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Introduction: bore pāloke
This chapter presents excerpts from the bore, the wedding ritual cycle of the Thangmi community. The Thangmi are an ādivāsī janajāti (indigenous nationality) group of approximately 40 000 spread across central eastern Nepal (primarily Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok districts) and northeastern India (concentrated in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal and the state of Sikkim). The Thangmi maintain a synthetic ritual system that draws upon elements of Hindu and Buddhist practice, but relies exclusively upon Thangmi guru, or shamans, as the chief officiants. Guru conduct ritual affairs largely in the Thangmi language.

There are eleven discrete phases of the Thangmi wedding, which together comprise the bore pāloke, or “wedding recitations”. A Thangmi wedding is an involved and drawn-out process that begins with asking for the bride’s hand, which in turn can only be undertaken after consultations with the groom’s extended family. The bride can only be brought to the groom’s house after several of the rites are completed, all of which involve specific offerings made from the groom’s family to the bride’s family. This process usually takes a minimum of one to two years. Between the first rite, called the lāngmi khutāme, and the last rite, known as senevā, a series of activities occur, all of which are essential to the successful completion of the wedding ritual as a whole. Following the lāngmi khutāme, the

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1 With any undertaking of this size and complexity, there are many individuals who have contributed time and insight over many years. First and foremost, we thank Lalit Bahadur Thami (also known as Maila Guru), for allowing his oral text to shape this contribution. Maila Guru’s patience and generosity have been invaluable from the moment of documentation in 2005 through to the final analysis, and we remain indebted to him for his patience and good humour. Second, we thank Ram Jivan and Sangita Thami for permitting us to attend and record their wedding ritual; we are grateful for their trust. Finally, we wish to thank our hosts in Damarang, Mangal and Dalli Thami, for welcoming us into their homes and community, and our many friends and research partners in Dolakha and Sindhupalcok who have guided and advised us for two decades now, and continue to share the beauty of Thangmi culture with us. We are grateful to the Fulbright Commission, the Social Science Research Council, the US National Science Foundation, and Cornell University for funding Shneiderman’s doctoral research during which this project first took shape; the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and Leiden University for funding Turin’s doctoral research; the Firebird Foundation, Williamson Fund, and St Catharine’s College Cambridge, for supporting the analysis and community consultation phases of this project; and support from Yale University and the University of British Columbia during the final phase of manuscript preparation. Editor Martin Gaenszle offered many important and substantive suggestions which improved the final text, and Aidan Pine provided crucial technical and layout support. Any errors, omissions and misrepresentations are the responsibility of co–authors Shneiderman and Turin.

2 Pāloke is a general term used to refer to ritual recitations in Thangmi. It is comparable to the Kiranti muddum as a form of ritual speech. For further details see Shneiderman (2015: Chapter 3).
The key ritual components are: *deva sāng* (propitiation of the deities), *sagun thoṭko* (consecration of the ritual alcohol offering, discussed in section 1 of this chapter), *deupāloke* (recitation of the origin myth), *cyurkunko bhākā* (the song of the deity *cyurkun*), *sākhi* (narrative review of ritual progress), *sārmāko bhākā* (placation of the deities), *āyu* (examination of and offering to the soul of the groom), *cārdām* (agreement and consent to the match, discussed in section 2 of this chapter), *senevā* (concluding ritual sequence, discussed in section 3 of this chapter), and *kholādāpla* (return of the deities to the divine world, discussed in section 4 of this chapter).

The main actors during the wedding celebrations are the *lāngmi* (matchmakers), *khāmi* (ritual officiant), *guru* (shaman) and *syunduni* (ritual manager). The role of the *lāngmi* is to serve as envoys of the groom’s family, making several visits to the girl’s house to persuade her parents of the value of the match. Only once they are satisfied can the marriage be arranged and the rituals proceed. *Khāmi* is a term reserved to refer exclusively to the *guru* who is commissioned by the groom’s family to serve as chief officiant at a wedding ritual – although the same individual may also be a *guru* who conducts funerary and curative rites, other titles are used to refer to him in those contexts. The *khāmi*, as chief officiant, is usually joined by several other *guru* who play supporting roles. The night before the final day of the wedding, the *guru* propitiates the household lineage deity and then calls upon various territorial deities who must all be satisfied. The *guru* then asks the deities to ensure that the groom is successful in his future work and life, and the *khāmi* explains the purpose and meaning of the various rites to the community who are gathered as guests and witnesses, including key members of both the groom’s and bride’s families. The role of the *syunduni* is to prepare all of the necessary ritual materials and to ensure that the guests and participants are shown an appropriate degree of hospitality.

We cannot present all sections of the ritual sequence here due to limitations of space, but are working to publish the full set of texts in the future. Here we focus on four principal sections: 1. *sagun thoṭko*, 2. *cārdām*, 3. *senevā*, and 4. *kholādāpla*. These ritual components contain crucial narrative sequences that help inform and shape our understandings of the entire Thangmi wedding ritual complex, and hint at why certain acts must be performed as they are. They also highlight several lyrical turns of phrase that demonstrate the metaphorical flexibility of the Thangmi language. These sections are thus a rich basis for analysis in both cultural and linguistic terms: by studying them closely, we can begin to see how Thangmi wedding rituals work as a technique of cultural reproduction, as well as how the Thangmi language itself embeds key cultural orientations, understandings and values.

Rather than offering putative generalizations about the content of ‘Thangmi wedding rituals’, which are of course conducted in greatly divergent ways depending on the officiant and locale, here we present excerpts from one actual ritual event as recorded in Suspā-Kshamawati VDC, Dolakhā, Nepal.

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3 Following Gaenszle’s discussion (2010), this is an *in situ* performance, but our interpretation of it also benefited from an *in vitro* performance by the same *guru*, as well as multiple elicited descriptions from a range of Thangmi community members, who narrated the ritual in its ideally imagined form.
translation (in Nepali and English) of the oral recitations of the khāmi and guru at the final wedding rituals of Ram Jivan and Sangita Thami, which took place on 29–30 January, 2005. Serving as khāmi, the chief officiant was Lalit Bahadur (locally known as Maila Guru), with additional participation from the guru Bal Krishna, Dhal Bahadur and Chitra Bahadur.

In consultation with Thangmi cultural activists and indigenous intellectuals, we have chosen to render both the original Thangmi and the Nepali translation in Devanāgarī, the abugida or alphasyllabary used by Nepali, Hindi and many other South Asian languages. While at first glance this may appear somewhat unusual, our decision has a number of interrelated motives. First, although Thangmi is a Tibeto-Burman language and thus genetically unrelated to Nepali, its phonological inventory can be very well represented by the character palate of the Devanāgarī script (Turin 2012: chapter 3). In other words, it is surprisingly easy to write Thangmi in the Nepali script.

Second, during the period that we have worked in partnership with the community over the past two decades to document and support the revitalization of the Thangmi language and the cultural traditions that it encodes, community members have expressed a growing desire to see their language represented in a writing system that they can read. As the script used by the national language, Nepali, and the writing system in which almost all literate activity in the region is conducted, Devanāgarī was the preferred community choice for a Thangmi orthography. Other options included Tibetan (impractical for many reasons) or the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which although accessible to outside linguists and scholars was perceived to be yet another form of alienation from their own language for the already highly marginalized Thangmi community. For these reasons, we believe that using the Devanāgarī script is an act of inclusion that will widen access to the material contained in this contribution, presenting it in a form that Thangmi scholars – who increasingly read all that is written about their culture – will see themselves in and be well positioned to engage with and critique.

The bore pāloke are primarily carried out in vernacular, everyday Thangmi. Certain Nepali loan words and phrases are widely used, and we have not attempted to ‘correct’ such usages nor are they marked in the Thangmi text. Other terms and phrasings derive from an elevated ritual register of Thangmi, which includes specialised lexical terms for many specific ritual items which have alternative names in the daily vernacular.

The materials presented here have been prepared for publication through a collaborative process of research and consultation that has involved many members of the Thangmi community. The recordings were transcribed by Bir Bahadur Thami who then worked with Hikmat Khadka and Sara Shneiderman to produce the initial Nepali and English translations. Mark Turin then worked to harmonize all three languages and ensure accuracy. We sought additional input from Maila Guru himself at several points in the translation process, as well as corroborations from other guru and community members in both

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4 The Thangmi were classified as one of 14 ‘highly marginalized janajati’ (HMJ) in a 2004 rubric promoted by the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN). See Shneiderman (2013) for details.
In late 2009, Shneiderman and Thami presented drafts of the translation to diverse members of the community in consultation workshops in Kathmandu and Darjeeling. Approximately 150 attendees between both events offered written and oral comments on the textual presentation, in response to which we have made several substantive and stylistic changes. However, we have remained faithful to representing the text as it was recited by Maila Guru at the original event in January 2005, with repetitions and Nepali loans included even when there may have been appropriate Thangmi words that could have been substituted in some instances. What follows should therefore be understood as excerpts of the bore pāloke in practice as recited by a specific guru at a specific place and time. It is not intended to promote a standardized or “scripturalized” (Gaenszle 2011) ideal form of the bore pāloke, and should be read in conjunction with other recent publications that present Thangmi ritual texts (NTUS 2069 vs [2012–13]), as well as recent publications by community members that describe their sociocultural context (Thami and Thami 2069 vs [2012–13]; Gurung and Thami 2014). By presenting the recitations in the original Thangmi, with Nepali and English translations immediately following, we have aimed to provide a resource which may be of interest and use to members of the Thangmi community themselves, as well as to scholars.

