

**Local Perspectives of Sacred Landscapes and Tourism:
Exploring the Linkages in Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park, Nepal**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Many cultures around the world attach sacred values to natural and cultural sites. Although different cultures interpret the word “sacred” differently, sacred places generally reveal strict behavioural restrictions, a sense of separateness (Hubert, 1997), as well as strong emotion-oriented and place-bound characteristics (Levi & Kocher, 2013). However, the concept of sacred landscape appears to be a vague one, and is not fully examined in existing literature. As many sacred places turn into popular tourist destinations, the environmental, economic and social implications of tourism to such destinations require deeper understandings of tourism’s role in reshaping spiritual values and reproducing local perceptions of the “sacred”.

This study examines local residents’ objective recognition and subjective interpretations of a sacred landscape, and how these are influenced by tourism development. The Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park (SNP) in Nepal’s Khumbu Region was selected as the case study area. The region is perceived as a sacred *beyul* (hidden valley) by local Buddhist Sherpas, and has undergone tremendous environmental, economic and social changes brought by trekking tourism. This study is exploratory in nature, and is based on author’s field observation and 33 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with Sherpa residents during fall 2014.

Study findings indicate that Sherpa residents’ objective recognition of sacred landscape are influenced by geographical proximity to sacred sites, age of residents, and their religious background. Subjective interpretations of sacred landscape are shaped by a strong awareness of the behavioural restrictions, family influence, as well as personal experiences. Sherpas’ emotional and spiritual bonds with the landscape are reinforced through routinized contact with the sacred cultural features, and consistent compliance with the rules of conduct at sacred sites. Through everyday practices, Sherpas unconsciously remind themselves about the spiritual values and religious beliefs embedded in the landscape. Sherpas are actively engaged in activities such as religious festivals which promote their cultural identity and spirits. Tourism’s influence on local spiritual values is evident and reflected in three aspects: changes in mountain deity worship; shift in human-land relationship; and, alterations of religious routines and practices. Tourism development has made *beyul Khumbu* a hybrid and dynamic place, where traditional spiritual values and religious practices exist simultaneously with increased commercialization and modernization due to tourism. Although Sherpas still regard Khumbu as a sacred place and are actively focused on retaining the essential components of Sherpa spiritual values and cultural identity, the religious influence of *beyul* is slowly declining as people’s life drift away from the land, and interests shift to material consumption.

This research aims to make contributions to the existing literature on landscape studies and cultural geography by examining local residents’ perceptions toward multiple aspects of a sacred landscape under changing social and economic contexts. Also, exploring the changing indigenous spiritual values and religious beliefs will help developing more sustainable and effective management policies in cultural and environmental conservation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In various cultures around the world, many natural and cultural sites are deemed sacred. The reasons why they are deemed sacred and what levels of significance varies largely from site to site, and from culture to culture. Sacred places are found in mainstream faiths and in indigenous beliefs, as well as in non-religious contexts (Bremer, 2006). People honor a deity, provide sanctuary for spirits, view landscape as a living expression of certain gods, or protect a sanctified historic site (Dudley, Higgins & Mansourian, 2009). Although different culture interpret the word “sacred” differently, sacred places around the world generally reveal strict behavioural restrictions, a sense of separateness (Hubert, 1997), as well as strong emotion-oriented and place-bound characteristics (Levi & Kocher, 2013). They are sites reflecting humanity’s various forms of interactions with the superhuman entities (Stump, 2008). The concept of a sacred landscape appears to be vague and complex in the existing literature. Previous research regarding sacred landscape focused on the religious geographies of sacred places, examining their establishment, religious traditions and pilgrimage, or emphasized on sacred natural sites and their role in ecological conservation (Barry, R.R., Pandey, J., Kohli, N., 2008; Shepherd, Yu & Gu, 2012; Li. et al., 2013). There is a lack of scholarly research on the concept of sacred landscape and its embedded social meanings and values. As Singh (2005) stated, a sacred landscape is a “faithscape”, which embodies not only the tangible geographical features and cultural establishments, but also the intangible spiritual elements. Symbolic rituals and practices are also important components in a sacred landscape as they reflect local people’s religious worldviews and cultural identity. The meaning of landscape is multi-layered, and subject to personal understandings and experiences (Knudsen,

