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News from the *Phe reng ki*: The Pilgrim-Merchant Pūraṇ Giri as Cultural Mediator between Tibet, India, and the British

Abstract. The Indian pilgrim-merchant Pūraṇ Giri (1745–1795) accompanied George Bogle on his first British diplomatic mission to Tibet in 1774 to the court of the Third Paṇchen Lama. A confidant of the Third Paṇchen, Pūraṇ Giri was one of the so-called *gosains* who maintained busy trade and pilgrimage between India and the Himalayan regions and Tibet in the eighteenth century. He played a key role in the transmission and circulation of knowledge between the culturally heterogeneous worlds of Tibet, India, and the British East India Company. Nevertheless, he fell into obscurity relatively quickly after 1800, and in the narrative of the early history of Anglo-Tibetan relations, he occupies at best a minor role alongside the two main actors George Bogle and Samuel Turner. This chapter examines Pūraṇ Giri's role in the transmission of knowledge about India and the British in eighteenth-century Tibetan scholarly culture by looking, among other sources, at the writings of the Third Paṇchen Lama.

Keywords. Pūraṇ Giri, George Bogle, Third Paṇchen Lama, cultural mediation, transmission of knowledge

Introduction

> In this region of Vā ra ṇa se in the deer-grove at Sarnāth is the dwelling place of the thousand buddhas, [. . .] in its vicinity are also some great places of the non-Buddhists and there are gateways so that they can perform their ablutions in the river Ganggā.[1]

1 Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes 1775: fol. 9r–v: "Wā ra na se'i yul der drang srong lhun ba ri dvags kyi nags na [. . .] sangs rgyas stong gi bzhugs khri dang/ de'i nye 'dab na phyi rol pa'i gnas che ba 'ga' zhig kyang mchis shing chu bo ganggā la khrus byed pa'i sgo dang/." In this chapter, Tibetan is transliterated according to Wylie 1959, while Sanskrit is transliterated according to the internationally accepted rules. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

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So says the Third Paṇchen Lama Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes (1738–1780) informing his countrymen of the religious customs of the neighbouring country of India. In his "Narrative of the Holy Land" (*'Phags yul gyi rtogs brjod*),[2] written in 1775, the Paṇchen Lama presents an adventurous mix of fact-based information and wild speculation about India. The country received renewed attention in Tibet in the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the increased number of published travelogues and descriptions, including the travel report of 1752 by bSod nams rab rgyas[3] or the 1789 "Treatise on India in the South, Called 'Mirror of the Eight Objects of Inquiry'" by 'Jigs med gling pa.[4]

Why was India so popular in eighteenth-century Tibet? One might suspect a connection with the resurgence of intellectual interest in Sanskrit in the seventeenth century, when the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) invited Indian Sanskrit scholars to Lhasa.[5] However, if we look more closely at the transregional linkages of Tibet in the eighteenth century by examining the flow of visitors, we notice a group of people originating from India who "commuted" between Tibet and India in particularly large numbers in the eighteenth century. These are the *gosains*, so called in eighteenth-century British sources. The term *gosain*, derived from the Sanskrit *gosvāmin*, refers to the religious character of these travellers. The *gosains* were pilgrims and merchants simultaneously, and in the eighteenth century they played a central role in trade on the Transhimalayan routes to Tibet.[6]

Of the many unnamed and unknown pilgrim-traders to Tibet that provided a steady stream of information about India and its political systems, heterogeneous society, various religions, and culture, the best known is Pūraṇ Giri (1745–1795), or Purangir[7] Gosain as he is known in British sources of the time. And yet his role in the establishment of Anglo-Tibetan relations was already half forgotten towards the end of the eighteenth century. A century later he was brought out of obscurity, but while recent scholarship concentrates mainly on Pūraṇ Giri's diplomatic importance to Anglo-Indian relations,[8] his role in the transmission of knowledge has received far less attention, with the notable exception of Toni Huber's seminal *The Holy Land Reborn* in which he examines "how the influence of these traveling Indian ascetics and their traditions reshaped Tibetan understandings and actions in relation to India".[9] I, in turn, would like to draw attention to the

