

Embattled Frontiers and Emerging Spaces

Transformation of the Tawang Border

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In the years following the India–China War (1962), Tawang underwent a significant makeover. In 1964, the Indian government sanctioned the construction of the Nehru Gompa monastery to commemorate Jawaharlal Nehru’s visit to Tawang. Nehru Gompa is a symbol of the new relations between the Indian state and the Tibetan Buddhist institutions that were forged in the early postcolonial period in India’s North East Frontier. This paper looks at the changing dynamics between the Tawang Monastery, the local population, and the state in this context, and focuses on how the Tawang Monastery negotiated with the local administration through the medium of official correspondence.

In 1964, in the aftermath of the India–China War of 1962, the Indian government sanctioned the construction of the Nehru Gompa (Tib Dgon Pa) monastery to commemorate the visit of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, to Tawang, a far-flung border in north-east India. Locals narrate how stones and bricks from an older *kakaling*, a square arch that served as an entryway to the area, were used as the foundation for the new monastery. The Nehru Gompa, originally built as a *kakaling*, was later rebuilt as a monastery, and the charge of its maintenance was given over to Tawang Monastery, which controls the other monasteries in the area. Nehru Gompa or Nehru Dolma Lakhang now stands in Tawang’s Nehru Market area as a symbol of the new relations between the Indian state and the Tibetan Buddhist institutions that were forged in the early postcolonial period in India’s North East Frontier Agency (NEFA).

In the postcolonial history of Tawang, 1962 was a watershed year. Having more or less continued the policy of loose administration begun by the British colonial government in frontier areas till the early 1950s, the Indian government rethought its administrative strategies from a security perspective as boundary-related disputes with China intensified. This meant establishing political offices and agents in untouched frontier regions, and the first paramilitary post was set up in Tawang in 1951. Tawang was of particular strategic importance, as it was coveted by the Chinese state which saw it as an extension of Tibet; it had been under Tibetan rule for more than three centuries. When border tensions blew up during the Sino–Indian War, offices, residences, and monasteries were temporarily evacuated as Chinese troops overran Tawang for two months (from October to December in 1962).

The war hastened the process of state consolidation in Tawang. As the Indian government set up military bases and administrative quarters in Tawang, cooperatives, retail stores, and other civic infrastructure also followed in a state-enabled urbanisation process; the aim was to cater to the needs of the military population and to the new administrative, business, and professional classes who started trickling in from the early 1970s. So, how did the people of Tawang respond to the new government and to the politico-economic and demographic changes it initiated?

This paper looks at the changing dynamics between the Tawang Monastery, the local lay population, and the state in this changing context, and focuses on how the Tawang Monastery negotiated with the local administration through the medium

I carried out the research for this paper in Tawang in May 2013. This was a field visit to Tawang following extended visits in 2008, 2009, and 2010. An initial draft was presented at the Asian Borderlands Research Network conference in Hong Kong (8–10 December 2014).

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of official correspondence. This, in turn, contributed to Tawang's "integration." I use the term integration to refer to the inclusion of Tawang in Indian political and economic institutions and its eventual cultural integration (Watson 2000).¹

While scholars have written about the role and agency of the state in fashioning border subjects (for example, Aggarwal 2004; Van Schendel 2005), I argue that the incorporation of Tawang into Indian political networks was caused not only to the deeds of an assertive state, but also by the recognition given to the Indian administration by the local elite—that is, high-ranking monks and the lay population.

Historicising the concept of "recognition," Charles Taylor (1994) wrote that individual and group identities rest on recognition and are always formed in dialogue with others. Ideally, equal recognition means that all individuals and groups are entitled to a uniform set of rights and immunities in the public sphere in modern democratic states. However, in most societies, some individuals or groups with historical disadvantages are denied proper recognition or are not recognised. Hence, Taylor argues that equal recognition should coexist with the politics of difference, so that historically marginalised communities are ensured protection by the state.

I apply recognition in reverse, in the sense that communities should be able to recognise the state as a legitimate presence in their political lives. The state also needs to earn recognition from the communities to which it extends its jurisdiction, and it attempts to do so through iterative (restating its goals) and performative (active staging of its presence by propagating cultural symbols, development goods, etc) means. I look at one process which enabled the communities of newly merged Tawang to recognise the Indian state. During the period of political transition, highly placed monk officials and village leaders in Tawang wrote petitions to the local administration with a variety of requests. The image of the Indian sovereign power acting through the local Tawang administration became entrenched in the minds of Tawang's public as the volume of official correspondence and government circulars grew.