Soper & Metro-Roland, 2008). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the interpretation of a sacred landscape, in particular, should draw insights from perspectives of local insiders, who personally experience and interact with the landscape on a daily basis (Tuan, 1974; Cosgrove, 1998; Timms, 2008). In recent years, researchers have become increasingly aware of the values of the sacred landscape in attracting tourists from other cultures, and affecting visitors' perceptions toward certain destinations (Andriotis, 2009; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Singh, 2006; Willson, 2013). As many sacred sites are transforming into popular tourist destinations, the importance of research on the implications of tourism development on sacredness and their local interpretations cannot be understated. Within the tourism literature, the environmental, cultural and economic impacts on various sacred sites are becoming a major concern. Sacred tourist sites were examined as physical expressions of local communities' spiritual values and cultural identity, and also as means for ecological and cultural conservation (Arora, 2006; Salick, et al., 2007; Brandt, et al., 2013). However, this body of knowledge has largely neglected the role of tourism in influencing the spiritual values and religious practices of local residents at sacred sites.

1.1 Study Purposes, Objectives and Research Questions:

The purpose of this study is to understand local residents' interpretations of various components of a sacred landscape, and how these interpretations are influenced by tourism development. Specifically, this study aims to: 1) document local residents' objective observation and identification of sacred features; 2) explore residents' subjective interpretations of, and personal experiences with, the sacred landscape; 3) and, examine

whether trekking tourism plays a role in influencing/re-producing the sacred landscape and place-based spiritual values. Specifically, this study aims to address the following research questions:

- 1) According to local residents' objective observation and identification, what features and figures are perceived as sacred?
- 2) How do local residents subjectively interpret the multiple aspects of the sacred landscape, and how do they interact with the sacred landscape in their daily lives?
- 3) How has trekking tourism influenced/reproduced local residents' spiritual values and religious practices, as well as their perceptions toward the sacredness embedded in the landscape?

The Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park (SNP) in Nepal's Khumbu Region was selected as the focus of this study. The SNP offers several interesting avenues for this research. First of all, SNP is a world renowned trekking destination. More than 36,000 visited the national park in 2012 for its magnificent mountain sceneries and rich culture (Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation (MCTCA, 2013). Secondly, the entire Khumbu region, where SNP is located, is considered sacred by Sherpa people, the ethnic inhabitants of Khumbu. The sacred *beyul* (hidden valley) of Khumbu and Sherpa spiritual values has been a subject of research in a wide range of disciplines such as cultural geography, anthropology and religious studies (Bjonness, 1986; Fisher, 1990; Sherpa, 2005; Spoon, 2010). The Sherpa people have strong attachment to the natural and cultural landscapes in the region. They believe in numerous deities and demons that inhabit mountains, caves and forests. Each village

recognizes certain peaks, valleys and rivers as its own protective deities. Thirdly, various effects of tourism on local economy, society and environment have been widely reported (Ortner, 1999; Nepal, 2015; Stevens, 2003) which provides a solid context for this research.

1.2 Significance of the Study:

This research will contribute to the existing literature on landscape studies and cultural geography, by providing a detailed examination of local residents' multiple layered perspectives of sacred landscape in this world renowned trekking destination. Since tourism has linked this once remote part of the world with the global economy, providing new opportunities for cross-cultural interactions, it is important to understand the role tourism plays in influencing local residents' spiritual values and practices, as well as their understanding of sacredness. Deeper insights to indigenous spiritual values and religious beliefs in the face of modernity (in the form of tourism) will help develop more sustainable policies and practices in cultural and environmental conservation. The focus on local Sherpa residents is important as they have the potential to critically influence cultural conservation initiatives. Understanding their changing relationship with the landscape will hopefully help establishing more sustainable and effective management policies.

1.3 Thesis Structure:

This thesis is organized into six chapters. After introduction, Chapter 2 begins with a comprehensive literature review, which situates this study at the intersection of literature exploring the meaning and classification of landscape, the creation and uses of sacred places,

