When the Lowlands Met the Snowlands: A Dutch Theosophist (?) on Himalayan Buddhism*

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Abstract: Johan van Manen (1877–1943), a Dutchman and initially a theosophist, conducted his research on Himalayan religions—primarily, but not limited to, Tibetan Buddhism—in the early twentieth century. Now a largely forgotten figure, he made significant contributions towards Buddhist and Tibetan Studies in Europe and British India. Collecting both Himalayan (Tibetan and Lepcha) texts and artifacts, Van Manen was mostly interested in 'extra-canonical Buddhism' and how people practiced religion in his area of research: the greater Darjeeling region. This article discusses Van Manen's methods of research and collecting, as well as the influence of his works and collections on the academic study of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism. The paper shows him to be a 'facilitator of knowledge' and—perhaps more significantly—as an important intermediary between the Highlands of the Himalayas, British India, and the Lowlands of Van Manen's place of birth. Lastly, this paper highlights the importance of his Himalayan assistants with regard to all stages mentioned: from collecting to translating and understanding texts and objects.

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Introduction

> It is generally not known or scarcely noticed to what an extent history is dependent on the local distribution of materials. When a country shows some predilection for this or that branch of research we are, at first, inclined to find the reasons in some national instinct, or in the efficacy of the teaching and writing of some scholar. This does not, however, explain how it is that—to turn to Indian research—Denmark has only produced Pali scholars (Westergaard, Fausböll, Trenckner, Andersen), that Northern Buddhism is chiefly cultivated in Paris (Burnouf, Feer, Senart, Lévi, Guimet), and that other branches of Indian studies are more or less equally confined to particular seats of learning. *The real explanation lies in the dispersion of the materials*.[1]

The above citation relates to Classical Indology in European institutions more than a century ago, but this contribution aims to demonstrate that the early dispersion of materials, and additionally their origins and the access people had to these works, laid the groundwork for scholarship in specific institutions—something that appears relevant when it comes to most Asian collections. More specifically, the present article intends to give a preliminary overview of the role of Van Manen—a Dutch 'orientalist' living in India in the early twentieth century—and his collection as intermediaries of

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ther the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. I am thankful to my team-members, Nils Martin, Tenzin Tsepak, and Samten Yeshi, for their feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

[1] Leumann, 'Bühler as a Collector of Mss.', 368–69. Italics added. Also refered to in Rath, 'On the Johan van Manen Collection', 63.



FIG. 1 Van Manen and his assistants Karma Sumdhon Paul (l.) and Drin-chen (r.), Calcutta, 1924. NL-LdnRMV-A17-187 Wereldmuseum.

Himalayan culture and religion.[2] I here look particularly at how they, the collector and the collected, are of significance for the field of (Tibetan) Buddhist Studies, in the past, present, and future. In addition, the article examines how Van Manen (1877–1943) worked with and acknowledged his Himalayan teachers, assistants, scribes, and manuscript-hunters. It is here crucial to recognize that Van Manen's collection efforts were not just his alone: he was assisted by many (mostly) Himalayan helpers (Figure 1).

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[2] While he rose to some prominence during his lifetime, Van Manen is now no longer a household name. Elizabeth J. Harris hypothesizes that William Knighton was forgotten about in later times exactly because he was hard to categorize (see her chapter in this volume); I suspect that the same happened to Van Manen.

In a letter dated to September 17, 1919 to the well-known folklorist Evans Wentz, Van Manen notes that since he has just moved from Ghoom (Ghum)[3] to Calcutta to take up a temporary position of librarian at the Imperial Library, his usual 'book-seekers are no longer active but slack', but that he will try to find the Tibetan text that Evans Wentz requested regardless, through his 'Ghoom friends'.[4] Here he refers to his Tibetan, Himalayan, and Chinese friends, who also acted as his book-seekers, teachers, and research assistants. Their presence is noticeable in nearly every aspect of Van Manen's physical legacy.[5]

Johan van Manen's collection is now the subject of my ERC Starting Grant project entitled *The Van Manen Collection: Locating Literature, Lived Religion, and Lives in the Himalayas* (2023–2028). This project offers a study of an important, yet mostly forgotten, collection of Himalayan texts and artifacts collected between 1919 and 1943. It intends to provide a view of the Van Manen Collection through a study of its rare manuscripts, the material objects, undocumented marginal writings, and the unique Tibetan language autobiographies written by ordinary Himalayan people and commissioned by Van Manen himself. This collection of written materials, held in the Leiden University Library, contains a large number of Tibetan and Himalayan texts. After Van Manen's death in 1943 a large part of his personal collection became housed at the university, totaling more than 1,500 mostly Tibetan texts. He also collected Himalayan artifacts, now stored separately from the texts, in the Wereldmuseum in Leiden.[6] The texts and artifacts reflect the collector's interest in the lived religion and the lives of Himalayan people. The project's goal is

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[3] Ghoom (also spelled Ghum, Tib. Gum; Sgum; Gung) is a small village close to Darjeeling proper.

[4] Evans Wentz archives, The Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. Lett. C 577, no 117, 118.

[5] These figures are currently the research subject of Tenzin Tsepak, post-doctoral researcher in the VAN MANEN project.

[6] Previously known as Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde and Museum Volkenkunde.

the examination of the Van Manen Collection as a whole using historical, ethnographic, philological, and Digital Humanities methods. Hereby, the provenance and usage of the texts and artifacts can be traced, mapped, and made available, linking them to other editions in online databases as well as to local Tibetan archives. The main aim is to get an understanding of the proliferation, usage, and presence of religious and ritual literature and artifacts in the greater Darjeeling area in the first half of the twentieth century and, by extension, their religious milieus. Many of the texts are unica in Tibetan literature—and as they are mostly unstudied—merit a thorough examination. The broader question the project tries to answer, however, is how to 'read' and engage with a multi-media collection acquired by one single collector—but helped by many—and how to understand the collection formation process. It is my hope that the project results will contribute to the analysis of other multi-media collections of non-Western literature and material culture. This article presents some preliminary findings on how to understand the methods of collecting Van Manen and his 'Ghoom friends' employed.

