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Cultural and religious significance of hot springs in Buddhist influenced societies in the Himalayas¹

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The Himalayas are storing a lot of water and ice and are thus also referred to as part of the “Third Pole”. Apart from providing people with water and thus being provider of life, numerous pilgrimage sites are connected to water in the Himalayas. Sacred hot springs are one of these pilgrimage sites that, over the centuries, gained cultural and religious significance. One should bear in mind, that many different cultures live in the Himalayas, which follow distinct religious traditions. In this study, I will refer to some places and parts of the Himalayas that were and partially still are influenced by different forms of Tibetan Buddhism. I will set the hot springs in context by analyzing primary sources written in Tibetan.

The Tibetan plateau lies North of the Himalayas. Different forms and traditions of Tibetan Buddhism have their roots in Tibet and, in the course of many centuries, these traditions also spread to the surrounding regions in the Himalayas.² All those parts surrounding Tibet that were once influenced by Tibetan Buddhism are known as Tibetan Cultural Area.³

Today, I am going to talk about the significance of hot springs in different parts of this so-called Tibetan Cultural Area, referring to Tibet and to Bhutan in general and providing more detailed information on Sikkim.⁴

This paper has been divided into four parts: 1) local myths and hidden treasures; 2) narratives in religious and historical writings; 3) medical and spiritual aspects of hot springs; and 4) preservation and promotion of hot springs.

Within the Tibetan Cultural Area, natural features were –and still are– regarded as geographical markers that were either seen as abodes of supernatural beings, for examples, gods, demons, and

¹ This study is mainly based on textual study, analyzing, comparing and contextualizing Sikkimese and Tibetan sources. Sikkimese and Tibetan passages are transliterated according to the Wylie transliteration system.

² The different forms of Tibetan Buddhism are often divided into “sects”. In order to avoid misunderstandings this term may bring along, the various forms are referred to as traditions.

³ “These regions that surround the central region of Tibet are also known as Greater Tibet (*Bod chen po*) or as ethnographic Tibet.”, Marlene Erschbamer (forthcoming), *Bulletin of Tibetology*, editorial introduction.

⁴ Sikkim, nestled between jungles and glaciers in the Himalayas, is a former Buddhist kingdom that has been part of India since 1975. The state comprises 84 glaciers, 227 wetlands, 104 rivers and 9 hot springs on 7096 sq.km; Data provided by Government of Sikkim: Bio-Diversity Statistics of Sikkim, www.sikkim.gov.in, published 2016, retrieved 2019.

spirits, or as places visited and blessed by accomplished Buddhist masters who wrote their visions and experiences in guidebooks. Visiting hot springs for curative and also for religious reasons have a long tradition in the Himalayas. The Tibetan Yönten Gönpo (Yon tan mgon po, 790-833), known for having compiled the Gyüzhi, the most important book on Tibetan medicine, wrote already in the 9th century about the benefits of hot springs (*chu tshan*) and medical/curative waters (*sman chu*).⁵ According to him, these curative waters possess five qualities:

- 1) to cure diseases from wind-imbalance
- 2) to cure diseases from bile-imbalance
- 3) to cure disease from phlegm-imbalance⁶
- 4) to cure worm diseases
- 5) to cure lymph diseases

But why have hot springs gained cultural and religious significance, besides of being of curative use? To answer this question, it will be necessary to look at local myths that are part of the cultural identity.

1) *Local myths and hidden treasures*

Many hot springs in the Himalayas are connected to one important religious figure: Guru Rinpoche.⁷ It is said that Guru Rinpoche, also known as Padmasambhava, visited Tibet during the 8th century. He tamed supernatural entities and transformed them into protectors of the Buddhist faith and thus made the spreading of Buddhism even at all possible in Tibet. By doing so, he helped establishing the Buddhist teachings in Tibet. Additionally, he visited many places along the borders and prepared them for a future spreading of Buddhist traditions and he left prophecies how this would happen.

Especially along the Himalayas, there exist many legends that are connected to Guru Rinpoche. Each village and each valley has its own legends connected to this religious figure.

