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## Chang (Beer): A Social Marker, Ritual Tool, and Multivalent Symbol in Tibetan Buddhism


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***CHANG* (BEER): A SOCIAL MARKER, RITUAL TOOL, AND MULTIVALENT  
SYMBOL IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts, Religious Studies

By

Kayla Janae Jenkins

May 2019

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Religious Studies

Missouri State University, May 2019

Master of Arts

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**ABSTRACT**

In this thesis, I analyze the use of beer (Tib. *chang*) in Tibetan tantric Buddhism and emphasize its importance for studying themes of purity and pollution, meaning, and power in this context. In doing so, I argue that beer functions as a social marker and influences gender dynamics in Tibet. Beer also functions as a religious ritual tool for transactions of power. Lastly, beer is present as a multivalent symbol in Tibetan tantric songs and stories, useful as both a negative and positive metaphor for qualities or states of mind. As something that informs social, religious, and literary worlds within the Tibetan Buddhist context, beer is more than another transgressive substance or nutritious drink. Through looking at hagiographies, ritual texts, and performative songs, I present beer as useful and relevant in understanding how Tibetan Buddhists spread messages, reinforce hierarchies, and describe religious meaning.

**KEYWORDS:** *chang*, beer, Buddhism, Tibet, tantra, symbols, ritual tools, women, alcohol

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to the people of Tibet.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Beer (Tib. *chang*), is a powerful object and symbol in Tibetan tantric Buddhist culture. The power of beer as an object and symbol lies in its ability to be interpreted differently and to inhabit various levels of meaning. Beer can appear in various contexts and transform its meaning depending on the context. At the same time, all possible connotations of what beer represents and signifies are present in each context. Negative connotations of beer include that it is dangerous and mysterious. Positively, beer can be a medicinal healing substance or a source of income. In daily life, the symbolism of beer appears in social contexts of interactions between persons. When beer functions as a symbol in Tibetan songs and stories, the connotations and ideas connected to its use in daily life are still present.

Beer's power as an object and symbol speaks to the complexity of the Tibetan Buddhist world. Proof of beer's power as an object and symbol is apparent in the way that people are categorized as being "suitable" (Tib. *skal ldan*) and "unsuitable" (Tib. *skal med*) to consume beer.<sup>1</sup> In both Tibetan society and Buddhist literature, there are agents who are suitable and unsuitable to consume beer, depending on the context. The use of beer as something that can form identities or reflect hierarchies demonstrates its relevancy and vitality as an object or symbol. This thesis addresses the social and symbolic roles that beer has played in Tibetan culture and religious practice, including its function as a symbol of enlightenment found in

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Ardussi, "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism: The DOHA Tradition in Tibet," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 2 (April-June 1977): 119. Milarepa uses these categories to describe individuals who are fit to drink the beer of yoga and those who are not. This song will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. These categories clearly emphasize how certain individuals must have certain skills, a certain status, or other means to appropriately navigate the complex social structure of Tibetan society, and how to address and relate to the object of alcohol, specifically *chang*. Further, these categories refer to the unsuitable as those with lesser merit or those who are unprepared to receive particular teachings. Thus, unsuitability and suitability refers not only to social interactions but spiritual attainments.



religious literature and tantric texts, as well as its function as an identity marker among groups of people.

Using sources such as hagiographical accounts, ritual prescriptions, folk songs, biographies, and autobiographies, this paper portrays examples of beer functioning socially and symbolically, as a material drink and as a metaphorical depiction. I refer to literal, consumable beer as “material” beer throughout the thesis insofar as that is the term used by multiple yogins in their tantric folk songs when describing beer as a literal drink. The role of beer in culture nonetheless also shapes its use as a symbol, as demonstrated in well-known Tibetan sources. The social and symbolic components of beer are present in various sources. In looking at the gender dynamics of beer production, service, and consumption, I look to two nuns’ autobiographical and biographical sources in order to extrapolate their experiences with beer as something to make or consume. I then look to general Buddhist texts and stories to glean how these experiences of women in relation to beer may reflect stereotypes and views of women in various religious texts. When addressing beer as a ritual tool in religious contexts, I look to tantric prescriptive texts and secondary anthropological resources to analyze beer’s presence in various ceremonies and rituals. From this I gather the apparent meaning and power of beer in various rituals. When addressing beer as a symbol, I look to Tantric songs and stories of popular Tibetan yogins who employed beer as a performative tool and symbol. From these songs we can analyze the assumed audience’s reaction to such teachings, as well as get a glimpse of the complex religious terminology used in tantric language by the yogins.

There has been a recent emergence of interest in the study of alcohol and religion. The symbolization of wine in the traditions of Christianity and Judaism is recognized and discussed frequently in scholarship. Even in Islam, one finds research on wine’s symbolism and function as

a vital aspect of spiritual experience, specifically among the Sufis, and the tension between hadith law and modernization in contemporary Muslim communities. This thesis seeks to contribute to the study of alcohol in religion through the lens of Asian traditions such as Buddhism. Recent research, however, has neglected the role of alcohol in Tibetan Buddhist religion and culture. Recognizing the plethora of untapped texts and documents in the Tibetan language that could quite possibly shed new light on this topic, this thesis analyzes available sources and pieces together the appearances of beer—in society, ritual, and symbolic literature. Noting that these arenas are intertwined, this research ties the functions of beer together and recognizes that each role or function of beer informs the other, illuminating the study of religion and culture in the Tibetan Buddhist milieu.

Beer in Tibetan tantric Buddhism is more than another transgressive substance and cultural drink, and it informs us about social and religious distinctions, hierarchies, and dynamics. Beer functions as a social marker that influences gender dynamics. Beer also is a religious ritual tool that both empowers and separates individuals. Lastly, beer is found to be a relevant and potent symbol for religious attainment and states of being. In this thesis, I will first introduce information pertinent to the ensuing chapters, such as how to define and conceive of “Tibet” as an entity, and how the influences of Buddhism and the surrounding cultures of China and India in Tibet inform ideas about purity, pollution, and the role of alcohol in society. Next, I ask the question, “*why alcohol?*” and consider its uniqueness as an object. I then define *chang* as an important material drink in Tibet in order to set a foundation for the arguments in the thesis. Chapter two examines the way women encounter and engage with beer in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, both in lay life and ritual ceremonies. These engagements reflect deeper perceptions of women in Tibetan Buddhism more generally. Chapter three analyzes the role of *chang* as a ritual

tool in tantric practices, while addressing its use as something to form separate identities between practitioners and lay persons. Chapter four discusses the way *chang* is used as a multivalent symbol in tantric songs and stories, composed by yogins and other teachers. I conclude by arguing that the ambiguity of beer in Tibet speaks to a revolving and complex structure of purity and pollution in Tibetan social life and religious ritual, where symbolism and reality are interwoven. Christian K. Wedemeyer has argued that “transgressive elements of the Tantras reveal themselves to be motivated discourses, whose primary semiotical interest is to stress the Tantric message of the nonduality of pure and impure.”<sup>2</sup> To Wedemeyer’s formulation, however, I would add that transgressive practices and objects, both semiologically and materially (physically), such as beer and the collection of responses to it as a substance, also work to reinforce and reiterate dualisms such as gender, social status, and levels of religious experience. This ambiguity of beer as an object, tool, and symbol denotes its usefulness and relevancy in Tibetan Buddhist society.

### **Defining “Tibet”**

The idea of “Tibet” is complex to define. Scholars have referred to an ethnic Tibet and geographical Tibet. Geographical Tibet exists as a space in Central Asia that has fluctuated throughout history due to political changes. Ethnic Tibet exists in this geographical region and beyond it—today in diaspora throughout India, China, Europe, and the United States. Between the seventh and tenth centuries CE, the Tibetan Empire was powerful, flourishing, and influential, and its physical space included lands that are now located in modern day Mongolia and China. Tibet’s geographical and political power fluctuated throughout the following

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<sup>2</sup> Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, & Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 128.

centuries.<sup>3</sup> From around 900-1250, Tibetan Buddhist communities became fragmented, leading to the founding of lineages, monasteries, and distinctive gurus that separated themselves from other lines of teaching.<sup>4</sup> This era of fragmentation was an important time for the transformation of Buddhist practices and traditions that influenced many of the sources in this thesis.<sup>5</sup> Since the mid 1900's, Tibet's borders and ways of culturally identifying have dramatically changed due to the involvement of the People's Republic of China. Political changes have left many ethnic Tibetans living in exile in India, Nepal, and around the world, including their political and religious leader (of the *Gelug* sect), Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Contemporary geographical Tibet is now referred to as the Tibetan Autonomous Region. "Tibet" in the case of this research refers to a community that has shared a common history enveloped by ideas, practices, and language. One of the contributions of this thesis is to emphasize an aspect of Tibetan culture that is important insofar as the current situation threatens the history and identity of its people and past. I will be incorporating sources that existed before the modern era and the subsequent obscuring of Tibetan identity. I consider beer to be one of many important aspects of Tibetan Buddhist culture and therefore is important for cultural preservation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tibetan history is organized into various periods or phases, depending on the scholar or historical aim, in order to assist in the conceptualization of a history of Tibet. Bryan J. Cuevas rejects the normative historiographical ideas of history, such as medieval or modern. Instead, Cuevas suggests that the best possible way to divide Tibetan history is into four epochs. The first of these epochs, beginning in 610 CE, marks the birth of Songtsen Gampo. The second epoch begins in 910, and marks a time of fragmentation—also an important time for the transformation of Buddhist practices and traditions. The third epoch begins in 1249, which marks the appointment of Sakya Pandita as viceroy of Tibet, given to him by the Mongol rulers. This era of Sakya Pandita's leadership is characterized by reform and reorganization within Tibetan Buddhism. It is during this epoch that tantric practices became visualized, internalized, and symbolized—particularly ones relating to alcohol consumption or other taboo practices. The fourth epoch begins in 1705, and marks the "age of foreign interests and occupation." Bryan J. Cuevas, "Some Reflections on the Periodization of Tibetan History," in *The Tibetan History Reader*, ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, eds., *The Tibetan History Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), xvi.

<sup>5</sup> Cuevas, "Some Reflections on the Periodization of Tibetan History," 55.

<sup>6</sup> There is not enough room to discuss this argument here, but I will say that I understand beer's role in Tibetan society to be something valuable to its identity, which is in a constant state of flux and undergoing various challenges in the modern era.

Tibetan peoples have shared geographical and cultural history with the regions of China and India, and inherited cultural practices, philosophies, agricultural processes, and religious identities from such regions. Thus, any understanding of Tibet's religious and cultural ideas requires some recognition of its relationship between China and India. The mutual influence between these civilizations has left some aspects of Tibetan culture hard to trace. Tibet was not directly along the Silk Road and similar trade routes between the East and West but did have some contact with Chinese and Indian merchants and travelers. Patrick McGovern suggests that "key ideas" regarding fermented beverages and their production "were passed along the same prehistoric Silk Road in either or both directions during the 'revolutionary' Neolithic period."<sup>7</sup> Sophisticated and innovative, the early Chinese incorporated alcoholic beverages like these into many aspects of culture—from funerals to weddings. The Chinese not only shared agricultural knowledge about brewing and fermentation with the Tibetan peoples, but literary themes and ideas. One can discover wine poetry produced in China from as early as the third century CE. McGovern notes "[D]rawing on a long tradition of shamanism and spiritual inspiration aided by alcohol, the poets, known as the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove," reinvigorated religious life."<sup>8</sup> Sages would meet, drink wine, talk philosophy, play music, and write poetry about their thoughts and experiences, emphasizing the transcendent aspect of their beverages.<sup>9</sup> Alexander Joffe describes that during the Zhou period in China (1027-221 B.C.), "elaborate rituals of ancestor worship developed around sacrificial feasts and consumption of large amounts of millet beer."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Patrick E. McGovern, *Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 128.

<sup>8</sup> McGovern, *Uncorking the Past*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> McGovern, *Uncorking the Past*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander H. Joffe, "Alcohol and Social Complexity in Ancient Western India," *Current Anthropology* 39, no. 3 (June 1998): 308.

China, which later influenced and informed much of Tibetan culture and practice, had ancient practices that involved alcohol and were related to life, death, and spiritual practice. Documents found in the Dunhuang caves, dated to the early seventh century<sup>11</sup>, point to communications between the Tibetans and Chinese during this formative period in Tibetan history.<sup>12</sup> During this century, the Tibetan king, Songsten Gampo requested in a marriage alliance for China to send “wine-brewing” technicians who could teach practices of wine making to Tibetans.<sup>13</sup> Thus, symbolic and social ideas were shared between the Tibetans, Mongolians, and Chinese through various writings and encounters.

The historical exchange between Tibet and Indian civilization also influences the way alcohol has been viewed in Tibetan society. The traditional function of alcohol in Indian society has been generally understood as related to the caste system. For centuries, alcohol use “was prohibited for certain castes and permitted for others, just as other social functions were specialized according to caste.”<sup>14</sup> Yet around the emergence of Buddhism in India, the “social meaning” of liquor and intoxication changed, and alcohol became understood as “polluting to those who sought to follow the edicts of scripture,” reflecting Buddhism’s disdain for the use of

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 2001), 50. These texts were sealed within the cave around 1005 CE.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetans* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 54-56. The Dunhuang scrolls, found in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, point to the sharing of ideas, medical information, religious philosophy, and more, between the Chinese, Daoists, and Mahayana Buddhists in the area.

<sup>13</sup> Howard J. Wechsler, “T’ai-tsung (Reign 626-49) the Consolidator,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 3, Part 1., ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 230. Although the processes wine-brewing appear in this seventh-century encounter, there is no evidence for a sustained or successful viticulture in Tibetan regions until the eighteenth century when Catholic missionaries entered the region and introduced wine making to Tibetan Catholic nuns, but some forms of wine must have been available to medicinal practitioners, shamans, and other members of society involved in healing and curing.

In a section of the text addressing humoral pathology, “millet wine” is considered one of the ingredients included in various concoctions that help those with “diseases due to unbalanced air.” The *rGyud-bZhi* is another Tibetan medical text that prescribes alcoholic beverages for various physical ailments. For diseases which require a warm substance, “wine from molasses” or “wine from bone” is prescribed. Ven. Rechung Rinpoche and Jampal Kunzang, *Tibetan Medicine: Illustrated in Original Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 141, 218, 63, 53.

<sup>14</sup> David G. Mandelbaum, “Alcohol and Culture,” *Current Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (1965): 283.

alcohol.<sup>15</sup> After the introduction of Buddhism, Indian society still allowed for alcohol among the *Kshatriya* caste—the warriors and rulers of the state—therefore prohibition was never considered, yet social customs among other groups in society were shaped by Buddhist ideals.<sup>16</sup> The Brahman caste, or religious priests and leaders, are allowed to imbibe occasionally, but must “abstain when they seek to be in a state of ritual purity.”<sup>17</sup> Another example of Indian Buddhist influence in Tibet is their inheritance of the *dohas*, a genre of Indian tantric literature that uses symbolic language to describe complex meditative or spiritual experiences of Buddhist yogins and teachers. Tibetan forms of this genre, the *nyams mgur*, will be discussed in chapter four. Thus, in a sense, the Tibetan Buddhist worldview not only includes ideas that developed from the Bön tradition that existed in pre-Buddhist Tibet, but it also incorporates ideas and practices from Chinese and Indian sources.<sup>18</sup>

Tibetan forms of Buddhism also influence how beer is regulated in mainstream society. Tibetans have historically been “proponents of the *Mahayana* (Skt. “Great Vehicle”) school of Buddhism.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, Tibetans embraced the tantric or esoteric approach to Mahayana Buddhist practice, also known as the *Vajrayana* or “Diamond Vehicle.”<sup>20</sup> Tantric streams of practice pervade both exclusive monastic lineages and peripheral but influential lay communities throughout Tibet. In tantric forms of Buddhism, a nondual approach is encouraged when viewing what is pure and impure. This view allows one to see past the constructions of existence and

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<sup>15</sup> Mandelbaum, “Alcohol and Culture,” 283.

<sup>16</sup> Mandelbaum, “Alcohol and Culture,” 283.

<sup>17</sup> Mandelbaum, “Alcohol and Culture,” 283.

<sup>18</sup> Bön refers to the pre-Buddhist, shamanic religious tradition in Tibet. Its definition is extremely complex and its use is debated among scholars, but it is the most relevant way to identify pre-Buddhist Tibet in this research.

<sup>19</sup> Donald S. Lopez Jr., introduction to *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 12. Two general differences between Mahayana forms of Buddhism and others is their emphasis on many buddhas or the inclusion of deities into meditative practice, the goal of bodhisattvahood.

<sup>20</sup> Lopez, introduction to *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, 14.

view reality for what it is—a truth beyond dualities that control daily life. Tantric practices emerged from texts developed in the late seventh to early ninth centuries, spread from India to Tibet, China, and Japan—yet the Tibetan milieu of texts expanded and embraced creativity in adding to these collections.<sup>21</sup> Tantric texts in some cases prescribe the literal consumption of impure substances, in order to transcend dualities of existence.

In most scholarship dealing with Tibetan tantric Buddhism, most would be familiar with its particular reputation for utilizing transgressive practices as part of Tantra’s identity within mainstream Buddhism. The consumption of alcohol, whether metaphorically or literally, however, has not been a focus of research on tantric Buddhist traditions, which instead has focused on taboo practices that involve sexual intercourse and bodily fluids—those which create the most shocking response. I argue that beer in Tantric Buddhism is more than just another transgressive substance—it is a powerful and relevant object that can be used ambiguously to send messages, reinforce ideas, and transact power. Tantra creates an alternative space for *chang* to be used and interpreted that safely transcends social norms found in mainstream Tibetan Buddhist society.

The mainstream Buddhist view on alcohol and intoxication is a widely negative one. Alcohol is considered a dangerous substance that can hinder one’s ability to make good choices. The “Ten Evils” (Skt. *akusala*) in Buddhism practiced by Tibetans are “killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, abusive speech, senseless speech, coveting, ill will, and wrong views.”<sup>22</sup> These evils can be fueled by lack of discipline, altered states of consciousness, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Tantric Buddhism in the Renaissance: Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 33. Tibetans organized tantric texts into four categories.

<sup>22</sup> Lama Kunga Rinpoche and Brian Cutillo, *Drinking the Mountain Stream: Songs of Tibet’s Beloved Saint, Milarepa* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 177.



placing oneself in negative situations. Alcohol is directly related to the cautionary teachings surrounding these evils. Male and female monastics are prohibited from consuming alcohol, and they are forced to take a vow against its consumption. The autobiography of Orgyan Chokyi, a nun (Tib. *ani*), supports the idea that abstinence from intoxicating beverages was a required aspect of monastic life. In her writings, Chokyi describes her “vow of purification,” in which she confesses to “give up alcohol, which supports many faults.”<sup>23</sup> Here one can see that alcohol was understood to be an accelerant to other morally wrong actions and thoughts. Beer’s function as both a dangerous substance to religious renunciants and a practical tool for tantric practitioners is one of the reasons why addressing *chang* in Tibetan Buddhism is valuable, complex, and necessary.

### **Why Alcohol?**

The study of alcohol in religious traditions is unique and important for multifaceted reasons. Alcohol has religious, cultural, and medicinal functions and associations, all which signify or mark a transition from one state of being or object to the opposite. Binary oppositions such as purity and impurity, suitable and unsuitable, male and female, material and symbolic, are found throughout the sources. In these oppositional encounters, beer functions as the tool, marker, or symbol of the change from one to the other. The question of “why alcohol” and what makes it unique can be answered generally in the following points, however the complete study of beer in the Tibetan Buddhist context is an untapped field which this work contributes to.