Van Manen had a particular interest in extra-canonical Tibetan literature: the materials that existed outside of the Kangyur and Tengyur.[7] He collected and studied manuscripts that contained different kinds of rituals that were carried out in ethnic Tibetan households, temples, and monasteries in the greater Darjeeling area at the time. Among these ritual manuscripts, both Tibetan religious traditions, Bon and Buddhism, can be found, which I suppose to be representative of the religious landscape of that area and that time.[8] Not a great deal is known of the ritual practices of this region during this period. In the first half of the twentieth century, the area already was a melting-pot of cultures, religions, languages and ethnicities. Tibetans who had settled there in recent years and Himalayan peoples who also used the Tibetan written language lived side by side in

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[7] Jansen, 'Serendipity among Books'.

[8] The following select sources inform on what was known to Western scholars about the religions in the region: Risley, *The Gazetteer of Sikhim*; Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet*; White, *Sikhim and Bhutan*.

Kalimpong and Darjeeling. In addition, it was a contact zone where Westerners went to study Tibetan language and culture.[9] It was in this highly diverse and vibrant environment that Van Manen started learning the Tibetan language. He worked with the Himalayan assistants he had taken in his employ and paid out of his own pocket, between 1916 and 1918. Van Manen went about collecting works in different ways: not able to go to Tibet himself since it was closed to foreigners, he commissioned Tibetans traveling between India and Central Tibet to buy mostly printed Tibetan books (blockprints). He also had his assistants collect texts in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong regions, some of which were locally produced. One of his assistants, Phüntshok Lungtok, reporting on his early encounter with Van Manen, writes the following:

> The Sahib had bought a total of two thousand Tibetan books, in *uchen* and *umé*.[10] The sellers were monks from Darjeeling, Sikkim, Ghoom, and Jorebungalow. The books were all texts that dealt with rituals of the Sakya, Gelug, Kagyü, and Nyingma schools.[11] Some of the books were biographies. I copied some of these biographies that had been written in *umé*, and other works that had interesting content, into *uchen*.

As Phüntshok Lungtok shows, many of his works were ritual manuals and the like, which he was able to buy outright. In other cases, he

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[9] Viehbeck, 'Introduction: Cultural History as a History of Encounters—A "Contact Perspective"'.

[10] Uchen (*dbu chen*) and umé (*dbu med*) refer to script with a head and script without a head, respectively. The former is generally speaking easier to read.

[11] Phun tshogs lung rtogs, *dge rgan gyi rnam thar*, vol. 4, ch. 15: 353, 354: *sa heb kyi bod kyi dpe cha dbu chen dang dbu med bcas sdom stong gcig gnyis mi 'dra ba nyos song/ de tshong mkhan ni/ rdo rje gling gi grwa pa/ 'bras ljongs pa/ gum/ dzor spang la bcas kyi grwa pa tsho red/ dpe cha ni/ sa skya ba/ rnying ma pa/ bka' rgyud pa/ dge lugs pa bcas kyi cho ga btang ba'i dpe cha sha stag/* (354) *yang kha shas ni rnam thar gyi dpe cha red/ de tsho'i nang nas dbu med kyi rnam thar dang/ yang dpe cha tshig don yag po yod mkhan tsho nga yi dbu chen du bris pa yin/*

resorted to borrowing manuscripts and had his assistants copy them by hand. Since the paper that these manuscripts were copied onto was new, these works may appear relatively modern, but their age can only be assessed when the contents of these works are studied in more detail. Since we do not have a running record of manuscript acquisitions, it is a challenge to assess the provenance of the collection currently in Leiden.

Van Manen was not a trained academic but had come to India initially to work as a librarian at the Theosophical Society. Disillusioned by that institution for its political stance on WWI, he left to study Tibetan in Ghoom. He subsequently found employment at the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, initially as a librarian but later as its Secretary-General. Even though he published several articles on Tibetan language, religion, and art, he has come to be much better known for the materials he collected, which he generously shared. In his time, he was also much praised for editing and contributing to other people's scholarly work. After his death, these materials came to be housed in Leiden. In the short but well-researched life sketch he wrote of him, Pieter Pott, once director of the Ethnographic Museum (now called Wereldmusem) in Leiden, aptly called him a 'promotor of science'.[12]

During Van Manen's lifetime, he was awarded the highest honours by scientific societies and the governments of Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Be this as it may, he is still not very well known for his contribution to either Buddhist or Tibetan Studies.[13] Among Tibetologists his name may be more readily recognized in the context of an article by Vostrikov, in which he reviews and highly criticizes Van Manen's contribution to the bibliography of Tibetan literature.[14] Upon closer examination, however, the

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[12] Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 138.

[13] Peter Richardus has made admirable contributions in writing his Van Manen's biography and editing the much-abridged translations of the autobiographies written by his assistants. Richardus, *The Dutch Orientalist Johan van Manen*; *idem*, *Tibetan Lives*.

[14] Vostrikov, 'Some Corrections and Critical Remarks'. This article was writ-

impact Van Manen and his Himalayan assistants made upon the study of Tibetan Buddhism and Himalayan culture and language writ large is both more profound and more enduring.

The Theosophist and the Collector

To get a more complete picture of Van Manen's collection of mostly Buddhist texts and artifacts, we must first consider both the collector's own background and interests as well as the availability of the works collected. Johan van Manen, in Pott's words, a 'self-made man',[15] drops out of secondary school because of a general lack of interest in the subjects that were offered. Instead, he becomes heavily involved in the Theosophical Society relatively early on. He shows himself to be an active member of the Society, and he translates several seminal Theosophical works from English into Dutch. His early writings demonstrate his deep-seated interest in the esoteric and display an early interest in Asian religions—not unlike many of his contemporary Theosophists.

After several peregrinations in Europe and North Africa, he leaves for the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, south of Madras, in 1908. There, he works as 'joint-librarian' (an assistant librarian of sorts). Making use of 'manuscript-hunters'—presumably a common method of acquiring books at the time—he is soon able to add significantly to the library's collection.[16] In 1912, Van Manen publishes a booklet that contains the speech he gave on the occasion of the commemoration of the Shri Ramanujacharya's birthday (b. 1017) in Bangalore. Entitled *On the Value of the Comparative Study of Sacred Books*, the tractate—addressed to a predominantly Indian audience—shows his disposition, undoubtedly heavily influenced by

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ten in reaction to an article Van Manen wrote in 1922 (Van Manen, 'A Contribution to the Bibliography of Tibet').

