

Social manifestations of XIV Shamar Rinpoche posthumous activity

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Abstract. This paper analyze and present social phenomena which appeared after the sudden death of Tibetan Lama- XIV Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche Mipham Chokyi Lodro. It contain ethnographic descriptions and reflections made during anthropological fieldwork in Germany as well in Nepal. It shows how Buddhist teacher can influence his practitioners even after death. What is more this paper provide reliable information about the role of Shamarpa in Kagyu tradition.

Keywords: Anthropology, Buddhism, Fieldwork, Cremation.

1. Introduction

Information and reflections published in this paper are an attempt to present anthropological approach to current and global situation of one specific tradition within Tibetan Buddhism. The sudden death of Kagyu tradition Lineage Holder- Shamarpa influenced many people from America, Asia, Australia and Europe and Russia. In following section of this article you will find examples of social phenomena connected to this situation, as well basic information about Kagyu tradition.

2. Cremation at Shar Minub Monastery

31 of July 2014 was very hot and sunny day (more than 30 degrees) in Kathmandu, Nepal. Thousands of people gathered at Shar Minub Monastery and in its surroundings. On the rooftop of unfinished (still under construction) main building you could see a crowd of high Tibetan Buddhist Rinpoches and Lamas - representing different Tibetan Buddhist traditions. All of them were simultaneously leading pujas and various rituals. Among them Shamarpa family members as well as other noble guests were also present. Roof was beautifully decorated with many altars (facing in all directions), flags, Buddhist ornaments and statues. The participants were hiding under the tents protecting from the sun. In the main place of the rooftop smoke and flames blazed forth from specially prepared cremation stupa. Even though for Buddhist death is not an end you could notice grief and loss etched on some participants faces. It was the last moment to pay respect for the *Kudung*- in Tibetan Buddhism physical body of someone who attained liberation, perceived as a precious one. For few hours XVII Gyalwa Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje was leading cremation ceremony of his main teacher XIV Kunzig Shamar Mipham Chokyi Lodro. Despite of very hot weather thousands of people participated in all ceremonies standing on nearest rooftops, surrounding hillside or inside specially prepared and adjust indoors of the monastery. Some of them came from Nepal and neighborhood countries, the other participants came from Europe, America, Australia and Russia. What is more, the whole cremation was streamed. People who couldn't take part physically were able to follow ceremony in different countries. I was also there, as an anthropologist and simple participant melting under the sun.

June 11th 2014 became a breaking day in monastic and lay societies of Kagyu tradition in the whole world. One of the two most important teachers in Kagyu Lineage known as the Red Hat Lama passed away in Renchen- Ulm, Germany. Because of my PhD research dedicated to Kagyu monasticism in India and Nepal I decided to take part and observe the unusual international farewell to Tibetan Lama. By participation in ceremonies leaded in Germany as well in Nepal and implementing quantitative research methods I became

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involved in anthropological project exploring the phenomena connected to the death of XIV Shamar Mipham Chokyi Lodro. In this paper I would like to focus on the social approach to this topic.

Death is woven into the life-course of every human. Since years many sociologists and anthropologists are debating and analyzing this unpredictable part of life from many different perspectives. What I consider to be interesting and worth to explore is not only the social reaction to the death of Shamarpa but also his posthumous activity. Activity is understood as the influence which caused any extraordinary or unusual behavior made by any social group connected to the Mipham Chokyi Lodro in period of 49 days after his death. Unlike to Tanya Zivkovic I would like to analyze and present not how the “life can continue in new mediums including relicts, reincarnation and hagiographical representations”¹ but how death of Buddhist teacher can influence students and supporters behavior. This paper will present five types of examples which were considered as unusual and as manifestations of social phenomena connected with the death of Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche.

