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#### 4c. Between Worlds: Guardians in Tibet as Agents of Transformation

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### Introduction

In a single step, one can cross the threshold of the Jokhang,<sup>1</sup> stepping from the bustle of the Barkhor market to the devout atmosphere inside, moving from a heady jumble of merchants, soldiers, tourists and townsfolk, of warrens and back alleys teeming with shops and the sharp cries of peddlers, to a world of monks, devotees and deities, of the heavy smell of yak butter lamps and the hushed steps of pilgrims. Watching over this threshold, and every such space in Tibetan temples are vibrant, ferocious guardians who mount a fierce watch over entering pilgrims. Vivid and horrific, laden with imagery, symbolism, and dynamism, these guardian deities were old friends - I had seen them in temples across Asia, from my native South India to China, from the crumbling caves of the ancient Silk Road to the shrines of modern Japan. Still, my encounter with the Tibetan guardian image was like no other: with a distinctly wrathful iconography featuring blazing eyes, brilliant colors, garlands of freshly severed heads, mythical weapons, and a furious bloodstained scowl, Tibetan guardians are singularly terrible apparitions.

Despite their prevalence in Tibetan Buddhism, guardian deities are defined by contradiction. They are at once inside and outside, sacred and mundane, demonic and divine, wrathful in a compassionate and peaceful religion. In the following pages, I will attempt to explore the complex role and function of guardians in Tibet as well as account for the paradoxes inherent in these ferocious guardians.

Guardian deities, I will argue, are agents of transformation. In the first section I define guardian deities, and illustrate a few of the complexities in their classification. I then

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<sup>1</sup> Jokhang Temple is one of the most famous Buddhist monasteries in Tibet. It is known as *Dazhaosi* in Chinese. -Perspective Editor.

discuss how guardians are marginalized, and mark transitions between the profane and the sacred in both mandala and in temples. In an effort to understand the liminal identity of guardians, we look to the myth of the demoness and the Jokhang. I hope to demonstrate that this beautiful tale describes the deep roots that contemporary Tibetan guardians have in the arcane traditions that existed before Buddhism. Finally, I will attempt to capture guardians in motion from demonic to divine by looking to the elaborate mythology in which they are embedded. We find time and again guardians change the spatial and religious axes in which they are embedded, and are themselves transformed by this process.

Like Lhasa itself, my case will revolve around the Jokhang temple, the spiritual center of Tibet. First built over 13 centuries ago by the famous king Songtsen Gampo, the Jokhang has subsequently been rebuilt numerous times.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, its art, architecture, and sculptures allow us to decode the palimpsest of Tibetan notions of guardianship. The primary text must be the fantastic guardian image – but I will draw upon a diverse array of disciplines, including anthropology, history, art history, and religious studies in order to unpack the guardian image and its supporting mythology.

We begin our journey at the antechamber of the Jokhang, where the gentle scrape of prayer blocks and soft murmur of chanting is in the air, mixing with the thick fragrance of incense from the giant brazier. Pilgrims from all corners of Tibet and beyond are gathered here, but few are looking at the giant *lokpalas*, or guardians of direction, painted in brilliant color on the walls flanking the threshold. Beyond are the mystical inner chambers of the Jokhang, adorned with compassionate Buddhas and gently smiling apostles – but for a moment, at least, we shall linger at the threshold.

### **A Brief Orientation**

The classification of guardian deities in Tibet is characterized by complexity. Both in India and in China, there are a few classes of guardians who fit neatly into categories, such as *dvarapala* - guardian of the gate, *lokpala* - guardian of direction, or *dharmapala* – guardian of duty. On the other hand, in Tibet, there are not only several classes of guardians, but also numerous intersections between diverse representations of Tibetan guardians and protective deities.

Despite their heterogeneity, guardian deities can easily be recognized by a combination of stereotypical location and wrathful features.<sup>3</sup> Typically, their facial features are 'wrathful', and it is possible to organize Tibetan deities strictly according to their demeanor. In his beautiful book, *Ruthless Compassion*, Robert Linrothe introduces the category of *krodha - vighnantaka* (in Sanskrit 'wrathful destroyer of obstacles'),<sup>4</sup> or wrathful deities. Guardians are often wrathful, and share specific iconographical elements. In *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, the classic compendium on the topic, Rene de Nebesky – Wojkowitz describes:

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Chan, *Tibet Handbook* Chico, Calif. : Moon Publications, 1994. p63

<sup>3</sup> Robert Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion: Wrathful Deities in early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art*. London : Serindia Publications, 1999. pp20 - 29

<sup>4</sup> Robert Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion*. p12

The wrathful protective deities are mostly described as figures possessing stout bodies, short, thick and strong limbs and many of them have several heads and a great number of hands and feet. The color of their bodies and faces is frequently compared with the characteristic hue of clouds, precious stones, etc...the mouth is contorted into an angry smile, from its corners protrude long fangs...the protruding, bloodshot eyes have an angry and staring expression and usually a third eye is visible in the middle of the forehead <sup>5</sup>

These are some of the features that typify guardian deities of Tibet. Many others, such as their bright color, the furious dance on the back of a pathetic creature, and the fire that rages behind them, are consistent with their ferocity and fierceness.

However, defining guardianship based strictly on wrathful iconography is problematic as wrathfulness has a wide scope in Tibetan religion. For example, relatively high status deities such as *Avalokitesvara* or *Manjushri* might have a wrathful form just as they have a compassionate form. Linrothe organizes the relationship between wrathful deities into a single diagram. Relative status is the key dependent variable that differentiates between the wrathful deities. Guardians are considered to be of lower status than other wrathful deities. The profane status of guardian deities often manifests itself in the placement of guardian deities: typically, guardians appear on the periphery, at thresholds, outer walls, flanking major deities, or in *gonkhangs*, special protector chapels on the outer kora of temples.