Of course, the state presence in Tawang was not just enforced through official documents and bureaucratic outreach. Overt state-building measures such as militarisation, and more covert means such as the introduction of mainstream education and development programmes in the post-war period, helped the state to penetrate border regions (Gohain 2013).² In this paper, however, I highlight two aspects of the material basis for state formation in Tawang. First, on the one hand, material concerns forged (or forced) alliances amidst an expanding state apparatus, and on the other, the border population was driven by instrumental concerns to recognise the former state; second, the participation of border populations in the material technologies of governance—official documents and bureaucratic correspondence—facilitated local recognition of the new administration. This article draws on documents retrieved from the deputy commissioner's office in Tawang and, in particular, on archives of petitions for government grants addressed to the local administration.³

From Monastery Space to Administrative Base

Tawang is a town in the Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh in North East India, traditionally inhabited by the Monpa communities who are of the Tibetan Buddhist faith.⁴ Located on the borders between Indian, Tibetan, and Bhutanese territories, Tawang is famous for the Tawang Monastery which was established by Mera Lama in 1680 as a Gelugpa outpost in the 17th century sectarian wars between Tibet and Bhutan, at the initiative of the fifth Dalai Lama (Aris 1980). By decree of the Dalai Lama's office, and with an administration linked to the Tibetan government (Tib *bodgzhung*), the Tawang Monastery was authorised to collect taxes from Monpa villages in and around Tawang. Tawang and its adjacent district, West Kameng (together known as Monyul), were divided into administrative centres or *dzongs* (Tib *rdzong*, meaning fort or district), which were in charge of jurisdiction and tax collection. The present town of Tawang is located one kilometre away from the monastery. Monyul had three major dzongs, from south to north—Talung Dzong, Dirang Dzong, and Tawang Dzong or Gyanghar Dzong—where grains collected as taxes were stored and carried by compulsory or *corvée* labourers *u-la* (Tib *u lag*) from villages in a relay until they finally reached Tsona in Tibet, which served as the administrative headquarters of Monyul. Tawang Monastery deputed senior monks as *dzongpons* (officers) to the dzongs to oversee the collection of agricultural levies and to settle local disputes (Sarkar 1996). While people in other parts of what is now Arunachal Pradesh also paid taxes to some Tibetan private families (Grothmann 2012; Huber 2011), it was only in Monyul—and mainly through the Tawang Monastery—that the Tibetan state established systematic control.

British officer Captain Bailey, who, along with Captain Morsehead, was deputed to map the boundary between Tibet and India in 1913, gave an account of the relation between Monyul and Tibet (Bailey and Morsehead 1914; compare with *Approach Paper* nd; Sarkar 1996):

Mönyul is the comparatively low-lying district of Tibet[,] which is governed by the lamas of Tawang. The district is governed by a council of six[,] named *Trukdri*. They are the *Kenpo*, or Abbot of Tawang Gompa, another lama in a high position, two monks known as *Nyetsangs...* and two Tsöna [district in Tibet] *Dzongpöns*. In this way, the Tsöna *Dzongpöns* have a hand in the Government of Mönyul. In the summer when the *Dzongpöns* are at Tsöna they keep agents at Tawang to act for them but from November to April they themselves live at Tawang and send their agents to live in the cold climate of Tsöna. Under the *Trukdri* are the two *Dzongs*, Dirang and Taklung, each of which is held by two monks sent from Tawang who act together. The *Dzongpöns* of Taklung live at Amratala on the Assam border in grass huts during the trading season. (pp 41–42)

Tawang Monastery was the spiritual centre for all the adjoining areas of Tawang; it allotted specific roles to local people. Although traditionally located at the outskirts of settlements, monasteries were never self-enclosed units; they were bound to villages with organic ties (Goldstein 1989; Sarkar 1996). Shyo Basti (Tib *Shyo/Zhol* meaning lower part or that which is below in location), a village located just below Tawang Monastery—and still in existence today—was established during the construction of the monastery. As part of the

monastic tradition, a group of people settled down near the monastery premises to maintain it. The monastery, in turn, looked after the needs and problems of the people from Shyo Basti; the village and the monastery were engaged in what may be seen as a patron–client relationship. Other villagers also actively participated in the construction and maintenance of the monastery, provided food supplies, and supplied labour for services such as portage or u-la.

The affairs of Tawang Monastery were—and still are—managed by a governing council, Lhangye Khang, headed by the abbot. The office of *lopon* is next in the hierarchy after the abbot, and the *lopon* manages the monastery affairs in the abbot's absence. Indeed, when I interviewed Tawang Monastery's *Lopon Acharya Ngawang Norbu* in May 2013, my intermediary *Gelong Sangey Leta* introduced him as the “second abbot.” Other important office-bearers in the monastery administration are the *changzey* (the abbot's secretary), *dratsangbuk* (who looks after the properties of the monastery), and the *nyertsang* (who is responsible for collecting contributions from villagers and issuing provisions to monks based on their entitlement).⁵

Tawang Monastery has 13 subsidiary monasteries as well as two nunneries in the Tawang region.⁶ *Nehru Gumpa* was later added to the list of the original 12 branches. The abbot of Tawang Monastery appoints monks to each branch for a three-year period. The deputed monks have to take care of the monastery's affairs and, in return, the monastery supplies their provisions. Traditionally, villagers contributed foodgrains and other articles to sustain the monks (Sarkar 1996).⁷

In those pre-independence days, it was compulsory for each family in the surrounding villages of Tawang, which had three sons or more, to send their second or middle son, *bu sum barma* (Tib *bugsum barpa*), to become a monk. Breach of this custom resulted in community fines. Traditionally, each family had to contribute foodgrains to the Tawang Monastery twice a year—once in summer and once in autumn (*Approach Paper* nd). People who paid taxes in the form of grains were *khreipas* (Tib *khralpa*). During the time of the monastery's founder, *Mera Lama*, each taxpaying family's landed property was measured in terms of *khreikang*, a local unit of land measurement. Each householder had to pay a given amount of wheat, millet, or barley per *khreikang*, which varied according to the year or area. When the landed property of a householder was divided among heirs, the *khrei* was also proportionately shared. Families also had to provide firewood to the monastery in rotation and cultivate land belonging to the monastery, retaining a percentage of the produce (*Approach Paper* nd; Sarkar 1996).