The latter audience may also be interested in a discussion of comparative aspects in relation to existing research about wedding rituals in the Kiranti communities of eastern Nepal. For instance, Nick Allen’s 1987 article about Thulung weddings describes nine ritual elements, several of which appear to be cognate with elements of the Thangmi ritual as described here. Allen sets out to understand which ones have become “Hinduised” (Allen 1987), as a means of making sense of the ritual cycle’s “apparent incoherence” (1987: 25). At first glance, the Thangmi wedding ritual cycle might be seen as similarly elaborate and difficult to parse in a linear, episodic fashion. However, Allen ultimately concludes that “the Hindu-tribal dichotomy provides a model that is exceedingly crude” (1987: 33), and therefore inadequate for understanding the complexity of actual Thulung practices. Rather, the Thulung wedding ritual cycle moves in multiple directions at once, both Hinduising and indigenising ritual elements and ritual participants at the same time.

While the scholarly debate over “Hinduisation” has developed significantly in the decades since Allen wrote (see for instance Fisher 2001), such that we as non-Indigenous scholars no longer feel compelled to identify which elements are “Hindu” and which are “tribal” in such a diagnostic manner, Thangmi community members themselves remain concerned with such questions. For this reason, placing the Thangmi ritual as recounted here in conversation with Allen’s piece, as well as Gaenszle’s (2010) description of ceremonial wedding dialogues among the Mewahang Rai, will help generate deeper understanding of both shared non-Hindu ritual substrates, and different trajectories of adaptation to the encounter with the Hindu state. Areas of overlap between the three wedding traditions (Thangmi as described here; Thulung as described by Allen; and Mewahang as described by Gaenszle), include the dialogic exchange between the “wife-takers” and the

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5 See Shneiderman (2014) for further considerations of how these different perspectives shape understandings of ethnicity in a broader sense.
“wife-givers”, in which the former party displays exaggerated modesty and the latter feigns ignorance; and the distribution of meat among several recognized social groups that taken together are deemed to comprise the “whole” of the community.

The ritual context
The full Thangmi wedding ritual cycle and its cultural import is described in detail elsewhere (Shneiderman 2015: Chapter 7; Gurung and Thami 2014). Here we offer just a few notes to set the recitations excerpted below in context.

Marriage rituals are at once central to the reproduction of Thangmi ethnic identity, and a highly flexible form which has shifted significantly over time. Historically many Thangmi couples did not wed until they had children, or even until their own children were grown and prepared for marriage themselves. In recent decades this practice, often called buddho biha, or “old-aged wedding” in Nepali, has become unpopular, and most Thangmi now wed in their late teens or early twenties.

Although always officiated by Thangmi guru and khami, weddings are one of the sites where the influence of dominant hill Nepali Hindu culture on Thangmi cultural practice is most evident. In the 1940s, during the last years of Rana rule in Nepal, many Thangmi families consciously attempted to remove some of the elements of their wedding ritual deemed “impure” in caste Hindu terms: most notably, the offering of a bovine leg by the bride’s family to the groom’s to indicate their acceptance of the marriage offer. Today there is a strong awareness of how marriage rituals have been altered over time, and a desire among many Thangmi community members to return to what they imagine as “authentic practices.” However, given the lack of a written tradition or other forms of textual documentation until relatively recently, it is difficult to know precisely what such a return might mean. Since the resultant cultural politics and their present day impact are described elsewhere (Shneiderman 2015: 212-214), here we simply note that the lines below referring to a goat’s carcass would most likely have instead referred to various cuts of beef prior to the 1940s. Other elements of the recitation may also have shifted significantly over time, but once again it is difficult to pinpoint such transformations in the absence of any prior detailed documentation of Thangmi ritual practice. As Allen astutely states, “The anthropologist who attempts to set his field material from a non-literate society within a diachronic framework risks being excessively speculative” (Allen 1987: 32).

Despite these changes, we can see how the recitations offered below present a template for Thangmi cultural reproduction over time by instantiating a clear sense of belonging and ethnic boundedness. References to the seven clans and their required presence demonstrate how wedding rituals serve to bring disparate branches of the Thangmi community together to reaffirm their solidarity through the union of each couple. For their part, the individual bride and groom are also “inducted” as fully adult members of the Thangmi community through the process of becoming temporally and spatially specific subjects of these recitations which themselves are repeated in more or less the same format – albeit with individualized stylistic shifts unique to each officiant – each and every time a young couple wed.
After the lāngmi khutāme, or confirmation of the bride’s acceptance, which takes place at her house, all other ritual sections usually take place at the groom’s house. After the bride’s family accepts, gifts are exchanged through a ritual sequence known as sāuti (ko-seli in Nepali). Once these exchanges are completed, the wedding itself may take place at any time. The timeframe for this is highly flexible, however. Historically, as noted above, once these preliminaries were completed, in many cases the actual wedding was not held until the couple’s children themselves were old enough to wed. In recent years, this has become less common, and weddings are often held within one to two years after the lāngmi khutāme and sāuti take place. Wedding dates are usually set after consulting the Nepali astrological calendar, which designates only a limited range of dates as auspicious for weddings. These must be calibrated with the agrarian cycle to choose a time when all of the key actors are available, and may also be shaped by other factors such as recent deaths in either family (which would delay the ritual for a period of one year due to a pollution taboo). Occasionally the process is speeded up further, for instance in cases where the groom is due to migrate abroad for work. There is no standard timeline, and each couple’s experience varies due to individual, familial and community factors. For instance, during especially tense phases of the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) some weddings were delayed due to emergency-era restrictions that prohibited large outdoor gatherings from taking place; however, the preliminaries could be completed as these take place behind closed doors in the couple’s homes.

The first set of recitations involves propitiating lineage and territorial deities in the deva sāng recitations. These are long lists of deities and place names, many of them specific to the locality in which the wedding is being conducted. The deva sāng recitations are comparable to those that initiate any other Thangmi life cycle ritual (such as funerary rites) or household deity propitiation, and for that reason, we have selected to not include them here.

1. Sagun thot.ko (Consecration of the ritual alcohol offering)

Instead we come directly to the sagun thot.ko recitations. By this time in the ritual sequence, it is late at night, and all of the deities have been propitiated and are present in the indoor domestic space of the groom’s house. Each holding a bāldāne leaf while incense is lit on a flat wicker nanglo tray that holds several flour effigies of the deities (pucyuk), the guru chant to consecrate the bowls of grain beer that have been presented to them by the groom’s family. The deities are requested to activate and “move” the powers immanent in the natural and social world around them. Sagun (a multifacted term of Nepali origin that is often used in wedding sequences, including among the Newar and the Mewahang Rai) is a ritual offering of grain beer (called rem in Thangmi ritual language, tong in vernacular Thangmi, jād in Nepali), and thot.ko refers to its consecration. The line numbers in the examples in this article reference the line numbers of the entire original text in order to facilitate easy cross referencing with the complete forthcoming publication. The missing line numbers will indicate to readers the length of the sections that we have not included in this article due to limitations of space.
Thangmi

34 Jatamāsiyey māsāalāndu sādāho, thalāsūchīyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
35 Gaurāvatiyey, sāmāranthak, sāmādhūriyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
36 Lāntikīchālā hūndawalāyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
37 Lāntikīchālā hāyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
38 Samākochtī bānchāyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
39 Sāra ḍukūndey jatāmāsīyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
40 Dūrāsādākore ḍukūndey sālāudhūlīyey māsāalāndu sādāho, gokuludhūlīyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
41 Antārādātūke ḍukūndey nāna pātiyey bharāhūthūlīyey māsāalāndu sādāho.
42 Tāmil khundūkore sārīsūkpaey māsāalāndu sādāho sānbe pāraṅthārī nānbe.
43 Ko dēwāsāyey māsāalāndu sādāho.

Nepali

34 Jatūthūchīlē nāchālācō chalāow, tīchūlīlē nāchālācō chalāow.
35 Gūthmaṭāle, sāmūshak, sāmūdhūlītē nāchālācō chalāow.
36 Gāṁkā khulō nāchālācō chalāow, khulō nāchālācō chalāow.
37 Dūlo bārakākore dēinterpre tē nāchālācō chalāow.
38 Sāra bhānālō nāchālācō chalāow.
39 Lāntikī bāharekhiyey jatāmāsīlē nāchālācō chalāow.
40 Dūra sālāudhūlītē nāchālācō chalāow, gokuludhūlītē nāchālācō chalāow.
41 Bīch ḍukūndey bāharekhiyey nānāpārītē, bhaṛumāpārītē nāchālācō chalāow.
42 Tāmil khundūkore sārīsūkpaey nāchālācō chalāow ānbe pāraṅthārī abāt.
43 Yo dēwātākore bhāma nāchālācō chalāow.

