

Tibetological Collections & Archives Series [part 2]

# The Bonpo Katen Cataloguing Project

Research >  
Central Asia

A whole set of manuscripts of the Bonpo canon, the Kanjur part, was long hidden away in the vicinity of the dBal-khyung Monastery in Nyag-rong when the Tibetan areas in Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan were harshly subjugated by the Chinese during 1957–58. After relaxation of the strict control by the Chinese at the beginning of the 1980s, it was deemed safe to bring out what was hidden.

By Samten G. Karmay

There was some cause for anxiety as this manuscript set of the canon was the only surviving copy in the whole of Tibet after the Cultural Revolution. It was therefore a matter of great urgency to make new copies by reproducing the manuscripts lest anything irrevocable should happen to the unique copy. But due to the great number of volumes, it represented a prohibitively costly enterprise to have them published. Mr sKal-bzang phun-tshogs with the staunch support of his friend Lama Ayung finally overcame all the obstacles. They encountered both financial problems and non-cooperation on the part of the people who claimed to have been the owners of the manuscripts. Ultimately, the publishers had the backing of the Sichuan government as well as several Tibetan officials, who were mostly rNying-ma-pas working in Chengdu and the whole printed edition was published



Dori Heiligers-Seelen

Organizing the Tibetan canon at the library of the Kern Institute for shelving in accordance with the Osaka/Triten Norbutse catalogue.

in Chengdu from 1985 to 1988. The new print was decried by the 'owners of the manuscripts' and other Bonpo as of poor production quality. However, the main concern of the publishers was in fact to quickly bring out new copies of the manuscripts so that there would be no unrecoverable loss should anything happen to the unique original manuscripts.

It is this edition of the Kanjur, the first part of the canon, of which Per Kværne obtained a copy for the Uni-

versity of Oslo. In 1996, he there began organizing a group of scholars in order to make an analytic catalogue, which is now being prepared for publication.

However, the Katen, the second part of the canon, does not seem to have survived in any one set of manuscripts or printed editions either in Tibet or anywhere else. Although a great number of the texts that theoretically belong to the Katen part of the canon were published in India by Tibetan refugees with the encouragement given by Gene

Smith during the 1960s and 1970s, no systematic collection of the whole of it has so far ever been made. Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma, the publisher of the present collection, therefore felt the urgent need of assembling together the Katen texts that were still available, even though scattered over various locations.

In assembling the texts Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma seems to have made no attempt to select texts as the Abbot Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin would have suggested if he were alive (see the accompanying article by the same author on p 17). Given the predicament of the cultural and religious situation in Tibet, it is understandable that Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma has collected texts almost indiscriminately and wherever he could lay his hands on them for his new edition of the Katen texts. It made no difference whether a text belonged to the old or new Bon tradition. The present collection of his edition that made its way to the Triten Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu in 2000 has 300 volumes, not counting the texts that belong to the Kanjur part of the canon and a number of gsung 'bum that have, in fact, come along with the collection.

Another characteristic of Sog-sde

bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma is the lack of any systematic approach to his action. The texts in this collection are not arranged in any kind of order nor are the volumes numbered coherently in a particular way. It lacks a general title in spite of the claim that it is the 'Bonpo Tenjur'. There is no indication of the place where it is published, nor a date of publication. In other words, it is a totally disorganized mass of texts. We have therefore preferred to use the term Katen (bka' rten) which is the traditional term for this part of the canon rather than describing it as the 'Bonpo Tenjur'. However, it must be pointed out that the collection does indeed contain a considerable number of rare and extremely important works that had thus far never been published before. Moreover, however poor the quality of the reproduction may be due to the process of reproducing the old manuscripts by means of photostat, the value of the publication is all the same great and there is no doubt that scholars will highly appreciate having such texts in their 'original form'. In this sense the publisher is to be warmly congratulated for this vast undertaking and his strenuous efforts in bringing out this composite collection.

## Ferdinand Hamer, Martyr in China

In the late summer of the year 1900 the West was horrified by the news of the misdeeds of the Boxers in China. The Boxers not only besieged the embassies of the civilized world in Beijing, but had also assassinated thousands of Chinese Christians, Chinese priests, and European missionaries. A century later, in the year 2000, a symposium was held in Shandong to commemorate the uprising. On 1 October, the national holiday of the People's Republic of China, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the canonization of 120 people who had been killed in China for their beliefs.<sup>1</sup> The canonization evoked a furious reaction from the Chinese authorities. In their opinion this was a typical example of Western post-colonialism! The Dutch catholic society was also quite surprised as – among the 120 canonizations – they missed Bishop Hamer. Ferdinand Hamer, who in July 1900 had been assassinated in the most atrocious way. Ferdinand Hamer, the very example of the missionary-martyr....