During one of my field-trips in Sikkim, people joked about how Guru Rinpoche is connected with so many places and natural features throughout the land. People joked about a village where it is frequently foggy. And they told that this is obviously because Guru Rinpoche had flatulence while traveling through this village.

⁵ Yönten Gönpo . "sman chu rigs Inga bstan pa", In *sngo 'bum sman gyi gter mdzod*. TBRC W00EGS1017863, 294-308. Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005. Yönten Gönpo made a distinction between *sman chu* and *chu tshan*, however, as stated by Pommaret in the case of Bhutan, "*Menchu (sman chu)* "medicinal waters" is a term almost synonymous with *tsha chu*. most of the time, it seems that the term usage depends on the locality. many springs are clearly associated with a religious figure [...]", p. 544 (?); Françoise Pommaret: Note on Tsha chu. The therapeutic hot springs of Bhutan. Charles Ramble; Ulrike Roesler. *Tibetan and Himalayan Healing: an Anthology for Anthony Aris*, Vajra Publications, pp.543-546, 2015.

⁶ Yönten Gönpo . "sman chu rigs Inga bstan pa", In *sngo 'bum sman gyi gter mdzod*. TBRC W00EGS1017863, 294-308. Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005, here: p. 297.
According to Tibetan medicine, it is important to keep the three bodily principles (wind, bile and phlegm) in balance to stay healthy.

⁷ His followers, members of the so-called Nyingma tradition (meaning the "old" tradition) of Tibetan Buddhism regard him as Second Buddha.

However, according to religious scriptures, Guru Rinpoche blessed the hot springs in the Himalayas and thus transformed them into medicine (ex. hot springs in Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet).⁸ And he entrusted some of these hot springs to supernatural entities.

The re-organization of landscape and the incorporation of local supernatural entities into protectors of Buddhism is known as 'mandalization'.⁹ And exactly that happened in Sikkim. Local narratives tell legends about Guru Rinpoche: how he tamed supernatural entities, established Tashiding as navel of the land, blessed four caves in the four cardinal directions around Tashiding and thus arranged the land as a huge mandala. By connecting and rooting sacred landscape to important Buddhist figures, in the case of Sikkim mainly to Guru Rinpoche, the spreading of Buddhist traditions was authorized and legitimated and, additionally, pilgrimage sites were established. Even centuries later, Buddhist masters that arrived from Tibet, recognized Sikkim as a mandala.¹⁰

Guru Rinpoche not only re-organized the landscape but he also hid treasures, called "*terma*". Some of these *terma* have already been found, others remain yet hidden. Those people who reveal such treasures are called *tertön*, treasure revealer. They have revealed, among others, guidebooks to sacred places and so-called hidden lands, that were once blessed and prepared for the Buddhist doctrine by Guru Rinpoche.¹¹ Also present-day Sikkim is one of these hidden lands that were described as paradise on earth. Sikkim was ritually opened for the Buddhist doctrine during the 17th century by three Tibetan masters, who then also installed the first Buddhist king in Sikkim. But prior to this opening, treasure revealers described in their guidebooks Sikkim and also mentioned the hot springs of Sikkim. I will provide two examples of *tertön* that have mentioned hot springs in their revealed guidebooks:

⁸ Khenpo Dechen Dorje, An account of Guru Padmasambhava's contribution to the establishment of Dharma tradition in Sikkim, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 31 (1), 1995, pp. 15-18, here: p. 16; Phurpa Wangchuk and Yeshe Dorji: Historical Roots, Spiritual Significance and the Health Benefits of mKhempa-IJong gNyes Tshachu (hot spring) in Lhuntshe, pp. 112-128, *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 16, 2007; Bod kyi yul lung khag gcig gi lo rgyus phogs bsdebs, *Ngag rgyun lo rgyus deb phreng*, Oral History Series 29, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2012 p. 115.

⁹ On mandalization, see Toni Huber, *The Cult of the Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet* (Oxford University Press), 1999, here: p. 26.