[15] Pott, 'Notitie ter zake van de Collectie Van Manen', 1.

[16] Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 137.

Theosophist ideas, to study religion comparatively. While at the time of writing he had not yet mastered the Tibetan language, the work also demonstrates his early interest in Tibetan Buddhist literature: he praises the Transylvanian father of Tibetology, Csoma de Kőrös , for the Tibetan-English dictionary he produced almost a hundred years ago.[17] In fact, it seems he was much impressed by this important figure within Tibetan Studies, since Csoma de Kőrös' biography 'was read to tatters by him'.[18] Van Manen writes in this tractate that it is 'unnecessary to point out the importance of this work, as it is well known that the body of Buddhist writings, often lost in their Indian originals, have [*sic*] been almost completely preserved in their Tibetan translations'.[19] Around the same time as he wrote this short work, in which he emphasizes the importance of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, Van Manen was in the process of acquiring the Kangyur and Tengyur for the library in Adyar.[20] Interestingly, we see that after his sojourn in Ghoom, in which he encounters real life Himalayan Buddhism, his focus on canonical Buddhism—and the limited notion of Tibetan as a mere means to the end of uncovering Indian Buddhist texts, their 'originals' mostly gone—shifts to one deeply concerned with the everyday religious lives and cultural experiences of ordinary Tibetans and other Himalayan people.

The 1912 tractate, true to Theosophy's ideal, but without ever even mentioning the word Theosophy once, continues to emphasize the intrinsic value of all religions and the importance of the study of these religions. In his own words:

> As I view it, the comparative study of the various religions, the increased means of physical and mental communication, and the general line of progress have unified not only the outer world, but

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[17] Van Manen, 'On the Value of the Comparative Study of Sacred Books', 12.

[18] Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 141.

[19] Van Manen, 'On the Value of the Comparative Study of Sacred Books', 12–13.

[20] Richardus, *The Dutch Orientalist Johan van Manen*, 24.

> have also unified the field of human thought. More than ever before it has now become true that a touch of humanity makes all mankind akin with one another.[21]

Van Manen further argues optimistically that the age for true mutual understanding between people of the East and West has finally arrived.[22] One sentence stands out as significant for the course of his life that had yet to come: 'No amount of the study of the sacred books will avail us if we have no religious experience in our hearts.'[23] While little is known of Van Manen's personal religious or spiritual practices, he is described by his friends as dedicated to the truth in not just an intellectual way. In a memorial speech by his friend Mr. Barwell at the Royal Society of Bengal, he declares: 'Van Manen was not what the ordinary academician calls a "Scholar".... His learning had come to him not from the School, but had been acquired in the business of feeding an abundant curiosity as to the nature of truth.'[24]

During the First World War, Van Manen becomes disenchanted with the Theosophist movement, on account of the society's refusal to remain politically neutral. He then leaves Adyar for Ghoom, in the Darjeeling district, to study Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism. According to Johan van Manen's sister, Charlotte—a scholar with a Ph.D. in economics herself—he remained a Theosophist until the very end. His Himalayan assistants, however, call him a Buddhist without reservations. Not just that: according to his erstwhile teacher and assistant, Karma Sumdhon Paul, he was a 'true Bodhisattva'.[25] Phüntshok Lungtok, on the other hand, speaks of him as someone who 'due to the aspirational prayers made in previous lives has a profound faith in the Buddha'.[26]

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[21] Van Manen, 'On the Value of the Comparative Study of Sacred Books', 8.

[22] Ibid., 13.

[23] Ibid., 28.

[24] Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 164.

[25] Richardus, *The Dutch Orientalist Johan van Manen*, 38.

[26] Phun tshogs lung rtogs, *dge rgan gyi rnam thar*, vol. 4, ch. 24, 509: *sa heb*

After his move from South India to the Himalayas, we see Van Manen develop himself more as a scholar than a practicing Theosophist. The topics that he chooses to publish on from this time onwards, are varied in nature, but generally deal with Himalayan religion and culture. While *On the Value of the Comparative Study of Sacred Books* is idealistic and tries to inspire the audience, his later works are mostly descriptive and analytical. In Ghoom, he starts learning Tibetan, with the help of two teachers, Karma Sumdhon Paul (Karma bsam gtan Paul, also known as K.S. Paul, and Karma Babu) and Phüntshok Lungtok (Phun tshogs lung rtogs), whom Van Manen refers to as 'Gegen' (Tib. dge rgan, teacher).[27] Initially, he studies colloquial Tibetan, while he also aims to learn Tibetan proficiently enough to read Buddhist canonical materials.[28] Some of the Tibetan works he reads to help him learn the language, he subsequently uses as the subjects for several shorter and longer articles. In his publications, he leans heavily on the glosses that his informants provide him.[29] The ephemera—Van Manen's notes, drafts, and other writings—are witness to his general process of gathering and processing textual materials and information.[30] It cannot be emphasized enough that the presence of Van Manen's teachers, his friends, his manuscript-hunters, is noticeable throughout his published and unpublished work. Later, when he is appointed Secretary-General of

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khong rang gi sku tshe sngon ma'i smon lam gyis 'phul shugs kyi sangs rgyas la shin tu dad pa chen po yod/ This statement is absent in the English language version, see Richardus, *Tibetan Lives*, 52.

[27] Their roles are addressed by Tenzin Tsepak in a forthcoming article, entitled 'Modern Encounters: The Lhasa Dialect, Christian Mission Schools, and Religious Conversion in Modern Tibetan Autobiographies', an early draft of which I have consulted in March 2025.

[28] Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 143.

[29] E.g. Van Manen, 'Khacche Phalu: A Tibetan Moralist'; and *idem*, *Minor Tibetan Texts, I*.

[30] These ephemera, which have not been catalogued or digitized yet, will play a key role in the provenance research of the texts and objects in the collection.

the Asiatic Society, his duties are such that he finds little time in his day to do actual research. While he still publishes, the work he produces is more reactive.[31]

Van Manen's research processes are naturally closely linked to his methods of collecting. The manuscripts and blockprints, as well as the artifacts and ephemera now preserved in Leiden, can be closely connected to his publications, public talks, and other scholarly activity. Scholars would not find this aspect surprising, yet when it comes to provenance research and thinking about the ways in which objects and texts derive from a certain time, place, and cultural context, understanding this fact can prove very valuable. Naturally, not all objects and texts can be connected directly to his own research activities.

