

The Pilgrimage to Mount Kawakarpo: A Metaphor for *Bardo*?*

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Mount Kawakarpo forms the divide between the Mekong and Salween river basins on the border between Yunnan province and Tsawarong (Tibet Autonomous Region). At 6740 m, it is the highest mountain in Kham (present Chinese Yunnan province) and the most sacred of all mountains for the Khampas, who consider it their most important territorial god (*yüllha-shidag*).



Photo 1. Pilgrims Prostrating in Front of Kawakarpo Mountain

Source: Katia Buffetrille (2003).

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All research has shown that these territorial gods and their cult preceded the arrival of Buddhism. A territorial god is generally a mountain deity difficult to distinguish from the “mountain dwelling” of this same god. It is an earth god, master of a well-defined territory and specific to a village or a political federation. A more powerful territorial god can hold sway over a whole region and thus rule over several other, less important territorial gods. This is the case with Kawakarpo mountain. The territorial god is looked at as a human being with qualities and defects, and is generally considered to be a founding ancestor, the mythical ancestor of the territory and the population living on it. The name he often bears, amyé (“ancestor”) confirms this, as in Amyé Machen or Amyé Nyenchen. The worship of these gods was and still is aimed at improving life and affairs of the earthly world, but it requires bloody sacrifices, a practice in total contradiction with the Buddhist ideal of compassion towards all beings. It was therefore constantly fought against by the Buddhist authorities, who strove to transform these gods into protectors of the Dharma that still retained numerous characteristics of territorial gods. These mountains’ territorial gods have been gradually transformed into “holy Buddhist mountains” (néri) through a process we can call “buddhization”. New rituals appear in order to secure soteriological benefits, among them the circumambulation around the mountain.

However, the result of buddhization occurred unequally across the Tibetan landscape. A mountain such as Kawakarpo is perceived by Tibetans as both a mountain territorial god (yüllha) and a holy Buddhist mountain (néri).

Kawakarpo is still ‘unconquered’: the various expeditions that tried to climb it in the 1980s and in the 1990s never reached the top due to difficult weather conditions. A major accident occurred in 1991 when a joint Sino-Japanese team of seventeen climbers perished, killed by an avalanche. Tibetans explain these events as the result of Kawakarpo’s

anger at the violation of his territory. Since 2001, permits to climb the mountain have no longer been issued.



Photo 2. The Mountain God Kawakarpo

Source: Katia Buffetrille (2003).

I did my first fieldwork in the area of Kawakarpo in 2003. My main aim was the study of the Kawakarpo pilgrimage in the frame of general research on Tibetan pilgrimages around sacred mountains that I started in 1990 as a Ph.D. and have carried on with since. Since then, I have often returned to this area.

My main reason for going there in 2003 was to observe the pilgrimage in a very specific year, the water-sheep year, supposed to be the most auspicious one for the Kawakarpo pilgrimage, since it is said to be the year of the birth of the mountain god, and it was the sixtieth year in the Tibetan sexagenary calendrical system.

Düdül Dorjé, a great nyingma master of the 17th century who wrote a pilgrimage guide dedicated to Kawakarpo, explains:

“If a man filled with veneration overcomes his sufferings and goes around Kawakarpo a year of the sheep, he will obtain one thousand seven hundred and twenty-five billion benefits every circumambulation. Otherwise a man who does the pilgrimage another year and circumambulates with faith and veneration will

receive seven hundred billion in benefits". (Buffetrille, 2000: 199)

2003 was thus a unique opportunity for somebody who wanted to observe the Kawakarpo pilgrimage. I did the pilgrimage twice in 2003, once in 2004 and two half in 2015. In fact, the pilgrimage is no longer allowed for foreigners since several years ago, because half of the route is in the TAR and half is in Yunnan. 2015 was a wood-sheep year, then the twelfth year of the pilgrimage in the duodecimal calendrical system.