¹⁰ For example, the Tibetan master Jigme Pawo, an important religious figure that was invited by the third Buddhist ruler of Sikkim during the 17th century and who served later on as regent of Sikkim, wrote in his collected writings: 'There is a need to bring benefit for the Buddhist doctrine and the sentient beings, [here in this land, which] represents a big mandala of a hidden land.', see Jigme Pawo ('Jigs med dpa' bo, lHa btsun sprul sku, 1682–1730) 1984, *rDzogs chen rig 'dzin 'jigs med dpa' bo'i mkha' 'bum mthon grol chen mo*, TBRC W21558, Gangtok: Pema Thrinlay; here: folio 407.5.

¹¹ These guidebooks (*gnas yig*) are an own genre among Tibetan literature. They have been written for pilgrims by religious figures to give them descriptions of the path, the site etc. On pilgrimage and guidebooks in Tibet, see, among others, Nakza Drolma, "Pilgrimage Guide of the Tibetan Buddhist Holy Mountain Brag dkar sprel rdzong", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, 48, 2019, pp. 170-183.

The treasure revealer Rindzin Gödem (Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, 1337-1408/9) wrote in his guidebook to Sikkim: *There are five curing waters (sman chu) and hot springs of the five kinds.*¹² *[They] benefit regarding all disease of wind, bile, phlegm, heat and cold [categories].*¹³

And also Tertön Sanggya Lingpa (Sangs rgyas gling pa, 1340-96) mentions in his guidebook to Sikkim, the beneficial curing waters (*sman chu*) that cure various diseases.¹⁴

Both Tertön, Rindzin Gödem and Sanggya Lingpa, wrote guidebooks to Sikkim for pilgrims, wherein they mention the importance of hot springs and thus created pilgrimage sites.

Not far away from Sikkim, there is another hidden valley, the region of Khambu, where 12 hot springs are said to cure various diseases. Again all of these hot springs are connected to Guru Rinpoche:

As Guru Rinpoche stayed in Tibet, he bound 12 Protectors of the Buddhist teachings – 12 female spirits or supernatural entities – under oath. Even more, he made them guardians of Tibet and of Buddhism in Tibet. He entrusted each of these guardians one of the 12 hot springs in Khambu. Each of these hot springs is said to have been blessed by Guru Rinpoche, each of these hot springs is under special protection of one of the 12 female Protectors of Buddhist teachings in Tibet (*brtan ma bcu gnyis*), and each of this hot spring cures different diseases.¹⁵

2) Narratives in religious and historical writings

But not only guidebooks for pilgrims that are closely connected with the legendary Guru Rinpoche inform about the benefits and the value of hot springs but also writings of religious figures wherein they speak about their personal and spiritual experiences with hot springs. In the following I will give two examples: 1) the one of the 5th Dalai Lama and 2) of one Sikkimese Buddhist master.

¹² Depending on the composition of minerals in the water (sulphur, calcite, lime etc.), the water has different effects in curing disease and also a different smell, color and taste. On the five kinds of curing waters and hot springs (in Tibetan), see Yönten Gönpö: "sman chu rigs lnga bstan pa" and "chu tshan rigs lnga bstan pa", In *sngo 'bum sman gyi gter mdzod*. TBRC W00EGS1017863, 294-322, Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005; Gélong Chöpel (dGe long chos 'phel): *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzho'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs*, 10, TBRC W1PD96945, Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa, 2009, here: p. 297.

¹³ *Mkha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs*, ed. by Tshi Tsering 2008, p. 289: *sman chu lnga dang chu tshan rigs lnga yod / nad rlung mkhris bad kan tsha grang thams cad la phan no /* According to Tibetan medicine, it is essential to keep the three bodily principles – wind, bile and phlegm – in balance to stay healthy.

On Rindzin Gödem, see Khenpo Lha Tsering, *A Saga of Sikkim's supremely revered four pioneer Nyingmapa reincarnates and their torchbearers*, 2002, here: p. 13; Tsultsem Gyatso Acharya: A Short Biography of Four Tibetan Lamas and Their Activities in Sikkim, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 41 (2), 2005, pp. 49-76, here: p. 51; Jay Valentine: Introduction to and Translation of The Garland of Light: Lives of the Masters of the Northern Treasure Tradition, *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 39, April 2016, pp. 133–165; *Mkha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs*, ed. by Tashi Tsering 2008, p. 35.