the complex interrelation between tourism and sacred sites, as well as cultural conservation initiatives at sacred sites. Chapter 3 introduces the geographical and human contexts of the study area: Nepal's Khumbu region. It is followed by a description and justification of methods, focused on fieldwork, interview and analysis used in this study. Chapter 4 presents study findings, which are organized to address three main research questions accordingly. The first section of the finding chapter focuses on objective interpretation of the sacred features in Khumbu which derives from local Sherpas' identification, as well as author's personal observations in the field. The second section focuses on the results of in-depth interviews articulating Sherpas' subjective interpretations of the sacred *beyul* and personal interactions and experiences with the sacred landscape. This is then followed by local perspectives on the influence of tourism on local spiritual values, and the perceived sacredness of the *beyul*. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of the research findings, linking back to key concepts discussed in the literature. Chapter 6 provides a summary of key findings, conclusions, and implications for further research and practice.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the dynamic sacred geography in Khumbu, this chapter reviews literature pertinent to the meaning and classification of landscape, the creation and uses of sacred places, and the interrelation between tourism and sacred religious sites. Previous studies of landscape and place covered a wide variety of topics from physical morphology to people's sense of place. It is commonly recognized that the meanings of the term "landscape" and "place" are multi-layered and subjected to personal understandings and also the disciplines under investigation (Tuan, 1977; Cosgrove, 1998; Coles, Millman & Flannigan, 2013). Multiple interpretations constructed for a certain place suggested the fact that a landscape could reveal ideology and values by translating "philosophy into tangible features" (Meinig, 1979, p.42). In other words, physical and cultural features, as well as the embedded values and philosophy constitute a landscape together. When people experience and interact with a landscape, certain images, memories, beliefs and emotions relating to their personal identity and history are evoked and reinforced (Tuan, 1974).

2.1 Approaches to Landscape Studies

2.1.1 Natural Landscape and Cultural Landscape

As a term employed in a wide range of disciplines such as painting, environmental design and planning, landscape embodies multiple layers of meaning (Cosgrove, 1998). In general, the word landscape appears to contain visual sceneries, and the interpretation of the sceneries (Jackson, 1986). Cosgrove's definition of landscape implies that landscape includes not only features in the natural world, but also embodies an understanding and interpretation toward

the physical and cultural constructions of that place.

“Landscape is a construction, a composition of the world... Landscape is a way of seeing the world.” (Cosgrove, 1998, p.13)

The mainstream research approach in geography regarding landscape in the early 20th century focused on the separation of human systems and natural systems, with a preponderance of studies on the latter. However, understanding a landscape from merely the ecological aspects could not explain the complex human cultural and social system within (Sauer, 1963). Geographers have come to recognize that the non-human physical world and human-built socio-cultural systems share similar patterns of organization, and therefore should not be separately examined (Greer, Donnelly & Rickly, 2008). In the late 19th century, influential German geographer Otto Schluter identified geography as the “examination of the visible landscape as a nature-society relationship” and the role of non-human process in shaping landscape should not be excluded from the study of landscape (cited in Turner, 2002, p.57).

In his influential work “The Morphology of Landscape”, Carl Sauer (1963) identified the division between natural and cultural landscape. He identified the area prior to the introduction of human activities as original, natural landscape. These pure natural landscapes, although no longer exist in many places on earth, constitute the “geognostic basis” and “climatic basis” for formal morphology (1963). All natural resources that humanity has at its disposal are included in Sauer’s definition of natural landscape. He also claimed that physical landscape has generic meaning which derived from people’s observation of different physical

scenes in a place. People's own judgment influences their selection of the characteristics of a landscape. Cultural landscape, on the other hand, represents the works of humanity carried out upon the physical landscape (Sauer, 1963). It is the natural environment modified and interpreted by humans (O'Hare, 1997, p.33). The term "cultural landscape" was first defined by Otto Schluter in the late 19th century in his settlement morphology theory (as cited in O'Hare, 1997). The morphological concept asserted that all landscapes involve "a cultural overlay on the natural landscape", and the identity of place comes from this consistent interaction between human-built cultural features and natural features of the landscape over time (Figure 1, O'Hare, 1997, p.33). In the 1920s, Carl Sauer further developed Schluter's idea by emphasizing that the cultural landscape is the consequence from human modification and transformation of natural landscape (1963). He claimed that natural features in the physical landscape work as medium, react with culture (which he identified as the agent), and cultural landscape is produced as a result. Also, since cultural landscape is consistently changing and evolving over time, it is influenced by the development of a culture and could be replaced by the emergence of a new culture (O'Hare, 1997). This conceptualization of cultural landscape as the product created by culture working on nature arguably shaped the research direction in landscape studies (Knudsen, et al., 2008). Cultural landscapes are closely associated to the physical environment, and the examination of cultural landscape can reflect some basic readings of the physical landscape as well (Jackson, 1984).