This system continued until the early 20th century. When the Chinese Manchu general, *Chao Ehr-feng*, conducted some exploratory forays south of Tibet towards the NEFA in 1910–11, the British were alerted to the vulnerability of this border. As a result, officers *Bailey* and *Morsehead* were deputed to map the boundary between Tibet and British India in 1913. In 1914, British and Tibetan representatives met at the Shimla Convention to delineate the Indo–Tibetan boundary, the McMahon Line. According to this delineation, Tawang was included in India. However, as the Chinese representative refused to sign

the boundary agreement, the British were reluctant to actively engage in boundary demarcation. Thus, the Tibetan representatives of Tawang Monastery from Tibet continued to collect taxes from the Monpas.

For several years, Tawang had no dealings with the Indian government except for occasional encounters with the odd expedition of British officers—*Captain Neville* in 1914, *Ludlow* and *Sherriff* in 1934–35 and 1938, and *Frank Kingdon-Ward* in the 1930s, to name a few. Tawang remained de facto a part of Tibet. In February 1951 (almost four years after India's independence and in the context of an impending Tibetan defeat by Chinese forces),⁸ a paramilitary expedition to Tawang led by *Major Bob Khating* of the Indian Frontier Administration Services put an end to Tibetan tax collection and established the first Indian administrative post in the region.

In October 1962, Chinese troops attacked several posts on the western and eastern sectors of the Sino–Indian border (Lamb 1966).⁹ After the war ended, the Indian government sealed all border passages between Tawang and Tibet. Tawang was co-opted into the NEFA, a frontier tract that was initially composed of five divisions: *Kameng*, *Subansiri*, *Siang*, *Lohit* and *Tirap*. The office of the political officer, later renamed the deputy commissioner, governed each division. Tawang was made a subdivision of the *Kameng Frontier Division*, and the highest political post in Tawang was that of additional political officer, later renamed additional deputy commissioner. The Ministry of External Affairs administered the NEFA with the governor of Assam acting as an agent to the President of India. In 1972, NEFA became a union territory and was named *Arunachal Pradesh*. In 1987, *Arunachal Pradesh* was conferred full statehood; at present, it has 16 districts. Tawang became an independent district with its own deputy commissioner on 16 October 1984.¹⁰

Tawang's Makeover

In the years following the India–China War, Tawang underwent a significant makeover. The construction of new administrative quarters, the movement and settlement of Indian Army troops, and their occupation of local residential, forest, and grazing lands for use as housing, cantonment areas, and firing ranges reinvented Tawang as a military base. Earlier, Tawang Monastery and its networks constituted the dominant spaces of Tawang by defining duties, roles, tenancy, and tax. However, with the co-option of the monastery into Indian politico-economic circuits, new networks replaced old ones. At present, the abbot of Tawang Monastery holds the highest office; this position was previously appointed by Tibet, but is now appointed by the Dalai Lama from Dharamsala, in direct consultation with the Government of India (*Approach Paper* nd, emphasis mine).

During this phase of political transition, the monastery administration negotiated with the Indian administration for material assistance. While it had previously funded its religious and commercial supplies needs primarily through taxes and partly from Tibet's treasuries, Tawang Monastery now had to rely on grants from the Indian administration to meet

the basic needs of its inmates and to conduct rituals. In 1996, Sarkar wrote about the changed economic situation of the monastery: “With the establishment of the [Indian] administration, these dzongs had ceased to function and the loss of the tax is made up nowadays from other sources and internal adjustments” (1996: 15).

In this respect, writing petitions was an important means of gaining access to the state. It was not as if official correspondence came into existence through the dealings with the Indian state. Writing, not speech, characterised earlier official interactions between the Tibetan government and Tawang. As Lopon Acharya said, “Till 1951, the Tibetan Dzongpon ... used to be based at Gyanghar. All orders sent from Tibet would come in two copies, one to Tawang Monastery and the other to the Dzongpon at Gyanghar. Tawang Monastery had many branches up to Udalguri in Assam...” Copies of all the orders that came to Tawang Monastery from Tibet were sent to these branches. The lama in charge of the branches would communicate the order to those working in the *gompa* under him. Officers at Gyanghar Dzong would also send copies of the orders to the villages. All such circulars were sent from Tawang Monastery (personal interview with Lopon Acharya, 27 May 2013).