¹⁴ *Mkha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs*, ed. by Tshi Tsering 2008, p. 198-9

¹⁵ Gangs can bod kyi rang byung bdud rtsi sman chab khag gcig gi ngo mtshar khyad chos gnad bsdus, *Ngag rgyun lo rgyus deb phreng*, Oral History Series 25, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2008 pp 87-96; *Ngag rgyun lo rgyus deb phreng*, Oral History Series 29, pp.107-117 and pp 202-203; Gyurme Dorje: *Tibet Handbook*, p. 361.

Tibet's first spiritual leader that also gained the political power and that was enthroned as king of Tibet was the 5th Dalai Lama.¹⁶ But he was also a passionate writer.¹⁷ In his collected writings (*gsung 'bum*), the Great 5th, as the 5th Dalai Lama is also referred to, mentioned hot springs and their benefits and he reported different visits to such hot springs for personal curative reasons: For example, at the age of 42, he had problems with his legs (*rkang pa*). As he was not able to walk, he visited hot springs (5th book, ca, p. 387, 10-13). Some years later, at the age of 48, he visited hot springs and by taking baths, he took care of his health for seven days. And he wrote how wonderful such a treatment was and how beneficial (5th book, ca, p. 522, 6-8). And again, at the age of 50, he repeatedly visited hot springs and took care for his health always for 7 days (6th book, cha, p. 20 and p. 32, 6-7).¹⁸ In spite of being an important religious and political figure, it seems that referring to the benefits of hot springs was regarded as important enough to include these sections at different parts of his writings.

The Sikkimese Lama Trinlé Gyatso (17th/18th century) performed rituals at the shores of the hot springs near the southern cave, where he frequently meditated. As usually, there were many monkeys. While he was performing the ritual, one older female monkey came closer to him and joined her palms together – a Buddhist gesture that was interpreted as auspicious sign. About the curing powers of the water he wrote that:

<i>Tibetan transliteration</i>	<i>Translation</i>
'jig rten nad kun sel ba'i sman chu rdol ba	The medical water that comes out [there] cures all mundane diseases. ¹⁹

Generally, it is believed that hot springs are better than consulting any doctor. One Tibetan text goes like follows:

Oral History Series, 25, p. 94

<i>Tibetan transliteration</i>	<i>Translation</i>
/ gso byed ye shes bdud rtsi ngo mtshar che / / nad ngo mi zin sman dang dpyad log gi /	[Hot springs are better] than more than 1000 desirous doctors who are not certain about the

¹⁶ Today, in western perception, Tibet is closely connected with the lineage of the Dalai Lama and particularly with the present charismatic Dalai Lama, the 14th in this line. The most influential incarnation, however, was the 5th Dalai Lama that lived during the 17th century.

¹⁷ Samten G. Karmay: *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century, the Capital of the Dalai-Lamas, traduction révisée et augmentée en anglais de l'ouvrage publié en français 1997*, F. Pommaret (ed.), Tibetan Studies Series, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2003, pp. 65–80. online: https://info-buddhism.com/The_Great_5th-Dalai_Lama-Ngagwang_Lobzang_Gyatso_Samten_Karmay.html

¹⁸ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho: *rGyal dbang lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, TBRC W1PD107937, Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009.

¹⁹ *'Phrin las rgya mtsho'i gsung rnam*, TBRC W 23561, fol. 200.4-202.4. Khenpo Lha Tsering wrote about Trinlé Gyatso and his visit of the hot springs near the southern cave: *nad kun sel ba'i dkar po gcig thub kyi sman chu rin po che'i nang* → *Inside of the precious medical water it is possible to cure all diseases* (p. 242); Khenpo Lha Tsering: *mkha' spyod 'Bras mo ljongs kyi gtsug nor sprul pa'i rnal 'byor mched bzhi brgyud 'dzin dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa blo gsar gzhon nu'i dga ston – A Saga of Sikkim's supremely revered four pioneer Nyingmapa reincarnates and their torchbearers*, Gangtok: Khenpo Lha Tsering, 2002.