There are several classes of guardian deities, such as *lokpalas*, *dvarapalas*, and *dharmapalas*. Many of them have deep roots in India, which we shall see has great relevance in thinking about guardian deities of Tibet. The Indian guardians originated from the form of a *yaksa*,<sup>6</sup> a curious tutelary deity that predated Vedic culture. Guardian deities followed the trajectory of Buddhism as it spread to the Kushans (in present-day Afghanistan), across the expansive Silk Road and into China during the first millennium.<sup>7</sup> Though a developed conception of sacred space existed in China before the arrival of Buddhism,<sup>8</sup> there is little question that guardians arrived in their current form along with Buddhism via the Silk Road. Whether Tibetans first encountered Buddhism and its guardians upon their early ravages of central Asia, through intermittent official channels with China and India, or through a slow diffusion of ideas over the Himalayas remains unknown. However, there can be no mistake regarding the transformation that Buddhism effected upon Tibet.<sup>9</sup> Buddhist protective deities were central players in this fundamental

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<sup>5</sup> Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of Tibetan Protective Deities*. Gravenhange: Mouton, 1956. p6

<sup>6</sup>Robert Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion*. p46

<sup>7</sup> Edward Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism*.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Faure, "Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions". In *History of Religions*. University of Chicago Press. May 27, 1987 p 337 - p356

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Rhies, *Worlds in Transformation: Tibetan Art of Wisdom and Compassion*. New York : Tibet House in association with the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation : Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1999.

societal change. As in China, the guardians of Tibet arrived with Buddhism. However, I hope to demonstrate that the source of the current guardian image originates in the dialogue between Buddhism and indigenous Tibetan tradition.

### **At the Threshold**

In the Indian view, the threshold is a singular location, in suspension between inside and outside, as illustrated by the myth of Narasimhan, the fifth avatar of Vishnu. According to the myth, the king Hryanakasyipu meditated for several years in order to win the gods' favor, and thereby everlasting life. The gods refused to grant him immortality; instead, they restricted the conditions on his death. He could not be killed inside or outside, during day or night, by man or beast, or by weapon or natural causes. On the strength of these boons, Hryanakasyipu became arrogant and fearlessly terrorized his subjects. In response to the intense prayer of a young devotee, Vishnu returns to earth in the form of a man-lion, Narasimhan in order to kill the tyrannical king. Narasimhan cleverly takes Hryanakasyipu to the threshold at twilight, and kills him with his nails. The crux of the story is that Narasimhan is only able evade all the restrictions on the circumstances on Hryanakasyipu's death by looking in between the conventions of night and day, man and animal, weapon and hand, as well as inside and outside. The threshold, the site at which Narasihman kills Hryanakasyipu, is an interstitial place.<sup>10</sup>

Though this story is Indian, it reflects a conception of the threshold that is consistent in temples across Asia. As Bernard Faure observes, from a Chinese viewpoint of space and place, "The threshold in many local traditions, is a dangerous place, a focal point where space inverts... and Turner, among others, has stressed that liminal states and individuals are both ambiguous and dangerous."<sup>11</sup> In Tibet, whose temples and monasteries are, in part, inspired by both their Indian and Chinese counterparts,<sup>12</sup> the threshold is a definitively liminal place. The placement of guardian deities at the threshold, then, is indicative of their peripheral status as well as their ambivalence.

Guardians are also peripheral in mandala, the 'sacred circles' which are central to Esoteric (or Tantric) Buddhism.<sup>13</sup> As a 'geometric projection of the world reduced to an essential pattern',<sup>14</sup> mandalas portray everything from the sweep of life and time to stylized line patterns. Mandalas have diverse potential psychological and philosophical functions, and as renderings of Buddhist cosmos, offer deep insight on guardianship.

For instance, guardians, typically lokpalas, often appear in the outer rings of the concentric circles of mandala in their official capacity, keeping watch over the cardinal

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<sup>10</sup> I first read this story as a comic book in the infamous *Amar Chitra Katha*. However, you can find a version of this story at: [www.hindumythology.com](http://www.hindumythology.com).

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Faure, "Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions". p351

<sup>12</sup> David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*. New York, F. A. Praeger, 1968. P78

<sup>13</sup> Reginald A. Ray. *Mandala Symbolism in Tantric Buddhism*. PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973. p148.

<sup>14</sup>Giuseppe Tucci. *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala*. trans. Alan Houghton Brodrick. London: Rider, & Co, 1961. p25

directions. Even mandalas with no visible guardians retain the idea of a protected space: for example, the symbolic mandalas composed of concentric geometry, a design element is often alludes to guardians. Common representations include changes in color, or renderings of a charnel ground.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the fabled abodes of many guardian deities include the hallmark features of mandala. The lokapala Vaisravana lives "In the middle of the four lakes lying in the four cardinal points."<sup>16</sup> Dorje Shugden and is "surrounded by a protective circle of meteoric iron."<sup>17</sup> Both contain direct references to the directional matrix contained in mandalas, and the carving out of a protected circle.

At their heart, mandalas are protective structures. For instance, the traveling camps and the war camps of Tibet are arranged in mandalaic patterns. For instance, in Stein's *Tibetan Civilization*, it is possible to glimpse the Dalai Lama's traveling camp, strikingly reminiscent of mandala. The similarity is no coincidence: judging from Stein's account, early Tibetan camps are:

clearly comprised of concentric enclosures, for we are told of three successive gateways at a hundred paces distance from on another, *guarded by soldiers and sorcerers or priests* who escorted the visitor. In the center was a great standard with a high platform....the hierarchies lived at the center...with a throne and a statue of a protective deity...<sup>18</sup>

This description of a ninth century camp, recorded by the Chinese at the historic signing of a treaty with the Tibetans, is shot through with mandala. Like all mandala, we see concentric circles revolving around a clear axis. This description suggests that mandalas were practical protective enclosures; indeed their layered structures make utter sense as a fortification. Notable, the Tibetan traveling camps also feature 'thresholds,' gateways between successive enclosures, with human guardians mediating each gateway. The date (around 822 CE) puts the camp/mandala on the cusp of Buddhism encroachment on Tibet and invites speculation about how deeply rooted mandalaic thinking is in Tibet.

