OPENING (TO) THE SACRED
The Ecology of Contemplation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition

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Abstract: *This article calls for an ecological approach to Buddhist contemplation, which recognizes the inherently relational and ethical nature of contemplative practice, in contrast to modern, corporatized approaches to mindfulness as an exercise of detachment. Showing that Tibetan Buddhist onto-epistemologies rest on the entanglement of mind, body, and environment, this piece proposes that an ecological approach to the traditional Tibetan lifeworld is most apt to illuminate its dynamics. Drawing on contemporary ecological theorists, it proposes a case study of the place-based activities of Tibetan contemplative master and treasure revealer Chokgyur Lingpa (1829–1870) and his two closest collaborators. A survey of their biographical and place-based writings (site guides) shows that their introduction of a new network of sacred sites in Eastern Tibet (Kham) was part of a larger project to promote Buddhist order in the service of social and environmental balance. By opening the sacred geography of their region for contemplative use, the treasure revealers (*tertons*) strengthened the bonds of their communities with each other and with their animated landscapes, in the hopes of ensuring communal welfare—a fundamentally ethical project grounded in a relational understanding of human happiness.*

INTRODUCTION

Aho! The pure celestial realms
Descended upon earth as the land of India,
And only subsidiaries appeared in Tibet.
Therefore, accomplished Tibetan contemplatives were few.[1]
That is why, I, Padma,
Practiced in and blessed
All suitable vital points of the Tibetan land.
I invited here the entire hosts of knowledge holders[2]
And sky-goers residing in the celestial realms,[3]
Sacred sites, and charnel grounds of India,
And dissolved them into these supreme sites,
Which became one with the celestial sites.
I made guides for the sites and hid these as treasures.[4]

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What do ecology and contemplation have in common? A popular view, influenced by corporate interests, might suggest that they are both matters of individual responsibility and self-discipline. In this sense, the modern-day practice of mindfulness is to social change what curbside recycling is to climate change: a relegation of the responsibility to the individual, which conveniently absolves corporations and disempowers other societal forces.[5] Such hyperindividualism—whether in mindfulness or in ecology—actually accentuates the sense of self underpinning the neoliberal system behind our collective ecological and spiritual crises. Ironically, it is the very antithesis of the doctrine of no-self, a formative principle of the Buddhist traditions from which popular mindfulness practices are derived. However, corporatized mindfulness today has managed to shed the relationality inherent in its Buddhist ethical background in order to focus solely on inner, personal change—handily eliding questions of social responsibility.[6]

In contrast, the thousand-year-old Tibetan Buddhist tradition of ongoing treasure (*terma*) revelation, which is the source of the opening epigraph, exemplifies a socially—and ecologically—embedded contemplative practice.[7] Regarded as accomplished contemplatives, treasure revealers (*tertons*) unearth sacred texts and objects from the Tibetan land, thereby opening new areas of sacred geography and founding new contemplative lineages. Their identification of locations of revelation, often accompanied by the revelation of the relevant site guides (*gnas yig*), has been the main force shaping the ever-evolving sacred geography of Tibet over the past millennium. This sacred geography has further determined the establishment of temples, monasteries, retreat hermitages, and pilgrimage routes—collective nexuses of contemplative practice around which Tibetan Buddhists have oriented their lives.

The activities of treasure revealers thereby nurture and perpetuate ecological relationships (of humans to their environment) as well as social relationships (of humans with each other) in an integrated manner. This intertwinement of the social and ecological spheres reflects the broader Tibetan Buddhist ontology of personhood, which recognizes mountains, lakes, and other natural features as deities, and therefore "persons" in their own right, blurring from the outset any distinction between the ecological and the social.[8] The lives of Tibetan Buddhists are therefore traditionally embedded in more-than-human networks of ecological relationships that tie together the human and nonhuman in webs of responsibility and reciprocity—and treasure revealers have a key role in maintaining these relationships.

A unique aspect of this role is the identification and establishment of new sacred sites, a process known as "opening the door to the sacred sites" (*gnas sgo 'byed*), an understudied phrase that this article also aims to illuminate. This practice revives the legacy of Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, the apotheosized figure largely attributed with the original conversion and consecration of Tibet as a Buddhist pure land. Padmasambhava is believed to have tamed or co-opted the pre-Buddhist spirits and demons animating the landscape of Tibet and bound them under oath as protectors of the Buddhist teachings during the imperial propagation of Buddhism in the mid-eighth to mid-ninth centuries. He later entrusted the local spirits with the guardianship of treasures meant for future generations, physically filling the landscape with the blessings of these Buddhist teachings.

His heirs and successors, the treasure revealers believed to be reincarnations of his imperial-era students, later mirror this process by rediscovering consecrated sites and negotiating with local

spirits for the sites' opening and the extraction of treasures. The correct unfolding of these negotiations is thought to be essential for the preservation of social and environmental balance in the region and is therefore a fundamentally ethical project. Revealers are assisted in this societal project by the great number of site guides concealed by Padmasambhava, which provide instructions for the identification of sites' sacred dimension. Publicized by their revealers, the guides also encourage the wider community to relate to the landscape as a medium of contemplative practice. By unveiling Tibet's sacred geography and revealing these place-based contemplative guides, treasure revealers' activities thus foster Tibetans' contemplative relationship with their land, further strengthening their bonds of collective identity. This is seen as part of the wider project of establishing and preserving a Buddhist ethical order on the Tibetan land and in society.

This inextricability of the social and the ecological in the Tibetan treasure tradition forms a direct challenge to the nature-culture division at the root of post-Enlightenment thought. Avoiding epistemic violence in the study of the treasure tradition therefore requires something akin to Bruno Latour's symmetrical anthropology, which calls for a reevaluation of one's epistemic presumptions as a scholar.[9] The traditional Tibetan lifeworld problematizes the modern understanding of personhood as individual and ontologically distinct. To make sense of it obliges one instead to adopt an ecological perspective that acknowledges humans as "organism-persons" inextricably immersed in an environment inhabited by manifold beings, such that social relations form "but a subset of ecological relations."[10] This implies a relational definition of human life, in which knowledge and meaning are constructed in the process of engagement with our inhabited environments: an ecology of life, which for Buddhist practitioners translates into an ecology of contemplation.[11]

The New Treasures tradition of Chokgyur Lingpa exemplifies this Tibetan ecology of contemplation. Dating back to nineteenth-century Kham, Eastern Tibet, this treasure lineage was headed by three masters from different schools of Tibetan Buddhism: Chokgyur Dechen Zhikpo Lingpa (1829–1870), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820–1892), and Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye (1813–1899).[12] Together, they introduced a network of sacred sites in Kham, notably by revealing treasures from and guides to many old and new sacred sites, which thereby became physical hubs for contemplative practice. By collaboratively harnessing their contemplative knowledge of sacred geography and ritual skills, these three treasure revealers strengthened the bonds of their communities with each other and with their lands, intending to foster social and environmental wellbeing in the region. Their activities thus highlight the fundamentally ethical and relational nature of the Tibetan contemplative tradition.

Using primary sources from Chokgyur Lingpa's biographies and site guides, we will delve into the ecology of contemplation by first examining Tibetan Buddhist theories of land. This first section argues that Tibetan Buddhist ontologies rest on a mind-body-environment entanglement that is best described as an ecology of life, which extends into an ecology of contemplation in the practice of contemplative engagement with sacred sites. In the second section, we will further explore the nature of Buddhist sacred sites, drawing on the ecological theory of affordances to show how sacred sites emerge relationally, in the contemplative practitioner's engagement with the physical features of the landscape. Site guides, I will show, therein act as contemplative manuals facilitating communal knowledge of the landscape as a medium of contemplation. Finally,

the third section will build on these general, theoretical reflections to present a historical case study of Chokgyur Lingpa's land-based contemplative activities, demonstrating the ethical dimension of the Tibetan ecology of contemplation.

Throughout this study, we will be guided by the ecological approaches elaborated by a number of contemporary theorists in an endeavor to sustain Latour's critical reflexivity and avoid any slippage into the all-pervasive Cartesian dualism that fails to make sense of the Tibetan lifeworld. Rather than imposing yet another foreign theoretical framework, the relational and processual models of life suggested by ecological approaches constitute an epistemic opening that allows for many more varied modes of being. They enable us, as ecological anthropologist Tim Ingold puts it, to learn *from*, and not just *about*.[13] Ethically speaking, this approach skirts the extractive model of scholarship within which information is retrieved but rarely integrated in the transformative ways in which it was intended. Existentially speaking, it is central to the urgent task of finding new ways of being in the world, for, as Ingold argues, "the truth is that in finding ways to *carry on* we need all the help we can get."[14]

THE LANDSCAPE OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nonduality, or the Ecology of Life

> *Aho! The pure celestial realms*
> *Descended upon earth as the land of India,*
> *And only subsidiaries appeared in Tibet.*
> *Therefore, accomplished Tibetan contemplatives were few.*
> *That is why, I, Padma,*
> *Practiced in and blessed*
> *All suitable vital points of the Tibetan land.*[15]

This passage opens Guru Padmasambhava's statements in the *Guide to Lotus Crystal Cave, the Supreme Magnetizing Site*,[16] a guide to one of the most important sites of the Chokling Tersar tradition.[17] This origin story of sacred sites reveals the ecology of contemplation at play in the Tibetan treasure tradition, as ostensibly expressed by the tradition's originator, Padmasambhava, popularly known as Guru Rinpoche—the Precious Guru.[18]

Guru Padmasambhava is considered by most Tibetans as the Second Buddha, the Indic tantric master who single-handedly tamed the Tibetan land and its inhabitants, human and nonhuman, subduing and converting them to Buddhism at the height of the Tibetan empire, from the mid-eighth to the early ninth century. Prior to Padmasambhava's arrival, Tibet's animated landscape is believed to have created all manner of obstacles to the propagation of Buddhism and the construction of the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery, Samye: environmental catastrophes and epidemics abounded. Invited as a last resort by King Trisong Detsen (742–796/800) for his tantric virtuosity, Padmasambhava used his thaumaturgical powers to co-opt and coerce the spirits and deities animating the Tibetan landscape into accepting Buddhism and becoming the guardians of its teachings.[19] According to the narrative that crystallized within the treasure tradition from the twelfth century onward, he then proceeded throughout his lengthy stay in Tibet to visit every

mountain and valley, practicing and concealing treasures throughout the landscape, literally filling it with his blessings.[20]

Padmasambhava's story, like his narrative of the consecration of Tibetan land in the opening epigraph, reveals the deep entanglement of Buddhist contemplatives with their environments. In the first few lines of the epigraph, Padmasambhava directly attributes the scarcity of accomplished contemplatives in Tibet to the secondary status of its sacred sites, stating that "only subsidiaries of the pure celestial realms appeared in Tibet" and "therefore, accomplished Tibetan contemplatives were few."[21] He thereby acknowledges the role of the environment in influencing the results of contemplative practice, as well as the importance for tantric contemplatives to engage with sacred localities—places considered "pure," a reflection of the celestial realms. Padmasambhava then affirms that he improved the Tibetan land's potential for contemplative practice by practicing in and blessing certain sites, thereby augmenting their purity and potency.[22] This in turn implies that contemplative practice can have a direct impact on the quality of the environment. The sacredness or purity of the environment can thus be said to be both a cause and a result of contemplative practice.