In this article, based on my observations of pilgrimages around Kawakarpo mountain, I would like to highlight the relationship between pilgrimages around sacred mountains and *bardo*, the intermediate state between death and rebirth. I argue that pilgrims make use of features of the landscape to enact the drama of the perilous way of the consciousness through the *bardo*, as if the performance of facing in real life the dangers described in Tibetan texts will mitigate them.

I. The Pilgrims

Since 2003 was supposed to be the most auspicious year in the running sixty-year cycle, the question of the number of pilgrims who would show up was an interesting one. It is always very difficult to determine how many people are doing a pilgrimage in a given year, but the problem was solved in this case thanks to a Hong Kong NGO, which set up a teahouse and a clinic next to a bridge over the Mekong, a compulsory passage for all pilgrims. From June to December 2003, teams of Chinese and Tibetans counted pilgrims every day from 6AM to 8PM and arrived at a total of 69 477. Among these, 1046 were monks and 1560 were nuns.

June: 1995 (among them 69 monks and 25 nuns)

July: 2768 (among them 47 monks and 9 nuns)

August: 3410 (among them 73 monks and 42 nuns)

September: 8148 (among them 122 monks and 148 nuns)

October: 28 787 (among them 355 monks and 675 nuns)

November: 17 956 (among them 276 monks and 451 nuns)

December (the first ten days): 6413 (among them 104 monks and 110 nuns).



Photo 3. Pilgrims around Kawakarpo

Source: Katia Buffetrille (2003).

In comparison, in October 2004, an ordinary year, only 1252 pilgrims were counted against 28 787 the previous year.

The pilgrimage is physically arduous because of the significant altitude differences between 1700 and 5000m. Tibetans do it in seven days, which requires walking 15 to 18 hours a day. For other people, ten days are necessary.

Buddhists and Bonpos alike circumambulated the mountain, each in the direction conforming to their respective traditions. Most of the pilgrims were Khampa, coming from all parts of Kham, which confirms Kawakarpo's status as a local deity.

However, whereas at Tsari, another difficult pilgrimage in southeastern Tibet, on the border between India and Tibet or at Amyé

Machen, the most important sacred mountain of Amdo in northeastern Tibet, one circumambulation (*kora*) seems sufficient to be purified from sins (*digpa*) and defilements (*drib*), at Kawakarpo many ritual circuits are required. A large number of pilgrims wanted to do as many as thirteen *kora* in one lifetime, a number that appears with great frequency in Tibetan non-Buddhist cosmology, history and religion. But whatever the final number, it must always be an odd number because, according to pilgrims, even numbers represent processes that have come to an end and no longer bear fruit. In contrast, odd numbers, being “incomplete”, are full of potential and continue to produce positive effects. Thus 3, 9, and –above all– 13 are lucky numbers in Tibetan tradition.

II. Tibetan Concepts Relating to Pilgrimage and Death

Shabkar, a great Tibetan yogi of the 19th century (1781–1851), coming back from his Tsari pilgrimage, expressed his thoughts in a song which draws a parallel between the difficulties of circumambulating the mountain and the numerous traps that the deceased encounter in *bardo*:

*When I made the pilgrimage of the Tsari ravines,
When traversing with difficulty the treacherous paths,
The rivers and bridges of the land of Lho,
It occurred to me that it must indeed be like this
When travelling the perilous paths of the bardo.* (Ricard, 1994: 254)

This description could be applied to Kawakarpo pilgrimage as told to me by a Tibetan lady: while in Bodnath, in Nepal, in November 1994, I met Khadro, the ‘secret wife’ (*sang yum*) of Khyentsé Rinpoché, a famous master of the nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Khadro was born in Kham and had done the Kawakarpo pilgrimage in 1931 (an iron-sheep year) in seven days, when she was thirteen years old. She had vivid but frightening memories of her pilgrimage and spoke about it in a way similar to Shabkar:

“It is a very dangerous pilgrimage. There are only ravines, no vegetation. We had to cross many high barren passes full of brigands, and cross rivers hanging onto a rope. Everywhere, you could see very steep cliffs. The paths are very narrow and it’s always raining. When sleeping at night, one has to tie oneself to a tree in order to avoid falling into a precipice. The forests are deep and full of wild animals.”