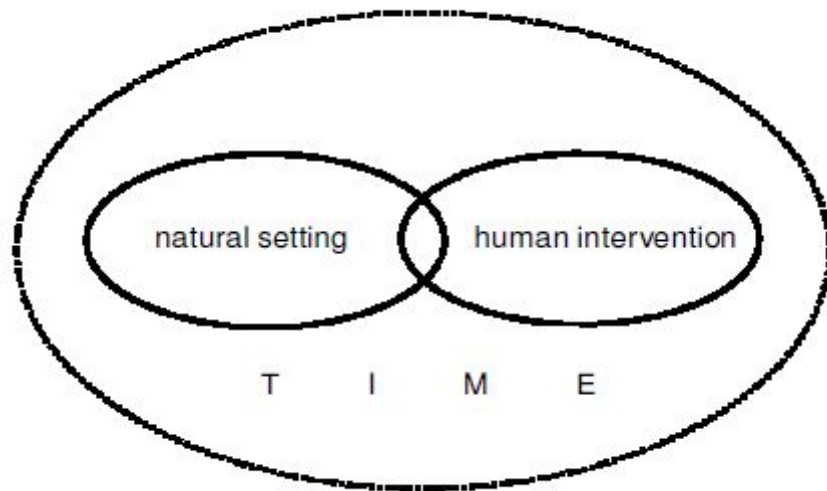


Figure 1. Cultural landscape as a result from a constant interaction between human intervention and the natural landscape, over time. Adapted from O'Hare, 1997, p.34.

2.1.2 Morphological Approach and Humanistic Approach

An examination of the literature on landscape studies reveals two main approaches used by researchers in interpreting a landscape: a morphological approach which emphasizes the tradition of quantification and classification of landscape, and a humanistic approach which focuses more on socially constructed elements in landscape. The morphological approach is mainly applied in physical geography, and also studied by planners and architects.

Traditionally, a morphological approach attempts to formulate an objective presentation of landscape by using statistical databases and illustrating the overlay of selected thematic layers and clusters (Vogiatzakis, Griffiths, Melis, Marini & Careddu, 2006). An example of this is a topographic map showing layers of landscape features and categories such as mountain ranges, rivers, forests, settlements and roads. In short, morphological approach in landscape studies follows a process of taking different landscape features into either individual or categorical units, and producing a quantitative classification of landscape (Mucher, Klijn,

Wascher & Schaminee, 2010). However, the classification variables associated with cultural, historical and religious features are rarely available in a quantitative database and are largely relied on subjective judgment (Hou, Burkhard & Muller, 2013). In their research on mapping of traditional cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean area, Cullotta and Barbera (2011) applied the “landscape character assessment” approach to identify, classify and map areas of similar character in a cultural landscape, and described their particular meanings. This method echoed Swanwick’s (2004) research on landscape characters in England by emphasizing the role of unique physical and cultural characters in the production of an unique sense of place. It is hard to compare different landscape classification methods used by researchers since the primary research purposes and data sources vary greatly. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that all landscape classifications reflect a hierarchical framework, and demonstrate the interrelationship between physical and cultural features. Landscapes are classified from a higher to a lower level of abstraction, scaling from generic landscape regions to specific land features and various environmental units (Blasi, Carranza, Frondoni & Rosati, 2000). Researchers have also focused on the interconnections among landscape features to form a “relatively homogeneous landscape unit” (Chuman & Romportl, 2010, p.201).

It is believed that a structured classification of landscape which takes into account all the underlying features in the physical and cultural environment is a great challenge (Chuman & Romportl, 2010). In more recent landscape studies, researchers have emphasized a humanistic approach to understand landscape and the relations between human and their