"A mandala delineates a consecrated superficies and protects it from invasion by disintegrating forces," wrote the 11<sup>th</sup> century sage Abhayakaragupta, an Indian scholar revered by Tibetans.<sup>19</sup> A demarcation between sacred and profane space, order and chaos is clear throughout mandala iconography; even the simplest of mandalas illustrate this idea. Even the most simplistic renditions of mandala manifest this concept. In line drawings of mandala from Tibet and even in China, there often are circular patterns of lines embedded in more intricate, convoluted patterns. Beyond the outermost rings of this mandala is a jumble of disordered, undulating lines, in sharp contrast to the mandala itself, which is comprised of rigid geometry.

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<sup>15</sup> This became clear to me through discussions with the proprietor of a mandala shop just behind the Jokhang, in Lhasa. I was able to discuss this with only while haggling over the price of a painting.

<sup>16</sup> Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* p72

<sup>17</sup> Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* p136

<sup>18</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. Stanford University Press, 1972. p119 (my italics)

<sup>19</sup> Lokesh Chandra, *Tibetan Mandalas*. New Delhi, India: Aditya Prakashan, 1995.

Mandalas create a polarity between protected and unprotected space, between sacred and profane, divine and demonic, order and chaos, tamed and wild. It is possible to extend this polarity along several axes, such as between heaven and earth, stillness and motion, passive and active, or masculine and feminine. The polarity that is set up between mandala and non-mandala space is central to understanding the nature of the worlds that guardians stand in between. With one foot in mandala space, and one foot outside of mandala, they are truly between worlds, the very worlds that the pilgrim crosses between when stepping over the threshold.

As one moves inward in a mandala, one progresses in discrete increments towards sanctity, order, passivity, divinity, or heaven, rather like ascending a stepladder. The concept of incremental progression is the where guardians become paramount in mandala. Guardian deities stand watch over the contact points, the 'thresholds', between the different levels of mandala. As Ray comments "the integration and hierarchical arrangement of [the mandala's] terrible deities [indicates] not only their fundamental importance to the Tantric process of transformation, but also to the different stages of awareness bound up within this process."<sup>20</sup> The guardian deities directly catalyze the transition between different levels, changing the untamed, disordered world to the consecrated space of mandala.

The Jokhang temple is no exception, and "encloses" the deity Jowo, around whom the entire temple revolves. The polarities of mandala are articulated in a pilgrim progress throughout the Jokhang temple. At the periphery, one encounters guardians, fiery, motive scrollwork, black frescoes, angry dancing demons and tiger skins. As one moved inward through successive thresholds, the artwork retreats not in color but in temper: gods and famous monks can be observed to offer blessings with tranquil expressions, until finally the intrepid pilgrim glimpses the ultimate compassionate smile of Jowo in the inner sanctum, and then returns to the melee of the world outside.

The guardians' role in the transformation of mandala is only the first level of their story, the first layer upon our palimpsest of guardianship. The Tibetan rendition of guardian deities encompasses more than articulations of consecrated space. To visualize these underlying layers of guardianship and engage their identity, we must look deeper at the Jokhang, not in space, but in time.

### **The Jokhang and the Demoness**

There is rumored to be a stone in the Jokhang that sounds like the sea. According to the legend, behind this stone is a passageway that leads to an ancient, subterranean lake.<sup>21</sup> In the Tibetan view, this lake, over which the entire Jokhang is built, is no ordinary body of water, but the heart of a gigantic demoness. The tale of the demoness, and how she was subdued is an organizing principle in thinking about the adoption of Buddhism in Tibet. The story accounts for the construction of the Jokhang and her sister temples, as

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<sup>20</sup> Reginald A. Ray, *Mandala Symbolism in Tantric Buddhism*. 194 - 195

<sup>21</sup> Chris Taylor, *The Lonely Planet: Tibet*. Hawthorn, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications 1995.

far afield as in Kham<sup>22</sup> and Bhutan and details the shift in religious favor in Tibet towards Buddhism. Primarily, it is a story of the transformation of Tibet and the fate of all guardian deities.

The tale goes something like this: Songtsen Gampo, the Tibetan king who played a major role in consolidating the power of the Yarlung Valley kings, wanted to build a worthy temple to enshrine the gifts which he received as part of his dowry from his marriage to the Chinese Princess Wencheng. She brought with her many fantastic treasures, including a magnificent Buddha statue, Jowo. Their original attempts to build a temple failed, being mysteriously undone at night. To determine the source of the trouble, the king and Princess Wencheng visited nearby Pabonka monastery and divined the presence of a supine demoness who inhabited the whole of Tibet.<sup>23</sup>

Upon perceiving the demoness, King Songtsen Gampo set up out to tame it. He determined that her heart was contained in a lake at the site of the present day Jokhang: The most important and vital landmark of the "*Srin-land*" is the "Plain of Milk" at Lhasa. It is of crucial importance, because this is the very spot where her heart-blood is pulsating. The three mountains which encircle the "Plain of Milk" denote her two breasts, and are her lifeline...Her subjugation is successfully achieved by the erection of Buddhist structures upon her body, at cardinal and other significant points. Having been pinned down by brute force, she is now completely immobilized, and the construction of the temples can begin: on her arms and legs, on her hips and shoulders, and on her knees and elbows, thirteen temples in total are raised. By erecting these edifices, the Jokhang, as the dominant structure-placed on top of her heart-her life force is repressed and she is pacified, but not defeated<sup>24</sup>

This story is one of taming, and subjugation. The fate of the *Srin mo* demoness<sup>25</sup> can only be seen as symbolic: but if this is a story of conquest, what is the element that is buckling under, and that which is forcing it down? One could construe the *Srin mo* demoness as a manifestation of the unruly, hostile elements of Tibet, an instance of 'adverse and unaccountable influences,' which the guardians must combat. In Tibetan conception, "thus is the entire shape of the landscape perceived as highly deleterious. The [demoness subduing story] goes on to attribute the unsavory behavior of the country's inhabitants, such as banditry, etc. to the *Srin mo* land."<sup>26</sup> The *Srin mo* demoness can be thought of as an "exponent of a chthonic and telluric forces of the cosmic substratum,"<sup>27</sup> supporting the relationship of the demoness to physical landscape of Tibet. If the demoness stands for the harsh landscape and unruly aspects of Tibetan

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<sup>22</sup> Eastern Tibet, located in the western half modern Chinese province of Sichuan.