3. Introduction to Kagyu Tradition

In Tibetan Buddhism we can distinguish four main schools: Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug. Each one of them has a different lineage of tradition, transmission and teachings. What they have in common are the teachings given more than 2500 years ago by Buddha Shakyamuni. They share the same corpus of philosophical advices given by Siddhartha Gautama in India². The roots of Kagyu tradition are starting from the Indian jogi Tilopa (988-1069) and follow through Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, Karmapas and their main students, who transmits the lineage. The sub- Kagyu tradition (which is currently recognized as the biggest) that is going to be presented here is Karma Kagyu.

Silvia Wong in her book is precisely explaining the traditional interpretation of Karmapas origins. "The first master to reincarnate continuously, life after life, while keeping the same identity, was the first Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193). Before he died the first Karmapa left brief oral instructions with three separate disciplines concerning his next reincarnation. After his death, this first ever tulku declared himself to be the reincarnation of Dusum Khyenpa"³. From that time Karmapas- The Black Hat Lamas lineage remains unbroken. Nowadays the XVII Gyalwa Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje is the highest living lineage holder of the Karma Kagyu School. Figure of Shamar Rinpoche in Karma Kagyu is second to The Gyalwa Karmapa. From the times of third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, the Shamarpa is responsible for the patronage of Karma Kagyu school while Karmapa is unavailable. Good example of the accord between the lineage holders is presented in quotation of the 4th Karmapa addressed to the 2nd Shamarpa: “You are the one manifestation, while I am the other. Therefore, the responsibility to maintain the continuity of the teachings of the Kagyu lineage rests equally on you as it does on me”⁴.

In Tibetan Buddhism the Kunzig Shamarpa is presented as a teacher and lineage holder of Kagyu Tradition. What is more, it is also possible to present him from semiotic point of view. He is perceived by his students and other lamas as the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha.

4. Who was the XIV Kunzig Shamarpa Mipham Chokyi Lodro?

According to information gathered from the official websites, stories told by his disciples and short biography published by Shangpa Rinpoche, Mipham Chokyi Lodro (1952-2014) was born in Derge, Eastern Tibet. In pursuance of the Kagyu tradition he was recognized at the age of four by XVI Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. From 1960 in Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim, he began to receive teachings and buddhist training from XVI Karmapa and many other high dharmic masters. Rangjung Rigpe Dorje officially enthroned Shamarpa and instituted in the highest position after himself. It is said that Mipham Chokyi Lodro received the whole transmission of Kagyu Lineage and stayed with XVI Gyalwa Karmapa until his death in 1981⁵. After death of his root teacher Shamarpa continued projects and activity led by Karmapa. One of the most important responsibilities was the recognition of XVII Karmapa. Looking back at all political conditions this activity might have been the most difficult and courageous. Karmapa controversy was widely described by different authors, such as: Silvia Wang, Tomek Lenhert or Eric D. Curren. Because of big complex and vast ambit this paper will not further analyze the subject of controversy.

XIV Shamarpa officially and formally recognized XVII Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje in march 1994, New Delhi, India. From that time young Karmapa was under dharmic education and guidance of Mipham Chokyi Lodro. Apart from this activity Rinpoche was also responsible for monasteries, shedras (monastic educational institutions), retreat centers and different Buddhist institutions (not only in Asia but also in Europe, America and Australia). He founded international organization of lay centers and groups to explore and teach how to use teachings given by the Buddha in regular life. Name of this international organization is Bodhi Path. He was also a writer who published books about: meditation, Buddhist practice, biographies of X Karmapa and XVI Karmapa (so far available only in Tibetan), as well political proposition on democracy. Most information about this publication are posted at official website of Shamar Rinpoche.

Until the time of his death Shamarpa was traveling, visiting and giving teachings in Kagyu centers all over the world. Two weeks before his death, he was leading Buddhist course in Dhagpo Kagyu Ling in France later on in Renchen-Ulm, Germany where he passed away.