Research >  
China

By Harry Knipschild

Just over twelve months ago I began my research on the life and work of Ferdinand Hamer in China. In this article I will give special attention to one aspect to the missionary work of Hamer, namely the continuous periods of extreme drought on the north of China. In *History in three keys. The Boxers as event, experience and myth* (New York, 1997), Paul A. Cohen explains in detail the enormous influence of natural phenomena on the life and actions of the Chinese farmers in the Shanxi and Shandong provinces. Working with oral sources and authentic documents of the Boxers and American missionaries and sisters, the American historian explained the reaction of the local farmers to the flood of the Yellow River in 1898 and the extreme drought in the period thereafter. The Chinese peasants experienced the catastrophes as a disturbance of the harmony of heaven, so they gave it a religious meaning. They blamed the foreigners for the crop failures and the ensuing hunger; on their flags they carried their device: 'Support the Qing; destroy the foreigners'.

In periods of extreme drought there was not much work to be done in the fields. The peasants, therefore, had ample time to unite in groups or gangs. In the years of the Sino-Japanese War (1894), unofficial groups for self-defence, with such names as the Big Sword Society and the Plum Flower Boxers, were frequently called on to perform a protective

function in Shandong. These groups were always antagonistic towards the Christian religion.

After 1894, the West behaved more and more in an imperialistic manner. In this respect the German apostolic vicar (Bishop) of Shandong, Johann Anzer, played a prominent part. He manipulated the opinion of Emperor William's Germany to his advantage, resulting the German annexation of the seaport town of Qingdao after the murder of two missionaries. He also built a church in the birthplace of Confucius. In response, the farmers united into new gangs, Boxers United in Righteousness. The Boxer Uprising started in Shandong and, fed by lack of rain, spread to Beijing and further inland.

### The Belgian Mission in the North

After the treaties of Tianjin and Beijing in 1860, Theophile Verbist, chaplain of the Belgian army and director of the Belgian section of the Holy Childhood, founded a new missionary congregation with the intention to save the Chinese children and, especially, their souls. Pope Pius IX assigned the CICM congregation (also called Scheut after the village of their main residence, near Brussels) the whole of Mongolia. In 1865, the first four missionaries, accompanied by a servant, departed from Belgium for the Far East. They hardly had any opportunity to prepare themselves - for instance, they no knowledge of the Chinese language.

The Belgian pioneers crossed the Great Wall near Beijing and arrived in the village of Xiwanzi. They started working with the help of a few Chinese priests, with Latin as their lingua franca. Ferdinand Hamer, aged twenty-five, was by far the youngest member of the group. Unexpectedly, his young age quickly became an advantage, as he was reasonably quick in learning the Chinese language and able to acclimatize to the long, cold Mongolian winters, the local food, and the Mongolian way of living. In contrast, two of his companions, including Verbist, died from spotted typhus within a few years.

Less than thirty years old, Ferdinand Hamer, the son of a grocer in Nijmegen, became a veteran of the Mongolian mis-

sion in an inhospitable and dangerous territory - dangerous, indeed, as it soon became clear that most of the Chinese were inimical to the faith of the West. But each year, new young men from Belgium and the Netherlands arrived in Mongolia – men who were prepared to sacrifice everything for their ideal: the conquest of Chinese souls. They brought with them Western knowledge and technology, Western medicines and medical science; they founded orphanages and schools; and they felt supported by European military supremacy along the Chinese coast. Moreover, the missionaries had money at their disposal, which was essential for buying all sorts of goods, for buying food, and for buying land on which to build churches and other buildings.

In 1878, the CICM mission was extended to the Chinese provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. Ferdinand Hamer, now thirty-eight years old, was designated the first Bishop of that enormous territory by Pope Leo XIII. In 1889, he was transferred to 'Western Mongolia' (Ordos), a mission area where many organizational problems had to be solved. In the end, it was not until 1891 that he could make a start there, as his serious stomach complaints forced him back to Europe for a time. While in Europe, he managed to collect enough money to build a huge church in his episcopal village of Sandaoho, not far from the Yellow River.

The first years of the 1890s brought extreme drought to the north of China (an offshoot of the Gobi desert). The Chinese farmers, who had settled north of the Chinese wall, died in great numbers. Hamer, however, had money at his disposal, so instead of building his church, he bought food. In his letters home he was able to report: 'From all sides the poor people have come flocking in, hoping to be received into the bosom of the Church and get some temporal relief. During the last two months we have acquired more than two thousand people asking to be baptized, people which, under normal circumstances, would never have the idea to become Christians without being animated by necessity'. In other Mongolian areas, where the mission did not have much money, more than a thousand Christians were slaughtered. The years 1891 and 1892 were a sort of pre-Boxer uprising.

### Hamer and the Boxer Uprising

A new drought, only seven years later, aggravated the situation in the Ordos mission. By then, the financial resources had been depleted, and any available money was invested in agricultural land in order to give the converts a solid base.

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<sup>1</sup> Among them was the French missionary Chapdelaine, whose untimely death in 1856 gave the French an alibi to invade China, in cooperation with the British, and force the Qing government to ratify the 'unequal' treaties of Tianjin and Beijing (1858/1860). From then on, missionaries were allowed to travel inland and preach the Christian faith, while the Chinese were able to live according to the 'religion of the West'. The French Emperor, Napoleon III, was now the acknowledged protector of all European missionaries and converts of the Qing emperor.