2 The little noticed first part of his famous *Shambha la'i lam yig*.
3 bSod nams rab rgyas 1752, quoted in Huber 2008. Huber 2008: 183–188 provides a detailed summary of the contents of this report.
4 'Jigs med gling pa 1991: 70–93. Aris 1995 provides an annotated English translation.
5 Schaeffer 2005: 70.
6 Clarke 1998. The *gosains* travelled as far as Mongolia and China; see Mosca 2020.
7 The spelling varies, from Purungir (George Bogle) to Poorungheer (Samuel Turner).
8 Teltscher 2006; Stewart 2009; Mosca 2013.
9 Huber 2008: 208.

general knowledge about India's political realities that was transmitted through the *gosains*, including knowledge about the British and their attitude to religious traditions. To this aim, I choose a biographical approach and follow the traces of Pūraṇ Giri, that great cultural mediator whose actions and interventions created a new communicative space shared equally by Indians, Tibetans, and the British. My approach is situated in the theoretical concept of a global microhistory in the sense of a "comprehensive history of relations".[10] Global microhistory thus defined conceives of its subject of study being generated "exclusively through its respective relations".[11] Contrary to a methodological focus on nation-states, in this approach new spatial structures are viewed as produced through interactions and relations. Consequently, global microhistory starts its investigation at the level of the historical actor. Fortunately for us, Pūraṇ Giri left his mark not only in the travel accounts of the envoys of the East India Company, George Bogle (1746–1781) and Samuel Turner (1759–1802). Glimpses of his life are also found in Tibetan contemporary sources like the writings of the Third Paṇchen Lama, his biography, and some legal documents.[12] Finally, we have his own report of the Paṇchen's journey to Peking. These sources belong to different sociocultural environments and have different trajectories. Unfortunately, the scope of this chapter does not allow for a detailed exploration of their respective sociocultural contexts. It must suffice to point out that Bogle's and Turner's reports belong to the genre of travel report.[13] They are situated in an imperial context and functioned as an important link between "home" and the distant regions they visited.[14] As Mary Louise Pratt has shown, European imperial expansion was made meaningful by travel reports which created the imperial order for those who stayed at home.[15] In contrast to the British sources, the Tibetan sources explored here belong to a wider range of genres: specifically, itineraries, biographies, and legal travel documents. They are mostly located within a Buddhist interpretive framework and follow different purposes. Tibetan itineraries like the *Shambha la'i lam yig* ("Guide to Shambhala") of the Third Paṇchen Lama describe travel routes to Buddhist pilgrimage sites (both actual routes and routes for tantric adepts with the appropriate spiritual qualities to travel them). The genre of biography (in Tibetan coined *rnam par thar pa*, "complete liberation") includes many different literary forms and narrative contents,

10 Epple 2012: 45.
11 Epple 2012: 45.
12 Petech 1950 examines the available Tibetan sources regarding the diplomatic missions of Bogle and Turner. However, he discusses Pūraṇ Giri only in relation to his Tibet mission in 1785.
13 For a short description of travel writing as a source of authoritative knowledge, see Kollmar-Paulenz 2017: 11, 13–14.
14 For a typology of the European traveller in Inner Asia, see Kollmar-Paulenz 2017.
15 Pratt 2008: 3–4.

ranging from the religious to the political. Generally, a biography tells the life of a religious personality, with the main focus on his (rarely her) spiritual path, but simultaneously conveys historical, political, and sociocultural information.[16] This also applies to the biography of the Third Paṇchen Lama in which Pūraṇ Giri is repeatedly mentioned. Finally, the Tibetan road documents (*lam yig*), usually issued by the Tibetan government, in Tibet before 1950 permitted travel within its political borders, authorising the requisition of transport and supplies.[17] In summary, it can be said that the Tibetan sources have a considerably greater literary breadth than the British sources and consequently also pursue more diverse goals. Yet all these disparate sources provide us with a concrete starting point from which to begin our investigation into the circulation of knowledge in the Himalayas conveyed through significant encounters by local interlocutors.