This direct impact of place on progress in contemplative practice is repeatedly emphasized in the majority of site guides, which admittedly aim to promote the sites they describe. Regardless of these texts' intent, the importance they place on the site of contemplation is striking, as illustrated by the following statement from another site guide from the New Treasures of Chokgyur Lingpa, *Boundless Benefit to Beings: The History of the Great Hidden Site of the Glacial Ranges of Rudam, Main Site of Awakened Qualities* (hereafter *Boundless Benefit*):[23]

> If you are not at a site of practice,
> All your practice will come to nothing.
> When you practice at eminent sites of practice,
> Results are effortlessly accomplished.[24]
> Practice at an excellent site is one hundred thousand times
> Superior to that performed in an ordinary place.[25]

Such statements abound in Tibetan site guides. By tying the results of contemplative practice directly to its emplacement, they depict contemplation as a thoroughly embodied practice dependent on its environment—challenging modern conceptions of meditation as an exercise of detachment.[26]

Such popular depictions of meditation today—in total contrast with the embodied and emplaced practice described by Padmasambhava—stem from the Cartesian philosophical lineage that separates cognition from the physical body that supports it, and therefore from its environment. As Francisco Varela and others show in *The Embodied Mind*, this Cartesian mind-body duality still has clout far beyond popular culture, as it also frames much of the cognitive sciences, despite being at odds with our lived experience as embodied beings.[27] Conversely, as a practice of embodied presence and observation, Buddhist meditation reveals the interdependence of cognition and environment that shapes our everyday experience.[28] To bring our understanding of cognition in line with its lived experience, Varela and others propose a fundamental shift in our epistemic frameworks, one toward an ecological approach to cognition. Rooted in the insights

afforded by contemplative observation, the ecology of cognition recognizes the intrinsic entanglement of mind, body, and environment.

This approach follows closely that of anthropologist Gregory Bateson, who first coined the phrase "ecology of mind" to highlight the fact that mind "is not limited by the skin" but always immanent to the process of organism-environment relationships.[29] Building on this, anthropologist Tim Ingold replaced "mind" with "life" to counter any remaining mind-matter duality latent in the concept of an ecology of mind (or cognition), as distinct from an ecology of matter and energy.[30] Ingold's ecology of life considers the dynamics of the "whole-organism-in-its-environment" as a singular, developmental system in which organism and environment, as well as mind and matter, have never existed independently but always and only co-arise through the emergent process of life.[31] In addition to recognizing cognition's dependence on body and environment, Ingold's ecology of life thus recognizes the environment's dependence on the mind-body as well—there is no environment independent of the life it sustains.

An approach to life as the continuous emergence of an entangled mind-body-environment is most apt to make sense of the treasure tradition's contemplative relation to place. Indeed, Padmasambhava's transformation of the Tibetan landscape into sacred sites through his contemplative practice signals that it is not just the mind-body that arises dependent on its environment, but that the latter is also co-constituted in this process. This co-arising of mind-body and environment is premised on the opposite of Cartesian dualism—the radical nonduality of subject and object that frames the dominant strands of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. That is, the perceiving subject (the mind-body) and the perceived object (its environment) are ultimately interwoven as one in the philosophy that accompanies Tibetan Buddhist contemplative practice. In fact, the very goal of the practice is to realize this nonduality, breaking free from the mistaken dualism of ordinary perception.

Interweaving of mind and matter is clearly expressed by Padmasambhava in the *Seminal Drop of Light*, a guide to another of Chokgyur Lingpa's treasure sites, Tsādra Rinchen Drak,[32] in the following manner:

> In the sight of ordinary eyes,
> They are primarily the ground that allows for life.[33]
> But the vajra cliffs and the thickets of trees,
> The rock clefts and the waterfalls,
> Are all the self-arisen forms
> Of the primordial protector Samantabhadra.[34]

Here, the mistake of ordinary perception is to apprehend the environment as a mere backdrop for beings, "the ground that allows for life." In contrast, Padmasambhava affirms that the true nature of the land is awakening itself, as personified by the primordial buddha Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra, the original principle of awakening, is even said to take physical form, manifesting as all the features of the landscape, from trees to waterfalls and rock formations. The very fabric of material reality here is embodied cognition, and the differentiation of animate life from inanimate environment is merely the result of confusion.

Tibetan Buddhist notions of sacred place are thus expressive of a mind-body-environment entanglement that challenges the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter. As Varela argues, Buddhist philosophy and practice thereby counter "the assumption—prevalent throughout cognitive science—that cognition consists of the representation of a world that is independent of our perceptual and cognitive capacities by a cognitive system that exists independent of the world."[35] Instead, the Tibetan contemplative tradition describes a world that is entangled with cognition from the start, where mind and environment co-arise and cocreate each other. It describes an ecology of life in which the world arises in our experience relationally, through our interactions with each other and with our environments, such that mindscape and landscape are always intertwined.[36]

More-Than-Human Entanglements

> *I invited here the entire hosts of knowledge holders*
> *And sky-goers residing in the celestial realms,*
> *Sacred sites, and charnel grounds of India,*
> *And dissolved them into these supreme sites,*
> *Which became one with the celestial sites.*[37]

The relationality embedded in Buddhist practice is not just between contemplatives and landscapes, but enfolds the latter's human and nonhuman inhabitants as well. As described in the above lines—the continuation of the preceding section's epigraph—Padmasambhava's consecration of sites involved not only his personal practice but also his interaction and collaboration with others. As he describes it, Tibetan places truly "became one with the celestial sites" once he had invited tantric deities (the male knowledge holders and female sky-goers) and dissolved them into the landscape.[38] This move effectively blurs the distinction between tantric deities and land, or animate and inanimate. The narrative of Padmasambhava's consecration of special places thus intertwines humans, nonhumans, and landscape in a more-than-human web of mutual dependency and influence.

Centuries before Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT), Tibetan followers of Padmasambhava recognized that agency to affect and shape human lives extends to nonhuman beings and other constituents of their environments.[39] Their actions on and relationships to the land therefore had to contend with, and often be mediated by, these manifold beings with whom they shared it. In fact, the Tibetan word that is, as here, commonly translated as "sacred site" more literally means "residence" or "abode." That is, Buddhist sacred sites are the places where exalted human or nonhuman beings reside—sites that are marked by the physical presence of awakening.

Already in early Buddhist history, the historical Buddha's past visits, or the continued presence of his relics, were thought to imbue Indian sites with sacredness. The land of India thereby became entangled with the very person of the Buddha, acting as a mesocosm or structural milieu that allowed one to relive "the whole life and person of the Buddha" through pilgrimage.[40] For Indian Buddhists as for later Tibetan pilgrims, the Indian landscape was a medium through which history, and the presence of its hallowed figures, could be experienced in the present.[41] Buddhist pilgrimage practices thus enlisted in concrete ways what Ingold calls the "temporality of the landscape" as both a product and shaper of history. Indeed, the landscape was for them, as Ingold

writes, "not so much a stage for the enactment of history, or a surface on which it is inscribed, as history congealed."[42]

It is this very capacity of the land to congeal history that permitted the emergence of the treasure tradition in Tibet from the tenth century onward—revealing treasures concealed in the land manifested above ground a hallowed past that had been preserved below.[43] Building on one and a half millennia of Buddhist history, the treasure tradition ambitioned more than contact with the historical Buddha, however: It connected Tibetans with their imperial history and the host of humans, spirits, and deities involved in the creation of a Tibetan Buddhist empire—with Padmasambhava at their center. Indeed, from the twelfth century onward, the treasure tradition had apotheosized Padmasambhava as the ultimate wielder of the power to tame Tibet's animated landscape and convert it into a Buddhist kingdom.[44]

This process has been described as "mandalization," a reframing of Tibetans' relationship with their land as the physical and geographic manifestation of buddhahood. Tantric mandalas are geometric representations of the sacred universe as inhabited by the pantheon of Buddhist deities and seen as the ultimate, pure dimension of reality. When Padmasambhava declares in the above epigraph that he invited tantric deities from India and the celestial realms to dissolve them into the Tibetan land, he is in effect describing the transposition of these mandalas onto Tibet. As Dan Smyer Yü has shown, the mandalization of the Tibetan landscape thus "involves not merely the perceived Buddhist sacredness but, more critically, it pertains to a range of inter-sentient communications between mutual embodiments of Buddha Dharma, place, gods, and people."[45]

Indeed, local deities associated with mountains and other spirits and demons all find their place in the mandala's organizational structure,[46] as illustrated by the imperial myth of their taming by Padmasambhava, who appointed them as "oath-bound" guardians of the Buddhist teaching.[47] Moreover, as declared by Padmasambhava in the opening epigraph, the introduction of Buddhism also brought with it the pantheon of Indian Buddhist deities to Tibet. In *Boundless Benefit*, Padmasambhava likewise says:

> I entrusted the land to the sky-goers
> And posted the oath-bound Dharma protectors as guardians.

Thus, local spirits (the guardians) and Indian Buddhist deities (the sky-goers) together participated in structuring and populating the Tibetan land.[48] That is, the mandalization of Tibet brought humans together with local, Indian, and transdimensional spirits and deities in a hierarchically organized, "single ritual cosmos."[49]

The early Buddhist theme of the landscape as a mesocosm through which one could come into contact with the historical Buddha was thus extended through Padmasambhava's consecration of the land to facilitate interactions with the expanded pantheon of Buddhist Tantra. In the Higher Yoga tantras in which the practice of tantric pilgrimage was developed, such mandalas are moreover depicted as present within the body of the practitioner as well, in a nondual reflection of inner and outer realities.[50] Pilgrimage to tantric sites thus became a means to experience the sacredness of the inhabited landscape as inseparable from the sacredness of one's inner body and of the outer universe—all of which are ultimately realized as the singular reality of buddhahood.[51]

The conceptions of sacred geography at play in the Tibetan treasure tradition are thus steeped in an ecological understanding of perception, as outlined by ecological psychologist James Gibson. Indeed, Gibson observed that "we always perceive the world at the same time as we perceive ourselves—we always perceive the world in relation to a sense of self, in terms of complementary relationships."[52] Tibetan theories of tantric pilgrimage take this ecology of perception to its most radical implications by positing that the self and world are not only complementary but also so intrinsically entangled that they are mirror reflections of each other. As Padmasambhava states in *Boundless Benefit*:

> The one who knows these dependent connections of the outer and inner
> Is said to be a yogi of the Anu scriptures.[53]
> The unfabricated knowledge of the reality of outer and inner places
> Is the spontaneously present mandala of buddhas.[54]

The gist of these lines is that pilgrimage to sacred sites forms a means to realize the correspondence of the microcosmic and macrocosmic mandalas, the ultimate nonduality of inner and outer realities. This is actually the ultimate mandala of buddhas: the wisdom of nonduality, the radical entanglement of inside and outside, self and other.

