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## Beyul Khumbu: Sherpa Constructions of a Sacred Landscape

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Beyul Khumbu:  
Sherpa Constructions of a Sacred Landscape

by  
Lindsay Ann Skog

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
GEOGRAPHY

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Portland State University  
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## ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Lindsay Ann Skog for the Master of Arts in Geography presented June 9, 2010.

Title: Beyul Khumbu: Sherpa Constructions of a Sacred Landscape

Khumbu, part of Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park in eastern Nepal and an UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to the Sherpa people, ethnic Tibetan Buddhists who migrated to the region more than 500 years ago. Sherpas animate the landscape with localized water, tree, rock, and land spirits, identify sacred mountains, mainly associated with the Bönpo and Tibetan *yullha* traditions, and some view the landscape as a *beyul*, a sacred place and hidden valley protecting Buddhist people and beliefs in times of turmoil and need. These beliefs protect the natural environment through religious practices and taboos against environmentally harmful behaviors and activities. Associated ritual practice, perceptions, and mythology encode Sherpa culture and beliefs in the landscape. This research contributes to discussions of place, sacred landscapes, and conservation by documenting older Sherpa residents' constructions of Khumbu as a sacred landscape in two Khumbu villages. Interviews and participant observations reveal a socially constructed sacred landscape expressing a distinct Khumbu Sherpa identity.

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Sagarmatha National Park for granting me permission to conduct research in Khumbu. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, who introduced the beyul to me and provided guidance from afar. I extend my deepest appreciation to my research assistant and translator, Miss Kami Doma Sherpa, whose patience, enthusiasm, and skill proved invaluable to this project. Further, this thesis has benefited from the support of Mountain Spirit and The Mountain Institute resources in Nepal.

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## **NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION**

Sherpa words are transcribed in English transliteration as published (Sherpa, 2009) or to approximate what I heard as their spoken equivalents. The first occurrence of a Sherpa word is italicized.

## GLOSSARY<sup>1</sup>

- beyul* sacred hidden refuge for Tibetan Buddhists
- Bön* a spiritual tradition of the Tibetan ethnic region
- Chekyong Surra Rakye* guardian of Beyul Khenbalung
- Gelug* Tibetan Buddhist sect
- gompa (gonde)* temple or monastery
- Guru Rinpoche* Indian saint who brought Buddhism to Tibet and the Himalaya
- Jomo Miyo Langsangma* Goddess residing in Jomolungma (Mt. Everest)
- Kagyud* Tibetan Buddhist sect
- kani* covered entrance gateway
- Khumbi Yullha (Khumbila Tsen Gylapu)* territorial god of Khumbu
- lhasu* small outside fireplace for household offerings
- Losar* Sherpa New Year
- lu* water spirit
- mani* prayer carved in stone, wood, or metal
- Mani Rimdu* masked dance festival for the Buddhist god of compassion
- mantra* prayer
- Nyingma* Tibetan Buddhist sect
- Nyingmapa* person adhering to the Nyingma sect (the Sherpa are Nyingmapa)
- Orgyan Rinpoche* Guru Rinpoche, familiarly

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions derived from Zangbu 2000; L. N. Sherpa 2008

*Padmasambhava* (Sanskrit) Guru Rinpoche

*panchayat* (Nepali) Nepali government system from the 1960s until 1990

*Pecha* Buddhist text

*puja* ceremony

*ru* Sherpa clan

*sadak* soil spirit

*Sakya* Tibetan Buddhist sect

*Sharwa* people of the east, Sherpas' name for themselves

*sonam* merit; power and good fortune

*sur* yak butter

*terma* hidden treasure text

*terton* treasure text seeker

*Thakmeru* the 'red rock', western gate of Beyul Khenbalung

*tsen* land spirit

*yullha* territory or country god

## PREFACE

“I forget to walk,” observed the young Sherpa woman as I watched her stumble for the third time along the trail toward Nauche. She explains, “Because I live in an apartment I forget to walk,” alluding to a difference between her life in Kathmandu and in Khumbu. The young woman, born in a Khumbu Sherpa village to a yak-herding family, attended the Khumjung school, a two-hour walk from her home; now she lives in Kathmandu attending university and keeping a watchful eye on her young siblings, who attend a Kathmandu boarding school. Her brief comment captures a challenge facing the Khumbu Sherpa community: as older generations of Khumbu Sherpas, the warehouses of intimate knowledge about this place, pass away, and younger generations move at an early age to Kathmandu and abroad for school and work, Sherpa connections to Khumbu—connections mediated and understood through Sherpa belief systems—are strained and even lost. Stumbling along a trail, my young friend’s connection to Khumbu’s physical landscape is eroding in much the same way. She has lost, or never gained, this connection to Khumbu’s sacred landscape.

Several weeks later, the same young woman and I wander through the Sherpa village of Thame; our path winds clockwise around several banks of slates carved with homages to the Buddha, *Om mani padme hum*. Blue, white, red, green, and yellow prayer flags dance between the trees, as towering peaks and growing tourist lodges dominate my vision. Ritual trumpets echo down the hillside from the monastery as we enter the dark first-floor storeroom of a traditional Sherpa home. I am reminded of the



distinct feel of such a home when I hit my head on the low door frame and run my left hand around the post at the top of the stairs, smoothed by several generations of hands doing the same. As I share milk tea with the woman I came to see, she explains that the past three days of rain are the result of an upset *lu*, a female water spirit.

The woman's understanding of the supernatural beings within this place and their effects on her daily experiences reveals a particular knowledge about Khumbu as a sacred landscape. It is this knowledge, along with the other layers of meaning Sherpas ascribe to Khumbu, I am here to explore. The contrast between the experiences and knowledge of these two Khumbu Sherpa women illustrate the generational differences in Khumbu Sherpa culture. A wide body of literature and research exploring the Khumbu landscape and the Sherpa people build a platform supporting my contribution of a narrow yet revealing look at the interplaying forces influencing Sherpa elders' relationship to Khumbu.

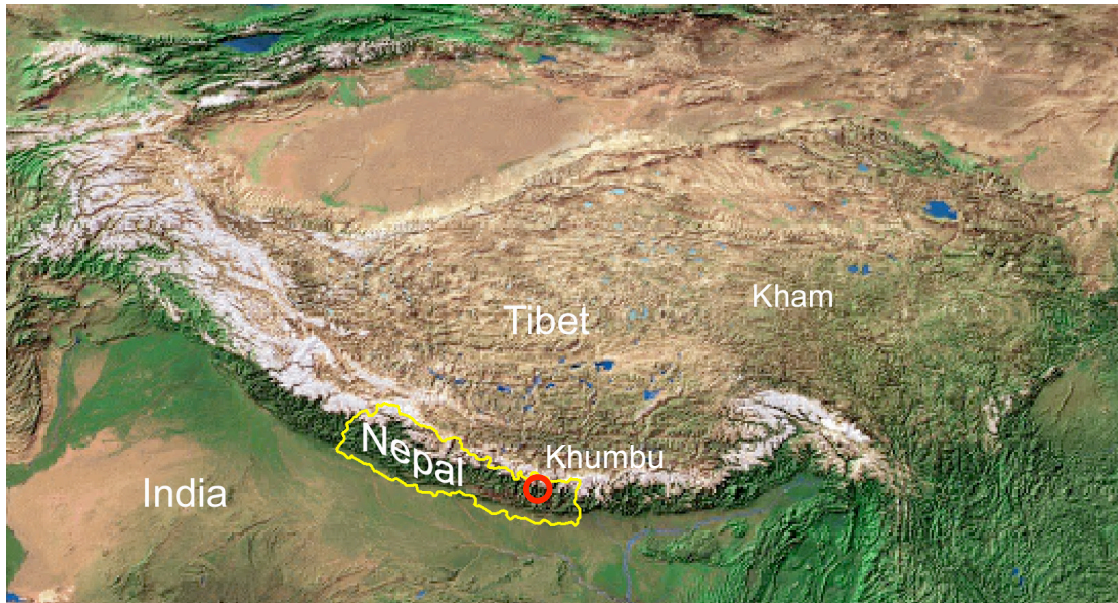


Image courtesy of B. Brower

Figure 1. Regional map of the Himalaya and Tibetan Plateau

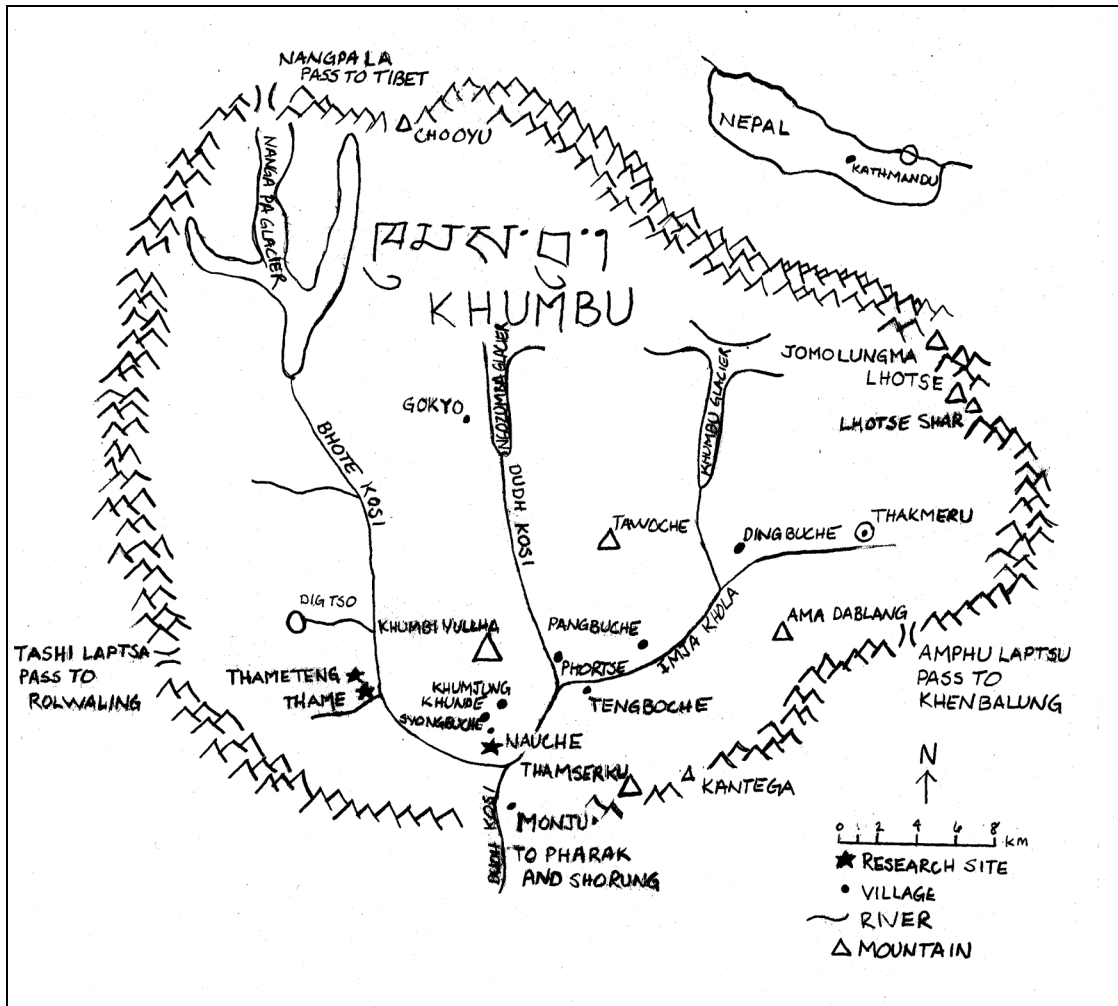


Figure 2. Sketch map of Khumbu (Skog 2010)

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### Overview

For generations since the arrival of the first Sherpa migrants to Khumbu from Kham in eastern Tibet, Khumbu Sherpas have populated the landscape with myriad spirits and deities that govern their everyday lives and experiences. These quasi-animistic beliefs and accompanying rituals originated from the pre-Buddhist and *Bön* traditions of the Tibetan plateau. Early Sherpa religion in Khumbu continued the popular traditions of the Tibetan plateau, based in *Nyingma* Buddhist practice, and was led by community lamas and shamans in the absence of formal monastic institutions.

Khumbu Sherpas subsisted primarily as agro-pastoralists and traders, until political upheaval in South Asia and Nepal resulted in significant changes to Khumbu's subsistence economy. Traditional trade routes closed, but access through Khumbu to the long-sought southern approach to Mount Everest opened. While one leg of the Khumbu Sherpa economy was failing another began; Khumbu was poised to reap the benefits of a growing tourism industry.

Nearly two generations later, Khumbu is now Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park and an UNESCO World Heritage site, and the consequences of the rise of mountaineering and the tourism industry are apparent. Increased wealth, first accruing to those families along the main trekking routes, then spreading to more remote villages, as well as support from foreigners admirers, allow Sherpas to travel, work, and attend school in Kathmandu and abroad. Sherpas in general, and young

people specifically, have the resources and incentives to establish homes and businesses in the economic centers of Kathmandu and abroad. Increasing numbers of young Sherpas migrate out from Khumbu, returning to visit one or two times per year. They are not learning the Sherpa culture, language, and traditions as their parents and grandparents did.

Concomitant to the rise of trekking and tourism in Khumbu, sponsorship of the monastic community continued to grow as well. Khumbu Sherpas' success as traders and in the mountaineering enterprises out of Darjeeling in the first half of the twentieth century brought enough wealth to a few individuals that they were able to sponsor the first celibate monastic communities in Khumbu. The growing monastic community advocated 'high' Buddhist practices over the 'low' Sherpa traditions, popular since migration into Khumbu, and set out to reform Sherpa religion (Ortner 1999). 'High' Nyingma Buddhist tradition identifies Khumbu as one of many sacred hidden valleys, or *beyuls*, in the Himalaya (Zangbu 2000; L. N. Sherpa 2003, 2005, 2008). Nyingma texts describe beyuls as refuges where Buddhist teachings and practitioners will be protected in times of turmoil and need. In addition to protecting Buddhists and their traditions, beyuls contribute to environmental protection through behavioral taboos. The rise of Khumbu's monastic community, in some ways the result of the same circumstances now threatening Khumbu Sherpas' lifeways, allowed for the dissemination of the beyul concept from the monastic community over the past several generations. Recent efforts to revitalize beyul knowledge among the lay Khumbu Sherpa community focus on monastic beliefs about the beyul, with little

attention to the myriad ways lay Khumbu Sherpas make meaning of Khumbu as a sacred landscape.

### **Project Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of my research is to better understand the relationship between people and place by examining how older Khumbu Sherpas understand their sacred landscape. Our experience in a place and the meanings we bring to places shape our emotions and behaviors toward that place. Further, place is a lens through which we view and experience the world around us. The landscape in which we dwell places us in the physical world and is the locale, or stage, for many of our interactions with the rest of the world. In this way, place mediates how we interact with an environment and informs our worldview. My research contributes to the study of place by revealing multiple layers of beliefs held in Khumbu's sacred landscape and how those meanings influence older Sherpas experiences in Khumbu and their view of the world outside of Khumbu.

In addition to contributing to the academic dialogue exploring people and their environment, research on the relationship between sacred landscapes and residents contributes to cultural and environmental conservation efforts, protected area planning, and natural resource management. Peoples dwelling within and interacting daily with a sacred landscape are the stewards of a place; they are critical agents in carrying out conservation initiatives and management plans. Understanding the multiple meanings brought to a sacred place by its residents and the myriad ways

those meanings affect their lives can inform planning and conservation efforts sensitive to beliefs held by local populations. Management, planning, and conservation initiatives that accommodate and draw from a people's relationship with a sacred landscape will be better informed by a thorough examination of all residents' understandings of that landscape.

In this research I seek the specific knowledge about Khumbu's sacred landscape held by older lay Sherpas in two communities, Thame/Thameteng and Nauche. I investigate how resident beliefs shape Khumbu as a sacred place by asking a series of questions: What is the nature of knowledge about Khumbu's sacred landscape in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng, and where did that knowledge come from? How do older Sherpas mentally construct and perceive Khumbu's sacred landscape?

My research demonstrates that a sacred landscape holds different meanings and significance among the people living within that place. This effort reveals an animated sacred landscape reflecting the historical development of the Khumbu Sherpas' belief system and the myriad sacred meanings found in that place. Following a thread weaving through 'lower' popular Sherpa traditions and 'higher' Buddhist notions about Khumbu's sacred landscape, this thesis explores older Sherpas beliefs in land spirits inhabiting springs, trees, and rocks, guardian mountain deities, and the monastic beyul tradition. Further, an unexpected understanding of the beyul emerges among older Sherpas, who employ the beyul to bound their identity out of the region's political and cultural landscapes. I observe that older Sherpas evoke the sacred

landscape as an expression of a homogenous Khumbu Sherpa identity, despite the heterogeneous nature of sacred landscape knowledge, and see in that landscape a protective boundary around the Khumbu Sherpa identity.

### **Thesis Structure**

This thesis is structured into four chapters. Chapter 1 situates my research at the intersection of literature exploring place and identity, sacred landscapes, conservation, and Khumbu, from multiple disciplines. The second part of Chapter 1 sets out the fieldwork and analysis methodology I employed for this project. Chapter 2 builds the platform upon which I based this research. This platform is best thought of in layers, beginning with Khumbu's physical landscape, overlaid with the culture, traditions, and practices of the Sherpa people. Upon these layers, I sketch interplaying regional, national, and local political and economic forces. Finally, Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the origins, transitions, and influences of religious traditions in Khumbu, and a description of the recent campaign to reinvigorate the beyul tradition in Khumbu. Chapter 3 opens with a description of the Nyingma Buddhist tradition's imprint on Khumbu's physical landscape. The subsequent three sections draw from interview data to articulate participants' understandings of the land and mountain spirits in Khumbu, as well as Khumbu as a beyul. This study concludes in Chapter 4 with a synthesis of my research findings, analysis of the data, and conclusions to my research questions.



## **Studying a Sacred Place**

I situate this research at the intersection of literature exploring place and identity, sacred landscapes, conservation, and Khumbu. The geographical study of place examines physical locations, locale, and sense of place, as well as exploring how societies construct meaning through place (Cresswell 2004, citing Agnew 1987). Tuan (1974) coined the term “topophilia,” to capture one’s attachment to or love for a place, which is frequently evoked in discussions of place. He argues that the meanings one brings to a landscape or place govern the emotions and attachments experienced in that place. For instance, one observer’s pleasure in viewing a garden may result from the visual enjoyment of casting an eye upon the blooms, while another’s attachment derives from the financial gain seen in selling the cut flowers; the first observer brings an aesthetic meaning to the garden and the second brings an economic one. D. W. Meinig observes that such multiple meanings may be constructed from one place and suggests that among those meanings landscapes reveal ideology by representing “a translation of philosophy into tangible features” (1979, 42). In this way, experiencing a place may evoke images, memories, and emotions representing a person’s ideological history, including their personal belief system. My work thus draws from and adds to the studies of place and sacred landscapes within geography.

Geographers’ concerns for religion and religious geographies have historically focused on the spread of Judeo-Christian religious traditions and their sacred sites, rather than close examinations of the meanings held in sacred landscapes (Sopher

1981; Kong 1990; Park 1994). However, geographical participatory mapping practices may engage belief systems and religious practices in an applied framework.