<sup>23</sup> Victor Chan, *Tibet Handbook*. p63

<sup>24</sup> Rosemarie Volkmann, "The Genetrix/Progenitress as the Exponent of the Underworld." p198

<sup>25</sup> Akin to an Indian *rakshasa*.

<sup>26</sup> Janet Gyatso. "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet". p37

<sup>27</sup> Rosemarie Volkmann, "The Genetrix/Progenitress as the Exponent of the Underworld." in *Female Stereotypes in Religious Traditions*. ed. By Ria Kloppenborg and Wouter J. Hanegraaff. Leiden, NY: E.J. Brill, 1995. p197

culture, then Buddhism can be seen as an impetus to tame the land and transform it into a sacred, habitable space.

However, if we further unpack the symbolism of the demoness, it rapidly becomes clear that the demoness transcends a simple metaphor for the landscape. In her insightful piece "Down with the Demoness, Reflections on Feminine Ground in Tibet," Janet Gyatso identifies the subjugation of feminine ground as domination over a pointedly female force. Both Gyatso and Rosemarie Volkmann suggest that the demoness subduing myth is a kind of rape of Tibet. Though the implications of such a reading are beyond the scope of this essay,<sup>28</sup> we shall return to interesting variations upon this theme later.

The method of subjugation that is prescribed is to pin the demoness at critical points, involving physical control of the demoness by erecting sacred edifices over her hips, joints, arms and legs<sup>29</sup>. Elaborating on this idea, Stein points out that "The conquering and civilizing function...was performed in accordance with Chinese ideas: in square concentric zones, each boxed in by the next and extending further and further from the center."<sup>30</sup> This construct has to be seen as mandala -- the explicit reference to the cardinal direction and the concentric zones of temples are the hallmarks of mandala space. Furthermore, it is telling that the impetus for the subjugation of the demoness stems from Princess Wencheng, who we may think of as the long arm of Chinese influence. The Jowo statue, a marriage present from China, is a rather obvious attempt to convert and pacify the heathen Tibetans, whom the Chinese view as a "savage race"<sup>31</sup> threatening their western trade routes.<sup>32</sup>

The fate of the demoness foretells the story of guardians, who have their origins in the demonic world. Foreign Buddhism attempts to fix local gods, as indicated by Faure:

...while Ch'an masters were intent on desacralizing places such as mountains, and imposing on them the abstract space of their monasteries, they became engrossed in enshrining relics and erecting stupas in order to fix dangerous chthonian influences, the creating of new centers, new sacred spaces or places that were protected by local gods and were in due time identified with them.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Both Janet Gyatso and Rosemarie Volkmann do a wonderful and intelligent analysis of the demoness subduing temple from a feminist point of view. Later, when I introduce Drukpa Kunley, an occult divine madman, I shall once again return to a sexual reading of subjugation. This is an interesting topic that is the focus of an altogether different direction of inquiry in to the relationship between sex and Esoteric Buddhism.

<sup>29</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p39 Here is Stein's original citation: "rGyal-rabs-rnamesk-kyi 'byung-thsul gsa-ba'I me-lon. 104 Dege By bSodnams rgyal – mtshan, 1508"

<sup>30</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p39

<sup>31</sup> The Sui Shu is a Chinese text found at Dunhuang dating from the Sui Dynasty 581-618 BCE. Quoted in: Janet Gyatso. "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet". p34

<sup>32</sup> Tibet was a major power in Central Asia, with an immense sphere of influence that included the Silk Road. For more information, see Christopher Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard Faure, "Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions". p355



The fate of many local gods, then is to be fixed (or, if you're a *Srin mo* demoness, impaled) – and then converted to guardians of the very spaces that converted them.

Another key point is that the demoness story is thought to have penetrated Tibetan consciousness well after the construction of the Jokhang. The late Michael Aris identifies the twelfth century *Mani bka 'bum* as the seminal *gter-ma*<sup>34</sup> text for the Buddhist retrospective account of Songtsen Gampo's reign and the first appearance of the supine demoness in Buddhist literature.<sup>35</sup> Though the *Srin mo* demoness may have deep origins in Tibet, there is a distinct revisionist aspect to the myth of the demoness. This is a story of Buddhism looking back and contemplating its own unfolding in an alien land.

The conversion of Tibet to Buddhism was a slow and difficult process<sup>36</sup> suggesting another possible rendering of the demoness - she represents not only landscape, unruly Tibetan culture, but also entrenched indigenous tradition. Evangelical Buddhists would obviously consider this tradition as an obstacle, and see it as profane, demonic, chaotic, feminine, and uncivilized. Rolf Stein, in his pioneering treatise on Tibetan culture, *Tibetan Civilization*, finds a volume of evidence for pre-Buddhist customs, and groups them under the heading "The Nameless Religion."<sup>37</sup> Though these pre-Buddhist customs are opaque to the present generations, they are a perennial specter in our consideration of Tibetan guardians and we will find evidence of them below in the gods of cairns and local gods.

The story of the demoness is one of the transformations of Tibet. An invading force, Buddhism, enters Tibet, and subjugates an opposing threat to its arrival. Tibetan society was profoundly changed by the arrival of Buddhism, and Buddhism was itself changed in this process:

...what interests us particularly is just how much the native Tibetan genius turned all these foreign influences in specifically Tibetan directions, and how much of the original Tibetan indigenous culture remained as a coherent part of the new Tibetan Buddhist civilization.<sup>38</sup>

As we think more about the origin of guardianship, it behooves us to follow these roots in the traditions that predate Buddhism and explore the native Tibetan genius, for the origins of guardian deities and the fate of the 'nameless religion' in Tibet are intimately intertwined.

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<sup>34</sup> A tradition or 'sect' within Tibetan Buddhism

<sup>35</sup> Janet Gyatso. "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet". p36 (her italics)

<sup>36</sup> David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet* p92 - 93.