Later in life, Van Manen is well-known for his enormous personal library. One of his servants, a Chinese-Tibetan boy who served him during the last years of his life, and who also wrote his own autobiography—again inspired or commissioned by Van Manen—has this to say about his collection of books:

> I have never seen so many books in a single room as in the flat of my sahib. There were books in Sanskrit, in Chinese, in Tibetan, and of course in Dutch and English, and in many other languages. I have counted books in more than thirty different languages.[32]

Elsewhere, he states:

> I think that the biggest book he had was a collection of the holy books of Buddhism, which he loved very much. It had thirty-seven volumes and was printed in Siamese letters, impossible to read, of very thin lines that all look alike. It was in the old language of Buddhism, called Pali, and was given to him by the Siamese government. But he also had a great collection of Buddhist books in Chinese, and he had more than one thousand Tibetan books, printed in Tibet,

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[31] This is also noted in Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 158,

[32] Yang, *A Houseboy in India*, 128.

but these he had given to be kept in a library in Holland.[33]

That said, in an article by Van Manen published in 1922, he remarks that he possesses 'a collection of slightly over a thousand numbers, half MSS and half prints'.[34] This suggests that the lion's share of his collection was acquired before that time. In addition to studying his materials with his assistants, there is another way in which he uses the objects and texts he collected: Van Manen takes them to what one could call a scholarly 'show and tell'. On numerous occasions, during the regular meetings at the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, Van Manen demonstrates his recent acquisitions and presents them to the other members present. Fellows of the society with many different specializations would also present at and attend these meetings. Presentations on various subjects, ranging from the field of archaeology, to zoology and linguistics, to name but a few, were given during these meetings. While his presentation notes have not been uncovered in the archives, the reports published in the subsequent proceedings of the Asiatic Society give us valuable context with regard to the materials he exhibited, materials that are now—quite bereft of context—kept in storage in the Museum and the University Library.

One example is particularly telling of his method of both collecting materials and his, rather modest, dissemination of materials. At the exhibition of the annual meeting of the Asiatic Society that took place on February 6, 1928, Van Manen presents a 'Tibetan Divination Chart and illustrated handbook to the same'. The report, which is anonymous but may have been written by Van Manen himself, states the following:

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[33] Yang, *A Houseboy in India*, 130. The statement that he had given his Tibetan works to be kept in a library in the Netherlands is puzzling. We know that he occasionally bought and sent Sanskrit and Tibetan books on behalf of some Dutch institutes and university libraries, but the letter exchange between Pott, responsible for acquiring the collection, and Van Manen's heirs suggests that the bulk of the works were still in India at the time of his death.

[34] Van Manen, 'A Contribution to the Bibliography of Tibet', 467.

> The Tibetans ascribe to their Wisdom-God, Hjam-pahi-dbyangs, Mañjughosha,[35] the invention of this divination chart, called gab-rtse, and ascribe to him also the authorship of the manual teaching its use. Tibetans attach the highest value to this kind of divination. It foretells misfortune and fortune; sickness and health, the length of human life, man's death-date, the kind of wife he will marry, how many children he will have, at what times in life he will be rich or poor. The calculations can be made at the birth of a child for the whole future life, and will indicate whether he should be a trader, artist, officer, etc. Further they can guide in marriage questions, foretelling whether the boy and girl are suited to each other, whether they will love each other, whether they will be healthy, and so on. Before undertaking a voyage the chart has to be consulted. Similarly, before starting to build a house. The time for the beginning and the eventual success of any action is made plain by it. At death the time for the burial and the choice of appropriate ceremonies are fixed by consultation of the chart. Agricultural operations are determined by it. Consultation of doctors and taking of medicine likewise are regulated by it, as briefly the dates for all undertakings. Lastly in affairs of state, military operations are dependent on its prognostic.
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> The chart was copied by the exhibitor's Tibeto-Chinese 'Munshi'[36] Drin-Chen from an original in the possession of a professional diviner. The explanatory book was, by a singular coincidence, obtained at the same time. It is a good example of modern Tibetan coloured book illustration. In Tibet many illustrated block prints exist, but only with black-and-white woodcuts. Colour print does not exist in Tibet, and coloured books have to be produced in manuscript form.[37]

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[35] Wylie: 'jam dpal dbyangs; IAST Mañjughoṣa. Technically, the Tibetan name translates Mañjuśrī, whereas the Sanskrit is translated by *'jam dbyangs*.

[36] It appears that at the time it was quite common for Western scholars to call their scribes, regardless of their ethnicity, 'munshi'. Hannah, the author of a Tibetan grammar also uses this term to describe someone who was effectively his 'co-author'—the Sikkimese Kazi Dawa Samdup. See Hannah, *Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, x.

[37] '(2) Tibetan Divination Chart and illustrated handbook to the same'.

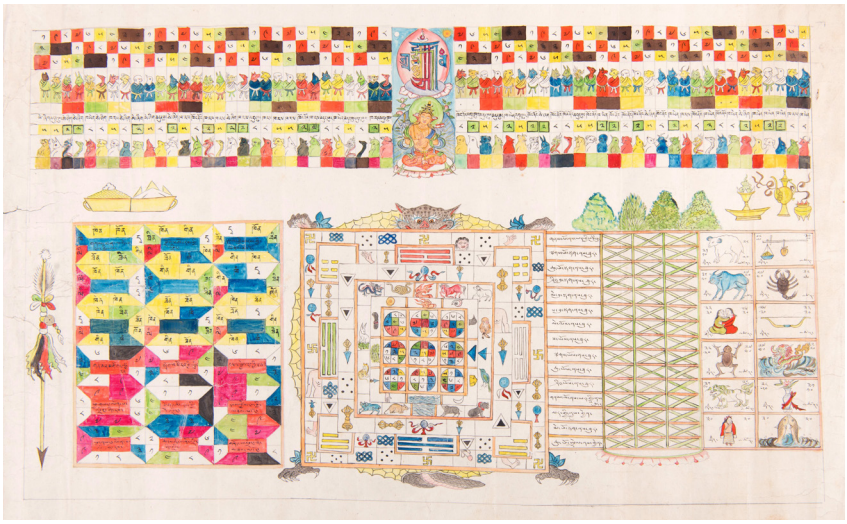

FIG. 2 An astrological chart, paper, ink, water colours. Collection Wereldmuseum, Leiden, RV-2740-146. https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/751996.