In postcolonial India, however, petition writing in the language of modern bureaucracy was a “technology of governmentality” (Gupta 2012) through which the communication and interaction between populations and the state were regulated by standardised rules. The monastery elite as well as local populations discovered that they could now take recourse to writing in English, the official language, and adopt the bureaucratic format of government forms and applications to reach out to the state. As village councils (*mangmas*) and village heads discovered that they could directly communicate with state offices, they also drafted appeals to the Tawang administration for infrastructural support for their local cultural institutions.

It was not writing per se, but official documentation that was an issue—the legacy of British colonial rule. Scholars have pointed out how bureaucratic documents have a “generative capacity”; statistics, data, and reports act as originators (Gupta 2012; Hull 2012; Mathur 2012). But documents are also central to how the state is imagined and encountered by subject populations, and how state presence materialises (Sharma and Gupta 2006). As people participate in the culture of official documentation—file culture, paperwork, proforma filling, and so on—they allow themselves to be part of a shared identity that is created, coordinated, and controlled by the exchange, routing, and circulation of documents (Hull 2012). Thus, by engaging with the document culture of the Indian state, the people of Tawang made themselves its subjects.

Writing petitions for grants had another material outcome—petitions were oriented towards material objectives—for securing financial aid for monastic sustenance and for new cultural projects, such as the building of monastery schools and cultural committees. The Indian state responded by giving due consideration to these applications and supplications for

grants. This was not simply a way of carrying out patrimonial responsibilities towards its marginal frontier inhabitants, but Indian administrators also understood that promoting local cultural institutions was key to holding onto a still slippery border.

Custom, Conflict, and Change

At the turn of the 21st century, weighed down by the pressure to keep up with the changing times, Tawang Monastery underwent major renovations and a rehaul of its functioning system in 2003. The “Approach Paper for the Workshop on Traditional System and Functioning of Tawang Monastery” brought out by Tawang Monastery during this time focused on the challenges that the monastery had faced since its political control shifted from Tibetan to Indian hands. Among other issues such as greater disciplining of the monk population, the approach paper discusses the need to open new channels of communication with the district administration. This included proposals to have a member of the monastery regularly attend meetings convened by the district administration, which centre on seeking financial help from the Government of India to construct a museum and preserve the monastery’s antique treasures. There were also proposals to improve the link between the monastery and the laity by involving villagers in the running of the monastery—by appointing and training people from the surrounding villages to be caretakers of some branches of Tawang Monastery. The problems addressed and the solutions provided in the approach paper were not new; they had originated in the 1950s—in the period of Tawang’s political transition. With the loss of Tibetan networks, former equations between the monastery and the laity also shifted. Tawang Monastery lost its authority over former taxpaying subjects who were freed from previous compulsory levies and subsequently became lax in performing traditional duties and services to the monastery.

While doing my doctoral fieldwork (conducted in different phases from 2008 to 2013), elderly Monpa villagers told me that the local people were glad when Indian forces got rid of the Tibetan tax officials in 1951. The Tibetan tax collector is remembered as a cruel master in Tawang’s collective memory. Older people in their 80s recalled the dread that the Tibetan tax collectors would arouse in them when they arrived for collection. Punishments ranged from beatings, starvation, and jail time for even the most trivial follies such as a failure to feed the horses on time.

A locally published biography of Pema Gombu, an influential man from one of the aristocratic clans of the Lhou administrative subdivision and former head of the Lhou village in Tawang, presents a description of how the people of Tawang supported Major Bob Khating’s expedition to Tawang.¹¹ Pema Gombu, who was 89 years old when I interviewed him and has since passed away, mentioned that he had guided the Indian forces through Tawang when they had first arrived. A common local narrative is that the Monpas had requested the Indian state to occupy their lands because they wanted to be free of Tibetan rule. While I am not completely sure whether the

discursive element of “request”—whereby the Monpas’ wishes are supposedly taken into account—is a later addition to local legend mediated by official representations, it hints at the fissures that existed between the local lay people and an extractive monastic system.

As the Sino–Indian War raged in the mountainous terrain of Tawang in the winter months of 1962, an incident took place that revealed the extent to which the breach between the monastery and the laity had widened. On 24 October 1962, taking advantage of the wartime disorder, some local villagers looted Tawang Monastery of many valuable items, including sacred gifts to deities comprising priceless gems, silk robes, gold, and diamonds. As the government had evacuated the monastery, looters seized the opportunity to pilfer even the personal property of many monks. When confronted later, many of these villagers refused to return the items they had stolen (Arunachal Pradesh State Archives 1962).¹² The incident weakened the monastery’s position in local society, both spiritually and financially, while exposing the declining hold that the monastery had on the local people.