<sup>37</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. pp191-223

<sup>38</sup> David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet* p73

## The Origins of Guardians

The hillsides of Tibet are sprinkled with heaps of stones – cairns – brightly festooned with prayer flags, yak skulls, and bits of yak fur. Rolf Stein describes a Tibetans' interaction with these cairns:

Every traveler that crosses the pass lays a stone on the heap, or, failing that a bone, rag, or tuft of wool or hair. At the same time, he calls out "The gods (of the sky, *lha*) are victorious, the demons are vanquished, *ki-ki, so-so!*" The exclamations at the end are war-cries. They are accounted for by the warlike nature of the gods (*dr̥ga-lha*) and the idea of passing through a difficult or strategic place. It is for this reason that other crossing places - fords and bridges - are marked in the same way.<sup>39</sup>

As with the temple threshold, cairns denote a point of contact between two distinct regions of sacred space. In many cases, cairns simply mark the pass between two valleys or a river crossing. Summit cairns, perched atop mountains, denote the more subtle transition between heaven and earth. The stacked stones of cairns, with their tapered tower, are designed to represent the *mu*, rope, or ladder to the sky.<sup>40</sup> One finds cairns in a similar capacity at other auspicious locations, and at other salient junctions between earth and sky.

Like guardians, cairns confer protection at ambivalent places, whether it is the threshold or the mountain pass. All Tibetan travelers, from bus drivers to nomads, invoke the protection of the gods before proceeding. According to Drukpa Kunley<sup>41</sup>, a "mad" saint, poet and shaman of Tibet:

Formerly, at the time when the world was made, the heap of stones was built on the white glacier. *It is the road-marker of man's protecting gods...* afterwards people built it in their own country or village -road marker of the mighty god of the country; then by lake and rock - road marker of the gods of the soil.<sup>42</sup>

Protection, then, is a fundamental part of cairns, and is part of their original charter. An even more interesting point that Drukpa Kunley points out is the connection between

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<sup>39</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p206

<sup>40</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p212

<sup>41</sup> Who was Drukpa Kunley? I find that question difficult to answer...he was prophet, poet, saint and shaman somehow rolled together. For more information and an account of his charmed life, see *The Divine Madman*, translated by Keith Dowman. , Drukpa Kunley's ribald adventures are a strange brew of sexual exploits, inspired religion, and Tibetan humor. He is a favorite subject of beer hall stories, a saint "closest to the hearts of the common people." For me, Drukpa Kunley is a rare vista into a different Tibetan religious world, beyond and before Buddhism. Notice that his comments, in the space of three lines, unify much of the intersection between cairns, protector, and local / country gods that I am trying to articulate. For more information, see: Dowman's book: *The Divine Madman*. London, UK: Rider and Co., 1980.

<sup>42</sup> This quote is also lifted from Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p208. (Autobiography of Drukpe Kinley (80a-b). The italics are mine. Here is Stein's original citation: "Autobiography of Drukpe Kinley xylograph 2 vols 16<sup>th</sup> century." (my italics)

cairns and local deities of place, the 'gods of the soil' and the country or village gods', a point that we shall return to shortly.

Stein points out that, "“Dimly, too, the heap of stones must have conjured up the idea of a tomb.”<sup>43</sup> Tombs are perhaps the aboriginal protected space, and perhaps were the birthplace of guardian deities. As Sha Wu-tian, a Dunhuang archeologist, sketched for me, guardians have been found throughout the construction of Chinese tombs. The famous terracotta army of Qin Shi Huang is an army of such guardians, protecting the tomb of the ancient Chinese tyrant.<sup>44</sup> Though little is known about early Tibetan burial practice, Stein points out that “it is possible that the early kings [of Tibet] were inspired by great Chinese tombs.”<sup>45</sup>

In Tibet, the original tomb guardians may have descended from actual people. The tomb was “guarded by ministers who behaved ‘like dead men’ and were thus enshrined as ‘servants of the corpse.’<sup>46</sup> According to an early Chinese text, some rituals included the practice of posting a living person by a fallen warrior as a sort of guardian. This living guardian would accept food and clothes for the fallen man. Stein discusses ancient kings whose subjects were buried alive with a king’s statue.<sup>47</sup> In time, these living tomb guardians have been converted to effigies and sculptures, the inspiration for the present incarnations of guardian deities. In any case, tombs are a sanctified space, and similarly to mandalas and temples, are delineated from the outside world by guardians.

The typical guardian image is replete with the symbolism of death:

Human corpses - mummified, fresh, and in decomposition - are lying scattered around...inside, the palace, corpses of men and carcasses of horses are spread out, and the blood of men and horses streams together forming a lake. Human skins and hides of tigers are stretched into curtains. The smoke of the "great burnt offering" (i.e. human flesh) spreads into the ten quarters of the world. Outside, on top of a platform, revived corpses and raksasas are jumping around, and the four classes of accompanying attendants and skeletons perform there a dance. On all sides are hung as tapestries fresh skins of elephants and skins drawn from corpses...<sup>48</sup>

According to their mythology, guardian deities are often found at cemeteries and at charnel grounds,<sup>49</sup> and, as mentioned in previous sections, are rendered this way in mandala. Some of their most distinguishing features, such as the crown of five skulls, the skull cup, bloodstained mouths or the freshly severed heads are direct references to death.

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<sup>43</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p206

<sup>44</sup> Shaanxi Museum, *Qin Shi Huang: Pottery Figures of Warriors and Figures*. Shaanxi Museum, 1981.

<sup>45</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p202

<sup>46</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p133.

<sup>47</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p201.

<sup>48</sup> Rene de Nebesky-Wojtkowitz. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*. p137

<sup>49</sup> This is the 'burning ground' in Hindu mythology, site of all types of demons, spirits, and other unfriendly creatures. Typically, decaying corpses might pile up here, waiting for cremation. I am not sure how Tibetan view cremation. As far as I know, cremation has never been a major death rite in Tibet.

The tight relationship of guardians with death, or *Bardo*,<sup>50</sup> is a further component of their transformative capacity. Charnel grounds and cemeteries are located on the periphery of human settlements and lie well outside the conventional conception of sacred. Like the guardians themselves, the cemetery is at once demonic and divine, pure and impure. The charnel ground and the cemetery are points of transition between life and afterlife, heaven and earth, and the cemetery is a sort of threshold. At the crucial transition between life and death, the guardian serves to transform the soul along the same axes that they transform space in mandala: impurity into purity, chaotic into ordered, demonic into divine, profane into sacred.

