

Museums and Metonyms: The Making of Tibet

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Abstract

Darjeeling, or *Dorje-Ling*, throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, along with Kalimpong, served as sites from which an entire corpus of knowledge regarding Tibet was produced and disseminated. These two sites served as spaces which facilitated not only a complex network of negotiations between the British and the Lhasa government through the Chogyal of Sikkim, but also ended up becoming metonyms of Tibet itself. As Thomas Richards writes in his book *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*¹, for the Western world, particularly British historiographers and early explorers, Tibet was the ultimate *Shangri-La*, “the unmapped library where a complete knowledge lies in a state of suspended animation”. Post the British attempts of mapping Tibet through the Young Husband Expedition (1903-04) and its failure when Lhasa closed its doors once again to outsiders, Darjeeling and Kalimpong would emerge as crucial “contact zones” (to use Mary Louis-Pratt’s term) from which an “archive-state” vis-à-vis Tibet could be produced. My paper shall look at the figure of Sarat Chandra Das, a Bengali from Chittagong who was sent as headmaster of the Bhutia Boarding School in Darjeeling and later became one of the *pundits* sent as spy to Tibet by the British. Now a largely forgotten figure, Das would emerge as a key player within Anglo-Tibetan negotiations. Post his two expeditions to Tibet, he would retire permanently in Darjeeling, name his house *Lhasa Villa* and write the Tibetan-English dictionary along with a host of other articles which were serially published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Das, primarily an explorer and collector, needs to be read as an important part of the colonial pedagogy of knowledge production vis-à-vis Tibet, who contributed heavily to the rendering of Tibet as a knowable “archive-state”. The paper shall also be looking at the Himalayan Tibet Museum, founded in 2015 in Darjeeling, and how in framing its poetics of museumization, it has sought to recuperate figures such as Das, Csoma de Coros and Rahul Sanskritayana. In her book *The Museum on the Roof of the World*, Claire E. Harris describes how China has tended to present Tibet in its entirety as a museum “to proudly display the evidence that Tibet is its ‘inalienable’ territory” and how China has had no qualms with the perpetuation of Tibetan culture “so long as it is safely confined to the domains of artworks and museums”.² By contrast, museums set up in India by Tibetans in exile, have tended to be implicated within a strong nationalist consciousness which translates itself into the museological rhetoric. The Himalayan Tibet Museum in Darjeeling, as I shall attempt to show, through its fore-grounding of figures such as Das and Coros, attempts to posit Tibet and Tibetans as part of a continuing lived history. Also, by doing so it seems to consciously lay claim to an earlier pedagogy of archive-making, in this case that of British India, to counter Chinese semioticization of Tibet’s peoples and cultures.

Keywords: Metonyms, Museum, Darjeeling, Sarad Chandra Das, Tibet

Thomas Richards writes in his book *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (1993) that for the Western world, particularly British historiographers and early explorers, Tibet was the ultimate *Shangri-La*, “the unmapped library where a complete knowledge lies in a state of suspended animation.” Richards describes how

¹ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993).

² Claire E. Harris, *Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics and Representations of Tibet* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 9-12.

in Western mythology, “Tibet was a sanitarium for the recuperation of an exhaustive knowledge that was always in danger of entropy, loss, or destruction.”³

For the British explorer and historiographer, Tibet generated a mythical yet polarizing response. While it was projected as a spiritual recuperative sanitarium of sorts, Tibetan Buddhism was also seen as “degeneration” from earlier forms of Indian Buddhism owing particularly to its reliance on esoteric *Tantric* rituals. The semiotics of how Tibet has continued to feature within Western imagination has changed dramatically over the past century, particularly post Chinese occupation, the escape of the Dalai Lama to India and the formation of the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamshala and the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-76) which culminated in the burning down and ransacking of many Tibetan monasteries. As Donald S. Lopez writes in his book *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (1998) –

Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism have long been objects of Western fantasy. Since the earliest encounters of Venetian travelers and Catholic missionaries with Tibetan monks at the Mongol court, tales of the mysteries of their mountain homeland and the magic of their strange-yet strangely familiar religion have had a peculiar hold on the Western imagination. During the last two centuries, the valuation of Tibetan society and, particularly, its religion, has fluctuated wildly. Tibetan Buddhism has been portrayed sometimes as the most corrupt deviation from the Buddha’s true dharma, sometimes as its most direct descendant. These fluctuations have occurred over the course of this century, at its beginning as Tibet resisted the colonial ambitions of a European power and at its end as it succumbed to the colonial ambitions of an Asian power.⁴