1 An Indian *gosain* as a diplomatic envoy for two masters

The year 1773 brought an opportunity for the Third Paṇchen Lama to fill a role central to Tibetan Buddhist clergy, that of political mediator. In 1765 Bhutan had begun to interfere in the succession to the throne of neighbouring Kuch Bihar, a small principality between Bengal and Bhutan. In 1772 Dharendra Narayan (?–1775), the ruler of Kuch Bihar, requested military assistance from the East India Company against Bhutanese troops posted in Kuch Bihar.[18] In return for military aid, he signed a treaty with the East India Company in which he agreed to the annexation of his principality to the province of Bengal. In the ensuing First Anglo-Bhutanese War, Bhutanese troops were driven out of Kuch Bihar. The rising power of the British upset not only the Bhutanese but also the Gurkha ruler of Nepal. Both appealed to the Paṇchen Lama, who during the minority of the Eighth Dalai Lama 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758–1804) held the most powerful political position in Tibet next to the Tibetan regent. The Paṇchen Lama in turn pleaded with Warren Hastings (1732–1818), the Governor General of Bengal, on behalf of Bhutan, which he declared to be a vassal state of Tibet. In the Anglo-Bhutanese Treaty of 1774, Bhutan was obliged to return the annexed land to Kuch Bihar, pay an annual tribute, and restore free trade.

Contact between the Lama and the Governor General had been established in the form of a letter accompanied by gifts from the Paṇchen Lama, which Pūraṇ Giri and a representative of the Lama named Padma delivered to Warren Hastings

16 Quintman 2014: 5–10 provides an overview of the structures and functions of *rnam thar*.
17 Wylie 1968: 152.
18 Aris 2005: 42.

in Calcutta in March 1774. That was the first time that the young Pūraṇ Giri, barely thirty years old, caught the eye of the British. He reported to Hastings about Tibet and its trade relations with Kashmir, India, and China, and thus contributed not insignificantly to Hastings proposing friendship and a trade agreement between Bengal and Tibet in his reply to the Paṇchen Lama. The rest of the story is well known and need not be retold here. Suffice it to recall that the successful mission of the British envoy George Bogle to Tashilhunpo, the seat of the Paṇchen Lama, was due primarily to the negotiating skills of Pūraṇ Giri, who knew how to clear the political obstacles that arose en route to agreement.[19]

Apart from Pūraṇ Giri's dual diplomatic service to the Paṇchen Lama and the East India Company, little is known about him personally. The only somewhat detailed account of him was provided by the Bengali scholar Gaur Das Bysack[20] in 1890. In it, Bysack creates an idealised image of the *gosain* based on the oral narratives of Umrao Gir, the then *mahant* (abbot) of Bhoṭ Bagan, the Tibetan temple that had been established on the banks of the Hooghly opposite Calcutta in 1776 with the significant participation of Pūraṇ Giri (see below). Umrao Gir says of Pūraṇ Giri that although he was a Brahmin by birth, he lived as a wandering ascetic:

> He was a young man when he went to Tibet as a pilgrim, he had fair features, and was tall, strong and sinewy. His usual dress consisted of the Sannyásí's *kaupína*, with a short red ochre-dyed piece of cloth wrapped round his loins, and a tiger skin thrown over his shoulders, but on certain public occasions he wore a kind of toga, and covered his head with a turban. [. . .] His habits were simple and his heart pure, he took a single spare meal, and cooked his own food consisting of rice and vegetables only.[21]

Umrao Gir did not personally know Pūraṇ Giri, who had died in 1795, so his account is either a romantic fiction or based on hearsay. However, his description of the *gosain*'s clothing corresponds to contemporary representations as depicted in Indian paintings (Fig. 1).[22]

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19 Teltscher (2006: 48–73) describes with vivid imagination both these obstacles and Pūraṇ Giri's negotiating skill.

20 I could not ascertain the exact dates of his life. Gaur Das Bysack was a close friend of the famous Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dhutta (1842–1873) and the Bengali scholar of Tibetan language and culture Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917). In 1872 he was the deputy magistrate of Howrah (Banerjee 2007: 454). Perhaps that fact and his friendship with Sarat Chandra Das led to his research into the Indo-Tibetan relations of the later eighteenth century of which the Tibetan monastery established in the Howrah District was a material expression.