Another common abode of guardian deities includes the mountains of Tibet. As Stein observes, mountains are representative of both tombs and guardians:

“Mountain and tomb were analogous in character... where human or stone ‘witnesses’ guarded the tombs of the historic kings...the tomb guardian of Yumbu Lhakar, the first royal castle was the sacred mountain Shampo Kangtsen.”<sup>51</sup>

The first kings of Tibet are not known to possess explicit tombs; rather, mountains have become their tombs. The tombs of later kings, such as at Chonggye, are built in their image. Furthermore, the spirits of first kings of Tibet are the source of many of the gods of the countryside, and of landscape, and have taken up residence among the breathtaking mountains of Tibet.

The interwoven symbolism of tombs, mountains, cairns, and guardians is beautifully intricate. Simply put, each of these facets of Tibetan tradition are related through their reference to sacred space and Tibetan ideas of protection. They also encompass the idea of 'local' or country gods, as the passage from Drukpa Kunley's narrative above illustrates. Many of these local gods who originated from the life spirits of Tibet's first kings, inhabit foci of the sacred landscape, such as mountains and rivers.

Many of the ‘gods of the country’ – local, indigenous gods had interesting fates as Buddhism encroached on Tibet:

Both Bon and Old Order (Nyingma, Tibetan Buddhism’s oldest sect) developed new sets of temple-rituals, which paid honor both to the buddhas and the new Buddhist gods of Indian origin, as well as to selected indigenous gods, who *from now on began to manifest themselves as protectors of the new religion*.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, the origins of guardians lie outside of Buddhism, several of the mysteries that surround fall under a new light. Consider the gonkhang, the protector's chapel that stood

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<sup>50</sup> W.Y. Evantz - Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1974. I spent a lot of time looking through this book, and determined that an exploration of wrathfulness in the Bardo Thodol is a fascinating but altogether separate topic.

<sup>51</sup> Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. p206

<sup>52</sup> David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet* p109

unique to Tibetan temples. In Trandruk monastery, sister temple to the Jokhang in the Yarlung Valley, I saw angry masks fixed upon the threshold, scowling fury in bright colors. In one corner, a monk sat in one corner, beating a deep, resonant drum. Inside, protectors were positioned slightly at or above eye level, covered by a cloth to shield the eyes of the pilgrims from their horrible faces. Like the masks on the threshold, nothing about the gonkhang is Buddhist, and potentially can be linked to the indigenous, pre-Buddhist traditions.

Typically, after local deities are tamed, they then faithfully serve Buddhism as protectors under oath. Padmasabhava, the great Buddhist missionary from India, is the keeper of many of these oaths: "many Tibetan deities [are] said to have tried to obstruct Padmasambhava's mission in Tibet, but were eventually subdued and even turned into protectors of the Buddhist teachings."<sup>53</sup> The same principles we find in the colorful stories of Drukpa Kunley, who demonstrates "not merely how to destroy demons, but to transform them into guardians and protectors of the Buddha's Truth."<sup>54</sup>

We find, then, that the fate of the demoness is the fate of many of the guardians of Tibet. Guardians are subjugated local gods, who have been converted and transformed by Buddhism. It is important to remember that the demoness is *not* killed,<sup>55</sup> instead, she is transformed: her story and the story of guardians across Tibet are stories of subjugation, of taming a threat from a powerful opposing force.

The story of subjugation plays out in the guardian image, where we often see guardians dancing on the broken back of a pathetic creature is an act of violence. The violent essence of the guardian image, then, may be linked to its origins; indeed, though freshly severed heads, pouches full of disease, and skin smeared with human blood can be construed as philosophical devices, this denies the rather obvious demonic imagery of these hideous talismans. Such fierce and disgusting iconography may suggest something of the stress of syncretism upon both Buddhism and an indigenous tradition in Tibet. If this is the case, then guardians are a point of departure for a reading of the subjugation of Tibet that is divergent from the monastic view: that of the forcible conversion of the local populace to an alien religion. The violence and wrath of the guardian and the fear that it inspires are testaments to the stress of transformation.

Guardians in Tibet, then, have primary connections landscape, as well as with cairns and tombs via their interface with sacred landscape and space. Guardian deities, who may have distant beginnings in an indigenous, pre-Buddhist Tibet, must be understood as creatures of syncretism with encroaching Buddhist deities. Today, they appear in the same places and roles as Buddhist protectors. The guardian deities are emblematic of a tamed, indigenous religion, but they are also purveyors of very process of subjugation that they have experienced. Guardians transform threats to Buddhism and are themselves

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<sup>53</sup> Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*. p154

<sup>54</sup> Keith Dowman, *The Divine Madman*. p17

<sup>55</sup> Janet Gyatso, "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet."p42

transformed along the similar axes, and their vivid iconography bears testament to the tension and stress of transformation.

Though Buddhism chooses to view the guardians as tamed, the indigenous, subjugated religion is not incapable of fighting back. Indeed, as I looked at the guardians of the Jokhang day after day, week after week, I could not be entirely sure that they were holding still.

### **The Ambition of Guardians**

One of the most beloved deities in Hinduism is Ganesa, the elephant headed god. Any child in an Indian family inevitably hears volumes about Ganesa. Of course, one of these stories relates how it was that Ganesa came to have an elephant head:

Parvati is disturbed by her husband while she is bathing. Displeased, she decides needs a faithful doorkeeper. With the 'impurities' from her ablutions, she creates a handsome young man [Ganesa], who is to allow no one to enter. Siva tries to force his way, but Ganesa stops him. Siva calls in the troops, Visnu (and Skanda) are repelled, but by means of a trick, the creation of a beautiful woman named Maya who momentarily distracts the guard, the assailants cut off Ganesa's head. Parvati is furious and creates goddesses who attack the gods. She finally agrees to make peace on condition that her 'son' to be brought back to life. Siva cuts off the head of an elephant that has only one tusk and puts it in place of Ganesa's severed head. He entrusts him with the command of the armies [ganas].<sup>56</sup>

In this myth, Ganesa is the faithful guardian. He sacrifices a part of himself in the line of duty and comes out somehow changed. This change is a recurrent them in many tales of guardianship.<sup>57</sup>