5. Life after death

In Tibetan Buddhism death is presented and explained as next step rather than an end of life. This assumption relates to every being, even those who are not practicing Buddhism as well as to those who are not humans for eg. animals. The conception of time is presented as circular rather than linear. It is said that previous actions of beings are the cause of their next existence conditions. The concept of reincarnation means that every being can be born again but in a different body. There are few anthropological interpretations which commence to present the concept of reincarnation (Gupta 1992, Mills 1994; Zivkovic 2010, 2013,2014)

In Tibetan Buddhism the concept of *tulku* reincarnation process is perceived otherwise than reincarnation in the case of other human being. Shamar Rinpoche was recognized as a *tulku* by his uncle XVI Karmapa. The conception of *tulku* in Tibetan Buddhism refer to the people who in previous life where wishing to be born again for benefiting others. It is assumed that this kind of rebirth is in buddhist interpretations a conscious process. It is a honorific title usually used naming recognized incarnations of lamas, who were found by their previous students or other lamas empowered to this activity⁶. At this point it is also worth to mention the term *Kudung* which was applied to name the physical body of Shamar Rinpoche after his death. This term was used in official letters, announcements and articles connected with Mipham Chokyi Lodro fading away. From explanations given by my consultant- Khenpo Tsering it is easy to infer that *Kudung* is also a honorific term. It is reserved only for high Buddhist Lamas and Rinpoches. The etymology of this Tibetan term create clear conclusions. *Ku-* means body; *-dung* is short form for *Dung Rui* meaning relic bones. This kind of explanation creates the understanding that this body is significant not only because it belonged to respected high Lama or Rinpoche but also because it can became a source of relicts. Relicts can become a transmitter of blessing and qualities of Lama. They can evolve and extend activity of lama by common conviction of positive influence to the surroundings and people who would like to receive blessing. "Tibetan Buddhist bodily relicts [...] are often viewed as a signs of spiritual mastery that emerge at the time of death"⁷. Some of them can manifest as images on bones, the not burned parts of body merged together during cremation, pearls which manifested in the surrounding for e.g. on flowers, or in many other ways. Dan Martin described widely topic of relicts in his article: *Pearls from bones: relicts, chortens, tertones and the signs of saintly death in Tibet*.

In sociology and anthropology we are able to find interpretations saying that the funeral can manifest social status of deceased⁸. In this case the process of 49 days from the moment of Shamarpa biological death up to cremation itself provided many information about his social role and status. This period allowed to manifest posthumous activity of Lama, and create social phenomena among his students all over the world. By direct participation in ceremonies organized firstly in Europe and next in Asia I was able to perceive and experience this unusual social phenomena which appeared among his students and supporters worldwide. For the first time in history *Kudung* was transported from one country to another so that many people could pay their last respect and participate in ceremonies. The program started in the cemetery chapel in Renchen (Germany), then Karmapa International Institute New Delhi (India), Shri Diwakar Institute in Kalimpong (India), Paro (Bhutan) and Shar Minub Monastery in Katmandu (Nepal). To all of those places people were

traveling from surroundings and the neighborhood countries just to pay last respect. I was taking part at the events organized in Renchen, Germany as well in Kathmandu, Nepal. Based on direct experience gained through participant observation I would like to present the four manifestations of social phenomena which appeared in both of these places.