A government official, Shri Chakma, touring Tawang in 1972, noted the changing relations between monasteries and the lay people:

It was pointed out by the Rinpoche [abbot] that the gompa [monastery] is finding difficulties in maintaining the day to day activities of the monastery because of lacking interest on the part of the villagers in the Tawang area. In the past [there was] material assistance by way of foodgrains, firewood, etc. to maintain the livelihood of the inmates of the monastery. With the advent of our administration and the expansion of schools, agriculture, and other obligations such as provision of porters for carrying loads, provision of labo[ur]ers for construction of roads, buildings, and various other government purposes, the religious life of the people are gradually disturbed and traditional pattern of activities seriously eroded. This is a very serious problem for the people of Tawang region, and I thought it worth bringing to the notice of the Administration and the members of Pradesh Council/Zilla Parishad.¹³

Weakening Influence of Buddhist Institutions

As the Indian administration grew in prominence, ideas of democratic citizenship rather than that of a theocratic order came to define social roles and membership. Previous hierarchies loosened as lay people observed high-ranking monks, whom they held in awe, submit to the local administration. As more and more non-Buddhist people moved into the area to fulfil functions of security, governance, trade, and education, local Monpas began interacting on a much wider cultural canvas, and the overarching influence of local Buddhist institutions slowly began to unravel.

During Tibetan rule, law and order situations under the jurisdiction of Tawang Monastery were addressed by high-ranking lamas, and disputes in Tawang were either settled by Tibetan dzongpons or, if the disagreements were larger, they were taken to the Lhasa courts. In cases of failure to perform duties or deliver taxes, errant villagers were disciplined with straightforward measures such as caning or imprisonment. With the declining influence of Tawang Monastery in the politico-economic domain, civil disobedience mounted, and monastery authorities turned to the new sovereign power to resolve these problems.

They appealed to the Indian state to bring to account villagers who did not fulfil their duties as monastery subjects.

In a letter to the additional deputy commissioner of Tawang, monastery authorities protested that the people of Kharteng village were violating their traditional duties by not carrying grains to Kharteng Gompa (an affiliate of Tawang Monastery), as was expected of them, and were instead diverting them to another village. The Tawang district administration responded by holding a meeting with the villagers of Kharteng to remind them of their traditional duties. The monastery also turned to the Indian administration to settle or negotiate private disputes and to enforce discipline among monks by sending Central Reserve Police Forces to the monastery.¹⁴

Conversely, villagers also turned to the state as a medium through which to negotiate with the monastery. Official correspondence addressed to the additional deputy commissioner in 1973–74 shows how in the changed social context, villages (Kharman, Gispu and Mago-Thingbu) tried to bargain for greater leeway in discharging traditional services by offering cash in lieu of construction labour in the monastery.¹⁵

Besides calling on the state to adjudicate conflicts, monastery authorities also requested financial aid from the state to carry out cultural activities. For example, during the previous Tibetan regime, public funds and levies were used to finance the annual monastic festival, Torgya. Expenses for the Dzungyur festival, celebrated every third year, were met with taxes levied from the Talung Dzong area; the first two days of the Monlam Chenmoh ceremony, performed in the monastery in the first Monpa lunar month (Dawa Dangpo), were funded by taxes from Dirang (Sarkar 1996). When this source was extinguished as a result of political change, Tawang Monastery appealed to the local administration. In 1974, the monastery asked the administration for extra security forces and continuous electricity supply as well as costumes for *cham* (Tib religious ceremonial dances held in the monastery).

The original *cham* dress (dress for lama dance) was provided to Tawang gompa by [the] Tibet govt. [sic] when this region was under Tibetan region ... after that few items had been replaced by our admin. [sic] In general, the dance dresses now used by the lamas during the Tarja [Torgya] are really tattered and miserable and require replacement to keep the prestige of the gompa and admin. [sic] because this gompa is now more or less maintained by this administration.¹⁶

Deprived of their earlier sources of sustenance, high-ranking monks had to rely on the new government to maintain their existing lifestyles. An official letter (1973) shows how the abbot of Tawang Monastery, Rigya Rinpoche, sought government funds for transportation for his pilgrimage and a private house that he could use as a meditation retreat:

[A]t present, I am staying in the monastery itself. But sometime[s] I have to stay away from [the] population for meditation ... I decided to construct a house of my own which can be used for meditation mandir cum residence ... I will be grateful if administration can help me in this respect.¹⁷

The monastery administration was not the only entity that used formal grant applications to generate funding. As a letter from a village council attests, rural people were also quick to

recognise this new and democratic source of income. With the establishment of village councils and panchayati raj institutions in 1965, prominent villagers and village heads could directly negotiate with state authorities in their capacities as resource people to get grants to renovate village or local gompas. As awareness about the state's interest in keeping cultural institutions alive grew, many of these men requested and were granted funds for community activities.

Most requests from lay people for financial help were either to revive dying customs or renovate decaying cultural structures. One of the first proposals of this kind, which was submitted under the cultural grant category in 1975–76, was in support of the Choekor festival (Tib *Choskor* meaning cycle of teachings, texts). During the festival, lamas and lay representatives from every village carried sacred Buddhist scriptures from Tawang Monastery in procession around all the villages to ensure good fortune and plentiful crops. Each village provided the procession participants with food and drink in temporary shelters; the money to buy food rations and construct shelters was requested from the local administration. There were also several petitions for grants to rebuild village gompas. In response to such requests, in 1978, the local administration sanctioned a total of ₹93,938 to renovate 10 gompas that came under Lumla, an administrative section in Tawang.