<p>/ 'dod pa can gyi lha rje stong las lhag / de bas 'di nyid rtag tu spyod par rig ces sman chab yan lag brgyad ldan gyi yon tan phan yon rgya mtsho lta bu la /</p>	<p>signs of sickness and [thus] make wrong diagnosis and medications. Therefore, it is always good to use [the hot springs]. The medical waters are like a vast ocean, benefitting with the eight good qualities.²⁰</p>
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Also the British Macaulay Colman (1849-1890), who visited Sikkim in 1884 while looking for a new trade route that would connect Tibet with British India, was told that the hot springs are the best medicine, or in his own words:

“[They] began to drink freely. We tasted the fluid, which was like a mixture of bad eggs and hot water. I resisted the Kazi’s entreaties to wash in it and drink freely of it and thus be young for ever. He said it was better than any doctor’s medicine.”²¹

But hot springs can also help to survive a cold night in the mountains: The English botanist and explorer Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911) travelled through the North of Sikkim in 1849. And described his observances in his *Himalayan Journals*. One day, one of his instruments, a thermometer for high temperatures, was lost at some hot springs of the Kinchinjhow Glacier in the very North of Sikkim. His servant felt responsible for this mishap and, although not used to the cold temperatures in this high region, went up again to the hot springs to search for the instrument. Hooker wrote about this in his journal:

*“rather than lose the chance of a day-light search on his way back, he had spent the cold October night in the hot water, without fire or shelter, at 16,000 feet above the sea.”*²²

In this way, he survived a cold night. But from a mere medical point of view – when should one visit and enter hot springs? Which curative effects do they have?

3) Medical and spiritual aspects of hot springs

In Tibet, it is generally recommended to visit the hot springs in autumn or in spring: favorably 2 weeks in spring and 3 weeks in fall.²³ But for the hot spring in Kyirong, in Southwest Tibet, the best

²⁰ The eight good qualities of water: 1) coolness, 2) sweetness, 3) lightness, 4) softness, 5) clearness, 6) free from impurities, 7) when drunk, soothes the stomach, 8) clears and soothes the throat.

²¹ Colman Macaulay, *Report of a Mission to Sikkim and the Tibetan Frontier: with a Memorandum of our Relations with Tibet*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885, here: p. 26.

Kazi (or Kaji) is the land-owning nobility of Lepcha, Tibetan and Lhopo descent in Sikkim; Anna Balikci: *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim*. Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library, Vol. 17. Leiden: Brill, 2008, here: p. 48.

²² Joseph Dalton Hooker: *Himalayan Journals*. Vol. II. London: John Murray, 1854, here: p. 184

²³ chu tshan spyi'i phan yon skor." In *bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs*. TBRC W1PD96945. 10 khreng tu'u: si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa/ si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009, here: p. 297. (written by mkhan dge slong chos 'phel and chags chen 'phel dar in 1982); Oral History Series 25, here: p. 129.

time to enter is wintertime.²⁴ In Sikkim, as well, the hot springs are mainly visited by pilgrims during winter, and the same can be observed in Bhutan.²⁵ This is obviously due to climatic reasons: Kyirong in Southwest Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan show similar climatic condition that differ from those on the Tibetan plateau.

Several Tibetan scriptures tell when one should consult hot springs and under which circumstances one should avoid a bath:

When not to consult hot springs:

Oral History Series 25, p. 130 → Do not enter hot springs to clean or purify the following disease:

<i>Tibetan transliteration</i>	<i>Translation</i>
/ rims dang tsha ba rgyas dang 'khrugs pa dang / / /snying gzer ngan khrag mtho dang khrag srin gyis / mgo gzer mig la dmar tshag rgyas pa dang / / bud med khrag tshabs bryal gzer dag la'o /	Having an infectious disease, creasing fever, being disturbed (?); having bad heart disease, high blood pressure, worm diseases with bleeding; having headache, red eyes and women having menstruation, having worms in the blood nadis of the brain.