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<sup>23</sup> Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 176.

First and foremost, alcohol can transform and be viewed as a positive or negative substance, depending on the situation, one's cultural background, and one's personal experience with the substance. This ambiguity brings value and complexity to the study of alcohol. Dwight Heath describes why alcohol matters:

Alcohol has long been one of the most popular chemicals used by human beings to enhance their moods, and it has been one of the most widespread throughout history. Ironically, it is a tranquilizer, appetizer, disinfectant, anesthetic, food, solvent, and economic commodity, as well as a potent symbol—all in various ways in different cultures. A relatively simple compound, alcohol occurs in nature without any human input... Like salt, it is toxic if taken in excessive quantities but, also like salt, it is often refined or diluted and consumed with other substances to make them taste good and to make people feel better.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis will address how *chang* is a potent symbol in the Tibetan culture—and how its practical properties are still present in beer's symbolic representations. Roderick Phillips contributes to the multifaceted nature of how alcohol can be viewed:

For some people, the discovery of alcohol and methods of producing it created new opportunities for health and pleasure: alcoholic beverages were found to be generally more nutritious than the produce they were made from; they were for centuries safer than the polluted water that was available for drinking in many parts of the world; they gave their consumers a feeling of well-being; and they were quickly associated with positive qualities like conviviality, fertility, and spirituality. In contrast, other people have found history since the advent of alcohol resembling one long hangover for humanity: alcohol has long been ascribed negative associations such as social disruption, violence, crime, sin, immorality, physical and mental illness, and death.<sup>25</sup>

In Tibet, one will find both these positive and negative qualities present when beer is described—depending on the context, author, audience, and purpose of its use. In the anthology of sources that culminate into a form of lived religion that we call “Tibetan Buddhism,” one finds that alcohol was viewed as positive and negative. This contributes to beer's complexity as a

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<sup>24</sup> Dwight B. Heath, “An Anthropological View of Alcohol and Culture in International Perspective,” in *International Handbook on Alcohol and Culture*, ed. Dwight B. Heath (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Roderick Phillips, *Alcohol: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 8-9.

symbol, which will be discussed in chapter four, and its complexity as a social and religious tool, to be discussed in chapters two and three.

Second, alcohol affects living beings physically and mentally. The “rapid diffusion of alcohol throughout the system...can affect all our senses and abilities, in varying ways and in varying degrees.”<sup>26</sup> Alcohol affects various senses or aspects of one’s physical existence—the ability to walk or communicate, as well as the ability to think about a topic or perceive a social situation. It is the affects that alcohol can have on one’s mind and body that denotes its dangerous qualities.

Third, alcohol can be used to heal the physical body, depending on the amount consumed. Its presence in medicinal texts highlights its poisonous but also healing properties. In a Tibetan medical text, the *bShad-rGyud*, one finds instructions on how and when to consume alcohol for medicinal purposes. Alcohol is described as giving “warmth to the body,” as well as being “digestive, appetizing, violent, warming, generative of satisfaction and plumpness,” and:

[I]t kindles the digestive fire, penetrates and purifies the apertures of the body and causes a little purging. Alcohol is wholesome for those suffering from insomnia or hypersomnia; drunk moderately, it is wholesome for lean, very rough and very delicate people. Old alcohol, taken in limited quantities, aids the elimination of air and phlegm and is good for the body.<sup>27</sup>

The same medical text claims, “fresh alcohol is heavy and produces excessive air, bile, and phlegm: in one word, it is like poison.”<sup>28</sup> A Tibetan medical text, the *bShad-rGyud*, includes a collection of stories and tales regarding the introduction of medicine in Tibet and the life of *gYu-thog* the Elder, “the Great Physician-Saint.”<sup>29</sup> In a story titled “Salt, Beer, Sunlight and Women,”

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<sup>26</sup> Heath, “An Anthropological View of Alcohol and Culture in International Perspective,” 2.

<sup>27</sup> Rechung and Kunzang, *Tibetan Medicine*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> Rechung and Kunzang, *Tibetan Medicine*, 62.

<sup>29</sup> Rechung and Kunzang, *Tibetan Medicine*, 141.

a sick king is instructed by a Nepalese doctor to avoid the four poisons: salt, beer, sunlight, and women—but after doing so, the king continues to grow ill. A Tibetan doctor encounters the king and instructs him that one must simply learn to consume moderate and healthy amounts of the four poisons. He tells the king, “[B]eer is said to be poison to the flesh but thin people grow fat from it,” and goes on to explain how the other poisons are helpful in particular situations and for certain people.<sup>30</sup> In the case of other disorders, “concentrated *chang*” is suggested.<sup>31</sup> Medical texts portray alcohol in moderation, and for certain health concerns, as a positive action, while the dangers of alcohol are not ignored.

Fourth, alcohol can affect not only the person but the community. Tibetan sources sometimes refer to *chang* as “*dPa’ bo chang*,” which is based on the idea that beer has the ability to “make the weak courageous.”<sup>32</sup> In this way, beer can inhibit one’s ability to critically assess situations and therefore can cause one to act irrationally, dangerously, or boldly. The possibility of danger challenges and threatens the social order of a community. Lastly, and intertwined with its effects on community, beer is important because it is a regulated and controlled substance. Beer in Tibetan society must operate under a system of rules based on ideas of purity and impurity. In order to keep the community pure, threats must be regulated. Alcohol is one of the threats that is regulated in all societies in history, at least to some extent.<sup>33</sup> Beer is a unique object that can be utilized as a symbol insofar as it signifies connotations of purity and impurity (or pollution).

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<sup>30</sup> Rechung and Kunzang, *Tibetan Medicine*, 218.

<sup>31</sup> Rechung and Kunzang, *Tibetan Medicine*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> John Vincent Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet: Calling Down the Gods*, Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 273.

<sup>33</sup> For more on the issue of alcohol across cultures, see Dwight B. Heath, *International Handbook on Alcohol and Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).

Beer as a symbol in Tibetan Buddhist songs, addressed in chapter four, illumines the ambiguity and uniqueness of alcohol in this context. Beer as a symbol is more potent than other objects—such as tea, building a house, or plowing a field—to describe and define religious states of being and attainments. Tea does not hold the same connotations and characteristics mentioned above—it does not have strong regulations or boundaries around its consumption between genders, in ritual settings, and so forth. The drinking of tea is not used as a metaphor for a transcendent religious experience, as the yogins describe in their songs of experience. Building a house and plowing a field are good images to refer to spiritual discipline, but these specific images do not have strong connotations or purposes attached to them in an ambiguous fashion. They are simply physical acts that bring change or growth. Beer is a more potent symbolic substance that not only informs abstract meanings in literature, but it can be associated with social markings, ritual boundaries and experiences, and the hierarchies within both environments. The multivalent power of beer speaks to its role in the greater context of the Tibetan Buddhist world. According to Heath, the study of alcohol is valuable insofar as it creates a “sort of window into other aspects of culture.”<sup>34</sup> I want to emphasize the importance of beer in Tibetan Buddhism in particular as a way to understand greater themes and ideas in the context of Tibet. These themes include rules of purity and pollution, gender hierarchies, ritual exclusivity, and the relevancy of performative literature like Tibetan songs and stories. Looking deeper into how beer relates to persons, places, and perceptions in the Tibetan Buddhist world will illumine other aspects of the culture and how parts of culture can be interrelated and can mutually influence each other.

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<sup>34</sup> Heath, “An Anthropological View of Alcohol and Culture in International Perspective,” 336.

## Purity and Impurity

Beer operates on a continuum within society based on rules and regulations surrounding purity and impurity. Mary Douglas has contributed greatly to the discussion of how food and beverages function in cultures, in conjunction with rules of purity and pollution. Douglas has argued that internal lines can be found within groups of people, which separate individuals in a social environment. The concerns with individuals crossing these lines also evokes the fear of endangering others.<sup>35</sup> One of the contexts in which alcoholic beverages requires regulation is in the social distinctions of gender. Douglas notes “pollution ideas” are “enlisted to bind men and women to their allotted roles.”<sup>36</sup>

Allotted roles are important in the production, serving, and consumption of beer. Lines are drawn in Tibetan society to protect those in the social environment. Rules exist in Tibetan society, whether obvious or implied, that place individuals within a certain distance of *chang*, depending on the location and agent. Rules regarding purity and impurity relate to a community’s moral expectations. Fernanda Pirie’s anthropological work shows that Tibetan villages consider certain behaviors to be unacceptable, including drunkenness which leads to violence or arguing. Pirie notes “moral judgements are orientated towards the harmony of the community,” and “drinking alcohol” can disrupt this harmony.<sup>37</sup> Rules of hospitality in Tibetan villages demand that “beer is brewed, offered, and drunk frequently and in very large quantities,” leading to an “inconsistency between theory and practice.”<sup>38</sup> Pirie claims that the inconsistency lies in the commonality of beer drinking, alongside the discouragement caused by negative

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 172.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 174.

<sup>37</sup> Fernanda Pirie, “Secular Morality, Village Law, and Buddhism in Tibetan Societies,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 1 (March 2006): 181.

<sup>38</sup> Pirie, “Secular Morality, Village Law, and Buddhism in Tibetan Societies,” 181.

effects of that drinking, such as fighting and other moral failures. Pirie notes that “a common feature of these moral attitudes is an orientation towards the community. Mere drunkenness and adultery can be ignored but fighting and unmarried mothers are a problem.”<sup>39</sup> I argue that this is not a case of inconsistency, but of complexity. The Tibetan social construct does not have vague or unclear lines drawn—the lines are simply complicated. As the survey of sources in this thesis will show, beer’s function in Tibetan culture is multivalent and requires more than a generalized analysis.

### **Defining *Chang***

*Chang* is the traditional drink of the Tibetan region. *Chang* would have been and is produced exclusively from what crops are available in the region. The term “*chang*” is “loosely applied to any kind of alcoholic beverage, much as Sanskrit *sura* came to be used,” according to John A. Ardussi.<sup>40</sup> Fermented from barley or rice, *chang* is made from the staple food crops of the area. Other mentions of alcoholic beverages are found in Tibetan texts, but *chang* is the most prevalent.<sup>41</sup> In the eastern Himalayas, along the border of Tibet, H. Garrison Wilkes finds that

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<sup>39</sup> Pirie, “Secular Morality, Village Law, and Buddhism in Tibetan Societies,” 181.

<sup>40</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 118. Sometimes *sura* is noted as “soma.”

<sup>41</sup> Jyoti Prakash Tamang, *Himalayan Fermented Foods: Microbiology, Nutrition, and Ethnic Values* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2009), 212. *Aarak* is a distilled liquor produced from “fermented cereal beverages” such as *chang*. In some translated texts, the term “liquor” has been used for the English audience—this seems to present the source as referring to stronger, distilled beverage similar to *aarak*, but instead, it is most likely the Tibetan source used the word *chang*.

In correspondence with Scott Wellenbach of the Nalanda Translation Committee, Wellenbach clarified that “not every instance of ‘liquor’ in the English translation is a translation of *chang* in the Tibetan,” and sometimes “liquor” is used only for the “sake of clarity for the English reader.” Scott Wellenbach, “Tilopa,” email message to author, 2018.

In this thesis, the word *chang* will be used unless the Tibetan source otherwise uses *aarak* or a different term. This is because it is important to adhere as closely as possible to the original world of the texts we investigate and use terms that would have been recognized among the original members of the audience. *Chang*, or a fermented barley beverage, is most closely associated with what we understand to be beer, and therefore, that is what term will be used.

beverages such as tea and beer account for “one-quarter to one-half the daily calorie intake.”<sup>42</sup>

*Chang* is a mildly alcoholic drink that is “consumed without additional carbonation and is usually neither aged nor filtered.”<sup>43</sup> The brewing process and the technical information regarding brewing was later used symbolically in Tibetan songs, and more practically, can be found in stories and evidence of gender relationships to alcohol. Wilkes describes the brewing process and the levels of alcoholic content:

To prepare *chang*, barley is boiled on the stove until all the water has boiled away. The whole grain is then spread on bamboo mats to dry...or on a clean blanket. A yeast cake made from barley flour is added and mixed with the barley now spread to dry. At this stage, the barley is called *lum*. Before the *lum* is completely dry, it is placed in narrow-necked pots which are sealed with skins and left for 3-10 days until it ‘smells right’ at which time the first liquid is drained off in the form of a potent, clear yellow oil. This is the first quality brew. Water is again added to the pot. If sour brew is desired, warm water is added; if sweet, cold. The third brew is weaker and sourer than the second brew.<sup>44</sup>

The levels of brew are important not only in consumption, but in understanding social dimensions of drinking. Wilkes notes that “it is not socially correct for women to become more intoxicated than men, and they usually consume the second brew. Children are usually given the third brew.”<sup>45</sup> Here one can see the indications that gender and age play in the world of beer consumption, which will be dealt with more in chapter two.

Recent anthropological work in the Ladakh region confirmed that “*chang* is one of the important and indispensable barley based alcoholic beverage prepared and consumed by people for centuries,” forming a “part of sociocultural life of the people of Ladakh and no social activity is complete without the beverage.”<sup>46</sup> *Chang* is consumed as an afternoon or evening beverage for

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<sup>42</sup> H. Garrison Wilkes, “Interesting Beverages of the Eastern Himalayas,” *Economic Botany* 22, no. 4 (1968): 347.

<sup>43</sup> Tamang, *Himalayan Fermented Foods*, 204.

<sup>44</sup> Wilkes, “Interesting Beverages of the Eastern Himalayas,” 351.

<sup>45</sup> Wilkes, “Interesting Beverages of the Eastern Himalayas,” 351.

<sup>46</sup> Konchock Targais, et al, “Chhang—A Barley Based Alcoholic Beverage of Ladakh, India,” *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge* 11, no. 1 (January 2012): 190.



all Tibetans—except the extremely poor living in the central provinces.<sup>47</sup> Beer is an important part of cultural milestones such as marriage proposals, weddings, births, farm operations, and is a “gesture of welcome.”<sup>48</sup> Regarding hospitality and beer, Wilkes notes that “on occasion when they do consume to excess, the Tibetan host takes it as a compliment if his guests become so intoxicated that they cannot get up from their cross-legged position.”<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, beer is vital to everyday life in Tibet—as a part of one’s diet and a celebratory drink. Yet simultaneously beer is much more and exhibits numerous meanings and functions in different contexts.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis, I argue that beer is an effective and powerful social marker, ritual tool, and spiritual symbol in the Tibetan Buddhist context. I will present evidence that exemplifies varying experiences with beer in the Tibetan context, whether through first-hand situations or through hearing a performative song. This survey of encounters with beer as a drink and symbol includes many sources meant for different contexts and audiences. Through the analysis of hagiographical accounts, ritual prescriptions, folk songs, biographies, and autobiographies, I will show that beer functions in various ways, embracing a new identity based on the particular social or religious context. Thus, beer can transform or be transformed through its use in various settings in the Tibetan Buddhist world. Beer serves as a marker for the transition or transcendence of a state of being—in social, ritual, and symbolic ways. As a cultural drink but at the same time a powerful substance with various meanings and purposes, beer spreads messages in societal, ritual, and literary settings. The ambiguity and complexity of material beer generates its power as an

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<sup>47</sup> Wilkes, “Interesting Beverages of the Eastern Himalayas,” 347.

<sup>48</sup> Targais, “Chhang—A Barley Based Alcoholic Beverage of Ladakh, India,” 190.

<sup>49</sup> Wilkes, “Interesting Beverages of the Eastern Himalayas,” 351.

effective, multivalent symbol in tantric songs and stories. This thesis addresses the relationship between persons of historical Tibet and *chang* and in all of the intricate ways that relationship can be experienced and observed. Addressing the topics of gender dynamics, religious ritual, and tantric songs will present a well-rounded argument for the importance of the study of *chang* in Tibetan Buddhism as a path to illumine other intricate aspects of culture, meaning, and interpretation in various Tibetan contexts.

## CHAPTER TWO: GENDER DYNAMICS IN BEER PRODUCTION, SERVICE, AND CONSUMPTION

A complex relationship exists between women and alcohol in Tibetan society. The collection of symbols surrounding beer also speak to a dynamic that illumines aspects of Tibetan society that address gender issues and perceptions. *Chang* functions as an identity marker in Tibetan society, specifically between men and women, and further between subgroups among women (lay, monastic, and in-between).<sup>50</sup> This chapter discusses the impure or mundane characteristics of beer in its worldly relevance in society, as women are also associated with impurity and mundane life.<sup>51</sup> However, the distinction between the mundane and transcendent is not clear in daily Tibetan life. Everyday life in Tibet points to greater cosmological themes, ideas, and beliefs. Therefore, in this chapter the role of beer as a drink in society will be discussed, but its relevance in influencing and informing symbolic meanings, themes, and impressions cannot be ignored. Something that functions as a symbol in one context, such as a religious ritual, never loses its capacity for symbolic influence in another context, namely the organization of society.

Ultimately, this chapter attempts to exemplify how beer acts in society and contributes to the categories of the “suitable” and “unsuitable”—in this case, women are in many contexts “unsuitable.” The symbolism and literal social function of beer aids in the reiteration of separations between the genders in Tibetan society. This chapter will examine this function of

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<sup>50</sup> There are various levels of renunciation found in Buddhist-structured societies, where a person may exist in a space that is not necessarily separate from lay life, but that requires some form of renunciation from other aspects.

<sup>51</sup> Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik, introduction to *Women in Tibet*, ed. Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 19.

beer through analyzing the gender of beer production, service, and consumption, by looking at hagiographical accounts, stories, songs, and anthropological sources. Women in Tibetan society have been involved in the cultivation of barley for beer, the brewing of beer, the selling of beer, and, in controlled situations, consumers of beer. Women's roles in beer production may contribute, reflect, and reinforce certain Buddhist themes that place women in a submissive or subservient role to men in both symbolic spiritual practice and real social situations. Women's roles in serving beer also point to some larger themes, including women as temptresses in Buddhist literature—their role as servers of such a powerful, dangerous drink places them in the category as something to beware—according to many Buddhist religious texts and stories. Another theme to be found in these sources is that of women as being primarily concerned with worldly affairs, whether or not they truly are more involved in such situations than men. By looking at certain ceremonies and cultural practices, one can see that women's relationship to beer consumption shows a definite difference between the way women and men act in social settings in Tibet. Depending on where a woman exists on the spectrum of society, that position delegates how she is to interact with beer.<sup>52</sup> The woman's interaction with beer is controlled and regulated in a stricter sense compared to men and their relation to beer.

As Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik have noted, “gender stereotypes pervade Tibetan social conceptions and operate actively to restrict women's liberty and opportunities,” even though it is true that “gender norms do not entirely determine the life of women.”<sup>53</sup> I would add

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<sup>52</sup> In Tibet there are a number of religious or spiritual roles that women can embody which vary in importance in society. Women could be “spirit-mediums” (*lha-kha-s*), religious bards (*ma-ni-pa-s*), tantric consorts (*mudra-s*), “incarnations of the feminine principle of insight and wisdom” (*dakini-s* or *yogini-s*), women who are ordained later in life (*rgan-chos*), and nuns (*ani-s*). Janice D. Willis, “Tibetan Ani-s: The Nun's Life in Tibet,” in *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet*, ed. Janice D. Willis (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1987), 98 and 121.