surrounding environment (Knudsen, et al, 2008). This humanistic approach is applied in a wider range of work than the morphological approach used in traditional landscape studies such as those by Sauer and Schluter. The humanistic approach is focused on place-specific questions. Landscape, in humanistic approach, is viewed more than just a physical form; it is a complex expression of a dynamic system which involves the area's culture, custom, social structure and values (Knudsen, et al, 2008). This humanistic approach also incorporates the "spiritual views" in interpreting people-environment relations (Stokols, 1990), where the landscape is viewed as providing important contexts for cultivating human values and spirits. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) is one of the influential scholars who examined the relationship between landscape and people by adopting a humanistic approach. Tuan presented the concept of "topophilia" to interpret people's emotional attachment to a place. He argued that the perception of and experience with a landscape is derived from the viewers' personal attachment and emotions to that particular place. Donald Meinig's *The beholding eye: ten versions of the same scene*, (1979) and Pierce Lewis' "*Axioms for reading the landscape*" (1979) reflected this new direction in landscape studies with emphasis on social construction of places (as cited in Greer, et al. 2008, p.14). They both demonstrated that the understanding of a landscape is largely based on subjective readings and varied largely among different viewers. Humanistic scholars also highlighted the fact that groups with the same cultural identity usually share certain similarities in the interpretation of landscape since they are commonly socialized by family, history and shared values (Greer, et al., 2008). In general, previous researchers used this humanistic approach to understand landscape as a highly multifaceted and dynamic place (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Each visitor to a particular

landscape brings his/her own experience, perception and knowledge to that landscape, and thus conclude with different interpretations, as Knudsen, Soper & Metro-Roland (2007) stated: “They [cultural landscapes] are at once ageless and altered in some small way by every passing person.” (p.228). In fact, the essence of humanistic approach in landscape studies is the attempt to examine the dynamic human-landscape relationship. Concepts of place attachment and place identity are used to interpret people’s understanding and connections to the surrounding environment (Proshansky, 1978; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993; 2004; Kyle, Graefe & Manning, 2005; Brown & Raymond, 2007; Wynveen, Kyle, Absher & Theodori, 2011). Scholars have also emphasized on the emotional and affective elements which are accompanied by with cognitive recognition, beliefs and behaviours in constructing perceptions and attachment toward particular places (Canter & Craik, 1981; Low & Altman, 1992). The subjective meaning of a place is forged through individual interaction and experience with the environment (Kyle, Mowen & Tarrant, 2004), but it is also influenced by a collective recognition of the place identity and culture (Greer, et al., 2008).

2.1.3 Landscape Studies and Tourism

Some scholars have suggested that the study of tourism cannot be separated from the study of the landscape since the latter creates the geographical, historical and cultural context for tourism (Knudsen, et al., 2008). Urry (1995) defined tourist places as locations “distinguished from everyday life by their natural, historical or cultural extraordinariness” (Bramham, 2001, p. 301). He claimed that tourists sites are made by the process of “spectaclization” (Urry, 1992, p.5). Distinct features endow tourism landscape with symbolic meanings (Cosgrove,

1998; Knudsen & Greer, 2008), but cultural landscapes are also subsequently influenced by tourism (O'Hare, 1997). Tourism landscape, therefore, is arguably a sub-category of the cultural landscape and often overlaps and coexists with other categories of cultural landscape (O'Hare, 1997; Knudsen et al., 2007).

Tourist places have local, endemic and insider meaning, as well as broader, pandemic and outsider meaning (Lowenthal & Prince, 1972, as cited in Knudsen, et al., 2008, p.5). For the insiders who occupy the landscape, the place is embodied with a strong personal and social meaning, while the outsiders, who are not part of the landscape, have less personal connection to the place (Tuan, 1974). Personal experience and interaction with the same landscape are quite different between insiders and outsiders, and thus contribute to a salient difference in the interpretation of one landscape (Knudsen, 2008). Hubert (1997) argued that it's difficult for those outside the local culture to recognize the nature of the cultural landscape, especially sites with special meanings to the locals, such as sacred sites. Limited by their cultural and personal experiences, outsiders usually seek more general and superficial meanings in a place (Timms, 2008). In natural tourist sites, for example, outsiders tend to recognize the romantic sublime for a "pure nature" rather than its embedded historical and cultural meanings, which require more intimate reading and understanding of the site from the insider perspective (Zaring, 1977). In other words, the degree of familiarity or knowledge to local culture and tradition is a key to this insider-outsider distinction.