As the relations between the monastery, state, and laity evolved, civil society organisations arose to mediate the relations between the state and the monastery, and formed the basis of an emerging public sphere (Habermas 1991).¹⁸ In Tawang, the monastery was initially an all-enveloping entity, functioning within the theocratic organisation of the Tibetan state. Public and private interests fused with regard to the operation of monasteries under the religious government of Tibet. Tawang Monastery claimed absolute rights over its subjects and there was no civil society force to question these claims. But with the dilution of the monastery's powers, and its absorption into the new democratic administration, the situation was reversed—the monastery was now on the side of civil society in the state–civil society divide, and it required its own mediating organisations.

A new civil body, the Tawang Monpa Cultural Society, was inaugurated on 27 July 1974. Fifty prominent Monpa elders attended the inauguration, including representatives of different subdivisions of Tawang, the abbot of Tawang Monastery, lamas, panchayat members, and *gaonburas* (village heads). It was agreed that the Tawang Monpa Cultural Society will make a joint decision with monastery authorities regarding any disciplinary action to be taken against monastery employees. While the pattern of monastic discipline would continue as was custom, if the need for change arose, senior monks, panchayat members, and *gaonburas* would discuss the matter. This civil society organisation initially worked as the public relations unit of the monastery,¹⁹ but gradually widened its focus to include other activities.

The various forms of collaboration between the monastery, civil society, and state were especially visible in the building and operation of Tawang Monastery School, which came into being in 1977–78 thanks to grants from the Arunachal Pradesh

government. When a political officer in Tawang observed that people preferred to send their children to the newly set up government schools instead of to the monastery, he conferred with the abbot of Tawang Monastery to discuss solutions. Both parties recognised that the monastery would have to reform its traditional curriculum by invigorating it with modern subjects to attract students. In 1980–81, the monastery administration obtained government funds to construct a school and a hostel for students.²⁰

Bartering Border Loyalties

The postcolonial transformations of Tawang call to mind Peter Sahlins' (1991) classic study on the formation of the France–Spain border in Cerdanya, a border region in the Pyrenees ranges. Sahlins shifts his focus between the state/centre and the local Catalan rural society to show how the border was not only the result of state manoeuvres, but was also actively shaped by local elites and rural peasants, who alternated between Catalan and French national identities at different moments to further their own interests. Thus, the construction of a “national” identity among the border people was not a simple imposition from the centre or a top-down “Frenchification” process. Rather, it was a dialogical process, wherein local inhabitants actively participated in fashioning their identities as Frenchmen as opposed to Spaniards.

The integration of Tawang into the Indian state cannot entirely be captured through relations of dominance and resistance between the centre and the areas at the periphery. The reorientation of Tawang from the Tibetan to Indian government was not a completely state-directed process. It is clear that deliberate calculations were involved, based on the responses from the local elite and lay people; they were not passive recipients of the policy, but worked to gain leverage in the form of material aid from the new administration in exchange for recognising Indian sovereignty.

The state acknowledged these appeals for material assistance as a tactical measure. Michael De Certeau (1984) treats “tactics” and “strategies” as opposites. He states that strategies are the forthright, forceful, and well-formed ways of ruling that the strong employ to have their way; on the other hand, tactics are “weapons of the weak,” a kind of dissimulation where dominated people momentarily inhabit the spaces of the dominant in a “fragmentary merging” to win temporary gains. Here, I extend De Certeau's conceptualisation to define tactics as not just the “weapons of the weak,” but as the tools utilised by the dominant to manufacture a hegemonic consensus. In managing subject populations, states frequently combine strategy with tactical measures to build a consensus.

I have discussed previously how state strategies for incorporating Tawang into India have included the physical settlement of military personnel and the construction of cantonments. Additionally, symbolic forms of occupation have included changing Tibetan area names to Hindi names. Hindi names, mostly given by the military, co-opt Tawang into the Hindi–Indian cultural universe (Gohain 2013).²¹ On the other hand, state tactics in Tawang comprise embracing symbols

and institutions of Tibetan Buddhism; in doing so, the state manoeuvres an eventual integration through the temporary adoption of others' symbols and spaces. Thus, the Tawang War Memorial, which is dedicated to the 2,420 Indian servicemen who died in the 1962 Sino-Indian War, is a large white Buddhist stupa, complete with prayer wheels adorned with the Pali script. The tribute to local culture in the architecture is a way to garner local sympathy for the national military by appropriating Tibetan Buddhist cultural symbols. In using tactics, the state does not blatantly advertise dominant cultural symbols in the public sphere; its approach to secure hegemonic consent is subtler.

