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Differentiating smoke: smoke as *duwa* and smoke from *bsang* on the Tibetan plateau

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Abstract: On the Tibetan plateau, smoke, either as by-product of heat-generating activities or intentionally produced, is ubiquitous. Wafts of smoke rising from the central flaps of black yak-hair tents in pastoral communities are mirrored by yak-dung smoke rising out of chimneys in stone houses of agricultural areas. Observers of summer horse races and other community events might note the presence of thick plumes of smoke emerging from pyres of dried branches, often placed within or near a cairn of stones and prayer flags or *latse* (T. la rdzas).¹ To a casual observer, the ever-present smoke might seem homogenous but, for Tibetans, smoke is expressive of multiple contexts and meanings. In this article, I attend to different kinds of smoke as they are articulated in the literature and experienced by nomadic pastoralists in eastern Tibet. Smoke as *duwa* (T. du ba, dud pa) from everyday activities including yak-dung burning and cigarette smoking and smoke from *bsang* (T. bsang)—a ritual complex of fumigation and purification—reveal that Tibetan perspectives distinguish kinds of smoke. Understanding where smoke comes from and the contexts of which it is part are crucial when attempting to delineate a conceptual and terminological category such as smoke. Tibetan phenomenological categories broadly prioritise vernacular ways of knowing and classifying, which presents a corrective to a dominant classification of smoke that could be used as rationale to resettle nomadic pastoralists and transform their way of life.

Keywords: Ethnographic categories, Tibetan nomadic pastoralists, *bsang* purification ritual, pollution, human-nonhuman relationships.

¹ Tibetan transcription within text follows the vernacular of Kham nomadic dialect. In the first use of a Tibetan word, it is followed in parentheses by the standard Tibetan Wylie transliteration.

For Tibetan pastoralists, smoke as *duwa* is an integral part of sustaining life. Smoke is produced when dried yak dung, *chiwa* (T. lci ba), is burned either to boil water for tea or to boil milk to convert to yoghurt, butter, and cheese. These daily staples of the pastoralist diet are used for personal sustenance and also to sell or exchange for another staple, roasted barley flour or *tsampa* (T. rtsam pa). For communities that continue to sustain themselves primarily through labour and the products generated by their animals, smoke—through the all-important yak-dung hearth—indicates a necessary result of sustaining life. On the plateau, a common sight in pastoral areas is a thick billow of smoke wafting from the top open panel of a black yak-hair tent. So prevalent is smoke on the plateau that a term used synonymously for households in central Tibet was 'small smoke' or *duchung* (T. du chung) (Goldstein 1971, 66). Similarly, and even in agricultural areas with access to electricity, smoke emerges from the houses of farmers across eastern and northern regions of the plateau. In this regard, smoke indexes the quantifiable and phenomenological presence of life on the Tibetan plateau.

Nonetheless, smoke on the Tibetan plateau is more than the auxiliary result of quotidian heat-generating activities such as burning dried yak dung or wood. Smoke itself becomes focal when considered within the ritual complex of an incense-purification ritual, known in Tibetan as *bsang* (T. bsang). Variations of this ritual range from simple versions where pastoralist women chant a straightforward chant and sprinkle dried juniper leaves on hot hearth stones when boiling milk has spilt over to increasingly complex examples. For example, a pastoralist man would perform offerings of *tsampa*, butter, and tea, burned on dried juniper branches, while chanting specific chants to a territorial master or homeland deity respectively known as *zhidag* (T. gzhi bdag) or *yulha* (T. yul lha). The most elaborate manifestations of *bsang* involve ritual practitioners who perform ritual chants to particularly powerful worldly deities (T. 'jig rten pa'i lha) while releasing the fumigating or purifying components of *bsang* (Bellezza 2011; Fitzherbert 2016; Karmay 1998). All examples require the presence of fragrant incense and smoke to both please and purify numerous deities.