2.2 Sacred Places and Sacred Landscapes

2.2.1 Definition of “Sacred”

Although different cultures around the world translate and interpret the word “sacred” differently, there seems to be an universal understanding of the concept of sacredness. The English word sacredness is derived from Latin. It is defined as “restriction through pertaining to the gods” (Hubert, 1997, p.11). This definition reflects that the concept of “sacred” implies strict prohibitions and restrictions on behaviours. In other words, something is sacred because certain sets of rule are observed in relation to it. Hubert (1997) stated that concepts of separateness, respect, worship, and rules of behaviours are common to sacred sites in different cultures. The restrictions on human behaviours at sacred sites help define the relationship between the superhuman and human. It is usually believed that superhuman powers can be protective and assisting, but they can also punish and destroy at the same time (Horster, 2010). Therefore, certain rules are made to prevent offending the gods, who must be awed and appeased. These prohibitions of certain behaviours can be closely associated with religious activities, and they can also be tied to ritualized practices in daily life. In Christian belief, sacredness is very specialized and tends to have little connection with family relationship, mundane life or with the economic activities (Hubert, 1997). But in many other religions, especially those with animistic characteristics, trees, springs, mountains, even an unmarked piece of rock can be sacred and people should deal with them with great care (Ormsby, 2013). Hubert questioned the possibility for outsiders to truly understand other culture’s sacred values and perception of sacredness (1997), but believed that there is an universally agreed concept of sacredness among different culture. Stump (2008) agreed with Hubert (1997)’s argument regarding the commonality in the perception of sacredness. He

asserted that all sacred sites symbolized human's interrelationship with the superhuman entities (2008), despite their various forms of manifestation. Beside from separateness and behavioural restrictions, sacred places also embody emotion-oriented and place-based characteristics. Levi and Kocher (2013) claimed that the sacredness of a place can be derived from people's emotional experiences. Visiting religious places and sacred sites can inspire reflections and meditations to selves, and lead to a general sense of reverence and humility (Levi & Kocher, 2013). People's emotional experiences in sacred places vary with individual and cultural backgrounds (Shackley, 2001). For example, religious visitors might feel a stronger sense of god's presence in sacred places and are more aware of the embedded spiritual values within those places. Their emotional experiences with the sacred places also enhance their religious belief and contribute to their personal spiritual development. On the other hand, non-religious visitors generally feel a sense of serenity and peace in religious and sacred places, which may also help their personal spiritual development (Shackley, 2001). Place-based definition of sacred place was emphasized by Levi and Kocher (2013) several times in their research. Sacredness is highly place-bound because it's usually perceived and defined locally. In many natural sacred sites, for instance, the presence of superhuman powers granted the inherent sacredness of the natural landscape, which only local residents of that area recognized as such. People also recognize sacred places using their place-based experiences and preferences which developed from local values and cultural expressions (Brown & Raymond, 2007).

In religious studies, the meaning of sacredness is defined based on two approaches:

substantial and situational (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995). Substantial approach describes sacred as the mysterious and powerful manifestation of reality, and emphasizes the ultimacy of the supernatural significance (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995). Situational approach sees nothing is inherently sacred, and the meaning of sacred is open to any interpretations. In other words, anything can be “made” sacred by people (Kraft, 2010). These two definitions reflect a contrast between the “poetics” and the “politics” of sacred places (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995). The former represents a romantic imagination of a place and the latter reflects the contested and political nature of a place. Van der Leeuw was one of the first researchers to address the poetics nature in sacred places (as cited in Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p.6-9). His articles focused on the transcendence and predominance of sacred supernatural power at sacred places. Later researchers argued that the establishment of sacred place can be a highly political and powerful process involving conflicts and conquests (Stump, 2008). The ownership, possession and appropriation of sacred objects, symbols and rituals can be highly contested among different parties. The establishment of sacred sites can reflect power relations within a place (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995).

2.2.2 Consecration and Desecration of Sacred Places

Sacred places are most commonly consecrated by the religious faith (Vukonic, 2006; Stump, 2008). Their holiness is a result of a historical or legendary event that took place there, or because they comprise important places of worship, or places hosting sacred events and rituals, or for enshrining sacred objects and relics (Vukonic, 2006). In some indigenous religions, the entire land on earth is considered sacred. For example, Maori cosmology

emphasizes strong connections to their tribal territories by calling themselves “people of the land” (Hay, 1998). The land itself is endowed with spiritual meanings, containing energy of the divine power. Places that are associated with revelation of superhuman entities and miracles usually become important destinations for religious pilgrimage (Stump, 2008). In some congregational religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism, sacred cultural structures provide social venues for the learning and expression of adherents’ religious identity. Through collective rituals and practices, the sanctity of the sacred cultural site is strengthened and reinforced (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993). Chidester and Linenthal summarized the production of sacred places in their examination of American sacred space (1995, p.10-12). They concluded that sacred places can be produced 1) as ritual space where symbolic ritual ceremonies performs; 2) as a significant site which reflects human being’s relationship with superhuman powers, a means for establishing meaningful worldviews and orientations in reality; and 3) as contested space where the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols is contested among different claims and interests.