The above provides us much much-needed context for the single divination chart currently present in the collection of the material objects (Figure 2), currently housed in the Wereldmuseum Leiden.[38] We learn the copyist's name and when he copied the chart. The accompanying text, the 'explanatory book', which was acquired at the same time, may be the work now catalogued in the Leiden University Library as *Phug lugs rtsis kyi legs bshad mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan baiḍūr dkar po'i do shal dpyod ldan snying nor zhes bya* in two volumes, more popularly known as the *White Beryl*, written by the famous regent of the fifth Dalai Lama, Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705).[39] This is still hypothetical, but while there are numerous short astrological works in the collection itself, this one is the most richly

[38] RV-2740-146.

[39] The collection contains three versions of this blockprinted work: I.KERN Br.79/H352; I.KERN 2740/H89; I. KERN 2740/H577. The latter two are identical copies. For more information on this text, which was written between 1683 and 1685, see Schuh, *Untersuchungen*, 37, 38.

illustrated, more so than the others. Moreover, it is perhaps the most important astrological work for the Dge lugs school.[40] This is no coincidence: when one considers Van Manen's assistants' close connection to that school and since Van Manen's early connections to Tibetan religion and culture seem to be closely aligned with the famed Ghoom monastery (also known as Yid dga' chos gling), a Dge lugs monastery with some connections to Tashi Lhunpo (Bkra shis lhun po) in Tibet through its founder, the Mongolian monk Sherab Gyatso (Sog po bla ma shes rab rgya mtsho). This person happened to have been well-known for his aptitude in astrology. The institution of Ghoom had been a place of importance to many foreigners wanting to learn Tibetan since its founding in 1875.[41] In addition, elsewhere in the collection of manuscripts in the Special Collections at the Leiden University Library, we find a hand-copied manuscript on western paper of the same work, which contains drawings in black ink (presumably by the hand of the same scribe Drin-chen)[42] and some explanatory notes in English (Figure 3).[43] While he was clearly deeply interested in the subject, Van Manen never published anything on Tibetan divination. This is but one example, but there are many other instances, in which we can establish a connection between text and object, and between the collector and the collected.

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[40] Another work, that contains just one illustration, that deals with astrology is *'Bras rtsis mdor bsdus* (I.KERN 2740/H214 and I.KERN 2740/H410). One issue is, of course, that none of the versions in the collection are actually colourized.

[41] Harris, 'Photography in the "Contact Zone"', 110–11. For a visual description of this monastery, see de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Where the Gods Are Mountains*, 18–21. A short history of this monastery and its deep connection to Tibetan Studies as a field is forthcoming by the author.

[42] His Chinese name is Chen Cunzhi 陳存誌.

[43] I.KERN Br. 72/M80 *Phug lugs rtsis kyi legs bshad mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan baidūr dkar po'i do shal dpyod ldan snying nor gyi lhan thabs rtsis kyi man ngag gsal bar byed pa gzhan phan nyi ma'i 'od zer.*



FIG. 3 I.KERN Br. 72/M80 *Phug lugs rtsis kyi legs bshad mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan baidūr dkar po'i do shal dpyod ldan snying nor gyi lhan thabs rtsis kyi man ngag gsal bar byed pa gzhan phan nyi ma'i 'od zer*, copied and illustrated by Drin-chen. Photographed by author.

The Facilitator and the Intermediary

Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal, had praised Van Manen, saying that he was 'himself the epitome of what the Society should be—a combination of practical business capacity and scholarly brilliance'.[44] As mentioned above, in his later years, he has but little time for study and research and spends all his days at the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. He is responsible for, among others, the publications that the society produced, but also for much of the correspondence with other members and scholars elsewhere.[45] This means that Van Manen knew, and was known by, almost everyone involved in Indology, Buddhist Studies, and Tibetan Studies in the 1920s and 30s. He is invited to speak in different venues with some regularity. Some of these lectures are then reported on. In his role as researcher, administrator, and public speaker for a predominantly Western audience, Van Manen appears to hold views concurrent with many educated, 'liberal' Westerners. Views that nevertheless do not entirely stand up against the test of time. It is clear, however, that of the religions that India gave birth to, Van Manen holds Buddhism closest to his heart. In a public lecture on the difference between East and West in The Hague, in the Netherlands, Van Manen is reported to have said that Buddhism was the only true large-scale liberation movement

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[44] 'Patron's Address: Speech by His Excellency Lord Lytton, Governor or Bengal, at the Annual Meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal on the fourth of February, 1924'.

[45] In a letter dated to March 30, 1935 he apologizes to renowned Dutch Sanskritist Prof. Gonda for his delayed response, noting 'the unusual circumstances that I have to deal with; namely work in the Bibliotheca Indica on ten publications at the same time; our journal; our memoirs; our catalogues; our Indian Science Congress Proceedings, oftentimes 3000 pages of printed material a year; all of this, in addition to the day to day office drudgery, the administration, the board, all has to be managed with very little help, except for that of the mechanical kind. In the past 10 years, my letters have on average surpassed the 3000 mark on a yearly basis.' Translation from Dutch by the author (Gonda archive 1.1.392, Utrecht University, Van Manen to Gonda).

in India. Elsewhere, he notes that, while this may be the case, 'even Buddhism has not been able to "convert" India'.[46] Even though he lived the largest part of his adult life in British-ruled India, his relationship with the land was oftentimes fraught. On Tibet—the country he never managed to visit—he was more optimistic, but never entirely starry-eyed. Speaking in 1925, when Tibetan-British relations were relatively stable, he shows himself hopeful about the potential 'opening up' of Tibet. The journalist reporting on this lecture writes:

> Being himself a great admirer of the Tibetan character, and having found much to value in the Tibetan outlook of life, notwithstanding its great strangeness on the surface, the lecturer hoped that if at last the big mountain barrier was to be conquered by modern progress, it might result in true benefit for the Tibetans and a real human gain.... the awakening and opening of Tibet would be a gain to the common possessions of the world.[47]

It may well be that this view, a view that truly sees the value of the 'Tibetan outlook in life', is what guided and motivated Van Manen's collecting and research endeavours. In addition to his collection practices, he was always either translating Tibetan texts, commissioning translations, or collaborating in translations. The following section deals with Van Manen's involvement in what is perhaps the most well-known Tibetan Buddhist translation in the world today: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

The Translator(s): Methods of Collaboration and Acknowledgment

Early colonial-era orientalist scholars are often much maligned when it comes to their accreditation of their Asian co-translators. To put

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[46] 'Wetenschappelijke gedichten. Indisch Genootschap'.