Even if all pilgrimages around sacred mountains do not present the same difficulties as those of Tsari or Kawakarpo, mountains frequently offer a rough landscape: vertiginous paths are always numerous, snowstorms are frequent and the sound of thunderstorms is regularly heard.

But what is the reason for Shabkar to make such an explicit relation between the pilgrimage to Tsari and the *bardo*?

When a person is approaching death, it is usual for relatives to call a lama to recite the texts of the *Bardo thödröl*, the “Liberation upon hearing [the instructions] during the intermediate state between death and rebirth”, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a text dating from the 14th century.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, after death, the consciousness (*namshê*) wanders in an intermediate state during 49 days before entering into the next life. The aim in reciting these texts is to guide the consciousness through a process of purification in the *bardo* until its integration in a new existence. Indeed, while Tantric adepts and scholar monks aim at being liberated from the cycle of the existences (*saṃsāra*), ordinary people know that such a goal is beyond them. Rebirth is then a difficult voyage into the unknown, a process over which they have no control, entirely determined by the individual’s karma. Everyone knows that to cross the *bardo* will be a fearsome passage during which, unable to recognize the manifestations of actual reality (*chöni*), he will be confronted by terrifying visions and overcome by fear, feelings that can be also experienced during a pilgrimage around sacred mountains

as expressed by Khadro.

Indeed, one striking feature in pilgrims' description of pilgrimages around sacred mountains is the similarity of terms with those encountered in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* describing the dangers of the intermediate state:

"There will be the sound of mountains crumbling, of lakes flooding, of fire spreading and the roar of fierce winds springing up. Terrified, you will try to flee wherever you can, but your path ahead will suddenly be cut off by three precipices... You will imagine that you are being pursued by hordes of people, and [that you are struggling] through snow, through rain, through blizzards and through darkness."

This description could have been given by a pilgrim after a pilgrimage. Indeed, a parallel can be made between the terminology used for the journey of the consciousness through the bardo and that of pilgrims through the rough topography of the mountains.

As I already said, my observation of the pilgrims going around Kawakarpo mountain suggests that they make use of features in the landscape to enact the drama of the perilous way of the consciousness through the *bardo*, as if the performance of facing in real life the dangers described in the book will mitigate them

Along the way, two kinds of ritual actions are performed: those done for oneself and those done for others.

1. Actions for Oneself

In Buddhism the karmic theory of moral retribution is central in defining the nature of the afterlife. Consequently, one's fate after death is decided by one's moral conduct in previous lives. Purification of sins is an important rite as much for the living as for the dead. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* emphasizes the importance of ritual actions and prayers for the purification of the consciousness, and the pilgrim put this into

practice during pilgrimages around sacred mountains.

The difficult paths *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* speaks of are given a peculiar form in the context of pilgrimage. As on most pilgrimage paths, and even more so around Kawakarpo, pilgrims crawl through narrow passages between or under rocks. Called “Narrow path of the intermediate state between death and rebirth (*bardo dranglam*) or “Pathway to hell” (*nyelam*), their very names highlight their relation to the afterlife. Going through these narrow spaces is said not only to purify the pilgrim of his sins but also to help him in overcoming his fear of bardo and assure him an easy journey through the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Those burdened by sins and defilements are supposed to be unable to pass through them, so the test determines if one can be purified. The notion of ordeal is present, and with it that of supernatural sanction.



**Photo 4. Pilgrim Going Out from
A “Pathway to Hell”**

Source: Katia Buffetrille (2003).

