- 27 To conclude, we can draw a parallel with the Western world and its monasteries, which also played – and continue to play – an important role in the definition of the community<sup>46</sup>. As Jean-Paul Willaime (2007, p. 41) mentions: “a place of worship establishes a space and thus gives the community a visible presence”. Furthermore, we can add that in a mobile society, the monastery favors the constitution of a genuine community, as well as provides a basis for the future preservation of the community.
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## NOTES

1. Yeh & Henderson 2008, pp. 9-10.
2. Gaubatz 1996, pp. 153-154.
3. See for example van Spengen 1992, p. 58 ; Rohlf 2013, pp. 165, 168.
4. Ekvall 1968, p. 82.
5. Ekvall *ibid.*
6. Humphrey & Ujeed 2013, p. 115.
7. See also Sonam Wangmo's article in this volume.
8. See Sonam Wangmo 2013, p. 29.
9. Jackson 2003, p. 203.
10. From 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>th</sup> of June 1940, according to the diary of André Guibaut. With many thanks to Sarah Le Berre for communicating to me these diaries.



11. Photos of Lhagang monastery taken by André Guibaut in 1940 can be seen on the website of the Musée du Quai Branly (<http://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/explorer-les-collections> (access date October 2016).
12. “Tent monasteries” or “tent temples” seem to have been very widespread in the past, sometimes being even the only structure to accommodate monastics. Several researchers mention them, often under different terms such as, for example : *tshogs gur* (Humchen 2007, p. 246), *tshogs ras* (Tsering Thar 2003, p. 343-344), *gsas khang* (Tsering Thar 2008, p. 534) or *sba/sbra nag* (David-Néel 1985, p. 147). Goldstein mentions also a “tent-monastery” set up at the district horse-racing festival in the 1980s in Pala (1990, p. 103).
13. Imhof 1974, p. 92.
14. *Ibid.*, figures 41-43.
15. In the agricultural areas of Minyag, which lie to the south of Lhagang, houses used already to be very big in the past.
16. The above-mentioned explorers all noted that Lhagang monastery was a lively place.
17. Personal communication (2014) with Mayum-la, born ca. 1916, who grew up in a nomad family living close to Lhagang.
18. Personal communication with Mayum-la (2014).
19. Jackson 2003. Dezhung Rinpoche came even twice to Lhagang monastery to give teachings and to confer ordination on many monks.
20. *Khams phyogs dkar mdzes khul gyi dgon sde so'i lo rgyus gsal bar bshad pa nang bstan gsal ba'i me long*, vol. 3, pp. 2-4.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.
22. It is interesting to note that Namkhai Norbu also points to a prevalence of Nyingmapa monasteries in pastoral regions of northern Kham ; Namkhai Norbu 1997, p. 20.
23. For more information on the life of this lama, see Thub bstan chos dar 2003. For summaries of this biography in French and English, see Schneider 2013, pp. 109-114 ; Thinlay Gyatso 2014.
24. My thanks go to Fabienne Jagou for this information.
25. This set of monastic rules has been reproduced in Lama Tséphel's biography, see Thub bstan chos dar 2003, pp. 35-38.
26. However, locals as well as outsiders, who call the nunnery – or more precisely the religious site – Mañijango or Sergyago, rarely use the name Tashi Gönsar.
27. For a short biography on Khenpo Chödrag, see Rig 'dzin bstan srung 2015, pp. 295-298.
28. For more information on Pema Tumpo, who is also called Sku gsum gling pa, see Buffetrille 2009, 2015.
29. Up to now, some pastoralists have kept their previous winter houses while building a second one close to the monastery.
30. At the beginning, the summer religious gathering lasted only two weeks, but it has recently been expanded to 45 days. In winter, it lasts two months.
31. In recent years, some nuns and monks from as far as Lhasa have also joined the religious gathering.
32. Pastoralists or any other people are strictly forbidden to open shops or restaurants in Mañijango, probably to avoid competition.
33. A medium for videos used instead of DVDs.
34. Shortly after the founding of this primary school, another lama of a neighbouring pastoralist community, Khenpo Dorje Tashi, has built a boarding school for nomad children, the “Dzogchen School of the district Dardo in Minyag” (Dar do rdzong Mi nyag rdzogs chen slob grwa), which also prepares for secondary education ; see also Tan 2013.
35. For a short biography of Dr Jamyang Dragpa, see Rig 'dzin bstan srung 2015, pp. 328-331.