English

34 Move the unmoved with the sacred water, move the unmoved with the sacred earth.
35 Move the unmoved with the household’s mother deity, the planet Venus, or the rooftop beam.
36 Move the unmoved with stalks of dry wheat or by the leaf of the brown oak.
37 Move the unmoved with the big door.
38 Move the unmoved with the bamboo strips that bind together the beams of the house.
39 If you are in the high pastures, move the unmoved with the jatāmāsī bush.
40 If you are in the low pastures, move the unmoved with the incense of the sāl tree or by the incense of the gokul plant.
41 If you are in the middle pastures, move the unmoved with various other plants and by the bhairum leaf.
42 Move the unmoved with the incense of saurisukpā from the Timāl region, oh parmesvari.
43 Now move the unmoved with the divine congregation.
While the purpose of this chapter is to focus the reader’s attention on the narrative flow, and not to offer an interlinear analysis, we should highlight at the outset that the Thangmi ritual register is replete with loans from Nepali, Newar and even Sanskrit elements and morphemes. The *jal-thal* binary of the opening line (No. 34), with evident Sanskrit roots, can be understood in a number of ways, indicating water and land respectively, or meaning marshy land if read as a combined element. It is quite common for loan words to have a different, even more metaphorical meaning from that of their original linguistic context. The recitation continues with an additional invocation of unmoveability:

**Thangmi** थाङ्गः  
44 धनसभा मासाइनादु साडो।  
45 ईतरबीये मासाइनादु साडो।  
46 लोइकः मासाइनादु साडो।  
47 नान्चे का सुनाम्वी, गोलाबम्बी मासाइनादु साडो परमेश्वर।  
48 का बे मे के बान्दाले कि चे बान्दाले का नान्चे मासाइनादु साडो।  
49 आल्ताआवार, पाल्ताआवार मासाइनादु साडो।  
50 भयामसी मासाइनादु साडो सै परमेश्वर।  
51 दुदुकवा, सिङ्का न्याय मासाइनादु साडो।  
52 मासाइनादु साडो नान्चे।  
53 का नान्चे का जलेश्वर, कालेश्वर, बिसुनी, बिवश्वर देवा सै परमेश्वर।

**Nepali** नेपाली  
44 धनसभा नचलएको चलाउ।  
45 ईतरवाचले नचलएको चलाउ।  
46 लोइकः नचलएको चलाउ।  
47 अब त यो सुनाबम्बी, गोलाबम्बी नचलएको चलाउ परमेश्वर।  
48 यो त सानो र टूलो सोटलाले नचलएको चलाउ।  
49 भुईमा जम्मा गर्नको र पतामा राखको देबताले नचलएको चलाउ।  
50 टुलो मार्सीले नचलएको चलाउ है परमेश्वर।  
51 दुदुकवा, सिङ्का बाले नचलएको चलाउ।  
52 नचलएको चलाउ अब त।  
53 यो अब त यो जलेश्वर, कालेश्वर, बिसुनी, बिवश्वर देबता है परमेश्वर।

**English**  
44 Move the unmoved with the ritual offerings.  
45 Move the unmoved with *itar* lamps.  
46 Move the unmoved with the large lamps.  
47 Now *parmesvari*, move the unmoved with the *sunābarmi* or the *golābarmi*.  
48 Move the unmoved with the small and large *ṭotālā* flower.  
49 Move the unmoved with the deities gathered on the floor and on the leaves.
50 Move the unmoved with the mārsi variety of unhusked rice, oh parmesvari.

51 Move the unmoved with the nibāro leaf and the paiyū leaf.

52 Now move the unmoved.

53 Now [we call upon the] deities jalesvar, kā̃sesvar, bisuni and bisvakarmā, oh parmesvari.

At this point, the guru begins to invoke specific territorial deities:

_Thangmi_ थाङमी

54 Simāngghāt kumāngghāt बाङ्ग्राहु देवाः: हाईदिङ्ग्राहु, हुईदिङ्ग्राहु, साङ्गुङ्ग्राहु, न्युटाटीको देवा, सुने गुहुङ्ग्राहु देवा।

55 देउराक्सा, देउटाकको देवा, सुनेठुङ्ग्राहुको देवा, सिमेलार्बाको देवा स्थायीलाइ जाँ।

56 कमारु देशवाट कमाङ्गुङ्ग देवा स्थायी।

57 आहा गोजुङ्ग्राहुको ठिमेले, ओहो गोजुङ्ग्राहुको ठिमेले, बाङ्ग्राहु देवा नाड, का मेकेलार्बाको देवा, सिमेलार्बाको देवा, ह परमेश्वरी।

58 का माई देवा, का खोकको देवा, ठूलो टोटलाको देवा, च्युकङ्ग्राहु देवा, गोखाङ्ग्राहु देवा, याङ्ग्राहु देवा, गोठलाएको देवा, परमेश्वरा का सांडा सो।

_Nepali_ नेपाली

54 Simāngghāt kumāngghāt आएको देवता: हाईदिङ्ग्राहु, हुईदिङ्ग्राहु, साङ्गुङ्ग्राहु, न्युटाटीको देवता हो, सुने गुहुङ्ग्राहुको देवा।

55 मालाको देवाः, ठाटा किरोको देवाः, ठूलो टोटलाको देवताहुङ्ग्राहु नचलाएको चलाउँ।

56 कमारु देशवाट कमाङ्गुङ्ग देवता है देवता।

57 आहा गोजुङ्ग्राहुको ठिमेले, ओहो गोजुङ्ग्राहुको ठिमेले, आएको देवता, तिमी थूङ्ग्राहु टोटलाको देवता, सानो टोटलाको देवता, हे परमेश्वरी।

58 यो माई देवता, यो खोकको देवता, ठाटो छुङ्ग्राहु को देवता, च्युकङ्ग्राहु देवता, गोखाङ्ग्राहु देवता, याङ्ग्राहु देवता, गोठलाको देवता, परमेश्वरा यो सच ठाउँको देवताहुङ्ग्राहु चल।

_English_

54 Now [we call upon] the deities who came from Simāngghāt and Kumāngghāt: hāidingmā, huidingmā, sanggungmā, the deity nyuṭāti, and the deity sunai gunggung.

55 Make active the deities of the rāksā rosary, the deity of the one-sided drum, the deity of the two-sided drum, and the deity of the large toatal tree.

56 Now we call upon the deity kamākshanu, from the place called Kamāru.

57 Aha, you deities who have come from Thime of gorjumā, oh you deities who have come from Thime of gorjumā, this deity of the large toatal, deity of the small toatal, oh parmesvari.

58 The māi deities of the deep places, the deity of the tall road-blocking stone, the deity cyurkummacā, the deity gorkhāmacā, the deity of the senior-most household, the deity of the animal shelter, oh parmesvari, all you deities must move.
In this section, we have seen how the congregation of deities is called upon to activate, animate and enliven the environment around them, coming to inhabit various domestic spaces such as “the rooftop beam” and the “big door.” The “road-blocking stone” refers to the bampa, or hearthstone that is the single unique feature of Thangmi domestic design (see Shneiderman 2015: Chapter 4). Some deities bear names that will be familiar to those accustomed to the Hindu pantheon, such as bisvakarmā and parmesvari. Others are territorial deities, such as hāidingmā, huidingmā, sanggungmā, gorjumā, cyurkunmācā, gorkhāmācā. In most Thangmi rituals, such deities reside together in a synthetic space, where the notion of “Hindu”, “Buddhist” or “Thangmi” deities as separate categories holds little relevance or appeal to community members. Rather, these are all of the deities with whom Thangmi guru have established lines of communication, and all of them must be present to comprise the quorum necessary to conduct a wedding.

Key locations are also mentioned, notably Simāngghāt, another name for Simraungadh. This is a town along the contemporary Indian-Nepali Tarai border, to which Thangmi origin myths trace one line of descent. It is generally understood by community members that the territorial deities currently residing in Thangmi areas of Nepal’s hills were brought by the original Thangmi settlers Yāpati Chuku and Sunāri Āji (also known as Ya’apa and Sunari Ama) from Simraungadh.

This story is recounted in detail in the next section of the wedding ritual, the deupāloke. The myth of Yāpati Chuku and Sunāri Āji can be read elsewhere (Shneiderman 2015: Chapters 3 and 6; Shneiderman and Turin 2006: pp. 145–162; Turin 2012: pp. 108–115), so we have not included these recitations here.

The next three phases of the ritual sequence are cyurkunko bhākā, sākhi and sārmāko bhākā. Cyurkun is a deity that resides in outdoor animal shelters, or goth, and the propitiation of this deity extends the consecrated space from the human world inside the house to the domain of livestock beyond those four walls. Maila Guru’s recitation at Ram Jivan and Sangita’s wedding includes this propitiation of cyurkun, but the particular deity invoked at this stage in the ritual process can vary depending upon the clan lineage of the groom, in whose house the ritual takes place; in another household the guru might call upon sun-dravati or gate at this point in the recitation instead. During the sākhi, a brief narrative is offered to recount how the ritual has proceeded until this point, and the deities are asked to ensure a clear passage from this point in the ritual sequence until its conclusion. The narrative description of the ritual is repeated in both the cârdām and senevā, as presented below. Sārmāko bhākā provides an interlude to placate the congregated deities; the focus shifts from the bride and groom to the deities themselves while the guru go into trance to commune directly with the presences gathered in the house. Āyu is a loan word from Nepali meaning “spirit” or “soul”. In this phase of the ritual, the groom’s āyu is examined and offered various gifts to increase the groom’s vitality and life essence. This ritual component has some parallels with Tibetan wang (dbang) rituals (Gerke 2012).
2. *Cārdām* (Agreement and consent to the match)

This brings us to heart of the ritual: the *cārdām*. Here the guru recount the ritual sequences through which they have arrived at this moment. Through a montage of reported speech, narrative description and offerings to the deities, the guru bring all ritual participants into the fold. Even those who have not been present at earlier ritual phases are now included as full participants by virtue of having listened to the *cārdām*. Through the process of articulating in detail how a wedding should be conducted, these recitations work to reproduce culturally specific knowledge that strengthens prospects for the ritual reproduction of Thangmi ethnic identity in the future. The recitation also portrays several details of day-to-day Thangmi life in a manner that is at once celebratory and self-deprecating. These contain a strong dose of humour, which works to keep participants engaged during long drawn out ritual sequences, while also objectifying in discursive terms several Thangmi identity markers, such as the *bampā*, the Himalayan nettle bag, and so forth.

We should note here that the *cārdām* reproduced below takes place during the final phase of the wedding ceremony. However, a shorter version of the same narrative is recited at the bride’s house before she departs for the final portion of the ritual at the groom’s home – her own home to be. In this manner, the final *cārdām* recitation at the groom’s house itself refers to the earlier *cārdām* that has already taken place at the bride’s house.