Due to this intrinsic entanglement, the mind-body, geographical places, and the entire universe are equally populated by deities who are an expression of buddhahood, or awakened cognition. Indeed, some of the Higher Yoga tantras that inform the Tibetan understanding of pilgrimage feature lists of correspondences between geographical locations, places in the body, deities, and states of contemplative realization.[55] Due to their entanglement, each of these elements can be seen as forming a point of contact with the rest in their set of correspondences. Thus, for instance, visiting a sacred site can put one in contact with the corresponding deities and facilitate certain contemplative states, while the latter can also connect one to deities, sacred sites, and so on.[56] Tibetan Buddhists' relationships to the land thereby encompass the host of past humans and timeless spirits and deities thought to populate it, forming an ecology in which land, human, and nonhuman beings cooperate within the contemplative framework of the mandala—an ecology of contemplation.

THE TIBETAN LANDSCAPE AS A MEDIUM OF CONTEMPLATION

The Land's Contemplative Affordances

> *That is why, I, Padma,*
> *Practiced in and blessed*
> *All suitable vital points of the Tibetan land.*
> *I invited here the entire hosts of knowledge holders*
> *And sky-goers residing in the celestial realms,*
> *Sacred sites, and charnel grounds of India.*[57]

The Tibetan ecology of contemplation requires recognition and use of the sacred places that form geographic mandalas, which reflect the cosmic and body mandalas. That is, if the goal of tantric pilgrimage is to realize the complementarity of inner and outer realities through contemplative practice, complementary qualities must first be identified by means of external as much as internal observation. Such attention to the landscape entails an awareness of its variegations, and it follows that not all places are equal in providing a sacred reflection of ultimate reality. As Padmasambhava states, he only "practiced in and blessed / All suitable vital points of the Tibetan land."[58] This raises the question: Which places are considered suitable for consecration?

From the various site guides examined in this article, it appears that a place's potential for consecration is largely determined based on its apparent physical features. Padmasambhava's mention of vital points in the land signals the geomantic dimension of sacred geography in Tibet. As Martin Mills shows in his article on the foundational myth of Tibetan geomancy,[59] this, like its Chinese source, largely consists of a perspectival analysis of a site's topographical and geological features, which are evaluated in terms of their resemblance to auspicious or inauspicious forms and symbols.[60] This divination technique underlies many of the lengthy descriptions offered in site guides, which give lists of resemblances for the various features of a site. Thus, valleys are likened to blossoming lotuses, cliffs resemble deities or ritual oblations, and rocks and boulders likewise have their look-alikes.

For instance, one of Chokgyur Lingpa's main treasure sites, from which he revealed his most important treasure cycle, the *Guru's Heart Practice: Dispeller of All Obstacles*, is the Mouth of the Da-Nyin Gorge.[61] The *Guide for the Mouth of the Da-Nyin Gorge, Site of Supreme Qualities* describes the place in the following way:

> Its shape is like a sky wheel, this auspicious site;
> Its ground is like an eight-petaled lotus, this auspicious site;
> It is auspiciously surrounded by the ten virtues of place;
> It is a place where all secret mantra yogis come.[62]

The guide here states the auspicious resemblances of the place and the qualities of the land as they pertain to habitation: the ten virtues of place consist of adequate resources in land, water, grass, wood, and stone for agriculture, pastoralism, and construction.[63] Together, these features ostensibly form the reason why tantric contemplatives, the secret mantra yogis, visit the place. After all, meditators, too, need food and shelter, in addition to the more esoteric inspiration provided by such features as the auspicious layout of a place. Both types of characteristics of the sacred site—practical and esoteric—therefore appear to be enumerated insofar as they offer particular opportunities for contemplative practice.

Other site guides likewise present the appropriateness of certain places for contemplative practice by describing them in similar terms. The shape of a valley or boulder, the quality of the water or grass, and so forth, are features of the composition and layout of an environment that make it more or less hospitable to contemplation, as clearly stated about the Rudam valley in *Boundless Benefit*:

> Since the eternal glaciers tower on high,
> To meditate here is to gain great confidence in the view.

Since the water has the clear sound of drums,
To practice here is to swiftly obtain the power of mantra.[64]
Since the valley is spacious and luxuriantly green,
To teach here is to see one's knowledge flourish.
Since the lakes and rivers are clear and fresh,
To study here is to see one's intelligence surge.[65]

These lines imply a direct causality between the topography and resources of a place and its conduciveness to contemplation and the cultivation of wisdom. The line between place and meditator—or subject and object—is once again blurred by this correspondence, as the external qualities of the land are mirrored in the inner qualities attained by the meditator.

Such statements of correspondence can best be understood as describing the land's "affordances," a term coined by Gibson to refer to the qualities of an environment in relation to the needs of its inhabitants. [66] Affordances are neither entirely subjective qualities, since they are inherent to the environment, nor entirely objective, since they relate to individual beings' needs and skills. The height of glaciers or spaciousness of valleys, for instance, are characteristics inherent to the landscape, but they will only have the effects described above on a contemplative practitioner and not on a slug. Operating at the nexus of the environment-inhabitant relationship, an affordance therefore "undercuts the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy"[67]—an inadequacy rendered evident by any dualistic attempt to understand the correlations expressed above, such as between the clarity of a river and the intelligence of a contemplative practitioner.

The most common correlation throughout the site guides surveyed is that of valleys to the eminent Buddhist symbol of a lotus flower, which is a common structuring principle for tantric mandalas. Sites considered as sacred are thus further mandalized through visual association with Buddhist symbols,[68] as well as with members of the tantric pantheon. Indeed, the likenesses of Buddhist deities are often visible in the landscape and form part of its affordances for contemplative practice. For instance, the main feature of the Mouth of the Da-Nyin Gorge is a cliff that resembles a nine-headed and eighteen-armed *heruka* (a wrathful buddha) called the "Nine-Headed Wrathful One," which Padmasambhava declares to be "inseparable from Great Glorious [Heruka]" in the site guide.[69] The rest of the site is said to be structured by an enclosure of mountains atop which other wrathful Buddhist deities abide in each of the four cardinal and four intermediate directions, thereby constituting a fully populated, mesocosmic mandala.[70]

To be in such a site is therefore to place oneself in the center of a model of the tantric Buddhist universe, drawn to local scale. This is a physical enactment of the visualization practices prominent in Padmasambhava's tradition, in which the practitioner envisions herself as the central deity surrounded by a retinue in a divine mandala. The goal of such visualization practices is to manifest this embodiment of awakening in actuality by realizing that all physical reality is in truth an expression of awakening.[71] Though this is seen as a universal truth, it is nevertheless facilitated in physical places in which the features of awakening are readily apparent: the mandalized sites of tantric pilgrimage.

Tibetan sacred sites thus mediate direct contact with the pantheon of deities who populate the tantric practice of contemplation. No wonder, then, that such sites are said to afford hundreds or

thousands of times more benefits for contemplation: merely being there is to be in the presence of the Buddhist deities that one contacts in contemplative practice; it is to be in the center of the mandala that one aims to manifest through the practice. Padmasambhava makes this clear when he extols the Lotus Crystal cave:

> One day of feast gathering in this place[72]
> Is superior to practicing elsewhere for a year.
> Why is that, you ask?
> Because this place is the mandala that gathers
> The hosts of spiritual heroes and sky-goers for the feast.[73]
> It is superior in the same way as it is better
> To go and personally distribute alms in a village,
> Rather than calling a lone villager over to collect them.[74]

Thus, according to Padmasambhava, to be in a sacred site such as the Lotus Crystal cave very nearly actualizes the result of practice, bringing the contemplative physically into the fold of the mandala of buddhas.

Sacred sites, such as the abodes of Buddhist deities and historical figures, are those that afford the most for contemplative practice because they mediate direct contact with exalted human and nonhuman beings, whether past or atemporal. Treated as equivalent in our texts, sacredness and affordance for contemplative practice are both defined in terms of relationality: sacred sites are those that afford more-than-human entanglements that are supportive to contemplation. Moreover, though these affordances are inherent to the physical features of the landscape, they must nevertheless be identified for contemplatives to take full advantage of them—a skill of observation that is trained by the site guide.

The Site Guide as a Contemplation Manual

> *I made guides for the sites and hid these as treasures*.[75]

Insofar as the affordance of a place resides in its topography and geology, as Gibson argues, to perceive a landscape is to perceive what it affords in relation to the observer's needs.[76] In particular, for a contemplative practitioner, perceiving a landscape is therefore to perceive its potential affordances for contemplation—that is, its sacredness. The perception of affordances, however, not only depends on a being's particular needs but also on innate and learned skills.[77] It requires an "education of attention" so that novices may learn to perceive the affordances inherent to their environments.[78] As Ingold explains:

> Truths that are inherent in the world are, bit by bit, revealed or disclosed to the novice. What each generation contributes to the next, in this process, is an *education of attention*. Placed in specific situations, novices are instructed to feel this, taste that, or watch out for the other thing. Through this fine-tuning of perceptual skills, meanings immanent in the environment—that is in the relational contexts of the perceiver's involvement in the world—are not so much constructed as discovered.[79]

According to Ingold, this is the affective or intuitive perception of the world that is transmitted from generation to generation by the training of observational skills, and which determines in large part the different lifeworlds in which people live.[80] It is, however, not so much a conceptual overlay on the natural world as the revelation of values inherent to the environment to the observer's mind—in other words, its affordances.[81] Thus, to posit that sacredness in the Tibetan lifeworld is inherent to landscapes does not contradict the fact that this perception needs to be cultivated, notably through the transmission of site guides.

This explains why, once Padmasambhava had blessed the suitable sites of Tibet, his last act in their consecration was to make site guides and hide these as treasures, as stated in the last line of the opening epigraph.[82] The creation of site guides may seem prosaic compared to the preceding supernatural feats; however, it is no less essential. Composed by Padmasambhava, the Second Buddha, these guides describe the sites from an awakened perspective, making explicit the "latent but . . . able-to-be-perceived sacredness" of the place.[83] Guides thereby offer instructions for perceiving sacred sites, an education of attention that develops practitioners' ability to perceive a site's affordance for contemplation—and thus enhances their contemplative skills.