In other border areas, the state has occasionally attempted soft cultural imperialism to propagate national or dominant symbols. Aggarwal (2004) describes how the Sindhu Darshan Festival was inaugurated in Ladakh in 1997 at the specially constructed *Sindhu Ghat* on the banks of the river Indus. Since its inauguration, there has been a *yatra* (pilgrimage) to this location every year in June. During this festival, the river Indus is worshipped, flags hoisted, and hymns chanted to "Mother India." I had not observed festivals of this kind or scale in Tawang in the course of my fieldwork. However, state patronage of local Buddhist institutions and cultural programmes is becoming increasingly more visible. One may perceive the Indian state's promotion of activities and organisations that preserve Tibetan Buddhist culture in Tawang as a tactical move to earn loyalty in a region with border disputes. Further, some nationalist narratives argue that Buddhism is an indigenous offshoot of Hinduism, even though many scholars disagree (for example, Omvedt 2003). This view of Buddhism has been used to mobilise nationalist pride amongst marginal communities in India. The mushrooming of Vivekananda Kendra schools in Arunachal Pradesh, which adopt a "culture-based" curriculum that emphasises a blend of Buddhist cultural preservation, nationalism, and patriotism, is just one instance of the attempt to seamlessly assimilate Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indian nationalism.²²

In 2009, the Department of Karmik and Adhyatmik Affairs (DOKAA) (Tib *Chos-rig*) was created by the Arunachal Pradesh government to look after the religious and cultural affairs of the communities of Tawang and West Kameng. Its objectives included the maintenance and construction of monasteries, renovation

of Buddhist pilgrimage sites, and providing support to the traditional Bhoti language and Sowa Rigpa medicine system.²³ The first chairperson of DOKAA, the 13th Tsona Gontse Rimpoche (the monk and former minister), was very active in ensuring Buddhist cultural preservation and founded the movement for a Mon Autonomous Region in 2003, before his untimely death in 2014. In 2012, the three-day Tawang Festival to celebrate Mahayana Buddhism was first held. Since then, it has been celebrated annually in April. The current chairperson of DOKAA continues to organise activities to preserve and restore Buddhist sites and monuments in Tawang and West Kameng with the active support of the state government.

The current state sponsorship of Tibetan Buddhist cultural preservation is not simply an avenue for cultural domination, nor is the revival of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural toolkit a show of cultural resistance by the marginalised. Rather, these are the results of collaborations between the Indian administration and the local political and religious elite. The willingness of the state to entertain pleas for grants-in-aid in the immediate post-Independence period was a similar tactic.²⁴ Alert to the fact that "the loyalty of the border peoples has always to be earned" (Nanda 1982: 8),²⁵ the state dispensed cultural grants in return for loyalty. Then, as now, the state did not invent the idea of bartering aid for loyalty, but developed it as a tactical response to local appeals.

In the period after the Sino-Indian War, the Indian state asserted its presence in Tawang through the recognition that the border people gave it. The monastery elite and local people not only recognised the new sovereign power, but also submitted to it to secure material benefits. The state fashioned new spaces that symbolically built a symbiotic relationship between itself and the Tawang frontier; the Nehru Gompa, with which I began this paper, was such a space. While the interior of the monastery is like any other—with Buddhist statues, the Dalai Lama's portrait, and *mandalas*—the entrance has a portrait of Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter, the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, on its walls. In addition, there are marble busts of Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and her son and political successor, Rajiv Gandhi, installed on the left side of the courtyard. The Nehru Gompa remains a symbol of the emerging relations between the border people and the Indian state in Tawang.

NOTES

1 Watson (2000) uses integration instead of assimilation to speak of nationalist co-option, because unlike assimilation, which brinks on the denial of distinct cultural identities, integration accepts differences between the "parts" but as included in the national "whole." In India's case, while integration with a multicultural spirit portrays India as a "composite culture"—where diversity is not annihilated, but unified through fusion—such integration is impaired by the clause of allegiance to a national concept, primarily defined by the majority culture. Integration, although more nuanced than assimilation, also eventually makes demands for subordinate existence in minority cultures and assumes that the latter would prioritise a commitment to the

national goal over their ethnic and religious allegiances.

2 I have dealt with state and military practices in the Tawang frontier in my PhD dissertation, currently under revision as *Himalaya Bound: Culture, Politics, and Imagined Geographies in India's North East Frontier* (University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

3 The archive consisted of several faded blue government files in unsystematic piles on the floor against the walls of a small dusty room in the deputy commissioner's office in Tawang. I am grateful to the deputy commissioner, Abhishek Deb, for granting me permission to access these files. Many government files were either destroyed in the 1962 war or were moved to safer central locations, but those that were allowed to remain included correspondence,

mostly relating to petitions for grants between monks, lay people, and the local administration from 1960 to 1989.

4 The Monpas are not a homogeneous group; they consist of different communities that are split based on language, custom, and traditions. On the basis of language alone, four main (oral) language groups can be identified: Tawang Monpa, Dirang Monpa, Brokeh, and Lish.

5 Sonam Tsering, my friend from Tawang who was social cultural officer (SCO) in the Tawang deputy commissioner's office in 2007 when I visited, gave me the "Approach Paper for the Workshop on Traditional System and Functioning of Tawang Monastery" (nd). He told me that it was published around the time that Tawang Monastery was being renovated in 2003. However, there is no date on the approach paper,

and although it was probably published in 2003–04, I have listed it as nd (no date). My account of Tawang Monastery's administrative set up and present challenges are based on the approach paper, interviews with Lopon Acharya (27 May 2013), and Sarkar's (1996) work.