In this article, I elaborate on the multiple experiences and contexts of smoke—both as *duwa* and from *bsang*—for Tibetan pastoralists. Through these elaborations, I consider how these different Tibetan words express specific meanings and contexts, which, in English, are elided in the word, 'smoke'. Moreover, even a cognate Tibetan word, *duwa*, carries different connotations depending on the material from which it originates and the context in which it is experienced. Context is provided not only in terms of usage within a particular time period but also with regard to different regions of the Tibetan plateau.² These points highlight the importance of historic and regional contextualisation. Nonetheless, despite historical and regional variations, I suggest that Tibetan cosmology is consistent both in revealing ethnographic ways of knowing and by demonstrating that these ethnographic categories matter: namely because they make it possible to appreciate what is occluded when a particular definition of 'smoke' becomes hegemonic. This hegemonic definition carries influence both conceptually through a classification of smoke as 'a visible suspension of carbon or other particles in air' (OED online 2017) that threatens to diminish varieties of

² Unless specifically indicated, the context for this article is contemporary pastoral areas of the eastern Tibetan region of Kham.

knowing and experiencing smoke on the Tibetan plateau, and practically as practitioners of science and policy seek to change the behaviour of smoke-producing pastoralists.

Smoke as *duwa*

For Tibetan pastoralists, smoke as *duwa* is an integral part of everyday life. Living at an average altitude of 4000 metres above sea level and often above the tree line in most latitudes, pastoralists also mostly do not have access to electricity. For fuel needs, women collect fresh yak dung, lay out or spread the dung patties to dry, and gather the dried dung to use as their primary source of fire and heat. In those areas without access to shrubs or other forms of kindling, women will maintain the embers in the yak dung hearth overnight to be stoked again in the morning. Prior to daybreak, women wake to begin their morning milking of the female yaks, also known as *dri* (T. 'bri). The yak dung hearth, in some places a waist-high structure made of dried earth with a metal pipe emerging from one end to funnel smoke out of the black yak-hair tent and in others a simple arrangement of five hearth stones with no chimney, is tended after the milking activities are finished. The rest of the household—men, children and older relatives—stirs at that time, waking to the sounds of thudding milk buckets and forceful directed breaths to glowing embers. Smoke quickly fills the tent and one might imagine that smoke is the alarm clock of a Tibetan pastoralist household, signalling the time for the first morning meal. The burning yak dung that is used to boil water for tea in this meal is stoked with more dried yak dung after the tea and *tsampa* have been consumed. The oldest woman in the household then starts to boil the milk from the recent milking and proceeds through the day to convert this to butter and cheese (and yoghurt in the summer)³. Especially in the summer months when milk is plentiful, the yak dung hearth stays lit for longer and, with longer days, is re-lit up to five times a day.

Despite—or perhaps because of—its centrality to life on the plateau, particularly for communities that sustain themselves through their own labour and the products of their herds, the everyday-ness of the yak dung hearth and its ensuing smoke means that, for pastoralists, smoke is largely unremarkable. Pastoralists' thoughts on *duwa* might include a comparison between smoke from different heat-generating materials such as dried yak dung and wood, including comments such as 'yak dung smoke doesn't hurt your eyes as wood smoke does' or 'yak-dung smoke isn't "hot" like wood smoke'. These comments demonstrate that pastoralists appreciate the qualitative difference in smoke from different sources even if, in the course of their daily activities, they are mainly ambivalent to smoke as *duwa* and accept it as part of their way of life.

In situations apart from the rhythms of prosaic life, however, the ethnographer begins to appreciate different qualities of smoke as they emerge within different contexts. Such situations are revealed specifically when humans of divine origin such as incarnate lamas or *trulkus* (T. sprul sku) are present. *Trulkus* are 'the earthly corporeal manifestation that appears in the impure world' (Hirshberg et al 2017, i) who embody an 'unbroken chain of incarnations

³ For further ethnography of Tibetan nomadic pastoralists in Kham, see Tan (2016b).

occupying the same abbatial or monastic office and bound up very closely with this office' (Tucci 1970, 135). Within their presence, smoke as *duwa* for pastoralists ceases to be an unremarkable phenomenon but rather something prohibited and polluting. In particular, smoke (*duwa*) from tobacco is viewed negatively. Tibetan pastoralists refer to the act of tobacco smoking as *thamag then* (T. tha mag 'then), which literally means 'to draw tobacco'. With regional language variations, they may also say *duwa then* (T. du ba 'then), which literally means 'to draw smoke'. In contemporary pastoral communities of Kham, women generally do not smoke. Men will smoke, but this occurs less frequently within the community and more often in urban and peri-urban towns where packets of filtered cigarettes are available for purchase. Tobacco smoking is almost never done at home either in black yak-hair tents or winter stone houses, and tobacco is never smoked in monasteries or in the presence of incarnate lamas. This particular prohibition is strong and I have observed Han Chinese workers put out a lit cigarette when approaching an incarnate lama. To further understand this observation and augment how tobacco smoke is viewed within Tibetan culture, I turn to Berounsky's (2013) work focused on the role of tobacco in Tibetan history and cosmology in central Tibet.⁴