As mentioned above, site guides' descriptions of sacred sites as mandalas not only reencode the landscape as sacred but also place the pilgrim within the contemplative framework of the mandala visualization. This entails reencoding each feature of the site as a mark of transcendental reality, in "dynamic relational systems."[84] *Boundless Benefit*, for instance, abounds in such networks of associations between the physical features of the Rudam valley and cosmic or transcendental principles, such as:

> The eternal glaciers are the truth body.
> The lasting turquoise lakes are the enjoyment body.
> The cliffs, rocky crags, forests, and so on
> Are the emanation bodies, manifested as desired.
> The shape, like a relic mound, is the truth body;[85]
> The visible incantations are the enjoyment body;[86]
> And the various deity images are the enjoyment body.[87]

Here, various features of the site, both large and small (glaciers and inscriptions of incantations), seemingly ordinary and explicitly sacred (cliffs and deity images), are respectively said to embody each of the three bodies, or dimensions of a buddha: the ultimate and ineffable truth body, the subtle and remote enjoyment body, and the visible, material emanation bodies.[88] These associations are made by way of analogy: permanence is associated with both glaciers and the truth body, lastingness may be associated with lakes and enjoyment bodies, and manifold variation is a feature both of the general landscape and of the emanation bodies. Moreover, in the tantric understanding, the truth body is the mind aspect embodied in relic mounds, the enjoyment body is the speech aspect embodied in incantations and mantras, and the enjoyment body is the body aspect embodied in deity images and statues.[89] The conflation between the local and the cosmic, the profane and the sacred, or the worldly and the transcendental, is thus made by invoking emplaced features and associating them with aspects that defy notions of space and time.[90]

This analogical system that encrypts aspects of the physical site as transcendental principles is further developed in *Boundless Benefit* with respect to the enjoyment body, the aspect of Buddhahood that is expressed as the five buddha families. These five buddha families are traditionally associated with several other sets of five, such as the five colors of the rainbow or the five elements.[91] In *Boundless Benefit*, the association between the enjoyment body and the five elements is directly established with respect to the site of Rudam, without expressly calling upon the notion of the five buddha families. Thus, the essence of space is said to be distilled in the blue sky, the essence of earth in the glaciers, the essence of water in the lakes, the essence of fire in the ground's warmth, and the essence of wind in the fruit trees.[92] In this way, each feature of the site is reminiscent of a basic property of reality, whether in terms of the three bodies or the pure aspect (i.e., the distilled essence) of the five elements.

Boundless Benefit and similar site guides thereby call for a complete reencoding of the pilgrim's experience of the site, so that each feature they encounter calls upon certain contemplative insights. This process replicates the very principle of tantric mandala visualizations, which commonly start with the re-creation of the entire cosmos ex nihilo, beginning with the fundamental structure of the five elements, each associated with a form and a color.[93] The association of every visible feature of Rudam with one of the five elements therefore serves to remind the practitioner not only of the five buddha families (as implied by the assertion that the elements manifest from the enjoyment body's blessings) but also of the very origin of the cosmos as envisioned in tantric visualization practices. As perceiver and perceived co-arise in this nondual Buddhist tradition, reencoding the very process of arising is meant to transform the practitioner-in-their-environment as a whole. The pilgrim is thereby re-creating the world of their experience in the very moment of its arising, as an awakened mandala.

Site guides thus act as contemplation manuals, using the medium of the landscape to guide the meditator through the process of tantric visualization. As argued by Catherine Hartmann in her dissertation on the subject, guides such as *Boundless Benefit* are not merely descriptive but instead have a work-like function: they "work on the pilgrim" and the pilgrim's perception of the site. Unlike Hartmann, however, I would not contend that these texts limit themselves to constructing "the imagined mode of the pilgrimage site so that pilgrims experience it in a different way."[94] Rather, an ecological approach to the site guide proves closer to the tantric Buddhist perspective, as both approaches see the world and the mind-body as coming into being jointly at every moment, so that there is no perception "in here" independent of a landscape "out there."[95] Working on the meditator-in-their-environment as a whole, the site guide aims to transform it all in one fell swoop through its eco-contemplative instructions.

THE TREASURE REVEALER AS ECOLOGICAL MEDIATOR: A CASE STUDY OF CHOKGYUR LINGPA

Opening to Contemplative Affordances

To bring their eco-contemplative instructions into the public sphere, site guides from the treasure tradition must first go through a particular line of transmission, from their concealment to their revelation and dissemination. Indeed, the rationale behind treasure revelations is that these texts and objects were not meant for the times in which they were taught by Padmasambhava. Rather,

they were concealed to be revealed at a later time, when they would be most needed. Concealed with this intention, treasure texts usually end with an aspiration for their revelation by the right person, often with the formulaic phrase, "May it meet with a karmically destined heir!"[96] Through the site guides, Padmasambhava is thus thought to transmit his eco-contemplative instructions to his spiritual heirs—the treasure revealers, who are charged with disseminating the texts in their own societies.

By extracting guides, treasure revealers make the sacred sites known, in a process known as "opening the door to the sacred site."[97] A survey of these events in Chokgyur Lingpa's site guides and biographies shows that site openings take various forms and are sometimes accompanied by elaborate rituals. However, the sole revelation of a guide to a particular site can be enough to consider it opened. Thus, in his extensive biography of Chokgyur Lingpa, the treasure revealer's second incarnation, Könchok Gyurme (1871–1939), provides an overview of Chokgyur Lingpa's most influential site guide: the narrative map of the twenty-five sacred sites of Kham, which consists in a compilation of short guides to the forty-two sites it actually contains.[98] Konchok Gyurme's synopsis concludes with the following striking statement: "These forty-two sites that have been clearly laid out were all in meaning opened by the Great Terton, no matter whether he actually went there."[99] He thereby implies that Chokgyur Lingpa's revelation of the narrative map is sufficient to consider him the opener of all the sites it contains.[100]

The opening of a site and the revelation of its guide are indeed equivalent in aim: both publicize the sacred identity, or contemplative affordances, of a place. Site openings and guide revelations thus serve to manifest Padmasambhava's imperial-era mandalization of the land in the experience of the treasure revealer's contemporaries. For instance, a guide to Tsādra revealed by Chokgyur Lingpa claims: "When this guide appears overground, / the body, speech, and wisdom of Heruka / will have descended here from Akaniṣṭha."[101] Here, the guide's appearance on earth constitutes the signal for the site to become fully inseparable from the deity Heruka and the celestial realm of Akaniṣṭha—a cosmic mandala in the here and now. Thus, as the heirs and regents of Padmasambhava, treasure revealers' role lies in large part in the reiteration of his mandalization of Tibet, a process that continuously revitalizes the contemplative affordances of the land for the benefit of their contemporaries.[102]

The narrative surrounding the opening of Tsādra Rinchen Drak, Jamgon Kongtrul's hermitage above Palpung Monastery, illustrates well the event's impact on the site's affordances for the wider contemplative society. In his autobiography, Kongtrul reports that before Tsādra's sacred identity had been officially recognized, he had wondered whether it might be a sacred site. However, without official recognition, he worried that, were he to build a temple there, any construction might fall into disrepair once he departed.[103] Tsādra was eventually officially recognized as sacred when Chokgyur Lingpa opened the site in 1859—notably by revealing the narrative map of Kham, which includes this site.[104] In an 1871 letter to pilgrims, Kongtrul and Khyentse recount the ensuing events:

> Terchen Rinpoché [Chokgyur Lingpa] retrieved from Tsādra Rinchen Drak profound treasures of outstanding spiritual teachings and consecrated objects. On the same occasion, he unveiled this sacred area and gave a detailed and definitive description of its features.

> This proclamation of its magnificent qualities marked the beginning of this area's enlightened activity.[105]

These events happen after Chokgyur Lingpa's revelation of Tsādra's site guide as part of the narrative map of Kham. In this later episode, two factors are cited in conjunction with the "unveiling" or opening of the site: an oral description of the site's features and the revelation of treasures. By orally describing the special features of Tsādra, Chokgyur Lingpa was physically pointing out what the guide indicated in writing, orally transmitting Padmasambhava's land-based contemplative instructions. In parallel, by retrieving further teachings and objects attributed to Padmasambhava, the treasure revealer was revitalizing the former's presence and attesting to the presence of Padmasambhava's blessings in the landscape.[106] In doing so, he revealed to his contemporaries the exalted history congealed in the landscape, as well as its affordances for contemplative mandalization.

This had concrete repercussions. Chokgyur Lingpa's initial revelation of the narrative map, which included Tsādra, had marked the official recognition of the site as sacred, which lent Jamgon Kongtrul support in his petition to the Palpung monastery administration for the restoration of the site. Since Chokgyur Lingpa wrote that for a full opening of the site, a Heruka temple would first need to be built, this formed Kongtrul's first undertaking, with the financial support of the monastery administration.[107] Kongtrul then gradually proceeded to restore the dilapidated retreat huts, setting up a space for five practitioners to engage in long-term contemplative retreats.[108] Thus, the opening of Tsādra, initiated by the revelation of its guide, very concretely augmented the site's contemplative affordances for the wider community. It set the ball rolling for the construction of physical facilities to house communal rituals and private retreats, and made a lasting mark—both literally and figuratively—on Tsādra as a sacred site inviting contemplative practice. In the words of Khyentse and Kongtrul, it permitted the unfolding of the "area's enlightened activity" for the benefit of others, by furthering the Buddhist societal project of eco-contemplative practice.

The Ecology of Revelation

The activities of treasure revealers as openers of sacred sites and revealers of their contemplative affordances are anything but incidental to their role. Rather, revealers' eco-contemplative skills are essential to their core function in Tibetan Buddhist societies. By opening sacred sites and thereby making them known and accessible to their communities, revealers create deeper connections for Tibetans to their land and societies. They are able to do so because they themselves are highly skilled in negotiating the more-than-human network of interdependent relationships with the land and its human and nonhuman inhabitants, through ritual and contemplative means. In displaying these eco-contemplative skills, treasure revealers are most explicitly embodying the legacy of Padmasambhava, the ultimate consecrator of Tibet's animated landscape.

This continuity between Padmasambhava's and treasure revealers' eco-contemplative activities is evidenced in a further detailed narration of Tsādra's opening, provided in Chokgyur Lingpa's biography:

> After the Great Terton [Chokgyur Lingpa] had made splendid, extensive rituals of smoke offering and command, he went to Tsādra Rinchen Drak in order to introduce the sacred site. Yet, since he did not see the mantra protectress [Ekajaṭī], he repeatedly lost consciousness. Eventually, [Jamgon Kongtrul] covered [Chokgyur Lingpa's] forehead with a symbolic script written in [Padmasambhava's] own hand, and he was thereby revived. [Chokgyur Lingpa] then introduced the main, naturally formed practice caves. To extract a few catalogs, he went inside during the daytime, and there were a few disturbances, such as a great wind rising. Going to the lama's residence, he then transcribed the map of the twenty-five major sacred sites.[109]

There are several notable elements to this narrative. First, Chokgyur Lingpa started out by rituals of smoke offerings and command that are respectively aimed at appeasing and coercing the local spirits and deities to co-opt them into aiding his Buddhist activity. He thereby established cooperative relationships with the land's animating forces through the skilled use of contemplative rituals.

Nevertheless, he then failed to see the mantra protectress, Ekajaṭī, and could not continue his guided tour of the sacred site, but fainted repeatedly. It is instructive to note that his repeated loss of consciousness was not due to some ritual faux pas, but merely to his inability to *see* the deity: a failure in his perceptual skills. However, once Jamgon Kongtrul placed a handwritten, symbolic note by Padmasambhava, the ultimate tamer of spirits, on his forehead, Chokgyur Lingpa was no longer impeded in his activity. By wearing Padmasambhava's writing on his forehead, the treasure revealer declared that he was acting under Padmasambhava's authority and was thereby allowed to continue.

Chokgyur Lingpa then introduced the site's sacred history, congealed in its main meditation caves, in which great masters of the past had practiced.[110] He extracted as treasures the *Three Cycles of the Secret Vital Essence* and an independent site guide to Tsādra, both of which are attributed to Padmasambhava.[111] He also revealed a sacred substance called "Jewel Crest," said to contain relics from all the buddhas.[112] The elements very nearly created new obstacles on this occasion, notably with the arising of a great wind, but Chokgyur Lingpa was nevertheless successful. Through these revelations, he once again brought the teachings and the blessings of sources of the Buddhist tradition above Tibetan ground, manifesting the potency of the sacred past congealed in the land.