Sacred places exist in both secular and religious contexts (Bremer, 2006). Some sacred places obtained their sacredness through means other than religious faith. As Vukonic (2006) stated: “What society often holds sacred, primarily the unquestionable and fundamental structure of beliefs about the world, does not have to be religious.” (p.246) Sacred places that are not related to religious context can arouse strong emotions and attachment as well, such as graves and national memorial sites which are deemed sacred in their own way (Vukonic, 2006).

Sacred places can also be desecrated. Usually, the desecration can be generalized into two forms: dispossession and defilement (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995). Dispossession implies that religious rituals which used to take place on the sacred ground are alienated and can no longer be performed. In Christian religion, religious authorities can perform rituals to deconsecrate religious sites if they are no longer in use (Stump, 2008). Defilement refers to the serious violation of the rules of behaviour which contaminate the purity of a sacred place. Adherents of different religions make various efforts to retain the sacredness of religious sites and prevent the violation and desecration of sacred places. Different forms of control have been used by adherents such as performing a purification of body before entering sacred places, or enforcing specific standards for clothing and behaviours at sacred sites. Some researchers have found out that sacred places might be perceived as less sacred when high number of tourists and tourism-related commercial activities are present (Levi & Kocher, 2013; Terzidou, Styliadis, & Szivas, 2008). Lack of religious activities and the emergence of modern and urban elements are also considered as main factors contributing to a loss of sacredness by visitors of sacred places (2013).

2.2.3 Categories, Scales and Uses of Sacred Places

There is usually a wide variety of sacred sites in sacred places, with distinct forms and functions even within one culture (Hubert, 1997). Stump's (2008) research on the geography of religion summarized a comprehensive categorization and scale of sacred places. Seven categories of sacred places were identified: cosmological, theocentric, hierophanic, historical, hierenergetic, authoritative, and ritual (Table 1). These categories of sacred places have a

wide variety of forms and overlap each other significantly. For example, a single sacred place can simultaneously be a theocentric site with direct relation to a certain deity and a historical site where a significant religious event took place.

Table 1. Classification of sacred places, adopted from Stump (2008, p.301-305)

Categories of Sacred Places	Characteristics
Cosmological	-Spiritual realm exists in cosmic structure depicted in a religion's worldview (e.g. Heaven, hell) -Often associated with the afterlife, but might have physical manifestation on earth (e.g. Mt. Kailas)
Theocentric	-Key locations with direct association with a deity or other superhuman entities -Dwelling place of a deity or deities -Can also exist in imagined realms
Hierophanic	-Sites of religious revelation or miracle -Can be reflected in natural features such as mountains
Historical	-Sites which played significant roles in the historic development of a religion such as places where founding events of a religion took place
Hierenergetic	-Sites that are believed to have the potential for invoking spiritual or divine power by providing a direct contact between human and superhuman entities -Powers can be attributed through interactions with specific religious icon or structure (e.g. Buddhists circumambulate stupa)
Authoritative	-Sites obtained sacredness by holding authority in the interpretation of religious doctrines, or superhuman events (e.g. Vatican)
Ritual	-Sites perform religious practices and serve as ritual centers

This classification of sacred places also reveals a scale of sacred places, associated with the scope of adherents' worldview in both metaphysical and physical places. People perceive a

sacred place from the broadest “cosmic scale”, which refers to the imagined universe like heaven and hell, to the narrowest “microscale”, which involves specific sacred objects used in rituals. This “abstract-to-concrete” scale is very similar to the hierarchical landscape classification framework discussed earlier. It is worth mentioning that sacred places at the “microscale” can reflect the philosophical worldviews at the most abstract “cosmic scale”. For example, as Stump (2008) pointed out in some religious contexts “microscale” sacred place involves the bodies of adherents themselves. For example, Buddhists create an internal sacred place in their mind during deep meditation and chanting (Ortner, 1989). This internal sacred place creates direct connection between the adherent and the superhuman entities in the broadest “cosmic scale”. Overall, Stump’s (2008) description of sacred places indicated that regardless of various forms, functions and scopes, sacred places set stages for different kinds of interactions between human beings and the superhuman entities in their understanding of the cosmos. Through these close interactions and intimate experiences with sacred places, people gain better understanding of the motivations and objectives associated with the ideology of their religious system.