Chu tshan spyi'i phan yon skor, TBRC W1PD96945, p. 297:

<i>Tibetan transliteration</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Khrag shed mtho dang snying nad can / tsha ba rgyas pa'i nad rigs can / sbrum ma bcas kyis spangs dang nying zhugs bya	Having heart disease and high blood pressure, having kinds of illnesses involving fever, being pregnant, then one should avoid and seldom enter [hot springs].

When to consult hot springs:

Oral History Series 25, p. 130

<i>Tibetan transliteration</i>	<i>Translation</i>
/ yan lag rengs 'khums zha dang rtsa nad kun / / 'bras dang rma rnying pags nad rkang 'bam dang / / sgur po sha rus chu ser g.yos pa dang / / grang nad kun la shin tu bsngags pa'o /	All disease of limbs and face (?), results and old wounds [of] skin diseases and swollen feet, hunchbacked ones, pus flowing in bones and flesh, all diseases after being chilled/frozen – then [hot springs] are highly praised.

²⁴ Mang yul gung thang gi rig gnas lo rgyus, 2012, p. 483 (on ICags chu tshan in Kyirong).

²⁵ Balikci 2008, *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors*, p. 81; and Pommaret 2015, Note on Tsha chu, p. 533.

Chu tshan spyi'i phan yon skor, TBRC W1PD96945, p. 297:

<i>Tibetan transliteration</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Dug	Poison
tshad r/snying	longterm fever diseases (?)
dreg grum	gout
'bam	rheumatism
rnag dang chu ser skem	drying out serum and pus
skran	tumor
pho ba	stomach

Despite of the medical benefit of visiting hot springs, people believe, that these waters can clean or wash away sins and defilements. So people not only visit hot springs for health reasons but also for spiritual and religious reasons. Therefore, as part of their pilgrimage, people often combine a pilgrimage with the visit of curative waters/sacred hot springs.

4) Preservation and promotion of hot springs

And yet – not to forget – people visit hot springs also to meet other people, to have fun and to relax. Today, Sikkim is the most popular tourist destination for Indians. This not only brings benefits but also challenges as hot springs are getting polluted. In 2004, the Department of Forest, Environment & Wildlife Management of Sikkim published a “State of Environmental Pollution Report”.²⁶ In this report, it is pointed out that the sacred hot springs are facing serious problems: Generally, there are unhygienic conditions. Since people with different diseases enter the hot springs and drink the water directly while bathing in it, it is likely that people may infect with new diseases.

To protect important natural features, the Government of Sikkim published a notification in 2001 that lists the most sacred peaks, caves, rocks, lakes, chörten (i.e. Buddhist reliquary shrines) AND hot springs that stand under special protection and preservation (nine sacred hot springs in Sikkim).

On the one hand, hot springs are promoted as tourist destination, combining holidays with relaxing and curative visits of these waters. Therefore, hot springs not only attract locals and pilgrims but also tourists. On the other hand, the government has recognized the value and importance of these natural features and started programs to preserve them. In the last few decades, a lot has happened to save and to preserve nature and religious places in Sikkim: Besides of this notification

²⁶ www.sikkimforest.gov.in/docs/EnvPollution.pdf – retrieved 2019.

of 2001, the government has stopped the import of chemical fertilizers (2003), launched a prohibition of burning waste (2015),²⁷ published a State Action Plan on Climate Change (2015),²⁸ and declared Sikkim as first state in the country as being a full-fledged Organic State (2016) – just to name a few examples.

To sum up, different guidebooks to important pilgrimage sites have been written by religious figures in the Himalayas. Many of them include hot springs and describe the benefits – curative, spiritual, religious ones. Moreover, most hot springs are connected to important religious figures or supernatural entities through ancient legends, which in turn form part of the cultural identity. Since hot springs combine mythological, historical, religious, cultural, economic and medical aspects, they are to be viewed as a complex entity within the Tibetan Cultural Area.

²⁷ During a field trip in 2010, I was told to throw organic waste out of the kitchen window and to burn the “rest” behind the house I was living.

²⁸ <http://www.sikenvis.nic.in/PublicationDetails.aspx?SubLinkId=273&LinkId=2662&Year=2015>