Another common feature along the Kawakarpo circumambulation path are the stones – said to be loaded with the pilgrims’ sins – that are seen hanging from trees. In fact, the deceased is perceived as a receptacle of virtues and sins accumulated during his or her previous lives that can be counted and weighed. And the judgement that Shinjé (Skt: Yama), the Lord of Death, pronounces and that seals the fate of the deceased is metaphorically described as the weighing of small stones. Every pilgrim, even if illiterate, has heard the story of the Lord of Death weighing the sins of the deceased by means of white and black pebbles. He knows also that the Lord will be helped by two spirits who were born at the same time as the deceased and who stayed with him all through his life: the divine spirit will count the virtuous actions with white pebbles and the demonic spirit will count the sinful actions with black pebbles. Once this is done, the god will look in the “mirror of karma” (*lékyi mélong*) in which all the deceased’s deeds, both good and bad, will be viewed. The pilgrim cannot cheat and he has no way to escape the Lord’s judgment. As might be expected, the presence of Shinjé is recalled along the way, under various forms such as a rock said to be the god’s “spontaneously appeared reliquary” (*kudung rangjön*) or different prints of his body, or feet.

The fear of meeting the god of death is expressed in an even clearer way around Amnyé Machen mountain: during the pilgrimage, all the pilgrims stop in a place called “The balance and the mirror of Shinjé”. Men and women alike pass through one of these narrow passages, here a sort of gutter in the cliff, then the men (I only saw men) hang onto a protuberance of the cliff to weigh their sins and tilt their heads back to see what is called the mirror of Shinjé, in fact a rocky mountain on the other side of the valley.



Photo 5. A Pilgrim Weighing His Sins at Amnyé Machen

Source: Katia Buffetrille (2003).

To tie stones to a branch of a tree or to hang onto a protuberance while tilting one's head back are two ways of weighing one's sins in order to facilitate that inevitable encounter with Shinjé. This became clear to me thanks to two pilgrimages I did around Mount Kailash, the famous sacred mountain in western Tibet. In 1990, as I arrived close to a rock of about 2 meters high and 70 centimeters wide, I saw pilgrims hanging onto the rock and tilting their heads back, just as at the Amnyé Machen. When I returned in 1996, many small stones were tied to this same rock, just as stones are hung on trees at Kawakarpo.

This encounter between Shinjé and the deceased is described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, but also in a cycle of "popular" texts that became an established literary genre in the 16th century, the *délo* narratives.

A *délo*, which means literally "one who has returned from the netherworld", is an ordinary human being (sometimes a male, but generally a female), who is supposed to "die" following a sickness and

then is said to travel in the *bardo* and the netherworld led by a guide (in general their tutelary deity, *yidam*).

Once in the hells, the *délos* meet dead people whom they have often known and who tell them about their sins and ask them to request that their relatives perform virtuous acts for their benefit. The *délos* also have an encounter with Shinjé, the Lord of Death, who gives them messages for the living beings, recommending that they follow a virtuous path. Back on earth, the *délos* relate their afterlife experiences, which become popular teaching devices. These stories are widespread thanks to their recitation by wandering storytellers (*maṅipa*).

Let us turn back now to the pilgrim circumambulating Mount Kawakarpo. His behavior leads us to think that the journey the consciousness undertakes in the *bardo* is transposed on the landscape. The pilgrim not only prays for an easy journey through *bardo* after his death, but enacts concretely what his consciousness is supposed to go through during the 49 days spent in the *bardo*. Through what I qualify as “training” rites, he expects to lessen the future sufferings of his consciousness. He performs physically by anticipation what his consciousness will have to undergo later. Underlying these rites is the assumption that “if my body succeeds in doing that, my consciousness will succeed also”, in other words, the consciousness or the immaterial body is made identical to the physical body. By overcoming these concrete and material trials during his life, the pilgrim wards off his fear of the tests his consciousness is supposed to pass after his death. What he is enacting is the worldly rehearsal of the imagined travel of the immaterial consciousness, in the hope that this will help with crossing the *bardo* and assure him an easier afterlife.

But the pilgrim is not only acting for his own benefit. He accomplishes many rituals directed to the benefit of others.

2. Actions for Others

According to my observations of pilgrims, the idea that the helpless dead can benefit from virtuous actions performed by their living relatives is widespread.