<sup>53</sup> Gyatso and Havnevik, *Women in Tibet*, 10.

that stereotypes are deeply embedded in the way women relate to beer in Tibetan society, and there is only limited space to move beyond gender norms related to alcohol. Stereotypes are apparent in the way women are presented in stories, in the way they are treated in their own lives, and in how they are present or not present in contexts related to alcohol. The concern surrounding women's associations and relationships to beer is connected to the issues of purity and pollution in society—symbolically and literally. The way material beer separates individuals in Tibetan society informs how beer functions as a symbol as well, which will be discussed in chapter four. However, one can see the influence and power of literary symbols such as beer in the way that women act in society and how they are spoken or written about in various sources. Sometimes these sources are their own works, as will be seen later. Ultimately, women are categorized and controlled in the Tibetan Buddhist social world, and placed into categories, whether markedly or vaguely through inference.

### **Women as “Suitable” or “Unsuitable”**

This chapter analyzes how the categories of “suitable” and “unsuitable” are designated among women in Tibetan Buddhist society. This distinction made by Milarepa, in a tantric song, referred to a particular context, but I argue that one can find this distinction more generally between men and women.<sup>54</sup> These examples do not straightforwardly label women as “unsuitable” or not—instead assumptions and conclusions can be made by looking at women's presence in particular stories, ceremonies, and practices—and by also looking at their absence in these same contexts. Their presence influences the ways that it can be used as a symbol in Tibet, whether in religious ritual, songs, or stories. Women are held to be suitable to serve beer or brew

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<sup>54</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

it in taking on responsibilities of the nunnery or in feeding one's family, but women are unsuitable to consume beer in excess in a public place. The following examples will look at how women are present or not present in the production, service, and consumption of beer—highlighting their suitability or unsuitability as members of Tibetan society, subject to an ordered structure of what is pure and impure.

### Women in Beer Production

In Tibetan society, women—both lay and renunciant—are involved in agricultural processes related to the production of beer.<sup>55</sup> Research of Himalayan tribes in the Tibetan geographical area shows that “every adult” woman knows how to “brew beer and distill liquor,” and many of them sell both beer and liquor.<sup>56</sup> Thus, in the Himalayan regions of Tibet and surrounding communities, women are the primary producer of beer. In the hagiography of an eighteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist nun, Orgyan Chokyi, one finds interesting insights into the production of beer by renunciant women. In her autobiography, *The Life of Orgyan Chokyi*, she writes about the difficult physical labor that she and other nuns, or *ani-s*<sup>57</sup>, are required to partake in, which she calls “the pain of working the barley” in the fields, which was then used in part to brew beer.<sup>58</sup> Orgyan Chokyi refers to her and other women's responsibilities in the

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<sup>55</sup> I have used this term in many cases instead of “Buddhist nuns” in support of Nirmala Salgado's use of the term to denote the various ways that women in Buddhism can renounce to degrees and exist in society. For more, see Nirmala Salgado, *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the Female Renunciant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Rex L. Jones and Shirley Kurz Jones, *The Himalayan Woman* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1976), 38.

<sup>57</sup> Tibetan for “Buddhist nuns”; singular is *ani*.

<sup>58</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 170. Monasteries and nunneries have always played an important role in the agricultural industry of Tibet. Monks and nuns who participate in cultivating crops also incorporate superstitious and religious practices to ensure success, which lay people trust in the hands of the monastic communities. Ploughing of fields are scheduled for “auspicious days” and prayers, songs, and rituals are performed to ensure “their crops will remain safe”—whether on the land of the monasteries or the land of villagers. R. S. Mann, “Role of Monasteries in Ladakhi Life and Culture,” *Indian Anthropologist* 15, no. 1 (June 1985): 44. Monasteries and nunneries in general have been involved in many spheres of lay Tibetan life, such as in healthcare,

kitchen, which includes making beer. She consoles another nun, Ani Drupamo Palden Drolma, who was tired from making “a lot of beer” for visitors at the monastic compound in which she was living.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, Orgyan Chokyi tells the nun to continue to “work hard!” and encourages her to take “a retreat in solitude” as soon as she is able.<sup>60</sup> Orgyan Chokyi’s stories paint an image of the *ani-s* working extremely hard in the fields and in the kitchen in order to produce and serve beer. Orgyan Chokyi brought “two ale, a good scarf, and a full gourd of brew” as an offering to her master when she requested “not to tend the kitchen,” which she found to be difficult.<sup>61</sup> Orgyan Chokyi also wanted to go into solitary retreat in order to work on her meditative practices instead of working. Unfortunately, she was instructed to continue to work for two more years. At that point, she again offered her master “one ale, a scarf, and a strong *dzomo*,” for which she was granted the chance to leave her work and go into retreat.<sup>62</sup> In these snapshots of daily life among renunciant women in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, one can see that beer symbolizes the mundane and worldly side of life. The renunciant women in this account want to focus on spiritual progress through meditation retreats, but instead have to tend to their worldly responsibilities in order to keep the monastery running smoothly and successfully.

Women in Tibetan society are also involved in the selling of beer. Ramesh Raj Kunwor describes women in the Himalayan regions as being very involved in the business of beer—he

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life cycle rituals, politics, economics, and of course, religious life. Milling grain products has also historically been a source of income for monasteries throughout Tibetan and Chinese regions, as found in the Dunhuang manuscripts from around the seventh and eighth centuries. D.C. Twitchett, “The Monasteries and China’s Economy in Medieval Times,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 19, no. 3 (1957): 534.

<sup>59</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 167.

<sup>60</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 168.

<sup>61</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 160.

<sup>62</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 160. A *dzomo* is a yak or a type of domestic cattle.

notes that “liquor has become one of the important income sources of women.”<sup>63</sup> Kunwor notes that in his research in Nepal and surrounding areas (portions of ethnic and geographical Tibet), “in most of the villages, where the tea-shop or ale-houses are opened, that is generally watched by the woman,” and notes that women are usually the hostesses, dedicated to their livelihood of selling *chang* and other forms of alcohol.<sup>64</sup> Women are the skilled brewers and successful sellers of beer. This evidence can also be found in various Tibetan tantric songs written and performed by yogins—the figure of the woman as a seller of beer or other alcoholic beverages reflects the real roles of Tibetan women throughout history.

Women as producers of beer is a literary trope that is present in the stories and songs of Tibetan Buddhist yogins. In a story of Tilopa, an eleventh-century Tibetan yogin, the gendered aspect of the sale of alcoholic beverages is apparent. Tilopa was a yogin, poet, and teacher known as “one of the most important figures in an antinomian movement that practiced tantric Buddhism in an especially colorful and vivid manner,” and was known as a *mahasiddha*, or a “great accomplished one.”<sup>65</sup> In this story, Tilopa’s antics are used to presumably teach a woman a lesson—to rid herself of desire for this world and to follow the Buddhist path. It begins with the introduction of a woman called “Sunlight,” who sold liquor (or *chang*): “Her liquor was famous for being equal to ambrosia, and thus everyone bought her liquor, which was very

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<sup>63</sup> Ramesh Raj Kunwor, “Nepalese Society: Liquor and Culture,” *Ancient Nepal: Journal of the Department of Archaeology* 81 (April-May 1984): 23.

<sup>64</sup> Kunwor, “Nepalese Society: Liquor and Culture,” 24.

<sup>65</sup> Many stories about his life have circulated in Tibetan Buddhist circles for centuries. *Mahasiddhas* lived lifestyles that would have violated cultural and religious norms, including rules of right livelihood prescribed by Shakyamuni Buddha himself. Tilopa involved himself in these practices in order to use ordinary activities as tools for liberation—liberation from the dualities of existence. Tilopa, like Milarepa, came from a common home and exceeded others in spiritual success and prominence. His wild antics and stories became popular among laypeople. He became a famous Buddhist teacher in the Kagyupa sect, and gave his teachings to Naropa, who then passed teachings to Milarepa. In the range of biographies attributed to Tilopa’s life, the Nalanda Translation committee claims that Tilopa had many lifestyles and careers, in addition to *mahasiddha*: a “king, a sesame-oil salesman, a pimp, a mendicant Buddhist monk, and a professional teacher,” as well as “an unemployed street person.” Nalanda Translation Committee, “The Life of Tilopa,” in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 137-140.



expensive. At the same time, she was constantly occupied with her business.”<sup>66</sup> It is unclear whether Sunlight was the direct producer of this beverage, but it seems that she was at least involved in its production, and she was the exclusive seller. She made a living from the sales of alcohol and was successful at it. The point that she was “constantly occupied with her business” shows that Tilopa’s concern may have been regarding the amount of time and effort the woman put into her business, in contrast with how much time and effort she put into her spiritual attainments and goal of enlightenment. The tale continues on:

One day, the young man who worked at the store went to gather wood. Tilopa, in the guise of a yogin, entered the deserted store, drank some of the liquor, and then began pulling out the stoppers, causing the liquor to run out. At that point the woman arrived, angrily beat him, and threw him out the door.<sup>67</sup>

Later in the story, Tilopa again disguises himself, but this time as a cat, and “took out all the remaining stoppers,” which left no liquor to sell.<sup>68</sup> Tilopa reappeared once more, and asked Sunlight why she was “in despair,” to which she responded that she had “nothing to live on.”<sup>69</sup> At that moment, Tilopa tells Sunlight: ““You need not cry. Look inside. You have liquor again.””<sup>70</sup> The tale concludes:

‘Is this true?’ she wondered. She looked, and there was a liquor of a higher quality and in much more quantity than before. She sold a lot of it, obtaining a high price. Thus faith arose in her, and she supplicated Tilopa to accept her as a disciple. Tilopa gave her oral instructions, and she obtained spiritual accomplishment and was called Torch Holder.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Scott Wellenbach, one of the translators of this tale have communicated in an email conversation that the original Tibetan word that is used is “chang.” They decided on using “liquor” in their original chapter translation as it is sometimes a general term for alcoholic beverages. Scott Wellenbach, “Tilopa,” email message to author, 2018; Nalanda Translation Committee, “The Life of Tilopa,” 150.

<sup>67</sup> Nalanda Translation Committee, “The Life of Tilopa,” 150.

<sup>68</sup> Nalanda Translation Committee, “The Life of Tilopa,” 150.

<sup>69</sup> Nalanda Translation Committee, “The Life of Tilopa,” 150.

<sup>70</sup> Nalanda Translation Committee, “The Life of Tilopa,” 150.

<sup>71</sup> Nalanda Translation Committee, “The Life of Tilopa,” 150.

The miracle of Tilopa convinced Sunlight to become his disciple. The miracle does not devalue her business and send the message that the beer she was selling was inherently bad. In fact, Tilopa replaces her beer with even stronger, purer beer of a higher quality. Yet another aspect of this tale is that not only was the woman a successful seller of beer, but she ultimately became a disciple of Tilopa's and "obtained spiritual accomplishment."<sup>72</sup> Sunlight is an example of a woman concerned with worldly affairs, but also a woman who became convinced to follow Tilopa along the yogic path. This tale affirms and acknowledges women's roles as sellers of beer in Tibetan society but emphasizes the importance of following a more advanced and committed Buddhist path, removed from worldly affairs.

A song of the fifteenth-century yogin Brugpa Kunle also highlights women's roles as involved in the production and selling of beer, which is viewed as equivalent to the hostess's concern with worldly affairs.<sup>73</sup> Kunle is traveling through Lhasa, Tibet, and stops to stay at an inn. The hostess of the inn, a woman, is described as a brewer of beer. The hostess asks Kunle if he knows how to brew beer, and he responds by describing a recipe. Convinced, the woman leaves for three days and gives Kunle the responsibility of brewing her beer:

She put down four measures of barley and said, 'Brew a batch with this, Kund-dga' legs-pa'. Then she went off, carrying her cold weather clothing.

In three days time she returned and asked, 'Has the beer risen yet?' 'If it has risen it has risen; if it hasn't risen it hasn't risen. It's still in the winnow,' I said.

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<sup>72</sup> Nalanda Translation Committee, "The Life of Tilopa," 150.

<sup>73</sup> Also translated as "Drukpa Kunle" or "brug pa kun legs" or "The Crazy Yogi of the Drukpa." He is one of the many infamous yogins of Tibet, known for his superhuman abilities and great knowledge of the path to liberation. He was born near Lhasa of a noble, nomadic family. His family suffered political instability and faced threats to his life as a child in the midst of political conflicts his family endured. At nineteen, he began to wander and travel throughout Tibet, where he eventually met a Buddhist master who became his teacher. Drukpa Kunle studied with many masters and went on many pilgrimages. He also served as an abbot. He later gave up monkhood, married, traveled between Bhutan and Tibet, and became a well-respected Buddhist figure around his region. He is said to have been involved in "outrageous antics and methods for teaching Buddhism that extend beyond the written word and into the ritual and imaginative lives of Bhutanese people." He is mostly recognized for his "womanizing" and "antinomian" characteristics, "while under the influence of the potent local brew known as 'ara' (*a rag*)." He performed many miracles and is particularly important in Bhutan, where after his death, his relics were distributed. Elizabeth Monson, "Drukpa Kunle," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed November 20, 2018, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Drukpa-Kunle/10857>.

And she replied, 'You're a disaster as a teacher! The knowledge you have, but still you didn't brew the beer!'

To this I replied, 'Hostess, I [as a yogin] must know all things; but I also must not do them. What is achieved by doing everything one knows how? I even know how to kill goats [but I don't do so]!'

And I sang this song:

'Oh hostess, concerned with yourself alone,  
Hear without distraction the words of this melody:  
In the Mandala of Victory which is my own body,  
I have laid out the hearth stones of Wisdom and Means;  
In the spacious vessel of indivisible Union-contemplation,  
And ripened barley of the Three Bodies.<sup>74</sup>

In this section of the story, the woman is disappointed in Kunle's failure to brew her beer while she was away. In this situation, the woman is presented as concerned with worldly affairs involving her business. Kunle describes her as "concerned with yourself alone," indicating that she is selfish in her priorities.<sup>75</sup> Kunle assumes that his work in symbolically brewing the "barley of the Three Bodies" is more important than her beer.<sup>76</sup> Kunle admits his priorities were not parallel with hers: "'Brewing, brewing the beer of achievement of the two goals [of self and others], the time has passed and I have forgotten to brew the hostess' beer.'"<sup>77</sup> This story contributes to the collection of stories that depict women as trapped in their desires for things of the world, such as money and business. In this case, the woman is too focused on worldly desires to make money as a seller of beer. The moral lesson here is that the spiritual path is more important, and brewing an inner, metaphorical beer of religious practice is more valuable in the mind of Tilopa, the Tibetan Buddhist saint.

## **Women in Beer Service**

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<sup>74</sup> Ardussi, "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment," 121.

<sup>75</sup> Ardussi, "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment," 121.

<sup>76</sup> Ardussi, "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment," 121.

<sup>77</sup> Ardussi, "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment," 121.

In Tibetan society, women are also involved in the serving of beer—in lay, monastic, and esoteric contexts. Women’s roles in serving beer mirror their responsibilities in serving others in various aspects of daily life. The difference between women as subservient in other aspects of daily life and their role as beer servers is that beer in the context of society holds negative and harmful connotations. Serving too much beer may result in the person’s drunkenness, violence, or unruliness. Locations where beer is served may also represent other various moral vices, such as sexual promiscuity, fighting, gambling, and so forth. Therefore, the role of serving beer is a complex, delicate role that can easily result in dangerous situations or a bad reputation in society. Women in their role of serving beer must keep in mind the invisible boundaries drawn within groups and individuals in society that determine pure and impure actions or environments. In these examples, women are “suitable” to serve beer, as it mirrors the female responsibility in general, but not necessarily to consume beer. In the following examples, beer aids in marking women’s identities in society through determining women’s relationship to the substance in a controlled manner.

Orgyan Chokyi’s autobiography alludes to the role of women in serving beer, not only making or producing it. Orgyan Chokyi, a Tibetan Buddhist nun working and studying at Mekhyem Monastery in Tibet, spent her days as an “employee” of Lama Orgyan Tenzin, the master of the monastery.<sup>78</sup> Her duties included taking care of patrons visiting and staying at the monastery.<sup>79</sup> Orgyan Chokyi describes her distaste for working and she describes the patrons as “overwhelming,” and writes, “I had a heavy heart...Day and night there was so much bustle—

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<sup>78</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 31.

<sup>79</sup> These patrons were laymen who “traded goods, money, or lodging in exchange for religious services,” which was essential to keeping the monastery funded and running. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 31. This relationship of mutual dependence worked well but left the renunciants in a role that required them to work difficult hours to maintain the building, crops, and so forth in order to feed and house the guests. This left many renunciants, such as Orgyan Chokyi, without time for meditation or retreat.

boiling tea, serving meat, serving liquor.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, renunciant women were required to serve beer in particular contexts in order to conform to rules of hospitality.

Lay women in particular social settings also function as servers of beer. Tibetan women are “ceremonial beer-servers,” known as the “‘trungshuma’ (Tib. *khrung-zhu-ma*),” and their role is not only to serve beer to guests at events such as weddings, but also to “entertain the guests with beer and songs.”<sup>81</sup> Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy describes the responsibility of such women to be “to provide a joyful atmosphere” and to “sing drinking songs to the guests.”<sup>82</sup> In both of these examples, women, both renunciant and lay, serve beer to laypeople who are either in need of hospitality (at the nunnery) or entertainment (at events). However, their involvement does not include their ability to liberally participate in these activities. Certain social rules must be followed by women in both of these circumstances.

Female tantric practitioners also function as servers of beer in sexual rituals. In tantric practice, important female figures are the powerful yoginis, whom yogins can gain power from through ritual sex, and they play a vital role in aiding male practitioners along the path of enlightenment. Yogins gain power through drinking the yoginis’ sexual fluids, or “power substances,”<sup>83</sup> which are then mixed with alcohol.<sup>84</sup> Thus, women aid in serving powerful substances to men in the tantric ritual context. A particular eleventh-century tantric text, the

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<sup>80</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 31. Liquor can also be translated as “*chang*” here.

<sup>81</sup> Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, “Women in the Performing Arts: Portraits of Six Contemporary Singers,” in *Women in Tibet*, ed. Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 201.

<sup>82</sup> Henrion-Dourcy, “Women in the Performing Arts,” 202.

<sup>83</sup> White also notes the importance of distinguishing between “‘soft core’ and a ‘hard core’” type of Tantric practice. White describes the “soft core” as corresponding to “accounts that most modern-day practitioners who would consider themselves to be Tantric give of their practice,” while the “hard core” refers to “practices found mainly in early medieval Tantric texts, liturgies, and imagery, and nowhere else in the range of South Asian religious traditions.” David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: “Tantric Sex” in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 10-13.

<sup>84</sup> White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 85.

*Prabodhacandroday* (Rise of the Wisdom Moon), describes the female yoginis as purifying the alcohol with their mouths, after which it is ritually drunk. The mendicant then exclaims:

Great is the favor (takes the vessel and drinks from it). Ah, the beauty of alcohol! How many times have we drunk alcohol with prostitutes, alcohol that is made sweet with the fragrance of the fully opened bakula blossoms and that is left over after coming in contact with the mouth of beautiful-faced women. We think that the gods crave for nectar (only) because they do not get the alcohol that has been made fragrant with the nectar of the mouth of the Kapalini.<sup>85</sup>

In this instance, the tantric practitioners involved in the ritual later note that this alcohol touched by the yogini's mouth (or vulva, as David Gordon White argues), is a different "kind of alcohol," and is not the same kind drunk by "the poor man."<sup>86</sup> White then claims that the alcohol is simply a term denoting her "menstrual or sexual emission."<sup>87</sup> I would argue that this is not the case, insofar as the male practitioners compare the alcohol purified in ritual with alcohol drunk on the streets by laymen—I do not think that they were comparing menstrual blood or bodily substances that laymen drink with the kind they were drinking in that context. It is clearly beer or other alcoholic substances that is being referred to in the text. In additional references to similar rituals that involve the mixing of sexual fluids or blood with alcohol, White does not question the literalness of the alcohol.<sup>88</sup> In each case, the woman mixing her fluids with the alcohol and purifying it is the only practitioner in the ritual with the ability to serve the correct drink for consumption. In the same way, then, that women provide men powerful drink such as beer in society, women provide powerful drink in religious ritual—both substances to be drunk are taboo, or considered impure, unless consecrated and purified through correct practices and in an exclusive context. In this example, one can see a normally impure drink being served by a

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<sup>85</sup> White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 116.