[47] 'TIBET WAKING TO NEW DAY'.

it mildly, one could say that there is a general lack of transparency when it comes to the roles of the translation and editing work that was carried out. One could also—less generously—accuse these so-called translators of taking all the credit and short-changing the pandits, who could actually read and understand the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts. Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), for example, worked intensively with the Bengali scholar Atal Bihari Ghose (for Sanskrit) and with the Sikkimese Kazi Dawa Samdup (Tib. Zla ba bsam grub). The latter figure, Dawa Samdup, and to a lesser extent Ghose, is known to have been the overall translator of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bar do thos grol*). Evans Wentz, however, initially made his name by editing and finalizing the translation.[48] Through an academic game of Chinese whispers, he is now, nearly a century after the book's first publication, generally, but erroneously, viewed to have been *the* translator of the work. As a result, he has been subjected to criticism for taking the credit.[49]

The real story of the enterprise of Indo-Tibetan translation is more nuanced: Woodroffe's relationship with Ghose was closer to equality than Sahib-Pandit relations had been in the past[50] and Evans Wentz himself acknowledges his role in the publication of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* in an honest and transparent way:

> Nevertheless, I have been really little more than a compiler and editor of 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead'. To the deceased translator—who combined in himself a greater knowledge of the Occult Sciences of Tibet and of Western Science than any Tibetan scholar of this

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[48] For insights into the complicated relationship between Western scholars and their often much more knowledgeable Himalayan informants, see Martin, 'Translating Tibet in the Borderlands'.

[49] In his history of this Tibetan work, Brian Cuevas notes the involvement of Campbell and the centrality of Dawa Samdup in the translation process but is unaware of the discussions and exchange between Evans Wentz, Campbell, Thomas, and Van Manen, that deal with the interpretation and importance of the Tibetan work in question. See Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 5–9.

[50] Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal*, 210–11.

> epoch—the chief credit for its production very naturally belongs.[51]

Woodroffe and Evans Wentz, both closely aligned to the Theosophical movement, knew each other: Woodroffe famously wrote the foreword to Evans Wentz's publication of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.[52]

How did Van Manen fit into all of this? It deserves mentioning that Van Manen was, in fact, a close friend of John Woodroffe.[53] In addition, he was not just corresponding with Evans Wentz and lending out his copy of the *Bar do thos grol* for him to use, but he had also been sent a typescript of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, so that he could add his notes to it. Pasted into this typescript, now held in the Special Collections in Leiden, is a letter in which Evans Wentz writes the following:

> To Mr. Johan van Manen;
>
> Please see the pencilled queries by Dr. F.W. Thomas. Anything you care to suggest may be written on the opposite blank page. I am chiefly anxious about the Tibetan transliterations in the foot notes.
>
> I should be glad, too, if you could verify with the enclosed photography of the folios of the manuscript the translation of their Tibetan text as given on pages 34 (between bars) and 8-99 (between bars) of the book.
>
> I have told Mr. Atal Behari Ghosh that he can always have the right to borrow this copy of the Tibetan Book of the Dead from you in case he is called upon to verify or correct anything in it.
>
> You will find, with the photo of the two folios, photos of the three Tibetan paintings which will go in the book and my descriptions of the figures. I am sure that your criticism of these descriptions would be more than worth while.

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[51] Evans Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, x.

[52] Ibid., xxv–xliv.

[53] Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 144.

> With all good wishes and thanks,
>
> Sincerely yours,
> W.Y. Evans Wentz[54]

It is clear here, as is the case elsewhere, that Evans Wentz is more than humble and transparent about his limited understanding of Tibetan. A copy of the typescript that contains the copious notes and corrections Van Manen made to the translation of the *Book of the Dead* is still preserved among the Leiden Archives and awaits further study. A few years before the above exchange took place, the two Tibetologists had exchanged letters about the work Evans Wentz was doing on the book. In 1919, Van Manen writes to Evans Wentz:

> What you say about your work-plan seems reusable and I think your book when issued should excite much interest. It is a real success to have finished the translation of the 1356 pages in so relatively small a time. When you have finished with my blockprint you had better send it to me c/o Imperial Library, Hare Street, Calcutta, for that will be the safest, because most permanent, address. I think you are quite wise in leaving remote questions of textual criticism alone. The main contents of the book will be most important for the general reader, and your aim is rather folklore, I think, than philology. The subject is quite new to Western readers and cannot fail to attract. In Dawa Samdub you have also a very capable helper. As you say spiritualists, Theosophists, psychical researchers, must be much interested in this lore, and the whole [1] after-death Tibetan doctrine is most fascinating, though also intricate and almost totally unexplored. Anyhow I wish you all success with your labours.[55]

Kathleen Taylor notes that the non-Western translators 'Ghose and Dawasamdup belong to a class of people who have perhaps not been

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[54] Van Manen Archives, 1/26 (103), Institute Kern, Leiden University Library.

[55] Evans Wentz archives, MS. Eng. Lett. C 577, no. 117, 118, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

much noticed by historians: learned scholars who played an important though often humble role in bridge building for Westerners interested in Hinduism and Buddhism, from the late eighteenth century through till recent times'.[56] In a similar vein, Viehbeck writes:

> In the more stratified and religiously oriented Tibetan societies, information about encounters between European individuals and their Tibetan interlocutors, mostly learned people, but not among those at the highest level of religious institutions, was hardly ever recorded. An effect of this is that one is often forced to resort to works by Europeans for information on the lives of the individuals who served as informants for European academics.[57]

Van Manen's assistants, some of whom went on to work as university lecturers in their own right,[58] clearly belong to this 'class of people'—and part of The Van Manen project's aim is to make these individuals visible, show their accomplishments, and demonstrate their agency as important contributors to this collection, and—by extension—to Tibetan and Buddhist Studies in The Netherlands and the world.[59]

The Afterlife (and Future) of Van Manen's Life Works

Van Manen's collection of objects was bought by the Wereldmuseum, whereas his written works were acquired by the University

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[56] Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal*, 211.