Finally, Chokgyur Lingpa's last act was to transcribe Padmasambhava's teaching, consisting of the narrative map of twenty-five (but actually forty-two) sites, which also contains Tsādra. Thus, much of his activities in opening the site were an emulation or continuation of Padmasambhava's land-based, thaumaturgical activities: he affirmed his command of the local spirits and deities; displayed his knowledge of the land and its affordances; revealed and transmitted the concealed teachings of Padmasambhava, bringing the blessings of the buddhas above Tibetan ground; and opened the site as Padmasambhava ordained. This neatly mirrors the progression in the opening epigraph, in which Padmasambhava identified special sites, brought down blessings upon them, and concealed their guides. Padmasambhava's initial establishment of the land's contemplative affordances was thus revitalized in the present as Chokgyur Lingpa employed the same eco-contemplative skills to manifest what had since been dormant.[113]

As intimated by the anecdote of Chokgyur Lingpa's failure to see the mantra protectress Ekajaṭī, an important aspect of treasure revealers' eco-contemplative skills is moreover their ability to observe their environment and identify its contemplative affordances, notably by coming into contact with its spiritual inhabitants. Among the latter is also Padmasambhava, who has been apotheosized by the tradition in a transcendent, ever-accessible form, in particular to those who have the requisite contemplative skills. Chokgyur Lingpa's autobiographies contain numerous records of his visionary dialogues with Padmasambhava, attesting to his contemplative achievements through his ability to relate to the nonhuman realm.

In one such exchange, Padmasambhava wakes Chokgyur Lingpa at the end of his three-year retreat, telling him that his retreat is over and it is time that he "watch over the happiness of Tibet and Kham."[114] Asking Padmasambhava for advice to fulfill this role, the treasure revealer is given extensive instructions, including a list of rituals to be performed at specific places and times for specific purposes, all of which aim to ensure the welfare of his contemporaries.[115] Padmasambhava then proceeds to give Chokgyur Lingpa another list, this time of the signs he will see in various locations, many of which are his own treasure sites.[116] The list provides interpretations of what will be signified in the landscape, without actually specifying the signifiers. Identifying the concrete signs is left up to the observational skills of the treasure revealer, and Padmasambhava concludes his advice with: "Son, look for signs all over the kingdom."[117] Chokgyur Lingpa's responsibility to ensure broader social and environmental welfare is thus shown to be dependent on his ability to identify and interpret signs throughout the landscape, an observational skill of engagement with his environment.

A near contemporary of Chokgyur Lingpa, the Third Dodrupchen, Jikme Tenpe Nyima (1865–1926), further explicates treasure revealers' social and environmental roles:

> The Terma [treasure] teachings are revealed because of the power of aspirations made by the assembly of Guru Rinpoche, the King, and the subjects for the benefit of the people of the dark age and because of the power of the blessings of *ḍākas* [spiritual heroes] and *ḍākinīs* [sky-goers]. That is the very reason why just by the recovery of the Termas [treasures] various results occur. The power of evil human and non-human beings declines and the radiance of virtuous beings increases, and the degenerations of the dark age—disease, hunger, war and so on—are pacified. Discovery of the teachings protects the temples and monasteries of Lhasa, Sam ye, and Tha dul and Yang dul from the dangers of war, earthquake, fire, enemies and so on.[118]

Here, exalted figures from Tibet's Buddhist history (Padmasambhava, King Trisong Detsen, and his subjects) as well as apotheosized nonhuman beings (the spiritual heroes and sky-goers) lend their support to treasure revelation. Treasure revealers are thus understood to participate in a collaborative effort involving more than human beings, which is aimed at maintaining environmental and societal balance. The relational nature of treasure revelation empowers the revealer to avert even such catastrophes as epidemics, war, famine, earthquakes, and fire—events that happen at the intersection of the social and environmental spheres.

Revealers' ability to engage in this cooperative, relational process is predominantly attributed to their contemplative abilities.[119] These lend them visionary insights, as in Chokgyur Lingpa's

conversations with Padmasambhava, as well as the knowledge and observational skills to intervene in ways appropriate to their particular time and place. As argued by Sarah Jacoby, the network of interdependent relationships that treasure revealers negotiate with the aid of their contemplative skills is therefore eminently social and ecological:

> More than a philosophical illustration of the Buddhist truth of interdependence, the worldview invoked by the Treasure tradition brought weather conditions, social interactions, and physical health into its network of relationality. These conditions both affected and were affected by Treasure revealers and the texts and ritual objects they discovered with the help of Treasure protectors.[120]

Treasure revelation is thus a particularly potent example of the ecology of contemplation, in which contemplative skills are unfolded within a network of interdependent relationships of humans with their more-than-human environments. Treasure revealers are supported in their activities by a host of human and nonhuman collaborations and empowered by the legacy they inherit from Padmasambhava. As heirs to this prototypical ecological mediator, they are expected to harness their relational and contemplative skills in the pursuit of social and environmental welfare.

Constructing the Buddhist Ethical Project

Treasure revealers' eco-contemplative skills are thus presented as part of a broader ethical project—the maintenance of social and environmental balance. Indeed, this can be said to be the very project of Buddhist mandalization, starting with Padmasambhava's establishment of Tibet as a Buddhist realm. As argued by Martin Mills, the resistance shown by human and nonhuman beings to the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet during the imperial period was an ethical problem, an obstruction to the establishment of Buddhist order and the accompanying pursuit of awakening. He explains, "the 'inner' mental disciplining of the mind and the 'outer' geomantic subjugation of the landscape are equated within the Buddhist path: both are 'obstructions' to spiritual awakening."[121] Since outer and inner realities, or landscape and mindscape, are inherently entwined in the Tibetan lifeworld, the conversion of the landscape is thus part of the larger Buddhist ethical project of the manifestation of an awakened reality through contemplative practice.

As with project of mandalization of the Tibetan land during the imperial period, treasure revealers' efforts to promote a Buddhist ethical order moreover involved the physical transformation of the land through the construction of temples and other religious monuments. Tibetan monasteries often wielded significant political as well as religious influence over their constituencies and were therefore inscribed within a larger project of Buddhist governance. As Mills argues, temple founding was therefore part of an ethical project on both personal and societal scales, which "embeds the familiar Buddhist project of the disciplining of afflictive emotions within the wider tableau of the realm of governing the land itself."[122] In their quest to establish social and environmental harmony, treasure revealers' promotion of contemplative practice and temple construction thus went in tandem as joint ethical endeavors on the path to manifesting an awakened reality.

In Konchok Gyurme's biography of Chokgyur Lingpa, the former refers to such religious construction projects as "ripening the moxibustion points of the land."[123] Moxibustion is a practice of Chinese medicine involving the burning of medicinal herbs (moxa) on specific energy nodes on the body. By referring to moxibustion points on the land, Konchok Gyurme alludes to the founding myth of Tibetan geomancy, in which the Tibetan land was divined to be shaped like a supine demoness, obstructing the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the early imperial period, prior even to Padmasambhava. The geomantic remedy prescribed was the construction of temples on the demoness's moxibustion points, effectively pinning her down.[124] These religious constructions moreover had to be accompanied, as is always the case in Tibetan Buddhism, with extensive land-based rituals. As Mills explains:

> This emphasis on the importance of the process of ritual subjugation—in bringing out the divine reality of a landscape which initially manifests as a complex of inauspicious features—suggests that the demoness motif within the early dynastic stories needs to be understood as part of a wider narrative in which this demonic appearance is replaced by the emergent reality of Buddhahood.[125]

The process of ritual subjugation and physical transformation of the landscape was thus part of the Buddhist project of manifesting the qualities of awakening within the landscape—its affordances for mandalization, which support the practice of contemplation in Tibetan societies.

Likewise, in his list of Chokgyur Lingpa's activities for the ripening of geographic moxibustion points, Konchok Gyurme first mentions the construction of a temple at the Mouth of the Da-Nyin Gorge, and the ensuing maintenance of a practice tradition there.[126] The "ripening" of the land's vital points is thereby equated with the firm establishment of Buddhist contemplative lineages on these specific sites, facilitated by the construction of temples.[127] In yet another equation of landscape with mindscape, this reflects the common use of the term "ripening" to signify the preparation of a person's mind for the Buddhist path: ripening—whether of landscape or mindscape—is foremost an ethical project. In relation to the landscape, it moreover requires the entire range of eco-contemplative skills that we have seen to be necessary for the identification, revelation, and opening of a sacred site and its contemplative affordances.

In his own writings, Chokgyur Lingpa similarly presents the geomantic construction of temples in the right locations as a means to preserve the Buddhist tradition with the cooperative support of the landscape. The late nineteenth century was a particularly tumultuous time in Tibet, with tremendous political instability and conflict.[128] In particular, Chokgyur Lingpa's home region of Kham was afflicted by warfare initiated by a small, local kingdom named Nyarong from 1863 to 1867. Around this period, the treasure revealer and his map of sacred sites were directly or indirectly causes for the construction of a number of temples, including the Heruka temple at Tsādra Rinchen Drak. These religious constructions were thought to protect Buddhist teachings and practitioners in the midst of chaos.[129] For instance, in a letter to Kongtrul regarding Tsādra, Chokgyur Lingpa plainly writes:

> While these days, all flee from the tumult of the Nyarong armies
> With incomparable suffering, all the doctrine holders
> Of Kagyu and Nyingma have managed to stay on:

This is also a blessing of this temple.[130]

Chokgyur Lingpa thereby attributes the survival of his and Kongtrul's traditions to the presence of the Heruka temple at Tsādra, and the temple's construction was dependent on his collaborative efforts to open up the sacred site.

In the conclusion of the same letter, the treasure revealer further writes: "It is said that noble beings would appear in each of the main sites, the central twenty-five major sites; and if they built temples there, no other means to ensure the welfare of Tibet and Kham would be necessary."[131] As the opener of the twenty-five major sites and revealer of their guides, Chokgyur Lingpa is of course the main catalyst for any further activities meant to manifest their sacredness, or contemplative affordances—such as temple construction. With these words, he is therefore positioning himself as a key agent in the promotion of societal welfare in Greater Tibet—all based on his use of eco-contemplative skills to open up his region's sacred geography. Thus, the treasure revealer's unique role in negotiating the network of ecological relationships that shape the Tibetan lifeworld gives him claim to great power, but also to tremendous ethical responsibility.

CONCLUSION

An ecological approach to human life enables a Western scholar like me to extricate herself to some degree from the snares of the prevailing nature/culture and mind/body dichotomies. This is essential to arriving at any kind of understanding of the Tibetan contemplative tradition, as illustrated by the foregoing study of the role of land in treasure revelation. Though grounded in long-standing Buddhist and Indic practices of visionary and land-based revelations, the Tibetan treasure tradition took on a unique form of its own, shaped by the legacy of Padmasambhava and the Tibetan landscape.[132] It thus offers a compelling window into the Tibetan Buddhist lifeworld, which is populated by much more than human contemplatives, encompassing instead the whole range of more-than-human relationships that constitute the experience of life in an environment.