21 Bysack 1890: 87.

22 Clarke 1998 includes some illustrations of *gosains*.

Figure 1 Four male ascetics: A Bhairagi, a Gosain, a non-Brahmin Karnataka priest and a fakir. Tanjore, ca. 1830. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O20160/four-male-ascetics-painting-unknown. © Victoria and Albert Museum

That Pūraṇ Giri was an athletic man is corroborated by Bogle, who tells us about their horse races together.[23] The "Gir" in the name of Pūraṇ Giri indicates that he belonged to the Giri sect of the Daśanāmī Saṃnyāsīs, a Śaiva religious order that traces its origins to Śaṅkarācārya.[24] Committed to asceticism and celibacy,[25] they engaged in banking and money lending, and as such were an economically powerful community in North Indian cities of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As pilgrim-traders they played a key role in the transregional trade between Bengal and Nepal to Tibet in the eighteenth century. During their annual pilgrimages to the sacred sites in the Tibetan Himalayas, they combined pilgrimage with profit, and were particularly known for supplying Tibetans with pearls, corals, and diamonds, which were mainly needed for decorative arts. On their way back, they carried musk and gold dust into India. Contrary to the impression we get from British travel reports in which they are often described as a bunch of needy beggars fed by the Paṇchen Lama out of compassion,[26] they were highly organised and had established a network of monasteries that served at the same time as trading posts. Many of them knew several languages and were cosmopoli-

23 Markham 1876: 79.
24 Bysack 1890: 55, n. 4; Clark 2017.
25 This was not always the case (Clarke 1998: 58); however, pilgrim-traders in Tibet are described as celibate.
26 Turner 1800: 330–331; Markham 1876: 87.

tan and confident negotiators. Bogle describes their standing and position with the Paṇchen Lama:

> The Gosains, the trading pilgrims of India, resort hither in great numbers. Their humble deportment and holy character, heightened by the merit of distant pilgrimages, their accounts of unknown countries and remote regions, and above all, their professions of great veneration for the Lama, procure them not only a ready admittance, but great favor.[27]

The Paṇchen Lama, with his insatiable curiosity, was an ardent recipient of the *gosains*' knowledge. He was one of the most important political and intellectual figures of his time; he not only aligned himself with China by maintaining a close contact with the Second lCang skya Qutuγtu Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717–1786), the confidant of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1796), but also established diplomatic relations with India in the 1770s. For the first time since the period of the Fifth Dalai Lama, India as the place of origin of Buddhism and thus of religious knowledge was not only cultivated as a "memory space" in the cultural memory of Tibetans but was established as a "real" place. Of the *gosains* present at Tashilhunpo, Pūraṇ Giri enjoyed the Paṇchen's highest favour and trust. It is said that he was fluent in several languages, including Tibetan and Mongolian, and was well acquainted with the customs and traditions of the Inner Asian peoples. There is no evidence, however, that he spoke English: the language common to Pūraṇ Giri and the British was Hindustani.

2 Pūraṇ Giri's relationship with the Third Paṇchen Lama

The Third Paṇchen Lama had established contact with India when he sent his first pilgrimage mission to Bodh Gaya in 1771 and at the same time initiated relations with the ruler of Benares, Chait Singh (r. 1770–1781),[28] whose envoys to the Paṇchen's seat in Tashilhunpo had subsequently painted a very negative picture of the British in India. However, Pūraṇ Giri, who had been a double ambassador for both the East India Company and the Paṇchen Lama since the Anglo-Bhutanese conflict, managed to convince the Paṇchen Lama to receive George Bogle and his companion Alexander Hamilton in Tashilhunpo. This cleared the way to Tibet for the East India Company emissaries. The trust Pūraṇ Giri enjoyed with the Paṇchen Lama is most evident in the role he played in the establishment of a Tibetan temple site, the famous Bhoṭ Bagan, "Tibetan Garden", near Calcutta. The Paṇchen Lama