Participatory mapping is a set of tools used by communities to produce representations, mostly maps, of a given landscape. These practices, used to delineate land rights and territorial claims by the First Nations communities of Alaska and Canada (Chapin, Lamb, and Threlkeld 2005), and South and Central American indigenous communities (Nietschmann 1995; Offen 2003), often associate a unique ethnic identity with a mentally mapped territory (Knapp and Herlihy 2002). Further, community-driven mapping projects have proved useful in helping communities determine resource management practices and communicating those practices to outside agencies (Lynam et al. 2007). More specific to Himalayan communities, Forbes (1995) suggests participatory mapping may be a useful tool toward better understand the relationship between residents in Nepal's Makalu-Barun National Park and their landscape, which may improve park planning and management.

Applied research directly examining sacred landscapes has focused on their use as conservation mechanisms. Religious communities revering sacred sites often unintentionally act as agents conserving those sites through respectful behaviors and preservation (Ramakrishnan 1996, 2005; Sharma, Rikhari, and Palni 1999; Pei and Luo 2000; Xie, Wang, and Xu 2000; L. N. Sherpa 2003, 2005; Allison 2004; Jain et al. 2004; Anderson et al. 2005; Salick, Yan, and Amend 2005; Arora 2006). Within the Himalaya and South Asia such investigations expound the conservation value of small-scale sacred sites and natural landscape features, such as sacred groves and

lakes. Less attention has focused on larger scale landscapes, with two notable exceptions: the sacred value of Mount Kawa Karpo in northwest Yunnan Province, valued also for its collection of medicinal plants (Pei and Luo 2000; Xie, Wang, and Xu 2000; Anderson et al. 2005; Salick, Yan, and Amend 2005), and Beyul Khumbu (L. N. Sherpa 2003, 2005, 2008), the site inspiring my research.

These investigations into the conservation potential of indigenous belief systems reflect a movement in the 1980s and 1990s during which conservationists embraced ‘natural’ sacred sites as important tools in promoting environmental conservation and protected areas. Further, protected area advocates called for management policies reflecting indigenous beliefs and management practices. Recent literature on protected areas and indigenous beliefs suggests that sacred sites serve a hybrid function: as physical expressions of a community’s belief system and their identity, and as a means of conserving natural and cultural resources (Arora 2006).

Drawing from geographers’ concern for place and focusing on sacred landscapes, Anthropologists Basso (1996) and Thornton (2008) demonstrate how Native American communities in New Mexico and southeast Alaska, respectively, understand physical landscape features, and the landscape itself, as visual cues evoking encoded indigenous cultural and ecological knowledge. In both case studies physical landmarks, such as trees or water bodies, are connected to folklore or moral teachings shared among the community. The landscape features serve as cues reminding community members of their shared values, history, and codes of conduct. Stutchbury (1991, 1999) provides another example, more specific to the project at

hand, by demonstrating residents' conceptions of the landscape of Karzha, India as a sacred mandala encodes their Buddhist practice. Karzha residents identify physical landscape features as part of a mandala representing the Buddhist universe and move through the landscape in the same way Buddhist practitioners move through mentally-constructed mandalas during meditation practice. Stutchbury argues that the landscape is not simply a physical symbol of the Buddhist cosmos or mandala, observable in the landscape; the act of walking and practicing within that place becomes a physical manifestation of the Buddhist practice in the same way that meditating on a mandala manifests the Buddhist practice. In all, these investigations suggest that beliefs symbolized in a landscape are connected to individual and community identities. Indeed, place may be seen as a symbol of human identity, tied to resident belief systems expressed in the physical landscape.

Pratt (1999) builds on the classic geographical theme of place by tying together identity—the ways we define ourselves—and place. In her work with Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, Canada, Pratt demonstrates how place intertwines with identity as Filipina domestic workers negotiate their cross-cultural identities and spaces. Pratt contends that historical and cultural forces construct identities and geographies. Moreover, Pratt (citing hooks 1992) confirms that identities are defined in opposition and by establishing a boundary. Boundary-making defines what a person or community is by establishing what it is not (Pratt 1999).

Arora (2006) engages these discussions of place, sacred landscapes, and identity in her exploration of the relationship between the Tholung sacred landscape

and the Lepcha people in Sikkim. Arora tells how the sacred landscape acts as a mechanism protecting the forest and wildlife, embodies historical symbols of the Lepcha peoples' belief system, represents a nexus of authority, and constructs a boundary defining the Lepcha people. In the same way, my research draws on this literature by describing a sacred landscape, exploring how residents attach meaning to it through their culture and beliefs, and use that landscape to construct boundaries defining the Khumbu Sherpa identity.

Scholars from a range of disciplines have studied the Khumbu landscape, the Sherpa people, and the relationship between the two, with passing attention to the sacred nature of this place. Fürer-Haimendorf (1964, 1975) was the first ethnographer to document Sherpa lifeways following the opening of Nepal to foreigners. In nearly fifty years since Fürer-Haimendorf's research, the Sherpas and Khumbu have been among of the most studied Himalayan peoples and landscapes. The body of literature is broad and growing, as researchers carve out their individual perspective on Khumbu's dynamic landscape and people. Nearly all the literature exploring this place has looked into the interconnected systems and lifeways sustaining the Khumbu Sherpas in the rugged Himalayan environment. Unique perspectives come from studies exploring the transformations in Sherpa culture head on (Fisher 1990, 1991; Adams 1996), through the lens of animal husbandry practices (Brower 1991, 1996), as they affect land management (Byers 1987a, 1987b, 2005; Brower 1991; Stevens 1993;) and livelihoods (Zurick 1992, 2006), and as influenced by the Sherpa and Nyingma belief systems (Ortner 1978, 1992, 1999). In addition to ethnographic

literature, physical science researchers discuss land cover changes and environmental degradation in Khumbu (Byers 1987a, 1987b, 2005), while quantitative survey techniques have demonstrated the negative influence of Khumbu's tourism economy on traditional Sherpa lifeways (Spoon 2008). Finally, literature emerges from within Khumbu Sherpa society itself expressing a concern for the eroding Sherpa culture and contributes efforts toward arresting that loss (Zangbu 2000; L. N. Sherpa 2003, 2005, 2008; Klatzel 2009). This body of research provides insights into the lifeways and practices allowing the Khumbu Sherpa people to thrive in the harsh Himalayan hinterlands. Much of this research further speaks to the often contentious relationship between parks and people, exploring the on-going dialogue between national policy, market demand, and traditional mechanisms informing natural resource use and management. Moreover, in all, this literature also demonstrates what no one would argue: that change has come to Khumbu. Such a comprehensive collection of literature exploring a specific place and people is unique within the broader context of Himalayan Studies and, therefore, allows for my more specific and nuanced investigation where others have generalized.

### **Fieldwork and Analysis**

From July 2009 through May 2010, I spent eleven months in Nepal, making four trips to Khumbu ranging from three to seven weeks each, collecting data and preparing this written work. The intervening times in Kathmandu, one to three months each, were spent securing research permission from the Government of Nepal's

Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, developing affiliations with individuals and organizations, and studying Nepali.

My first trip to Khumbu in July and August 2009 allowed for a broad overview of Khumbu's main settlements and initial contacts with several Khumbu residents. In Fall 2009, I returned to Khumbu with my research assistant. Over seven weeks, including three weeks in Nauche, two weeks in Thame/Thameteng, one week traveling to a sacred rock on the eastern edge of Khumbu, and one week as a participant observer in the *Mani Rimdu* festival at Tengboche monastery, I observed several community rituals and conducted 30 interviews primarily in Thame/Thameteng and Nauche. From November 2009 through January 2010 I returned to Kathmandu's milder climate, along with a significant portion of the Khumbu Sherpa population, where I conducted follow-up interviews.

I chose the villages of Nauche, on the trekking route, and Thame/Thameteng, off the main trekking route, as communities exemplifying the on-the-trekking-route versus off-the-trekking-route contrast constructed by Spoon (2008) in his examination of the effects of market integration on, among other factors, Sherpas' knowledge about the sacred landscape. The twin villages of Thame/Thameteng are situated seven kilometers to the northwest of Nauche, and represent different Khumbu communities. Nauche is the economic, political, and social center of Khumbu. This is the first Khumbu village through which all trekking groups pass and is a near-mandatory resting point along the main trekking route to Everest Base Camp. As a result, Nauche residents engage Khumbu's tourism industry on a near daily basis. At least 21 large,

well-appointed trekking lodges dominate the Nauche structures, while interspersed among the lodges are internet shops, trekking stores, and western-style bakeries.

In contrast, Thame and Thameteng are off the popular main trekking route, though increasing numbers of trekkers are passing through the villages seeking less-populated trekking routes in Khumbu. Most Thame and Thameteng residents do not engage tourists daily, but there is an extensive history of Thame and Thameteng residents working seasonally with the high-altitude climbing expeditions. As a result, it is appropriate to acknowledge that these two communities are exposed to the threats of the tourism and trekking industry in different ways. There are only four trekking lodges in Thame and one in Thameteng; the majority of structures are traditional Sherpa homes. Thame and Thameteng were historically distinct as two separate ritual units; however, they are often thought of as a single community, separated by a modest ridge. Thame/Thameteng residents travel to Nauche for the weekly market, internet use, and social networking—typically over a cup of tea or *chang*, home-brewed beer. Nauche and Thame/Thameteng demonstrate the contrast often described between on-the-trekking-route development and the more traditional Sherpa lifeways retained in off-the-trekking-route Khumbu communities.

My participant group consists of 24 Sherpas from Nauche and Thame/Thameteng and six key informants, those directed to me by Sherpas as particularly knowledgeable about Khumbu's sacred landscapes, from Pangbuche, Phortse, Dingboche, and Khumjung (Bernard 2006). I attempted to equally balance male and female participants, specifically seeking female community-members to



balance the males represented among the monastic participants. I limited my interviews with monastic community members to one per institution, as my project specifically seeks the knowledge of older lay residents in Thame/Thameteng and Nauche—those who interact daily with the sacred landscape. I focused on the lay population above the age of fifty, the cohort demonstrating the greatest knowledge about Khumbu’s sacred landscapes (Spoon 2008), in an attempt to minimize the effects of generational culture change within my data. Table 1 details the demographics of my participant sample.

Table 1. Sample demographics: Gender, Village, Lay/Monastic

	Lay participants		Monks
	Male	Female	
Nauche	7	5	1
Thame	3	4	1
Thameteng	1	1	1
Key informants	4	0	2

In both Thame/Thameteng and Nauche, I first approached the head lama at the village *gompa*, or monastery, out of respect both for his authority on all matters sacred in the community and to reassure participants that, having already sought this authority, their contribution to this research would not usurp the extensive knowledge held within the monastic community. I located participants using snowball sampling, asking each interviewee to suggest another community member who may be willing to participate (Bernard 2006).

I conducted translated, semi-structured interviews focusing initially on sacred sites, then moving to larger-scale conceptions of Khumbu's sacred landscape including the idea of beyul (Bernard 2006). After settling into a cup of tea, I explained that I was seeking to learn more about the environment and Buddhism, and requested an interview and consent as a research participant. I typically began interviews with an open-ended question about a nearby forest or small-scale sacred site. From this initial question, I directed interviews toward resident deities and the beyul. At times, after unsuccessful attempts to evoke the beyul, I would directly ask a participant to explain more about it. The following recreates an actual interview and typical line of questioning:

LS: The forest on the hillside looks quite healthy compared to some of the forests along the trail between Thame and Nauche. Why do you think that is?

Ang Pemba (Thame/Thameteng): The forest up by the gompa is owned by one family, who plants trees there and cares for that part of the forest. On the hillside, there is a lu. Lu are found in water, trees, and rocks. The lu is not very important, but if we make its home dirty then it will harm us. If we keep the area around the lu clean, it will be happy. In the past, all the villagers supported Thame monastery. Kayrok gompa [the gompa located on the Thameteng side of the ridge] was there, but did not have any supporters. The two lamas did business and twelve households moved to supporting Kayrok gompa from Thame monastery. Each gompa has a god. Gompo is at Thame monastery, but I cannot remember which god is at Kayrok.

LS: Are there other spirits, like the lu, living in Khumbu?

AP: All the mountains have gods. Also, there was a ghost living in the lake near Chosaro. The ghost made the yak and nak disappear. All the villagers were afraid to go near the lake because of the ghost, but the lake was washed out during a flood.

At this point the man offers a description of the property he owned before the 1985 glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) destroyed it. To redirect the interview, I return to a question about the Khumbu environment.

LS: Yes, I can see where the water from the flood came close to this village and destroyed many things. But, in other places in the village, the environment still looks very clean. Why?

AP: The water here is clean because it comes from the mountain snow. If there is no snow, then there is no water.

LS: Why do Sherpas keep this place clean?

AP: We keep the water clean because we have to drink it. We protect the forests because we can collect medicine from the forest.

LS: Is the beyul part of protecting the environment? Why is the beyul important?

AP: The beyul is important because inside the beyul there is no hunger and no war. On TV we can see other places where everyday 40-50 people die, but here only one or two people die because it is a beyul. There are beyuls in Khenbalung, Yolmo, and Khumbu.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

AP: From the lama and old people.

LS: What is special about this place? About the beyul?

AP: Money. With money you can go anywhere.

This interview concluded with another cup of tea and the man describing his recent trip to Kathmandu.

I chose not to audio-record the interviews, having found that participants in a pilot study I conducted in Portland, Oregon in January and February 2009 were uncomfortable with the hand-held recorder. I took copious notes both during and after

each interview, conferring with my research assistant. This system proved adequate in representing the breadth and depth of the information shared; however, I am certain interesting and useful information was lost as the result of my own lack of experience in interviewing, the lapsing memories of both me and my research assistant after many hours of Sherpa hospitality, and all parties' language limitations when discussing complex notions in a mix of Sherpa, Nepali, and English. Throughout this thesis I reconstruct portions of interviews from my research notes, rather than from transcriptions. I use pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality for the research participants.

In this thesis, in addition to recreating interviews, I retell stories of Khumbu's animated landscape. The retold story is a fusion of the versions of the same story recounted to me by Sherpa elders. I acknowledge conflicting details where critical to the intention of the story; however, where conflicting details are not critical, I give preference to the most often told version. The stories are re-presented as versions in which most Sherpa would agree on the major events, and perhaps disagree, though not reject, the incidental details.

As a geographer a seemingly natural inquiry is how residents represent, or map, Khumbu as a beyul. My inquiry acknowledges the possibility that my research participants may hold a distinctly different mental map of Khumbu's sacred landscape from the map I may construct. This understanding is informed by participatory mapping methods employed by indigenous communities to represent their interests in specific landscapes. With this literature in mind, my initial research proposal included an examination of what participant-drawn maps reveal about Beyul Khumbu.

However, I withdrew this component from my research tools early in the fieldwork. I quickly noted participants' reluctance to draw a map of the beyul; the few maps produced focused on the locations of villages, rivers, and mountains as opposed to sacred sites, or elements that may be interpreted as part of a sacred landscape. L. N. Sherpa (2005), illuminating this challenge, observes in relation to Sherpas' perceptions of large-scale sacred landscapes, "the area covered by a sacred natural site is difficult to determine because they [sic] have a fuzzy sphere of influence or a mental map rather than a distinctive boundary on the ground" (68). Sherpas' hesitations to map the beyul may represent expressions of both their degree of beyul knowledge and nature of that knowledge.

Semi-structured interviews proved useful, if inefficient, in generating an array of information about beliefs and perceptions (Bernard 2006). This method was valuable in quickly building rapport with participants by allowing them to speak, at least initially, about those aspects of the Khumbu landscape with which they felt most comfortable. The challenge with this method was steering the discussion toward the broad points I sought to illuminate. I was unable to define variables that could be analyzed, so instead I deconstructed interviews to examine subtext, a revealing though imprecise exercise.

In early 2010 I began to analyze the interview data. I labeled my interview notes in segments by topic and sub-topics, some four layers deep, using personally "constructed codes" (Jackson 2001, citing Strauss 1987). I then allowed a "repertoire" of topics to emerge by grouping these codes based on scale, time, and keywords such

as sacred, economic, or political (Jackson 2001, citing Fish 1980). I drew conclusions from demonstrated relationships between degree of knowledge and each participant's home community and his or her social proximity to Khumbu's monastic community. As I will discuss below, such proximity emerges as a factor in how a participant understands Khumbu's sacred landscape.

In addition to these interviews, the literature exploring Khumbu Sherpas, Himalayan sacred space, and sacred texts describing Khumbu inform my inquiry. However, here I give primary authority to the descriptions of Khumbu's sacred geography as provided by Khumbu's residents, turning only to textual sources, both Buddhist texts and scholarly discussions, to provide context or fill in gaps left, perhaps, as the result of the fieldwork challenges discussed above.

The nature of a non-native researcher's inquiry into a place is problematic. I venture into this project recognizing that in seeking participant's perceptions—that is, how Sherpas view, understand, and experience Khumbu's sacred landscape—I am restricted by my own world-view, as defined by a western cultural context, and language constructions. I cannot see Khumbu as a Sherpa does. Yet the act of inquiring into perception may, at the least, reveal lessons of how a people learn to live in a place.

## CHAPTER 2. LANDSCAPES OF KHUMBU

### Physical Landscape

*Khangri*, 'snow mountains,' surround the approximately 1114 square kilometer area known to Sherpa residents as Khumbu (Figure 2). Nestled within the massive Himalayan uplift Khumbu rises from approximately 2800 meters at its southern boundary to 8848 meters on the peak of Mount Everest, which is known to Sherpas as Jomolangma, after the goddess residing there, and Sagarmatha in Nepali. Along with Jomolangma, Lhotse (8414 meters), Lhotse Shar (8393 meters), and Cho Oyo (8153 meters) crown Khumbu's northern border, the Nepal-Tibet international border. The Himalaya stretch to the west through northern India and Pakistan before giving way to the Karakoram and Hindu Kush ranges. To the east of Khumbu, the Himalayan range extends through Sikkim, Bhutan, and eastern India, terminating at Namche Barwa. The Tibetan plateau sits beyond the Himalayan peaks and is seasonally accessible from Khumbu through the Nangpa-la pass. Glaciers descending from Khumbu's high peaks flow into rivers carving valleys separated by rugged ridges, draining toward a confluence at Khumbu's southern tip, where the Bhote Kosi waters join the Dudh Kosi flowing south through Nepal's middle hill regions, and ultimately into the low-land Terai and Indian plain.

Khumbu is located in the subtropical Asian monsoon zone and is generally marked by warm, wet summers and cool, dry winters. The majority of Khumbu's precipitation falls during the monsoon, roughly June-September, while the remaining seasons are relatively dry; however, unpredictable weather characterizes the shoulder

seasons, as warmer temperatures in the southern low-lying regions mix with cooler mountain air (Brower 1991; Byers 2005).

Three elevation zones broadly characterize Khumbu's vegetation with localized variations determined by aspect, slope, climate, and moisture. Diverse broad-leaf, conifer, and birch forests dominate moisture-rich protected areas in the lowest elevations, 2800 meters to 3200 meters. At these elevations pines are prevalent in the dry forests, while scrub vegetation replaces forests in resident-influenced areas, mainly near villages. This low elevation mix continues into the middle elevations, 3200 meters to 4000 meters, with decreased variety as the sub-alpine terrain rises. Above 4000 meters, in the alpine zone, the forests give way to krummholz trees and ground-clinging forbs, sedges, grasses, lichens, and mosses evidencing the effects of increased wind, a short growing season, and decreased temperature (Brower 1991).