<sup>86</sup> White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 116.

<sup>87</sup> White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 117.

<sup>88</sup> White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 118.

normally impure person (a female) inhabiting a new role as a powerful server of a purified and purifying drink. This ritual context allows the female practitioner to function in an opposite way than she would in a normal social setting.

## **Women in Buddhist Literature**

Women's roles in the production and serving of beer contributes to greater themes found in Buddhist literature that depict women as both aids of enlightenment and dangerous distractions. The collection of stories discussed above are just some of the many in Tibetan Buddhism that contribute to themes and stereotypes about women. In proverbs, songs, and stories, women and the imagery associated with them reflect real experiences or ideas about women by those composing or listening to the literature. Mineke Schipper suggests that since "people (probably men in the first place) speak (or used to speak) in proverbial ways about women from their own feelings and experience," it is therefore "logical...to see proverbs and their figurative language as a mirror, not so much of reality, but of reality as seen, or dreamed of, by men."<sup>89</sup> In addition, how women are imagined in literature helps one to decode "people's attitudes and strategies regarding desirable as well as undesirable gender relations and hierarchies."<sup>90</sup> In the same way, women and the imagery surrounding them that relates to alcohol (such as their role as temptresses, as intoxicating, etc.), allows one to take a deeper look into the attitudes and strategies for dealing with gender hierarchies in society. Presenting women in a particular way, in their relation to alcohol, reinforces hierarchies and norms in place that protect the society's well-being, at least according to the authors of such texts. To add to the work of

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<sup>89</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: Women in Proverbs From Around the World* (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 271.

<sup>90</sup> Schipper, *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet*, 272.

Schipper on women as “flowers, trees, fruits,” and food in general, women can also be viewed or imagined as “drinks”—alcohol in particular—and this can be found in Buddhist literature that has circulated throughout Tibet and further. Women’s association with the mundane, the impure, and danger of pollution echoes similar associations that beer elicits in Tibetan Buddhist society. If women are referred to as being intoxicating or entrapping, one can make connections between these characteristics and similar characteristics of beer as a material drink. In short, women are sometimes pictured as aids to enlightenment, which mirrors their role as servers of beer, since beer and alcohol are used as symbols of enlightenment, liberation, or ultimate wisdom. Women are also pictured as worldly beings, which manifests in stories of women and their concern with the production or selling of beer, which in these cases presents beer as a negative, material substance that brings about desires, sin, and so forth. In general, the following themes contribute to the idea that women are not only socially inferior in Asian societies, but also spiritually inferior in Buddhism as a whole. These ideas come not only from the supposed words of Shakyamuni Buddha himself, but from various sources, commentaries, and stories throughout the Buddhist tradition.

A woman serving beer to carousing male wedding guests is acting as an aid in that guests’ intoxication or enjoyment. In the same way, the nun who toils long days and gives the product of her toil, a strong brew, as a gift to her tantric male master, in order to make a personal request, is functioning as an aid, creator, and yet submissive tool in the comfort and satisfaction of guests and her male master. In the same way, the yogini who gives her bodily fluids and mixes them with alcohol to be consumed in tantric ritual is serving as an aid in the enlightenment of the male practitioner. One of the main ways that women function in Tibetan society and religion is as aids to men, whether in the tantric ritual context or in the fields providing for one’s family.



Women as servers or producers of a forbidden substance, but rarely the consumer of it (because of their impurity), points to a theme regarding women in Tibetan Buddhism—women are important, valued, and vital, but are not allowed to partake liberally in certain activities.

Women's roles in the production and serving of beer mirrors the overarching submissive and subservient roles that women have in Tibetan Buddhist culture, and in the Buddhist tradition in general.<sup>91</sup> Diana Paul notes that “while women are acknowledged as spiritual assistants to the Buddha, on the one hand, they are relegated, on the other hand, to a lower stage of development than their male counterpart.”<sup>92</sup> Women's authority is therefore subordinated to that of men's, which is a product of social order, monastic hierarchies, and cultural structure that is present in Buddhist texts and stories that present women in such ways. Tara, the female bodhisattva venerated in Tibet, is a consort to Avalokitesvara, a male bodhisattva.<sup>93</sup> Therefore even in such a powerful position as bodhisattva, the female figure still inhabits the role as aid to the male figure and assists in his ritual power and enlightened state. The female figure of the *dakini* functions in Tibetan Buddhism as an important “messenger.”<sup>94</sup> The *dakini* brings “inspiration and insight to advanced practitioners.”<sup>95</sup> This type of woman therefore brings messages and wisdom to (mostly) male practitioners seeking it, therefore aiding in their enlightenment. Ultimately, women are chiefly viewed as aids to men in Tibetan Buddhist literature and daily life. This

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<sup>91</sup> I understand that generalizations of “Buddhism” is impossible, in that there are a variety of Buddhisms that exist in many geographical and cultural areas with differing texts, figures, and philosophies. However, there is not a clear theme or view of women that disproves that they are considered submissive or subservient in any of the traditions. Therefore, this argument can be made because of the lack of evidence for an opposing argument. Making this argument also does not mean that I find “submission” or “serving” to be inherently a bad position or negative responsibility—it is just an argument that places women below men, or simply in a different role. What that means to the reader is up to the reader. For more on women's roles and portrayals in Buddhist literature, see Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979).

<sup>92</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 170.

<sup>93</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 251.

<sup>94</sup> Janice D. Willis, “*Dakini*: Some Comments on Its Nature and Meaning,” in *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet*, ed. Janice D. Willis (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1987), 66.

<sup>95</sup> Willis, “*Dakini*: Some Comments,” 75.

theme can be found in the way women are involved in producing and serving beer for men. Thus, the stories that evoke images of women serving beer serve to reiterate ideas about women found in other aspects of life and religious practice.

Women are depicted in Buddhism as connected to the world, or to the impure. Paul notes that due to the “male dominance” of Buddhism, “the feminine is frequently associated with the secular, powerless, profane, and imperfect.”<sup>96</sup> Paul suggests, when “the sacred is represented as masculine while the profane or imperfect is represented as feminine, we have a polarization that suggests both internal psychological conflicts and external social barriers between the sexes.”<sup>97</sup> I argue that in the case of the symbolism and connotations found in beer’s presence in songs, stories, and hagiographical sources, women’s connection to beer parallels their connection to the profane or worldly. The way in which women or the feminine has been described in Buddhist literature contributes to their connection to beer’s profane, impure or worldly qualities.<sup>98</sup> Early Buddhist texts describe women through negative adjectives that are also employed in connection to the lifestyle of someone involved in excessive drunkenness or indulging. In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, Shakyamuni Buddha himself is said to have called women “uncontrolled”, “envious”, “greedy”, and “weak in wisdom.”<sup>99</sup> The *Saddharmasmrtyupasthana* teaches that women are “the root of ruin, and the loss of substance; when men are to be controlled by women how can they gain happiness?...A woman is the destruction of destructions in this world and the next; hence one must ever avoid women if he desires happiness for himself.”<sup>100</sup> Alan Sponberg notes that through literary traditions depicting women as associated with the fall of humankind, both

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<sup>96</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, xiii.

<sup>97</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, xiv.

<sup>98</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 30. Paul defines this as “living in an impure state.”

<sup>99</sup> Alan Sponberg, “Gender and Buddhist History: Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Jose Ignacio Cabezon (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 18-19.

<sup>100</sup> Sponberg, “Gender and Buddhist History,” 19.

Gnostics and Buddhists “would come to associate impurity with the natural realm and female fecundity, while seeing transcendent purity to be expressed in masculine celibacy.”<sup>101</sup> Women and their physical form in Buddhism are also described as “intoxicating” and “distracting” by the Buddha himself.<sup>102</sup> Women as “intoxicating” points to similar language used to describe the effects of drinking excess alcohol, which is normally viewed as an immoral act in Buddhism. The use of women’s bodies being compared to the dangers of drinking shows that the collection of symbols and ideas that surround beer and alcohol in general can be connected to gender issues. Sponberg suggests that such literature encourages not only sociological attitudes regarding gender, but it creates a psychological “fear of the feminine.”<sup>103</sup>

The common trope in Buddhism that presents women as “temptresses,” embodying evil and representing “the limitations of the human condition,” can be connected to the way in which women are involved with alcohol. It is a drink that fuels lack of restraint, desire (which traps one in samsara), and other themes that relate to worldliness and evil.<sup>104</sup> In “The Tale of King Udayana of Vatsa,” a monk describes women as ones who can “ruin the precepts of purity,” which is, I argue, both related to sexual purity and purity attributed to abstinence from drinking alcohol.<sup>105</sup> In this same text, one’s desires for women and other evils are like “liquor,” in that they are “intoxicating to men.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore women contribute to the fall of men insofar as they can be intoxicating and distracting for them. The use of words such as “intoxicating” in relation to women, worldliness, and temptation, suggests that readers and audiences would recognize the mutual symbolism in femininity and intoxication.

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<sup>101</sup> Sponberg, “Gender and Buddhist History,” 20.

<sup>102</sup> Sponberg, “Gender and Buddhist History,” 20.

<sup>103</sup> Sponberg, “Gender and Buddhist History,” 20.

<sup>104</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 31.

<sup>106</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 33.

Paul notes that the connection in Buddhism between women and evil stems from Indian mythological structures: the feminine is both life-giving and destructive, both mother and destroyer.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, women's association with images of uncontrolled sensuality aid in their supposed role as temptresses, entrapments, and aids in destruction. Worldly desires trap one in the cycle of death and rebirth, and women are viewed in Buddhist literature as a major player in this entrapment. Not only did these ideas about women come from Indian mythology, but they were propagated throughout history by the Buddhist monastic system, and the fear of women among ascetics. Paul notes that in the Buddhist monastic milieu, the feminine symbolizes "the profane world, *samsara*."<sup>108</sup> In both Theravada and Mahayana forms of Buddhism, "the preservation of the social order and the monastic community may have also dictated that a woman's position in both society and Buddhism should not be elevated," due to their dangerous tendencies and attributes.<sup>109</sup> The preservation of the social order includes rules and regulations about who can drink certain substances in certain situations—such as *chang* in the Tibetan world. The feminine association with ideas of profane or impure actions and states of being are reflected in the way women are connected to alcohol.

### **Women and Beer Consumption**

Women's involvement, or lack thereof, in the consumption of beer, as opposed to the production and serving of it, shines light on the way women are perceived in Tibetan Buddhist society. The regulation surrounding women's involvement in the consumption of beer is another example of the "fear of the feminine."<sup>110</sup> Anthropological sources point to there being a social

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<sup>107</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 6.

<sup>109</sup> Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 8.

<sup>110</sup> Sponberg, "Gender and Buddhist History," 20.

regulation surrounding what women can drink and how. Wilkes notes that beer is brewed three times, with the first having the highest alcohol percentage—and “it is not socially correct for women to become more intoxicated than men, and they usually consume the second brew. Children are usually given the third brew.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore, women are either suitable or unsuitable to consume beer, depending on the context, environment, and purpose—highlighting the complexity of gender relations in Tibetan society.

Laywomen can consume *chang* as a part of their diet and for special social occasions, but there is always a limit as to what they can do versus what men can do. Kunwor notes that in the Himalayan regions of Nepal, Tibet, and surrounding areas, “where drinking is culturally approved it is typically done more by men than women.”<sup>112</sup> Women are more involved in the brewing and selling of beer than in its consumption. Perhaps the most public involvement with consuming beer by women is during wedding engagements and ceremonies. *Chang* is vital to all parts of the marriage ceremony and the engagement between the young Tibetan couple. *Chang* is given as a gift between the two families of the soon-to-be married couple. *Chang* is also used to mark the “contract” between the two families.<sup>113</sup> The ending to the long marriage ceremony involves heavy drinking by the groom and the men of his family. Even in smaller, less extravagant marriage ceremonies, liquor is always used as one of the gifts given to each of the families by each other.<sup>114</sup> During the wedding ceremony and subsequent festival atmosphere, women may consume alcohol in celebration—however the main emphasis rests on the men and the groom’s side of the family becoming intoxicated—it is the proper setting for them to do so.

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<sup>111</sup> Wilkes, “Interesting Beverages of the Eastern Himalayas,” 351.

<sup>112</sup> Kunwor, “Nepalese Society: Liquor and Culture,” 23.

<sup>113</sup> Skal Bzang Nor Bu and Kevin Stuart, “The Rdo Sbis Tibetan Wedding Ceremonies,” *Anthropos* 91, H. 4/6 (1996): 444.

<sup>114</sup> Nor Bu and Stuart, “The Rdo Sbis Tibetan Wedding Ceremonies,” 454.

One example of laywomen consuming beer is found in the Sherpa community, where women “under birth pollution,” are given a special form of *chang*.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, laywomen are only “suitable” to consume beer in particular circumstances or safely in their home. In general, a laywoman in a public setting is “unsuitable” in that the negative connotations and risks of her consumption of beer are greater than the positive connotations.

Buddhist nuns (*ani-s*) take a vow to abstain from alcohol when pursuing the monastic life. In this context, women are “unsuitable” to consume beer due to its impurity and the risk of becoming even more impure. One of the ten precepts of monastic life is to “refrain from taking intoxicants.”<sup>116</sup> This precept is also attributed to male monks, denoting renunciant men as “unsuitable” as well. Even as this is not a unique expectation for women in the monastic world, it still exemplifies a context in which women are not allowed to partake in drinking beer, but must participated in the production of it. Orgyan Chokyi’s autobiography describes an additional vow of purification, in which she vows to “give up alcohol, which supports many faults.”<sup>117</sup> This vow is given alongside the vow to abstain from other moral vices, such as taking a life, stealing, having sex, dishonesty, and so forth. Beer in this context is considered impure and a danger that can cause one to make other mistakes. Here one can see a separation between religious persons who live a renunciant lifestyle and those who are religious tantric practitioners, existing under different expectations and regulations.

Female tantric practitioners, however, are documented as partaking in *ganacakras*, or tantric ritual feasts that include consuming taboo substances such as beer. They are only allowed to participate in these rituals insofar as they are in the correct context and among members of the

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<sup>115</sup> Ramesh Raj Kunwor, “Chhyang: Its Origin and Importance in the Sherpa Society,” *Himalayan Culture* 2, no. 1 (1981): 32.

<sup>116</sup> Stephen C. Berkwitz, *South Asian Buddhism: A Survey* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 215.

<sup>117</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 176.

exclusive tantric community. The *ganacakra* involves “ritual engagement in what were normally considered impure activities”—therefore allowing women to take on a different role in consuming beer but not breaking boundaries as recognized by Tibetan society.<sup>118</sup> Suzanne M. Bessenger describes the goal and aim of the *ganacakra*: “Posited as the embodied realization of futility of such dualistic concepts as subject-object, cleanliness and purity, acceptance and rejection, and so forth, ritual texts dating from this period assert that these acts of transgression endow participants with magical powers.”<sup>119</sup> Therefore, a female tantric practitioner can transcend the societal expectations of her abstaining from impure substances in this ritual that reconstructs the boundaries of gender and purity. The *ganacakra* is one context in which women can consume beer that does not render them impure afterwards, as the woman in this situation is following the rules of preparation and exclusivity. Sönam Peldren is one female tantric practitioner who is recorded as participating in the *ganacakra*. In her biography, Sönam Peldren writes numerous *nyams mgur*,<sup>120</sup> or songs of realization, in which she refers to the “tantric feast’s nectar” and the “pure ambrosia of beer.”<sup>121</sup> Chapter four will address terms relating to nectar and ambrosia, but in short, these terms refer to the pure essence of wisdom, immortality, enlightenment, and so forth. Sönam Peldren suggests that one should move “beyond labels such as ‘impurity’ and ‘purity’”—and her participation in the *ganacakra* gives her this opportunity as a woman. In this ritual, the woman is viewed as “suitable” to partake in the liberal consumption of beer and to perform other ritual acts that would be normally viewed as impure or impossible for a woman. This ritual contributes to the complexity of Tibetan Buddhist structures, in that this

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<sup>118</sup> Suzanne M. Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment: The Life and Legacy of the Tibetan Saint Sönam Peldren* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 103.

<sup>119</sup> Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 103.

<sup>120</sup> Sönam Peldren is said to have “garnered a reputation in her community for singing songs.” Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 101. These songs, and their influence in Tibetan Buddhism will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four, which focuses on the *mgur* genre.

<sup>121</sup> Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 105-107.

form of tantric practice stands apart from mainstream Mahayana and other Buddhist traditions. Therefore, one can conclude that the role of beer in relation to gender is even more complex in Tibetan society because of their tantric worldview and context.

## **Conclusion**

The study of women and their relationship to alcohol and drinking is important for scholarship in order to understand how Tibetans interpret ideas about gender and rules of purity and impurity in both social and religious contexts. The roles and functions of women along the social continuum of pure and impure highlights the complex structure of Tibetan daily life. Women's roles in the production of, serving of, and consumption of beer emphasize various stereotypes about women in Buddhist literature, while also pointing to the complexity of women's opportunities in Tibetan society and religion. Women as either "suitable" or "unsuitable" is reflective of the general idea in Tibetan society that there are suitable and unsuitable individuals regarding the consumption of beer. Women, in comparison to men, live under differing structures related to how they can encounter and respond to beer in various contexts. In these various contexts, symbolic meanings, themes and impressions are also present and inform the interpretation of the situation. Women participate in the production, service, and consumption of beer in Tibet. However, at the same time, this participation reflects and reinforces certain Buddhist themes that place women in a submissive or subservient role to men in both symbolic spiritual practice and real social situations. This chapter has shown that women's relationship to beer consumption marks a definite difference between men and women. Not only can beer influence power structures between the genders in society, but it can also influence power transactions in religious ritual, to be discussed in the next chapter.



### CHAPTER THREE: BEER AS A TOOL OF RELIGIOUS RITUAL

Beer appears in tantric ritual texts as an offering to gods and a tool for religious ritual, depending on the context. In some cases, it is consumed by a particular person who has the correct skills to imbibe in the alcoholic substance.<sup>122</sup> In other cases, beer is not drunk at all, and is used as a symbolic offering desired by the recipient of the offering (such as a deity or lama). In the rituals described in this chapter, beer transcends its mundane impurity as found in society, and inhabits a higher role as purifier, aid, and offering. Beer's ritual functions exemplify the multivalency of beer and the collection of symbols surrounding it. When beer is present in a religious ritual, or a "prescribed formal behavior" that involves beliefs in magic or power, its reputation morphs into something more than how it is viewed in general society.<sup>123</sup> As Victor Turner has argued for ritual symbols, so also beer can "refer to principles and values of social organization" and therefore "confers order and structure" in Tibetan daily life.<sup>124</sup> By this I mean that material beer, used in religious ritual, has the potential to communicate other symbolic messages that relate to aspects of society outside of the ritual setting. One's access to beer defines who one is and what they are capable of doing in and out of the ritual setting. Thus, beer becomes a pure and powerful substance, and serves as a ritual tool of enlightenment and blessing, while simultaneously separating identities between practitioners and others. Beer as a literal tool in religious ritual and ceremonies not only creates a division between the tantric

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<sup>122</sup> Such skills refer to tantric yogins or masters of yogic practice who have years of training and knowledge in esoteric teachings, far removed from the everyday knowledge and spiritual status of a layperson and even a monk.