Mountain passes are understood in the Tibetan world to be auspicious sites infused with sacred power. This is confirmed at Kawakarpo by the various rites performed at passes. The most famous pass of the pilgrimage is the Dokerla, “Stairway of Stones”. It is not the highest (4487m) but it is the most fearsome one, as expressed by pilgrims through the prayers they utter the night before crossing it. Even Bacot – a French explorer who did the pilgrimage in 1907 in the anticlockwise direction to escape a confrontation with the Chinese authorities – gives a frightening description of it: “An abrupt and vertiginous wall, 300 or 400 meters high and dangerous in all weather. In summer, stones roll down. In spring and autumn, when there is still – or already – snow, pilgrims of a rare merit arrive in groups, tied together with a rope, like climbers. But if one of them happens to lose his footing, the others willingly let themselves be dragged into the abyss, happy to secure a reincarnation of the first order by such a meritorious death” (my translation).

At the top of the pass, flags are put up on both sides of the path: on the right, pilgrims offer “wind horse” (*lungta*) flags in order to increase their “good fortune” in this life, and on the left side they put up, tied generally to a bamboo or sometimes to a stick, white flags inscribed both with *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*, the mantra to Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva protector of Tibet, and with the name of the deceased person. These white flags are called “[flags with the] maṇi [mantra put] in high [places]” (*manithotsé*). Dokerla is the pass where it is recommended to offer them. The position of the two kinds of flags marks the sharp distinction made between the living and the dead.

At other passes such as Thola (3280m) or Lho Ösel (2990m), clothes

are hung on trees as offerings for dead relatives, friends and all beings who might need them in the *bardo* or the hells, as explained by the pilgrims. It is striking how the border between *bardo* and hells is a blurred one, a confusion which is shown also by the names given to the narrow passages between rocks: “Narrow path of the *bardo*” or “Passages to hell”. The conflation of these two concepts can be explained by the fact that both, as noted by one researcher, are “places where the dead suffer the effects of previous actions while en route to their next place of birth. The two terms essentially came to refer to the same scenario” (Cuevas, 2007: 303).

The most remarkable feature at Lho Ösel pass is the presence of huge heaps of roasted barley flour (*tsampa*), on which are placed hundreds of bowls: they were full of *tsampa*, butter and fruits in 2003 but were almost empty in 2004 when there were fewer pilgrims. All pilgrims add their share of flour and bowls in order for the dead to receive bowls and food they need in *bardo* or the hells. This amazing number of bowls had struck the French explorer Bacot (1909: 19) and the English botanist, Kingdon Ward (1971[1913]: 101). The latter makes clear that the bowls were empty, but he did the pilgrimage in June 1911, an iron pig year (an ordinary year), and at a less favorable period of the year.

During the pilgrimage, pilgrims not only feed and dress their dead, they also put up mañi flags at passes while reciting the six-syllables formula, *oṃ mañi padme hūṃ*, in order to help them to attain liberation. Another rite they perform shows how pilgrims are aware of the power of this mantra. At a sacred site, close to Lhaxhangra temple, there is a big rock marked with holes the size of a tennis ball and filled with white powder. Called “Drum of hell” (*nyelnga*), all pilgrims stop at this place. They hit each cavity one after the other with a stone while reciting the six syllables formula in the hope that their relatives and all the beings in the lower realms will be liberated on hearing the Avalokiteśvara

mantra. In fact, one of the most common interpretations of the late tradition attributes to each of the six syllables the power to deliver from each of the six paths of transmigration: the realms of heavens, demi-god, human, animals, hungry ghosts and hell.

I already mentioned how important it is for pilgrims to make several circumambulations around Kawakarpo mountain. However, for those who do not have enough time, who are sick, and also for those who are already dead, there is the possibility to have a substitute (*tshab* or *kodug* in local dialect) who will transfer the merits of the circumambulation to the “buyer”. Several mentions of substitutes are found in the Western literature. Among them, the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin (1991[1951]: 202) met a monk carrying a sick child in a basket on his back around Mount Kailash in 1909. The parents had given the monk enough barley flour for two days in order for him to carry the child hoping that he would recover his health.