The treasure tradition, like the Buddhist tradition of which it is part, does not separate humans from the network of relationships with the land and with other humans and nonhumans, relationships that are integral to being in the world. Rooted in an understanding of the ecological nature of experience, which acknowledges the co-arising of the perceiver and the environment, Tibetan Buddhism emplaces contemplation at the nexus of this arising, such that contemplation becomes as much a matter of transforming the mind as of transforming the world. This transformation is epitomized by the treasure revealer's opening of a sacred geography that supports and perpetuates the practice of contemplation in the Tibetan landscape and thereby purports to ensure social and environmental balance. This is a fundamentally ethical project, as it aspires to not just personal but societal and ecological welfare.

To read treasure revealers' site guides as eco-contemplative manuals is to acknowledge the environment's central role in contemplative practice, blurring the strict distinction between a nature devoid of intrinsic meaning structures and a culture that would impose such meaning structures on the otherwise-neutral landscape. It emplaces the contemplative in society and society in the land. This forms a direct challenge to the modern individualistic approach to mindfulness meditation, which cannot address the growing alienation of humans from each other and their environments. Failing to recognize the intrinsic entanglement of mindscape and landscape that

underlies the Buddhist contemplative tradition at its root, the corporate approach to mindfulness participates in perpetuating the intellectual hegemony of the nature/culture distinction, along with all of its implications. As Ingold writes about such an approach:

> It is to accord priority to the Western metaphysics of the alienation of humanity from nature, and to use *our* disengagement as the standard against which to judge *their* engagement. Faced with an ecological crisis whose roots lie in this disengagement, in the separation of human agency and social responsibility from the sphere of our direct involvement with the non-human environment, it surely behoves us to reverse this order of priority.[133]

Taking a cue from the Tibetan treasure tradition, moving toward an ecology of contemplation might open the possibility for an ethical reengagement of humans with their inhabited environments, with implications that hopefully reach beyond the theoretical.

NOTES

[1] "Accomplished contemplative practitioners" translates *grub thob* (Skt. *siddha*). This is a term specific to tantric practice.
[2] "Knowledge holders" here translates *rig 'dzin* (Skt. *vidyādhara*). In this term's complex etymology, "knowledge" originally referred to tantric spells. "Knowledge-holders" were therefore those who mastered the spells, and who thereby acquired supernatural powers. The term has since taken on many different valences, but these figures continue to straddle the line between the human and more-than-human realms.
[3] "Sky-goers" here translates *mkha' 'gro* (Skt. *ḍākinī*). These originally demonic beings in Indic tantric cosmology came to be seen as the female embodiments of Buddhahood in later Tibetan Buddhism.
[4] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 337.
[5] This is Zen teacher and Professor of Management Ronald Purser's argument in his controversial book *McMindfulness*, which explores the capitalist appropriation of Buddhist meditation techniques by the modern mindfulness movement. Drawing a parallel between corporate mindfulness and curbside recycling, Purser notes in a related article that "the real problem is the mass-production of plastics by corporations, and their overuse in retail. However, consumers are led to believe that being personally wasteful is the underlying issue, which can be fixed if they change their habits. . . . The neoliberal doctrine of individual responsibility has performed its sleight-of-hand, distracting us from the real culprit." Purser, "Mindfulness Conspiracy."
[6] Purser likewise argues that "such an individualistic spirituality is clearly linked with the neoliberal agenda of privatization, especially when masked by the ambiguous language used in mindfulness. Market forces are already exploiting the momentum of the mindfulness movement, reorienting its goals to a highly circumscribed individual realm." Purser, "Mindfulness Conspiracy. "
[7] Throughout this article, I use the terms "contemplation" and "contemplative" broadly to refer to the Buddhist tradition and its practitioners as a whole. Thus, in this context, contemplation covers the three aspects of the Buddhist path of study, reflection, and meditation. Meditation in the Buddhist teachings moreover includes both *śamatha* (calm-abiding) and *vipaśyanā* (insight) meditations, and is understood to be applied in silent meditation as much as in liturgical recitations, rituals, and visualization practices.
[8] As Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia remarks in regard to the mountain cults of Tibetan Buddhists in Sikkim, for them, "the landscape is recognized as alive: the mountains, hills, lakes and rivers are all deities (*lha*), protective deities (*gzhi bdag*), and spirits (*btsan*), which are ever present and need to be communicated with." Bhutia, "Living with the Mountain," 270.
[9] Latour, *Nous n'avons Jamais Été Modernes*.
[10] Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 5.
[11] Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 55.
[12] Out of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Chokgyur Lingpa belonged to the Nyingma school (*rnying ma*), Khyentse Wangpo to the Sakya (*sa skya*), and Jamgon Kongtrul to the Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*). Their collaboration was central to the promotion of a nonsectarian approach (*ris med*, Rimé) that gained traction in Kham, Eastern Tibet, in their time, as a counterweight to the growing and often antagonistic power of the Geluk (*dge lugs*) School that was ruling in Lhasa, Central Tibet, through the office of the Dalai Lama. Gardner, "Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams," 164.
[13] Ingold, *Making*, 3–6.
[14] Ingold, *Making*, 6.
[15] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 337.
[16] The full title is *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, which translates to "Guide to Lotus Crystal Cave, the Supreme Magnetizing Site, From the Three Sections of the Great Perfection Sacred Dharma." Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 2004.
[17] The importance of this site in the tradition is linked to the renowned and much revered treasure text revealed from it: *The Three Sections of the Great Perfection* (*Rdzogs chen sde gsum*). The *Brief Inventory of Eminent Sacred Sites of Tibet, Compiled by Padmasambhava, the Scholar from Uḍḍiyāna*, which was revealed by

Chokgyur Lingpa, introduces this site in the following manner: "Regarding the eminent site of speech qualities, in the region of Do-Kham Dri, in one of the great valleys called Mesho Dzom, lies the Lotus Crystal Cave of Great Bliss, supreme among all eminent sites of Tibet. This is the site of Garap Dorje, who attained the wisdom body, and of Shri Singha, who attained the body of unity. It was miraculously visited by the four masters of the four great streams of Tibetan Buddhism. Even more renowned than Kailash, Tsāri, or Zaplung, no other site comes close to this eminent one. It is the site of a treasure unique among all those under the Tibetan soil, the *Sacred Dharma of the Three Sections of the Great Perfection*, the distilled wisdom of all scholars and practitioners. This treasure, [which was hidden] within a jeweled gold casket, will remain until samsara is emptied to the last. What greater praise could be made of this site?" Mchog gyur gling pa, *Bod kyi gnas chen rnams kyi mdo byang dkar chag o rgyan gyi mkhas pa pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis bkod pa*, 116.

[18] According to traditional accounts, the production of literary treasures is a collaborative process that involves a series of steps and contributors, most notably Padmasambhava and the treasure revealer, but also Padmasambhava's students who are often cited as the transcribers and concealers of his teachings, and the treasure revealer's associates who often participate in revealing and decoding the texts. The *Guide to Lotus Crystal Ca*ve, for instance, is said to have been orally taught by Padmasambhava, transcribed by his consort Yeshe Tsogyel, revealed by Chokgyur Lingpa, and transcribed by Khyentse Wangpo from the treasure scroll. Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 370.

For the sake of simplicity, however, I will follow the convention used by those who follow these lineages, which is to cite most treasure texts as Padmasambhava's own words. This is sufficient for the purposes of this article, I contend, since we are concerned here with the treasure tradition's internal logic and self-understanding. There has however been extensive scholarship on the subject of authorship in the Buddhist tradition as a whole, which has shown that this is understood in a much more distributive sense than the individual authorship that is usually presumed in the Western tradition. See, notably, Cabezón, "Authorship and Literary Production," 233–263.

The issue of authorship and literary production in the treasure tradition has also been extensively studied by Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, as summarized in Mayer, "gTer Ston and Tradent," 227–242.

[19] Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born*, 1–3.

[20] Traditional and academic accounts of Padmasambhava differ as to his status in Tibet during the imperial period, but not as much as was once thought. Indeed, contemporary evidence for Padmasambhava's visit to Tibet exists, though scant, and recent scholarship has found that his cult as a mythical and even apotheosized figure began shortly thereafter, in the tenth century. For the latest scholarship on this, see Dalton, "Early Development of the Padmasambhava," 29–64.

[21] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 337.

[22] There is no direct equivalent for the term "sacred" in Tibetan. Buddha realms and localities of religious importance are often characterized as "pure" (*dag pa*, *dakpa*), as in the well-known Pure Land Buddhism. Places and objects can also be considered as having particular potency by virtue of being blessed (*byin gyis brlabs*, *jingi lap*)—which may literally translate as "flooded with power"—or consecrated (*rab gnas*, *rapné*), which refers to settling the presence of awakening in a particular object. For the purposes of this article, the terms "sacred" and "pure" can be used interchangeably, as they both point to perceived qualities of places that have thus been blessed or consecrated. For more on the significance of the Tibetan word *gnas* (*né*), translated here as "sacred place," see Huber, "Putting the *Gnas* Back," 23–60.

[23] This is the site guide for Rudam Glacial Ranges (Ru dam gangs kyi ra ba), the hermitage above Dzokchen Monastery (Rdzogs chen dgon). Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan gnas gtso ru dam gangs kyi ra ba'i sbas gnas chen po'i lo rgyus 'gro don mtha' yas* , 127–146.

[24] "Results" here translates *dngos grub* (Skt. *siddhi*). Literally "accomplishments," these are the superior mental or physical abilities that are said to result from successful meditation practice.

[25] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan gnas gtso ru dam gangs kyi ra ba'i sbas gnas chen po'i lo rgyus 'gro don mtha' yas* , 128.

[26] Varela et al., *Embodied Mind*, 23.

[27] Varela et al., *Embodied Mind*, xvi.

[28] Varela et al., *Embodied Mind*, 23.