This paper ranges across a series of concerns – I shall first attempt to map out the significance of Darjeeling and Kalimpong as “contact zones” from where a certain corpus of knowledge production and dissemination took place vis-à-vis Tibet especially towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. I shall attempt to show how such modes of producing knowledge vis-à-vis Tibet would span a range of registers – from linguistic to visual dissemination to the circulation of material commodities. I shall also look at how particular figures would become key actants within such forms of knowledge production. The second section of this presentation shall look at a more recent moment, the establishment of the Himalayan Tibet Museum in 2015. By interrogating its poetics of museumization, I shall attempt to show how Tibetans and their coreligionists, the Bhutias of Darjeeling, have attempted to create a form of cultural memory, as opposed to museums in Dharamshala which remain implicated within a strong nationalist consciousness vis-à-vis a Tibet free of Chinese occupation.

I shall use a literary metaphor to formulate a theoretical paradigm in order to describe the processes through which Darjeeling and Kalimpong were rendered as spaces which, for the early European explorers, entrepreneurs, photographers and

³ Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 12. It may be interesting to note here that with Tibet now under Chinese occupation and domination Bhutan and Nepal have emerged as the new ‘Shangri-La’s for the Western world.

⁴ Donald S Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 3.

historiographer stood in for Tibet. A metonym or metonymy generally refers to something that begins to stand in for another; something is seen to be an adjunct or a signifier of another. In many ways, Darjeeling and Kalimpong, at least in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, became metonyms of Tibet.

Darjeeling, or Dorje-Ling, throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, along with Kalimpong, served as sites which facilitated not only a complex network of negotiations between the British and the Lhasa government through the Chogyal of Sikkim, but also ended up becoming metonyms of Tibet itself. Darjeeling was seized from the Chogyal of Sikkim in 1835 and Kalimpong, which was earlier part of Sikkim and then taken over by Bhutan, was eventually annexed to the British empire in 1865. In many ways, both these towns as well as the rest of the Darjeeling hills can be read as “contact zones” defined by Mary Louis Pratt as “Social Spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.”⁵ Earlier under British colonial rule and presently under the administrative colonialism imposed by West Bengal with which they were merged post independence, even today, Darjeeling and Kalimpong continue to remain border sites facilitating a network of cultural interaction, mobility and transaction between Nepali, Tibetan, Sikkimese and Bhutanese cultures. These sites bring into continuous contestation the very notion of an ossified border and international boundary, treating them as fluid, flexible and highly mobile.

Throughout the late 19th and the early 20th century, the British sought to reproduce Darjeeling and to a lesser extent Kalimpong as spaces that were synonymous with Tibet. With Darjeeling emerging as the “summer capital” of British India and drawing a significant number of tourists, collectors, antiquarians, ethnographers, anthropologists, photographers and entrepreneurs, Tibet became increasingly rendered as a collectible of sorts, a movable archive that could not only be known but also possessed through a dissemination of material artifacts that bore its traces. As mentioned before, such forms of production and dissemination cut across a series of registers — ranging from linguistic/textual to the circulation of visual images and material commodities.

The primary register of such visual dissemination was the photograph. Right from the end of the 19th through to the mid 20th century, Darjeeling became the centre as well as the object of photographic dissemination. As I shall attempt to show, one of the primary axes along which such forms of photography worked was through an anthropologizing gaze that sought to produce Tibet and Tibetans as exoticized artifacts for a primarily Western audience. Early British photography, particularly in the colonies, was by default linked to an ethnographic project of mapping. These modes of mapping tended to use the photograph as one of the primary semiotic means of creating a knowable other, representations which would often elide the cultural process that generated these in the first place. As David G. Tomas writes in his dissertation *Ethnography of the Eye: Authority, Observation and Photography in the Context of British Anthropology, 1839-1900*, such “Culture of Representation” was

⁵ Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

part of a “Series of Technical Systems and Conventions governing how persons, events and social groups were to be described and fixed within a system of interpretation and analysis.” Such “portrayals of non-western populations” were made out “to possess the attributes of belonging to autonomous entities called ‘cultures’ and to manifest a diverse set of moral, psychological and physical characteristics.”⁶