In his article, Berounsky presents a translated decree issued by the 13th Dalai Lama in 1918, which banned the use of snuff tobacco and filtered cigarettes in all private and public places of Lhasa (2013, 29–31). The decree noted that tobacco had—through bad odour⁵—caused pollution or *drib* (T. grib)⁶ to strike the earth and stones of the central miraculous temple of Lhasa, thereby causing water leaks. Tobacco smoke angered various protective deities causing bad harvests and epidemics among people and cattle. The decree detailed how, through tobacco, also known as the poison 'Black Hala', the ten virtues (of Buddhism) would be abandoned, and that its poisonous smoke would destroy the dwellings of deities. Users of tobacco would be blind to the virtues of the dharma and unable to attain wisdom. This ban could be viewed in a continuum from what had been previously issued within Tibetan societies during the reign of the King of Bhutan in the 16th century and then in the 18th century in the main monasteries of central Tibet, where monks in particular were prohibited from the addictive effects of tobacco. Importantly, the ban was underscored by the thought that tobacco emerged from the menstrual blood of a demoness, was an evil nourishment that neither satiated thirst nor hunger, and that its smell was displeasing to the spirits and deities⁷ (Berounsky 2013, 9, 12, 17). As a poison composed of five parts (Berounsky 2013, 17), the release of tobacco through smoke emits a smell that displeases the deities who subsequently act out their displeasure by striking calamities and wars on to humans. Furthermore, there is a view expressed by certain prophetic texts noted by Berounsky that tobacco smoke—as with the effects of other anthropogenic activities—pollutes or defiles the deities themselves.

⁴ In addition, Mathieu Ricard's catalogue of Shabkar's works includes a brief text on the harmful effects of smoking: *Dug don lung dang rig pa'i mda' mo* (A Poisonous Effect: The Arrow of Scripture and Reason).

⁵ For more on the role of smells in ritual, see Howes (1987) and his argument that smell, or olfaction, signals a category-change in rites of passage.

⁶ This word is sometimes translated as 'pollution' but is also equally translated as 'shadow' or 'defilement' in a symbolic sense. For 'pollution' meaning 'dirty' or 'filthy', the Tibetan word is *tsog* (T. btsog).

⁷ A point to highlight here is that human senses are neither mentioned nor important (for comparison, see Howes 1987; Parkin 2007). The focus is on how bad smell and other forms of pollution invoke the displeasure of the deities.

Pollution in this context is manifest not through physical form but through an incorporeal embodiment that is displayed through, for example, stupidity and mental lethargy (Mills 2003, 206). The idea that tobacco smoke directly affects the deities is seen as the reason for the deities' displeasure and underscores both a generally negative view of tobacco smoke and the practice of keeping such smoke away from deities and other divine beings such as *trulkus*.⁸

While vernacular judgements among eastern Tibetan pastoralists might range from viewing smoke from yak dung as unremarkable to viewing smoke from tobacco as negative, there is a clear practical sense—for whatever underlying reason—that smoke as *duwa* is to be kept distant from the sacred presence of beings such as worldly deities and *trulkus*. In the reality of contemporary Tibet, most *trulkus* hardly come into the everyday environment of pastoral activities; that is: a *trulku*, especially one from the same region as local pastoralists, would not casually enter into a black yak-hair tent.⁹ In this regard, the separation of the sacred from the profane is, if not consciously kept apart, then at least practically distanced: smoke is a worldly sign of prosaic existence that is separate from *trulkus* as sacred beings.¹⁰ Pollution is thus expressed as the inversion of an appropriate order of things, or of the blurring of distinctions between realms that should be distinct. This general observation also goes some way towards explaining practices around the *duwa* of tobacco. Tobacco and dried yak dung mark a profane and prosaic realm and the smoke as *duwa* released from these materials bears this same quality. Nonetheless, the *duwa* of tobacco is additionally associated with demonesses and evil nourishment and, as a ritual pollution, is displeasing to divine beings (more on this in the next section).