27 Markham 1876: 124–125. However, elsewhere in his report he is quite negative about them; see Markham 1876: 87–88.

28 Teltscher 2006: 85–86; Mosca 2013: 129.

had probably been planning on establishing a temple site (including a residence, garden, and adjoining accommodation for pilgrims) in Bengal for some time for those Tibetans who went on pilgrimage to India. Behind this decision was, on the one hand, his unshakeable conviction that, despite all evidence to the contrary, Buddhism had not died out in India[29] and, on the other hand, his wish that the establishment of such a temple could contribute to the revival of Buddhism in Bengal. In one of his first conversations with George Bogle he expressed his desire to build such a temple and his hope for support from Warren Hastings.[30] He repeatedly returned to this idea and announced that if he was granted a site for the construction of the temple, he would install Pūraṇ Giri there to lead the house.[31] At the farewell to Bogle, the Paṇchen Lama came to speak for the last time about the Tibetan temple to be built:

> "In regard to the house which I wish to have on the banks of the Ganges", continued the Lama, "I propose that Purungir, who was down in Calcutta, should settle it. I do not wish it to be a large house, and let it be built in the fashion of Bengal." I begged him to give Purungir instructions about it, which he said he would do. "Purungir," says he, "has served me very well, and I have not found him guilty of so many lies as most other fakirs, and I hope the Governor will show him favour."[32]

At the completion of the Tibetan temple compound in 1776 Pūraṇ Giri was appointed the *Bhoṭ mahant*, "Tibetan abbot".[33] The temple served as a hub for pilgrims and traders from Tibet. In addition, it represented the nodal point for diplomatic relations between the British in Calcutta and Tibet. The importance of the temple to the British, with Pūraṇ Giri as abbot, can also be seen in the fact that during his pilgrimage in 1778 to the holy lake of Manasarowar in Tibet, George Bogle ordered and paid the gardeners who tended the temple grounds during Pūraṇ Giri's absence.

The reasons for Pūraṇ Giri's high esteem with the Paṇchen Lama probably lay not only in his immense knowledge of India and valuable services as a cultural mediator to Indian and British officials, but also in his personal character traits. The Tibetan *lam yig* issued to him on the occasion of his last mission to Tibet in 1785,[34] testifies: "This A tsar ya[35] Pu reng gi ri, sent during the Indo-Bhutanese

29 For the Paṇchen Lama's views on India, see Huber 2008: 193–220.
30 Markham 1876: 138.
31 Markham 1876: 164.
32 Markham 1876: 165.
33 Huber 2008: 222.
34 In the service of Warren Hastings to oversee a duty-free trading venture for Bengali merchants; see Teltscher 2006: 241.
35 *A tsar ya* is the Tibetan rendering for the Sanskrit *ācārya*.

war to increase fortune, accomplished great merit; he protected many living beings from untimely death."[36] In the eyes of the Tibetans, Pūraṇ Giri displayed highly valued Buddhist virtues like compassion and commitment towards his fellow human beings. These character traits as well as his trustworthiness in matters political, made him a confidant of the Paṇchen Lama who personally granted him generous travel provisions, as several *lam yig* of the years 1774 and 1778 attest.[37]

In 1780 Pūraṇ Giri followed the Paṇchen Lama to Peking where the latter died unexpectedly from smallpox. His privileged position of personal confidant becomes vividly tangible in a scene of the dying Paṇchen Lama told in the Tibetan biography written by the Second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po (1728–1791): "Thereupon, at his command, a man was sent to fetch the two A tsa ra. One was not there, but Purna ghi ri was fetched, and with a cheerful disposition he [the Paṇchen Lama] spoke to him a few words in the Indian vernacular."[38] While the asymmetries of power between colonial rulers and native collaborators are inscribed in contemporary British accounts through silence, the Tibetan language of politeness provides linguistic tools to carve out social space through clear hierarchical demarcations. In the intimate deathbed scene, however, in which the Paṇchen Lama summons his trusted confidant and whispers to him something in Hindustani, the social hierarchy is ruptured. The scene highlights the Paṇchen Lama's closeness to a cultural stranger and conveys the deep intimacy between the lama and the *gosain* developed over years of sharing ideas, goals, and their practical implementations.