Darjeeling saw a proliferation of studios and photographers in the late 19th and through the first half of the 20th century. Among the most famous of the studios opened in the late 19th century were the ones by Hoffman and Johnston established in 1890 and the studio of Thomas Parr. Theodore Julius Hoffman and P. A. Johnston established this commercial studio in Darjeeling following the success of their Calcutta studio established in 1882. Having begun their studio franchise in Rangoon, Burma, the company would eventually go on to establish yet another in Simla. Following the death of Johnston in 1891, Hoffman continued the business till the studio finally closed during the 1950s. Hoffman also accompanied photographer John Claude White to Tibet in July 1891. Samuel Bourne, the British photographer, who together with Charles Shepherd founded the most renowned of the British commercial photo studios in India, ‘Bourne and Shepherd’, made a career out of selling picturesque and ethnographic portraits of the Himalayas and Himalayan tribes. The ‘Bourne and Shepherd’ studio, earlier known as the ‘Howard, Bourne and Shepherd’ studio was set up by him and William Howard in Simla in 1863, and later after Howard left, became the ‘Bourne and Shepherd’ studio with its second outlet in Calcutta. Bourne himself travelled extensively in the Himalayas and produced a series on Darjeeling. Together with ‘Johnston and Hoffman’ these were considered as two of the premier photo studios, both specializing in the picturesque mode of representation as well as in ethnographic portrayals of indigenous communities. Also famous in Darjeeling was the studio of Thomas Parr who whose vintage albumen prints of which are now available on online auction sites at a price ranging anywhere between 200\$ to 500\$. The studios, in addition to large albumen prints, also specialized in producing picture postcards, which became a widely circulated medium of reproducing Himalayan people and landscapes.

Claire Harris in her book *Museum on the Roof of the World* (2012) writes regarding these studios of Darjeeling that since it was not possible for British photographers to work in Tibet itself in the 19th century, “those Indian towns with substantial Tibetan communities stood in for the country. For the colonial bourgeoisie, the closest they would come to Tibet were the “hill stations” of the Himalayan foothills, where the cool temperatures and shady forests provided a respite from the heat of North Indian cities like Delhi and Calcutta.” The possibility of “encounter” with Tibetan-speaking people “added to the appeal of these resorts-cum-sanatoriums.”⁷

The Darjeeling photographs by Johnston & Hoffman, Bourne & Shepherd as well as those by Thomas Parr and John Doyle show an almost obsessive investment in

⁶ David G. Tomas, “Ethnography of the Eye: Authority, Observation and Photography in the Context of British Anthropology, 1839-1900” (Ph. D., McGill University, 1987), 1-2.

⁷ Claire E. Harris, *Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics and Representations of Tibet* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 88.

indigenous photo portraits. Such modes of type photography not only aimed to produce Tibet as a consumable commodity for a predominantly Western gaze, but also rendered it as a knowable object. A 1905 photograph by the 'Bourne and Shepherd' studio entitled 'A Thibetan Man' produces a certain image of Tibetan people. The photograph shows a man of Tibetan ethnicity in a traditional dress complete with a maney/prayer wheel in hand. Another photograph from the 1880s entitled 'Group of Bhootas, Darjeeling' shows a Bhutia family sitting before their cottage, clad in traditional attire. Both women are seen in their baku and chuba and the elderly woman at the centre of the image is shown to be wearing traditional Tibetan jewellery made of silver and yak bone. These images seem to lock Tibet within a certain semiotics of knowability, thereby reducing it to a set of knowable markers. There is a suggestion that the 'real' Tibet, although perpetually deferred, lies immediately beyond the image, and a certain simulated Tibet can be known through a set of markers which foreground Tibetan people and objects associated with Tibetan Buddhism. Given the physical inaccessibility of Lhasa, Darjeeling and Kalimpong became major locations from where such images began to be produced and circulated.

The photographs by Thomas Parr show a greater staging. The photograph 'Thibetan Lady' (albumen print, 1880s) shows, like the Bourne & Shepherd image, a woman in her traditional attire and silver jewellery. Another photograph 'Bhutia Girl' (Parr, 1895/1901) shows the full bodied image of a bejeweled woman in her baku and chuba. This particular photograph has a colonial studio setting, the lady framed within a backdrop of curtains and wooden furniture. The removal of the object of Western gaze (in this case the Tibetan woman) to the space of the colonial studio and its framing therein gestures towards a semantic shift. Tibet now seems to have semantically moved within the discursive limits of knowability. Unlike the Bourne & Shepherd image, there is no outside or a 'real' Tibet lurking somewhere in an imagined backdrop. The image semantically seals the possibility of knowing a Tibet beyond a colonial representation of it, a representation that codifies and thereby limits the extent of knowledge. The image projects the woman and her attire as metonyms of Tibet and at the same time semantically locks Tibet within that metonym.