<sup>123</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 19.

<sup>124</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 21.

master in charge of the ritual or ceremony and the people attending or participating, but beer also functions as an identity marker between those involved in tantric practice and those who are not capable. Moving outward from the ritual setting, beer continues to present itself as something that can determine one's position in society. The categories of "suitable" and "unsuitable" will again be discussed—these categories are found quite frequently in stories and songs of Tibetan yogins.

### Beer Before Buddhism

The use of beer in ritual practices existed before the official and widespread entrance of tantric Buddhism into Tibet. Beer is used in pre-Buddhist rituals, ceremonies, medicine, and social events. Bon ritual texts describe *chang* as being used in divination rituals<sup>125</sup>—they prescribe the spirit-medium (Tib. *lha-pa*)<sup>126</sup> to "Give the first part of *phye-mar* and beverages [to the deity]. Offer libations of *gyu-brang bdud-rtsi*."<sup>127</sup> *Bdud-rtsi* is found in Tibetan texts as describing "libations of consecrated beer or spirits that are sometimes mixed with herbal ingredients," but only appears in some dialects.<sup>128</sup> The indigenous Tibetan text, *Unabridged Offerings to the Lha and Purification of the Lha of the Four Types of Little People*, describes many kinds of beer being used as an offering to the gods, such as, "grape [wine] of Mon, Chinese tea and beer, Mongolian beer, nectar of Iran, rice beer of Kashmir, *gyu 'brang* (beer) of

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<sup>125</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 2. These rituals are performed by spirit-mediums who are powerful individuals in Tibetan pre-Imperial society that communicate and invoke deities and mountain spirits to bring protection, healing, and so forth to the Tibetan people. The relationship between spirits, mediums, and the people is one of mutual dependence.

<sup>126</sup> A *lha-pa* is a spirit medium in Tibet, or someone who has abilities to communicate with the dead.

<sup>127</sup> *Phye-mar* is a parched barley meal with butter; *gyu-brang bdud-rtsi* is a consecrated beer mixed with herbs; Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 350.

<sup>128</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 350; Matthew Kapstein, "Research," email message to author, 2018.

Zhang-zhung, and barley beer of Tibet.”<sup>129</sup> The offering of beer is meant to bring “protection” upon one’s body.<sup>130</sup> Evidence like this and that found in other Bon texts shows the way in which beer existed as a spiritual tool and useful object in religious ritual before the rise of Indian and Chinese Buddhist influences in Tibet, and therefore its presence in tantric Tibetan Buddhist rituals and texts is logical. Many of the same meanings and connotations surrounding beer must have survived and remained in the Buddhist Tibetan milieu. At the same time, the use of beer in the aforementioned rituals is also used in a way that is carefully offered and only consumed by the spirit-medium who is said to be invoking and becoming a deity. Therefore, only the experienced and elite spirit-mediums are able to use beer as a tool that brings about real transformation or opens the door to the world of the spirits and gods. Bellezza describes the use of spirit-mediums and such rituals as a “multidimensional inheritance” that has “imprinted Tibet’s Buddhism.”<sup>131</sup> The relationship between beer and the spirit-mediums of pre-Buddhist Tibet foreshadows the way in which tantric Buddhist rituals function in later Tibetan society.

### **Beer in Tibetan Buddhist Tantra**

Moving forward to a Tibetan world teeming with Buddhist practices, texts, and ideas, one can find beer frequently appearing in tantric texts and rituals. In these later cases, beer still functions in particular settings and situations, with experienced practitioners using it as a ritual tool and an offering to deities. During the second propagation, or later transmission (Tib. *phyi dar*) of Buddhism into Tibet, tantric literature, such as the *mahayoga* and *yogini tantras*, were transmitted from India. These texts were not met with instant acceptance. David B. Gray

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<sup>129</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 208-209.

<sup>130</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 209.

<sup>131</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 2.

suggests that these texts “challenged Buddhist identity, either via their apparent advocacy of transgressive practices, or their possession of signs of non-Buddhist identity and origination.”<sup>132</sup> However, some aspects of tantric practice did resonate with pre-Buddhist Bön ideas. These tantric texts, such as the *Hevajra*, *Cakrasamvara*, *Guhyasamaja*, *Buddhakapala*, and others, prescribe a certain way of viewing the world that involved transcending mundane categories and restrictions.<sup>133</sup> In these texts, rituals involving transgressive practices, such as consuming beer, are part of tantric religious practice.<sup>134</sup> Specific rituals found in these texts prescribe practices for experienced practitioners in controlled settings. Gray describes these scriptures as such:

These scriptures, as the name suggests, largely focused on a class of female deities known as yoginis and dakinis. They were also notorious for their apparent advocacy of the transgressive conduct called ‘heteropraxy’ (vamacara), involving sexuality, the consumption of meat, alcohol, and ‘impure’ bodily substances, and, in some scriptures, sacrificial violence.<sup>135</sup>

Rituals described in the texts involve *ganacakra* rites, the consuming of human flesh, and other seemingly shocking behavior.<sup>136</sup> Alcohol (Skt. *madya*) is one of the “Five M’s” in early Tantra and is among other taboo or impure substances, such as meat and flesh.<sup>137</sup> White suggests that beer is used as a substitute for “vital bodily fluids” when it appears in ritual prescriptions.<sup>138</sup> I would argue that this may be the case in some instances, as Tantra is extremely diverse and appears differently in various communities, but there is something specific about beer’s presence as an important substance in numerous texts. Beer and bodily fluids may have similar symbolic roles, as transformative and powerful liquids, but they are not interchangeable.

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<sup>132</sup> David B. Gray, “The Purification of Heruka: On the Transmission of a Controversial Buddhist Tradition to Tibet,” in *Tantric Traditions in Transmission and Translation*, eds. David B. Gray and Ryan Richard Overbey (Canada: Oxford University Press, 2016), 230-231.

<sup>133</sup> David M. DiValerio, *The Holy Madmen of Tibet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42.

<sup>134</sup> Gray, “The Purification of Heruka,” 235.

<sup>135</sup> Gray, “The Purification of Heruka,” 235.

<sup>136</sup> A ritual tantric feast involving transgressive activities.

<sup>137</sup> White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 83.

<sup>138</sup> White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 233.

The purpose for transgressive actions in Tantra, according to Wedemeyer, is to reach a state of “nondual gnosis” through emphasizing “the Tantric message of the nonduality of pure and impure, sacred and profane, immanent and transcendent.”<sup>139</sup> I would add that not only do transgressive actions such as consuming beer have to do with transcendent aims towards nondualism, but they also have to do with reinforcing dualisms such as gender, social status, and religious experience. This ambiguous characteristic once again illumines the relevance and usefulness of beer as an object in society, tool of ritual, and symbol in songs. This chapter will address how beer functions in tantric ritual and practice as a tool for transcendence or power and identity marker between those who are “suitable” and “unsuitable”. Therefore, the context of the religious ritual, in pre-Buddhist and Tantric traditions, enables beer to be used as an effective tool that transcends its mundane impurity and takes on a new role as a pure and powerful substance.

### **From Impure to Pure: The Role of Beer in Religious Ritual**

In each of the examples of rituals below, one theme is clear—beer or other alcoholic beverages, normally found in Tibetan texts as *chang*, function as a pure and worthy offering to gods or a tool for spiritual practice in specific situations and contexts. Most of these contexts involve the alcoholic substance undergoing a form of purification or consecration by an eligible individual in order to be prepared for consumption. The alcohol itself, in a social context, is not pure or acceptable outright. Specific actions are done in order to prepare the liquid. There are various terms found in Tibetan rituals that differentiate between kinds of consecrated beverages that contain alcohol. Thus, beer as a material drink, associated with impurity and social dangers,

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<sup>139</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 128.

is able to be transformed into something transcendent and powerful in Tibetan religious rituals. No longer is this substance something to avoid, but now it is a substance to be poured out and consumed for higher purposes. However, even in this ritual setting, beer is controlled. It must be consecrated and handled by particular individuals with religious clout. Thus, the functions of beer in religious ritual below exemplify how a substance can transform from impure to pure in controlled settings.

First, beer functions as a powerful substance that brings the tantric practitioner powers and abilities. Through a set of particular ritual prescriptions, normatively impure or simply unimportant substances become other-worldly and produce results that empower the practitioner. In tantric initiation ceremonies, beer takes on this role as a power-bringing substance. Tantric practitioners must take three sets of vows throughout his life, including a set of vows that will allow him or her to be given initiation. This third set of vows is given in private with one's master and is considered to make the practitioner then a "holder of the mantra."<sup>140</sup> In this third set of vows, pledges are made to protect certain esoteric teachings and practices. Stephan Beyer describes this ritual: "in some rituals the monks will here drink a mixture of nectar, magic pills, and beer which has been empowered with OM AH HUM, and they will recite: 'This is your water of hell, and if I depart from my pledges let it consume me! But if I keep my pledges, may this diamond water of nectar grant me the magical attainments!'"<sup>141</sup> In this example, *chang* is mixed with nectar, which could refer to a number of forbidden substances, such as blood or semen, and magic pills.<sup>142</sup> This mixture is then understood to bring about "magical attainments"

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<sup>140</sup> Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tara: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 404.

<sup>141</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 404.

<sup>142</sup> Nectar is used as a symbol of the refined or distilled essence of wisdom in many tantric songs. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

that will aid the practitioner in reaching a state of liberation and assist them in teaching others the path.<sup>143</sup> Thus, when consumed in a particular context with other powerful substances and recitations, beer brings the initiate powers, or *siddhis*, including the ability to fly, remember past lives, and so forth. In this way, the consumption of this purified and powerful beer separates the tantric practitioner from the layperson, as this is a ritual exclusively for those beginning the path of a tantric practitioner. Beer in this example functions as both a powerful tool that confers special abilities to the consumer, as well as it functions as an identity marker.

Beer as a ritual tool can bring power to the practitioners and contribute to communal identity—while separating identities of people in Tibetan society. This is clearly found in the *ganacakra* rite, a tantric feast, which Suzanne M. Bessenger calls an “identity-enhancing communal activity” among tantric initiates.<sup>144</sup> This ritual occurs in a place that is “both secret, or known only to initiates, and frightening or impure, such as cremation grounds.”<sup>145</sup> In the *ganacakra* rite’s role as “identity-enhancing,” it simultaneously aids in the separation of identities in Tibetan society by setting apart those who are involved in the ritual and those who are not.<sup>146</sup> Adding to the exclusivity is the aspect of the ritual that is dangerous or taboo. The ritual prescribes the initiates to “continue the inversion of monastic ideals with ritual engagement that were normally considered impure activities,” such as consuming beer along with meat of impure animals and human flesh.<sup>147</sup> The *ganacakra* is an “embodied realization of the futility of such dualistic concepts such as subject-object, cleanliness and purity, acceptance and rejection, and so forth,” and such acts of transgression “endow participants with magical powers.”<sup>148</sup> It is

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<sup>143</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 404.

<sup>144</sup> Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 103.

<sup>145</sup> Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 103.

<sup>146</sup> Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 103.

<sup>147</sup> Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 103.

<sup>148</sup> Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, 103.

debated among scholars whether Tibetan versions of this feast were interpreted literally or symbolically—to which I respond that both interpretations can be true. It is likely that in some communities, Tibetan tantric practitioners really did consume such substances, as other groups have in the tantric tradition throughout history. At the same time, in the use of material beer as a tool, it also works as a symbol to those in and out of the ritual circle. In its ritual use as a real drink, beer functions as a signifier of greater philosophical and transcendent ideas—that of non-duality which brings one the highest forms of wisdom and superhuman powers.

Second, beer in religious ritual can both empower the tantric practitioners involved and bless the laypersons participating in the ceremony. A ceremony called the “Initiation into Life,” allows the tantric practitioner to engage in higher levels of ritual, while it is also a ceremony to bring blessings to the lay audience.<sup>149</sup> Beer is a vital aspect of this ritual and contributes to both the transformation of the practitioner and the experience of the layperson. In the “Initiation into Life” ceremony, lay people can participate and observe, while a tantric master performs the ritual. Disciples of the master will also be present in receiving the initiation. The main goal and purpose of the ritual is for the master to evoke the powers of Tara and bestow health upon the lives of those present. The ritual requires various offerings to be set up for Tara, which includes certain foods and ornaments. The key tool in this ritual is the “flask of life,” which operates as an “initiation *torma*.”<sup>150</sup> The *torma* is a metal object carried that holds various ritual substances and is carried by lamas along journeys to various events and locations. One example of a *torma* is the “flask of life,” which is used to distribute ritual drinks.<sup>151</sup> The *torma* is involved in three aspects of the ritual: “As an offering it is presented to the deity; as an evocation the deity is generated

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<sup>149</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 404.

<sup>150</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 376-77.

<sup>151</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 377.



within it, and the power thereof may be transmitted to a recipient through physical contact; and as a substance of magical attainment it may be eaten by the participants at the end of the ritual, to absorb the empowerment it contains.”<sup>152</sup> An image of White Tara is placed on top of the life *torma*, and bowls are set out with various substances, such as “‘the nectar of life,’ made from milk mixed with sugar” and “the ‘pills of life,’ made from ‘life substances’ of healing herbs and potions.”<sup>153</sup> The master of the ritual sprinkles “rice or grain” over the heads of the disciples and participants, while also using the flask to “empower the cleansing water.”<sup>154</sup> Variations of this ritual use the “‘beer of life’” as a vital substance of purification and power.<sup>155</sup> In this ritual, beer and other alcoholic beverages are used by the master to evoke the power of the deity, and project the deity’s protection upon the audience. Once the master purifies the audience, the ritual continues with the consumption of the “nectar of life,” such as the “beer of life.”<sup>156</sup> Beyer notes that “this privately evoked nectar is a magical recipe of ritual type that cleanses, purifies, and recreates itself. The consumer is then instructed to “visualize that by drinking it the entire inside of your bodies will be filled with the nectar of the thought of enlightenment, curing all the degeneration in the strength of your ‘channels, winds, and drop,’ pervading your body and mind with Bliss, freeing you from all impediments to life, and granting you the mantra of life without death.”<sup>157</sup> The beer therefore functions as a magical tool that brings long life, when used in a controlled, ritualized, exclusive setting. The beer’s powers are only activated when the master carefully prepares himself beforehand and follows the directions in great detail. Not only does it bring health and longevity in this life, but it enables one to experience a kind of blissful state.

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<sup>152</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 377.

<sup>153</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 377.

<sup>154</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 377.

<sup>155</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 377.

<sup>156</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 390.

<sup>157</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 397.

The next step of the ritual also can involve consuming beer. In many cases “magical pills” are used, but alcohol can also be used in its place.<sup>158</sup> The pills, or beer, are supposed to cleanse the consumer from all disease and illness. The substance is described as a “gathering of all the distillations of this world and nirvana,” and the “essence of the 404 sorts of medicine.”<sup>159</sup> Therefore, beer is a multipurpose tool in this initiation ceremony, while simultaneously separating identities between those being initiated, and those observing. At the same time, beer seemingly brings all those involved together, and creates a shared experience. However, hierarchies are still present in the roles that each individual is allowed to take.

In many Tibetan Buddhist and pre-Buddhist rituals, beer is considered an acceptable offering for deities and spirits. Beer is “acceptable” insofar as it is not considered impure or dangerous in this context, as it takes on a new role of something with meaning and desirability. When beer is used as an offering or currency in a transaction between persons and a deity, beer’s negative connotations are lost in its new identity as a pure and otherworldly substance. The context of these rituals allows beer to no longer be seen as an impure, dangerous substance, but instead it is a pure substance that is accepted by the deities and spirits. Beer is defined in ritual texts as an offering that is “transformed” as opposed to “natural”, as it is a substance that has been fermented and distilled.<sup>160</sup> In a teaching by the eleventh-century Tibetan yogin Milarepa, he declares that “all who offer worship with ‘grain juice’ [alcohol] will enjoy an ocean of ambrosia.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, beer is considered a useful tool in rituals relating to worship and

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<sup>158</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 396.

<sup>159</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 397.

<sup>160</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 439.

<sup>161</sup> Andrew Quintman, “Milarepa,” *Treasury of Lives*, accessed November 01, 2018, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Milarepa/3178>. Milarepa (*mi la ras pa*) lived and taught during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Tibet. He is one of the most famous yogins in Tibet, and is remembered for his skill in taming demons, meditative practices, and for his role as a teacher of Buddhism. Milarepa eventually was considered a Buddha. His influence spread further and became more mainstream in Tibetan Buddhist communities than the works and teachings of other peripheral Buddhist saints; Milarepa is “generally considered the greatest

supplication. In addition, beer functions as a type of powerful currency, which means that humans can use beer to trade for protection and other blessings. Beer as a ritual tool in these contexts ensures that one's request will be met, therefore contributing to a mutual dependence between humans and deities or spirits.

The "Thread-Cross Ritual" involves the use of beer as an offering to deities such as the goddess Tara. Originating in pre-Buddhist times as a Bon practice, the Thread-Cross Ritual is still used by Tibetans today to call upon the goddess Tara for protection from "curses, calamities, and malignant spirits."<sup>162</sup> Beyer notes that "the rituals of Tara are more private affairs, sponsored by lay or monastic devotees rather than by the monastery itself as part of its standard operation."<sup>163</sup> The worship of Tara, a goddess, "is one of the most widespread Tibetan cults, undifferentiated by sect, education, class, or position."<sup>164</sup> In one particular version of the ritual, various offerings are placed upon the altar such as dough (Tib. *ch'ang bu*), turquoise gems, and clothing; and additionally a miniature Mount Meru is constructed using barley and water, with small homes surrounding it.<sup>165</sup> Beyer describes an additional aspect of the offering involving a beer-like concoction: "There is also set out upon the table an 'infusion of various grains,' called sometimes a 'golden libation,' which is offered up to the local protectors in an additional ceremony inserted into the thread-cross ritual. This offering consists of beer or tea in a special long-stemmed goblet, mixed with grain or occasionally with the scrapings from an alloy of the

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Tibetan poet, as well as the most important figure in the tradition of the religious *mgur* composition." Roger R. Jackson, "Nyams *mgur*: 'Songs of Experience,'" *The Tibetan and Himalayan Library*. 2018. Accessed December 13, 2018. <http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/genres/genres-book.php#!book=/studies-in-genres/b22/dn6/>.

Milarepa is useful for this research not only because of his prominence in this literary tradition, but because of his consistent use of the imagery of beer in many of his songs and stories; Nalanda Translation Committee, "The Life of Tilopa," in *Religions of Tibet In Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 115.

<sup>162</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 319.

<sup>163</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 319.

<sup>164</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 3.

<sup>165</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 325.

five precious metals.”<sup>166</sup> This “golden libation” (Tib. *gser skyems*) is commonly found in references to offerings to various gods and goddesses in Indo-Tibetan sources. This substance is a drink meant to please the deity in the center of the ritual. In return, the deity bestows protection, health, long life, wisdom, and purity upon the worshippers. In this way, beer is a form of currency—presenting it not only as a gift but as something that can bring expectations of something in return from the deity.