While being aware through pilgrim narratives of the existence of substitutes in pilgrimage, I was never confronted with this phenomenon during the many pilgrimages I did around Tsibri in Central Tibet, Kailash or Amyé Machen. Nevertheless, this tradition is still alive, as S.G. Karmay, a great Tibetan scholar, told me in 1992. While doing the Kongpo Bönri pilgrimage in 1987, he met two young women who offered to do two circumambulations in his name for payment in cash. He gave each of them twenty yuan.¹

As for my experience at Kawakarpo, a couple from Lhasa came one day to the teahouse. The man wanted the benefits of three circumambulations while doing only one and his wife wanted the merits of five. They offered 550 yuan for each circumambulation plus the shoes and the food and easily found villagers as substitutes. I met another substitute who was doing two circumambulations for an old couple of his village and was paid 300 yuan for each.

¹ Communication S.G. Karmay (August, 1992).

I did not come across substitutes doing circumambulations for a dead person but I was told that this could occur. This custom exists in Dolpo (Nepal) as well, where those who act as a substitute for a living person have a low social status, close to that of a beggar.²

Unlike the Tsari pilgrimage, where the buyer receives only a share of the merits (Huber, 1999: 214), the substitutes I met at Kawakarpo claim that all the merits are transferred to the donor. Moreover, on his return the substitute has to bring back to the donor's household bamboo poles, one for each circumambulation he was paid to do.



Photo 6. Pilgrims with Bamboo Poles

Source: Katia Buffetrille (2003).

These bamboo poles are one of the main elements of a Kawakarpo pilgrimage. They are cut in a glade named “Honey Rain” (Drangshar). According to Dūdul Dorjé, the great 17th century nyingma master I quoted earlier, the bamboos are the “life-power trees of the *ḍākinī*” (*kadroma lashing*) and as such, are a powerful item of the pilgrimage. It is still a very living tradition, and all pilgrims know where to cut them.

² Information Geshe Nyima Woser (February, 2011).

Each cane, which is simply called *gato* (stick in the local dialect), must have an odd number of knots, in general five, seven or nine, for the reasons given above. Its function is not only to prevent the pilgrim from falling on this arduous path; it is also and above all the receptacle into which the pilgrim pours some holy water and some earth collected along the pilgrimage path, both being substances loaded with the power of the sacred mountain. Each pilgrim brings back his bamboo cane to his home and often others for relatives and friends.

In Dechen and Tsawarong, the bamboo staves are placed around the main pillar of the common room, so that it often disappears beneath them. It also happens, as I observed in a house in Aben, a village along the ritual path, that they form a second ceiling held firm by beams. People attribute great powers to them: they are put in the fields when the corn is not growing well, and in case of heavy rains threatening landslides, these bamboo poles are put in places where it is feared disaster may happen. As at Tsari, they are cut in a special place, but I never heard in 2003 or 2004 about their use as “protective knots” or bangles for medical help, as they are used in Tsari (Huber, 1999: 114–115), even if later on, a new tradition appeared. Now bamboo bangles are sold everywhere in the area of Kawakarpo and even further on, like in Beijing.

The fear people feel is not only directed towards *bardo* and the hells, but also towards the dead. As everywhere in the Tibetan world, the doorway of the houses is low, to prevent the *rolang*, “a zombie activated by an evil demon” (Wylie, 1964: 72) from entering, since it cannot bend. In addition, black circles are drawn on all the doors to prevent the dead from coming back.