After the death of the Paṇchen Lama, Pūraṇ Giri returned to India, where he was the head of the Bhoṭ Bagan until his violent death in 1795.[39] He submitted a detailed report of his journey to Peking to the East India Company, which was published in English in Alexander Dalrymple's *Oriental Repertory*.[40] The most important message of the report for its target audience at the time lies in the de-

36 Das 1915: Appendix 3, p. 4: "a tsar ya pu reng gi ri 'di pa/ rgya 'brug g'yul 'gyed kyi dus su legs spel du gtong ba gnang bar/ don chen po 'grub ste skye bo mang po dus min 'chi ba las bskyabs par brten/." This *lam yig* was issued on the first day of the ninth month of the year of the Wood Snake (1785), by which time the Paṇchen Lama, who is directly mentioned in the document, had been dead for five years. Therefore, it refers to Pūraṇ Giri's last mission to Tibet and not, as Huber 2008: 414, n. 112 asserts, to Samuel Turner's embassy that Pūraṇ Giri accompanied in 1783.

37 Das 1915: Appendix 3, p. 4; Bysack 1890: 99.

38 dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po (no date): fol. 264v: "De nas a tsa ra gnyis bos shig gsung pa bzhin 'bod mi btang bar/ cig shos ma bsdad pa dang thug kyang purṇa ghi ri 'byor byung ba la thugs dbyes pa'i nyams kyis rgya gar 'phral skad du bka' 'ga' zhig bstsal/."

39 He was fatally wounded by armed robbers during an attack on the Bhoṭ Bagan.

40 First published in London, in periodical form, in 1796, and in 1808 in book form (Dalrymple 1808). The original language of the report is not mentioned, and it is also not clear whether this report was delivered verbally or in written form.

scription of the Paṇchen Lama's conversations with the Qianlong ruler, in which he suggests that Qianlong establish trade relations with the East India Company. According to his report, Pūraṇ Giri was called in by the Paṇchen Lama to the conversation between him and Qianlong, "to answer the inquiries of the Emperor, respecting the governor of Hindustan, as he, the writer, had been often in his country".[41] Chinese and Tibetan sources are silent about this exchange between ruler and lama, and thus it is still disputed among scholars whether the Paṇchen Lama really presented Hastings' request to Qianlong.[42]

3 Mediator of knowledge about India and the British

In the newly circulating knowledge about the worlds beyond Tibet, in whose transmission and spread Pūraṇ Giri played a decisive part, the political realities of India and information about the British stand out. Of course, we cannot measure exactly the share that Pūraṇ Giri had in the circulation of this new knowledge. However, it is rather naive to assume that the Paṇchen Lama obtained his knowledge about India and the British from George Bogle alone.[43]

First, compared to Bogle's short visit, Pūraṇ Giri stayed in Tibet for many years and during that time was in constant communication with the Paṇchen Lama. Second, the free conversation between the lama and the British envoy had its linguistic limits. Bogle emphasised in his report that the Paṇchen Lama spoke Hindustani reasonably well,[44] so he could converse with him without a translator. However, the repeated emphasis on the lama's only mediocre language skills ("He spoke to me in Hindustani, of which language he has a moderate knowledge"),[45] exacerbated by a lack of practice on his part and the somewhat strange pronunciation of Bogle,[46] raises the question whether more complicated matters could really be conveyed one to one, or whether Bogle was not dependent on a translator—and this was Pūraṇ Giri—in many situations. How often the translator was present during the conversations between Bogle and the Paṇchen Lama cannot be judged

41 Turner 1800: 464.

42 See Cammann 1949: 10–13 who strongly doubts the credibility of Pūraṇ Giri's account. New arguments in favour of Pūraṇ Giri have been recently brought forward by Mosca 2013: 131–132.