One more tale, recounted in the *Bhavagatham*,<sup>58</sup> provides further insight on the mobility of guardians. Jaya and Vijaya were evil kings. In order to redeem themselves, they had to be born three times on earth, always as enemies of Vishnu and slain by the hand of his avatar. These three rebirths include famous villains in the Vaishnavite canon, such as Sisupala and Kamsa (in the Mahabharata) Ravena and Kumbakarna (in the Ramayana) and Hiranyaksa and Hiranyakasipu-- the very same king who was slain at the threshold by Narasihman, Vishnu's fifth avatar. After their time on earth, the two gatekeepers were allowed into the good graces of Vishnu, where they were allowed to become the gate guardians of Vaikuntha and of Vaishnavite temples.<sup>59</sup> Once again, the concept of

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<sup>56</sup> Rolf Stein, "The Guardian of the Gate". p896

<sup>57</sup> "Parvati, and the closed door to their room is guarded by Ganesa. Krsna throws the ax at him, and Ganesa consents to receive the blow with one of tusks, which breaks" Rolf Stein, "The Guardian of the Gate". p897

<sup>58</sup> *Bhavagatham*. This is a text of collected oral stories in Tamil, my mother tongue. It is a mainly about Krishna and Vishnu. It is a major text in the Vaishnavite canon. Its relevance to Tibet is perhaps marginal; I merely wish to illustrate that dynamism is part of guardianship. An English version is available at: <http://www.hindumythology.com/>

<sup>59</sup> *Bhavagatham* from <http://www.hindumythology.com/>

transformation is part and parcel of guardianship. A key point is that there is a direction to their change. Jaya and Vijaya begin far out of favor with Vishnu, and end up as vital, but still peripheral figures in Vaishnavite temples. They are moving *through* the position of the guardian of the gate. Guardians are *not* gods who fall out of favor, and are banished to the periphery; rather, they are in motion from profane to sacred.

The 'direction' of their transformation, from profane to sacred is rooted in the resilience of indigenous tradition. We would expect these indigenous forces to 'fight back', to vie for a stake in the present religion of Tibet. In Tibet, the beautiful story of Dorje Shugden illustrates the tenacity of indigenous Tibetan religion. Dorje Shugden is currently the focus of a firestorm that is currently raging through the Gelugpa sect stemming from deep historical and textual roots.<sup>60</sup> I believe that the conflict illustrates the ambition and motion of guardian deities. Consider the relatively recent origin of story of Dorje Shugden:<sup>61</sup> Diseases raged in towns and villages, which killed people and animals. The Tibetan Government suffered misfortunes repeatedly and even the [fifth] Dalai Lama was not spared: some unknown, evil force began to manifest itself, mostly at noon, by turning over the dishes with the food which was being served to the Dalai Lama and causing damage to his personal property...Astrologers and oracles soon discovered that a vengeance-seeking spirit was the cause of all this trouble. Many experienced lamas and magicians tried to destroy this evil force or to avert at least its harmful influence ...the Tibetan Government requested the learned and experienced head-lama of Mindoling monastery to catch and destroy the roaming demon. The head-lama, taking his seat in front of the Potala, performed a *sBying sreg* ceremony, and by the power of his magic incantations he managed to attract the spirit into a ladle which he held in readiness in his hand. Just when he was going to burn his captive, *bSke khrad*, the wrathful aspect of *Tsang pa*, decided to help the imprisoned spirit...For a moment, the head-lama's attention got distracted from the ladle and immediately the imprisoned spirit slipped out. Since all subsequent trials proved again in vain, the Tibetan Government and the spiritual leaders of the Gelugpa sect, who by now discovered that the cause of all the misfortune was the injustice they had done to *bSod nams grags pa*, decided to request his spirit to make peace with them, and instead of causing further harm to become a protective deity of the Yellow Hats. To this the spirit agreed, and under the name Dorje Shugden, he became one of the chief divine protectors of the Gelugpa order and a dutiful guardian of its monasteries.<sup>62</sup>

Several features of this story are by now familiar. Though the demon is not pinioned, as in the story of Jokhang, there is a clear bid to tame and control the demon by putting it in a ladle. When this attempt fails, the Tibetan Government resorts to diplomacy in order to

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<sup>60</sup> George Dreyfus. The Shuk-Den Affair: The Origins of a Controversy. Available at <http://www.tibet.com/dholgyal/shugden-origins.html>.

<sup>61</sup> I should stress that my version of this tale comes from faithful Nebesky-Wojkowitz. I have since found many different versions of the tale on the web; but it is hard for me, naive about the controversy and the forces at work within it, to discern the bias in each viewpoint. Clearly, those vying for Shugden's ascendancy would present the protector in a more favorable light than Shugden's detractors. Then again, Nebesky-Wojkowitz's version predates the controversy, and presents the details in a slightly different light.

<sup>62</sup> Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*. p136

contain the demon, which ultimately prevails. Still, the drive to fold the demon under the umbrella of Buddhism is unambiguous.

Like many guardian deities, Dorje Shugden is a demon turned to the good. Though demons can 'cross over' from profane to sacred, Dorje Shugden cannot easily shirk his demonic origins. The logical place for him, then, is in a marginal, entry level post as a guardian deity. From this position, his demonic energy is harnessed to subjugate the enemies of Buddhism without any threat to the integrity of Buddhism. Though his profane origins do not allow them to easily transgress the threshold to the sacred space within, must he always remain there?

As illustrated by tale of Pehar, it is not impossible for guardians to move inwards and upwards in status. Pehar, a major wrathful deity, has many alleged origins. What is clear is that Pehar was once only a minor guardian, as the protector of Samye. As legend goes, he traveled in a box to the major monastery of Drepung, where he became chief protector of Drepung – a big promotion. Today he is no longer strictly a guardian. He is no longer placed liminally, and comes complete with his own retinue. He is the subject of rituals, offerings, and appears at festivals. Pehar visits major Lamas in their dreams, has incarnations, and periodically possesses entranced devotees. Pehar is among the deities is properly classified as a tutelary deity, a *vidam*. Nonetheless, he has humble origins as a guardian, and his wrathful iconography bears the mark of his tenure as a guardian.