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**Thangmi** थाङ्गमी

486 साकालेई सेवा, थाङ्गमी जानलाई नमस्कार, मायामाइती पिन नमस्कार, गुरुमाइती पिन नमस्कार, गोरेनाङ्गेरे सेवा।
487 पादते सेवा, तु थोपानाऐदु बई सेवा।
488 निको जरिको मुनारो थुलीबुली लाडी बई दैकाउनो, बुलीबुली खामी बई दैकाउनो।
489 दैकाउदु कारणबादु बेना टिलीलीइ तोइ बई दैकाउनो।
490 सुम्पा माणी बई दैकाउनो।
491 रोथोक मेन्चा बई दैकाउनो।
492 नानु मेस्नुको नेम्ने हेन्को मायान् यासीताले खाम लोयेङ्नो।

**Nepali** नेपाली

486 सबै जनालाई नमस्कार, माणी माइतीलाई पिन नमस्कार, गुरुहरूलाई पिन नमस्कार, नाङ्लोलाई पिन नमस्कार।
487 पादी, मासु पूर्नहृदलाई पिन नमस्कार।
488 हाम्रो बेहुलाले जानुको नजारे लम्बी पिन जम्मा गयो, जानुको नजारेको खामी पिन जम्मा गयो।
489 जम्मा गर्दूहुन्तो घूटोभाद जोड पिन जम्मा गयो।
490 तीन वटा रोटी पिन जम्मा गयो।
491 एउटा अल्लोको झोला पिन जम्मा गयो।
492 अनु बेहुलीको घरमा जानुपयो भनेर कुरा गरे।

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6 In the Thulung context, Allen notes the use of four ‘pice’ coins, termed ‘*cārdām*’, and cites R.L. Turner’s definition of the Nepali ‘*car dam*’ as ‘earnest money, any money or gift offered before purchase’ (Turner 1997[1931]: 172). Gaenszle (2000:56) also notes that the term is used in the context of landownership, as a new settler in the Mewahang area must give a symbolic ‘*cardam theki*’ to the village chief, a usage corroborated by McDougual (1979: 30).
English

486 Sevā to everyone; sevā also to the bride’s respected natal family; sevā also to the guru, sevā also to the bamboo winnowing tray.
487 Sevā as well to the flowers offered in the ritual and to all those who have received enough meat.
488 Our groom has brought the knowledgeable and ignorant matchmakers together, he has also brought the knowledgeable and ignorant khāmi together.
489 [The khāmi says:] After bringing together [the lāngmi and khāmi], he [the groom] also filled the clay pot with grain beer.
490 He also gathered together three pieces of bread.
491 He also collected one Himalayan nettle cloth bag.
492 Then they said that they had to go to the bride’s house.

Thangmi थाङ्गी

493 जरीये वे का लाङ्गी निस्काकारेको टिकी बढी लागाईलो।
494 “नानू निस्कुचाको नेम्ते हेँगो मायाम्” डालोले डायाउँ वेपाउँ वे दीका जाने वे रोयोक् मेन्चा ख्यासीयान्।
495 दिका बाणे वे टिलीलीड तोइङ्ढु ख्यासीईन्।
496 दिका माणी चुम्सिलास् याहान्।
497 निस्कुचाको नेम्ते यापेडान्।
498 वैलोले यादास्ले ख्यासूख्याङ्ढ ईसेपेडान्।
499 “लौङ्छ का सु मिने ख्यालर कस्थो मिथ्नै के लान्?” ईसीताले।
500 पापासीलापाटे, मामासीलापाटे “लौङ्छ निको वे का मेन्चा लाङ्गीहरा लोडङ्छ कुनिङ्छ लोडङ्छ? ” ईसीतु कारणाङ्ढ वे लोइ खाणोउ बढी टाङ्चा हेनेङ्नो।
501 थेम्बा बढः उखातोले नाहुनो।
502 का बढःने कोन्टे बढः झोल्चा हेनेङ्नो।
503 खाणोउ टाङ्चालोले वे मजःरको छःउते होक्योडान्।

Nepali नेपाली

493 बेहुलाको बाबुले दुई जना लमीलाईटीका पनिलगाए।
494 “अब बेहुलाको बाबुआमाको घरमा जाउप्पर्” भनेर एक जना साथीलेअल्लोको झोलाभियो।
495 एक जना साथीले व हैलोमा जाँड पनि बाँक्यो।
496 एउटा रोटी पनिसमाएर गए।
497 बेहुलाको बाबुआमाको घरमा गए।
498 वैलोमा गार्ँख्याङ्ढ गरेल।
499 “लौङ्छ यो को मान्छे आयो, कस्थो मान्छे आयो?” भनेर।
500 बेहुलाको बाबुआमाको “लौङ्छ हामाँ त जो बेहुलालाई के गरौं, कस्थो गरौं?” भनेर ठोका पनिउघादे लगे।
501 संघारलाई पनिनमस्कार गरेल।
The groom’s father also offered tikā to two of the matchmakers. Saying, “Now we must go to the bride’s parents’ house,” one friend slung the Himalayan nettle bag over his shoulder. Another friend carried a clay pot of grain beer. They also carried one piece of bread. They went to the bride’s parents’ house. At the door, they made a lot of noise. “Oh! Who has come, what kind of people have come?” they [the bride’s parents] wondered. “What shall we do with our bride, and how shall we do it?” said the bride’s mother and father, as they slowly opened the door. They offered greetings to the threshold. Stepping in with their right foot first, they entered. Having opened the door, they sat down in the middle of the room.
English

504 Having sat down, [the bride’s parents] asked them, “Lau, now what shall we do, how shall we do it?” They [the match-makers] sat in silence.
505 “What have you come for, what brings you here?” they [the bride’s parents] asked.
506 “Oh, mother and father, we’ve come to trade cows and goats,” they said, “I need a healthy young female calf from your animal shelter.”
507 “But we have no young female calf,” they [the bride’s parents] said, “Oh, our purpose is to find a virgin,” they said.
508 The knowledgeable and ignorant matchmakers made faces like dogs.
509 The bride’s father shook a khukuri at them.
510 The bride’s mother shook a sickle at them.
511 The bride’s mother shook the stone cooking stove at them.

512 “Oh, what shall we do, how shall we do it?” they [the bride’s parents] said.
513 “Fine, you are responsible for the house.”
514 Having given them [the matchmakers] the responsibility, the bride’s father left the house.
515 One of the matchmakers stayed at the house.

Nepali नेपाली

512 “लौ, हारा लोङ्द्रो, कृनिङ्द्र लोङ्द्रो?” यासेयोङान्।
513 “लौ, निझाङ नेम्जिम्मा।”
514 जिम्मा लागावेङ्नो। पापसीलापाटे लेट्सा यासेयोङान्।
515 दिका लाङ्चीये नेम्लाहीउनो।
516 दिका लाङ्चीये लिङ्ची लिङ्ची याहान्।
517 रोथोक मेन्चा ब्याङ्चीसीताले सुम्भा माणाई साल्तोले नाहुनो।
518 दिका बाने लिङ्ची लिङ्ची पेया हेनुनो।
519 पेया हेनुदु कारणाङ्ङ बे उलाम नावासा याहान्। उलाम नावासा पोहुनो, उलाम कोताले याहान्।

English

512 “Oh, what shall we do, how shall we do it?” they [the bride’s parents] said.
513 “Fine, you are responsible for the house.”
514 Having given them [the matchmakers] the responsibility, the bride’s father left the house.
515 One of the matchmakers stayed at the house.
Another of the matchmakers followed him [the bride's father].

[The one who stayed in the house] hung a Himalayan nettle bag containing three pieces of bread [on the household bampā].

One friend had followed [the bride’s father].

He followed him, up he went, and down he went, following all the way.

Thangmi थाङ्नी

मेलोते याहान् मेलोते बई पोहुनो।
जामाते याहान् जामाते बई पोहुनो।
नगरीते याहान् नगरीते बई पोहुनो।
बोरेते याहान् बोरेते बई पोहुनो।
साबाते याहान् साबाते बई पोहुनो।
पोहुदु काराणाङ् वे जेखा सोहडो जेखा आलाकड़ा होक्योइताले वे खाम लोयेङ्नो।
आलाकको छुँउँ तो होकँहाले “लौ, खाम लोहडो” यासीन्।

Nepali नेपाली

मेलोमा गयो, मेलोमा पछाबयो।
जता पनि गयो, जता पनि पछाबयो।
बैठकमा गयो, बैठकमा पनि पछाबयो।
निम्हमा गयो, निम्हमा पनि पछाबयो।
सभामा गयो, सभामा पनि पछाबयो।
पछाउँदाखेिर तटो खोलाको टुलो सोवुमा बसेर कुरा गरेइ।
साँघको छुँउँ वबसेइ “लौ, कुरा गरनौ” भने।
चोया मुसाले चोया काटे जस्तै, थाम्पा मुसाले जमिन खने जस्तै कुरा गरेइ लगे।

English

He [the bride’s father] went to do communal work in fields, he [the matchmaker] followed him there.

Wherever he [the bride’s father] went, he [the matchmaker] followed.

When he [the bride’s father] went to a meeting, he [the matchmaker] followed him to the meeting.

When he [the bride’s father] went to a wedding, he [the matchmaker] followed him to the wedding.

When he [the bride’s father] went to a gathering, he [the matchmaker] followed him to that gathering.

Following along, they sat on a big bridge by a large river, and talked.

Sitting by that bridge, they said, “Alright, let’s talk.”