43 See, for example, the representation by van Schaik 2011: 147–149.

44 Markham 1876: 87.

45 Markham 1876: 135.

46 At one point, Bogle notes: "He made no answer to what I said. Indeed, I doubt whether he understood it well, for I spoke in a language which he had not been used to, and the guttural R, which I inherit from my mother, probably increased the difficulty" (Markham 1876: 137).

because the Indian and Tibetan collaborators of the British envoys too often remained invisible. The interactions of the Third Paṇchen Lama, Pūraṇ Giri, and the British would have been defined by asymmetrical power constellations that differed for the individual actors involved. They probably did not come to the fore so much in the actual situations but in the later reports. The Tibetan sources only passingly mention Bogle and his attendants who are listed either as gift-bearers to the Paṇchen Lama or as one among many envoys during an official audience.[47] In the British reports Pūraṇ Giri's presence is often mentioned only in passing or not at all. However, one must give Bogle a great deal of credit for often singling out Pūraṇ Giri and his services to the diplomatic rapprochement with Bhutanese and Tibetan government officials. This is particularly striking when one contrasts his account with that of Samuel Turner, who mentions Pūraṇ Giri only rarely, even though, unlike Bogle, he did not speak Tibetan at all and was therefore completely dependent on Pūraṇ Giri's translation services.

In the following, I will give two examples of the knowledge about India and the British communicated by the Paṇchen Lama in his writings. My first example concerns the political situation at that time in northern India. The Paṇchen Lama showed himself to be well informed about the slow decline and disintegration of the once powerful Mughal Empire. For example, he writes that

> "although the expansion of power internally appears necessary, various internal strifes have eroded internal power, and while in name he [the Mughal emperor] is ruler over all provinces, his own power has been undermined by the king of the Marathas in the south and the king of Bengal in the east; today the name of the king who merely retains his throne is A li mal in Gha wo.[48]

"A li mal of Gha wo" is the son of Alamgir II (1699–1759), the Mughal emperor who was murdered by his own vizier Imad al-Mulk. In 1757 Ahmad Shah Durrani (c. 1722–1772) had captured Delhi but then retreated to Afghanistan. The influential vizier Imad al-Mulk subsequently formed an alliance with the Marathas, a powerful Hindu confederation from the Bombay region. The Marathas recaptured Delhi and expelled Ahmad Shah's son Timur from Lahore, prompting his father to invade India again in 1759. In the same year, Imad al-Mulk killed Alamgir II, and when he established a puppet ruler on the Mughal throne, Alamgir's son Ali Gawhar (1728–1806), who at that time was already in exile, declared himself ruler

47 Petech 1950: 341, 342.

48 Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes 1775: fol. 19v: "khong ba'i mthu stobs rgyas dgos rgyur 'dug kyang da lta ni nang 'khrug sna tshogs pas mthu stobs bri nas ming rgyal khams spyi'i bdag po yin pa la/ rang gi stobs gshed lho phyogs ma ra ṭa'i rgyal po dang shar phyogs bhang ga la'i rgyal po gnyis la re bzhig ste/da lta khri skyong bar mdzad pa'i sa skyong gi mtshan ni gha wo la a li mal zhes bya ba yin no/."

as Shah Alam II. But even when he was able to return to Delhi in 1772, his actual power did not extend beyond the city. The Paṇchen Lama's analysis was indeed very astute.

My second example refers to the British attitude towards religious diversity in India. Toni Huber has convincingly shown, using the example of the Tibetan adoption of Hindu ritual practices in the worship of the Ganges River, how strongly the *gosains* have influenced the Tibetan understanding of India.[49] In addition, the *gosains* also influenced the Tibetan perceptions of the British, the *Phe reng ki*,[50] whose worldviews and actions the Tibetans learned about filtered through Indian lenses. The appropriation of the "other" was achieved through the integration of the strangers into the familiar Hindu mythology. In the words of the Paṇchen Lama: "[T]heir original king, who lives on a small island in the sea, is descended from the lineage of the Paṇḍavas[51] and is therefore himself from Āryadeśa."[52] The Paṇchen Lama repeatedly addresses the religious diversity of India, and particularly emphasises the British attitude towards the different religious communities there, which he considers remarkable: "They respect whatever religious system (*chos lugs*), be it Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim, and appear to treat them fairly according to a law of secular character."[53] In his talks with the Paṇchen Lama, Bogle had emphasised the religious tolerance of the British and called Pūraṇ Giri as a key witness to the credibility of his statement.[54] While we still tend to underestimate the effective influence of local interlocutors in the complex network between primary actors and their local intermediaries in a precolonial or colonial context, Pūraṇ Giri's statement clearly carried weight. He not only influenced the Paṇchen Lama's perception of the fluid connections between Tibetan Buddhism and the Indian Śaiva and Vaiṣnava traditions, but also shaped the Lama's perception of the newly encountered British notions of religion. Such new knowledge about foreign religions and peoples was eagerly received and discussed among the cosmopolitan Tibetan-speaking religious and secular intellectual circles of the Qing Empire.[55]