Another image by Parr 'Prayer Wheel in Buddhist Temple, Darjeeling' (albumen, c. 1880) shows a man in Tibetan dress revolving a gigantic maney/prayer wheel. The photograph suggests a semiotic continuity between a Darjeeling under British colonial domination and a Tibet, which still remained elusive and impregnable to British modalities of control and mapping. Within the photograph, the man, the prayer wheel and the monastery become cultural markers of a Tibet in absentia, a Tibet which could be simulated through a border zone that bore its unmistakable imprint. Such ethnographic modes of representation tended to treat the body of the "native" as museum objects. It was in India, as Harris writes, in these Himalayan border zones that Tibet was first "mocked up as a photographic subject in order to feed the demands of the imperial imagination." Tibet thus "appeared most vividly in the colonial imagination when it was restructured elsewhere."⁸

⁸ Harris, *Museum on the Roof of the World*, 96.

Tibet also began to be disseminated through a circulation of material objects, from jewellery made of silver and yak bone to curios. Even before full-fledged shops selling Tibetan objects had been set up there had already existed a circulation of objects which were being sold to Westerners by Tibetan women. Laurence Austin Waddell, the British explorer and collector, who had accompanied Francis Younghusband on his mission to Tibet (1903-04), and who was stationed in Darjeeling from 1885 to 1895 extensively photographing the “Himalayan tribes” of Sikkim, eastern Nepal, “British Bhutan” and Bengal, mentions the “pedlars” on the streets of Darjeeling who “pester” people to buy “all sorts of things – jewellery, plaids, daggers and swords, carvings and the crudest of curios, including prayer wheels, amulets, skull-bowls and trumpets of human bones.”⁹ Most often, such peddlers would be Tibetan women. As a demand for such objects which seemed to bear the material imprint of Tibet grew among Westerners, Darjeeling and Kalimpong saw the proliferation throughout the 19th century of curio shops specializing in antiquities of Tibet. Established by a Kashmiri businessman in 1890, ‘Habib, Mullick & Sons’ located at the centre of the Chowrasta Mall Road and presently managed by Mullick’s grandsons, Parvez and Habeeb, continues to dish out such items even today – ranging from curios to statues, thangkas and silver jewellery. The circulation of Tibetan objects as commodified art thus also effectuated a paradigmatic shift – from sacred to profane, from a ‘live’ object of veneration to a ‘dead’ curio/ showpiece denuded of its ritualistic trace. Rather, these circulated as cultural signifiers of an ethnologic other, and, along with the photographs of Tibetans, seemed to render Tibet itself as a movable museum. I would also like to add here that right through the 20th century and even into the 21st, Tibet has continued to circulate as a collectible commodity. And although there have been various semantic shifts in the processes through which Tibet has continued to be disseminated among the West, especially post Chinese occupation in 1959, it has been remained a continuous object of museumization and material circulation.

Additionally, Darjeeling and Kalimpong were zones from where a certain form of textual production took place vis-à-vis Tibet. The primary mode of such textual/ linguistic knowledge production was through the compilation of lexicons/ dictionaries and grammar books of Tibetan. Such production, however, was by no means, limited to Darjeeling and Kalimpong. As Emma Martin writes, Christian missionaries, especially the Moravian Christians had been particularly active in this process of knowledge production. Martin refers to Heinrich August Jäschke who compiled his *A Tibetan-English Dictionary, With Special Reference to the Prevailing Dialects* in 1881 from Lahaul. There existed a network of activities by missionaries, anthropologists and collectors, such as the Canadian Dr. Susie Rijnhart, the anthropologist Berthold Laufer, the American Tibetologist William Woodville Rockhill and another American Albert Shelton, along Tibet’s border areas with China. Laufer ended up collecting more than four thousand objects for the Chicago Field Museum.¹⁰

⁹ L.A. Waddell, *Among the Himalayas* (London: Archibald Constable, 1899), 42.

¹⁰ Emma Martin, ‘Translating Tibet in the Borderlands: Networks, Dictionaries, and Knowledge Production in Himalayan Hill Stations,’ *Transcultural Studies* 1 (July 2016), doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.17885/heiup.ts.23538>.