Diverse fauna populate Khumbu despite challenging environmental conditions and competition for scarce resources. Wildlife includes pika, weasel, bats, Himalayan snow cock, Himalayan griffon, Impeyan pheasant (Nepal's national bird), and crows. Large omnivorous and herbivorous wildlife include the Himalayan tahr, musk deer, black bear, elusive snow leopard, and yeti. Domesticated animals and managed herds comprise the majority of observed animal life in Khumbu and include cattle, such as yak, cows, goats, and sheep (Brower 1991; L. N. Sherpa 2008).



## **The Khumbu Sherpa People**

The *Sarwa*, ‘people of the east’, as Sherpas refer to themselves in their Tibetan-based Sherpa language, practice Nyingma Buddhism, an ancient sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Sherpa communities are found throughout the Himalayan region and worldwide. Approximately 3500 Sherpas live in Khumbu, though roughly one-third spend significant portions of the year in Kathmandu, the Nepali capital, or abroad (Spoon 2008). Scholars widely accept that Sherpas migrated to Khumbu more than 500 years ago from Kham in eastern Tibet. The original migrants’ motivations for leaving Tibet remain subject to speculation. Some chroniclers suggest Sherpas migrated as the result of religious persecution by the dominate, theocratic *Gelug* sect of Tibetan Buddhism, then subduing other religious movements and especially Bön, Tibet’s dominate pre-Buddhist tradition (Childs 1999; Zangbu 2000; L. N. Sherpa 2008). Nyingmapas, including Sherpa ancestors, may have been subject to this persecution as the result of their close relationship with Bön practice (cf. Karmay n. d.; L. N. Sherpa 2008). Others attribute the Sherpa migration to threats of harm at the hands of the invading Mongol army (Ortner 1992, citing Oppitz 1968). Still others posit the Sherpas journeyed to Khumbu believing it to be a beyul, a sacred valley where they and their Nyingma beliefs would be protected. These three reasons for the Sherpa migration are not mutually exclusive. Karmay (n.d.), an eminent Bön scholar, explains that a Kham Buddhist ruler elicited the assistance of the Mongol army in persecuting Tibet’s non-ruling religious movements, including both Bön and

Nyingmapa practitioners. Under such threat and persecution, the Kham Sherpas may have sought the beyul for protection in their time of need.

Sherpas believe the first Tibetan to enter Khumbu was a man named Phachen. He is thought to have entered Khumbu from the Rolwaling valley to Khumbu's west by passing over the Tashi Lapsa pass. Subsequent Sherpa settlers entered Khumbu from the north over the Nangpa-la pass, which is still used today as a trading route between Khumbu and Tibet (Zangbu 2000; L. N. Sherpa 2008). The question of whether the Sherpa were the first humans to settle in or travel to Khumbu remains another point of debate among Sherpa and Khumbu scholars. Kiranti Rai may have settled here first in Dingbuche after crossing the Amphu Labtsa pass on the eastern side of Khumbu, around the same time Phachen arrived (Brower 1991; Zangbu 2000). On the other hand, Ortner (1992) posits indigenous Rai, already settled in Solu, sold land to the migrating Sherpas; upper Khumbu had been used as a meditation retreat prior to Sherpa settlement. Regardless of who arrived in Khumbu first, by the mid-1500s migrants from eastern Kham began transforming Khumbu's rugged landscape into a place some Sherpa people would come to know as home for generations.<sup>2</sup>

***Sherpa Clans.*** Khumbu's original settlers were from four patriarchal clans, *ru*; today, Khumbu Sherpa society is organized into approximately 25 clans, most sub-

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<sup>2</sup> Byers (2005) argues soil, pollen, and <sup>14</sup>C analyses indicate possible human intervention and disturbance in Khumbu as many as 5,000 years prior to Sherpa arrival. This data does not conclusively indicate permanent settlements in Khumbu by either Sherpas or any other ethnic population. Byers suggests such disturbance could be the result of seasonal settlements. Brower (1996) challenges this data.

clans from the original four (L. N. Sherpa 2008). Historically, clan affiliation regulated property rights and use, defined Sherpas' ritual communities, and determined eligible marriage partners. Sherpa clan members delineate a ritual community by propitiating a specific clan deity thought to reside in one of Khumbu's peaks. Sherpas are exogamous, and therefore cannot marry within their own clans (Fürer-Haimendorf 1964). Clan membership is significant in that it is an "indispensable symbol of a person's status within the core of Sherpa society" (Fürer-Haimendorf 1964, 23) and such status once situated a Sherpa above Khambas, more recent Tibetan migrants without Sherpa clan affiliations, and migrants from Nepal's other ethnic groups. For comprehensive expositions of Sherpa social structures see Fürer-Haimendorf (1964) and Ortner (1978, 1992, 1999).

***Khumbu settlements.*** Over time, Sherpas organized themselves into six main villages between 3440 meters and 3985 meters elevation: Khumjung, Khunde, Nauche, Thame/Thameteng, Pangbuche, and Phortse. The first settlements were at Pangbuche and Dingbuche, a subsidiary settlement (Ortner 1992). Secondary settlements, in some cases approaching 5000 meters, serve as summer pastures and more commonly now as tourist outposts. Gokyo is an example of this; the one time summer yak herding settlement is now a top trekkers' destination in Khumbu, as marked by the growing collection of guesthouses.

Popular, lay oral traditions historicize Khumbu's settlements as important landmarks in Sherpa religious history through place names. Some Sherpas list thirteen place names in Khumbu ending in -che (ཅེ), often explained as meaning footprint (i.e.

Pangbuche, Tengboche, Chhulungche, Nauche, etc.). Sherpas tell that Guru Rinpoche, the Indian saint who brought Buddhism to Khumbu, and Lama Sangwa Dorje, the founder of Khumbu's first monastic institution, left footprints in the rocks at these thirteen places, from which they now derive their names. One informant provided an alternative explanation for these place names, explaining that the term –che means “big.” For instance, Pangbuche translates as “big corner grassy meadow,” while Tengboche means “big rhododendron goiter” (a reference to the unusually large rhododendrons characteristic of that hillside) and Nauche is understood to mean “big corner forest.” Goldstein's Tibetan Dictionary (2001) supports this etymological interpretation, indicating the Tibetan letter –che (ཇ) is translated as “big, large” (371). Regardless of the etymological foundations of place names in Khumbu, the common explanation that thirteen places within Khumbu are named for the imprints left by Khumbu's saints is significant evidence Khumbu Sherpas draw upon to historicize and connect Khumbu's sacred landscape to the physical environment.

### **Economy and Subsistence**

For centuries Khumbu Sherpas subsisted as yak herders, farmers, and traders with the hill people to the south and the Tibetans across their northern border. National and regional politics as well as development projects in the mid-twentieth century presented challenges to Khumbu's traditionally diversified economy, yet also presented new opportunities in the form of tourism and trekking.

***Transhumance.*** Historically, mixed herds of yak, cows, and yak-cattle crossbreeds provided dairy products, occasionally meat, wool, hides, and, most importantly dung to fertilize Khumbu's nutrient-deficient high-altitude soils. Sherpas moved herds between high- and low- elevation grazing lands throughout the year, avoiding cultivated lands during the growing seasons and fertilizing fallow lands during the off-seasons. Changes to Khumbu's economy resulting from the rise of trekking and tourism have decreased herd sizes and shifted their composition to maximize the yak-cow crossbreed's usefulness as an expedition and trekking pack animal. For a complete discussion of historical and changing Khumbu Sherpa animal husbandry practices see Brower (1991, 1996), as well as L. N. Sherpa (2008).

***Agriculture.*** Sherpas cultivate buckwheat, barley, turnips, hay (fodder for livestock during the winter) and potatoes on small, terraced fields, despite Khumbu's deprived soils, short-growing season, and dramatic slopes. In addition to fields located around village peripheries and beyond, many Khumbu Sherpa families, especially along the main trekking routes, grow vegetables and herbs in small kitchen gardens, often fertilized by nearby composting toilets, adjacent their homes. However, changes in livestock management and product demands in the past 30 years have effected agricultural composition in Khumbu. For instance, unmanaged livestock during the fragile growing season has eliminated fields of buckwheat in many places (Brower 1991; L. N. Sherpa 2008). Sherpa families today pull varieties of greens, carrots, onions, garlic, and mint, among others, from their family's garden and from simple

greenhouses during the winter. In addition to these vegetables, new fruit trees are slowly making their way to Khumbu from Pharak's lower elevations.

*Trade.* The third leg upon which Sherpa lifeways historically relied was trade. Awarded exclusive access to a trade route between Nepal's grain-producing lower elevations and the salt-rich Tibetan plateau, many generations of Khumbu Sherpas engaged in the transport and trade of grain and salt, among other commodities. Those not involved in trade took up other entrepreneurial activities serving Khumbu's communities. (L. N. Sherpa 2008)

*Decline of the salt trade.* The 1959 closing of the Nepal-Tibet border severed the trade routes used to transport salt and grain between Khumbu and Tibet. Simultaneously, successful efforts to reduce malaria in Nepal's border region with India, the Terai, opened trade routes through that region allowing less expensive Indian salt to penetrate the Nepali market, decreasing demand for Tibetan salt (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975; Brower 1991). This dramatically threatened Khumbu's traditional economy, and indeed destroyed livelihoods in other areas of the Nepal Himalayas. However, Khumbu Sherpas involvement in Himalayan mountaineering better positioned many families to accommodate the region's shifting political and economic situation. (Brower 1991; Ortner 1992, 1999; L. N. Sherpa 2008)

## **Politics and Governance**

Protected by the surrounding snow mountains and despite ongoing trade relations both to the north and south, the Khumbu Sherpas lived in relative isolation

until as late as the mid-1900s. For centuries the machinations of the Asian and European empires unfolded around them with minimal effect on Khumbu Sherpa lives. Until the late 1700s, Nepal was comprised of autonomous, independent states and tribal groups—many taking refuge in the mountains and hills escaping from persecution in central Asia or from the Mughals in the Indian plain. The kingdom of Gorkha consolidated Nepal's independent territories and tribal states in the late 1700s, bringing Khumbu within the Nepali state. The Shah monarchy imposed taxes and collected resources from Khumbu; however, the Sherpas otherwise remained relatively autonomous. (Brower 1996; Ortner 1999; L. N. Sherpa 2008)

The high-caste Hindu Rana lineage disrupted the House of Gorkha's political power in 1845, claiming heretical rule as prime ministers. With Rana control came British dependency for Nepal. Nepal's foreign affairs were managed through Great Britain, reinforcing Nepal's isolation. Internally, the Ranas increased the central government's ability to collect taxes, pulling the Khumbu Sherpas further into the Nepali state folds. While the Gorkha lineage remained on the throne, the Ranas wielded political power until the British departure from the Indian sub-continent and subsequent revolution to reinstate the monarchy in 1950. (Brower 1991; Spoon 2008)

The restored Shah monarchy opened Nepal's doors to the rest of the world, the consequences of which are central to this discussion. Continuing the Ranas' trend toward centralized government authority, the monarchy instituted the Private Forest Nationalization Act in 1957. This policy placed all of Nepal's forests under state control, yet recognized established control of cultivated lands. In the 1960s the

government established the *panchayat* system of centralized government authority. Under this system, government administrative units asserted national policy and governance at the local level. Within Khumbu, the panchayat disrupted traditional governance units by dividing the region into administrative units that conflicted with traditional divisions (Stevens 1993). Also at this time and in response to rising tensions between China and India, new police and army posts in Khumbu reinforced the central government's authority in the region (Brower 1991). The panchayat system and the physical presence of government posts folded Khumbu further into the Nepali state, limiting the relative autonomy Khumbu Sherpas had enjoyed under previous government regimes (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975).

Popular discontent with the government and protests culminated in *Jana Andolan I* (Nepali), the 1990 peoples' revolution changing the nature of centralized authority, yet retaining monarchical rule. The new 1990 constitution established a multi-party government with elected Village Development Committees with localized authority (Spoon 2008). By the mid-1990s, frustration grew with the new government's inability to fairly represent the interests and needs of Nepal's diverse ethnic groups. The concomitant rise of western Nepal's Maoist movement spurred a decade long war in Nepal, devastating life and property throughout the country. (Spoon 2008)

The People's War, 1996-2006, brought great change to Nepal's political landscape. Nepal's serene image dissolved; a state of chaos and armed conflict ensued as fractured political factions, self-proclaimed 'Maoists', engaged the Nepali army,



demanding an end to monarchical rule and the formation of a democratic government. With assassinations of much of the royal family in 2001, King Gyanendra Shah, the late King's brother, was enthroned. Following several unsuccessful attempts to end the Maoist insurgency, King Gyanendra was disposed in April 2006. The monarchy was abolished in a series of events known as *Jana Andolan II* and all political authority was entrusted to an interim, democratically-elected government. On May 28, 2008, The Kingdom of Nepal became the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. (Spoon 2008)

In all, national and regional political turmoil, upheaval, and changes imposed increasing limits on Khumbu Sherpas' relative autonomy. As the Khumbu Sherpa community melded into the Nepali state sphere of influence, the Hindu-dominated culture of the Nepali polity grew as a threatening and influential force facing Khumbu Sherpas. The Hindu caste system serves as one concrete example of the effects of the Hindu social and political structures the Khumbu Sherpas grew to resist.

***Caste System.*** The politics of the Hindu caste system underpin Nepal's contentious governmental history. Since the eighteenth century Gorkha expansion, Indo-Aryan ethnic groups have dominated state power in Nepal. In practice and by definition Nepal's non-Hindu ethnic groups fall low in the Hindu caste system. The 1854 Muluki civil code institutionalized this practice by listing 'tribal natives' in the Nepali caste system, including Tibeto-Burman groups like the Sherpas. Under this civil code, 'tribal natives' were divided into pure and impure castes based on alcohol consumption, and further divided into enslaveable and non-enslaveable. Sherpas were

classified as impure, enslaveable, non-Hindus and as such were among the lowest in Nepal's social hierarchy (Ortner 1999; Spoon 2008). The Nepali caste system is now unlawful and abolished, yet the discriminatory social practices and institutionalized legacies remain.

***Education.*** The Nepali state-mandated curriculum in Khumbu's schools serves as an example of the persistent influence of the Hindu norms and values in Khumbu. Government-controlled curriculum mandates a significant portion of subject material be delivered in Nepali, as opposed to local languages. Further, the state-centric, Hindu-centric curriculum does not include place-based learning practices (Spoon 2008). As a result, Sherpa children are educated in Nepali language and content presented in a Hindu caste-based context, threatening both the continuation of the Sherpa language and cultural practices (Fisher 1991; Spoon 2008; L. N. Sherpa, personal communication).

In the face of the cultural biases and threats presented by the state education system, Khumbu Sherpas place a high value on education (Spoon 2008). Beginning in the 1970s, the Himalayan Trust established schools in several Khumbu villages and foreigners continue to sponsor young Sherpas both at schools in Khumbu and in Kathmandu. Indeed, many young Sherpas are well educated with language and business skills useful in the trekking and mountaineering industry (Spoon 2008). Such educational endeavors and subsequent opportunities contribute to young Sherpas migrating away from Khumbu. As a result, current educational opportunities threaten

traditional Sherpa lifeways through both educational content and access to institutions and opportunities outside of Khumbu. (Spoon 2008)

### **The Rise of Mountaineering and Tourism**

Returning to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the implications of the rise of Nepal's monarchy and subsequent opening of Nepal to tourism spurred dramatic alterations to Khumbu's physical and cultural landscapes (Brower 1991; L. N. Sherpa 2008). These changes can be attributed to the rise of mountaineering and trekking in Khumbu's Mt. Everest region beginning in the 1950s, when Nepal opened to tourism, allowing access to the Himalayan peaks' southern approaches. Recounting the history of Himalayan mountaineering often begins with British interest in the mountains during their colonialism of the Indian sub-continent. In fact, the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, an undertaking of the British Raj, documented the highest mountain on Earth in 1852 and named it for the head of the Survey from 1820-1840, Sir George Everest. Militaristic-style, attempts to climb the Himalayan peaks began in earnest around the turn of the twentieth century from the northern approaches through Tibet (Ortner 1999). Before entering Tibet through Darjeeling, expeditions leaders hired Khumbu Sherpas, among others from the Himalayan ethnic groups, who seasonally traveled to Darjeeling for such work. When Nepal's southern Himalayan approaches opened increasing numbers of especially western climbers traveled to Khumbu, hiring Khumbu Sherpas, who had already established themselves in the first part of the century as indispensable expedition workers. Khumbu Sherpas no longer needed to

travel to Darjeeling for lucrative expedition opportunities, such opportunities were now at their doorsteps.

In addition to employment as porters, cooks, guides, and sirdars (expedition staff leaders), Sherpas hired out their pack animals to carry expedition gear and offered their homes as shelter. Over time, Sherpas' herds shifted in size, composition, and management to better meet the demands of expedition and trekking groups (Brower 1991). Sherpa hospitality led to modest guesthouses, which in the following decades grew to some of the most comfortable guest homes in the Himalaya. Fürer-Haimendorf expresses the promise of the growing tourism industry in Khumbu by predicting,

It is likely that the new tourist facilities based on Khumbu will counteract the present movement of Sherpas to Kathmandu, and make it possible for men to work in tourism without being separated from their wives and families for the greater part of the year (1975, 92).

Fürer-Haimendorf and others likely did not imagine that, while these new opportunities indeed kept Sherpa men close to home by providing economic opportunities within Khumbu, the accompanying economic success would allow—even encourage—their children to leave Khumbu, again separating families.

Replacing the salt trade with tourism in the Sherpas' livelihood scheme altered Khumbu's economic landscape. Tourism continues to grow in Khumbu spurring an overall shift from an agro-pastoralist to a service economy. Young Sherpas no longer aspire to inherit their family herds and fields, instead drawn to the trekking and mountaineering industry as porters, guides, leaders, and inn and tea house operators

(Fisher 1990, 1991; Brower 1991; Zurick 1992; Stevens 1993; Ortner 1999; L. N. Sherpa 2008; Spoon 2008). Tea houses, lodges, and other service-oriented operations rub shoulders along the main trekking route leading from Nauche to the high-elevation base camps from where expeditions launch their bids to stand on top of the world and tourists pose for pictures. Increased wealth, especially among Sherpas living along the trekking route, provides more opportunities for young Sherpas to leave Khumbu attending boarding schools in Kathmandu and elsewhere; trekkers and mountaineers are also known to sponsor young Sherpas to travel to other countries. Increased wealth and opportunities, however, come at a cost to Khumbu Sherpas, not only in loss of traditional lifeways, but also in loss of life, as demonstrated by solemn clusters of *Chhurung*, stone memorial monuments, sprawled like graveyards, marking the lives of Sherpas lost in mountaineering tragedies. The shift toward a service-oriented economy spurred many Sherpa families to abandon the three-prong approach to sustainable economic security, leaving those families more vulnerable to an unstable tourism economy. In addition, Sherpa out-migration brings an influx of western material goods, lifeways, and values to Khumbu, shifting young Sherpas' interest in their tradition and culture, and the mechanisms for delivering that knowledge (Brower 1991; Zurick 1992; Zurick and Karan 1999; Stevens 2003; Byers 2005; L. N. Sherpa 2008; Spoon 2008).