Beer functions as an acceptable offering when requesting protection from mountain spirits. The mountain spirits are believed to be involved in the destruction and flourishing of the Tibetan environment. Typically, Buddhist practice involves not only calling upon the Buddha but other lesser beings as well, such as the mountain spirits in Tibet. Bellezza describes the “*rKyang khra gsol kha*,”<sup>167</sup> which is a “traditional invocation to the mountain spirits used by all Tibetans,” and involves the offering of *chang*: “...[W]e offer the first portion of consecrated essence of grain *dza-gad* (beer) compounded with medicines and mercurial drugs... We sprinkle good libations of *chang* (beer) [in amounts] like a river current.”<sup>168</sup> This aspect of the invocation ritual is part of the greater aim to be given “blessings” from the deities and spirits with such powers. Invoking beer and other substances has power in the reciprocal relationship between men and gods. In another text used to invoke mountain spirits’ protection and blessing, the *Gangs-ri lha bstan*, consecrated beer, (Tib. *dza-gad*), is used as part of the offering, alongside other “libations.”<sup>169</sup> In the *Brug-pa gsol-kha* text, the *torma* offering is transformed “into a metaphor

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<sup>166</sup> Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, 325.

<sup>167</sup> The *rKyang khra gsol kha* “conforms to the standard formula of invocatory texts for indigenous deities: apology, offerings, and requests,” and “belongs to the Buddhist stylistic phase of ritual literature.” Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 217.

<sup>168</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 220.

<sup>169</sup> Bellezza notes these are “liquid offerings such as beer” and it “appears to be of Zhang-zhung origin,” that is, Upper Tibet. Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 253.

for the fundamental character of all phenomena, *stong-pa nyid* (emptiness).<sup>170</sup> The *torma* is described as becoming “the ocean of the nectar of wisdom inside the wide and spacious jeweled container of the *gtor-ma*.”<sup>171</sup> In this example, one can see the symbolic or metaphorical power of the material substance of the *torma*. Therefore, in religious ritual, material beer becomes more than just a drink—it becomes a religious offering and form of currency.

Beer functions as a celebratory tool in Tibetan Buddhist communities. In the Tibetan Tantric Buddhist text, the *Samvarodaya Tantra*, evidence is found for the use and necessity of liquors in sacrifices held during festivals and rites.<sup>172</sup> These festivals and rite ceremonies allow beer’s positive attributes to be incorporated—as it brings a sense of social enjoyment and holds value as a special drink in times of celebration. Beer is drunk at engagement and wedding rituals, and a specific pattern must be followed in regards to how beer is offered, who consumes it, and so forth. In an eighteenth-century sermon of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl, a Tibetan saint, beer is drunk as a celebratory ending to a session of spiritual teachings. Matthew Kapstein suggests that laypeople would dance to songs about being “joyous and energetic” and enjoying beer as a way to celebrate the end of a sermon.<sup>173</sup> This is an instance in which beer is viewed as a pure and wholesome way to celebrate a religious event, in which normal circumstances its consumption would not be encouraged in a religious setting among lay individuals.

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<sup>170</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 256.

<sup>171</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 258.

<sup>172</sup> Worth mentioning is that in this case, “liquor” is specified, contrasting to the common reference to “wine”. Later in this *tantra*, for a specific worship rite, “liquor made from honey or molasses or grain, such as is obtainable” is required for the ritual sacrifice. This eludes to the idea that in some cases, wine may have not been available to the rural communities of Buddhist adherents, and other types of alcoholic beverages had to be obtained through whatever means available to them in their specific geographic region. David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 162.

<sup>173</sup> Matthew Kapstein, “The Sermon of an Itinerant Saint,” In *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 367.

## Suitable and Unsuitable

The chapter thus far has described how material beer functions in religious ritual as a tool. A further investigation shows that there exists a metaphorical beer that is consumed by exclusive practitioners, setting further boundaries between the suitable and unsuitable, and contributing to identity markers in Tibetan society. In these examples, beer functions as something that separates the skilled practitioner or yogin from the layperson. In a song attributed to Milarepa, a “beer of yoga” is described.<sup>174</sup> In this case, beer functions as a tool to reach a liberated and purified state—and it is not clear whether it is a material drink that transforms into something more powerful through yogic ritual, or if it is a metaphorical drink that is unexplainable to the layperson. Each drink of the beer brings one closer to a liberated state of existence. Milarepa also invokes the categories of suitable and unsuitable, thus separating ritual practitioners from regular laypersons:

‘And now one drinks the beer of yoga. With the first [drink] he clarifies and purifies himself as Diamond Body; With the second he perfects his Buddhahood as Enjoyment Body; With the third he appears visibly as Emanation Body. The suitable man will drink of this unending flow of beer, which becomes [for him] nectar; There is no chance for the unsuitable to drink it.’<sup>175</sup>

Thus, Milarepa distinguishes between those who are unsuitable and suitable to consume beer, which is utilized as a symbol of yoga—further meaning that certain yogic techniques and rituals are not for everyone.<sup>176</sup> Various types of yogic practice are reserved for advanced spiritual practitioners who have been initiated and endure training, depending on their school or tradition.

To take part in tantric practices that involve consuming beer, one must be suitable and have a pure view of the intentions and meaning behind such practices. Milarepa emphasizes the

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<sup>174</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

<sup>175</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

<sup>176</sup> Yoga includes a variety of practices and disciplines relating to meditation and tantric ritual that vary between traditions and schools of Buddhism in Tibet.

level of attainment one must reach to indulge in tantric practices involving the consumption of beer. This teaching contributes to the hierarchical distinction between laymen and yogins in Tibetan society. In one of Milarepa's songs, titled, "Mila Visits a Religious Center," a young man tells Milarepa that he is interested in following the path of Tantra because in that path "it's all right to gather possessions, have lovers, produce children, and indulge in food and alcohol."<sup>177</sup> However, Milarepa responds with a moral lesson instructing the student to first renounce the world, in order to correctly practice Tantra and its indulgences:

'If you wish to gain the freedom of nirvana,  
You must stick to basic morality of the three commitments,  
Practice the path of the six transcendences,  
Carefully observe the cause and effect of action,  
And develop purity of view.  
Then you can realize appearances as deity's body,  
Understand all sound as mantra,  
Know all thought as dharma-body,  
Clarify the deities of the production stage,  
Stabilize the yoga of the completion stage,  
Make currents and channels fit for action,  
And incorporate sensory pleasures into the path.  
This was taught for the benefit of trainees.'<sup>178</sup>

Milarepa is suggesting that only when one first attains "purity of view" can one participate in tantric practices with the right intentions and mindset. If indulging in beer is one of the attractive characteristics of the tantric path according to the young man in the story, then that man is viewing the path with an impure view, and is not fit for Tantra. Instead, Milarepa instructs him to prepare and train in order to become able to "incorporate sensory pleasures into the path," such as drinking beer. Yet once again, it is questionable as to whether the sensory pleasures of the

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<sup>177</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Drinking the Mountain Stream*, 134.

<sup>178</sup> The six transcendences (Skt. *paramita*) include giving, moral behavior, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom. The three commitments (Skt. *samvara-sila*) are vows of "personal liberation of the Small Vehicle, the bodhisattva vows of the Great Vehicle, and the tantric vows of the Tantric Vehicle". The three vehicles (Skt. *yana*), are systems of teaching that are means of "traveling to enlightenment". Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Drinking the Mountain Stream*, 135, 181-2.

path are literal, material activities, or if they are visualized activities practiced within mandala meditation. The consumption of beer by tantric practitioners is something not allowed to be practiced by all. A separation is made between the suitable and unsuitable for these indulgences. Therefore, this passage creates a distinction between those who are unsuitable to drink a metaphorical, exclusive beer, and those who are suitable. The layman inquiring of Milarepa in this story is categorized into an unfit layperson who will be better suited to live a simple life, excluded from exclusive religious teachings and practices, such as the ones Milarepa is involved in as a meditator and tantric teacher. These categories of suitable and unsuitable are useful in understanding the way Tibetan Buddhists understand the roles of practitioners and the rules of purity in society.

## **Conclusion**

The use of beer in religious and social rituals in Tibet exemplifies the way in which beer, as a material (or impure) drink, can function as a transcendent (or pure) substance that holds important roles in various religious aims. These aims can be simply protection or blessings; but they also can include one's goal of enlightenment or spiritual liberation. Beer in this case no longer holds connotations of impurity, but takes on a new meaning as a pure substance with meaning and power. Beer is in this new ritual context not only viewed as pure, but as powerful and associated with the empowerment of practitioners. In addition to beer functioning as a way to determine or contribute to women's suitability or unsuitability in Tibetan society, Milarepa describes how real, material beer also contributes to these categories between laypersons and tantric practitioners like himself. In so doing, Milarepa broadens the gap between ritual contexts and everyday life, pointing out how beer should and should not be consumed by particular



people in those environments. Milarepa reinforces and encourages the dualisms of suitable and unsuitable among persons. Beer assists in the categorization of the persons Milarepa refers to. One's social and ritual (religious) status is determined and subsequently emphasized by their ability to consume or not consume a particular brew. Beer's function as a religious ritual tool and identity marker aids in its role as a symbol which will be discussed in the next chapter. Beer's multivalency as a symbol is possible in part because of its complex role in society, where various contexts change the role and meaning of beer, and the rules surrounding one's relation to it.

## CHAPTER FOUR: BEER AS A MULTIVALENT SYMBOL IN TIBETAN TANTRIC SONGS

Beer functions as a multivalent symbol that is used to describe spiritual experience and communicate religious teaching in tantric literature. As a multivalent symbol, beer can communicate various meanings, interpretations, and values. Beer is a multivalent symbol in that it does not signify just one particular idea or meaning. Depending on the context of the symbol of beer being used, it can send different messages to the reader or listener. In some examples, beer symbolizes a positive idea or theme, such as wisdom. In others, beer symbolizes drunkenness or lack of self-control. Beer's prevalence in Tibetan Buddhist teachings and stories exemplifies how beer is more than just a substance for antinomian practice, or staple part of one's diet. Taking into account the emphasis and discussion on beer's role in society and religious ritual in chapters two and three, this chapter aims to look further into beer's symbolic role in literature. We have seen how beer functions in society and public ceremonies, and we will now look at how it functions symbolically in complicated religious songs and teachings. The works of prominent Tibetan yogins will be analyzed, in that they have been instrumental in incorporating the relevant imagery of beer and its production and consumption in their writings and songs.

### **Tantric Buddhism, Yogins, and Songs**

The songs that accompany the life stories and teachings of various tantric yogins contains the collection of symbols surrounding beer that invoke various images of significance. In Tibet, yogins or madmen (Tib. *smyon pa*) function as influential spiritual teachers and cultural

figures.<sup>179</sup> These figures may gain supernatural powers (Skt. *siddhis*), through advanced meditative practices. Ronald M. Davidson suggests that these figures can be likened to Buddhist saints.<sup>180</sup> Viewing them as saints can help illumine the role that these figures play in Tibetan religious culture and memory. These yogins have become influential in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Yogins and *siddhas* (those who have obtained *siddhis*), most likely developed on the margins of society in order to fulfill roles within the Buddhist tradition that a struggling monastic tradition could not—during the fragmentation of Tibetan Buddhism between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. These figures “sang in songs composed in different languages or in idioms representative of the aesthetics and images employed and expected” by the community.<sup>181</sup>

Throughout the yogins’ lives and legacies, some lay followers were critical of their antinomian practices, such as consuming forbidden foods or drinks, engaging in sexual yogic acts, and in general, approaching cultural conventions with a nondualist attitude.<sup>182</sup> Even in the face of controversy, communities throughout Tibet’s history consider these figures to be important and influential for many reasons. First, they embody a type of spiritual wisdom that is not easy to grasp and therefore demands attention and respect. Yogins and similar figures exist on a plane seemingly above everyday life and the realm of understanding of a normal layperson. These figures are set apart from others because of their involvement in exclusive practices.

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<sup>179</sup>A yogin is one who is “deeply involved with the practice of meditation.” DiValerio, *The Holy Madmen of Tibet*, 2. Madmen are not understood to be mentally unwell in a negative sense, but instead this term bears more positive connotations. The involvement in antinomian practices contributed to their reputation as “madmen” or “mad yogins.” DiValerio discusses the various terms for these figures, and suggests they be referred to as “holy madmen.” DiValerio’s argument is that they are holy insofar as they have spiritual insight and are mad insofar as they are involved in culturally taboo practices. However, I do not use this term because of the connotations behind the word “holy” and the lack of its use in Tibetan Buddhist literature and linguistic milieu.

<sup>180</sup> Davidson, *Tibetan Tantric Buddhism in the Renaissance*, 33.

<sup>181</sup> Davidson, *Tibetan Tantric Buddhism in the Renaissance*, 33.

<sup>182</sup> A nondualist refers to one who does not adhere to rules of difference between, for example, good and bad, or pure and impure. Non-dualism is the view that everything is unified or indifferent, and is considered a transcendent state, because the nondualist is not concerned with worldly distinctions and dichotomies between categories of things, states of beings, actions, and so forth.

Second, they are entertaining—their life stories bring about varying emotions and feelings.

Emotions evoke action and attitude, therefore affecting the way one views and responds to the world and those around them. The power of an entertaining story can reverberate throughout the listener or reader’s life and cause them to have a particular lens of understanding or perception. The most important reason these individuals are relevant to this thesis is that they transform the way beer is understood, from a dangerous drink, to a symbol of the highest spiritual attainments.

Musical and poetic verse is one way in which the lives and teachings of yogins have been preserved throughout history. The collection of sources used in this chapter that evoke ideas about beer and the collection of symbols surrounding it are defined as *nyams mgur*, or “songs of experience.”<sup>183</sup> The *mgur* (abbreviated term for the “songs”) were composed primarily from the eleventh to the twentieth century by various authors.<sup>184</sup> *Mgur* is the Tibetan translation of the Indian tantric genre of *dohas*<sup>185</sup>, which is a particular form of *vajragiti*.<sup>186</sup> *Mgur* are songs that describe experiences of spiritual attainment, and “express ‘joy at having overcome an obstacle [or] hopes for future success.’”<sup>187</sup> The *mgur* are “positive and celebratory,” and meant to encourage the audience, most likely full of lay individuals, with hope for their own attainment of spiritual knowledge some day in the future.<sup>188</sup> Thus, the songs in this chapter invoke images of beer and its consumption, and they compare literal beer to a metaphorical beer that is meant for

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<sup>183</sup> Jackson, “*Nyams mgur*: ‘Songs of Experience.’”

<sup>184</sup> Jackson, “*Nyams mgur*: ‘Songs of Experience.’”

<sup>185</sup> Roger R. Jackson, *Tantric Treasures: Three Collections of Mystical Verse from Buddhist India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7. The *doha* tradition includes poetry performed as songs by these yogins. Jackson describes the *dohas* as rhyming couplets, transmitted orally and emphasizing a particular religious truth or a specific teaching or idea. Their form and style are particular, and it should be noted that not all Tibetan *nyams mgur* are technically part of the *doha* genre. *Dohas* were performed in public settings as a way to communicate religious teachings to a mass audience.

<sup>186</sup> *Vajragiti* is an Indian tantric genre of literature involves “direct, personal reports of experience and claims to attainment, whether secular or religious, physical or psychological.” Jackson, “*Nyams mgur*: ‘Songs of Experience.’”

<sup>187</sup> Jackson, “*Nyams mgur*: ‘Songs of Experience.’”

<sup>188</sup> Jackson, “*Nyams mgur*: ‘Songs of Experience.’”

an exclusive group of spiritual practitioners. John Ardussi has described some of the songs in this genre, which are listed below, as “drinking songs” that illumine the symbolic role of beer in the quest for enlightenment and realization.<sup>189</sup> Ardussi analyzes the songs of Tantric *yogins* from within Tibetan Buddhist circles, and claims that these *yogins* “adapted” such songs to “suit their needs and personal inspiration,” and ultimately the research into such songs may “provide greater insight into the kernel of their meaning and, by inference, into the Indian cultic environment from which the *doha* originated.”<sup>190</sup>

These songs not only inform the reader about the “Indian cultic environment” from which they may have formed or been influenced, but they also are revealing of the Tibetan world that they inhabited. The *nyams mgur* genre reflects ideas that were prevalent and important to those who were listening to such songs. This genre also emphasizes the ingenuity of the yogins in their ability to use images that would have been familiar to their audiences to teach a particular lesson and simultaneously reinforce cultural norms and expectations. Other images such as brewing tea or building a house are used by yogins to describe the path of spiritual progress, where each step moves one in the direction of a finished project. However, neither a completed house nor brewed tea symbolizes enlightenment in Tibetan literature. Thus, beer used as a symbol of spiritual progress or an enlightened state is more useful than other everyday objects or ideas found in Tibetan literature.

The use of beer and the collection of symbols surrounding beer that are employed in the songs and stories of yogins is telling as to what images and ideas would be understood among the lay Tibetan community. Davidson notes that these individuals “used images and told stories

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<sup>189</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 115.

<sup>190</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 115.

that violated Brahmanical ideals and must have both shocked and delighted their audiences.”<sup>191</sup>

In the hagiographical sources that piece together the lives and teachings of such yogins, one finds numerous references to the consumption of alcoholic beverages, in addition to other antinomian or taboo practices. These transgressions found in Tantric literature are, according to Wedemeyer, “pointed and specific: they take their meanings from the cultural context within which they were deployed.”<sup>192</sup> Therefore, when beer is utilized as a symbol in the literary sources below, the audience is reminded of particular themes, ideas, and concerns surrounding beer and its production and consumption.

### **Collection of Symbols**

Beer functions as a multivalent symbol in Tibetan literature, religious ritual, and social dynamics. The multivalence of beer as a symbol reveals an ambiguity. The basic understanding of symbols in this chapter borrows from the definition of Daniel J. Fleming: “when...a function is performed, not with the aim merely of signifying an object, but rather of suggesting a connotation connected with the object, it may be called a symbol.”<sup>193</sup> Symbols are “objective, visible objects and pictures which suggest conceptions that are not actually shown, but which are apprehended in association with these symbols.”<sup>194</sup> Beer as a symbol suggests conceptions such as wisdom, enlightenment, purity or pollution, which have corresponding associations with social conventions and hierarchies. Symbols can be multivalent and ambiguous. According to Douglas, “ambiguous symbols can be used in ritual for the same ends as they are used in poetry

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<sup>191</sup> Davidson also notes that their stories became “canonical in the most extreme of Buddhist scriptures, the yogini-tantras.” Davidson, *Tibetan Tantric Buddhism in the Renaissance*, 33.

<sup>192</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 131.

<sup>193</sup> Daniel J. Fleming, “Religious Symbols Crossing Cultural Boundaries,” in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F. Ernest Johnson (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1955), 81.

<sup>194</sup> Fleming, “Religious Symbols Crossing Cultural Boundaries,” 81.

and mythology, to enrich meaning or to call attention to other levels of existence.”<sup>195</sup> Beer functions in this way, insofar as it enriches the depth of stories and tales found in the hagiographical accounts of Tibetan yogins, and it signifies transcendent ideas and states of existence in both songs and stories, and its use in religious ritual.

Symbols reflect certain values within Tibetan society. Geoffrey Samuel suggests that within Tibetan societies there exists “a variety of explicit and implicit sets of values.”<sup>196</sup> The way alcohol is regulated in Tibetan society and religious settings reflects the concerns regarding societal values. Tibetan society invokes an array of symbols that reflect a complex organization of thought and understanding relating to alcohol. First, beer can reflect high spiritual values, such as wisdom.<sup>197</sup> Second, beer can reflect concerns about living a disciplined life in accordance to Buddhist and Tibetan expectations, such as in the way that drunkenness and intoxication are spoken of as negatively affecting one’s ability to function in society. Beer as a symbol emphasizes the importance of social order and spiritual attainment—all persons in Tibetan society play their own roles in a controlled, specific way, in order to keep the hierarchies of society and religion intact.

### **Beer as a Symbol of Enlightenment and Wisdom**

Beer appears in tantric folk songs as a symbol of enlightenment, and its consumption is connected with achieving a state of liberation. Enlightenment, in Tibetan Buddhism, comes

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<sup>195</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 49.