One more characteristic of Kawakarpo pilgrimages must be mentioned. Just before arriving at passes, but in particular before the two highest ones, Dokerla and Shola (4815m), one can see along the way many tiny structures made of three vertical stones and one

horizontal one serving as a roof. They are called 'houses' (*khangpa*), and cigarettes, alcohol, money or grains are put inside. A. David-Neel (1927: 30), the first European lady who arrived in Lhasa in 1924, travelled on this path in October 1923 while trying to find unfrequented roads to Lhasa. She characterized them as 'altars' containing "various small offerings made to the spirits", and Bacot (1909: 19) described them as "niches where offerings are displayed". A pilgrim whom I asked about the meaning of these 'houses' told me that "they were built by Tibetans who wanted to be reborn in this area where the climate and landscape are pleasant, where all kinds of fruits and vegetables grow and where many animals live". But a local scholar disagreed, although he gave in fact a similar explanation but with a stronger Buddhist connotation: the pilgrims build these houses in the hope of being reborn in this place, which is the paradise of Demchog (Skt. Cakrasaṃvara). Nevertheless, several other pilgrims, more down to earth, explained to me that they were building the house they hoped to have in their next life. This explanation makes sense when one sees some of these tiny houses with two, sometimes three storeys linked by a small ladder made of the branch of a tree in which notches have been cut, thus demonstrating that purely spiritual benefits are not always the primary goal of the pilgrims. I finally reached a better understanding of these small houses thanks to a Tibetan researcher who had studied the funerals in the Lhasa region. She noticed the presence of these small houses near the burial platform where the bodies of the dead are cut in order to be given to the vultures. Built by the family of the deceased, they are a stop for the deceased's consciousness when it arrives at the burial ground (Palmu, 2009: 96). At Kawakarpo, the tradition of building these 'houses' has thus endured, but the significance may have diverged from their original meaning.



Photo 7. Small 'Houses'

Source: Katia Buffetrille (2004).

III. Conclusion

Most of the rites pilgrims perform during the Kawakarpo pilgrimage are related to the afterlife and death. Tibetans conceive of the hereafter as a region that they transpose on the real landscape. *Bardo* takes its form in the mind of Tibetans, from texts like the Tibetan Book of the Dead and the *délo* stories. The descriptions of the *bardo* in these texts are precise, detailed and can be easily transferred onto a familiar environment such as the landscape surrounding sacred mountains.

These Tibetan beliefs are related to concepts that existed in the pre-Buddhist religion. They have survived and, under the influence of Buddhist religious masters, have been adapted in texts that form the eschatological framework of Buddhism.

We might say that while the texts on *bardo* guide the consciousness during its perilous journey, pilgrimages enable pilgrims to experience concretely through particular rites the trials to which the consciousness

will be subjected during its passage in the *bardo*. In the process, some features of the landscape are used as visual metaphors for the *bardo*.

The work of Lakoff and Johnson (1985[1980]) helps to understand the central role of metaphors in Tibetan pilgrimages to sacred mountains. According to them, conceptual metaphor is a system of metaphor that lies behind much of everyday language and forms one's everyday conceptual system, including most abstract concepts. Metaphor, in essence, is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (1985: 15, my translation). These authors have shown the importance of metaphors in our daily life, pointing out that without metaphors, we would be unable to speak about our experiences. They made clear that it is necessary to refer to concrete things in order to think about abstract ones. We may thus consider their work as a methodologically important contribution that brings to light the functioning of a fundamental cognitive process and that can be applied to our specific case.

Therefore, if we think these narrow passages between rocks are just small tunnels, we may regard them, for example, as a playground for children. But if Tibetans think of them as "narrow path of the intermediate state between death and rebirth" or "pathway to hell", their very names will structure their representations of them and will guide their behavior.

It is because Tibetans think of their consciousness in terms of their body that they can represent in a concrete way what the consciousness is supposed to perceive after death. And it is for the same reason that the Tibetan conception of the afterlife is metaphorically structured by concrete features in the landscape of sacred mountains. This conceptual system allows Tibetans to experience through pilgrimage the future perilous journey of their consciousness through the *bardo*, enabling them to tame the fears they have of this difficult, dangerous but inevitable passage through the intermediate state between death and

rebirth.