The Government of Nepal, with encouragement and support from New Zealand's government and the United Nations, designated Khumbu as Sagarmatha National Park in 1976. The national park was intended to mitigate threats posed by

increasing tourists, trekkers, and mountaineers to the fragile Khumbu environment, yet attract tourists and increase revenue (Brower 1991). In further recognition of Khumbu's significant cultural and environmental value, the region is designated an UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 1964, 20 tourists visited Khumbu (Brower 1991); Sagarmatha National Park reports 30,500 tourists visited the park in 2008. Neither of these numbers include expedition support staff, estimated to be as great as three staff for each tourist (Brower 1991, citing M. N. Sherpa, personal communication 1987).

Further burdening Khumbu's fragile, yet seemingly resilient, environment are migrants from Nepal's middle hill and lowland regions who travel to Khumbu in search of work, especially Rai from the Solu region who migrate to Khumbu as expedition workers, shopkeepers, and household employees—necessitated and facilitated by increased wealth and mobility among Khumbu Sherpas. In addition, non-Sherpa government employees, such as schoolteachers, army personnel, and national park employees continue shifting Khumbu's demographic composition; this is especially noticeable around Nauche, where a Hindu shrine is now tucked into the Buddhist-dominated hillside, and above Pangbuche, where a small Rai community is established.

### **The Sherpa and Nyingma Religious Traditions**

Nepal's mountain peoples practice four Tibetan religious traditions: *Sakya*, *Kagyud*, Bön, and like the Sherpas, Nyingma traditions; Tibetan refugees also practice the Gelug traditions. Nyingma, the oldest sect, combines all three forms of Buddhism:

“Hinayana to improve one’s character, Mahayana to think about others, and Vajrayana to follow a short cut to spiritual liberation” (Zangbu 2000, 10). The Sherpa religion combines Buddhist concepts of merit, rebirth, and compassion with rituals of exorcism and protection, often associated with the Bön religion (Ortner 1992)<sup>3</sup>. In this way, Sherpas express concern for their own and others current as well as future lives. The following provides a brief history of Nyingma traditions and the Khumbu monastic community.

Bön, the pre-Buddhist religious tradition of the current Tibetan ethnic region, can be articulated as an animistic and shamanistic tradition thought to have declined in Tibet in the eighth century as the Buddhist tradition emerged. The establishment of Samyé monastery, with patronage from the Buddhist King Trisong Detson, in roughly 779 AD as the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, marked the end of the struggle between Buddhism and Bön to reign in Tibet; Buddhism dominated (Dowman 1997). At that time, Bön practitioners were persecuted and exiled; however, Bön beliefs were so entrenched in Tibetan popular religion that they could not be completely eradicated. Further, those practitioners who did not wish to be banished were forced to accept Buddhism; some did so with the intention of surreptitiously incorporating Bön beliefs and traditions into Buddhist practices as a way to continue the doctrine (Karmay n.d.).

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<sup>3</sup> All four Tibetan Buddhist sects believe Buddhists gain merit throughout their lifetimes based on their actions, including their attitude toward other living beings, and participation in ritual, and their intentions in those actions. Buddhists’ merit determines their level of rebirth or reincarnation ranging from a hell-bound ghost, to a dog, to a human, or to an enlightened being. The importance of achieving enlightenment is found not in the personal gain, but in enlightened beings’ ability to assist other sentient beings toward the same goal. Demonstrating compassion toward sentient beings is particularly beneficial in gaining merit.

Bön practice reemerged in Tibet in approximately the eleventh century with a closer affiliation to Buddhist practice and within the Buddhist framework, especially among the Nyingma sect.

As the first and oldest sect of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma traditions were positioned to incorporate Bön to a greater extent than the later Buddhist sects. Karmay (n.d.) suggests that the debate over which tradition informed the other, Nyingma influencing Bön practice or vice versa, may simply be academic; these two traditions are intertwined and inseparable in their later permutations. Karmay further suggests the presence of Bön traditions led to the rejection of Nyingma beliefs by orthodox Buddhist sects, who viewed Bön's integration as a spoiling of the Buddhist doctrine. In the sixteenth century, a second wave of persecution against the Bön-pos, fueled by the theocratic Gelug sect, demonstrated continuing tensions between the traditions (Dowman 1997). It is possible this schism is the root of the persecution leading to Sherpa migration to Khumbu. The localized, animistic qualities of the Sherpa belief system may be attributed to Bön influence in the Nyingma beliefs. However, as I will demonstrate below, the Sherpa belief system and narratives draw a curious boundary between themselves and their Bön predecessors.

Khumbu Sherpas believe *Guru Rinpoche*, familiarly *Orgyan Rinpoche* to many Sherpas or *Padmasambhava* among Indian philosophical traditions, brought Buddhism to Khumbu, as well as Tibet and the Himalaya in the eighth century. Sherpas tell Guru Rinpoche flew from Halase, in the south, to a cave above



Khumjung, where he meditated and transformed Khumbu to a Nyingma Buddhist landscape from a place controlled by “sinful” pre-Buddhist forces.

The first community gumpa was founded at Pangbuche in 1667 with later gumpas founded at Thame and Khumjung. The early gumpas did not support communities of monks nor were they educational institutions like the Buddhist monastic institutions of Tibet at the time. Khumbu’s early gumpas were simple structures containing altars thought to house the gods, making them available and accessible for worship (Ortner 1992). Community members with some religious training, either formal or familial, served early Khumbu settlers’ ritual needs and later cared for the gumpas. Community lamas, often married, performed protection rituals for people, crops, and land, and Shamans performed exorcism rituals to banish evil spirits. Ortner (1999) observes that such ‘lower’ Buddhist rituals do not fully meet the needs of a Buddhist community because they exclude ‘higher’ Buddhist practices necessary to advance practitioners along the Buddhist path; thus, along with economic developments in the early twentieth century, the first two celibate monastic communities formed in Khumbu, introducing full-time ‘higher’ Buddhist practice.

In 1916, Tengboche monastery was founded with financial support from among others a Solu Sherpa whose fortune had grown as the result of capitalizing on Khumbu’s salt and grain trade. Tengboche monastery legitimated Khumbu as a Nyingmapa Buddhist community by demonstrating sufficient community resources and patronage for the Buddhist tradition to support a full-time monastic community. In 1952, Thame gumpa converted to Khumbu’s second full-time celibate monastic

community. It is important to note that community support for such an institution is significant. A full-time monastic community requires not only financial support for constructing the monastery structures, commissioning paintings and statues, and securing numerous volumes of sacred texts from Tibet, but also meeting the daily financial needs, including food and tea, for each resident monk, a responsibility typically met by monks' families. In addition, each member of the monastic community is no longer a productive agent in providing resources for their families. Therefore, the founding of Khumbu's first monastic communities demonstrates prosperity in Khumbu sufficient to support the founding and maintenance of full-time monastic communities and sacrifice the labor lost to such communities (Ortner 1992).

The foundings of Tengboche and Thame monasteries marked the beginning of Khumbu's transition from a community concerned with protection rituals and exorcisms focused on local deities and demons to a community oriented toward the celibate monastic institutions of the twentieth century with a focus on 'higher' Buddhist practices and the universal Buddhist pantheon (Ortner 1992). Ortner (1992, 1999) describes that with the foundings of the celibate monastic institutions, social and monastic forces in Khumbu attempted to eliminate popular, 'lower' ritual practices. The primary complaints against the community, married lamas and shamans, as representatives of Sherpa popular religion, focused on violence and sex. Ortner describes (1999) that the celibate monastic community viewed exorcism rituals to cure illness as violent acts against both demons and others. Such violent acts are violations of the Buddhist teachings as a result of the harm caused to others and the harm

generated within the person inflicting the harm. Further, the celibate monastic institutions objected to married monks' engagement in sex; however, the objection is not to the act of sexual intercourse, rather to the consequence of intercourse: family. Ortner (1999) articulates that the agricultural labor associated with sustaining a family leads to killing bugs and worms, a violation of Buddhist teachings, while social obligations associated with a family distract from Buddhist practice. As a result, Sherpa popular religion led by married lamas and shamans was accorded a 'low' status by the celibate monastic institutions practicing 'high' Buddhism. Ortner (1999) recounts that the outcome of the campaign to elevate Sherpa popular religion is most evident in the Dumji festival. Ortner observes that, upon assuming authority over the festivals, the celibate monastic institutions eliminated all depictions of sex and violence. Ortner contrasts her observations with previously observed Dumji festivals where celibate monastic authority was intentionally excluded. While efforts to reform the Dumji festival were successful, overall the campaign to reform Sherpas' 'low' popular traditions was unsuccessful. Ortner argues that Sherpas "reconfigured" 'higher' Buddhist practice to integrate the 'lower' practices of Sherpas' popular religious traditions, merging Khumbu's disconnected monastic world and with the realities of Sherpa popular tradition.

### **Beyul Campaign**

The rise of Khumbu's monastic community comes together with efforts to preserve Sherpa culture in the beyul concept, which is contemporarily deployed to

support both environmental and cultural conservation. L. N. Sherpa (2003, 2005, 2008), a Khumbu resident, one-time Warden of Sagarmatha National Park, and advocate for conservation of Sherpa culture and the Khumbu environment, observes a fading knowledge of the beyul among Khumbu Sherpa. Spoon (2008) demonstrates that, indeed, Sherpas over the age of fifty have greater knowledge about the beyul than younger Sherpas and that, in general, knowledge about Khumbu's sacred landscape decreases by age in ten-year increments. Further, Spoon's findings characterize Sherpas living off the popular Nauche-Everest Base Camp trekking route as having greater knowledge about the beyul than those living on the main trekking route.

From September 2006 through December 2009, The Mountain Institute's Asia Program developed and implemented the *Building Livelihoods Along the Beyul Trails* project (henceforth the Beyul Campaign), with support from Khumbu's monastic communities, seeking, among other goals, to re-introduce the beyul to Khumbu Sherpas, who have either forgotten the concept or never learned of it (Lama, L. T., personal communication, April 14, 2010). A documentary, illustrated Sherpa cultural guide, and educational display at the entrance to the national park aim to educate young Sherpas and remind older Sherpas of Khumbu's special significance as a beyul and the taboos and behaviors towards the environment and each other expected of beyul residents. L. N. Sherpa explains that Nepal's national park policies have historically focused on rules and regulations imposed from a central authority, however environmental advocates now recognize the importance of local support in

conservation efforts. L. N. Sherpa explains the importance of the beyul to conservation in Khumbu stating,

“ . . . we have to capitalize on peoples’ culture, peoples’ belief systems, and all those [sic] human side of things in order to get stronger support from the local people. Because without the support of the people who live inside the national park and around the national park the enforcement of rules and regulations alone is not sufficient to protect all the species and valuable endangered species that we have.” (Sherpa 2007)

Indeed, local residents in Khumbu play a vital role in conserving the Khumbu environment and have done so for many generations. An assumption in this statement, however, is that the beyul is an integral part of the belief system of Khumbu Sherpas’ who interact with the Khumbu landscape on a regular basis, informing their behavior.

The story of the beyul emerging from the Beyul Campaign materials comes from the monastic textual Nyingma tradition and as such is disseminated from the monastic community, a community with relatively less interaction with the Khumbu landscape than lay Sherpas. Spoon’s (2008) research quantified beyul knowledge among lay Sherpas, though left the nature of that knowledge open to further investigation.

### CHAPTER 3. THE SACRED LANDSCAPE

The physical artifacts of Khumbu's Buddhist cultural landscape are easily observable and indeed enrich the enchanted tourist's sense of Khumbu, while offering a perhaps different meaning to the Sherpa residents. When entering a Khumbu village, or more recently at the entrance to Sagarmatha National Park, the peripatetic journeyer passes through a *kani* or archway painted with Buddhist deities and *mandalas*, maps of the Buddhist cosmos. As one travels from Lukla to Nauche, the trail wraps to the left of *mani* stones carved with *mantras*, Buddhist prayers (figure 3). Sherpas commission these often multi-colored stones to generate merit. With the same intentions, mani wheels, carved with mantras, and filled with thousands more, surround gompas and *chortens*, memorials to the Buddha and three-dimensional maps of the Buddhist cosmos (figure 4). Innovative, hydro-powered mani wheels situated above streams ensure the continuous release of prayers for the well-being of all sentient beings, as long as water continues to flow. Walking the *khora*, the clock-wise path surrounding a sacred site, spinning the mani wheels, sending out thousands of Buddhist prayers with each spin, a Nauche man points out the bank of mani wheels he commissioned, and bemoans the lack of carvers available to produce the mani stones piled hundreds high on the opposing side of the path.



Figure 3. Wall of mani stones



Figure 4. Mani wheel filled with prayers



Figure 5. Prayer flags

In addition to mani stones and wheels, Buddhist prayer flags are at least as conspicuous in this Buddhist place (Figure 5). *Lungdar* are five horizontally-strung

colored flags representing five elements upon which Buddhist prayers are printed with wood blocks. Hung on top of homes, on mountain passes, and at sacred sites, these flags release prayers with each flutter in the wind bringing luck, happiness, and long-life. *Choodar*, vertical prayer flags, mark buildings containing Buddhist treasures, such as statues and/or texts; in the ethnically diverse urban context these flags simply mark a Buddhist household (L. N. Sherpa 2008). While these colorful flags are most typically associated with Tibetan Buddhists, not limited to the Nyingma sect, L. N. Sherpa (2008) identifies these flags as having Bön origins. Sherpas generate further merit by commissioning paintings of various Buddhist deities on rocks, usually found high on a cliff.

Apart from man-made artifacts of Buddhist beliefs appearing in Khumbu's physical landscape, Sherpas point to natural features as evidence of Khumbu as a Buddhist place. Sherpas revere rocks believed to hold impressions of Guru Rinpoche's or Lama Sangwa Dorje's footprints. Such a rock is found at the entryway to Tengboche monastery, where Sherpas believe Lama Sangwa Dorje slipped while meditating, leaving his footprint in the rock, and foretold this as a sign that Tengboche would be an important Buddhist place. Indeed, Tengboche monastery, Khumbu's first celibate monastic institution, was later founded at that place. Aside from establishing Khumbu as a sacred place through evidence of important historical figures, particular rocks provide evidence of Khumbu's divine nature by inexplicably displaying the Sanskrit/Tibetan alphabet letter Ah (ཨ). Such rocks are found in the hills above



Nauche (figure 6) and in the western settlement of Aranjung, generally translated as “Ah in the rock.”



Figure 6. ‘Ah’ in the rock near Nauche

While most of these artifacts are observable to an outsider experiencing Khumbu as a Buddhist place, older Sherpas know Khumbu as a place animated by deities and spirits actively participating in and influencing their daily lives. This section discusses Khumbu’s animated landscape. Following a growing scale of landscape deities, evidence from interviews, literature, and Buddhist texts explain beliefs surrounding localized land spirits, Khumbu’s protector deity, and a more broad

understanding of Khumbu as a beyul within the Nyingma Buddhist cosmos. Following these descriptions I will conclude with a discussion focused on answering my research questions.

### **Land Spirits**

*“Female willow planted to the right and male willow to the left  
In between, a shrine of Lu is built  
Make offerings of incense and milk to appease her . . .”*  
(Sherpa folk song, Music of the Sherpa People of Nepal I, translated by L. N. Sherpa)

Khumbu villages offer a glimpse of Sherpas’ belief in a landscape animated by spirits living in the springs, rocks, trees, land, and mountains. Khumbu Sherpas construct their homes facing away from sacred mountains and springs so as not to offend the resident deities (L. N. Sherpa 2008). This is most apparent in Phortse, Pangbuche, and Thame, where Sherpa homes are oriented in a single direction and away from the sacred mountains at the bases of which they sit. A Sherpa home itself is an element of the animated landscape; short doorframes and small windows characterize traditional Sherpa homes as mechanisms to keep out zombies, who cannot bend, from entering a home through the short doorframe (L. N. Sherpa 2008). These observable conventions and practices reveal a spirited landscape shaping Sherpas’ daily interactions with Khumbu’s landscapes.

The family *lhasu*, sometimes referred to as the *sangkhang*, is a small fireplace located outside and to the right of each home entrance. Typically, wispy bamboo flagpoles with prayer flags stand erect on or near the lhasu. Inside a Sherpa home, the family altar typically contains statues of Guru Rinpoche and Sakyamuni Buddha,

several ritual objects, often a set of sacred texts, and always photographs and postcards of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, family, and friends. Butter lamps line the front of the altar along with seven small water bowls; each is ritually lit or filled every day. In addition to household altars, many Sherpa families hang *thangku* paintings celebrating deities of the Buddhist pantheon, while some families erect massive mani wheels in a corner of their home.

Fürer-Haimendorf (1964) observes that such reverence to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Buddhist pantheon demonstrates Sherpas desire to participate on the paths toward meritorious rebirth and enlightenment; however, older Sherpas point to a separate and distinct class of supernatural deities concerned with their daily, worldly mundane affairs. As an example, Sherpas burn incense and butter in their lhasu as offerings to land deities for their families' health and well-being. For instance, one Thame Sherpa woman burns incense daily to ensure her son's safety while mountaineering, while a Nauje family burns incense on *Losar*, the Sherpa New Year, for good fortune and well-being in the year to come.

Khumbu Sherpa elders animate their household, village, and uncultivated spaces with *lu*, *sadak*, and *tsen* spirits believed to inhabit springs, trees, rocks, and land (figure 7).

LS: Are there gods in Phortse?

Ang Tsering (Phortse): Yes. But you cannot see them.

LS: Which gods live here?

AT: Lu, tsen, and sadak live here. They are people not in heaven or hell. They are spirits stuck in the middle. They can cause harm and

make people sick. They are in the water, trees, and dirt. Sadak and tsen are male. Lu are female.

LS: When they cause you harm do you go to the gompa? Who helps you communicate with the lu, tsen, and sadak?

AT: Lhawa [male] and Lhawan [female] can communicate with these. They are not monks or nuns. They are only in Khumjung. In the past, when there was not medicine, they were the people who Sherpas went to for help. But now people are educated and there is the hospital [at Khunde] and medicine, so no one uses these.

LS: How do people become Lhawa and Lhawan?

AT: The ability is not inherited. It is realized through a dream.

L. N. Sherpa defines that tsen are “misguided spirits” (2008, 170) and Ortner (1992) specifies that these may be the spirits of deceased religious practitioners. Land spirits are concerned with Sherpas’ mundane, worldly experiences influencing such things as health, well-being, prosperity, and success.

The relationship between Sherpas and the land spirits is reciprocal in that through ritual requests, appeasements, and reverence, repeated at daily, seasonal, and annual intervals, a pleased spirit ensures positive and beneficial daily experiences, while an upset spirit is held responsible for disease and misfortune.

LS: Please tell me about the different gods who live in the land.

Lhakpa Tenzing (Khumjung): Lu live in the streams. Tsen are mountain and hill deities. When yak pastures are built, we do pujas to the tsen. Sadak are the owners of the land. If you want to build something, you must pray to them first and ask permission.

Kami Futi (Thame/Thameteng), further explains:

LS: What are lu?

KF: Today and yesterday it rained because the lu is upset.

LS: Why?

KF: It is just in a bad mood—cranky. To make the lu happy I burn *sur* [nak butter] in the lhasu. It is very important to not use Tibetan butter for this.

LS: Why? Does this upset the lu?

KF: Cutting the forest around the lu upsets the lu. Burning meat, old clothes, anything that smells bad also upsets the lu. Everyday I burn juniper in the lhasu for the safety of my sons who are climbers.

Ang Nyima (Thame/Thameteng) also describes:

LS: Is the large tree outside your home a sacred site?

AN: That is our household lu. It has been there for at least two generations. The lu is in the tree but there is no water there. Many families have a lu. This one is only for my family.