Dorje Shugden's own ambitions lie in an ancient Tibetan tradition, which "claims that the guardian-deity Dorje Shugden "Powerful Thunderbolt", will succeed Pehar as the head of all *jig rten pa'I srung ma* once the latter advances into the rank of those guardian-deities who stand already outside the worldly spheres."<sup>63</sup> It is precisely his mobility that is the source of the conflict over his status among the Gelugpa. Among some factions of the Tibetan government in Dharmasala, Dorje Shugden has moved from his post as a mere protector and crossed over the threshold to become a *vidam*, and the most important protector of the Gelugpa sect.<sup>64</sup> Dorje Shugden's meteoric rise from a marginal protector to the center of a major conflict was primarily due to his popularity with several influential teachers. Among his current supporters, he is considered to be the major protector of the Gelugpa.

Dorje Shugden begins as a wayward spirit, an obstacle to Buddhism, and is currently moving towards a major protector of the largest sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The current conflict among the Tibetan exile community is in large part political. However, it is also about whether it is apropos for Dorje Shugden to ascend past his peripheral, liminal identity and become a *vidam*. This conflict, then, is the natural product of the tension set in motion by the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet centuries ago. Dorje Shugden exemplifies the resilience of indigenous religion. Through Dorje Shugden, we are partially able to explain the wrathful motif that runs deep in Tibetan religion. The *yidams* and wrathful

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<sup>63</sup>Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*. p140.

<sup>64</sup> For more information regarding the controversy and its implications, see: <http://www.tibet.com/dholgyal/> for the official line of the Tibetan Government in exile. Also see <http://www.shugden.com/> for the opposite viewpoint from the Dorje Shugden International Coalition.



deities are perhaps guardians who, after serving their time on the periphery, have ascended to more sacred, less peripheral positions within Tibetan religion. However, the wrathful iconography of these successful aspirants bears the demonic mark of their profane origins.

Guardian deities, are *alive* as cultural icons, possessing ambition and agency: ...mundane protectors (*'jig rtenpa'i lha*) are guardians in a universe alive with forces which can quickly become threatening, and are considered by Tibetans to be particularly effective because they are mundane, i.e., unenlightened. They share human emotions such as anger or jealousy, which makes them more effective than the more remote supra-mundane deities (*'jig rten las 'das pa'i lha*), but also more prone to take offense at the actions of humans or other protectors.<sup>65</sup>

In the Tibetan view guardians have to be alive in order to respond to the threats to Buddhism. The logic in placing guardian deities at the threshold, then, is transparent. Their links to the demonic world, from which they originate, allow them to be more effective at dealing with the obstacles to Buddhism, invariably manifested in the form of demons. As transformed demons themselves, they are best equipped to deal with their wayward brethren, and convert them to Buddhism. Additionally, the threshold is a point of contact between the worlds of sacred and profane; and it makes utter sense to place guardians at this transitional space. Deities in the inner ranks of a temple are too spatially and religiously removed to make a difference at the periphery.

## Conclusion

When I stepped over the threshold of the Jokhang for the very first time, I thought my curiosity about the fantastic Tibetan guardians would force me to explore every corner of the magical world inside the gates of the Jokhang. It seems, however, that I never left the periphery. By looking in between worlds, we have to some extent penetrated the historical, spatial and mythical dimensions of Tibetan Buddhism in order to tease out a coherent story of guardian deities in Tibet.

This story features guardian deities, incarnated in guardians of the gate, of the law, and of direction, as agents of active transformation. They remain suspended between outside and inside, profane and sacred, demonic and divine, their liminal identity defining them, extending beyond their placement to all aspects of their identity within Tibetan Buddhism. To account for the paradoxes that characterize guardians, we have looked to the rich mythology underlying guardians. One of these myths, that of the construction of the Jokhang to subjugate a demoness which inhabited Tibet, is an organizing principle for guardian deities. As an allegory for the conversion of Tibet to a Buddhist state, the myth details the subjugation of pre-Buddhist Tibet via mandala space. The origins of guardians have deep roots in these extant traditions, and can be thought of as products of the syncretism between indigenous tradition and encroaching Buddhism. However, they

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<sup>65</sup> George Dreyfus. "The Shuk-den Affair:"

are not static images – many guardian deities are in motion from profane to sacred, bringing with them their demonic roots.

And what of guardians elsewhere? Guardian deities are fundamental to most Asian religious structures. Despite diverse readings of Buddhism and Hinduism across Asia, guardians remain constant fixtures of gate and the periphery. The unbridled wrath and terrifying imagery of the guardian image in Tibet is unparalleled, except in Japan, a sister tradition of Buddhism that is perhaps related in its appropriation of tension with local traditions. Though the existence of guardian figures is ubiquitous, the specific flavor of guardian deities is culturally contingent. For example, the squat, stout guardians of Indonesia<sup>66</sup> are counterpoints to the more princely versions in India, and to the many armed demons of Tibet. Despite the considerable variation among guardians, the themes of transformation, dynamism, and syncretism found in Tibet may be applied with broad strokes across Asia. However, each rendering of guardianship merits independent inquiry to discover the particular beauty and history that must surround the guardian image in its many and brilliant colors.

Even in our current journey, it is difficult to say just how far we have gotten inside the question of guardianship, or just how many further layers exist upon our palimpsest of Tibetan Guardians. Given the intricate and beautiful complexity of religion in Tibet, it is likely that there many, many more. In this essay, I am certain that we have only scratched the surface of a deep topic in Tibet that will sustain a myriad of questions.

(The author is an MD/Ph.D student in Neurobiology at Yale University.)

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<sup>66</sup> The dvarapalas of Indonesia are fascinating. According to art historian A. J. Bernet Kempers They are pointedly *not* wrathful: "[dvarapalas] can hardly be called very terrifying. Central Javanese art avoided generally speaking all kinds of things which might upset the pious visitor. Even these guardians, meant to drive away evil influences, are in tune with this intention. In later times, however, in Eastern Java and Bali all kinds of terrible faces were depicted in order to create an auspicious atmosphere." from A. J. Bernet-Kemper, *Ancient Indonesian Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959 p. 54.