Herbert Bruce Hannah, a Calcutta High Court judge, published his *Grammar of the Tibetan Language, Literary and Colloquial* in 1992 from the Baptist (Serampore) Mission Press, which played a significant role in the publication and global circulation of resources on the Tibetan language. Hannah's publication of the dictionary was sponsored by Asutosh Mukherjee, the then Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, who had also been instrumental in the setting up of the first ever department of Pali. Hannah was schooled in basic Tibetan by Kazi Dawa Samdup, a Sikkim school headmaster. Hannah refers to the manuals of Norwegian missionary Edvard Amundsen, stationed in Darjeeling at the time and also to David Macdonald, part of the Younghusband Expedition who later became famous for the book *Twenty Years in Tibet* (1932). Hannah also acknowledges the inputs of Sarat Chandra Das, a Bengali born in Chittagong, who was posted in Darjeeling as headmaster of the Bhutia Boarding School in Darjeeling and later became a "pundit" under the Raj. The "pundits" as described by Derek Waller in his book *The Pundits: British Exploration of Tibet and Central Asia* (1988) were a motley "elite group of Indian trans-Himalayan explorers-recruited, trained, and directed by the officers of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India who were to traverse much of Tibet and Central Asia." Waller writes:

In the public documents of the Survey of India, these men came to be called "pundits" or "native explorers," but in the closed files of the government of British India, they were given their true designation as spies or secret agents. The use of these agents was sanctioned in the 1860s only after the closing of the borders of Tibet to foreigners, the deaths of several European explorers in Central Asia, the unwillingness and inability of the Chinese authorities to make provision for British travelers, and decades of reluctance by the government of India to allow technically qualified Indians to survey beyond the frontier.¹¹

Sarat Chandra Das (1849-1917) would go on to become a key figure in Anglo-Tibetan negotiations. As Das writes in his *Autobiography* published in *Modern Review* in 1908-09 and later reprinted in 1969, it was in March, 1874, while preparing to graduate in Civil Engineering from Presidency College, Calcutta that he took seriously ill of malaria. It was around this time that the botanist, Professor C. B. Clarke offered him an appointment as Headmaster of the proposed Bhutia Boarding School to be set up in Darjeeling by the then Deputy Commissioner, John Edgar. On the suggestion of his brother, Nabin Chandra, Das took up the appointment, believing that the change of weather would prove good for his health. In his *Autobiography*, he describes his lengthy journey to Darjeeling, where he finally arrived on April 10, 1874.¹² The 25 year old Das was told by Edgar that the British Government intended to set up this boarding school for giving English education to the crown prince of Sikkim. Accordingly, Das wrote to the Chogyal Kusho Sridkong Namgyal to send his son and also the sons of the chief Kazis of Sikkim to him for tutelage. The Chogyal responded favourably to this

¹¹ Derek Waller, *The Pundits: British Exploration of Tibet and Central Asia* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 1.

¹² Sarat Chandra Das, "Autobiography (Narratives of the Incidents of my Early Life)," *Indian Studies: Past & Present* 3, (1969).

and having also collected a few Bhutia lads from Darjeeling, Das started the boarding school.

It was also at this school that Das made the acquaintance of Lama Ugyen Gyatso of Pemayangtse Monastery (the royal monastery of Sikkim) who was sent there as a teacher of Tibetan language. This encounter would prove to be a major turning point in Das's life and career. It was through Gyatso that Das developed a keen interest in the Tibetan and also in Tibetan Buddhism, realizing that knowing the Tibetan script was most crucial to understanding what he perceived as the "lost" Sanskrit Buddhist literature of India. The Das-Gyatso alliance had far-reaching consequences in terms of how Tibet would feature within colonial knowledge making. Not only did Gyatso's connection make Das's travels to Tibet possible (journeys on which Gyatso accompanied him), but Gyatso also collaborated extensively with Das on his Tibetan-English dictionary, the compilation of a treatise of Tibetan grammar and translation of Tibetan texts to English.

Das persuaded Gyatso to take him along to Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in South-Central Tibet in 1879. The monastery's head abbot was keen to learn Hindi, and it wasn't difficult for Ugyen Gyatso to secure a permit for Das as a teacher of Hindi. Das's second, more extensive, 14-month long trip to Lhasa in 1881, the accounts of which were initially kept secret, would become key ingredient of Britain's later attempt at bringing Tibet under the purview of colonial mapping and surveillance through the Younghusband expedition of 1903-04. Heavily edited by William Woodville Rockville, it was published in 1902 as the book *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet*.