Like a bamboo mouse cutting bamboo, and like a thāmpā mouse scratching at the earth, they [slowly] began to talk.
Like a fish cutting through water, they cut through the conversation. So, he [the matchmaker] managed to convince him [the father of the bride] to return home. Bringing him [the father] back, they found that the other friend had burned the household rice-husking foot-mortar and quern as though they were a śivadhuni (a sacred fire made by Hindu ascetics). “Lau, now let's have a talk at home,” they said. “Let's talk about the engagement gifts,” they said, “Lau, father and mother, now we must call together the bride's paternal relatives.” “We must call together the bride's maternal relatives,” they [the bride's parents] said. The natal household came together.
The metaphorical allusions contained in the previous section attest to the poetic richness of the Thangmi language. “Like a mouse cutting bamboo,” “like a fish cutting through water,” and “like an eagle lying in wait for a chicken,” are the ways that the matchmakers finally cajole the bride’s parents to sit down for what eventually becomes “a good conversation”. Present at that conversation are seven clan representatives, and “seven from each village”. These double sevens refer to the fact that the Thangmi historically maintained a system of parallel descent – meaning that there are seven female as well as seven male clans, and girls receive their clan identity from their mothers, while boys inherit from their fathers.
The Thangmi forefather and foremother, Yāpati Chuku and Sunāri Āji, had seven sons and seven daughters, who were compelled to marry each other due to the lack of any other suitable partners. Both the male and female clan names were bestowed upon them by their parents during their joint marriage ceremony (see Turin 1999, Shneiderman and Turin 2006, and Shneiderman 2015: Chapter 7 for further details). While in contemporary practice the female clans are falling into disuse for reasons that we cannot explore in depth here, Thangmi universally see their heritage of parallel descent as a crucial identity marker as it distinguishes them clearly from other janajātī groups (Shneiderman 2015: Chapter 7).

In this recitation, the “seven from each village” refers to members of each male clan, since Thangmi origin myths state that each of the large Thangmi villages in Dolakha was settled after one of the sons shot his arrow there, while the “seven representatives” refers to the female clans. In practice, there is not always a representative of each clan at each wedding ritual, but representatives of as many different clans as possible are always sought.

**Thangmi थाङ्गमी**

545  “माझीकामछुकि?”
546  यासीदु काराणाङ्बे माझीकाम बई मानीतावान्।
547  धनगाल बई मानीतावान्।
548  साउगाल बई मानीतावान्।
549  निरोङ्टोकेको बोसिङ्टोकेको, बिक रा होक्दु?
550  यासीदु काराणाङ्बे का निरोङ्टोकेको, बोसिङ्टोकेको मानीतावान्। यासीदु काराणाङ्बे, का हारा बई मानीवान्।
551  “नान् का चारदामको भाका लोङ्” यासीदु काराणाङ्बे चारदामको भाका बई लोङ्नो।
552  का नगरी होताले “का आसास्युन्दुरी बई लोङ् मायान्” यासीदु काराणाङ्बे आसास्युन्दुरीको भाका लोङ्तोले, बुलबुली खामी नातोले, का बुलबुली लाण्डी नाहुनो। चार नस्ता बई नाहुनो।

**Nepali नेपाली**

545  “माझी काम छु कि?”
546  भन्ने कारणमा त माझी काम पनि देखेनौ।
547  धनगाल पनि देखेनौ।
548  साउगाल पनि देखेनौ।
549  तिब्री नगरमा निरोङ्टोको बटुको, उतसिको बटुको बिष छु कि?
550  छ भन्ने कारणमा त निरोङ्टोको बटुको, उतसिको बटुको देखेनौ भन्ने कारणमा त यो केही पनि देखेनौ।
551  “अब यो चारदामको भाका गरौ” भनेपछि त चारदामको भाका पनि गरौ।
552  यो नगरी बिरो “यो आसास्युन्दुरी पनि गनुङ्नुहो” भन्ने कारणमा त आसास्युन्दुरी भाका गरौ, जान्ने नजान्ने खामी राखेछ, यो जात्रे नजान्ने लम्बी राखेछ। चार नस्ता पनि राख्यो।
“Is there fishing to be done?”
Meaning to say, we didn’t see any fishing.
We also didn’t see any wealth.
We also didn’t see a rich man.
Are there bowls of nirong, bowls of alder, and poison in your house?
Meaning to say, we didn’t see nirongtoke and bosingtoke, that’s to say, we didn’t see anything.
“Now let’s recite the ritual melody of the cārdām,” they said, and with that they recited the melody of the cārdām.
With these representatives sitting here, “We must perform the āsāsyunduri ritual,” meaning to say, having recited the melody of āsāsyunduri, and having gathered the knowledgeable and ignorant khāmi, they summoned the knowledgeable and ignorant matchmakers; they also summoned the four nastā [representatives].

Thangmi थाङ्गमी

Nepali नेपाली
553 Now [they performed the] melody of the khuitung.
554 Like a crowd made up of all the people in the entire world, they crowded around our groom.
555 Like the wind surrounding a huge tree, they surrounded him.
556 They crowded around as bees would crowd around a cliff.
557 They all crowded around our [groom].
558 On green pastures, they were like a white congregation.
559 Having congregated, our business is finished.
560 With three pāthi of beaten rice, and three pāthi of husked rice, he also sang the melody of the nidākhāri.
561 He also sang our melody of the cenemāt.
562 Sevā to the winnowing tray and to all those of the respected natal household.

3. Senevā (Ritual transformation: the bride’s funerary rites and rebirth)
After the cārdām is completed, another sagun thotko interlude repeats very closely the section reproduced above. We then move on to the senevā, the final phase of the ritual in which the transformation of marriage is actually effected via a mock funerary rite for the bride. This affirms that her previous identity as a member of her natal household has now passed, and she is reborn as a member of her husband’s household. For this recitation, a ṭutumbārāṅg (wedding tent) is constructed in the front yard of the groom’s house. Various items, such as the goat’s meat, are stored there.

This ritual sequence is described as a “meeting”, during which all those who worked hard over the course of the ritual cycle (which may take several years) are rewarded. For instance, the khāmi does a lot of talking during the wedding, so he is given the tongue of the goat carcass. The groom’s mother gets the chest of the goat carcass for breastfeeding him when he was little. The lãngmi spends a long time walking in order to find the right match for the groom, so he gets the legs of the goat carcass. Also during the senevā, the bride and the groom are seated together for the first time, and the khāmi gives them advice about their future. The seneva picks up the narrative where the cārdām left off, and then describes in detail the ritual sequence as it takes place.
Nepali

618 हायो अब यो पहिला चारदामको रीति खायो।
619 अब यो वेघालको घरमा चाहें चाँदो छेकै।
620 यो सेनेवाको रीति जाने पनि नजाने पनि बस्तुपयों।
621 यहांको सामान जम्मा गर्नु पयो।
622 लौ, यहांको जौड छालने को छू?
623 जौड छालने यहांको सामान ल्याउ।
624 नाइलोमा दुई बटा पुच्छुक ल्याउ।
625 यहाँसम्म मात्रु ल्याउ।
626 छाती ल्याउ, पाँच बटा सप्तु मूल ल्याउ मात्रु गुरुलाई, मीटो जौड गुरुको स्वर खुल्नलाई।

English

618 Now, we have completed the first part of the cārdām ritual.
619 Then, at the groom's house, they blocked the path.
620 Whether we know it or not, we must carry out the senevā ritual.
621 We must gather together all of the necessary things here.
622 Lau, who here will help filter this grain beer?
623 Syunduni, bring all the things up here.
624 Bring two pucyuk effigies on a winnowing tray.
625 Bring the meat up here.
626 Bring the chest [of the goat carcass], bring five types of principal offerings: the main alcohol offering is for the guru, the delicious grain beer helps unleash his voice.

The syunduni mentioned in line 623 above is the person responsible for making and pouring the grain beer. Pucyuk are effigies made of mixed grain (usually rice, wheat or millet).

Thangmi

627 नान् निको माघली बई नाको।
628 सप्तु माथि कापु शिरखुर नाको।
629 लोंडोते दिमाना जाके, सेनेवाको दिमाना जाके, माघलीको दिमाना जाके, रु ५ पैसा, बुढामावलीको दिमाना जाके, रु ५ पैसा, बस्ती बई बालाइनो।

Nepali

627 अब हासो माघली पनि राखो।
628 सप्तू माथि टाउको शिरखुर पाखो।
629 छाती, एक माना चामल, सेनेवाको एक माना चामल, माघलीको एक माना चामल, रु ५ पैसा, बुढामावलीको एक माना, चामल रु ५ पैसा, बस्ती पनि राखल।
Now let’s seat our maternal relatives [of the groom].

Let us place the head and feet [of the carcass] on top of the alcohol offering.

The chest [of the carcass], one mānā of husked rice, one mānā of husked rice for the senevā, one mānā of husked rice for the maternal relatives, money worth five rupees, one mānā of husked rice for the mother’s menfolk, money worth five rupees; then light the lamp.

Now bring the oil mixed with grain beer.

Seat the bride and groom.

Seating them next to each other on the left and right, cover them with a shawl.

Now, with the bread made for the life essence ritual and twelve pāthī of fermented beer mash, stake posts in five places. Bury the cut branches of the wild cherry tree.

Using leaves of the sugarcane, make this ċuṭumbarāng (wedding tent).

Now we must perform the senevā.

At this point, Maila Guru interrupts his recitation to explain, “Now in order to perform the funerary rites for seven brothers: long ago, no matter how many children [were born], they all died, which is why we perform the funerary rites for seven brothers. It is said that long ago, our ancestors lived in Gomphā Āpok (Gompha Cave).”
After doing this, we will herd the groom inside.

In one large cooking pot [with rings on both sides], we put one pāthi of unhusked rice, one mānā of husked rice and one piece of gogan wood placed on the threshold.

We herd in five kinds of offerings, five ṭotāla flowers and the saimundro.

First we herd in the saimundro; after which we drive in the bride.

After leading the bride in, having placed five ṭotāla flowers, five lamps, and alcohol offerings, with the mother of the groom on one side [of the large pot with the rings], and the bride on the other, with the right foot first.
Now the bride and groom sit in the place where the senevā will be performed.

Then the alcohol offerings for the main officiant.

Along with the spines of banana leaves, and the bread with which the path was blocked, are needed.