Notwithstanding these understandings of smoke as *duwa* on the Tibetan plateau, an ethnographer would also observe particularly thick smoke created intentionally in the presence of *trulkus* at community gatherings. In one local video that displays footage of the 10th Panchen Lama's visit through eastern Tibet in the 1980s, smoke is at times so dense that it blocks clear vision of the large welcoming crowds and men on horseback who hold banners of colourful prayer flags while riding alongside the *trulku*'s entourage of vehicles amidst confetti of paper windhorses or *lungta* (T. *rlung rta*) swirling with the smoke to send blessings to the sky. This smoke that is intentionally and abundantly produced in the presence of *trulkus* is different from smoke as *duwa*. Thus, while this section has explored different contexts of smoke as *duwa* that has shown the importance of distinguishing where smoke comes from and the context of which it is part, the following section picks up on a terminologically distinct kind of smoke: namely, smoke that is embedded within a purification ritual known as *bsang*.

⁸ For a relevant discussion on the overlap between non-monastic and monastic understandings of pollution and *karma*, refer to Mills (2003).

⁹ This requires further explanation. In present times, lamas who are not *trulkus* usually do enter black tents especially if they are close kin relations to local pastoralists. However, a *trulku* is also an institutional role. This separation between *trulkus* and laypeople may have emerged as a result of modern expectations (see again the changing institution in Hirschberg et al 2017).

¹⁰ For more on hierarchy and the role of order in creating pollution, refer to Mills (2003, 211)

Smoke from *bsang*

Generally, *bsang* is a purification ritual that is commonly practised across the Tibetan plateau. In the literature, it is associated with the folk or native religious practices of Tibet (Fitzherbert 2016, Karmay 1998, Tucci 1970) rather than those of Indic Buddhist origin. However, in its integration into Buddhist Tibet, *bsang* combines elements of what Samuel (1993) has termed 'clerical' and 'shamanic' Buddhism in Tibet. These terms refer to the accommodation of both clerical, prescriptive aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and shamanic, dynamic approaches (Samuel 1993, 568-73). In contemporary *bsang* rituals, incense is burned to please the gods. This fragrant smoke is thought to 'please the five senses' (T. 'dod yon lnga)¹¹ of the Buddha as well other deities that have been incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon. The fragrant smoke rises to the sky creating a pathway or channel to the Buddhas in their Purelands (Fitzherbert 2016, 1). The incense, with its fragrant smells and smoke, is accompanied by ritual chants usually performed by a ritual practitioner. The chants range from simple texts that can be recited by almost anyone to more elaborate supplications (Bellezza 2011, Fitzherbert 2016, Tan 2016a). Collectively, these elements comprise the ritual complex of *bsang*. Specifically, *bsang* comprises two different although not exclusive categories: *bsang chod* (T. *bsang mchod*) or fragrant smoke as offering and *nol bsang* (T. *mnol bsang*) or fragrant smoke as treating various spiritual, social, and/or physical contamination.¹² While the two categories are related and vernacular practices often combine them, it is nonetheless important to understand the variety of ethnographic categories and the contexts in which one or the other might be prioritised.

Despite a Buddhist-inflected interpretation of *bsang* as pleasing to the gods, for Tibetans, *bsang* also purifies. What does it purify? An act or object of pollution or shadow (T. *grib*) that may be the effect of contamination. To fully appreciate this, let us consider pollution in more detail and the various instances in which *bsang*—in different degrees of complexity—might take place. As already noted, pollution among Tibetan Buddhists is implicated in explanations of misfortune and in processes of ritual (Mills 2003, 207). Rites of purification mitigate pollution that is thought either to displease divine beings (through the bad smell of tobacco smoke) or to affect them directly (through its manifestation as poison). As an example of the simplest rite of purification, *bsang* may occur within the context of daily activities of the black yak-hair tent. When a pastoralist woman boils a pot of milk on the hearth, an occasional lapse in attention can cause the milk to boil over the pot and spill on to the hearthstones. When this happens, she will immediately place dried juniper leaves on the hot stone with the spilt milk. The incense of dried juniper leaves along with its smoke and the women's chant is a form of *bsang*. Yet to purify, there must first have been a pollution. The spilt milk is a burnt liquid and therefore pollution to the god of the hearth (T. *thab lha*). To appreciate this more fully, let us turn to Tibetan cosmology.