<sup>196</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 215.

<sup>197</sup> John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1995), 93. The importance of wisdom in Tibetan tantric Buddhism cannot be overstated. Wisdom is a primary goal, in addition to collecting merit, of one of the five Buddhist paths, the Path of Accumulation. Wisdom leads to awakening which benefits all beings and forms the highest goal for Mahayana and Vajrayana forms of Buddhism. In addition, wisdom leads to one’s personal awakening or enlightenment. One cannot strive for spiritual attainments with the accumulation of wisdom.

through reaching a state of purified wisdom. Purity and wisdom appear to be interchangeable in literature and are connected in Indian tantric and Buddhist sources to the terms “nectar” and “ambrosia.” Pre-Buddhist Tibetan sources, such as indigenous Bön ritual texts, also describe the use of liquid libation offerings<sup>198</sup> that are metaphors for “the realized wisdom of the ritualists.”<sup>199</sup> Bellezza notes the rituals describe the beer as “the nectarous libation of wisdom” that is offered to the “knowledge-holder,” which includes whatever lama or deity is involved in the ritual.<sup>200</sup> Therefore, even in early sources that existed outside of Buddhist circles in Tibet, the symbolism of beer and wisdom is apparent. In “Mila’s Song in the Rain,” composed and performed by Milarepa, he claims that he has gathered “the nectar of omniscient gnosis,” which is a way of describing a purified substance, most commonly in Tibetan Buddhism, that of pure knowledge or wisdom.<sup>201</sup> Ardussi describes this nectar as “the refined essential of teachings or contemplative experiences,” or *dudtisi*.<sup>202</sup> Milarepa also uses beer to describe the “endless flow of nectar” of the Tibetan Buddhist path: “From the spiggot, the source of all desires, Tap the beer, the endless flow of nectar. Its raw material is the Pure Heruka; Its other ingredients are the Heruka of the Dharma-realm; Its color is the Lotus Heruka; Its flavor is the Diamond Heruka; Its smell is the Various Heruka; Its touch is the Heruka of sensuous beauty.”<sup>203</sup> Once again, beer is used to symbolize nectar—the purified essence of wisdom. Milarepa also likens the characteristics or attributes of the beer to different *Herukas*, which are deities in the Nyingma tradition used for meditative practices and who are given offerings in specific rituals for various means.

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<sup>198</sup> Consecrated or purified beer, sometimes mixed with other substances.

<sup>199</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 296.

<sup>200</sup> Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains, and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet*, 297.

<sup>201</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Drinking the Mountain Stream*, 56.

<sup>202</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 118.

<sup>203</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.



In other various songs from Milarepa’s hagiographical sources, he makes references to nectar: “My lama is Marpa of Lhodrak. As I had no wealth to give him, I offered the service of body, speech, and mind. And by distilling the nectar of the all-profound precepts, He gave me the most essential secrets of his mind.”<sup>204</sup> The symbolism of alcohol as nectar is commonly found in Tibetan Buddhist writings, and “initially derives from Indian usage.”<sup>205</sup> The term “nectar” appears in Greek mythology and Homeric poems as “the *drink* of the gods.”<sup>206</sup> Nectar is sometimes simultaneously referred to as “ambrosia” which is connected to the Sanskrit term, *amṛta*—the “beverage of immortality.”<sup>207</sup> In references to ambrosia or nectar in various types of literature, themes of purity, life, essence, and other abstract transcendent ideas are projected. In a collection of Tibetan folk songs translated by Giuseppe Tucci, *chang* is translated into English as “ambrosia.”<sup>208</sup> The fact that *chang* and “ambrosia” are used interchangeably exemplifies the understanding of beer in the Tibetan repertoire. More interesting is the way that in many usages, *amṛta*, or *ambrosia*, becomes a “synonym of nirvana as ‘the deathless,’ since one who has attained nirvana has escaped from the cycle of birth and death (samsara).”<sup>209</sup> This results in *chang* having the ability to function as a symbol of enlightenment or a liberated state. In Tibetan Buddhism, an enlightened state is achieved through the attainment of great wisdom. This is

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<sup>204</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Drinking the Mountain Stream*, 41.

<sup>205</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 118.

<sup>206</sup> Paul Haupt, “Manna, Nectar, and Ambrosia,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 61, no. 3 (1922): 230.

<sup>207</sup> Sometimes written as “amrita.” The Nalanda Translation Committee defines “*amṛta*” as “(T: *bdud-rtsi*; deathless) Blessed liquor, used in Vajrayana meditation practices. More generally, spiritual intoxication.” Nalanda Translation Committee and Chögyam Trungpa, *Rain of Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1980), 341; Haupt, “Manna, Nectar, and Ambrosia,” 233.

<sup>208</sup> The ambrosia in a folk song from Gyantse, Tibet, is described as “divine” and illuminating. Later in the song, *chang* “made of grains” is described as “a drink of ambrosia” and a “good auspicious cup.” Giuseppe Tucci, “Folk Songs from Gyantse and Western Tibet,” *Artibus Asiae Supplementum* 22 (1966): 55.

<sup>209</sup> In Indian mythology, this term is understood to be a drink of the gods conferring immortality, like the Greek “*ambrosia*,” or the Sanskrit, “deathlessness.” Damien Keown, “Amṛta.” *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/abstract/10.1093/acref/9780198605607.001.0001/acref-9780198605607-e-96?rskey=bf1sC5&result=1>.

achieved through perceiving “the true nature of self and world clearly.”<sup>210</sup> Therefore, as nectar or ambrosia, *chang* is connected to purity, clarity, and understanding of the ultimate. As will be mentioned later, material beer is connected, in contrast, to a lack of purity, clarity, and understanding. Beer and its connection to wisdom is not exclusive—it functions as a symbol of wisdom in a particular context.

In another song by Milarepa, beer functions as a symbol of knowledge; particularly the “Five Knowledges”:

‘We, too, brew a batch of beer and drink. Now to explain our method for the brewing of beer: Set out the hearth stones of Body, Speech and Mind; Within the copper pot of Emptiness, Pour the barley of Purest Faith; Pour in also the water of Mindful Compassion; Light the fire of Great Wisdom, Then cook to a mash of Dimensionless Uniformity.<sup>211</sup> Spread it out in the central plain of Sameness, Upon the rug of Great Joy; Add the starter of Sacred Instructions, then keep it warm in the bed of the Four Immeasurables.<sup>212</sup> When it has risen and become the ferment of Many-with-one-flavor, Pour it into the pot of the [five] Impulses; Infuse it with water to a union of Wisdom and Means; Strengthen it into the beer of the Five Knowledges.’<sup>213</sup>

The above recipe is for a type of metaphorical beer that invokes a collection of symbols surrounding beer and its production. Agricultural terms are used to create an image of beer brewing—images and symbols that would be recognizable to laypeople in their daily lives. At the same time, agriculture evokes meaning for Tibetan people. Hugh R. Downs, in his work on Sherpa villages, suggests, “Great spiritual quests, which elicit the highest regard among these

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<sup>210</sup> Lama Kunga Rinpoche and Brian Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey: Further Stories and Songs of Milarepa, Yogin, Poet, and Teacher of Tibet* (California: Lotsawa, 1986), 179.

<sup>211</sup> The use of “dimensionless uniformity” may refer to a realization of the emptiness and interdependence of all things, which would cause one to look past form, ego, independence, and so on that cause one to believe in the illusion that things and people have inherent existence. The usage of “sameness” may be referring to similar ideas.

<sup>212</sup> The “Four Immeasurables” (Tib. *tshad med bzhi*) are virtues that derive from Vedic and Sramanic literature. They include: loving-kindness or benevolence, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. The four immeasurables can “serve as an entryway to the experience of open awareness and completeness.” Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, *Tibetan Yogas of Body, Speech, and Mind* (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2011), 154. In Milarepa’s song, he instead uses agricultural processes to produce a beer that instantly manifests the stages of wisdom.

<sup>213</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119. The “rug of Great Joy,” according to Ardussi, refers to the act of spreading out the barley on a rug in order to cool, before adding the fermentation starter.

people, may occur in the midst of mundane activities like plowing a field. Because myth and daily life are interwoven, farming provides both food and meaning.”<sup>214</sup> Ultimately, the ingredients and steps—imagined as symbols of wisdom, faith, and so forth—culminate into a “beer of the Five Knowledges.”<sup>215</sup> The Five Knowledges can also be referred to as the Five Wisdoms. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche describes these “levels of awareness” as such: the wisdom of emptiness, discriminating wisdom, all-accomplishing wisdom, mirror-like wisdom, and the wisdom of equanimity, which together, he claims, “are describing a single wisdom.”<sup>216</sup> The “Five Knowledges” lead one to manifest the “Buddha dimension,” which is a complex way of describing entering a liberated, blissful state.<sup>217</sup> Once again, the connection between perfected wisdom and enlightenment are visible in the symbol of beer.

A similar theme is found in another song of Milarepa, where the purest beer is connected to the “Dharma-realm,” another way of describing the “buddha dimension.”

‘With the first beer of purest experience, Tapped in the Dharma-realm, One makes offerings to the Buddha and Lamas, possessed of the three [vows]. With the second beer of Wisdom and Means, Summoning them through one’s sacral pledges, One pleases the various deities of the mandala. With the weakest beer, of high and ordinary, Keeping it within the realm of sensory experience, One satisfies the desires of self and all others.’<sup>218</sup>

This song not only connects beer with enlightenment, but it describes a hierarchy of alcoholic beverages, beginning with a metaphorical beer and ending with a “weak” beer, which is real, material beer. Thus, Milarepa is sending the message that beer can signify phases or steps along the Buddhist path and communicate ideas about the individuals on that path. For example, Milarepa describes the person who “satisfies the desire of self and all others” through drinking

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<sup>214</sup> Hugh R. Downs, *Rhythms of a Himalayan Village* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 4.

<sup>215</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

<sup>216</sup> Rinpoche, *Tibetan Yogas of Body, Speech, and Mind*, 157-158.

<sup>217</sup> Rinpoche, *Tibetan Yogas of Body, Speech, and Mind*, 217.

<sup>218</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 120.

beer in the “realm of sensory experience.”<sup>219</sup> In this case, the person indulging themselves is far from the Dharma-realm, where liberation is attained. This “weak” beer refers to indulging in desires of the self, which is viewed negatively in Buddhist teachings. This echoes traditional concerns with the experience of intoxication, in that it can be dangerous if one is trying to live a disciplined life. Milarepa in another song compares those who “guzzle dark beer like fish” with shamelessness and greediness.<sup>220</sup> In contrast, the drinker of the metaphorical batch of beer is able to receive wisdom and means, as in the ability to practice the Dharma. These means include rituals and vows. Ultimately, the reference to types of beer, in symbolic and literal terms, communicates identity markers among individuals in Tibetan culture.

In another song attributed to Milarepa, he describes a beer that symbolizes steps or phases on the path to enlightenment. In this case, beer functions as a tool to reach a liberated and purified state. Each drink of the beer brings one closer to a liberated state of existence. Milarepa also explains that this beer is not for everyone:

‘And now one drinks the beer of yoga. With the first [drink] he clarifies and purifies himself as Diamond Body; With the second he perfects his Buddhahood as Enjoyment Body; With the third he appears visibly as Emanation Body. The suitable man will drink of this unending flow of beer, which becomes [for him] nectar; There is no chance for the unsuitable to drink it.’<sup>221</sup>

Thus, Milarepa distinguishes between those who are unsuitable and suitable to consume beer, which is utilized as a symbol of yoga.<sup>222</sup> Various types of yogic practice are reserved for advanced spiritual practitioners who have been initiated and endure training, depending on their school or tradition.

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<sup>219</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 120.

<sup>220</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey*, 156.

<sup>221</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

<sup>222</sup> Yoga includes a variety of practices and disciplines relating to meditation and other disciplinary practices that vary between traditions and schools of Buddhism in Tibet.

Beer as a symbol of enlightenment also appears in conjunction with a collection of symbols that denote various ideas and conceptions surrounding drinking and intoxication. Lorepa Wangchuk Tsondru, a thirteenth-century yogin, incorporates agricultural themes and images relating to producing beer.<sup>223</sup> Ardussi notes that the following song was sung to “chide some monks who had been engaging in drinking and merriment during the harvest season.”<sup>224</sup> Thus, this song functions as a moral teaching, and the inclusion of the metaphor of beer’s production and consumption had spiritual but also practical connotations.

‘While agriculture is practiced everywhere in the world,  
 The yogin, too, has his good crops.  
 To explain a bit about this system of goodness:  
 I – plow the ground of the fields of faith;  
 II – plant the seeds of the oral instructions;  
 III – fertilize with the water and manure of the practices.  
 In due time, when these three have been brought together,  
 The sprouts of Enlightenment will grow up little by little.  
 Happy am I when neither frost nor hail touches these crops.  
 While the beer is tasty in Dol Ma-ma-gSer-sTengs,  
 Yogins, too, become intoxicated from beer.  
 To explain a bit about this system of intoxication from beer:  
 I – that from the excellent barley grains from the fields of faith;  
 II – that from the practices of the Wisdom-Dakinis;  
 III – intoxication on the beer of the dance of the instructions.  
 In due time, when these three are in abundance,  
 One spews out the vomit of disgust with Samsara;  
 Having vomited and become free from drunkenness,  
 How happy am I!’<sup>225</sup>

Lorepa describes a metaphorical beer that is just for yogins to consume. The beer is produced through faith, practices, and instructions. Lorepa claims that the intoxication of this metaphorical

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<sup>223</sup> Lorepa (*Lo ras pa dbang phyug brtson 'grus*) lived from 1187-1250, and spent most of his adult life “meditating in caves or sealed retreats,” while taking extra vows of monastic renunciation. He became known for his involvement in founding the Tarpa Ling monastery and assisting in mass initiations. His song in this instance was meant to be a teaching for particular monks who were caught “engaging in drinking and merriment during the harvest season.” Dan Martin, “Lorepa Wangchuk Tsondru,” *Treasury of Lives*, accessed November 01, 2018. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Lorepa-Wangchuk-Tsondru/6671>.

<sup>224</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 120.

<sup>225</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 120.

beer of enlightenment actually frees one from literal drunkenness. This metaphorical beer of liberation from the world brings happiness to Lorepa. Once again, beer is used as a symbol of release from samsara, and a collection of symbols are used in connection to beer: vomit, drunkenness, barley grains, and intoxication. In addition, images are invoked related to the agricultural process of making beer, such as: crops, plowing, planting seeds, fertilization, sprouts, and the weather's effect on crops. In this song, beer is used as a familiar image to spread a particular moral message.

### **Distinguishing Between Beers**

As found in the songs above, beer is referred to in the songs of the *nyams mgur* genre as either metaphorical or literal. Milarepa further distinguishes between a kind of metaphorical beer that symbolizes something abstract, and a literal beer that is drunk by ordinary people. In these examples, beer as a symbol aids in the separation of identities between spiritual practitioners and lay people. Milarepa also contributes to the idea that once one has gained a particular level of enlightenment, ordinary food and drink, including beer, do not suffice. Instead, a transcendent, abstract drink is consumed by the one who has achieved this ability—the yogin. Milarepa uses metaphorical beer to symbolize mindfulness:

‘Fearing hunger I sought for food;  
The food I ate was deep meditation of the Absolute;  
Now I have no fear of hunger.  
Fearing thirst I sought for drink;  
My drink was the ambrosial beer of mindful mindfulness;  
Now I have no fear of thirst.’<sup>226</sup>

In this example, Milarepa claims that meditation and mindfulness, symbolized by food and beer, are what now sustains him. Here, Milarepa is turning around the connotations associated with

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<sup>226</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 118.

drinking alcohol and claiming that metaphorical beer in fact brings about an opposite effect than that of literal beer. Milarepa many times refers to an “ambrosial drink” in his songs and poetry.<sup>227</sup> Milarepa utilized the symbol of beer many times as a way to teach lessons to his lay followers. According to Lama Kunga Rinpoche and Brian Cutillo, Milarepa “sang of birth and death, the cause-effect relationship of action, impermanence, and ethical conduct in a simple and direct way, using everyday objects and experiences as his examples.”<sup>228</sup> Milarepa also sang to a wide range of audiences, transforming his songs to fit the context. In these literary lessons that Milarepa performed and taught, literal beer symbolizes worldliness and craving. In “Mila Visits a Religious Center,” Milarepa critiques his followers:

You work out of craving for beer.  
Daytime you hunt deer and slaughter beasts,  
Nighttime indulge in adultery and theft,  
Your life is filled with empty promises.<sup>229</sup>

In this verse, Milarepa seems to equalize the craving for beer with other immoral acts, such as killing, adultery, and theft. Therefore, he uses the symbolism of beer and its connections to other negative actions to teach his followers a lesson in what is right, and how one should live. In another sense, Milarepa is signifying to the ability of beer to cause craving, which is opposed to Buddhist values, since craving and desire are the roots of suffering. Therefore, beer symbolizes here a negative entrapment that one should avoid. A collection of symbols and images related to beer is found in Milarepa’s teachings and songs—he speaks of “drunkards” and the way in which people use beer to ease “the pain of affliction.”<sup>230</sup> Therefore, Milarepa understands that using the imagery of beer and drinking can be multivalent depending on the context of the imagery. Beer’s

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<sup>227</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey*, 50.

<sup>228</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Drinking the Mountain Stream*, 35.

<sup>229</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Drinking the Mountain Stream*, 128.

<sup>230</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey*, 132 and 51.

negative qualities are emphasized when Milarepa describes material beer, but when he describes a transcendent, metaphorical beer, it points to something positive and superior—enlightenment.

The next song of Milarepa differentiates between a pure, metaphorical beer and material beer that is “weak.”<sup>231</sup> Milarepa, surrounded by his followers, is at the base of a mountain, which Ardussi suggests could be Mt. La-phyi on the border of Nepal and Tibet, which was a “favorite meditation site” of Milarepa.<sup>232</sup> The story begins with Milarepa traveling to the top of the mountain, and claiming that ““up there on the mountain peak someone came and served me beer,”” which pressed his followers to ask how to obtain that beer. Milarepa responds by saying:

‘If you would reach the mountain peak,’ replied Mi-la-ras-pa, ‘you must meditate according to these instructions,’ and he sang this song: ‘Oh disciples of mine, desiring to see the sights of the mountain, Grasp them as you would with the Clear Light of the self-mind [in meditation]; Group them into two divisions, as you would in a catalogue; Bind them firm as you would with a great knot; Hold them firm as you would with a great hook. If you meditate thus, you will arrive, And reaching the mountain peak, you will see the view, And will drink the beer of this experience.’<sup>233</sup>

Milarepa continues on and uses the metaphorical beer to separate the suitable and unsuitable drinkers: ““but come within, you suitable men and women...you unsuitable ones who remain without, though you are unable to drink the beer which is pure, can you not at least drink the [material] weak beer? Though you cannot strive for Enlightenment, can you not at least strive for a superior birth?””<sup>234</sup>

Milarepa’s distinction between “pure” and “weak” beer highlights once again the connection between transcendent, metaphorical beer as a symbol of enlightenment, and real,

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<sup>231</sup> Ardussi notes that this song “seems to be the earliest to come down to us in writing,” but that there are oral versions as well. Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119. I am using Ardussi’s translation which was taken from Mgur-‘bum, ff. 291a.-292.b and two editions taken from the Toyo Bunko collection of Tibetan works on history.

<sup>232</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 118.

<sup>233</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 118-119.