A question still has to be raised. Why are there so many features related to *bardo* and the hells along the Kawakarpo pilgrimage? I am aware that my research has been conducted after a long period of time during which all religious practices were forbidden. But this is also the case throughout Tibet. Is the Kawakarpo landscape particularly favorable to such a transposition because of its physical aspect? Is it because pilgrims have to enter the pilgrimage path through a bridge over the Mekong, the Lamtsa bridge? The *délo* narratives always mention a bridge over a turbulent river that marks the transition between the world of living beings and that of the *bardo* or the hells (Pommaret, 1989: 71–72; Cuevas, 2008: 116). Somehow, it marks the transition between the ordinary world of living beings and the sacred world of the mountain where, as in the *bardo* for the consciousness, pilgrims cleanse their sins as well as those of their dead relatives' before experiencing a new rebirth.

Regarding the particular abundance of features related to afterlife and death at Kawakarpo, I would like to suggest a hypothesis that naturally calls for further research.

The Kawakarpo pilgrimage is said, in one tradition, to have been opened by Kawakarpo Namkha Gyatso, who studied at Kathog monastery in Kham Dergé in the 15th century. This monastery has played a prominent role in the spreading throughout Tibet of the *Karling* cycle—to which the *Bardo Thödröl* belongs—. It is quite likely that the Kathog monks went to Kawakarpo on pilgrimage, this mountain being the most sacred one for the Khampa people.

Would it appear unreasonable to imagine that the Kathog monks might have participated in the inscription of the *bardo* in the landscape, encouraging pilgrims to regard physical features of the landscape as concrete projections of the afterlife?

Glossary

Amyé Machen	A myes Rma chen
Amyé Nyenchen	A myes Gnyan chen
<i>bardo dranglam</i>	<i>bar do 'phrang lam</i>
<i>Bardo thödröl</i>	<i>Bar do thos grol</i>
<i>chöni</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>
Dechen	Bde chen
<i>délo</i>	<i>'das log</i>
Demchog	Bde mchog,
Dergé	Sde dge
<i>digpa</i>	<i>sdig pa</i>
Dokerla	Rdo skas la
Drangshar	Sbrang char
<i>drib</i>	<i>sgrib</i>
Düdül Dorjé	Bdud 'dul rdo rje
<i>kadroma lashing</i>	<i>mkha' 'gro ma bla shing</i>
Kathog	Kaḥ thog
Kawakarlo	Kha ba dkar po
Kawakarlo Namkha Gyatso	Kha ba dkar po Nam mkha' rgya mtsho
Khadro	Mkha' 'gro
Kham	Khams
Khampa	Khams pa
<i>khangpa</i>	<i>khang pa</i>
<i>Karling</i>	<i>Kar gling</i>
Khyentsé Rinpoché	Mkhyen brtse Rinpoche
Kongpo Bönri	Rkong po Bon ri
<i>kora</i>	<i>skor ra</i>
<i>kudung rangjön</i>	<i>sku gdung rang byon</i>
Lamtsa	Lam rtsa
<i>lékyi mélong</i>	<i>las kyi me long</i>
Lhakhangra	Lha khang rwa

Lho Ösel	Lho 'od gsal la
<i>lungta</i>	<i>lung rta</i>
<i>manithotsé</i>	<i>maṅi mtho rtse</i>
<i>namshé</i>	<i>rnam shes</i>
<i>néri</i>	<i>gnas ri</i>
<i>nyelam</i>	<i>dmyal lam</i>
<i>nyelnga</i>	<i>dmyal rnga</i>
<i>ryingma</i>	<i>rnying ma</i>
<i>rolang</i>	<i>ro lang,</i>
<i>sang yum</i>	<i>gsang yum</i>
Shabkar	Zhabs dkar
Shinjé	Gshin rje
Thola	Mtho la
<i>tsampa</i>	<i>rtsam pa</i>
Tsawarong	Tsha ba rong
Tsibri	Rtsib ri
<i>yüllha-shidag</i>	<i>yul lha-gzhi bdag</i>

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