Das's missions to Tibet were not without their consequences however. When the purpose of his journeys was discovered, all who assisted him were murdered, including the head abbot of Tashi Lhunpo monastery, whose body was dismembered and thrown into a river. The Younghusband Expedition of 1903-04 had led to a permanent straining in Anglo-Tibet relations. Das eventually settled down to a life of quiet retirement in Darjeeling, named his house 'Lhasa Villa' (a cottage which still stands today) and began compiling his monumental Tibetan-English dictionary. He also worked on translations of various Tibetan texts, which were serially brought out in the *Journals of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.

I would like to highlight here that Das's scholarship came out of a specific genealogy of knowledge production vis-à-vis Tibet. Such genealogy was generated by a network of individuals (from different parts of the world) some of whom proclaimed themselves as experts of Tibetan language and culture. From Moravian Christians to Norwegian missionaries, to British ethnographers to Bengali intellectuals such as Das, all of them fed into the production of this knowledge-archive apropos Tibet. Further, the locational specificity of Darjeeling as a border zone with affinities to Tibet and with living communities of Tibetans seemed to give their scholarship an added degree of authenticity. This network further extended to local individuals, from Ugyen Gyatso to Kazi Dawa Samdup to Laden La, individuals who often played a role akin to that of native informants and whose contributions to the process of compilation of this linguistic archive were often elided or overlooked.

I would also like to dwell a bit on Sarat Chandra Das's own subjective position. Das can be read as the product of a definitive colonial pedagogy, as a Bengali intellectual who easily fitted the role that the colonial modes of knowledge-making necessitated of him. These vast networks of knowledge production that were synonymous with the imperial fantasy of an ultimate archive recruited various indigenous subjects, at least towards the later part of the colonial period, thereby inaugurating a range of new subject positions— from indigenous informants to local scholars who straddled the worlds of colonial scholarship and local knowledge.

I shall now move on to a recent moment, that of the establishment of the Himalayan Tibet Museum on Gandhi Road in 2015. There have been various shifts in the ways in which Tibet continues to feature within Western imagination— particularly post Chinese occupation of Tibet, the escape of the Dalai Lama to India and the setting up of the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamshala. Particularly vis-à-vis museums, two polarizing responses need to be noted. Harris in her book describes how China has tended to present Tibet in its entirety as a museum “to proudly display the evidence that Tibet is its ‘inalienable’ territory” and has had no qualms with the perpetuation of Tibetan culture “so long as it is safely confined to the domains of artworks and museums.”¹³ By contrast, museums set up in India by Tibetans in exile, have tended to be implicated within a strong nationalist consciousness, showcasing a history of persecution, thereby formulating a counter-narrative to the one disseminated by China.

Museums have always been spaces for certain modes of ordering history, modes which are by default linked to structures of power and knowledge production. Stephen Bann coins the term ‘Poetics of the museum’ to refer to the “formative procedures and principles” which determine “the type of a particular museum, and relate these procedures to the epistemological assumptions” of the period. Bann goes to argue how the practices of museology and collecting at any given point of time gestures towards the “historical mindedness” of that age.¹⁴ Tony Bennett likewise writes regarding museums that these spaces of representation effectuate a “construction of a temporally organized order of things and peoples”, an order which assumes that of “a totalizing one, metonymically encompassing all things and all peoples in their interactions through time.”¹⁵ Such construction of a projected order is almost always by default linked to an exercise in power. For China, as Harris observes, the establishment of the Tibet Museum at Lhasa on October 5, 1999, was linked to a certain form of ordering of Tibet which treated Tibetan cultures as “relics” in a “deactivated sense”, rendered “lifeless by their inclusion in a secular institution, and neutralized by their insertion in a set of closed discourses dictated by the state.”¹⁶ Such a discourse treats Tibetan cultures as long deceased which in turn substantiates a justificatory rhetoric for occupation (itself read as “peaceful liberation”). By contrast, the Tibet Museum in McLeodganj which was designed by Japanese architect Kazuhiro Nakahara and established in April, 2000,

¹³ Harris, *The Museum on the Roof of the World*, 9-12.

¹⁴ Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 78-79.

¹⁵ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 79.