<sup>234</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.



literal beer as a hindrance to the highest forms of the Buddhist path.<sup>235</sup> He is claiming that those who consume “pure” beer are able to “strive for Enlightenment” and therefore experience it, while those who only consume “[material] weak beer” cannot.<sup>236</sup> In fact, the ordinary person’s highest goal can only be to have a “superior birth,” in the next lifetime.<sup>237</sup> Beer, as an image, functions in this song as a symbol of two opposing factors: liberation and samsara. These are different kinds of beer, however. One is exclusive to those who have achieved high levels of spiritual attainment, and one is exclusive to the material realm and drunk among ordinary beings. Ordinary, or weak beer, is connected in this song to worldly desires. Next, in Milarepa’s song, one of Milarepa’s disciples responds, “and I pray you allow me to drink the beer as well.” Milarepa then replies to his disciple:

‘This is how we drink the beer: according to the system of our dear Mar-pa [Mi-la-ras-pa’s guru],’ and he sang this song: ‘I bow down to the feet of Mar-pa the Translator, Who dwells in the unbroken flow of innate reality, The master of spiritual truth. These are the marks of him, my [spiritual] father: Like the sky, he is clear and pure; Omnipresent is he, like the sun and moon; Beyond measure in stature is he, like a thicket of reeds; This man from Lho-brag is the Lord Buddha, Residing as the adornment of my head, inseparable to me. Chief among the six classes of beings are humans. Yet every spring and every autumn, They busy themselves first with their useless crops, And then with the making of beer from yellow barley.’<sup>238</sup>

Once again, Milarepa describes the beer of ordinary people, which is “useless” compared to Milarepa’s experience learning under a great tantric master.<sup>239</sup> Next, Milarepa gives his

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<sup>235</sup> In this I mean that it is a hindrance to the higher Buddhist paths, such as that of a renunciant or yogin. A layperson still has capabilities to practice Buddhism in their lives, just to a different extent. The drinking of material beer therefore ensures that one is not on a higher religious path, but is living a lay Buddhist life. Even the layperson allowed to drink material beer must be cautious, as drunkenness and lack of self-control are oppositional to Buddhist values and ethics.

<sup>236</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

<sup>237</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119. In the Buddhist tradition, reincarnation is understood to be the plight of humans, trapped in the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*). A superior birth, which would be that of a human being under decent circumstances and living in a state of well-being, is the most realistic and approachable goal that a normal person can hope for. Those who are renunciants or spiritual practitioners may be able to reach a state of release much sooner than the ordinary lay person.

<sup>238</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

<sup>239</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

followers a recipe for the beer that can be consumed by yogins. This recipe, described earlier in this chapter, considers the symbolic beer to represent “the Five Knowledges”—therefore pointing out this kind of beer as a symbol for knowledge and wisdom.<sup>240</sup> The brewing process in this recipe symbolizes the discipline and practice of a yogin—furthering the separation between those who drink the symbolic beer of wisdom and those who drink the material beer of worldliness.

Milarepa’s songs are valuable sources that invoke images of beer and the collection of symbols surrounding beer that function as not only moral teachings, but as songs that contribute to the separation of identities and abilities between groups of people, particularly yogins and lay people. Milarepa’s use of beer as both a metaphorical signifier of something more abstract, and an image of something material that was commonly drunk and recognized in Tibetan society, is useful for understanding the way in which beer functions as a multivalent symbol in Tibetan literature. Beer’s multivalence and familiarity makes it a useful symbol. Beer, and the collection of symbols surrounding beer were used by Milarepa because of their relevancy and potency as tools for teaching and as contributors to social constructions of hierarchy.<sup>241</sup> Yet in addition, Milarepa’s use of symbolic explanations in various songs was not always easy to understand. Milarepa notes at the end of his “Song of Symbols” that the meaning of symbolic language was not always fit for a lay audience:

These are all merely outer symbols.  
The secret inner signs  
As explained in Peerless Tantra  
Are not fit to be given to you now.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 119.

<sup>241</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey*, 136-141. Milarepa is known for his use of symbols in religious teaching to lay people. In “Song of Symbols,” he responds to a lay man who requested that he sing a song about his cotton robe and skull cup as symbolic objects. Milarepa used symbolic language because his followers enjoyed that form of teaching—it was entertaining and meaningful.

<sup>242</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey*, 140.

Therefore, the depth of beer as a symbol in Milarepa's songs may not fully be understood by his audience, but the symbol of beer did resonate with Milarepa's listeners in complex ways, depending on their level of understanding.

A song of Drukpa Kunle is another useful source that exemplifies the distinction between two kinds of beer—that consumed metaphorically by a yogin, and that consumed by the ordinary person. The story begins with Drukpa Kunle traveling through Lhasa, where he was staying at an inn. The hostess of the inn asks Drukpa Kunle if he knows how to brew beer. He responds with a recipe for brewing beer, and she decides to trust him with her affairs while she embarks on a short business trip.

She put down four measures of barley and said, 'Brew a batch with this, Kund-dga' legs-pa'. Then she went off, carrying her cold weather clothing. In three days' time she returned and asked, 'Has the beer risen yet?' 'If it has risen it has risen; if it hasn't risen it hasn't risen. It's still in the win[d]ow,' I said. And she replied, 'You're a disaster as a teacher! The knowledge you have, but still you didn't brew the beer!' To this I replied, 'Hostess, I [as a yogin] must know all things; but I also must not do them. What is achieved by doing everything one knows how? I even know how to kill goats [but I don't do so]!'

And I sang this song:

'Oh hostess, concerned with yourself alone,  
Hear without distraction the words of this melody:  
In the Mandala of Victory which is my own body,  
I have laid out the hearth stones of Wisdom and Means;  
In the spacious vessel of indivisible Union-contemplation,  
And ripened barley of the Three bodies.'<sup>243</sup>

The woman is disappointed in Drukpa Kunle's failure to brew her beer while she was away.

Drukpa Kunle asserts that his work in symbolically brewing the "barley of the Three bodies" is more important than her material beer.<sup>244</sup> The "three bodies" refers to "modes of existence" of a Buddha that the yogin can achieve in completion of yogic practice.<sup>245</sup> The achievement of three

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<sup>243</sup> Ardussi, "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment," 121.

<sup>244</sup> Ardussi, "Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment," 121.

<sup>245</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey*, 16.

bodies allows one to exist abstractly, physically, and transcendentally in another realm.<sup>246</sup>

Drukpa Kunle admits his priorities were not parallel with the hostess': "“Brewing, brewing the beer of achievement of the two goals [of self and others], [T]he time has passed and I have forgotten to brew the hostess’ beer.””<sup>247</sup> Beer in this instance is specifically a symbol of “achievement of the two goals.”<sup>248</sup> These two goals refer to the liberation of oneself and of others, which is the aim of a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas, or experienced spiritual teachers, are supposed to focus not only on personal cultivation of meditative skills and knowledge, but they are also to teach others how to live according to the Dharma and cultivate the teachings within themselves.<sup>249</sup> Therefore, beer symbolizes achieving these two goals, or the attainment of pure wisdom and a liberated state. Thus, Drukpa Kunle uses beer to symbolize a bodhisattva-state of existence, and he uses beer again to symbolize an opposing drink—that of the woman and her material beer. The moral lesson, as Ardussi has written about in detail, is that one’s worldly concerns are not as important or beneficial as the spiritual path that Drukpa Kunle is apparently on. He is in the business of brewing a beer within himself. Drukpa Kunle uses a recognizable symbol, that of beer and the collection of symbols surrounding its production, to explain the cultivation of Enlightenment. He, as well as Milarepa, distinguishes between, on the one hand, a

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<sup>246</sup> Rinpoche and Cutillo describe the three bodies as such: “the dharma-body (*dharmakaya*) is the embodiment of his realization that all appearances—thoughts and phenomena—are inherently devoid of any independent identity. The enjoyment-body (Skt. *sambhogakaya*) is the means by which he communicates with advanced practitioners in their meditation. The emanation-body (Skt. *nirmanakaya*) appears in the world as though it were an ordinary physical body; but actually this physical body is not compelled by the force of past action and afflictive mental states but rather by the force of will and previous supplication for the welfare of beings (Skt. *pranidhana*). The latter two together are termed the form-body, and the unity of all three the essential-body.” Rinpoche and Cutillo, *Miraculous Journey*, 16.

<sup>247</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 121.

<sup>248</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 121.

<sup>249</sup> This idea comes from the work of Santideva, the *Bodhicaryavatara* (Introduction to the Practice of Awakening), which is a manual for those aspiring to be a bodhisattva, and therefore work towards the alleviation of suffering of all beings, not just oneself. Richard P. Hayes, “Philosophy of Mind in Buddhism,” in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 402.

kind of beer that is metaphorical for an abstract state of being or achievement, and, on the other, a literal beer that anyone can consume.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that beer functions as a multivalent symbol in tantric literature such as the *nyams mgur* genre of songs and other poetry used to describe spiritual experience and communicate religious teaching. Prominent Tibetan yogins have been instrumental in incorporating the imagery of beer and its production and consumption in their works as part of the greater Tibetan Buddhist repertoire of meaning. Beer is a unique symbol, and it has direct connections to abstract ideas about Buddhist practice, such as wisdom, clarity, and enlightenment. Beer is also a unique symbol because of its relationship to ideas of purity and pollution within society. Beer is a controlled substance that assists in various constructions of social hierarchies, based on context. Regarding the symbolic use of beer and “the cultivation of certain meditative experiences,” Ardussi claims, “it would be too misleading to be too emphatic about any real connection between them.”<sup>250</sup> I would respond emphatically with the claim that although other symbols are used in describing processes of meditation or the spiritual path, such as building a house or making tea, the use of beer is a unique one with particularly important connotations attached to it. These connotations are connected to alcohol’s transformative and yet dangerous characteristics and effects. Beer is directly associated with intoxication and the collection of symbols surrounding beer—such as vomit, drunkenness, and so forth—which are effects not caused or correlated with drinking tea and building a house. Building a home is not something regulated by Tibetan social rules. Making tea is not dangerous and consuming it in

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<sup>250</sup> Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking the Beer of Enlightenment,” 123.

public would not harm a woman's reputation. Material beer is therefore unique in that its use as a symbol reminds the reader of its complicated social uses and contexts which must be and are well-regulated and organized. Moreover, metaphorical beer, in songs by Lorepa and Milarepa, is presented as a better alternative to material beer, which can lead one to lose discipline and cause harm, which is not a concern about someone who is drinking tea or building a house.

This chapter has shown how beer as a symbol can contribute to particular religious and social themes. Beer's use as a symbol of wisdom and enlightenment ensure that it is not merely one of the many taboo substances to be used in tantric rituals. Beer is a multivalent symbol insofar as its context reflects how it will be viewed or defined, either in positive or negative ways. Beer as a symbol in Tibetan tantric songs highlights the ambiguity of alcoholic substances in Tibetan society and literature. Thus, the various uses and representations of beer allude to its usefulness as a symbol. Beer holds numerous negative connotations, but in its transformation as a ritual tool or symbol of wisdom, a complex argument for Tibetan Buddhist religiosity is made—that the impure can be pure, and that what is required to make this change is controlled correct practice. In this same way, women in Tibet have the ability to inhabit a pure(r) state than naturally deemed possible through tantric practice.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This thesis has set out to analyze the role and functions of beer in Tibetan Buddhist society, ritual, and songs. In these three contexts, beer can be understood in various ways, positively or negatively. In the contexts of social life and religious ritual described in chapters two and three, beer generates hierarchies in daily life but also points to greater stereotypes or understandings about people, specifically women. Chapter four supports my argument for the essential symbolic component of beer. Beer as a symbol of enlightenment is worth studying because of the connotations surrounding beer and the collection of symbols it presents that informs the ways Tibetan Buddhists understand themselves, their society, and religious truths. Specifically, these connotations influence how women are viewed and given opportunities in social settings. Such connotations of beer also aid in separating and defining ritual contexts and practitioners. The fact that beer can symbolize transcendent wisdom, and at the same time in its material form can cause one to lose control and act unwise is a testament to the multivalency and ambiguity of alcohol in Tibetan society. Studying beer highlights the complexities in the world of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the social structure of hierarchies defined by rules of purity and impurity, as well as the varying ways that persons and religious ideas are interpreted and used in Tibet.

I have shown that *chang* is a valuable and prevalent drink in Tibetan society that functions as a marker of dualisms such as pure and impure. Beer functions and is viewed differently in various contexts. Some functions of beer existed in Tibet before the rise of Indian and Chinese Buddhist influence, while other functions of beer seem to have been introduced through religious and cultural exchange. In addition to its important roles within society and

ritual, beer is a powerful symbol in Tibetan Buddhist culture. When beer functions as a symbol in Tibetan songs and stories, the connotations and ideas connected to its use in daily life are still present. The power of beer as an object and symbol in Tibetan contexts lies in its ability to be interpreted differently and to inhabit various levels of meaning. These multifarious meanings highlight the complexity of the Tibetan Buddhist world. I have, finally, shown that one of the most compelling reasons that beer is a unique object and symbol in Tibetan Buddhist society is due to its role as an identity marker among persons. People are categorized as being either “suitable” or “unsuitable” to consume beer both materially in society and symbolically in *mgur*. As something to be controlled, and at the same time through the regulations of which to control others, beer creates powerful boundaries between persons in social, ritual, and religious contexts, using rules of purity and pollution to reiterate these power dynamics.

Women in particular are affected by the use of beer as a social identity marker. The role of women in the production, service, and consumption of beer reinforces the categories of suitable and unsuitable. Women are in general “suitable” to produce and serve beer, while in most cases they are “unsuitable” to consume it. Women’s associations with drinking and the collection of symbols surrounding beer (intoxication, temptation, promiscuity, etc.) speak to the way that Tibetan women are understood in Buddhism and society. Addressing the function of *chang* in Tibetan society can help to make sense of greater ideas surrounding women and their role in Tibetan Buddhist society. These ideas are connected to boundaries of purity and impurity that pervade the social and symbolic landscape. Stories and songs told about women and their relation to beer or the collection of symbols surrounding beer are useful in understanding the way the Tibetan Buddhist tradition evokes images to spread meanings about women’s value, qualities, and roles, whether directly or indirectly.



Beer as a tool of religious ritual speaks to the complexity of its uses in celebration, offerings, and tantric feasts—all which operate under strict rules. Tantric uses of beer also separate those from the esoteric world who are not suitable or prepared to consume it. Particular persons, such as tantric masters, who are qualified to partake in the ritual consecration or consumption of *chang* are thus separated from the lay audience observing the ceremony. Not only does beer's presence in ritual texts show its use as a tool to create change, celebrate, form identities, and serve as an offering for various purposes, but it also exemplifies its value as a substance with power and influence. Those who are allowed to transcend the cultural norms surrounding beer consumption are considered to be spiritually superior and enlightened. This can be seen in Milarepa's distinction between the suitable and unsuitable. Alcohol in this case is not just another ritual substance, although it may be used alongside other items. Beer has multiple roles in ceremonial contexts, therefore making it unique as a ritual tool.

Beer's use as a symbol in Tibetan Tantric songs and stories is useful for understanding the multivalency of beer—it can symbolize wisdom or laziness, among other oppositional traits and states of being. The uniqueness of beer can be found in its ability to transform from a transgressive, impure substance into a powerful, pure substance that symbolizes levels of enlightenment or wisdom—superior spiritual qualities. The yogins' use of beer as a symbol for these qualities or states of being is telling of the connotations that may be associated with the material drink. Its physical and mental effects on the person must have had a connection with how beer could symbolize transcendence or knowledge. This ambiguity towards beer works only within structured social boundaries, where pure and impure substances or actions can be utilized depending on the situation, agent, and so forth. Beer can also be described as metaphorical which is a form of beer only drunk by particular persons with that visualizing ability. In this way, not

just material *chang*, but metaphorical *chang* can aid in the separation of identities between, for example, Milarepa and his lay followers. Thus utilizing the categories of suitable and unsuitable, beer as a symbol can be multivalent and therefore powerful in its symbolic relevance to teaching Buddhist truths and reinforcing Tibetan social boundaries.

Some additional conclusions can be made about the importance of studying beer as a social marker, ritual tool, and symbol. All three manifestations of beer relate to both oneself and society. All three angles of looking at beer and its varieties speak to both bodily functions and societal functions. Beer can be physically consumed, and lead to negative or positive effects on one's body and mind. In the same way, one's consumption affects those around them—such as society. As Douglas has argued, “the human body is always treated as an image of society” and “there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension.”<sup>251</sup> In addition, controlling one's body is valued in public, formal contexts, while the lack of control is more accepted in informal contexts. The “two bodies,” as Douglas calls them, share in the way they address beer and its production and consumption in society, ritual use, and symbolic language.<sup>252</sup> Just as it is inappropriate for a woman to consume large amounts of beer in a public setting, it is also inappropriate or possible for a man who is not a yogin to consume any amount of pure, metaphorical beer in symbolic language.<sup>253</sup> Beer is regulated to some degree in all three contexts, and in both “bodies”. The discussion of both bodies can also inform the world of symbolic meaning for Tibetan Buddhists. Both bodies, the physical body and the social body, influence the symbolic or abstract milieu of meaning in Tibetan Buddhism. Yogins used familiar images and symbols such as beer to spread ideas and

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<sup>251</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 70.

<sup>252</sup> Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 71.

<sup>253</sup> As described in the analysis of the “suitable” and “unsuitable”.

teachings to their listeners. These particular images and symbols are extracted from the daily life of Tibetans and can be used ambiguously to add complexity and coded meanings to the teachings of the yogins.

Beer as a transgressive substance in Tibetan Tantra can also be used as a ritual tool and semiotic symbol of nondual spiritual aims, as Wedemeyer has argued, while also functioning in societal contexts as an identity marker that reinforces dualisms such as gender, social status, and levels of religious experience. For example, beer is used to distinguish yogins from laypersons. Wedemeyer has also pointed out that the transgressions of the Tantric tradition are “pointed and specific,” taking their “meanings from the cultural context within which they were deployed and are manifestly aimed at occasioning an experience...of nondual gnosis.”<sup>254</sup> As this thesis has shown, beer as a transgressive substance and symbol can do this, but it can also have multifaceted social meanings with different aims—such as the aim to reiterate ideas about women in comparison to men in Tibetan society. In a sense, I am arguing that beer as a word, symbol, and ritually drunk substance—both material and abstract—points to the ultimate aims of Buddhist Tantric practice but sometimes beer does the exact opposite—it can reiterate or reinforce social roles and functions that are strictly relevant to daily life in a society.

Ultimately, I argue that beer is something vital to consider when studying how Tibetans use images and ideas to connect daily life and religiosity. Beer can be used in various ways to spread messages, reinforce stereotypes, transact power, and symbolize abstract states of being. In the Tibetan context, beer is used to strengthen social constructions of identity and separation. It also can be utilized as a tool for exchanging power between deities and humans. Beer can reinforce stereotypes about women, such as their association with aiding and serving others. In

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<sup>254</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 131.

addition, beer in the Tibetan world can symbolize and reflect powerful states of being in particular contexts while still assuming negative or impure connotations in other contexts. Unlike other images used for similar means, beer is a morally ambiguous substance that can operate as either a positive or negative object. Thus, *chang* in Tibetan Buddhism is a drink that operates in a more complex role than other drinks or substances that scholars have normally studied in comparison to each other. Beer in Tibetan Tantric Buddhism should not be lumped together with other transgressive substances, because beer cannot be defined solely by its impurity. Beer's pure and transcendent qualities, as exemplified in tantric songs and stories, are always present to an extent. Therefore, beer is a unique, ambivalent, and multivalent object (drink, symbol, etc.) in Tibetan Buddhist life and literature, and should be recognized in its numerous contexts and materializations as useful, relevant, and informative.

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