Now we exorcise the funerary spirits of the seven brothers and seven sisters.

There is a saying that seven brothers married seven sisters.

After gathering together madavali and lokanti, some oil in a small wooden vessel and turmeric and leaves on a leaf plate, the ritual must commence.

Now the khāmi performs the ritual.

In order for him to speak without ceasing, grain beer must be given to the khāmi.
651 मासु पुरुनेलाई पनि नमस्कार, भन्ने कारणमा सबै जनालाई नमस्कार, यो त रघुवंश राजाले राखेको थियिँ।
652 पतियौंत राजाले राखेको रीटिन।
653 सात नस्ता, सात पगरी बसे।
654 अब सेनेबाको भाका गयो।
655 पाँच वटा सगुन पनि राखो, मूल मान्छेको सगुन पनि राखो।
656 यो मासु, च्यापु सबै विज राखियो।
657 यो सेनेबाको भाका।
658 बेहुलाको घरमा जानुपयै भनेर बेहुलाको घरबाट दुई जना लमी पटाउनलाई सिन्दूरको टिका पनि लगाईसी।

English
649 Sevā also to the winnowing tray.
650 Sevā to the congregation that has gathered.
651 Sevā also to those who have enough meat; meaning to say, greetings to all, this is a tradition started by the kings of the Raghu lineage.
652 This is a ritual started by King Patipati.
653 Seven representatives and seven important persons came together.
654 Then we affirmed the agreement of the senevā.8
655 Five kinds of offerings were made, the offering to the main officiant was also made.
656 This meat, the chin [of the carcass] and all of the required items were in position.
657 This is the agreement of the senevā.
658 In order for the two matchmakers to go from the groom’s house to the bride’s house, the groom even offered them a tikā [made of sindur].

Thangmi थाङ्गी
659 का राखी नगरी सात नस्ताङाङ् बुलीबुली लाठी निस्कावे का राखी मेस्मुचाको नेम्से याताले वे सिन्दूरको टिकी बढह लागाइसीयहीस्थल।
660 लौ, नान् राखी मेस्मुचाको नेम्से याताले बहादुरहर्दो लागाइसीयहीस्थल।
661 “सु मी हारामी केलानन्?”
662 यीसीताले लाठीये “लौ, नान् विच्छा पाराईन् राखी पिको मायानन्“ यीसीताले।
663 विका लाठीये किन्टक हेक्ताले लोकह्याणोउ टाङ्चा हेनुनो।
664 लोहकोडोबाउ दहिने कोर्टो ह्याठा हेनुनो।
665 मझीको छुटेहोकयोधान।
666 वाम्पाको मेस्मु छुटेहोकयोले वे “हारामी केलानु कुनिदु मी केलानु?“ इसीताले वे “लौ, हारा हरेत नेम्से केलानु कुनिदु जेते केलानन्?”
667 “लौ, निचे का स्थि व्यापारते केलीनु टुणि व्यापारते केलीनु” इसीदु कारणाङ्गे दुर्दोहु योहुनो टिकी लागाइसीयहीस्थल रसा।

8 Here the term bhaka is translated as ‘agreement’, which emphasizes the promissory aspect of the term as used in the senevā context. Elsewhere in this chapter we have translated bhaka as ‘melody’, which reflects Maila Guru and other key informants’ descriptions of the term.
The two knowledgeable and ignorant matchmakers went to the bride's house, where they received sindur tikā from seven representatives of the clans and seven representatives of the villages.

So then, they went to the bride's house and made a loud noise: khyāng-khyāng.

"Who has come? What kind of person has come?"

The matchmakers replied, "We are helpless, you must give us a torch."

Bringing a padlock, one of the matchmakers opened the door.

At the large door, they each put their right foot first.

They sat in the middle of the floor.

"Who has come? What kind of person has come? So, on what business have you come? What brings you here?"

They [the matchmakers] said, "Lau, we have come to trade cows, we have come to buy goats," meaning to say, they [the bride's parents] looked at their [the matchmakers'] faces and saw that they were wearing tikā.
668 “We have come for a virgin,” they said.  
669 “You must give us your virgin,” they said, meaning to say, [her parents] said,  
"Lau, we should not give our child," saying that, the father raised a khukuri.  
670 The mother shook her sickle.  
671 The father shook the stone cooking stove.  
672 The mother shook a piece of smoldering wood from the fire.  
673 The father and mother left the house.  
674 One of the friends stayed back at the house.  
675 The other friend went [with the parents].  
676 The friend who stayed behind hung up three flat breads.  
677 While he was hanging them up, the other friend went following behind [the parents].  
678 He followed behind them, up he went, and down he went, following all the way.

**Nepali**  
668 “हामी त कन्या अर्थमा आयौ” भन्यो।  
669 “तिमो कन्या दिनुयौ” भने भन्ने कारणमा त “लो हामो बाला दिनु हैढैन” भने कारणमा त बाबुले खुकुरी उचाइयो।  
670 आमाले कच्चया जपपणया।  
671 बाबुले चुलो जपपणया।  
672 आमाले अगल्टो जपपणया।  
673 बाबुआमा निस्कर गए।  
674 एक जना साहीले घर कुनौ।  
675 एक जना साही गयो।  
676 एक जना साही त बसेर तीन बटा रोटी झुण्डयायो।  
677 झुण्डयाउने कारणमा त एक जना साही पनि पछिपछियो गयो।  
678 बाटोमाथि गयो, बाटोमाथि पछ्यायो, बाटोमुनि गयो, बाटोमुनि पछ्यायो।  

**Thangmi**  
679 मेलोते याहान् मेलोते पोहनो।  
680 जामाते याहान् जामाते पोहनो।  
681 बोरेते याहान् बोरेते पोहनो।  
682 नगरीते याहान् नगरीते पोहनो।  
683 ईसीदु कारणाइ वे सोडी आलाकते होकाले फकाइचा वानु।  
684 खामु उनुमु उनिङ काटाइचा हेलु।
685  आम्चाने उनिखु चामेक कोटेदु उनिखु खामु काटाईचा हेनेङ्नो।
686  ईसीदु काराणाङ वे खिय खिय काटाईचा हेनुनो।

Nepali  nepali

679  मेलोमा गयो, मेलोमा पछायो।
680  जता पनि गयो, जता पनि पछायो।
681  बिहेमा गयो, बिहेमा पछायो।
682  नगरीमा गयो, नगरीमा पछायो।
683  भन्ने कारणमा त खेलाको सौंघुमा बसेर फकाेर लयायो।
684  धाम्पा मुसाले जस्तो कुरा काट्दै लयो।
685  चोया मुसाले चोया काटे जस्तो कुरा काट्दै लगे।
686  भन्ने कारणमा त माझाले पानी काटे जस्तो कुरा काट्दे लयो।

English

679  He even followed them to their communal work in the fields.
680  Wherever [they] went, he followed behind.
681  [They] went to a wedding, he followed behind.
682  [They] went to the representatives, he followed behind.
683  Meaning to say, they rested on a bridge over a river, and he brought them back home.
684  Like a thāmpā mouse, he cut through the conversation.
685  Like a bamboo mouse cutting bamboo, they cut through the conversation.
686  Meaning to say, like a fish cutting through water, he cut through the conversation.

Thangmi थाङ्मी

687  नेम्ने येग्नान।
688  नेम्ने दिका लाङीयेचे वे झडती जैंतो ज्योेँतोले नाखुतोले।
689  “हारा लोहो, कुनिधु लोहो?” नेम्ने होक्योग्नान।
690  “लौ, आपमाली” आकाको उनिध निस्खेन लोयेङ्नो।
691  “लौ, कोसीलीको भाका लोहो मायान्” यासीयोग्नान्।
692  “चारामको भाका वे नाखो नेम्ने वे” चारामको भाका लोयेङ्नो।
693  “नाखो नेम्ने हारा जेखा र निदु? रापा जेखा र निदु? आईकु चा जेखा र निदु? निरोहाटोके, बोसीडुटोके र निदु?”

Nepali  nepali

687  घरमा गए।
688  घरमा एउटा लमीले झिकीरेर भेले राखेछ।
689  “के गरी, कसरी गरी?” घरमा बसे।
690  “लौ, बाबुहुरू” सिरगिके जस्तो दुई अनुहार बनाए।
English

687 They went home.
688 At home, one of the matchmakers set fire to the rice-husking foot-mortar and quern.
689 “Lau, what shall we do? How shall we do it?” They sat down to have a talk.
690 “Alright, guys,” [the bride’s parents said]; the two [matchmakers] made faces like a deer.
691 “We must perform the melody of the koseli,” they said.
692 “[We must perform] the melody of the cārdām at your house,” so they performed the melody of the cārdām.
693 “Is there a big hāng in your house? Is the axe large? Is the khukuri large? Are there bowls made of nirong and alder [in your house]?” [asked the bride’s parents.]