5.1. Renchen, Germany

In Renchen people were able to take part in traditional puja leaded by Tibetan lamas, offer flowers or traditional ceremonial scarf- *kathac*, make meditation, wishes or simply make any other contribution to Shamar Rinpoche. They were also able to receive blessing by making prostration in front of the coffin. *Kudung* was placed in cemetery chapel, which for a week was adapted to Buddhist tradition. Most place on the floor was covered by meditation pillows, on the walls where hanging few Buddhist paintings- *thangkas*, in small room in front of the coffin we could find special pillows on seats prepared for the lamas and small throne for Karmapa. Ritual instruments as drums, horns and bells were also present. Renchen- Ulm was the place where the social phenomena among Shamarpa students and supporters appeared. They manifested in few different ways. First of all it was the matter of the immediate and effective organization which was needed to be provide to make the official farewell possible. With the support of Shamar Rinpoche brother- Lama Jigme Rinpoche members of Bodhi Path center in Renchen- Ulm created and adjust the whole infrastructure which could provide an official and peaceful environment. What is more members of different Bodhi Path centers and organizations like Diamond Way or Dagpo Kagyu Ling from France also became involved in organization of this event. This unification and cooperation is consider to be second manifestation of social phenomena. Even though they travelled from different countries (mostly by car) to pay their last respect to Shamar Rinpoche, they got involved and help to arrange everything. Organizers had to host lamas, high Buddhist Teachers and Rinpoches from all over the world. Provide everything that was needed to conduct the ceremonies, communicate with the local government and media. For the reason that abundance of people wanted to take part in this farewell it was needed to organize food, sleeping place in local sports hall, create parking space and secure the environment so that visitors would not disturb the regular routine of this small city. People were arriving from different countries such as: Austria, Czech Republic, England, France, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Germany and Switzerland. *Kudung* remain more than a week in Renchen. During this time every day people where coming and going. For the participants last three days were very special. The main student of Shamar Rinpoche- XVII Gyalwa Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje for the first time in two years arrived to Europe from India to pay last respect to Rinpoche. What is more, as it was explained by the practitioners Karmapa came to accompany his teacher in his last trip to Asia. Even though there was no program with Karmapa during this last three days all cemetery surroundings were getting more and more crowded. Sleeping hall was full and so were all hotels and guesthouses nearby. People were able to attain the lectures given by Karma Trinley Rinpoche who was telling about life story of Mipham Chokyi Lodro and his position as Shamarpa in Karma Kagyu Lineage.

Last day when *Kudung* was transported from the cemetery more than 2000 people joined the cortege leaded by Karmapa through the city. This large number of participants taking part in this event during whole time in Renchen is consider as another manifestation of social phenomena⁹. Many of them had travel, sometimes even 16 hours in car just to join the ceremonies only for few hours. Some of them had to take off from work, for the ability to stay longer. Many others who couldn't come and join the events in Renchen, were following the streaming of the events online, following newsletters and information spreading via email as well doing their own meditation and dedication at home. This international online connection allowed people to have direct contact with valuable events for the Kagyu Lineage. This international online and technological connection is assumed as the fourth manifestation of social phenomena

5.2. Kathmandu, Nepal

Even though organizers of cremation in Kathmandu had more than a month for the preparation of this ceremony, they also had to put a lot of energy and effort to make this event possible. First of all they had to adjust the Shar Minub Monastery building which was still under construction to the requirements of big social events. Shar Minub Monastery was a part of the monastic project which was leaded by XIV Shamarpa.

Even though Shamar Rinpoche had many different social and institutional connections with Nepal the choice for Shar Minub as the cremation place was very symbolic.

Because it was still a construction site organizers wanted to create the whole infrastructure which could provide peaceful and calm environment needed for the farewell. That is why within three weeks empty and concrete halls transformed into beautiful indoors filled with materials on the walls and carpets on the floor. Beautiful and colourful *Gompa* appeared on the second floor of the building. Inside the *Gompa* apart from traditional altar, special monument was built up. It was symbolizing the pure land of Buddha Amitabha. Inside was prepared place appropriate for *Kudung*. On the walls you could see many *thangkas* representing *Mahasiddhas*, Kagyu Lineage Masters and *Yidams*. On the ground floor of monastery special exhibition presenting the life story of Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche was prepared. Every corner and place in the building was adjust and served special role during ceremonies. This kind of ability to organize and create something immediately and successfully (apart from the regular life as job and other duties), I consider as a first manifestation of social phenomena connected to the death of Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche. Analogously as it was in Renchen, Germany.