LS: What do you do everyday to make sure the lu stays happy?

AN: We do not do anything everyday, but we burn *sur* on the special days. At the time of a wedding, we cover the lu and sing songs so the lu will not follow the bride to her new home. We also do this at death, so the lu does not leave with the body.

LS: Do you do anything at birth?

AN: No.

LS: What else is important about the lu?

AN: Lu, *sadak*, and *tсен* come at night to cause problems. Good lu brings wealth and bad lu brings pain.

LS: Are the lu the most important land gods?

AN: Lu, *sadak*, and *tсен* are all equal, but older lu is more important than younger lu. My lu is an old lu.

Nyima Tenzing (Thame/Thameteng) recounts:

LS: Why is the forest behind your home protected from cutting the wood?

NT: I own the forest on the ridge and there is a lu there. When this house was built there was a lu beneath the ground and the lu had to be moved. The lu is happy as long as we do not do anything to upset it. The lu does not harm us. Sadak are worse than lu because they make your body ache.

These comments demonstrate that great care is taken to appease, or not upset, a lu. Behaviors known to upset lu are strictly avoided, including cutting forest near a lu, burning anything producing an obnoxious odor such as meat, old clothes, garbage—especially plastic, and cleaning raw meat near a lu. While Sherpas avoid upsetting lu through behavioral taboos and rituals, they are as easily appeased as they are upset, and evidence of this is often observable in the Khumbu environment. For instance, a dried up natural spring is often attributed to a lu's departure from that spring out of protest against taboo behaviors. In addition, older Sherpa also attribute minor illnesses to an upset lu. Lu causing particularly acute illness or discomfort are dealt with by offering soil from the offending household and making an appeal at *Lu Khangyal* (Reclining Vishnu) in Kathmandu (L. N. Sherpa 2008).

Thame/Thameteng participants demonstrated a preference for discussing Khumbu's lu, offering the explanations above with scant attention given to Khumbu's other land spirits. While the participants in Thame/Thameteng gave preference to discussing land spirits, especially lu, a Thame monk (TT) quickly dismissed this line of questioning:

LS: I saw a lu site along the path to the gompa; can you tell me more about the lu and other land spirits living in Thame?

TT: I do not know about the lu, tsen, and sadak; only the non-monk, married people believe in this.

Nauche participants did not discuss lu, tsen, or sadak during interviews. However, Nauche residents did describe the importance of lu during Losar, the Sherpa New Year, celebrations. Despite these observations, Nauche Sherpa participants could have misunderstood that interviews would focus specifically on the beyul or on my own lines of questioning not yet adapted to include questions about lu, tsen, and sadak. It is important to note that Thame/Thameteng participants discussed these localized deities, in most cases, without being prompted to do so, while Nauche's participants did not.

Land spirits' dwelling places and Sherpas' efforts to appease upset land spirits comprise a visual aspect of Khumbu's sacred landscape. Lu sites are marked by prayer flags hanging from trees surrounding a natural spring, stream, or tree (figure 8). A *lukhang*, a small shrine, may also be found at these sites. Smoldering lhasus and *tharshing*, prayer flags on bamboo poles, outside homes appease the land spirits and bring success and good fortune. Further, Sherpas hang varying colored clothes at land spirit sites or sites where an activity upsetting a land spirit took place, such as a cut tree near a lu.

KF: When the lu is very unhappy, five colored clothes are hung [showing strips of white, red, green, blue, and yellow cloths]. For instance, if a tree is cut, the cloth is hung from the cut tree. To appease an upset sadak, you should make and hang a half black and half white flag and put sur in the fire. The Pecha [the Nyingma sacred texts] and lamas tell you if, which, and why one of the deities is upset and what to do to appease the deity.

Sherpa requests to land spirits for protection are central themes to at least two annual rituals and celebrations. Older Sherpas believe lu travel to Tibet during the rainy season and return to Khumbu during the winter months.<sup>4</sup> The annual arrival of lu during Losar, the Sherpa New Year in mid-February, is an occasion during which Khumbu Sherpa take great care to not offend the new spirits; whether this is the return of a family lu or arrival of a new lu is unclear. Prior to Losar, Sherpa families thoroughly clean their homes and themselves in preparation to receive the lu. Round, white translucent seed pods resembling flower petals or flour are pasted to the walls throughout the home representing flowers offered to the new guest at a time of year when flowers are not available. Early in the morning on Losar a family member gathers the first water used by the household from a lu spring and brings it into the home, where family members use it to ritually bathe, bringing health and prosperity. The lu water is used in *pujas*, blessing ceremonies, during the day for fortune in the coming year. Following the puja, family members do not clean anything in the home for the day, believing that if they clean, the new lu will be cleaned away.

During the *Chirim Lhabsang* ceremony in the late spring, villagers arrange rituals, performed at a village shrine, requesting from the land deities the protection of the vulnerable crops throughout the summer growing season (Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; L. N. Sherpa 2008). Historically accompanying this ceremony is a ritual circling of the

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<sup>4</sup> Fürer-Haimendorf (1964) relates that Sherpas attribute a greater water supply in winter (the dry season) and diminished water flows in summer (the monsoon season) to lus' winter presence and summer absence. This observation explains the peculiar and seemingly non-logical statement noted in the course of fieldwork from a Nauche man describing there is more water available in the winter than during the rainy summer season.



villages' cultivated lands (Fürer-Haimendorf 1964). It is unclear whether this ceremony is performed in its entirety today as participants gave conflicting reports and I was unable to view the ceremony.



Figure 7. Lu



Figure 8. Lu site at Thamo

While land spirits are often associated with families and villages, as indicated by larger versions of the lukhang, a *lhapso*, often found near the center of a village, they are not limited to settled areas. Powerful localized spirits are known to inhabit both small and large physical landscape features throughout Khumbu and have the ability to cause just as much havoc. The Dig Tso flood is an often-evoked example of this.

In 1985, the many Sherpas living along the banks of the Bhote Kosi were away from the villages to celebrate *Phagnyi*, a secular summer festival. At that time a dog raided a home in Langmoche, near Dig Tso, a glacial lake on the western edge of Khumbu, eating food and drinking blood letted from the cattle. Upon returning home, the furious owner bound the dog's legs and threw him in the nearby lake. Dig Tso's resident deity, *Khang Bal*, 'snow frog god', felt polluted by the dog's intrusion and burst the lake in order to escape. As Khang Bal descended down the narrow valley leading to the Bhote Kosi, then down the Bhote Kosi itself, he leaped from bank to bank while the raging water followed him scouring alternating banks. At bridges, Khang Bal could not travel beneath, as the bridges are used for human traffic and humans must not pass above the path of gods; therefore, before each bridge, the floodwater pooled until it gathered enough energy to destroy the bridge, allowing Khang Bal to pass.

In this way the floodwaters raged downstream from Dig Tso destroying homes, fields, bridges, and even the preliminary structure for an Austrian-NGO financed hydroelectric facility at Thamo. Fortunately, and certainly owing to the protection of many Khumbu land gods and spirits, no human life was lost in this tragedy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> While residents share many slightly different variations on this account, resulting from differing experiences in making meaning from this event, one resident jarringly

## Mountain Gods

Powerful mountain deities, mostly *tsen*, rank highest among the hierarchy of land spirits populating the Tibetan ethnic region. Like the land spirits, the mountain deities are concerned with mundane affairs, such as health, community well-being, and prosperity. Mountain deities reside in one of two types of sacred mountains: *lha ri* and *gnas ri*. Khumbu's mountain gods reside in *lha ri*, or 'god mountains'; however, these mountains are not strictly considered sacred in a Buddhist sense because their resident is concerned with mundane affairs, as opposed to loftier Buddhist concerns. Rather, mountain deity traditions, an "essential element in Tibetan culture," are a laymen's tradition; they are secular and unwritten (Karmay 1996, 59). Buddhist sacred mountains, *gnas ri*, such as Mount Kailas, house sacred objects or texts, or are thought to be the abodes of famous practitioners, and where pilgrims travel to circumambulate the sacred peaks.

Sherpas list five goddesses within the *lha ri* secular mountain category, referring to them as the five sisters (L. N. Sherpa 2005, 2008). It is within this context

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reminded me of the vast differences in Sherpas' experiences in Khumbu's landscapes. After inquiring with several participants about the reasons for the 1985 Dig Tso flood, and hearing many versions of the story recounted above, I made the same inquiry to a Thame/Thameteng man, to which he responded, "The ice broke." His response evoked the scientific explanation of the Dig Tso flood as a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), as opposed to the more frequent explanation among Khumbu Sherpas evoking the deities inhabiting Khumbu's sacred landscape as responsible for the flood. Bjonness (1986) observes that Sherpas perceptions of mountain hazards are ascribed both scientific and sacred explanations and that such dual knowledge does not appear to be in conflict. See Bjonness (1986) for a discussion of Khumbu's land spirits and perceptions of mountain hazards.

that Sherpas point to Jomolungma (Mount Everest) as a sacred peak. *Jomo Miyo Langsangma*, resides at the world's tallest mountain, bestowing food and nourishment to those paying her homage. Her sister, *Tashi Tseringma*, the goddess of longevity resides in neighboring Rolwaling at Mount Garurishankar. The other three sisters reside in peaks yet to be revealed; however, the goddesses include *Tekar Dosangma*, the goddess of good fortune; *Chopen Dinsangma*, the goddess of wealth; and *Thingi-Shalsangma*, the goddess of telepathic power.

In addition to the five sisters, study participants state that every mountain in Khumbu has a god living in it and that different people pray to different gods. Recalling that each Sherpa clan has a unique mountain deity illuminates these statements. Among others, and as examples, Fürer-Haimendorf (1964) identifies *Tawoche-lha-tsen* as the *Nawa* clan god living in Tawoche, above Pangbuche; and *Loudze-lha-tsen* as resident in Loudze (Lhotse) [sic] and worshipped by the *Chusherwa* clan. Both these clans are thought to originate from the original four clans settling Khumbu. Suggested by their names, these deities are classified, like the five sisters, as *tsen*, or land deities.

Among Khumbu's myriad mountain deities, Sherpas identify *Khumbi Yullha*, *yullha* meaning "country god" or "locality god" as the most powerful of the *tsen* (Karmay 1996; L. N. Sherpa 2008). *Khumbi Yullha*, also named *Khumbila Tsen Gylapu* and described as the protector god of the Khumbu region (figure 9), resides atop *Khumbi Yullha* (often shortened to *Khumbila* as henceforth here), at the center of

Khumbu with the villages of Khunde, Khumjung, and Nauche at its base (Zangbu 2000; L. N. Sherpa 2008) (figure 10).

LS: What natural things are sacred in Khumbu?

Ani Pemba (Nauche): The snow-covered mountains are sacred. All the mountains have gods. Jomolungma is a lady god. Khumbi Yullha is the most famous. All Sherpa respect Khumbila and pray to Khumbi Yullha.

Similar to the Nauche woman's comments, a Thame/Thameteng woman shares:

LS: Are some of the gods in Khumbu more important than others?

Yesshe Tenzing: All the gods are a different rank.

LS: Which is the highest?

YT: Khumbi Yullha. His responsibility is to protect all the people.

LS: Is there a god specific to Thame?

YT: No. The gods help all people, not just one.

Another, Thame/Thameteng woman explains:

LS: Is Khumbi Yullha the most important god in Khumbu?

Ani Nyima: All the Khumjung, Khunde, and Nauche people pray to Khumbi Yullha.

LS: Whom do the Thame/Thameteng people pray to?

AN: The Thame people pray to Khumbi Yullha and hang pray flags printed with Khumbi Yullha.

Tashi Zangbu (TZ), echoes a similar idea:

LS: Please tell me about Khumbi Yullha.

TZ: We pray to Khumbi Yullha because we are born here.

These statements demonstrate that older Sherpas from both Nauche and Thame/Thameteng propitiate Khumbi Yullha.

Khumbi Yullha's ministry and family members dwell within Khumbu's most prominent peaks. *Tamosermu*, Khumbi Yullha's wife, resides in Thamserku, a prominent peak best viewed from Nauche. Khumbi Yullha's son, *Dingri Gangmar*<sup>6</sup>, lives in a Tibetan peak, one-day's walk from the Nangpa-la pass and will eventually inherit Khumbi Yullha's work in Khumbu. *Tawoche*, dwelling in the mountain by the same name behind Pangbuche, acts as Khumbi Yullha's government minister. While Khumbi Yullha dances at Nauche's Dumji festival, Tawoche, as Pangbuche's local protector deity, joins their Dumji celebrations. Khumbi Yullha's gamekeeper, or herdsman, *Si chu*, lives in Khumbu's eastern peak of Ama Dablang. It is noteworthy to observe that of the peaks described above, including Khumbila and excluding the Tibetan peak, sit directly to the four cardinal directions around the Sherpa villages of Pangbuche, where Khumbu's first gonde sits, and Tengboche, where Khumbu's first celibate monastery is located.

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<sup>6</sup> Diemberger (1995) provides a complete discussion of Dingri Gangmar, known as lHa bstan sGang dmar, the territorial deity in Dingri, a Tibetan area north of Khumbu with which Khumbu Sherpa have long been associated both in trade and religious practice. Diemberger relates that sGang dmar is thought to be the illegitimate son of Khumbi Yullha, who, out of shame, hid sGang dmar under an upside down red, copper cup resulting in the shape and color of sGang dmar's mountain abode.



Figure 9. Khumbi Yullha



Figure 10. Khumbila

Older Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng tell that Khumbi Yullha was in Khumbu before Guru Rinpoche came, but that he was sinful and caused many problems at the time. A Nauche elder with monastic training, explains:

LS: Is Khumbi Yullha the god of the beyul?

Aau Norbu: Khumbi Yullha was here before the beyul as part of Bön. Khumbi Yullha was the enemy of Guru Rinpoche. Guru Rinpoche gave Khumbila power and Khumbi Yullha became Guru Rinpoche's warrior. He was the army of Guru Rinpoche.

A former monk in Nauche further details:

LS: Which gods were here before Guru Rinpoche came?

Aau Sonam: Before Guru Rinpoche, Khumbi Yullha was not a god; he was sinful and did bad things. Guru Rinpoche made/trained him into a genya [genya is an advanced monk] and gave him all of Khumbu to

protect. Before Guru Rinpoche, all the gods and goddesses were bad and did bad things. Guru Rinpoche gave them training and taught them that if they did good for the people, the people would pray for them.

Older Sherpas describe that when Guru Rinpoche brought Buddhism to the Himalaya he tamed Khumbi Yullha, converting him from a wrathful country god to a Buddhist protector deity.

In the past, many gods and spirits roamed the world without homes and responsibilities. A Buddhist Lama (others assert it was the Tibetan king) in Tibet decided to build a monastery, Samyé Monastery, however the gods and spirits were opposed to this and deconstructed each day's work during the night. Knowing Guru Rinpoche was more powerful than the troublesome gods, the Lama asked Guru Rinpoche to come from India, where he was giving blessings and receiving education. Guru Rinpoche traveled from India to Tibet, through the Himalaya. Along his journey, he gave each worldly god a home and responsibilities, including Khumbi Yullha, who he made responsible for Khumbu's protection. Upon arriving in Tibet, Guru Rinpoche instructed the lama to continue building the monastery, assuring him the gods would allow the construction to continue, even ordering the formerly pesky gods to assist in the process. However, Khumbi Yullha became quite lazy, tired, and angry while building the



monastery. As punishment, Guru Rinpoche made the dirt in Khumbi Yullha's land different from the dirt in other Himalayan landscapes and no longer waterproof.

Dorje Tenzing (Dingbuche) concluded his retelling of this story by stating:

DT: In Tibet and Mustang the dirt is waterproof and can be used for roofs, but not in Khumbu. The roofs here were wood and slate, though now they are metal. Our dirt is not waterproof and cannot be used for roofs. Khumbi Yullha is a compassionate god. He cares for all people in Khumbu, even those who are not from here like the Tibetans and people from Solu.<sup>7</sup>

The story of Khumbi Yullha's conversion represents Khumbu's conversion from a pre-Buddhist and Bön landscape to a Buddhist place, a parallel for the same conversion in Tibet. This is not suggesting pre-Buddhist practitioners dwelled in Khumbu and were subjected to such a conversion; rather, the power of the trope is held in the *process* of the conversion, signifying Buddhism's strength and dominance, as well as negotiating and legitimating pre-Buddhist deities into the Buddhist framework (Karmay 1996). Karmay (n. d., 1996, 2005) traces the origins of the yullha

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<sup>7</sup> In much the same way, the following tale from the Khumbi Yullha story cycle explains for Sherpas why there is no salt in Khumbu.

At the base of Khumbila sits Gajo, where Buddha Tsenchen, the grandson of Phachen, met frequently with Khumbi Yullha, burning juniper incense to welcome him, and discussing Khumbu's affairs. One day they were discussing plans to find or develop a salt mine in Khumbu. However, Buddha Tsenchen's curious wife interrupted their meeting—a bad omen—scaring away Khumbi Yullha.

To this day, Khumbi Yullha remains difficult to converse with and there is still no salt in Khumbu.

mountain traditions to the ancient Bön and pre-Buddhist clan territorial systems of the Tibetan ethnic region. Karmay observes that each clan propitiated a yullha oriented toward a central polity or king, while others simply suggest the yullha tradition originated in pre-Buddhist and Bön traditions (Huber 1999). Likewise, Diemberger (1997) suggests the land spirit traditions may be traced to the Lamaistic practices of the same period. As discussed above, producing a cogent synthesis of the interaction between Buddhist and pre-Buddhist, or Bön, traditions may not be possible. However, relevant to this discussion is the subjugation of pre-Buddhist animistic and shamanistic traditions followed by the later reemergence of those same traditions within the Nyingma Buddhist framework—a vital theme, often repeated as new communities are founded in the Nyingma tradition (Ramble 1996).

Through this lens, the story of Khumbi Yullha's conversion represents a pivotal point in understanding Khumbu's sacred landscape as it is the story of the coming of Buddhism to Khumbu and how the most powerful land spirit, Khumbi Yullha, was repositioned into the Buddhist pantheon. This story tells of the construction of the first Buddhist monastery, Samyé Monastery, marking the beginning of Buddhism's rise in Tibet and Bön's decline along with other pre-Buddhist traditions, which is why the worldly, pre-Buddhist gods and spirits, depicted in the first part of this story were opposed to the monastery construction. By converting these deities, especially Khumbi Yullha, who is varyingly described as sinful and Guru Rinpoche's enemy, to Buddhism, Guru Rinpoche demonstrates both the strength of the Buddhist practice and negotiates the introduction of Buddhism into

Khumbu by co-opting Khumbi Yullha from a pre-Buddhist deity to a Buddhist protector deity. In this way, Guru Rinpoche repositions Khumbu into the Buddhist territory, priming it to be inserted into the Buddhist universal framework as a beyul, a sacred hidden valley.

### **Beyul Khumbu**



Figure 11. Beyul Khumbu. Painting by Passang Sherpa, Thame

*Oral traditions.* Many older Khumbu Sherpas identify Khumbu as a beyul (figure 11), a sacred valley hidden by Guru Rinpoche to protect the Buddhist people recounting,

Before the beyul, there were many gods and spirits in Khumbu who committed many sins and rounded the mani stones the wrong

way [a reference to pre-Buddhist and Bön practice of circumambulating sacred objects counter-clockwise, as opposed to Buddhists' clockwise khora]. Guru Rinpoche traveled to Adkarphug, a cave above Khunde, from Halase, in Solu, and recognized Khumbu as a powerful place good for meditation and where Buddhist people would be protected; therefore, he made it a beyul and hid it from people who would bring harm—foreseeing that the Buddhist practice would be threatened in Tibet.