[57] Viehbeck, '"The First Tibetan at a Western University?"—Entanglements of Scholarship, Buddhism, and Power in Kalimpong and Beyond', 292.

[58] Lama Padmachandra, a Tibetan about whom we know but little, went on to become a Tibetan lecturer alongside Kazi Dawa Samdup in 1921 (see *University of Calcutta: Minutes of the Syndicate for the Year 1921*, 356). Karma Sumdhon Paul taught at Calcutta University a few years after Dawa Samdup resigned.

[59] Complete translations of three autobiographies will be published as part of this project. Their abbreviated life stories have been published in Richardus, *Tibetan Lives*.

Library, the Kern Institute, and the Sinological Institute in Leiden. These works became the main components of the Buddhological reading room that was added to the Kern Institute in 1949. Not being able to facilitate blockprints, these were given on loan to the museum (and registered as Br. 79/HM). From 1950–1953, no one other than the renowned Tibetologist René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz had been hired to create the first catalogue of the blockprints and manuscripts.[60] He was again invited in 1953–1954 to catalogue the Lepcha manuscripts in the collection.[61] Roughly a decade later, J. W. de Jong, who held the chair of Buddhist Studies at Leiden University, hired two Tibetans, Rechung Rinpoche and Rato Khyongla (Chongla) Rinpoche, to create another alphabetized catalogue (1962–1965). It was during this time that some of these texts were microfilmed and sent on to other universities and scholars upon request.

Van Manen did not just collect Tibetan language works: between 1927 and 1931 he collected 588 palmleaf manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu,[62] which he sent on from India to Prof. Vogel and Prof. Caland in the Netherlands. These manuscripts are predominantly non-Buddhist in their contents and have been catalogued by Saraju Rath. Van Manen also collected a great number of Lepcha manuscripts, an endangered Tibetic language spoken by the indigenous people of historical Sikkim. As it stands, this is now the largest collection of Lepcha works in the world. These manuscripts, written in a language spoken in Sikkim and Darjeeling, have been catalogued and studied by Heleen Plaisier, mostly through the lens of linguistics.[63]

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[60] Plaisier, *Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection*, 34; Pott, 'Notitie ter zake van de Collectie Van Manen', Archive no. I. 41, 2. Pott gives a different date for this: 1953–1954.

[61] Plaisier, *Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection*, 34.

[62] Rath, 'On the Johan van Manen Collection'. Pott counted three hundred Sanskrit manuscripts.

[63] Plaisier, *Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection*; *idem*, *A Grammar Of Lepcha*; *idem*, 'A Key to Four Transcription Systems of Lepcha'.

They have not or hardly been approached from a cultural historical perspective, nor have they been studied in their original context. These works are thus a worthy topic of investigation, but due to the scarcity, or dare I say, lack of, scholars who know both Lepcha and Tibetan, they will remain unstudied for now. The Lepcha manuscripts nevertheless remain important to understand the process of collection formation.

Turning to the Tibetan works in the Van Manen Collection and their impact, more specifically, one may wonder what their current value is. This is particularly relevant, since so many Tibetan texts have now been made easily and freely accessible, largely thanks to BDRC. To assess the relevance of the collection, we should first consult the various catalogues that were made of Van Manen's works. There exist no fewer than four catalogues (of the Tibetan materials, that is). The first one was created by Johan van Manen's scribe Phüntshok Lungtok, which presumably was intended for his private usage.[64] The second catalogue was developed by the above-mentioned de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. He worked on this in 1953, just after he returned from India, on the invitation of Dr. Pott. Later, in 1954, he returned to study the Lepcha manuscripts. It is clear that having had the opportunity to work with the Tibetan collection in Leiden contributed to the publication of his, still widely cited, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, which first came out in 1956.[65] Some of the handwriting must have given him some difficulty as a fair number of titles are deemed 'illegible'—looking at the catalogue, we can also see that throughout the years other people have corrected and elaborated on de Nebesky-Wojkowitz's catalogue. The third catalogue was issued some ten years later in 1965. Two Tibetan lamas (Rechung Rinpoche and Rato Khyongla Rinpoche)—sent by the Tibetan Government in Exile and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation—spent about five years in Leiden, supervised by Prof. de Jong. They produced a

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[64] In all likelihood, this catalogue (divided up into a blockprint catalogue [*par ma'i dkar chag*] and a catalogue of manuscript written in *dbu med* [*dbu med dpe cha'i dkar chag*]) is found in the Archives, box number 109/ 185.

[65] de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*.

catalogue in which the works in the Van Manen Collection are organized alphabetically and classified according to traditional Tibetan standards. This catalogue fills six thick binders, currently held in the special collections at Leiden's University Library. The last catalogue that was produced was when the collection was microfilmed between 2003 and 2007 by Kalsang Norbu Gurung and Tharphen Lingtsang. This is the most user-friendly catalogue.

As mentioned, the works are largely extra-canonical, in the sense that the collection does not contain anything resembling a complete Kanjur and Tenjur, but do feature a few commonly read texts from these canons. There are treasure texts (*gter ma*), *sādhana*s, art manuals, Buddhist fairy tales, rituals to appease local deities and demons, biographies, religious songs, *pramāṇa* texts, and so on. Many of these were collected by Van Manen's assistants in Tibet proper, but quite a few were locally produced, bought, or copied in the greater Darjeeling area. Studying the catalogue, it is abundantly clear that Van Manen was interested in Tibetan texts that existed outside of the framework of the Tibetan Buddhist canon. Among other things, this means there is a wealth of such material in Leiden. It is therefore not a coincidence that de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, in a way, continued what Van Manen had started. A statement written in 1922, while working at the Indian Museum in Calcutta, makes this abundantly clear:

> [..] instead of a general study of the Tibetica it seemed more profitable to take in hand only one single portion of these and study them intensively. I have therefore selected a subject about something new can be said and which lent itself to new treatment, whilst at the same time it is illustrated by a sufficiently varied number of specimens in the collection. *This subject is that of Tibetan gods*. Much has already been written about these, but almost exclusively from an iconographical, mythological, archeological or doctrinal point of view. *The topic has hitherto been little illustrated from its material aspect or from that of ritual, so closely akin to ethnography*.[66]

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[66] Richardus, *The Dutch Orientalist Johan van Manen*, 36. Italics added.