For Tibetan pastoralists, deities are not only the transcendent beings of the Buddhist pantheon but also immanent deities that live in the world. These deities, known also as worldly deities, occupy a particular place in Tibetan cosmology. The more powerful are often associated with

¹¹ *Dod yon nga* (T. 'dod yon lnga) is a canonical set of five substances pleasing to the senses.

¹² *Nol* (T. *mnol*) is defined as a contaminated condition of the energy of a being that causes weakness. It is an underlying condition that is manifest as, and connected with, *drib* (T. *grib*) or pollution.

mountains or lakes. They interact with other living¹³ beings, such as humans; they feel anger, jealousy, approval and pleasure; and they enact deeds with positive or negative repercussions in daily life. Burning liquids, digging earth, moving stones and, indeed, smoking tobacco, are just a few of the many transgressive acts that are thought to be polluting. Not only does pollution displease these worldly deities who return negative ramifications to humans through misfortune, drought, disease and ill-health, or war; but also, and equally as important, pollution is thought to affect these worldly, environment-bound deities themselves.¹⁴ In this regard, the pollution is an effect of the contamination (T. *mnol*) of the energy of the deities. This aspect is particularly highlighted in older folk or vernacular expressions. As Bellezza has written: 'it is commonly believed that the environment-bound pantheon is of a limpid composition (T. *gtsang-rigs*) and is especially prone to being contaminated by anthropogenic activities of a negative character. In order to counteract the harm wrought upon the gods...incense is burnt throughout the *bsang* ritual and for the duration of the ceremony' (Bellezza 2011, 7). Pollution—and its subsequent purification—is not only a generalised transgression based on what pleases and displeases the gods but also a direct effect of anthropogenic actions on the deities that is spatially manifest with proximity.¹⁵

Depending on its cause and intention, *bsang* rituals vary in length and detail as well as emphasis on kind. A quick sprinkling of dried juniper leaves on a hot hearth stone by a pastoralist woman is perhaps the briefest and most reactive enactment of *bsang* with regard to pollution. A longer and more elaborate version of *bsang* may have a pastoralist man travel to a local mountain and burn juniper leaves while chanting to his specific territorial master on an auspicious day such as the first day of the new year or the eve of an important summer horse race. Depending on the importance of the day or event, he may prepare dried juniper leaves or branches from a particularly auspicious mountain or location, and then carry these branches to the *latse* of the territorial master. The man may mix butter and *tsampa* with dried juniper leaves, or if using branches, he may mix the butter and *tsampa* separately, and then burn these during the *bsang* ritual while chanting general incantations. These rituals are performed primarily to ask for the power of the territorial master on pastoralist man, thereby consolidating their existing relationship. *Bsang* may also accompany or augment other rituals such as the ritual of freeing life (T. *tshe thar, lha g.yag*), where an animal or animals of a herd are ritually liberated in order to gain Buddhist merit and/or as an offering to propitiate good relationships with certain territorial masters (Tan 2016a).

The most elaborate ritual enactments are performed by ritual practitioners. In practice, these rituals generally combine the two categories of *bsang*, namely *bsang chod* and *nol bsang*. Bellezza (2011) has noted in his translation of a *bsang* text (T. *bsang yig*) of Zhangzhung that the *bsang* ritual typically begins after Buddhist refuge prayers (T. *skyabs 'gro*) and aspirant prayers (T. *smon lam*). Following this, the *bsang* ritual itself commences and contains two parts: the actual fumigation of the deities with incense and the supplications to them

¹³ For more on what 'life' entails, refer to Tan (2016a).

¹⁴ For more on *drib*, refer to Mills' (2004) paper on *dip* in Buddhist Ladakh (pp. 354-356).

¹⁵ By this I mean that the spatial area of influence between territorial master and human supplicant is understood by various means such line of vision (if one can see the mountain or hill where the territorial master resides, then one can be influenced by, and affect, him).

(Bellezza 2011, 7). Ritual practitioners are usually specific lamas who are adept at a particular *bsang* ritual chant or who might have a particularly close relationship with the territorial master of a place. Having a close and established relationship with a territorial master is important because a key aspect of the ritual is the invitation to the territorial master to the ritual venue in order to be purified. The deity is more likely to accept the invitation from a practitioner he knows (and regards favourably). The ritual practitioner himself calls on the deity, noting the deity's appearance in detail and supplicating the deity through pleasant words and offerings.