Current and former members of Khumbu's monastic community prove significantly more knowledgeable about the beyul than other Sherpas in Thame/Thameteng and Nauche. One lama describes:

LS: What is the beyul?

LP: Guru Rinpoche hid the beyul. Inside the beyul there is no war and no fighting. The beyuls are only in the Himalaya. In the past, there were beyuls in India and Tibet, but those were destroyed by war. When the Chinese entered Tibet they ruined the beyuls. . . . People in the beyul ask for help from Guru Rinpoche. If people feel fear than Guru Rinpoche will help. If everyone cooperates and is selfless in the beyul then Guru Rinpoche will help. All sentient beings are the same in the beyul.

LS: Why was the beyul hidden in Khumbu?

LP: Because this is a quiet place surrounded by mountains. Before the beyul, only Mt. Everest was here and everywhere else was just ocean. Before the beyul there were bad people living here, who always did the wrong things. They round the mani stones on the wrong side. They didn't respect the Pecha.

LS: Where are the borders of the beyul?

LP: The beyul doesn't have borders.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

LP: I came from Tibet, from Nambrig, near Tingri, which was also part of a beyul before the Chinese occupation. I learned about the beyul from the monks in Khunde.

A Nauche Sherpa and former monk explains:

LS: Can you tell me about the beyul?

Aau Norbu: The beyul was hidden by Guru Rinpoche. There are no Maoists and no harm from Maoists in the beyul. . . . Inside the beyul there is no fighting, outside there is fighting. Inside the beyul there is no hunger. In the beyul, only potatoes grow, but everything is provided. Inside the beyul, there are no communicable diseases.

Guru Rinpoche likes this place. Of the four branches of Tibetan Buddhism—Nyingma is the best and most powerful. Nyingma is Guru Rinpoche's sect.

One of the Nyingmapa monks dreamt that drawing Guru Rinpoche in the Potala was good for Tibetans. So if Guru Rinpoche had been painted in the Potala [if Nyingmapa's were ruling, not Galukpas] the Chinese would not have invaded.

Another former monk and Nauche elder expresses similar themes in discussing the beyul:

LS: What is the beyul?

Aau Sonam: Guru Rinpoche chose Khumbu to be the place where the Tibetan people would go after the Chinese conquered Tibet. However, the Tibetan people came to Khumbu before the Chinese invaded Tibet because Guru Rinpoche knew the Chinese would invade. Guru Rinpoche knew everything, even into the future. Guru Rinpoche knew there would a conflict between the King of Nepal and the Maoists. Guru Rinpoche knows that this is a good place and Buddhism is here.

Older lay Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng spoke knowledgably about the beyul, sharing that they learned of the beyul from lamas or other older Sherpas. A Thame/Thameteng woman explains:

LS: What is the beyul?

Kami Futi: The beyul is a sacred place and there are many rituals here. People never sin here. In the beyul there is no flooding and no hunger. Everything is here inside the beyul because it all comes from Kathmandu and China. In the beyul there are many forests, no dangerous communicable diseases, no war, no shooting. The beyul brings people here to see the himal.

LS: Where are the borders of the beyul?

KF: I don't know about the borders. I only know that there are three beyuls—Khenbalung, Khumbu, and Rolwaling. The beyul is surrounded by himal.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

KF: From the lama.

Aau Gyalbu (Nauche), describes:

LS: What is the beyul?

AG: 1300 years ago Guru Rinpoche made beyuls in Bhutan, Sikkim, Khenbalung, Khumbu, Rolwaling, and many other mountain regions. There are many natural products available in the beyul. Outside the beyul, all the people will be destroyed, but the people in the beyul will be safe. All the people will be remade in the beyul. There has been conflict throughout the rest of Nepal, but not in the beyul.

LS: Where are the boundaries of the beyul?

AG: The lower boundary is above Jorsale or maybe it also includes Pharak because the Pecha describes landscape features found in Pharak.

LS: What types of landscape features does the Pecha describe?

AG: Trees and rivers.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

AG: I learned about the beyul from my grandfather.

A Thame/Thameteng woman shares her understanding about the beyul, while observing the loss of such knowledge in her own home:

LS: What is the beyul?

Ani Nyima: This is the beyul. People are cooperative here. Because of the beyul, all the people may not be rich, but they can survive.

LS: Where are the boundaries of the beyul?

AN: All the Sherpa villages are a beyul. Lower down are Hindu people who do hard work but never get rich. They do sins like killing animals.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

AN: I learned this from the old people, but my grandsons are not interested in learning about the beyul.

Still other older Khumbu Sherpa learned of the beyul from reading the *Pecha*, the Nyingma Buddhist texts. The Pecha is written in monastic Tibetan, a language older Khumbu Sherpas would only have learned as part of a monastic education or from a teacher (if not a formal teacher, than a parent or grandparent) with a monastic education. As a result, it should be assumed Sherpas stating they learned of the beyul from the Pecha have some connection in their life history to the monastic community, if such a history is not clearly stated.

LS: What is the beyul?

Trashi Gyalbu (Phortse): The beyul is a sacred place hidden by Guru Rinpoche. Khenbalung is also a beyul. In the past there was a big village in Khenbalung, then Guru Rinpoche hid the valley now all we can see are the mountains.

This is a beyul because in the Rai and Tamang places there are many political problems but not in Khumbu. Here people do not sin. And all the people here follow Guru Rinpoche.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

TG: I read the Pecha and I learned from the old lama.

Namgyal Tsering in Nauche explains:

LS: What is the beyul?

NT: Beyuls are in the eastern Himalaya. They are in Guru Rinpoche's area. Khumbu, Khenbalung, and Yolmo are beyuls. In the beyul there is no war and no fighting. Inside the beyul, there is the belief in Buddhism. In the future, there will be no belief in Buddhism in the world, but in the beyul, there will be the belief in Buddhism.

LS: Where are the boundaries of the beyul?

NT: Chaurikurka VDC [Village Development Committee] is the lower boundary of beyul. The lower boundary of the beyul is the same as the lower boundary of Chaurikurka VDC.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

NT: I learned about the beyul from reading the Pecha. I learned to read the Tibetan script from my father, who learned from a teacher.

Older Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng lacking a life history connecting them to the monastic community demonstrate limited knowledge of the beyul.

LS: What is the beyul?

Ani Dekyi (Nauche): Orgyan Rinpoche hid the beyul. Inside the beyul there is no shortage of anything.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

AD: This entire place is a beyul but only those who can read the Pecha know about it.

LS: Is there anything else you can tell me about the beyul?

AD: I do not know.



Tashi Zangbu (Thame/Thameteng) demonstrates similar limited knowledge:

LS: What is the beyul?

TZ: This is Orgyan Rinpoche's beyul and you never kill a yak in the beyul.

LS: What else is important about the beyul?

TZ: I don't know anything else about the beyul.

Similarly, Ani Pema (Nauche) suggests:

LS: What is the beyul?

AP: You should go to the lama to learn about the beyul?

LS: I already spoke to the lama. I am interested in how you think about the beyul.

AP: In the beyul, there is no fighting, and a big rock above Nauche has not fallen.

In sum, older Sherpas in Thame/Thameteng and Nauche demonstrate varying degrees of knowledge about Khumbu as a beyul. In general, participants explain that within the beyul there is the belief in Buddhism, there is no shortage of anything, food comes easily, and all needs are met. Further, within the beyul there is no sin, no polluting, no hunger, no shortage of food, no communicable disease, no theft, no war, no fighting, and no killing (either humans or animals). Some older Sherpas point to Khumbu's clean air, water, and environment as evidence that Khumbu is a sacred beyul, observing that other places in Nepal are not clean like Khumbu. Some older Sherpas point out that fighting occurs outside the beyul and in other areas, but not in Khumbu. Further, older Sherpas, knowledgeable about the beyul, observe that the

political problems in other areas of Nepal do not occur in Khumbu. Several older Sherpas explain that the Maoists did not come to Khumbu during Nepal's People's War of the last decade because it is a beyul; the beyul protected them.

Sherpa elders in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng do not identify distinct physical borders of the beyul. In general, among those who assign borders to the beyul, the surrounding mountains serve as the beyul edge, however the southern border is in dispute; Sherpas set the southern border as far north as the base of the steep hill leading to Nauche from the confluence of the Dudh Kosi and Bhote Kosi rivers and as far south as Khirtikari. The beyul's physical borders, however, may prove to be insignificant when measured against the less tangible boundaries created by Khumbu's beyul tradition, a point I address below.

Interestingly, few Khumbu Sherpa participants discussed any deities related to the beyul. Older Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng describe Khumbi Yullha as the protector of Khumbu; however, most participants do not connect him to Khumbu as a beyul. On two occasions, monastically-trained Sherpas discussed *Chekyong Surra Rakyé* the guardian deity of the neighboring beyul to the east, Beyul Khenbalung (Zangbu 2000), and described her living in the mountains between Beyuls Khumbu and Khenbalung. Interestingly, Chekyong Surra Rakyé appears during the masked dances at Tengboche's Mani Rimdu festival. Diemberger (1997) observes Tibetan's believe Chekyong Surra Rakyé to be the guardian of all beyuls, and particularly Beyul Khenbalung, offering a possible explanation for the curious appearance of Beyul Khenbalung's guardian deity at a Khumbu festival.

***Beyuls Khenbalung and Khumbu.*** In addition to Khumbu, Sherpa participants identify the neighboring areas of Rolwaling, to the west, and Khenbalung, to the east, as beyuls also hidden by Guru Rinpoche. Khumbu Sherpas closely relate Beyul Khenbalung and Khumbu as demonstrated in the oral tradition relating the foundings of the two sacred landscapes.

*Khyikharatho* was born to a Tibetan queen, whose amorous affairs with both a dog and goat resulted in her son having a dog nose and goat horns. To hide him from the Tibetan King, Guru Rinpoche advised the queen to send the boy to a hidden mountain valley. In this way, Khyikharatho came to establish a kingdom in Khenbalung. After many years, Guru Rinpoche, recognizing both the potential of the hidden valley of Khenbalung as a beyul and Khyikharatho's evil nature, decided to expel Khyikharatho from the valley. Guru Rinpoche enticed the prince and his followers away from his palace and up a ridge. At the top of the ridge, Guru Rinpoche hid the valley in clouds obscuring the path back to the palace and village. Khyikharatho and his followers were forced to descend the opposite side of the ridge into the Khumbu valleys where they initially settled in Monju. However, Guru Rinpoche did not want them in the Khumbu valleys either and created a vision in which Khyikharatho saw a great flood destroying his

palace at Monju. Out of fear, Khyikharatho moved his settlement out of Khumbu and to the south. With Khyikharatho's evil influence expelled from both Khumbu and Khenbalung, Guru Rinpoche hid the valleys as beyuls and charged powerful land deities [Khumbi Yullha in Khumbu and Chekyong Surra Rakyé in Khenbalung] to protect them.

Khumbu Sherpa oral traditions reveal the significance of the connection between Khenbalung and Khumbu and their role in the Buddhist apocalyptic destiny.

In the future, seven suns will come to the earth and at that time war and fire will destroy mankind. The holy land to the south will rise and Buddhists who have not sinned will seek refuge in Beyul Khenbalung, where Guru Rinpoche has stored the seeds of humanity to repopulate the earth. Now is not the time to enter Beyul Khenbalung, and one trying to enter would not find the key. The keys are stored in Beyul Khumbu and will be revealed at the appropriate time.

After recounting his version of this story, a former monk observes:

Aau Norbu (Nauche): The suns are coming and already heating the earth. In the past, there were tall ice pillars below Everest Base Camp but now I saw they are melted. All the snows are melting. Without the snow there will be no oceans, and without the oceans there will be no rain. This is evidence of the coming of the seven suns and the coming destruction of mankind.

*Physical artifacts of the beyul.* Sherpa oral traditions point to elements in Khumbu's physical landscape as evidence of Khumbu as a sacred valley. Most important in this evidence are Guru Rinpoche's footprints left in rocks and caves as proof of his visits. A conspicuous, large, square rock beyond Chikkung is one of the only physical landscape features connected directly to the beyul; however, this may be more significant to Beyul Khenbalung than Beyul Khumbu. Sherpa agree that one of the keys to Beyul Khenbalung, likely a text describing how to enter the protective beyul, is hidden in or beneath the rock. Sherpas relate the sanctity of this rock was revealed in the following way,

We know that something important is hidden at *Thakmeru* ['Red Rock'] (figure 12) because it was revealed to a young boy from Khumjung who visited there. In the springtime, the boy went to the red rock to look after his zopkio. As he rested there, all the rocks turned into a big gompa with a lama, and a field of spinach and a large dog appeared. The boy hung his slingshot on the rock to remember the place. He returned the next day, but the gompa, field, and dog were gone; only his slingshot remained. This means that something is hidden there.

A Khumbu lama provides further evidence of *Thakmeru*'s significance by relating:

LG: I went there once at a time when there had been no rain for a long time. I meditated there and water came out of the rock.

Water springing from a rock at a time of drought is meant to be an auspicious sign marking a sacred site.

A Sherpa elder relates that when all the earth has burned Buddhists who have not sinned will follow the Khumbu landscape as a map to locate Thakmeru, where the key to Beyul Khenbalung will be revealed.

LS: What is the beyul?

Dorje Tenzing (Nauche): Guru Rinpoche hid the beyul. In the future, this will be a good place, where there is no war. The places in Khumbu are a map to beyul. Shyangboche is like the hanging stomach of a goat. Above there, Khumjung and Khunde are a horse. Beyond the horse, Phortse looks like a place where someone would lay back and Dingbuche looks like a pig's body. In the future these features will be followed to the beyul. The key to the beyul is hidden in Thakmaru.

LS: Is the key at Thakmeru the key to Beyul Khenbalung or Khumbu?

DT: In the future, the beyul will become available after a bad situation. Now is not the time for the key.

The seven suns will come and all the things will melt. The temple at Dorje Din at Bodh Gaya [India] will hang in the air and everything else will burn. When this happens, man can follow the landscape features like a map to the key to the beyul where the seeds of man are kept.

LS: How did you learn about the beyul?

DT: I learned this from my grandfather, whose grandfather was a lama.



Figure 12. Thakmeru. The 'red rock' gate to Beyul Khenbalung

***Textual tradition.*** Sherpa oral histories connecting Beyuls Khenbalung and Khumbu are supported by Nyingma textual traditions. Beyul accounts originate and are transmitted from the Nyingma textual tradition of the *terma*, or rediscovered text. Nyingmapas believe that while in Tibet Guru Rinpoche instructed his students to write and hide his teachings. He foretold that in the future a war would throw religion into despair and at that time reincarnations of his students and himself, *tertons*, would find the hidden texts revealing where devote Buddhists could seek refuge and the Buddhist practice would be protected (Zangbu 2000). To this end, Guru Rinpoche concealed Himalayan valleys numbering as many as 108 as beyuls.

While the majority of the 108 beyuls remain hidden, and the guidebooks revealing their locations yet to be discovered, scholars and researchers have explored many revealed Himalayan beyuls (Reinhard 1978; Orofino 1991; Diemberger 1993, 1996, 1997; Ehrhard 1997; Bernbaum 2001; Boord 2003; L. N. Sherpa 2003, 2005, 2008; Spoon 2008). Most agree that the revealed beyuls are found in northern Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and south-west Tibet; these include Pemako in Yunnan province; the Kyimolung, Namgo, Yolmo, Dakam, and Kongpo regions in the eastern Himalaya; and the Khumbu, Khenbalung, Rolwaling, Rongshar, and Kyirong areas on both sides of the Nepal-Tibet border in the Mount Everest region among others (L. N. Sherpa 2005). Among the significant writings discussing Himalayan beyuls are the works focusing on Khumbu's neighboring beyul, Beyul Khenbalung, and the related terma guidebook, which contains reference to the Khumbu region (Reinhard 1978; Orofino 1991; Diemberger 1993, 1997).

The terma guidebook leading to Beyul Khenbalung, *sBas-yul mkhan-pa lung-gis lam-yig sa-dpyad dang-bcas-pa bzhugs-so*, 'Guide to the hidden land of the valley of Artemisia and examination of the sites,' describes how to approach Beyul Khenbalung through the Khumbu valleys. Orofino (1991) provides the following discussion and explanatory notes.

The folios containing the text open with Guru Rinpoche explaining to the Tibetan King:

'In the future there will be great change: as for the Buddhist teachings, we shall not succeed in subduing the enemies who will appear on the earth. The Buddhist doctrine will enjoy good fortune, and then go into decline, in direct relation to the virtues and merits of sentient beings'



(folio 2a) . . . ‘When the happiness of the people is almost at an end and the time of invasion from neighboring countries has come for Tibet, the Tibetans must escape to a hidden land towards the south on the border of the Mon territory (Orofino examples that Mon or Mong refers to Mongoloid ethnic groups who were considered neither Indian nor Tibetan “barbarian” groups occupying the Himalayan range (257-258)). The people of Tibet will have to renounce their native land, their fields, their wealth, their servants and everything, as one does with a stone that has crumbled to pieces. He who makes a serious effort to reach this wild place will succeed.’ (folio 2b)

The King asks how to recognize the hidden land and Guru Rinpoche replies,

‘. . . the secret land of mKhan-pa lung is southwest from bSam-yas. . . . to the west of mount Grab, and east of Mount Khum-bu.’ (Folio 3a)

Guru Rinpoche continues, explaining the circumstances under which his followers should seek the beyul, however Orofino suggests that the detailed events listed in the text are not meant to coincide with actual historical events. Continuing through the text Guru Rinpoche provides a detailed, yet vague, geographically-based description of the route to Khenbalung and the rituals to be performed along the way. As an example:

‘To the south they will see a mountain called sMan-tshun g.yu’i drill-bu; to the west of that mountain there is another rocky mountain; beyond that there is a spring like a lake of turquoise; beyond that there is a forest in a deep and narrow valley. In Mon territory there is a cave known as Ba-phung like the mouth of a mouse, facing south-east. There they should practice the *sadhana* of *Vajrapani* for half a month . . .’ (folio 4a)

The second section of folios describes the route into Khenbalung by way of Khumbu and is titled ‘The Key to Open the Western Door of the Hidden Valley of Artemisia.’

Diemberger (1997) translates this specific section in a more useful and accessible manner than the version included with the text above<sup>8</sup>.

Half a month away from rGyal-gyi Shiri in La-stod there is a valley called Khum-bu gangs-kyi rwa-ba [Khumbu surrounded by snowy mountains]. The area has the outline of a horse. The head points to the west, the tail to the east. The area with the two entrances is divided into three. If you go from there in a westerly direction there is a valley called Rol-pa mkha'-'gro gling [*alias* Khandro Rolwaling, an area west of Khumbu]. The Khumbu area has the shape of a horse with the tail pointing to the East. When you go to the east of Khumbu there is a snowy mountain that looks like a horse-saddle [Mt. Kantega (gangs rta'i sga), literally 'snow-mountain horse-saddle']. If you go past the mountain to the upper part of the valley, there is the queen sMan-btsun, [literally 'lady of medicines' or 'lady of the *sman* spirits'], Mi-gyos-glang-bzang-ma [one of the names of Mt. Everest]. From there towards the east there is a small pass. When you arrive there, make an offering to Tshe-ring-mched-lnga [a group of female deities linked to Mt. Everest] . . . (293)

The textual accounts coincide with the oral traditions offered by older Khumbu Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng. I present this discussion and evidence to demonstrate the interplay between oral and textual histories, and to provide context to each account by way of the other.