6 The 12 monasteries affiliated to Tawang Monastery were Sakti, Mormang, Manjing, and Khartung in the Lumla subdivision of Tawang; Urygelling, Changbu, Shormang, Khromten, Ariadung, Brakar and Kimmash in Tawang area; and Namchu in Dirang. See *Tawang Monastery* (Sarkar 1996) for interviews with Lopon Acharya Ngawang Norbu, the second abbot of Tawang Monastery (27 May 2013), and Lama Thuptan Tashi, Tawang Monastery (22 May 2013).

7 See Tawang Monastery (2007), <http://tawang-monastery.org/branch.php>.

8 On 25 October 1950, China announced its intention to militarily occupy Tibet: "People's Army units have been ordered to advance into Tibet to free three million Tibetans from the imperialist oppression and to consolidate national defence on the western borders of China" (Bhargava 1964: 23).

9 In the eastern sector, which included the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh, the boundary dispute between India and China centred on the alignment of the McMahon Line. While the Indian government stuck to the colonially demarcated boundary, the Chinese government claimed almost 33,000 square miles south of the McMahon Line. There has been much debate in scholarly circles regarding the causes of the India–China War; while some attribute the war to Chinese expansionist and irredentist aims, others cite the aggressive attitude of Indian nationalist leaders. For more on this debate, see the writings of Neville Maxwell (1970), T S Murty (1971), and Sujit Dutta (2008).

10 From the website of the Tawang Deputy Commissioner's office: <http://tawang.nic.in/page14.html>.

11 *A Brief Biography of Shri Pema Gombu* (nd) from Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh. I acquired a copy from Pema Gombu's son, Urgen Tsering, the chairperson of Lhou Secondary School, Tawang.

12 "Tawang Monastery, Kameng Frontier Division" (1962): External Affairs Commissioner, NEFA, No PCT 73/63, Arunachal Pradesh State Archives.

13 "An Extract Copy of Tour Notes of Shri U Chakma" (for the period 14–22 October 1972): IFAS Security Commissioner, Tezpur, Arunachal Pradesh.

14 On 25 October 1950, China announced its intention to militarily occupy Tibet: "People's Army units have been ordered to advance into Tibet to free three million Tibetans from the imperialist oppression and to consolidate national defence on the western borders of China" (Bhargava 1964: 23).

15 File No 46 (1972): BDL No 3, Development Branch, 1970–79, pp 44–78.

16 "Dress for Tarjacham", Miscellaneous File (B), BDL No 2, 1970–1979, pp 47–65.

17 Extract of a letter from Rigya Rinpoche, Tawang Monastery abbot, to the Chief Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh, Shillong (24 October 1973).

18 Public sphere, as defined by Jürgen Habermas (1991), is the collective public opinion formed through rational and critical debate between civil society members, which then influences the workings of the state. The public sphere arose in Europe in 18th century bourgeois society when the private split from the public, unlike in the medieval period, when private life and public affairs overlapped in the life of the feudal lord. With the coming together of private individuals as a public force to articulate the needs of society against the state, the

public sphere also signalled the formal recognition of the state as an entity separate from civil society.

19 A letter from the chairman of the Tawang Cultural Society to All India Radio requesting a broadcast of the minutes of a meeting between civil society representatives and state administration demonstrates the public relations role that this organisation plays (31 July 1974).

20 Annexure III to Order No SO-13/76/PI (24 November 1980) contains the following announcement: Know all men by these presents that we Tawang Monastery School Committee, Tawang (society registered under Societies Registration Act, 1960), and having its office at Tawang in the state of Arunachal Pradesh [herein after called the obligors] are held and firmly bond to the President of India [herein after called the government] in the sum of [₹]65,100 only, well and truly to be paid to the government on demand and without a demur for which payment we formally find ourselves and successors and assigns by these presents. Signed this eighth day of January nineteen eighty one, whereas on the obligor's request, the government has as per AP govt. order no. SO-13/76/PI dated 24.11.80, ...agreed to make in favour of the obligors a grant of [₹]65,100. Signed by Chanzo Tashi, Secretary, Tawang Gompa Monastery School Committee
A similar bond was presented on 28 January 1980, where the Tawang Gompa Monastery School Committee acknowledged the receipt of ₹92,425.

21 See also Gohain and Grothmann (2015).

22 Interview with principal, Vivekanda Kendra School, Kitpi, Tawang (20 May 2013).

23 See <http://www.karmikadhyatik.in/about-us-2/>, accessed on 9 September 2016.

24 In 1979, the additional deputy commissioner of Tawang proposed the opening of a new office of social and cultural affairs because "In a sensitive border area like [the] Tawang Sub-division ... this steadfast adherence of theirs to religion has during the past years effectively withstood the onslaught of marauders from across the centuries thus symbolising their integrated nationality and religion."

25 Neeru Nanda joined as the first woman additional deputy commissioner of Tawang in 1974 and wrote this book based on her experiences in Tawang. She was a beloved administrator and people speak of her with great adoration, even today.

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