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49 Huber 2008: 208–212.

50 Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes 1775: fol. 26v. Derived from the Persian-Indian *ferengī*; see Petech 1950: 334, n. 5.

51 The main characters of the Mahābhārata epic.

52 Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes 1775: fol. 27r: "'di dag gi rtsa ba'i rgyal po rgya mtsho'i gling phran na gnas pa de skya seng gi bu'i brgyud yin pas 'phags yul ba nyid yin te/."

53 Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes 1775: fol. 27r: "'di rnams nang pa dang mu stegs byed dang/ kla klo sogs kyi chos lugs gang la'ang mos pa byed cing 'jig rten lugs kyi khrims drang por spyod pa zhig yin par snang/."

54 Markham 1876: 138–139.

55 Wang-Toutain 2005; Fitzherbert 2015; Kollmar-Paulenz, forthcoming.

Conclusion

I have begun my search for traces of the Tibetan knowledge production about India and the British in the eighteenth century with a concrete actor in a concrete place, producing "a whole by means of its relationally conceptualized parts".[56] The knowledge Tibetans received from India in the eighteenth century was fed from various sources, but the most important represented the strong presence of Indian *gosains* at the court of the Third Paṇchen Lama, the most religiously and politically influential figure of his time in central Tibet. Among these pilgrim-traders, most of whom remained anonymous, Pūraṇ Giri has left his footprints in British and Tibetan documents alike. Reading these sources has allowed us a glimpse into the communicative network he established and through which a social space of encounter was created between the British, Tibetans, and Indians in the second half of the eighteenth century. His religious and commercial interests gave rise to a space of interaction beyond political and ethnic boundaries. For both the Tibetans and the British, the focus of their perception was not Pūraṇ Giri's status as a religious or ethnic stranger but the direct experience of his moral integrity, as is demonstrated by the Tibetan road document quoted earlier[57] as well as by Bogle's personal judgements of him. It was this shared perception that enabled Pūraṇ Giri's dual role at the Qing court in Peking as an unofficial envoy of the British and a member of the Paṇchen Lama's personal entourage. His report, which insinuated a genuine interest on the part of the Qianlong emperor in opening trade relations between the British and Qing China, left a lasting impression on the British, who in subsequent years attributed their failed attempts to establish trade relations with China primarily to the sudden death in Peking of their supposed advocate, the Paṇchen Lama. Just as Pūraṇ Giri's account significantly shaped British perceptions of the Qing toward the end of the eighteenth century, Tibetan perceptions of British India through the lens of Pūraṇ Giri and other *gosains* influenced Qing views of the British in India.[58] These diverse and often contradictory voices prepared the ground for the asymmetrical power relations that would define the political relationship between China and the British Empire in the following century.

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56 Epple 2012: 44.
57 See quote in section 2 (footnote 36).
58 Mosca 2013: 142–144.

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dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po (no date): *rJe bla ma srid zhi'i gtsug rgyan paṇ chen thams cad mkhyen pa blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes dpal bzang po'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa nyi ma'i 'od zer zhes bya ba'i smad cha bzhugs so* (*Second part of the biography of the superior lama, head ornament of samsāra and nirvāṇa, the all-knowing Paṇ chen Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes, Called* "*Ray of Sunlight*"). gZhis ka rtse: bKras lhun grub gsung rab par khang.

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