This also meant he displayed an interest in not just the texts, but also the ritual implements and ritual contexts that are part and parcel of the study of Tibetan gods. Initially, the artworks and ethnographic objects that Van Manen collected were highly regarded when they first reached Dutch shores. Not a more elaborate collection of Himalayan handicraft had ever been seen in the Netherlands before. The current situation, however, could not be more different: there has not been a dedicated curator for Himalayan artefacts for decades, and most works sit in storage, unstudied. While few scholars are aware of Van Manen's collection of Himalayan texts, even fewer know of the Himalayan art and ethnographica he left behind.[67]

To return to the citation given at the beginning of this article, which suggests that the direction a place of learning and research takes is dependent upon the collections of works available, we can ask the question as to what extent the Van Manen Collection influenced the course of the study of Tibetan Buddhism in Leiden and beyond. In an attempt to answer this, I would say that, when Van Manen started sending Prof. Vogel Sanksrit and Tibetan texts to be included in the collection of the Kern institute in the mid-1930s, it put Leiden on the global map as a place where several Asian manuscripts and languages could be consulted and studied. Later on, I am sure that Prof. de Jong, who was professor of Tibetan and Buddhist studies between 1956 and 1966, used the numerous versions of the songs and biography of Milarepa for his book on the same topic.[68] Whether the collection was consulted by Prof. Seyfort Ruegg (1966–1972) and Prof. Vetter (1974–2000), who held the same chair at Leiden, remains uncertain.

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[67] This will soon change, as my project-member Nils Martin is working on the collection and plans to produce a *catalogue raisonné* based on the materials.

[68] de Jong, *Mi la ras pa'i rnam thar*. Catalogue numbers 2740/H578, 2740/H579, 2740/H565, 2740/H566, 2740/H567, 2740/H57, 2740/H8, 2740/H68C all contain Milarepa's biography. Ironically, however, de Jong does not mention Van Manen or his collection even once in his 'A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America'. This may be because of Van Manen's lack of formal academic qualifications.

It seems that now the collection has almost been forgotten by the academic community, despite the fact that it has been largely digitized.[69] Furthermore, with the advent of BDRC, there is no lack of access to Tibetan Buddhist texts (these are often good scans, reasonably well described, and easily readable). Are the texts in the Van Manen Collection then, not only poorly accessible but also irrelevant, because other versions are available elsewhere? Having looked through the catalogues and the library website to find unique or rare texts, I have found a significant number of rare works. Most of the texts that appear not to be extant in any other library are ritual, astrological, prognostication, or narrative texts. One example is a work attributed to Skong rtse 'phrul rgyal, a name that may refer to Confucius (or the Tang Dynasty emperor Taizong), which contains what looks like a Bon ritual for suppressing demons.[70] It is not uncommon for Confucius to play a role in Tibetan ritual texts: Kong tse 'phrul gyi rgyal po—Confucius the king of magic (or: the wise king)—features in various other rituals, but this particular text appears to be nowhere else available. Among other (seemingly) unique works are: a treatise on illness divination ascribed to Pha dam pa sangs rgyas;[71] a ritual connection to the *Bar do thos grol* (translated as *The Book of the Dead*);[72] a manual on how to read (or write) *lantsa* and *vartu* scripts;[73] an anonymous text on the dangers of smoking;[74] a proselytizing short work on taking refuge by an otherwise unknown author from Darjeeling;[75] an instructional text on *gtor ma* (offering

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[69] This is partially due to the fact that the catalogues are poorly accessible and not descriptive.

[70] I.KERN 2740/M91: *Skong rtse 'phrul rgyal gyis mdzad pa'i sri gnan gyi cho ga*

[71] I.KERN 2740/M417, no. 19: *Pha dam pas mdzad pa'i nad rtsis brtag tshul gzhan phan nyi ma'i 'od zer*

[72] I.KERN 2740/M492: *Rnal 'byor rab 'brings bar do grol ba'i thabs*

[73] I.KERN Br.79/H369: *rGya gar gyi yig rigs nang nas lañtsa vartu dang hor yig bcas*

[74] I.KERN 2740/H412: *Gu ru padma 'byung gnas kyi gter chos las tha ma kha'i nyes dmigs*

[75] I. KERN Br.79/H337: *Skyabs 'gro'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus*

cakes),[76] and a short text on how to remove ritual pollution (*grib*).[77] A large portion of these works are anonymous, and some of them are hard to read—none of them have so far been studied.

Despite Van Manen's lack of university degrees and affiliations, he can be said to have been the first Dutch Tibetologist, or at least the first who published relatively extensively on Tibetan culture and religion using Tibetan sources.[78] Van Manen was never directly involved at Leiden University—the closest he came was giving a lecture at the Kern Institute in 1927.[79] Still, it can be said that Leiden University owes much to Johan van Manen. While digitized copies of these texts will and should travel the world and be studied everywhere, the physical presence of the Van Manen Collection in the Netherlands means that Leiden University will always be connected to the study of the language, culture, and religions of Tibet and the Himalayas. It is not just Johan van Manen who will be forever associated with the Netherlands: so will his helpers, manuscript-hunters, accomplices, informants, and scribes. To these people, Van Manen's Himalayan friends who found themselves in the in-between—the bardo, if you will—between the Snowlands and the Lowlands, and who are eternalized in this collection, we are much indebted.

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[77] I. KERN 2740/B3, no. 1: *Grib gsel*.

[78] Samuel van der Putte (1690–1745) was the first Dutch person to have studied Tibetan extensively and reached Tibet in the early eighteenth century. See Gandolfo, 'Bhutan and Tibet in European Cartography (1597-1800)'.

[79] Pott, *Introduction to the Tibetan Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, 157.

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