The second manifestation is connected to cooperation and unity which appeared among different organizations and institutions from Nepal and neighbourhood countries. High Rinpoches, Lamas, nuns and monks as well the lay practitioners, close students of Shamar Rinpoche, his followers and lay members from different *sanghas* (as for eg. Nigma) were working together to make cremation ceremony possible. It was no longer a matter of local infrastructure but also transportation among Kathmandu, accommodation for nuns and monks coming from different parts of India and Nepal. The buses were leaving early morning each day to bring volunteers from different parts of Kathmandu who would like to join and help with the preparations. The same thing was happening with nuns and monks coming every morning by special buses from different nunneries and monasteries all over the city. Lay people were mixing with nuns and monks, to prepare everything for the cremation ceremony of XIV Kunzig Shamarpa as well for the first visit of XVII Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje in Nepal. It was the matter of installing water utilities, building cremation stupa on the rooftop of monastery, creating a field kitchen to provide food to all participants, buying and installing decorations, supplying indoors by chairs and tables, arranging registration offices, donation office, media office, help desk, hiring the security agency and many more. Two weeks before the cremation, when the *Gompa* was ready nuns and monks leded by Rinpoches for. eg. Maniwa Sherab Gyaltzen Rinpoche, Beru Khyentse Rinpoche, Lodro Rinpoche, Sangsang Rinpoche started to perform traditional pujas as the ritual preparation for cremation itself. In the meantime other nuns and monks were engaged with still ongoing preparations by making *tormas*, decorating cremation stupa and the surroundings, running offices, etc. Lay practitioners were mostly engaged in transportation, cooking, providing drinks as well as office work. There was only one subject which was unclear and uncertain for many days. In this paper I will not describe or analyse it widely. My intention is only to mention the political issue connected with the permission for Shamar Rinpoche remains to enter Nepal. Even though it was unclear until three days before the cremation if the organizers will succeed in obtaining the permission, preparations were still ongoing without stop.

Two weeks before the cremation ceremony lamas started to perform different pujas in the main *Gompa* of Shar Minub. Even though *Kudung* was not present at that time people from Kathmandu and its surroundings were coming every day to offer *katac*, flowers, money or fruits in the gesture of last respect. They were able to enter the *Gompa* during pujas make offering and traditional prostration as a sign of respect and devotion. Some of them stayed in special prepared area and made their own contribution during puja. On weekends representatives of different buddhist organizations and traditions were able to come and perform their own rituals. Among them were: Tulku Ugyen Yangsi, Tsikey Chokling Rinpoche and Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche as representatives of Nyingma school; different Newari communities as well nuns and monks representing Hinayana Buddhism. Shar Minub Monastery for this first time became crowded and full of people. When *Kudung* arrived to Nepal thousands of people were waiting in lines with flowers and *katacs* at the main roads of Kathmandu as well at Shar Minub Moastery. The road leading to monastery was crowded. People were waiting for many hours just to see the cortege with *Kudung*. From the main gate to Shar Minub Monastery monks and nuns from different monasteries were also waiting in line. Some of them were dressed with full ceremonial clothing and ritual instruments. From the time, when preparation pujas started (more

than two weeks before cremation) at Shar Minub until the end of cremation puja thousands of people from all over the world as well from Nepal were taking part in this celebrations. Huge number of cremation participants, those who were coming day after day and those who came just for few minutes to make offerings are concerned as the third manifestation of this social phenomena connected with the death of Shamar Rinpoche.

Similar to technological possibilities and organization in Renchen the cremation was streamed online¹⁰. By this technical facilitation people who couldn't join this event in person were able to follow every action on computer at home, work or even on their phone. This technical support for the first time in history of Tibetan Buddhism allowed thousands of people join the ceremony all over the world. The fourth manifestation of this social phenomena is not only connected with these technical online opportunity to connect and follow the events, but mainly with the number of people who were watching it live¹⁰.