[29] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology*, 429.
[30] Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 19.
[31] Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 19.
[32] Tsādra is the hermitage above Palpung Monastery (Dpal spungs dgon) that was restored by Jamgon Kongtrul after Chokgyur Lingpa's recognition of the site as sacred.
[33] *khyad par 'jug pa'i srog gi gzhi*. Tentative translation.
[34] Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, *He ru ka dgyes pa'i gnas kyi yang byang 'od gsal thig le*, 166–167.
[35] Varela et al., *Embodied Mind*, xx.
[36] I borrow the term "mindscape" from Dan Smyer Yü, who uses it to discuss the intertwinement of landscape and mindscape in Tibetans' experience of their land. Yü defines the "mindscape" as "one's intellectuality and emotionality with both a spatial and a temporal structure of its own," emphasizing the given embodiment and emplacement of all human experience. Yü, *Mindscaping the Landscape of Tibet,* 20.
[37] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 337.
[38] Both of these terms can alternately describe human tantric practitioners and deities. See notes 2 and 3.
[39] On this, see Latour, *Science in Action*.
[40] This is John Strong's argument in his book on the early Buddhist legend of King Aśoka, the first Buddhist emperor who lived in the third century BCE. Discussing Aśoka's elaboration of a network of thirty-two sites linked to events of the Buddha's life, Strong highlights the parallel between this and the thirty-two signs of a great man (*mahāpuruṣa*) that are said to mark the Buddha's body. He writes: "In the thirty-two places of pilgrimage, we have not only an attempt to recall the various events in the life of the Buddha, but, once again, a systematic establishment of his whole person—his life as a Mahāpuruṣa [an exalted person]—on the face of the kingdom. Thus the thirty-two sites set up for posterity by Aśoka can . . . be thought of separately and as a unit; they form a single mesocosmic 'chronogram' that allows one to relive gradually, and then all at once, the whole life and person of the Buddha." Strong, *Legend of King Aśoka* 124–125.
[41] For the complex relationship of Tibetans with India as a holy land and pilgrimage destination, see Huber, *Holy Land Reborn*.
[42] Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 150.
[43] Holly Gayley therefore speaks of treasure revelation as an "ontology of the past," in Gayley, "Ontology of the Past," 213–240.
[44] In his comprehensive study of the evolution of Padmasambhava's role in Tibetan Buddhism, Dan Hirshberg shows that the earliest accounts of the treasure tradition offer alternative narratives of the origin of treasures, which do not necessarily involve Padmasambhava. However, the treasure tradition gradually crystallized around Padmasambhava as its originator and main protagonist. Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born*, 85–140.
[45] Yü, "Sentience of the Earth," 494.
[46] On this point, Huber remarks: "It is a well known feature of Tibetan culture, both pre-modern and contemporary, that the physical environment in both its animate and inanimate dimensions is believed to be occupied by a host of deities and spirit forces. They range from minor autochthons to supreme Tantric deities and Buddhas, and can exist in the world-space as a totality, by pervading all things in various ways, or reside at specific locations, being both mobile and fixed." Huber, "Putting the *Gnas* Back," 25.
[47] Though sources from the imperial period are scant, retrospective accounts of Padmasambhava's arrival to Tibet and taming of the landscape generally concord in traditional sources from the tenth century onward. Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born*, 1–5.
[48] Contrasting this with the Japanese case of landscape mandalization, Yü explains that in Tibet, the earthly and the transcendent were both included in the process of mandalization, such that Tibetans traditionally related to the sentient landscape for soteriological and mundane purposes. He writes, "The Tibetan case, by contrast, involves not merely the perceived Buddhist sacredness but, more critically, it pertains to a range of inter-sentient communications between mutual embodiments of Buddha Dharma, place, gods, and people." Yü, "Sentience of the Earth," 495.
[49] Huber and Pedersen, "Meteorological Knowledge and Environmental Ideas," 584.
[50] This is the *vajrakāya* (adamantine body) system that was developed in the *Wheel of Time* (*Kālacakra*) tantric literature, as discussed by Eric Huntington in his extensive study of Buddhist tantric cosmology. Huntington explains: "By articulating parallel accounts of the fundamental elements, the cosmos, the human body, and other

subjects, the Wheel of Time establishes a unifying logic for all knowledge that also suggests powerfully overlapping symbolism. For example, the physical body of the practitioner becomes a microcosm of the universe: 'Here in the body, earth is firmness, water is fluidity, fire is heat, and wind is swiftness because it causes contraction and expansion. A bodily aperture is space. A hard bone, or the backbone that extends from the hips up to the shoulders, is Mt. Meru, the best among the immortal mountains. . . . The heavenly bodies, or [the ten] planets, beginning with the sun, and so on, are the ten types of bodily apertures.'" Huntington, *Creating the Universe*, 46–47.

[51] For an in-depth, traditional explanation of the correspondences between outer sacred places and the inner subtle body, as presented by Jamgon Kongtrul, see Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 59–74.

[52] Gibson, *Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 139.

[53] The Anu Scriptures refer to the tantras of Anuyoga, which, in the system of the Nyingma school to which the New Treasures of Chokgyur Lingpa belongs, are the main source for theories of the subtle body and its relation to the outer environment.

[54] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan gnas gtso ru dam gangs kyi ra ba'i sbas gnas chen po'i lo rgyus 'gro don mtha' yas* , 143.

[55] This is, for instance, the case in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and its commentaries. Gray and Yarnall, *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*.

[56] This is just one possible interpretation of Higher Yoga tantra pilgrimage practices, which reflect dominant positions in Padmasambhava's tradition. However, such practices and philosophical positions were hotly debated throughout Tibetan history, with some considering tantric pilgrimage as effective only for those who already accomplished certain levels of realization in their contemplative practice, while others saw pilgrimage as a means for fostering such realizations. On one iteration of this debate, see Huber, "Where Exactly Are Cāritra, Devikoṭa," 121–164.

[57] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 337.

[58] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 37. Gray and Yarnall, *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*.

[59] This is the myth of the supine demoness, which explains the initial conversion of the Tibetan land to Buddhism in the seventh century, though it is first found in eleventh- to fourteenth-century sources. In the seventh century, Tibet was ruled by emperor Songtsen Gampo (Srong btsan sgam po), whose two wives, one Nepali and one Chinese, were instrumental in bringing Buddhism to Tibet. The Chinese wife in particular, Princess Wenchen Kongjo (Wen chen kong jo), divined that the land of Tibet itself was an obstacle to the establishment of Buddhism in the country, as it was shaped like a supine demoness. In order to tame the land and establish Buddhism, therefore, twelve temples had to be built on each of the demoness's moxibustion points. This myth was retroactively associated with some of the first Tibetan Buddhist temples, including the Central Temple of Lhasa. Mills, "Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness," 2–3.

[60] According to Martin Mills, the core principles of Chinese geomancy were adopted as is by Tibetans, though its purpose was redirected from Confucian state formation to the "structuring of Buddhist ritual life" in the process. Mills, "Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness," 7.

[61] The title of the collection is *Thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel*.

[62] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan mchog gi gnas zla nyin kha la rong sgo'i dkar chag*, 5.

[63] According to Jamgon Kongtrul, the ten virtues of place are: "(1) The two virtues of land: land for construction and land for agriculture; (2) the two virtues of water: water for drinking and water for agriculture; (3) the two virtues of grass: good pastures nearby and further away; (4) the two virtues of wood: wood for construction and firewood; (5) the two virtues of stone: stone for house-building and stone for hearth-building." 'Jam mgon kong sprul, *Thugs kyi gnas mchog chen po de bI ko TI tsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, 495.

[64] "Power" in this line translates *dngos sgrub* (Skt. *siddhi*).

[65] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan gnas gtso ru dam gangs kyi ra ba'i sbas gnas chen po'i lo rgyus 'gro don mtha' yas* , 134.

[66] Affordances are a key concept in Gibson's ecological theory of perception. He defines them as what the environment "*offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or for ill" (italics as in the original).

According to Gibson, affordances are inherent to an environment, though only perceived by beings according to their specific needs. Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 127.
[67] Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 129.
[68] Yü, "Sentience of the Earth," 494.
[69] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan mchog gi gnas zla nyin kha la rong sgo'i dkar chag*, 5.
[70] The deities cited are all of the main deities of the Eight Sādhana Teachings (*sgrub pa bka' brgyad*).
[71] For a detailed discussion of the role of the mandala in tantric visualizations, see Huntington, *Creating the Universe*, 63–108.
[72] A feast gathering (*tshogs 'khor*, Skt. *gaṇacakra*) is a key practice of tantric Buddhism, which has become widespread in Tibetan Buddhism despite its originally secretive nature in Indian tantra. In the later developments of tantra in India, feast gatherings were some of the main practices performed in Buddhist sacred sites (*pīṭhas*). For a short, historical introduction to the practice, see Szántó, "Minor Vajrayāna Texts V," 276.
[73] "Spiritual heroes" here translates *dpa' bo* (Skt. *vīra*), the transdimensional beings often presented as the male equivalents of the sky-goers.
[74] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 370.
[75] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 337.
[76] On this, Gibson writes: "The observer may or may not perceive or attend to the affordance, according to his needs, but the affordance, being invariant, is always there to be perceived. An affordance is not bestowed upon an object by a need of an observer and his act of perceiving it. The object offers what it does because it is what it is." Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 139.
[77] The Tibetan tradition generally distinguishes between innate skills (*skyes stobs*) and learned skills (*sbyangs stobs*) in appraising a person's ability and progress on the Buddhist path. With regards to the perception of affordances, Gibson illustrates the articulation of these two sets of skills by giving the example of a mailbox, which by its shape affords the postage of letters, but will only be perceived as such by a human person who has been trained to perceive it in this way. Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 138–140.
[78] Here I borrow the term from Ingold, who himself borrowed it from Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 154.
[79] Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 22.
[80] Ingold thus contends that "much if not all of what we are accustomed to call cultural variation in fact consists of variations of skills," which are acquired through engagement with other members of society as well as with one's environment. Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 5.
[81] Gibson makes clear the equivalence of an object's value and its affordances: "The perceiving of an affordance is not a process of perceiving a value-free physical object to which meaning is somehow added in a way that no one has been able to agree upon; it is a process of perceiving a value-rich ecological object. Any substance, any surface, any layout has some affordance for benefit or injury to someone. Physics may be value-free, but ecology is not." Gibson, *Ecological Approach*, 140.
[82] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 337.
[83] Yü, "Sentience of the Earth," 496.
[84] Huntington, *Creating the Universe*, 65.
[85] Relic mounds (*mchod rten*, Skt. *stūpa*) were originally funerary mounds that came to be associated with the Buddha's relics, and are now important religious monuments symbolizing the Buddha's awakened mind.
[86] Incantations (*gzungs sngags*, Skt. *dhāraṇī*) are long, powerful verbal formulae. Perhaps the precursors of mantra in the Sūtra tradition, their original function was to encode and encapsulate long scriptures in a few short lines, and/or to cast spells in the Kriyā yoga tradition.
[87] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan gnas gtso ru dam gangs kyi ra ba'i sbas gnas chen po'i lo rgyus 'gro don mtha' yas* , 131.
[88] The truth body (*chos sku*, Skt. *dharmakāya*) is one of the three bodies of the buddha, or three realities, in the three-body system (*sku gsum*, Skt. *trikāya*), the other two being the form bodies (*gzugs sku*, Skt. *rupakāya*): the enjoyment body (*long spyod rdzogs pa'i sku*, Skt. *saṃbhogakāya*) and the emanation body (*sprul pa'i sku*, Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*). In this order, the bodies are placed from subtlest and most esoteric to grossest and most accessible. In the reverse order, these three bodies are successively perceptible by Buddhist practitioners who have reached

increasingly high levels of meditative realization. Thus, perceiving the three bodies of a buddha is in itself a goal of practice, which ultimately leads to Buddhahood, equivalent to the truth body, and one's own emanation of the form bodies out of that ultimate reality.

[89] Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, "Three Kāyas Are Present," 265.

[90] Huntington, *Creating the Universe*, 65.

[91] Huntington, *Creating the Universe*, 18. Tibetans count five, not seven, colors in the rainbow: blue, white, red, green, and yellow.