In the following outline of a *bsang* text from the eastern Tibetan region of Kham, the ritual practitioner begins first with a homage to Guru Padmasambhava and notes how his most revered host tamed the Snow Land of Tibet. In the original text presented here, the territorial master called Zhara *zhibdag* is invoked. He is called Yarlha Shampo's younger brother and the text portrays Zhara *zhibdag* himself as holding aloft a victory banner and water jug, riding a white yak. It describes Zhara *zhibdag* as the protector, riding a white horse with cape and lance banner as he defeated the various demons of the region; it reiterates the purpose of the smoke-offering to soothe not only Zhara *zhibdag* but also the myriad water spirits, sky spirits, and demons of the region (T. klu btsan the'u rang bdud dang srin mo'i rigs): 'Be calm with this smoke-offering (T. zhi ba bsang gi mchod pa 'di 'bul bas)'.

The purification section of this *bsang* text is accompanied by a list of the different offerings:

The materials of the smoke-offerings including the powder of treasures, (five) medicinal herbs, incense; (T. bsang rdzas rin chen phye ma sman sna spos sna)

The three whites (milk, butter, curd), yoghurt, wholesome grain powder, roast tsampa with white butter, (T. dkar gsum 'o zho 'bru bzang phye ma dang mar dkar gyi phye mar)

Tea, best wine, and tea with butter, are used for the smoke-offering. (T. ja chang phud rgod sogs kyis bsags pa'i bsang dang)

Moreover, an eight-petalled ritual torma [offering cakes] (T. gzhan yang mchod gtor bshos bu 'dab ma brgyad pa la)

is surrounded by ten smaller tormas (T. 'khor bshos phran bcu)

and another twelve medicinal tormas. (T. sman bshos bcu gnyis)

And, twenty-eight relic pills, yaks, sheep, goat (three domestic animals), and other birds are embellished with coloured butter [ornaments] (T. ril bu nyer brgyad gyang lug rag sum sogs spyang gzigs sna tshogs bca' zhing mar tshon gyis brgyan pa dang)

The standing ritual flags, windhorses, and coloured wooden sticks (head of which is covered by sheep wools), all cleansed with wholesome ornaments, are extensively arranged (T. ba dan rlung rta dang shing rtsi bal mtshon dang byang dkar spus brgyan pa sogs rgyas par bshams la)

All are cleansed and purified. (T. gtsang sbra dang ldan pa bya zhing)

As mentioned by Bellezza (2011) in his work on a *bsang* ritual of Zhangzhung, supplications to the territorial masters follow purification and offerings. After the gods have been pleased and themselves purified by the fragrant incense smoke, and then placated by the various offerings, the supplications are made to 'please carry out the activities to which you have been entrusted' and to 'please carry out our wishes' (Bellezza 2011, 23-25 and 27). These activities and wishes may have multiple and often simultaneous supplications. Among those I have been told are 1) the granting of special powers/fortune for a particular event, 2) application for continued good fortune and wealth (T. nor) of a household, 3) petition to avoid displeasure or anger of the deity for a specific pollution/defilement, and 4) conferral of good health and well-being to the members of the household. The supplications presented here are by no means exhaustive. *Bsang*, when understood in its native formulation, purifies the deities themselves. This is evidenced through the agentive form of the verb, *bsang/bsang ba*, as 'I purify' or 'let us purify' (Bellezza 2011, 10; Karmay 1998, 382). Here, the role of humans in the constitution of the worldly deities is clear: just as anthropogenic activities, such as digging earth and smoking tobacco, affect and pollute the deities, so too does the removal of such pollution and the purification of deities depend on human *bsang* rites. As Mills (2003, 229) notes of tantric rites, [they] 'represented an entirely different kind of relationship with local deities. Rather than propitiating them as superiors as protectors, the local gods were felt to be thoroughly at the mercy of a fully trained and authorised monk...'. The *bsang* purification rite and its attendant fragrant smoke highlight a mutually-constituting process of becoming between humans and deities in Tibet.