The fifth manifestation of these social phenomena is not going to be presented among the examples of Kathmandu and Renchen or any different places where *Kudung* was present before cremation. It is connected with the activity which was made by thousands of people from all over the world. It concerned dedication, solidarity and public wishes for Mipham Chokyi Lodro. Even now, on the internet we can find many different media forms of expression presenting loss and memory of XIV Shamar Rinpoche. People who felt any kind of connection (emotional, spiritual, student- teacher, etc.) with Shamarpa were posting their own private pictures with him, disseminate stories connected with his life or teachings. Direct example of this kind of behaviour is a fan page on facebook: *Gyalwa Shamarpa Khyenno*¹¹ which has more than five thousands followers. People who wanted to share and manifest their filings or memories were able to express them on this fan page. The others who wanted to highlight and manifest their fillings even stronger were changing profile pictures into Kunzig Shamarpa pictures. Some participants of farewell ceremonies were sharing videos and photos on facebook, youtube or via email. The others were commenting and following their activity. This direct engagement in social media, online communication is consider as indicator of how Shamar Rinpoche was important to his supporters and followers. It showed his popularity.

6. Cooperation and unity

The social phenomena connected with the unexpected death of XIV Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche were presented and analyzed on five different levels. All of them were illustrated by direct experience and participant observation made by researcher in different parts of the world. First level was connected with the surprising ability to create infrastructure and organize environment which was needed to perform and prepare farewell ceremonies in Germany and Nepal. What is consider as unusual is the immediate ability to react and create everything despite regular duties and responsibilities of the Shamarpa family, friends and students. To organize and make things possible members of these social groups had to change their regular behavior, make an enormous effort and work as a team. The second level was connected to the unity and cooperation which appeared between groups that had never before work together so close. It was the matter of international cooperation in Bhutan, India, Nepal and Germany. Everywhere people who felt responsibility and wanted to join were able to help during preparations for the ceremony. They could participate and contribute their own work to their teacher. It was an opportunity to unite not only monastic and lay sangha but as well different world wide organizations which are practicing within Kagyu Lineage tradition. It can be consider as symbolic unification of east and west students and supporters who took part in the period of 49 days between death of Rinpoche in Germany and cremation ceremony in Shar Minub Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. The third level was based on the huge amount of participants who took part in all ceremonies. The pilgrims were able to join ceremonies and pay their last respects to Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche in different parts of the world. The videos posted online on official website of Shamar Rinpoche presents a large number of participants. The fourth level of this phenomena was related to the number of people who were interested in these events but were not able to directly join them, and who instead followed the online streaming of the events. Although there were no official announcements presenting the number of followers the unofficial information tells about several thousands viewers. The last level which was consider as the manifestation of this social phenomena was activity of Shamarpa students and supporters online. Using social media they were able to manifest their filings and shear their stories connected with Rinpoche.

Examples of such activities are posts appearing on Facebook fan pages such as: *Gyalwa Shamarpa Khienzo*, *Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche The 14 Shamarpa* or *Shamarpa*. Common activity was spreading among the students who as a sign of solidarity and memory were changing their profile pictures into Shamar Rinpoche photos. This kind of behavior appeared despite of origin of the students. They were all uniting using social media to preserve the memory and manifest their devotion.

7. Conclusion

Presented five different aspects of social phenomena connected with the death of Shamar Rinpoche are perceived as manifestations of Mipham Chokyi Lodro posthumous activity. All of the expressed activities which were conducted during the period of 49 days from the death of Shamar Rinpoche up to cremation ceremony were extraordinary, required great commitment and effort. This posthumous activity might have manifest as inspiration and influence of Shamar Rinpoche on his students. By their devotion to the teacher they were able to cooperate together and create proper conditions for the official and traditional farewell. What is more everyone who wanted to participate in this ceremonies were able to do it either by travelling to Bhutan, Germany, India, and Nepal or by following events and ceremonies online. This posthumous activity of XIV Shamar Rinpoche can be also symbolically presented as global unification of his followers from east and west. The mixture of Asian, European, Australian and American people who gathered during cremation ceremony was very symbolic. It showed the vast activity of Shamar Rinpoche as well as his social position.

The unexpected loss of a teacher created collective bond among his students and followers all over the world. From this time they decided to work and cooperate to finish projects led by Shamarpa as well create new tasks. XIV Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche is still present by his teachings, videos, pictures and private stories. Although his body is not physically present he continues to inspire and influence Buddhist practitioners. He's life extended and maintained in social memories and actions of his students.

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