36. See, for example, several articles in the collective volumes edited by Kreutzmann (2012), Bauer & Huatse Gyal (2015) respectively, as well as Gruschke 2008 ; Robin 2009 ; Ptackova 2011 ; Cencetti 2012, 2014.
37. See Robin 2009, p. 62 ; Wooser 2013.
38. See for example Ekvall 1968 ; Namkhai Norbu 1997 ; Jackson 2003.
39. See also Bauer (2015, p. 61-62) who points out that a considerable amount of household expenditures (ca. 26 %) among Tibetan pastoralists in Yushu Prefecture (Qinghai) goes to religious rituals.
40. On the growing number of houses and the strategies, which pastoralists in Golog follow in multiplying their residences, see Sulek (2012).
41. A newly installed board at the entrance of Manijango reads “Nomadic Settlement Project of Dartsedo county. Permanent residence for the pastoralists of Gongrima, rural township of Lhagang” (Tib. Dar mdo rdzong ’brog pa’i gzhis chags bya ’gul gyi ’char gzhir/ Lha sgang Gong ri ma gtan sdod sa gnas ; Chin. 康定縣 牧民 定居 行動 計畫 Kangdingxian mumin dingju xingdong jihua). Note that the spelling Gong ri ma here is wrong ; Rig ’dzin bstan srung (*op. cit.*, p. 53) gives Go ro ma, *go ro* singifying in ancient Minyag language “small country” (*lung pa chung chung*). Another spelling given by this author is Gangs ri ma.
42. The latter is actually not true for Goroma, where pastoralists with considerable livestock need to keep a second winter house higher up in the mountains.
43. There exists also a community leader (*dpon po*), born into the local hereditary lineage of leaders. However, because he is illiterate, his political power is weak.
44. It has to be underlined that Manijango does not host many nuns and monks under the age of 18 years like Tibetan monasteries elsewhere do.
45. In 2015, Manijango housed six *khenmos* (*mkhan mo*), nuns who have undergone higher studies in the Nyingma school and who have the necessary requirements to teach Buddhist doctrine to others. Nuns who hold this title and diploma are very few in Tibetan Buddhism ; the very first women who got access to it come from Larung Gar (Larung gar), the Buddhist Institute of Higher Studies of Sertha (Gser rta lnga rig slob gling), and were awarded their diploma in 1990 (Schneider 2013, pp. 153-161, and 2016).
46. See for example Hervieu-Léger 2002 ; Willaime 2007 ; Iogna-Prat 2012.

## ABSTRACTS

This article looks into pastoral monasteries and tries to determine how they are products of, as well as agents in, a Tibetan pastoralist’s world. After presenting historical archives, it draws mainly on fieldwork conducted in a contemporary monastery in Kham Minyag, which has contributed both to the settlement of a considerable number of pastoralists from the local area and to the constitution and preservation of a genuine community.

Cet article examine les monastères pastoraux et tente de déterminer de quelle façon ils sont des produits de, ainsi que des agents dans, le monde pastoral tibétain. Après avoir présenté des archives historiques, il s’appuie principalement sur des recherches de terrain effectuées dans un monastère contemporain dans le Kham Minyag qui a contribué à la fois à la fixation d’un nombre considérable de pasteurs nomades de la région et à la constitution et préservation d’une véritable communauté.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Tibet, Kham, nomade, monastère, vie religieuse, implantation

**Keywords:** Tibet, Kham, nomad, monastery, religious life, settlement

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