*The beyul mandala.* The sacred geography of Beyul Khumbu is further situated in a complex and multi-layered beyul tradition. Those Khumbu Sherpa most knowledgeable about beyuls often describe a beyul as having three levels: an outer, inner, and secret level. Descriptions usually suggest the outer beyul to be a place of

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<sup>8</sup> H. Diemberger (1997) translates from a different set of folios, entitled *sBas-yul mKhan-pa lung gi lam-yig sa-spyad bcas-pa bzhugs-so* (On the description of the path and the area of beyul Khenbalung), however the similarities between Orofino's version and Diemberger's version clearly demonstrate that these are simply two versions of the same text. Note that all bracketed comments are included from Diemberger's text.

safety, where all the needs of the residents are met. The inner beyul is believed to have a powerful sacred element to it in which the benefits of the Buddhist practice are magnified. Finally, the esoteric, secret beyul is thought to contain wisdom and power accessible only to initiated practitioners. The three levels of the beyul evoke a common Buddhist theme also associated with the three levels of a mandala, a map of the Buddhist cosmos at its outer level and a soteriological tool in meditation at its inner and secret levels (Walcott 2006). This metaphor enhances the synergy between Beyuls Khumbu and Khenbalung in that Tengboche Rinpoche Zangbu situates Beyul Khenbalung at the center of a circle of beyuls forming a mandala (2000). Completing a triad between the beyul and the mandala is the mind, also often referred to in Buddhist practice as containing three levels. Tengboche Rinpoche points out that the greatest beyul is our mind. Tengboche Rinpoche asserts that now the beyul has been destroyed through perversion and the loss of Sherpa culture in Khumbu (personal communication, February 2010).

*A Buddhist place.* Designating Khumbu as a beyul completes the process of integrating Khumbu into the Buddhist cosmology. This process began with Khumbi Yullha's conversion from a powerful, yet sinful, land spirit of the pre-Buddhist traditions to a protective deity in the secular, non-literate Tibetan ethnic tradition. Khumbi Yullha's land was finally folded into the Buddhist universe by historicizing it in the textual, monastic Nyingma terma, terton, and beyul traditions. Ramble (1999) articulates this process as it relates to territory claimed to be a mandala, an ordering of the universe and designation on the landscape, similar to that of a beyul.

The entire process is best understood in terms of the process of subjugation ('dul-ba) [sic] in which the hostile anarchy of nature is organized and brought into the service of the conquering religion. . . . saints and luminaries leave the prints of their feet and other parts of their bodies in stone, and bury treasure at various points; rocks are given the likeness of various conventional images, and the wildlife is literally tame. The authority for the conquest of a site derives from revelation, which might itself attend the opening of the site, or else may reaffirm its inclusion within the territory of the religion. (15)

In these terms, the evidence of Khumbu as a beyul, including Guru Rinpoche's footprints in the rocks, the revelation of a sacred rock as a gompa, and the terma revelation texts, suggest the beyul to be the method by which the Khumbu territory was claimed and included within the larger Himalayan and Tibetan Buddhist landscape.

## CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Synthesis

Sherpas interaction with the Khumbu environment is a story of ingenuity, resilience, and success. Since settling in Khumbu more than 500 year ago, generations of Khumbu Sherpas have subsisted as agro-pastoralists and entrepreneurs. In doing so they have capitalized on the fruits of Khumbu's landscape, as well as its location on a vital Himalayan trading route and at the base of the world's tallest peak. Aiding Khumbu Sherpas in this success is a pantheon of land spirits and mountain deities, including *lu* and *Khumbi Yullha*. While the origins of such mundane spirits can be traced to Bön and pre-Buddhist Tibetan religions, the integrated Bön and Buddhist tapestry of Nyingma Buddhist traditions persisted among Khumbu Sherpas with leadership from part-time community lamas, as Buddhist monastic institutions had not yet been founded.

The twentieth century brought great changes to the Khumbu Sherpas' lifeways, which had served them so well. In 1916, Khumbu's first celibate monastic center was founded at Tengboche, followed by the conversion of Thame gompa into Khumbu's second celibate monastic institution in 1952. Together these two institutions supported 'higher' Buddhist practices more closely tied to the Nyingma Buddhist textual traditions and universal Buddhist teachings, while pushing to disband 'low' Buddhist practices tied to the Bön and pre-Buddhist traditions.

In addition to the changes occurring within Khumbu, external regional and national conditions imposed changes as well. The closing of trade routes between Nepal and Tibet and the opening of access to Mt. Everest's southern approach through Khumbu fueled an overall shift from Khumbu's transhumance, agricultural, and trading economy to a service economy, especially along the trekking route through Khumbu's eastern valley toward Everest Base Camp. Foreign trekkers and tourists strained Khumbu's natural resources, increased wealth among Sherpas, and introduced new lifeways to Khumbu Sherpas. As a result, Khumbu Sherpas left for travel, school, and work abroad introducing further changes to Khumbu Sherpas' lifeways.

Synchronous to the steady rise of tourism and trekking in Khumbu during the later half of the twentieth century was an increasing presence and influence of the Nepali central government. Beginning with the Forest Nationalization Act, establishment of police and army posts, imposition of the panchayat authority, establishment of schools (initially by taking over those established by foreign philanthropists like Edmund Hillary), and finally formulation of the national park, the Nepali polity overlaid central authority on Khumbu, threatening Sherpas traditional land and social management practices. These transformations together with threats to Sherpa culture and the Khumbu environment are eroding Sherpa traditions, beliefs, and practices demonstrated to have sustained the Khumbu Sherpas' community for generations (Brower 1991; Stevens 1993; L. N. Sherpa 2003, 2005; Spoon 2008).

The Beyul Campaign responds to Khumbu's cultural and environmental threats by advancing a revitalization of the Nyingma monastic belief in Khumbu as a beyul, a

sacred hidden valley. This effort dually advocates conservation of Sherpa culture and the environment through a return to a Nyingma Buddhist belief about the landscape held among older Sherpas and calling for behavioral taboos protecting the environment.

Interviews with a cohort of Khumbu Sherpas demonstrating the most knowledge about the beyul—those over the age of 50 and those from Khumbu’s monasteries and gompas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng—demonstrate a gamut of heterogeneous knowledge about Khumbu’s sacred landscape among older Sherpas. Sherpas over the age of 50 in both communities identify localized land spirits, especially *lu*, concerned with daily, worldly experiences such as health, success, weather, and mountain hazards. *Khumbi Yullha*, similar to land spirits though older and of a higher rank, is invoked by Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng as Khumbu’s protector deity, especially significant both in the overall well-being of Khumbu’s communities and historically as the pivotal figure representing Buddhism’s domination over Khumbu’s evil, pre-Buddhist forces. Finally, participants describe Khumbu as a beyul, a protective landscape. Some older Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng attribute Khumbu’s historical, current, and future safety to its status as a beyul, some credit Khumbu Sherpas’ prosperity to the beyul, and some older Sherpas point to the beyul as protecting them from the adversities and hardships faced outside the beyul. Some older Sherpas in both villages speak knowledgeably about either the land spirits and mountain deities or the beyul, while others are limited in their knowledge of these concepts, especially the beyul. The analysis of this data

focuses on the heterogeneous knowledge about the beyul among older Khumbu Sherpas in Thame/Thameteng and Nauche, as well as the surprising beyul discourse emerging from older Sherpas in Nauche.

### **Analysis**

*The monastic beyul.* Discussions about the beyul with older Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng can be grouped into three categories: those knowledgeable about the beyul, those demonstrating some knowledge, and those with little or no knowledge. Interviews describing the beyul, connecting it to Guru Rinpoche, articulating behaviors to be observed in the beyul, and the protections afforded by the beyul demonstrate a high level of knowledge about the beyul. Each of the monastic community members in Khumbu and former monks in Nauche interviewed demonstrated this level of knowledge. Those participants who discussed some, but not all, of the beyul attributes listed above were grouped into the second category, demonstrating some knowledge about the beyul. Finally, those participants who stated they knew nothing about the beyul, referred me to the lama, or simply identified Khumbu as Guru Rinpoche's beyul fell into the last category of knowing little of the beyul.

As evidenced above, participants from both Nauche and Thame/Thameteng are represented in each of these three categories and indeed participants in both communities demonstrate a range of knowledge about the beyul. A closer examination of these groups reveals that those older Sherpas with the most knowledge about the



beyul are either members of the monastic community or former monks from Khumbu's monastic institutions. Sherpas in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng grouped into the second category, with some knowledge of the beyul, state that they learned about the beyul from reading the Pecha, from the lama, from older Sherpas, and from their parents or grandparents. Among the older Sherpas in Thame/Thameteng and Nauche who demonstrate little or no knowledge of the beyul, no indicators of a connection to the monastic community were noted. The correlation between beyul knowledge and social proximity to Khumbu's monastic community among participants in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng suggests beyul knowledge originates in the monastic community and is disseminated from there through monks educating their family and community members. This chain of knowledge in the beyul oral traditions is supported by the Nyingma textual tradition of the terma and beyul guidebooks.

This evidence that beyul knowledge originates in Khumbu's monastic community implies that the beyul belongs among the 'high' Buddhist traditions advocated by Khumbu's developing celibate monastic community throughout the twentieth century (Ortner 1992, 1999). As such, the beyul may not occupy the strong foothold among Khumbu Sherpas' lay traditions enjoyed by Khumbu's land spirits and mountain deities. Indeed, knowledge about Khumbu's land spirits and mountain deities is widely known among Nauche and Thame/Thameteng Sherpas, as well as by older Sherpas throughout Khumbu. In sum, participants' knowledge about Beyul Khumbu suggests the beyul is a 'high' Buddhist concept, which may not have been

embraced within Khumbu until the foundings of Khumbu's celibate monastic institutions in the twentieth century.

***Beyul discourse.*** An initial assumption in this research was that among those older Sherpas who demonstrate beyul knowledge, their perceptions of the beyul would be connected to Khumbu's physical environment and environmental conservation.

However, only one participant connected the beyul and environmental conservation.

Namgyal Tsering (Nauche): Polluting, killing animals, burning garbage will anger the gods and goddesses. In this way, the beyul is related to the environment.

Otherwise, the small population of older Sherpas in Thame/Thameteng and Nauche who spoke with any degree of knowledge about the beyul all identified the protective nature of the beyul, rather than the environmental conservation benefits available from the beyul. As part of the beyul's protective nature, participants in both communities explain that everything they need is provided in the beyul and all their needs are met.

For example,

Ani Dekyi (Nauche): Inside the beyul there is no shortage of anything.

Kami Futi (Thame/Thameteng): Everything is here inside the beyul because it all comes from Kathmandu and China.

Aau Norbu's comments articulate how Nauche Sherpas described the protection provided by the beyul:

AN: The beyul was hidden by Guru Rinpoche. There are no Maoists and no harm from Maoists in the beyul. . . . Inside the beyul there is no fighting, outside there is fighting. Inside the beyul there is no hunger. In the beyul, only potatoes grow, but everything is provided. Inside the beyul, there are no communicable diseases.

These comments capture how participants in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng describe the protective nature of the beyul in both providing for their needs and shielding them from harmful influences, such as disease and war.

Despite similar beyul discourse among participants in both Thame/Thameteng and Nauche, Thame/Thameteng participants demonstrated preferences toward discussing land spirits and mountain deities, rather than the beyul. In Thame/Thameteng, participants responded to open-ended questions about Khumbu’s sacred landscapes with comments and descriptions of Khumbu’s land spirits and mountain deities. Nauche participants, on the contrary, did not discuss land spirits, such as lu, at all during initial interviews.

<b>Landscape element</b>	Land Spirits	Khumbila	Beyul
<b>Scale</b>	Household/Village	Village/Centralized	Large-Scale
<b>Origins</b>	Bön	Transitional	Buddhist
	Localized		Abstracted




Figure 13. Sacred landscape elements and origins relating to scale

The beyul’s abstraction from the Khumbu environment suggests one possible explanation for participants’ failure to connect the beyul and environmental conservation efforts. Participants identify only one physical marker of the beyul, Thakmeru, as compared to abundant physical evidence of land spirits as well as

Khumbila as a dominant visual cue in the landscape. As the scale of sacred landscape elements increases in Khumbu, their connection to Khumbu's environment decreases. Synchronous with this movement, is the movement from the localized Bön traditions to the universal Buddhist traditions. Table 2 models this understanding of Khumbu's sacred landscape.

***Boundaries.*** Participants in both communities deployed the beyul to establish boundaries, defining a specific Khumbu Sherpa identity by articulating what they are not (Pratt 1999). Nauche participants evoke the beyul to separate themselves from contemporary and historical regional and national political wranglings. Generally, several participants describe that within the beyul there is no war and no fighting. More specifically, Aau Sonam's comments articulate the boundary constructed by the beyul in relation to both the historical Tibet/China conflict and the contemporary People's War in Nepal:

AS: Guru Rinpoche chose Khumbu to be the place where the Tibetan people would go after the Chinese conquered Tibet. However, the Tibetan people came to Khumbu before the Chinese invaded Tibet because Guru Rinpoche knew the Chinese would invade. Guru Rinpoche knew everything, even into the future. Guru Rinpoche knew there would a conflict between the King of Nepal and the Maoists. Guru Rinpoche knows that this is a good place and Buddhism is here.

Others observe:

Aau Norbu: There are no Maoists and no harm from Maoists in the beyul . . . . Inside the beyul there is no fighting, outside there is fighting.

Aau Gyalbu: There has been conflict throughout the rest of Nepal, but not in the beyul.

Trashy Gyalbu (Phortse): This is a beyul because in the Rai and Tamang places there are many political problems but not in Khumbu.

These comments suggest Nauche elders use the beyul concept to construct a boundary defining the Sherpa identity against historical and contemporary regional and national forces. While this is most apparent in discourses relating to regional and national politics in Nauche, such boundaries are also defined in more subtle ways.

In Thame/Thameteng, participants articulate a boundary around the Khumbu Sherpa identity by positioning themselves against an oppositional identity—defining themselves by what they are not (Pratt 1999). As examples,

Ani Zangmu: In other places, people kill the animals, but not here.

Ani Nyima: All the Sherpa villages are a beyul. Lower down are Hindu people who do hard work but never get rich and sin, like killing animals.

Like the Nauche participants, Thame/Thameteng participants bound the Sherpa identity by situating themselves in opposition to other identities, such as Hindus and those who kill animals. Older Khumbu Sherpas evoke the beyul to establish boundaries *within* the Buddhist, pre-Buddhist, and Bön traditions, as well. The beyul *itself* bounds the Nyingma tradition, separating it from especially the Gelug Buddhist tradition. The beyul tradition is not found in the other three Tibetan Buddhist sects; these hidden valleys were established for the protection of specifically the Nyingma traditions and teachings. This is evidenced by the belief that the texts revealing the beyul are Guru Rinpoche's teachings. While Guru Rinpoche is certainly revered among the other Buddhist sects, he is firmly seated as a Nyingmapa teacher. Sherpas' migration resulting from persecution by the Gelug sect suggests further evidence of

the beyul as a Nyingma place, defined as protected and separate from the Gelugpa sect. Capturing this tension:

Aau Norbu (Nauche): Guru Rinpoche likes this place. Of the four branches of Tibetan Buddhism—Nyingma is the best and most powerful. Nyingma is Guru Rinpoche's sect.

One of the Nyingmapa monks dreamt that drawing Guru Rinpoche in the Potala was good for Tibetans. So if Guru Rinpoche had been painted in the Potala [if Nyingmapa's were ruling, not Galukpas] the Chinese would not have invaded.

He explained that the dream meant that if the Nyingmapas had controlled the Tibetan government, as indicted by the paintings on the Potala, the Chinese People's Liberation Army would not have invaded Tibet. This story demonstrates that, while there is great respect between the Buddhist sects, there remains and is maintained a distinct boundary between the two as well.

Like the boundaries between the Buddhist sects, Nauche Sherpa elders draw an historical boundary between themselves and pre-Buddhist and Bön practitioners. Despite the early interactions of these belief systems, including the shared animistic, shamanistic, and mountain deity traditions, Sherpas continue to refer to pre-Buddhist and Bön practices as sinful, and frequently describe, in disgust, that these practitioners circle the mani stones in the wrong direction. This is best illustrated in a lamas comments as well as those made by Aau Sonam (AS):

Lama: Because this is a quiet place surrounded by mountains. Before the beyul, only Mt. Everest was here and everywhere else was just ocean. Before the beyul there were bad people living here, who always did the wrong things. They round the mani stones on the wrong side. They didn't respect the Pecha.

AS: Before Guru Rinpoche, Khumbi Yullha was not a god, he was sinful and did bad things. Guru Rinpoche made/trained him into a genya [genya is an advanced monk] and gave him all of Khumbu to protect. Before Guru Rinpoche, all the gods and goddesses were bad and did bad things. Guru Rinpoche gave them training and taught them that if they did good for the people, the people would pray for them.

The differences participants define between other forms of Buddhist and pre-Buddhist Tibetan beliefs and their own establish and maintain boundaries and further carving out Khumbu as a distinct Nyingma Sherpa place.

The significant difference between the beyul discourse in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng is in the construction of the identity to which Sherpas are opposed (Pratt 1999). While older Thame/Thameteng Sherpas construct an oppositional identity based in religious beliefs and behaviors, Nauche elders construct it based primarily in Nepali national and historical regional politics.

## **Discussion**

The evidence presented here suggests that the campaign to reinvigorate the beyul have been successful among older Sherpas in Nauche. Participants 50+ years-old in Nauche demonstrate at least as much knowledge about the beyul as those in Thame/Thameteng. These findings suggest increased knowledge about the beyul in Nauche since Spoon's (2008) fieldwork in 2006-2007. Since Spoon's research the beyul documentary, Sherpa cultural guide, and a national park interpretive exhibit have all been introduced in Khumbu. Further, Spoon's research itself undoubtedly generated discourse about the beyul among his participants.

It is too early to determine if the Beyul Campaign will produce the intended outcome of generating a stronger environmental ethic among Sherpas by linking environmental stewardship and Sherpa religion (L. N. Sherpa 2010, personal communication). I suggest invoking the beyul as a proxy, or representative of the Khumbu Sherpa belief system, is problematic in and of itself. As demonstrated, the beyul is a product of the Nyingma Buddhist monastic tradition and as such has been extolled in Khumbu less than 100 years. Further, as a ‘high’ Buddhist belief, the beyul is supported by the universal Nyingma framework with tenuous ties to Khumbu’s physical landscape, especially when compared to older Sherpas’ beliefs around localized land spirits and mountain deities (Ortner 1992, 1999).

Early observations resulting from this research, however, point to the unexpected outcome of older Nauche Sherpas, and to a lesser extent, Thame/Thameteng Sherpas, deploying the beyul as an expression of identity. The act of expressing identity through the Khumbu landscape has an historical precedence in the story of Khumbi Yullha’s conversion from a wrathful Bön deity to Khumbu’s Buddhist protector. This conversion attached the Buddhist identity to the Khumbu landscape and is reinforced with visual cues, both man-made and natural, throughout Khumbu. Ortner (1992, 1999) describes a similar campaign to “reconfigure” Sherpa religion with a greater emphasis on ‘higher’ Buddhist practices. The flexible nature of the Sherpa belief system allowed for the Beyul Campaign’s effort to “reconfigure” the beyul suggesting an alternative conception of the beyul as an environmental and cultural conservation tool, a departure from the beyul defined by the monastic



community. The monastic community presents the beyul as a refuge where Buddhist people and the Buddhist practice will be protected. However, rather than older Sherpas embracing the beyul as an environmental refuge, they “reconfigured” the concept yet again to reflect concern for the fading Sherpa traditional lifeways, a seemingly more urgent issue among dwindling older Sherpas, especially in Nauche.