Nonetheless, the contexts in which smoke is created and the complex of meanings of which it is part is crucial in determining how, and whether, smoke is part of a polluting situation or a purifying one. In the previous section, smoke as *duwa* from tobacco was regarded as demonic and an evil nourishment; moreover, it was not only displeasing to deities but also thought to pollute them. In this way, smoke as *duwa* indexed a profane and mundane existence to be separated from the sphere of sacred beings. By contrast, smoke from *bsang* rose to the sky, creating a pathway between humans and Buddhas in their Purelands. More importantly, according to a native formulation of *bsang*, the ritual purified the deities themselves and created a crucial mutually-enforcing relationship between humans and deities. Here, the spatial and symbolic separation between sacred and profane was intentionally bridged by the incense, fragrant smoke, occasional bells and drums, offerings, and the words of the *bsang* text invoked by the ritual practitioner.

Conclusion

How have the different ethnographic categories of smoke as *duwa* and smoke from *bsang*, which index different meanings according to context, augmented our understanding of 'smoke'? Before considering this question, it is important to remember that the different experiences of smoke as *duwa*, depending on whether it is in the context of everyday life in the black yak-hair tent or whether it emerges from yak dung, wood, or tobacco, are important

to how Tibetan pastoralists regard smoke as *duwa*. These complexities reveal that smoke as *duwa* might be regarded ambivalently or negatively in ways outlined above. Moreover, smoke from *bsang* is viewed positively because its fragrance pleases the gods and it is able to purify these deities. A key conclusion then is that Tibetans themselves regard *duwa* and *bsang* as indexing different actions, contexts, and motivations and would likely note a comparison of these as an awkward logical manoeuvre. Smoke as *duwa* is a by-product of human activity: when emitted from yak-dung fires, it is viewed with ambivalence and when associated with tobacco, it is regarded as blinding of virtue, mentally-warping to Buddhist wisdom, and polluting to deities. Smoke from *bsang* purifies deities and, through the act of purification, highlights a specific way of making the world by maintaining and re-enforcing specific human-nonhuman relationships. A Tibetan perspective would likely have found it strange that *duwa* and *bsang* had been combined and compared. Why then place these together?

In this article, I have combined and compared these terms, which index specific actions, contexts, and motivations, because—from one perspective—they have an apparently similar resulting effect: namely smoke. Smoke, according to a scientific definition, is a combination of vapour, gas, and particulate matter that is released from the combustion of materials such as yak dung, tobacco, and dried juniper branches. Through the hegemony of this definition, all smoke is understood according to this material aspect and becomes a universal and unproblematic category. Conceptually, this bears out in the data on and analyses of airborne particulate matter created by burning materials such as yak-dung and juniper incense. Smoke from these burning materials is viewed as the same kind of substance, which causes ill-health and respiratory ailments. While this substantive dimension of smoke is true, it should not occlude other and equally vital aspects of knowing and experiencing smoke (see Brown, this issue, and Dennis, this issue). The implications of thinking in a singular and hegemonic way have practical and political aspects as well. Consider that the implications of a hegemonic definition of smoke as a universal and self-same category has serious ramifications for Tibetan pastoralists. Evidence based on increased respiratory ailments or accelerated melt in permafrost could be used to move pastoralists away from their pastures to urban settlements away from the glaciers, mountains, and their territorial masters. Such evidence, too, could be used to school pastoralists in different ways of living that would eventually replace their thinking—located in 'backward serfdom'—with ideals lodged in 'development and progress' (Chinese Government White Paper 2013, Chinese Government Document 2011). The violence of hegemonic thought with regard to smoke and its effects is not only a potential threat but also a real one backed by precedents of previous actions of the Chinese state on marginal communities.¹⁶

The suggestion from the presentation and analysis of Tibetan categories in this article, however, is that smoke is not all the same and cannot be understood solely, or even primarily, through its manifestation as material effects (combination of vapour, gas, and particulate matter). The phenomenological categories of *duwa* and *bsang* were placed together if only to question the validity of isolating smoke from ethnographic contexts and of defining it

¹⁶ Examples are too numerous to list in this article but for an indicative list, see Bauer and Nyima (2011) and Yeh (2009, 2013).

primarily in terms of a hegemonic definition of smoke. I have argued for differentiating smoke on the Tibetan plateau, with appropriate attention given both to the various ethnographic situations that accompany the multiple manifestations of smoke as *duwa* from yak dung or tobacco and smoke from *bsang*, and to the rich cosmology and history of Tibetan ways of thinking and doing. Such differentiation complicates our understanding of smoke beyond a singular and hegemonic category.

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