Nepali

694 “हामीले बन्चरो ठूलो पिन देखेन्, राजा साहु पिन देखेन्” भन्ने।
695 यासीदु कारणमा तो लाई नान चारदामको भाका बढै लोरो।
696 चारदामको भाकापट भने खुईतुङ चेनेमाटीको भाका बढै लोरो।
697 “लौ, नाच्ने नेपाली भने ब्राह्मण उसिन राजा राणौ।”
698 हिरयो चौरमा सुकि लाई गरे।
699 खुईतुङ चेनेमाटीको भाकार राणौ नाहुने।
700 नानु सुचक जाके, सुचक फालीहरू, नाहुने।
701 छ्याहरामी का बढै याङै घिर्ने भनिन गर्ने।
702 का चामाईकाई किरिया सुनितोले का डामारीकाई पिनौ।
703 का सेनेवाको भाका लोरुनो।
704 सेनेवाको भाकार भने वुल्लुल्लु लाङ्घ्री नापैछन्।

Thangmi थाङ्ग्री

694 “निये रापा जेखा बढै मानी, राजागाल बढै मानी, साहगाल बढै मानी” यासीन्।
695 यासीदु कारणमा तो लाई नान चारदामको भाका बढै लोरो।
696 चारदामको भाकापट भने खुईतुङ चेनेमाटीको भाका बढै लोरो।
697 “लौ, नाच्ने नेपाली भने ब्राह्मण उसिन राजा राणौ।”
698 हिरयो चौरमा सुकि लाई गरे।
699 खुईतुङ चेनेमाटीको भाकार राणौ नाहुने।
700 नानु सुचक जाके, सुचक फालीहरू, नाहुने।
701 छ्याहरामी का बढै याङै घिर्ने भनिन गर्ने।
702 का चामाईकाई किरिया सुनितोले का डामारीकाई पिनौ।
703 का सेनेवाको भाका लोरुनो।
704 सेनेवाको भाकार भने वुल्लुल्लु लाङ्घ्री नापैछन्।
"We didn’t see a large axe; we also didn’t see a rich and powerful person [in the house],” he said.

Meaning to say, now they also performed the melody of the cārdām.

After the melody of the cārdām, they also performed the melody of the khuitung and cenemāti.

“Lau, they came and surrounded your house like bees,” [they said].

On green pastures, they talked happily.

[He] also offered a turban while performing the melodies of the khuitung and cenemāti.

Then [he] also offered three pāthi of husked rice and three pāthi of beaten rice.

From today, we have also untied [the bond of] salt.

Having exorcised this daughter, she has been given to our son-in-law.

This melody of the senevā was performed.

[They] brought together the knowledgeable and ignorant matchmakers for the agreement of the senevā.

The preceding stanza is where the ritual transformation of marriage actually takes place. Marriage is considered a symbolic death for the bride, whose spirit is ritually banished from her natal household with these lines. The “bond of salt” refers to the taboo in place during the funerary ritual sequence, or mumpra, during which the mourners may not eat salt. Here, by “untying” the bond of salt, the khāmi metaphorically pronounces the bride’s symbolic funerary rite complete. She is no longer a living member of her parents’ household as her spirit has been “exorcised” in its natal form, to be reanimated only after it has been transferred in this way to the groom’s household. There is no such essential transformation for the groom. This demonstrates that despite the system of parallel descent, the Thangmi must not be misunderstood as a “matrilineal” or “matriarchal” society. Rather, like most other Himalayan ethnic groups, they practice virilocal residence, where a new wife must formally be exorcised from her natal home and take up a new life in her husband’s home, although formally her clan affiliation remains the one she has inherited from her mother.

Thangmi थाङ्मी

बुलिबुली खामी नायेङ्नो।
बुलिबुली बमी नायेङ्नो।
बुलिबुली गोणेचा बई नायेङ्नो।
बुलिबुली मूल भी बई नायेङ्नो।
709 “What have you done up until this day, and how did you go about it?” [the guru said to the bride].

710 “The madyaūli must offer their sevā,” [ordered the khāmi].

711 [The khāmi] performed the melody and the recitation of āsāsyunduri.

712 “Now this bride must get to know the water spout,” [said the khāmi].

713 “She must also get to know the nagari.”

714 “She must divide one portion of cooked rice into two.”

715 “She must divide one piece of meat into two.”

Thangmi थाङ्गमी

“So, here, keep our child,” meaning to say, “so, from today, we have patched all the tears; we have sewn all that was unravelled; we have even brought the seven representatives and the seven villages and clans together; we have filled up that which was in short supply; [having done this,] we brought the performance of the senevā agreement to an end,” they said.

They brought together seven representatives.

“So, sevā as well to the knowledgeable and ignorant khāmi, sevā also to the knowledgeable and ignorant matchmakers, sevā also to the seven representatives and seven important persons, sevā also to those who have received enough meat, and sevā also to those who have enough leaves.”
This tradition was started by the Ratirati lineage and the King of the Patipati lineage.

This tradition was started by King Hāihāi.

This tradition was started by King Syusu.

This tradition was started by King Golmā.

Right then, now he has pretty much greeted everyone.

Sevā to our winnowing tray, to our friends and to all those gathered here.

The preceding passages demonstrate clearly how the Thangmi wedding ritual cycle works to reproduce ethnic identity writ large. As co-author Bir Bahadur Thami explained in reference to Maila Guru’s recitations at Ram Jivan and Sangita’s wedding, “Marriage is about bringing our community together. It’s about the bride and the groom and their families recognizing each other as pieces of the Thangmi jātī (ethnicity) and becoming whole” (field notes, January 30, 2005, as cited in Shneiderman 2014: 290). The ritual process works to patch “all the tears” and sew “all that was unravelled” in the social fabric, using the temporally and spatially specific occasion of two young people’s marriage to reaffirm the timeless, transcendent continuity of the ethnic collectivity as a whole. By offering sevā, or “service” to all members of the collectivity (as represented by the seven clan members), the gurus – and by association the deities – recognize each as an essential part of the whole. Ultimately the bride and groom must also offer such recognition (see below), to each other and each member of their extended families.

**Thangmi थाङ्गमी**

नेपाली

**Nepali नेपाली**
758 बेहुलाबेहुलीलाई नमस्कार गर्न लगाउनुपयो।
759 पहिला बेहुलाको आमा आऊ र बेहुलील तीन पटक नमस्कार गर।

**English**

752 Move the unmoved.
753 Move what has not been moved by bāsuki and bāsundhāri of the earthly realm.
754 The 33 million deities (tettīskot. ī) of the four directions, haricandra, gopicandra, siddhavān, bhagavān, bhagavati, we have completed that which we know how, oh parmesvara.
755 Os sālo, with the guru's alcohol offering.
756 Lau, we performed the sagun.
757 Now we must cut two pucyuk effigies in the middle and join them together again.
758 We must instruct the bride and groom to say sevā [to all those present].
759 First of all, come here, oh mother of the groom, and bride: say sevā to her thrice.

**Thangmi थाङमी**

760 बेहुलीये बेहुलाकाई सुम्फेरो सेवाको मायान।
761 बेहुलाको आमाकाई पहिला, बेहुलाते लिजी, बेहुलीये सुम्फेरोका आपा आमाकाई सेवाहुनो।
762 का दिदी भुट्टो जाके नानोल साकाले मीकाई सेवाको मायान।
763 पहिला बेहुलायेप, लिजीलिजी बेहुलीये, का नगरी पालीकाई सेवाहुनो।
764 नानूटु बुझाईको मायान।
765 हारी निको का आमाको लोन्डो।
766 लाङ्छीको कैन्टे।
767 खामीको ख्यापु।
768 मूल मीको कापुको खपट।
769 पहिला गुरी बेहुलीको आपा आमाकाई दि टोके जाके, दि गोरे पैसा, लोन्डो।

**Nepali नेपाली**

760 बेहुलीये बेहुलालाई तीन पटक नमस्कार गनुपयो।
761 आमालाई पहिला बेहुलाते, पछि बेहुलीले तीन पटक आमाबालाई नमस्कार गरे।
762 यो एकएक मुट्टी चामल राखेर सबै जनालाई नमस्कार गनुपयो।
763 पहिला बेहुलाते, पछि पछि बेहुलीये यो नगरीलाई नमस्कार गरे।
764 अब मासु बुझाउनुपयो।
765 हाम्रो यो आमाको लागि छादी।
766 लाङ्छीको लागि छुट।
767 खामीको लागि ख्यापु।
768 मूल माङ्छको लागि टाउको।
769 पहिला चाहिये बेहुलीको आमालाई एक माना चामल, एउटा पैसा र छादी।
The bride must say *sevā* to the groom thrice.
First the groom, then the bride, must say *sevā* to the [groom's] mother and father three times.
Each holding a handful of this husked rice, [the bride and the groom] must say *sevā* to all those present.
First the groom, and then the bride, said *sevā* to these representatives.
Now the meat must be shared out.
This chest is for [the bride's] mother.
For the matchmaker, a leg.
For the *khāmi*, the chin.
For the main officiant, the head.
First, to the mother of the bride, one *mānā* of husked rice, one coin and the chest [of the carcass].

**Thangmi** थाङ्गमी

नाङ्लोलाई नमस्कार।
सबैलाई नमस्कार।
पाँच, बेहुलीको ठु बुझाइवान।
नान् साक्खे मावलीले एक रुपैयाँमा बकाउँढोङा।
त्यसको साक्खे मावलीलाई दिटोके जाके, पाँच पैसा।
नान् बुढामावलीलाई एक रुपैयाँमा चोलो राख्योङा। त्यसको का दिटोके जाके, पाँच पैसा।

**Nepali** नेपाली

नाङ्लोलाई नमस्कार।
सबैलाई नमस्कार।
पाँच, पुराने नमस्कार।
गोलिपिर्ति मायामावलीलाई नमस्कार।
नमस्कार! यो चाहि आमाले छातीमा सुताएको, त्यस कारण यो छाती दिन सकिएन यो आमालाई।
लो, बेहुलीको मासु बुझाइवान।
अब साक्खे मावलीले एक रुपैयाँमा बकाउँढो ल्याउँद्यो।
त्यसको सातो साक्खे मावलीलाई एक माना चामल, पाँच पैसा।
अब बुढामावलीलाई एक रुपैयाँमा चोलो आउँद्यो। त्यसको यो एक माना चामल, पाँच पैसा।
English

770 Sevā to the winnowing tray.
771 Sevā to all.
772 Sevā also to those who have received sufficient leaves.
773 Sevā to the gotepite and respected members of the natal household.
774 Sevā [to the bride’s mother]! The mother put it [the groom as a child] to sleep on her chest, so this chest cannot be given to this mother [so instead she receives the chest of the carcass].
775 Lau, we have shared out the bride’s [share of] meat.
776 Then it is said that the immediate relatives of the bride’s mother would buy a shawl for one rupee.
777 In exchange for this, one mānā of husked rice and five coins were given to the immediate relatives of the bride’s mother.
778 It is said that the male kin of the bride’s mother arrived with a blouse worth one rupee. For this, one mānā of husked rice and five coins [must be given].