The re-imagined beyul both represents and defines a unique Khumbu Sherpa identity. A Khumjung Sherpa elder expressed “There is no beyul without people.” Recalling Pratt (1999), this comment articulates the social construction of the beyul. Further, as Pratt (1999) illuminates, Nauche and Thame/Thameteng Sherpas establish boundaries by articulating those aspects they do not consider part of the Sherpa identity. This identity suggests Khumbu Sherpas are not Hindu, violent, or do sinful things. While on the whole, participants present this singular Sherpa identity; the constructions of that identity differ between Nauche and Thame/Thameteng. Older Nauche Sherpas have bared witness to extraordinary change in their community. Not only has Nauche grown in wealth, population, and size, the seasonal mass of tourists—over 30,000 in 2008—passing through Nauche’s kani brings a constant barrage of new lifeways, threatening those lifeways that have effectively managed Sherpa society and the Khumbu environment for generations. Further, as Khumbu’s political and economic nexus, Nauche residents are engrossed in the folds of Nepali politics especially ethnic politics, which are at the forefront of Nepal’s political landscape and deserve more than the passing mention afforded here. In reaction to these contemporary issues, older Nauche Sherpas describe a conceptual beyul in

which Khumbu Sherpa are immune to negative outside forces, and around which a boundary keeps such forces at bay.

Older Sherpas in Thame/Thameteng did not demonstrate the same type of beyul construction tied to contemporary politics, however participants conceive of the beyul in a more generally socially constructed manner tied to historical religious identity and the Nepali state, a constant tension throughout Khumbu Sherpas' history and perceived threat to Sherpas' lifeways. Thame/Thameteng Sherpa elders' constructions of the beyul may be best described as using the beyul to carve out a distinct Khumbu Sherpa identity, rather than the reaction to contemporary forces observed in Nauche. Articulating the unique position of Khumbu Sherpas reflected in Thame/Thameteng participants comments about the beyul, Ortner observes a distinct "Sherpa ethnonational identity that persists to this day: firmly rooted in Tibetan culture yet historically distinct from ethnic Tibetans; firmly rooted in the Nepal nation-state, yet culturally distinct from caste Nepalis" (1999, 94). The difference between social constructions of the beyul among Nauche participants and Thame/Thameteng participants is likely the result of their locations in Khumbu. Nauche participants directly confront the people, government agents and agencies, and structures threatening their perceptions of Khumbu Sherpa identity. On the other hand, older Sherpa in Thame/Thameteng are not on the main trekking route and rarely travel to Nauche for the market (sending family members and neighbors in their stead), therefore they do not engage with the same forces facing Nauche elders and instead demonstrate concern for historical threats to Sherpa lifeways.

In this way, participants find value in the beyul as a landscape protecting the eroding Sherpa culture. While it is possible the Beyul Campaign may not have succeeded in influencing Sherpas behaviors toward the environment, and older Sherpas may not embrace the concept as defining a physical Sherpa place, Sherpa elders knowledgeable about the beyul deploy the beyul to define a conceptual Khumbu Sherpa place where Sherpa culture and beliefs are buffeted from the myriad threats to Khumbu Sherpas lifeways.

### **Opportunities for Further Research**

The concept of Khumbu as a bounded beyul juxtaposed against Khumbu as a globalizing landscape is an unavoidable observation. As younger Sherpas migrate out to Kathmandu and abroad, thousands of trekkers and climbers from across the globe travel through Khumbu every year, and the global community watches the world's highest glaciers melt, there is no doubt the world has come to Khumbu and Khumbu Sherpas are spreading out to the rest of the world. Younger generations are breaking down the boundaries created by the beyul and redefining the meaning of Sherpa. Articulating the tension between the bounded and unbounded beyul begs further research.

The conversation between the village and monastic communities as it relates to Sherpas' knowledge about the sacred landscape presents another opportunity for further research. The balance between village and monastic life in Khumbu is ever changing. As the oldest celibate monastery in Khumbu is less than 100 years old, there

is significant room for growth within the institution; yet, this must be measured against the seemingly more rapidly paced growth in tourism and the personnel demands within that industry. Investigations of this tension could focus on changing knowledge of the sacred landscape in the face of shifting village/monastic dynamics.

Finally, the role of beyuls in the Nepal's Federalism movement may prove to be the most timely and controversial project spurred from this research. As of this writing, the Nepali state is considering a governance model based on distinct ethnic states; however, the construction and authority of such states remains elusive. Nepal's ethnic groups are returning to historical territory claims to define their own states. The beyul is well positioned to attach specific territory to the people residing in Yolmo, Rolwaling, and Khenbalung beyuls. While discourse about Nepali federalism is limited in Khumbu, Nepal's other beyuls could be deployed to support territory claims in those contested areas.

## **Conclusion**

Pangbuche Geshe describes that young Sherpas leave Khumbu in search of a better education with which they hope to secure a better job and future for their families and themselves. However, he continues, these Sherpa do not develop *sonam*, a concept difficult to translate into English but roughly meaning a combination of power and good-fortune. Without sonam young Sherpa are restless and will not be happy regardless of the success they find outside Khumbu. A Sherpa elder explains that one way to develop sonam is to dwell within the sacred landscape, to learn about

and experience Khumbu as a sacred place, to perform rituals within that place, and to understand the meanings in Khumbu's sacred landscape.

This research has explored Khumbu, Nepal as a sacred landscape and the myriad meanings found in that place by older Sherpas dwelling there. I have described Sherpa beliefs encoded in Khumbu's sacred landscape, including the land spirits concerned with Sherpas mundane and worldly pursuits; Khumbi Yullha, Khumbu's protector deity; and older Sherpas understandings of Khumbu as a beyul. Finally, I have deconstructed beyul discourse among Sherpas 50+ years old in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng revealing how a small group of elders perceive the beyul as an expression of Sherpa identity and evoke the beyul to confront threats to Khumbu Sherpas' distinct cultural identity.

Khumbu Sherpas bring multiple meanings to their place. Each Sherpa experiences Khumbu in a unique way. To an older Sherpa woman in Thame, Khumbu is a beyul, where she and her family are protected and provided for as long as they continue to perform rituals and respect the spirits with whom they share this place; this woman's grandchildren may see a different landscape.

Sitting in the kitchen following dinner one evening, my host's son, who manages their family-owned guesthouse in Nauche, stares out the window onto the village of Nauche with a sad and disappointed look on his face observing, "There are many lights." The young man, connecting the glowing lights in many guest lodges with the recent beginning of the trekking season in Nauche, is bemoaning the fact that the trekkers are not coming to his lodge. Indeed, my guest room light will be the only

one shining from his lodge tonight. This scene and the young manager's comment reflect a landscape a world apart from that of the Thame woman. This young Sherpa experiences the Khumbu landscape as a place situated, not in the oral folklore and textual Nyingmapa traditions, but a place situated in Nepal's booming tourist industry – another generation, another set of meanings, another place.



Figure 14. Deploying the beyul among Khumbu's entrepreneurs

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## APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

### अनुसन्धा नमा सहभागिता स्वीकृतिको जानकारी Informed Consent to Participate in Research

पोर्टलाण्ड स्टेट विद्बविधालयका ज्ञातकोत्तरका विद्याथी लिण्डजी स्कागद्वारा गरिने अनुसन्धानमूलक अध्ययनमा तपाईंलाई स्वागत छ। अनुसन्धानकता खुम्बुको भूदृश्यको बारेमा तपाईंको बुझाइको अध्ययन गर्ने आशा गर्नुहुन्छ। डा. लाक्पा मोर्बु शेर्पाको सुपरिवेक्षणमा हुने अनुसन्धान तथा अन्तरवाताद्वारा प्राप्त जानकारी श्री स्कागको ज्ञातकोत्तर थेसिसमा समावेश गरिने छ, जुन पोर्टलाण्ड स्टेट विद्बविधालय, भूगोल विभागका डा. बारबरा ब्रोवेर (Dr. Barbara Brower) को सुपरिवेक्षणमा भइरहेकोछ। यो भविष्यमा प्रकाशित हुन सक्ने सम्भावना छ। यो थेसिस सामुदायका अनुवाहक, राष्ट्रिय निकुञ्ज तथा वन्यजन्तु सेरक्षण विभाग, माउण्टेण स्पिरिट तथा माउण्टेण इस्टिच्युटमा पठाइनेछ।

यदि तपाईंले यसमा सहभागि हुने सोचि सक्नु भएकोभए आफूलाई पाएक पर्ने ठाउँ र समयमो लागि श्री स्कागलाई भन्नुस। कुराकानी एक घण्टा जति लामो हुन्छ होला। अन्तरवाती दौरानता उहाँले तपाईंलाई खुम्बुको नक्सा बनाउन लगाउन सक्नु हुन्छ। यो अन्तरवातीलो तपाईंलाई केही जोखिममा (हानी नोक्सानीमा) अथवा नरामो असर पाइँन। यस अध्ययनमा भाग लिएर तपाईंले प्रत्यक्षरूपमा केही फाइदा पाउन सक्नुहुन्न तर यसले खुम्बुको बोरमा ज्ञान बढाउन मद्दत गर्छ जुन भविष्यमा अरुलाई मद्दत गर्छ।

तपाईं स्वच्छले भाग लिदैहुनुहुन्छ। तपाईंले भाग लिनैपर्छ भन्ने छैन। यदि तपाईंले यस अन्तरवाती सहभागि हुने विचार गर्नु भएको छ भने तपाईंलाई सोधिएका सबै प्रश्नहरूको जवाफ दिनै पर्छ भन्ने छैन तपाईंलाई अप्ठ्यारो नलाग्ने प्रश्नको मात्र पनि उत्तर दिन सक्नुहुनेछ। यदि यस्तो अप्ठ्यारो सवालहरू भएमा श्री स्कागलाई भन्नुस ताकि वहाँ अको सवाफमा जान सक्नुहुन्छ। तपाईंले उहाँसंग विना संकोच यस बारेमा प्रश्नहरू सोध्न सक्नु हुनेछ र यदि तपाईंलाई सोझै पर्ने विषय र जानकारीहरू सोध्न बिसन्तुभएको जस्तो लाग्यो भने ती विचार र धारणाहरू उहाँलाई भनिदिनुस।

तपाईंलाई खुम्बुको भूदृश्य किन महत्वपूर्ण लाग्छ भन्ने बारेमा श्री स्कागलाई धेरै चाखलाग्छ।

तपाईंको अर्को कुनै प्रश्न छ?

अन्तरवातीको दौरानमा यदि तपाईंको कुनै प्रश्नहरू भए स्कागजी लाइ भन्नुस। अन्तरवाती पछि पनि कुनै जिज्ञासाहरू भएमा तपाईं उहाँको स्वानिय ठेगानामा गएर कुराकानी गर्न सक्नु हुन्छ जुन तल दिइएकोछ। तपाईंको सहभागिताको बारेमा तपाईंलाई कुनै जिज्ञासा वा समस्या वा अनुसन्धानको विषयमा तपाईंको हक सम्बन्धि कुराहरू भएमा तल दिइएको ठेगानामा सम्पर्क राख्न सक्नुहुनेछ।

Lindsay Skog skog@pdx.edu Mobile: +977 9808176166	Human Subjects Research Review Committee Office of Research and Sponsored Projects 600 Unitus Bldg. Portland State University (503) 725-4288 1-877-480-4400	Executive Director USEF-Nepal P.O. Box 380 Kathmandu, NEPAL Telephone: 4444780
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यदि तपाईंले यो जानकारी बुझनुमयो र सहभागी हुन सकारात्मक हुनुहुन्छ भने अहिला नै 'हुन्छ' भन्नुस।

तपाईंले अन्तरवाती विदा दिइएको जानकारीमा आफ्नो नाम लेखिएमा वा आफ्नो नाम लेख्न स्वीकृति दिनु हुन्छ भने 'हुन्छ' भन्नुस। यद्यि तपाईंलाई नाम लेख्न स्वीकृति दिन मनलाग्दैन भने स्कागजीलाई 'हुदैन' भनेर भन्नुस उहाँले काल्पनिक नाम लेख्नुहुन्छ वा नाम परिवर्तन गरिदिनु हुन्छ।

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Lindsay Skog, who is a graduate student at Portland State University. The researcher hopes to learn about your perception of the Khumbu landscape. This research and information collected during this interview, which is under the supervision of Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, will be included in Ms. Skog's masters thesis, which is under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Brower at Portland State University, Geography Department, will possibly appear in future publications, and will be given back to community leaders, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Mountain Spirit, and The Mountain Institute.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to speak with Ms. Skog for about one hour on this topic at a location and a time that is convenient for you. During the time of the interview, the researcher may ask you to draw a map of Khumbu. It is unlikely any risks or harmful effects will befall you as the result of this interview. You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study, but the study may help to increase knowledge about Khumbu that may help others in the future.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study. If you do choose to continue with this interview, you are free to answer only the questions that you feel comfortable answering. If you do not want to answer a question, please let Ms. Skog know, and she will move on to another topic of discussion. Please feel free to ask questions and include thoughts and comments relevant to the topic that the researcher may fail to ask you about. Ms. Skog is most interested in what is important about the Khumbu landscape to you.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions during our interview, please let Ms. Skog know. If you have questions after the interview is finished, feel free to come talk with Ms. Skog at her local address, listed below. If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, or USEF-Nepal.

Lindsay Skog  
skog@pdx.edu  
Mobile: +977 9808176116

Human Subjects Research  
Review Committee  
Office of Research and  
Sponsored Projects  
600 Unitus Bldg.  
Portland State University  
(503) 725-4288  
1-877-480-4400

Executive Director  
USEF-Nepal  
P.O. Box 380  
Kathmandu, NEPAL  
Telephone: 4444780

If you understand this information and agree to go forward with this interview, please say 'yes' now.

If you consent to your name being associated with information provided during this interview, please say 'yes' now. If you do not consent to this, Ms. Skog will change your name in any publications.

## APPENDIX B. PERMISSION AND AFFILIATION LETTERS



Government of Nepal  
Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation  
Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation  
Eco-29



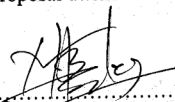
Date:-30th Aug 2009

Subject: - Study/Research Permission.

Reg:-384

Sagarmatha National Park  
Namche, Solukhumbu.

DNPWC has granted permission as per the proposal to conduct research/study to following individual/organization with following terms and conditions. Please find copy of the proposal attended for your kind perusal.

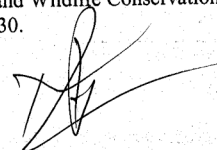
  
(Megh Bahadur Pandey)  
Deputy Director General

### Statements:-

1. Application Registered Date: - 30th Aug, 2009
2. Name of the Applicant: - Lindsay Skog
3. Name and Address of the Organization conducting study/ research:-Portland State University, Department of Geology, IIE Fulbright student grantee
4. Level of study: - M.Sc. Degree
- 5 Subject of study/research: - Sherpa Perceptions of a Sacred Landscape
6. Study period: - September 15, 2009 to June 1, 2012
7. Area's of study: - Buffer Zone of Sagarmatha National Park, Nepal
8. Bio-Species collection statement: - No.
9. Department's approved date:-

### Conditions:-

1. Provide 1/1 copy of Study/Research reports after completion to Department and concerned PA's.
2. Conduct study/Research under the concurrence of Chief conservation officer/Conservation officer or their Representative.
3. Follow National Parks and wildlife conservation Act 2029, Himalayan National Parks and wildlife conservation Act 2030 and other concerned rules and regulations.
4. The researcher should pay the entry permit fee as the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2030 and Himalayan National Parks and wildlife conservation Act 2030.



G.P.O. Box : 860, Kathmandu, Nepal. Tel. 4220912, 4220850, 4227926, Fax : 977-1-4227675



नेपाल सरकार  
वन तथा भू-संरक्षण मन्त्रालय  
राष्ट्रिय निकुञ्ज तथा वन्यजन्तु संरक्षण विभाग  
सगरमाथा राष्ट्रिय निकुञ्ज कार्यालय

प.सं.:  
च.नं.: १००

फोन नं.: ०३८५४०११४

मिति: ०९/०९/०९

**विषय:** अध्ययन/अनुसन्धान अनुमति दिइएको बारे

श्री लिपुङ्जी स्कोग  
पोटलाण्ड स्टेट विश्वविद्यालय

प्रस्तुत विषयमा श्री राष्ट्रिय निकुञ्ज तथा वन्यजन्तु संरक्षण विभाग, बबरमहल काठमाडौंको च.न.३८४ मिति २०६६/०५/१४ गतेको पत्र अनुसार तपाईंलाई यस सगरमाथा राष्ट्रिय निकुञ्ज तथा मध्यवर्ती क्षेत्रभित्र मिति sep 15 2009 देखि june 1 2012 सम्म "Sherpa Perceptions of a Sacred Landscape" विषयमा अध्ययन अनुसन्धान गर्न अनुमति दिइएको छ। राष्ट्रिय निकुञ्ज ऐन तथा नियमावलीको परिधिभित्र रहि कामकाज गर्नु हुन अनुरोध छ।

सुमन सुवेदी

श्री राष्ट्रिय संरक्षण अधिकृत

बोधार्थ  
श्री मध्यवर्ती क्षेत्र व्यवस्थापन समिति।  
स.रा.नि  
श्री टासिङ्गा/देबुचे/फुले/स्याङबोचे/जोरसल्ले पोष्ट  
स.रा.नि.



[Translation of SNP Permission letter, Ms Kami Doma Sherpa, 01/24/10]

Government of Nepal  
Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation  
Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation  
Sagarmatha National Park Office  
Namche Bazaar, Solu Khumbu  
Phone Number: 038540114

Date: 2066/06/06

Reference: 100

Subject: Study/Research Permission

Ms Lindsay Skog  
Portland State University

Per the letter from Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Babar Mahal, Kathmandu, reference #384, dated 2066/05/14 [Nepali date], Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone hereby grants permission to conduct the research study “Sherpa Perceptions of a Sacred Landscape” from September 15, 2009 until June 1, 2012. Ms Skog must follow the rules and regulations of the National Park.

Suman Subedi

From:  
Buffer Zone  
S.N.P.  
Tasinga/Debuche/Phorte/Syaangboche/Jorsalle Post  
S.N.P



हिमाली जोश  
MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

Regd: 386/053/54  
SWC Affiliation: 5135  
PAN: 301826396

Lindsay Skog  
C/o USEF Nepal  
P.O. Box 380  
Kathmandu

August 25, 2009

Dear Lindsay,

I am pleased to inform you that your proposal to work with Mountain Spirit as a local counterpart for your research work on Sacred Sites and Beyul in Sagarmatha Buffer Zone has been approved by Mountain Spirit (MS). MS is very pleased that you will be working in an area and subject that is of great interest to our members. We will be happy to provide you a supporting letter to help secure your research permit in SNP. Please sign the short MOU below and return to us. This is a standard agreement with volunteers and researchers working with MS. We will be happy to issue a letter of support for your research in SNPBZ.

  
Tuka Cheki Sherpa  
Coordinator

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