¹⁶ Harris, *The Museum on the Roof of the World*, 185.

presents a counter-politics of museumization. The Tibet Museum in Mcleodganj is thematically divided into sections, highlighting particular narratives – “Invitation,” “Resistance,” “Destruction,” “Sinicization,” “Escape,” and “The Tibetan Community in Exile.” By thus ordering its poetics, this museum seeks to project a powerful nationalist rhetoric and a sentiment for a homeland that has been occupied.

The Himalayan Tibet Museum in Darjeeling presents an altogether different poetics. Established in 2015 as part of the Manjushree Centre for Tibetan culture, the museum, located on Gandhi Road, seeks to project a certain kind of cultural memory. Rather than being implicated within a nationalist consciousness, the museum creates a certain ordering of objects which tends to show Tibetan cultures as part of a larger lived continuum, instead of being part of a deceased past. The museum tends to highlight everyday objects in their ritualistic aspect, instead of treating them as ossified cultural exhibits. It houses a number of kundas or statues of Tibetan deities. Besides, it also places them within a *chyosyom*/ Tibetan Buddhist altar, thereby ascribing them a certain sacrality, instead of denuding them of their ritual trace and rendering them as *migyuls*/ordinary objects. Unlike the Tibet Museum in Lhasa, where objects are ordered in a fashion in which they are completely denuded of their sacredness and rendered ‘profane’, the Himalayan Tibet Museum in Darjeeling locates these objects as artifacts of living cultures and religion. Also, unlike the Tibet Museum in Mcleodganj, the politics of which is derived from its polemical and nationalist positioning, the one in Darjeeling seeks to also perpetuate a cultural memory, one that is sustained by living communities of the Tibetans and Bhutias of the Eastern Himalayas. It may be important here to foreground the fluidity of “contact zones” such as Darjeeling and Kalimpong as also the erstwhile kingdom of Sikkim. Although geographically falling within the territorial purview of the nation-state of India, these spaces seem to treat the notion of borders as always already porous. Sikkim and Kalimpong/Darjeeling, when pitched against such a framework, shows a trans-Himalayan demographic continuity, one that bears distinct cultural affinities with Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, with Tibetan Buddhism playing a dominant role in shaping the forms of cultural practice. Unlike Dharamshala which became the capital of the Tibetan government in exile, Darjeeling and Kalimpong have always had settlements of Tibetan people and their coreligionists, the *Bhutias*, who, along with the *Kiratis*, the *Lepchas* and Nepalese people, have shared histories of continuous cultural and religious transaction and appropriation. The poetics behind the museumization of Tibet in Darjeeling, therefore, has greater focus on projecting and disseminating a continuing cultural memory of a lived community rather than a memory of loss and disenfranchisement.

As a conclusion, let me attempt to string together these two moments – the birth of Tibetology towards the close of the 19th century and this moment in the 21st century which has seen the creation of different forms of representational spaces vis-à-vis Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan cultural forms. Tibetology at least in its foundational phase, directly drew upon colonial modes of knowledge-production, straddling a vast range of activities, from collecting to travelogue writing to photography to linguistic scholarship. In addition to the Western ethnographers, linguists, missionaries and entrepreneurs, it also relied heavily upon local scholarship – not just of Bengalis like

Sarat Chandra Das but also of the likes of Lama Gyatso and Dawa Samdup. It co-opted them, not as active actants in producing specific forms of knowledge vis-à-vis Tibet, but rather as passive players, whose agencies became eventually relegated to a marginal, almost absent status. Additionally, it grew not out of the centres of colonial power, but rather out of marginal spaces – the border zones of empire. These moments of earlier colonial pedagogy vis-à-vis Tibet seem replicated within a present poetics of museumization as seen in the case of the Himalayan Tibet Museum in Darjeeling. This museum has a section commemorating personalities such as Sarat Chandra Das, and other figures like Rahul Sansritayana, Nicholas Roerich, Gendün Chöphel and Csoma de Coros. By thus foregrounding these figures, the museum seems to locate its poetics directly within this earlier pedagogy of scholarship and archive-making. The museum also destabilizes any hegemonic framing of a homogenous Tibetan community and identity, by foregrounding spaces such as Darjeeling and Kalimpong with their longer histories of lived Buddhist practice. While locating themselves as part of a larger trans-Himalayan sacred geography of Buddhism, these spaces also project their regional histories and specificities, often different from the political construction of an exile identity centred around Dharamshala.