[92] The text reads: "It was blessed by the saṃbhogakāya / And distils the essence of the elements: / The radiant expression of the distilled essence of space / Is signified by the encompassing azure, / Which is vast, radiant, deep, and luminous. / The distilled essence of earth is the glaciers. / The distilled essence of water is the lasting lakes. / The distilled essence of fire is the radiating warmth: / Though in the summer it is cool, a snowy retreat, / In the winter, the earth's eye does not freeze over. / The wind essence is the fruit-laden forest, / Where all kinds of medicine grow. / This is how this sacred site came about." Mchog gyur gling pa, *Yon tan gnas gtso ru dam gangs kyi ra ba'i sbas gnas chen po'i lo rgyus 'gro don mtha' yas* , 130–131.

[93] Huntington, *Creating the Universe*, 94.

[94] Hartmann, "To See a Mountain," 313.

[95] Ingold writes: "Dwelling in the world, in short, is tantamount to the ongoing, temporal interweaving of our lives with one another and with the manifold constituents of our environment. The world of our experience is, indeed, continually and endlessly coming into being around us as we weave. If it has a surface, it is like the surface of the basket: it has no 'inside' or 'outside.' Mind is not above, nor nature below; rather, if we ask where mind is, it is in the weave of the surface itself." Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 348.

[96] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Dam chos rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las dbang gi gnas mchog pad+ma shel phug gi dkar chag*, 370.

[97] The opening of a site is not necessarily a one-off act, and sites are often reopened several times throughout the centuries. Thus, Chokgyur Lingpa's narrative map of forty-two sacred sites in Eastern Tibet and Jamgon Kongtrul's commentary to it often mention several openers of sites, which may have lived centuries apart. 'Jam mgon kong sprul, *Mdo khams gnas chen nyer lnga yan lag dang bcas pa'i mdo byang gi gsal byed zin thung nyung ngu nyung ngu*, 125–143.

[98] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Bod kyi gnas chen rnams kyi mdo byang dkar chag o rgyan gyi mkhas pa pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis bkod pa*.

[99] Dkon mchog 'gyur med, *Gter chen mchog gyur gling pa'i rnam thar bkra shis dbyangs kyi yan lag gsal byed*, 282.

[100] Konchok Guyrme nevertheless goes on to mention the sites that Chokgyur Lingpa visited and opened in person, among the forty-two, indicating that these can still be set apart for that reason. Thus, the next sentence reads: "Those sites that he opened by actually going there are Luté Karma, Khala Rongo, Nabün Dzong, Gatö Yudrak, Yegyel Namkha Dzö, Khandro Bumdzong, Tro Ziltrom, Pa-ok Wangchen Drak, Dzongshö Pema Shelphuk, Tsādra Rinchen Drak, Sengé Namdrak, Doti Gangkar, Riwo Wangzhu, and the Tashi site that is the second Muksang." Dkon mchog 'gyur med, *Gter chen mchog gyur gling pa'i rnam thar bkra shis dbyangs kyi yan lag gsal byed*, 282.

[101] Mchog gyur gling pa, *Gsang thig snying po'i skor las / thugs kyi gnas mchog tsA 'dra rin chen brag gi dkar chagg*," 161.

[102] This still holds true for present-day treasure revealers, as shown by David Germano in his study of twentieth-century treasure revealer Khenpo Jikpun. Germano, "Re-Membering the Dismembered Body," 84.

[103] This had happened before. In the eighteenth century, Tsādra had been made into a retreat place by the main master of Palpung Monastery (Dpal spungs dgon), the eighth Tai Situpa, Chokyi Jungne (Ta'i si tu pa chos kyi 'byung gnas, 1699/1700–1774), who was said to have had visions there. However, by Jamgon Kongtrul's time, due to failing finances, the hermitage had fallen into disrepair. In his autobiography, Jamgon Kongtrul recalls the early difficulties of rebuilding the hermitage at Tsādra, despite the ninth Tai Situpa's insistence on its importance and his own attachment to the place. Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 132–136.

[104] On this subject, Jamgon Kongtrul recalls in his autobiography: "In the Fire Dragon Year [1856], during the great empowerment-practice of the Quintessential Vision of the Spiritual Master, held in the great center [Palpung monastery], before Blazing Auspicious Glory, the shrine of the new statues, the omniscient spiritual master, Jamyang Khyentsé Wongpo [*sic*] heard a vajra song of the wisdom *dakinis*, saying, 'This place is the

third Dévikotri!' Similarly, at the end of that year, the reincarnate great treasure revealer, Chok-gyur Déchen Lingpa, came from the great monastic center of Ok-min Karma [to Palpung]. . . . In response to my prayer that he open this area of sacred ground, he retrieved from Powerful Hero Cliff *The Location List of the Twenty-Five Major Sacred Sites of Amdo and Kham*, which contains a reference to this area." Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 135–136.

[105] Translated in Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 105.

[106] This role of the treasure revealer in building a bridge to the hallowed sources of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions through their revelations is the object of Gayley, "Ontology of the Past."

[107] Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 138.

[108] Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 140.

[109] Dkon mchog 'gyur med, *Gter chen mchog gyur gling pa'i rnam thar bkra shis dbyangs kyi yan lag gsal byed*, 304–305.

[110] One of the caves was notably said to have sheltered Padmasambhava's contemporary, Vimalamitra. Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 230.

[111] The title of the collection is *Gsang tig snying po skor gsum*.

[112] Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, "Breeze That Carries," 195.

[113] This is also Alexander Gardner's argument in his PhD dissertation on Chokgyur Lingpa's narrative map of the twenty-five sacred sites of Kham: "As with many Tibetan rites, treasure extraction is performed to draw out the importance of a particular place. It enacts the blessing bestowed on that place by reversing the order in which the blessing came down: what was hidden is now revealed, what lay dormant is now made to serve the community." Gardner, "Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams," 107.

[114] Tibet and Kham (Bod Khams) designate Greater Tibet, in the sense of the Central (Tibet) and Eastern (Kham) regions. It also indicates a political distinction made between these two regions. Mchog gyur gling pa, *O rgyan gu ru pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis sprul pa'i gter chen mor bstsal pa'i lung bstan bslab bya dang dag snang dris lan dogs gcod kyi skor 'ga' zhig phyogs bsdus rab dwangs nor bu'i me long*, 134.

[115] Referring to the three signs of the final age of degeneration—namely, illness, famine, and strife, which Padmasambhava identifies with Chokgyur Lingpa's time, he thus gives him the following advice: "In order to pacify this age of illness, / Distribute the nectar of accomplished medicine to all. / In order to pacify this age of famine, / Make hundreds of thousands of feast gatherings [*tshogs 'khor*] and fire offerings. / In order to pacify this age of warfare, / Perform the averting rituals of thread-crossing [*mdos*] and oblation [*gtor ma*]. / In order to pacify these troubled times, / Hide great treasures and build *stūpas*." Mchog gyur gling pa, *O rgyan gu ru pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis sprul pa'i gter chen mor bstsal pa'i lung bstan bslab bya dang dag snang dris lan dogs gcod kyi skor 'ga' zhig phyogs bsdus rab dwangs nor bu'i me long*, 138.

[116] Mchog gyur gling pa, *O rgyan gu ru pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis sprul pa'i gter chen mor bstsal pa'i lung bstan bslab bya dang dag snang dris lan dogs gcod kyi skor 'ga' zhig phyogs bsdus rab dwangs nor bu'i me long*, 139.

[117] Mchog gyur gling pa, *O rgyan gu ru pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis sprul pa'i gter chen mor bstsal pa'i lung bstan bslab bya dang dag snang dris lan dogs gcod kyi skor 'ga' zhig phyogs bsdus rab dwangs nor bu'i me long*, 139.

[118] Tulku Thondup Rinpoche and Talbott, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, 147.

[119] Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 179–181.

[120] Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*.

[121] Mills, "Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness," 24.

[122] Mills, "Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness," 24–25.

[123] Dkon mchog 'gyur med, *Gter chen mchog gyur gling pa'i rnam thar bkra shis dbyangs kyi yan lag gsal byed*, 564.

[124] See note 61.

[125] Mills, "Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness," 26.

[126] Konchok Gyurme writes: "Furthermore, here are a few examples of how, with his bodhicitta resolve, he directly or indirectly ripened the moxibustion points of the land for the teaching and beings on special days, in relation to his three seats of body, speech, and heart. The Great Terton stated that a Tenth Day temple and so forth were essential to have at the Mouth of the Da-Nyin Gorge. Thereafter, with Gyelse Wangchuk Dorje Kyegom and his patrons providing the main conditions at the start, Accomplishment and Great Accomplishment practices have been held there uninterruptedly." Dkon mchog 'gyur med, *Gter chen mchog gyur gling pa'i rnam thar bkra shis dbyangs kyi yan lag gsal byed*, 564.

[127] The use of the term "ripening" here is informative since it does not imply a forceful subjugation of the feminine ground, as Janet Gyatso has argued with regard to the myth of the supine demoness. Rather, as contended by Martin Mills, the process of ritual subjugation of the land was one that was meant to bring "out the divine reality of a landscape," such that initially inauspicious features might be "replaced by the emergent reality of Buddhahood." Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness," 33–51. Mills, "Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness," 26.
[128] Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 148–157.
[129] This recalls Heruka's role of cosmic reformer in the foundational myth of Buddhist sacred sites in India (*pīṭhas*). The connection between Tsādra, Heruka, and the myth of cosmic reform in which Heruka subdues Śiva and transforms his sites into Buddhist ones is evidenced in Kongtrul's first guide to Tsādra, *Music from the Ocean of Mind* (*yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*), which starts off with two different versions of the myth in a section entitled "The Origin of Primordial Sacred Places." All other guides to the site also feature Heruka prominently, attesting to Tsādra's importance in the continuous unfolding of the drama of cosmic reform. In his guide, Kongtrul cites *The Great Discourse Condensing All Realization* (*Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo chen* po) from the Early Translations (i.e., texts translated during the Tibetan imperial period) and *The Utmost Secret: The Scripture That Gathers the Net of the Ḍākinīs* (*Gsang mtha'i rtse mo mkha' 'gro drwa ba sdom pa'i lung*) from the Late Translations (i.e., texts translated during the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet). 'Jam mgon kong sprul, *Thugs kyi gnas mchog chen po de bI ko TI tsA 'dra rin chen brag gi rtog pa brjod pa yid kyi rgya mtsho'i rol mo*, 163–164. For a translation of Kongtrul's accounts of the two versions of this myth, see Zangpo, *Sacred Ground*, 171–173.
[130] Mchog gyur gling pa, *O rgyan gu ru pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis sprul pa'i gter chen mor bstsal pa'i lung bstan bslab bya dang dag snang dris lan dogs gcod kyi skor 'ga' zhig phyogs bsdus rab dwangs nor bu'i me long*, 151–152.
[131] Mchog gyur gling pa, *O rgyan gu ru pad+ma 'byung gnas kyis sprul pa'i gter chen mor bstsal pa'i lung bstan bslab bya dang dag snang dris lan dogs gcod kyi skor 'ga' zhig phyogs bsdus rab dwangs nor bu'i me long*, 146.
[132] In particular, see Mayer, "Rethinking Treasure (Part One)," 119–184; and Mayer, "Indian *nidhi*, Tibetan *gter ma*," 368–446.
[133] Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 76.

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