Thangmi थाङ्मी

779 लाङ्गिये तीन वर्षका केटी आमातेड्योडा ।
780 थ्याङ्ग तीन वर्षका कोन्टे खियेड्योडा ।
781 तोको का तुपीको कोन्टे ।
782 नान्खामीको गुरी का बेद पट्टीसिदु बेयाङ्ग बाङ्गा कालाईदुये ।
783 तोको लागि का बाङ्गा ।
784 लोङ्ग, नान्निको का बोरेको रीत तपान् ।
785 मायामाइती सेवा ।
786 हाम्रो यो बिहे गन्नुभन्दा पहिला यो समुन टोल्को गन्नुपछ ।
787 पूरामः यो शुभ काम गर्न । यो काम गन्नु पर्दछ ।
788 यो बेउताको समुनको यस्ती गन्नुपछ भजन हो ।
789 हाम्रीले त्यसै गन्नु हुँदैन ।
790 सामा सेरगाम गङ्गर्न भात्र यो काम गन्नुपछ ।
791 यो काम गरेर्दछ खोलाङ्ग्याल्को काम गाने भन्ने कुरा यो चाहियाहामी बनाएको ।

Nepali नेपाली

779 लाङ्गिये तीन वर्षका केटी आमातेड्योडा ।
780 थ्याङ्ग तीन वर्षका कोन्टे खियेड्योडा ।
781 तोको का तुपीको कोन्टे ।
782 नान्खामीको गुरी का बेद पट्टीसिदु बेयाङ्ग बाङ्गा कालाईदुये ।
783 तोको लागि का बाङ्गा ।
784 लोङ्ग, नान्निको का बोरेको रीत तपान् ।
785 मायामाइती सेवा ।
It is said that the matchmaker spent three years looking for a bride. And over these three years, his legs shriveled [due to overuse]. In return for that, he received the goat’s leg. It is said that the khāmi’s chin hurt from reading the ved. In return for that, he receives this chin [of the goat]. Lau, this marriage ritual has been concluded. Sevā to the respected members of the natal household. [Guru explaining in Nepali:] Before this wedding of ours is undertaken, this sagun thotko must be performed. Usually, while carrying out auspicious works, this task must be performed. This sagun of the deities must be carried out in this way. We cannot do it just any old way. This task should be performed only after sāmā sergām [gathering together all the materials that are needed]. After performing this task, the kholādāplā must be performed, [and for that purpose] this shrine has been constructed.

In these final segments of the senevā, the sacrificial goat offered by the bride’s family at the groom’s house is parcelled out between various ritual participants. The mother of the groom receives the chest, the chief matchmaker the leg, the khāmi the chin, and the chief guru the head. Often the khāmi and guru are one and the same person, in which case he would receive both cuts of meat. Once the meat is distributed, the marriage ritual itself is formally concluded; the bride and groom are fully united and most attendees disperse.

4. Kholādāplā (Return of the deities to the divine world)
The final stage of the wedding is the kholādāplā, in which the deities who have been called into presence are dispatched back to the divine world. Experientially, this feels almost like an afterthought – most guests have left, many are sleeping after the nearly 24 hour ritual, and the khāmi and/or guru chants almost on his own, speaking directly and exclusively to the deities. The recitations of the kholādāplā largely repeat those of the deva sāng and sagun thotko as described and presented above. Deities and their territorial abodes are named, and they are asked to “move the unmoved” with reference to several household and ritual
objects visible within the home in which the ritual takes place. All of the deities are then collectively called into a “shrine” which the guru constructs out of grain offerings and effigies. Once in the shrine, the guru beseeches the deities to rest at peace and be sated with the offerings they have received. Upon conclusion, the “shrine” is disassembled and disposed of in a nearby water source, thereby returning the deities to their territorial abodes. Phāselung is the local Thangmi name of the hamlet where the ritual is taking place.

**Thangmi थाङमी**

900 नंगर उरको लिङ्झाको देवा, खोकको देवा, खोलाडाप्लाको देवा कुबापाडङ्ग केलिए सै देवा है नान्ने।
901 का बई दाईनो थाचा केलिए सै देवा है नान्ने।
902 फासेलुङ्ग लोकोवालको बाङु बिलको छाखा, आमा दिलको काया का बई होकु।
903 सुई उनडङ छुसीचा केलिए।
904 डाङडङ उनडङ थाचा केलिए।
905 वर्मी उनडङ बाला छुसिचा केलिए।
906 काई चालको बाखे डाङडको बाखे लोडको बाळाबाले। सजेखोला लिङ्झाको बाङुदीलको छाखा आमादीलको काया।
907 का बई लोडको बाळाबाले। का बई दाईनो थाचा केलिए।
908 माथोफन्दु थोच्चा केलिए।
909 शान्तिको सम्पूण थाचा केलिए, आसु सालो।

**Nepali नेपाली**

900 कांचेचुरको डुङ्झाको देवता, खोचको देवता, खोलाडाप्लाको देवता थानीमा आऊ है देवता है अब त।
901 यो पनि दाहिने भएर आऊ है देवता है अब त।
902 फासेलुङ्ग डाङडको बाङु बिलको छाखा, आमा दिलको काया यो पनि छ।
903 केरा जतो पसाएर आऊ।
904 चरा जतो भएर आऊ।
905 अभिनेन्त्री जतो पात हालेर आऊ।
906 यो त चालको भाना गर। डाङडको भाना गरूँ भनेर। सजेखोला लिङ्झाको बाङु दिलको छाखा आमा दिलको काया।
907 यो पनि गरूँ भनेर। यो पनि दाहिने भएर आऊ।
908 नुपेन्तो पुरूङ आऊ।
909 सम्पूण शान्ति हुंदै आऊ, आसु सालो।

**English**

900 Oh deities of the stone, deities of the gorge and kholāḍāplā deities of the place known as Kābrecaur, come to the shrine, oh now you deities.
901 Come like this, to the right side, oh now you deities.
902 The shadow of the father’s heart and the body of the mother’s heart of the place called Phāselung, these are also here.
903 Come, ripening like a banana.
904 Come, being like a bird.
905 Come, growing leaves like the bouquet grass.
906 Talk in the language of these traditions. Saying, let us speak in the tradition of
dāngdāng [the sound of the shaman’s drum], the shadow of the father’s heart and
the body of the mother’s heart of the place called Sarjekhola Lingdāng.
907 Meaning let us also do this, let this also come to be on the right side.
908 If you haven’t enough, well then please come feeling sated.
909 Come, feeling completely peaceful, os sālo.

Conclusion

Writing about Anakalangese society, on the Indonesian island of Sumba, anthropologist
Webb Keane notes that ritual speech “creates authority by enacting icons of imputed an-
cestral originals” and that it “exemplifies the problem of agency because of the way it fore-
grounds the ambiguous authorship of spoken words: they must be attributable at once to
the speaker and the ancestors” (1997: 24). The same may be said for the language, regist-
er and speech patterns in which Thangmi wedding rituals are performed. There is some-
thing about ritual speech that “compels speakers to be aware that their words are not fully
in their control” (ibid), and thereby open to misunderstanding or misattribution. There is
a vulnerability among khāmi and guru who perform Thangmi wedding rituals: they are at
once elevated and empowered by the timeless quality and ancestral gravity of the ritual
register, and yet critically aware of its inherently reflexive character. “While saying things
about the world, ritual speech is constantly making reference to itself” wrote the organi-
zers of a 2010 workshop on ‘Ritual Speech and Subjectivity’.9

Thangmi ritual speech is heavily stylized and highly marked, and distinctively dif-
f erent from everyday speech. The Thangmi ritual register includes rhythms and rhymes
absent from the vernacular, and is replete with repetitive elements, reduplications and
paired couplets. While loans (both nominal and verbal) are a common feature of every-
day Thangmi, such borrowings are mostly from Nepali, Newar (Nepal Bhasa) and even
English in the vernacular. The Thangmi ritual register, by contrast, borrows more from
Sanskrit, Tibetan and Classical Newar, reinforcing a widespread sense that Thangmi rit-
ual speech “embodies an unchanging heritage that transcends the here and now” (Keane
1997: 115). This sense of linguistic elevation, loftiness, antiquity – even superiority – in
Thangmi ritual speech is further advanced by the use of specialized lexical items for oth-
wise mundane nouns that have commonplace vernacular equivalents. These elements
are not sacred per se, meaning that non-officiants are free to use them, but they are inex-
tricably linked to the production and context of Thangmi ritual, and essentially meaning-
less outside of ritual activities.

At the level of practice, we can see how each instance of marriage at once serves to
unite two individuals and their families, and to reproduce the ethnic collectivity as a
whole through a social ritual that incorporates the entire community. The fact that some

elements of the ritual cycle have been subject to Hinduisation does not diminish their power within the Thangmi social context. Rather, the wedding ritual with its many components should be viewed as a synthetic whole that has remained remarkably vibrant as a ritual form over time, even if some of its specific contextual elements have shifted in relation to broader socio-religious transformations. Indeed, each wedding is different, according to the personal style of the officiant; the characteristics of the locale where it is conducted and the territorial deities who abide there; and the personal traditions and desires of the two families in question, not to mention the bride and the groom themselves. By presenting excerpts from the recitations at one actual wedding event, we hope to have contributed to the ongoing discussion about the broader dynamics of cultural, linguistic and ritual change both within the scholarly community and the Thangmi community itself.

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