Ordinary worship practices in everyday life are probably the most identifiable ways of human-divine interactions. Rituals and other religious practices associated with specific life events such as birth, wedding and funerals are examples for such interactions (Stump, 2008). Pilgrimage represents an exceptional way of worship by establishing an extensive interaction with certain sacred sites. Adherents prove their devotion and fulfill their religious obligations by completing a pilgrimage, which usually symbolizes a milestone in their personal religious

experience (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Interactions with the divine powers can occur on the imagined metaphysical level as well (Park, 1994). These interactions are usually actions and efforts made by adherents which will influence their status in the imagined sacred spaces that exist beyond the material world (in afterlife or reincarnation). Adherents make lifelong efforts to prepare themselves for future interactions.

2.2.4 Sacred Places as Conservation Mechanism

Previous research examining sacred places also reveal their use as conservation mechanisms (Sherpa 2003; Salick, et al, 2007; Brandt, et al. 2013; Li, et al, 2015). Sacred natural sites embody the characteristics of the informal institution for natural resource management (Woodhouse, Mills, McGowan & Milner-Gulland, 2015). Active conservation and management are practiced voluntarily by local communities at sacred natural sites because there are usually strict non-extractive and non-violence rules of conduct closely associated with local spiritual beliefs (2015). Religious communities residing in sacred places conserve the natural landscape through respectful behaviours and specific rules of conduct. Spiritual values and religious beliefs regulate and influence local residents' interactions with the landscape. Basso (1996) and Thornton (2007) examined how Native American communities in New Mexico and Alaska understand physical landscape features and the landscape itself, as visual manifestations of the indigenous cultural and ecological knowledge. In both case studies, physical landmarks, such as water bodies and trees, were associated with local folklore and religious beliefs, reminding the community members about their shared identity, values and history. Stutchbury (1994)'s work in Karzha, India is another example

demonstrating local residents' perceptions and use of the landscape are regulated by religious belief. Karzha residents move through the physical landscape in the same way as Buddhist practitioners move through the mentally constructed mandalas during meditation practices for gaining more spiritual benefits. Similarly, Arora (2006) explored the relationship between the Tholung sacred landscape and the Lepcha people in Sikkim, which also showed how sacred place embodies historical symbols of Lepcha people's religious beliefs, and how these spiritual values confine the exploitation of forest and wildlife. Within the Himalayan region, the investigations regarding the values of sacred landscape in ecological conservation covered both small-scale features such as a sacred grove or a lake, and also large-scale natural landscapes such as mountains and valleys (Sherpa, 2005; Anderson, Salick, Moseley & Ou, 2005; Spoon, 2010; Allendorf, Brandt & Yang, 2014). Research has shown that sacred places can serve as symbols for local identity, tied closely to local religious belief systems expressed in the physical landscape. The implications of conservation and management policies which reflect these indigenous religious belief and spiritual values were widely advocated by many researchers.

2.2.5 Concept of Sacred Landscape

Horster (2010) argues that the concepts of religious landscape, holy land, sacred space and sacred sites are somewhat vague. There is currently a gap in existing literature regarding the examination of the concept and structure of sacred landscape. Singh (2005) defined the sacred landscape as a "faithscape" (p.221), which is created by the wholeness of a landscape and its sacred and symbolic geography. Faithscape encompasses "sacred places, sacred time,

sacred meaning and sacred rituals” (p.221). Both tangible landscape features and symbolic spiritual elements can be found in the faithscape, and they reflect peoples’ attempt to understand their identity and place in the universe. After examining the literature on physical and cultural landscapes, sacred places and sites, an attempt is made below to synthesize the fundamental elements which constitute a sacred landscape (Figure 2). A sacred landscape should be a complex structure that transcends the religious context and embodies all the spiritual, physical and cultural features within a landscape. Supporting Singh’s (2005) argument and the hierarchical landscape classification framework mentioned earlier, sacred landscapes should embody the abstract spiritual faith, the concrete physical and cultural sacred sites, and specific sacred practices, rituals and objects which all serve to reflect and reinforce the spiritual faith. A sacred landscape encloses various forms of interactions between the realm of human beings and the realm of superhuman entities. In this study, SNP located in Khumbu region will be studied as an epitome of sacred landscape.

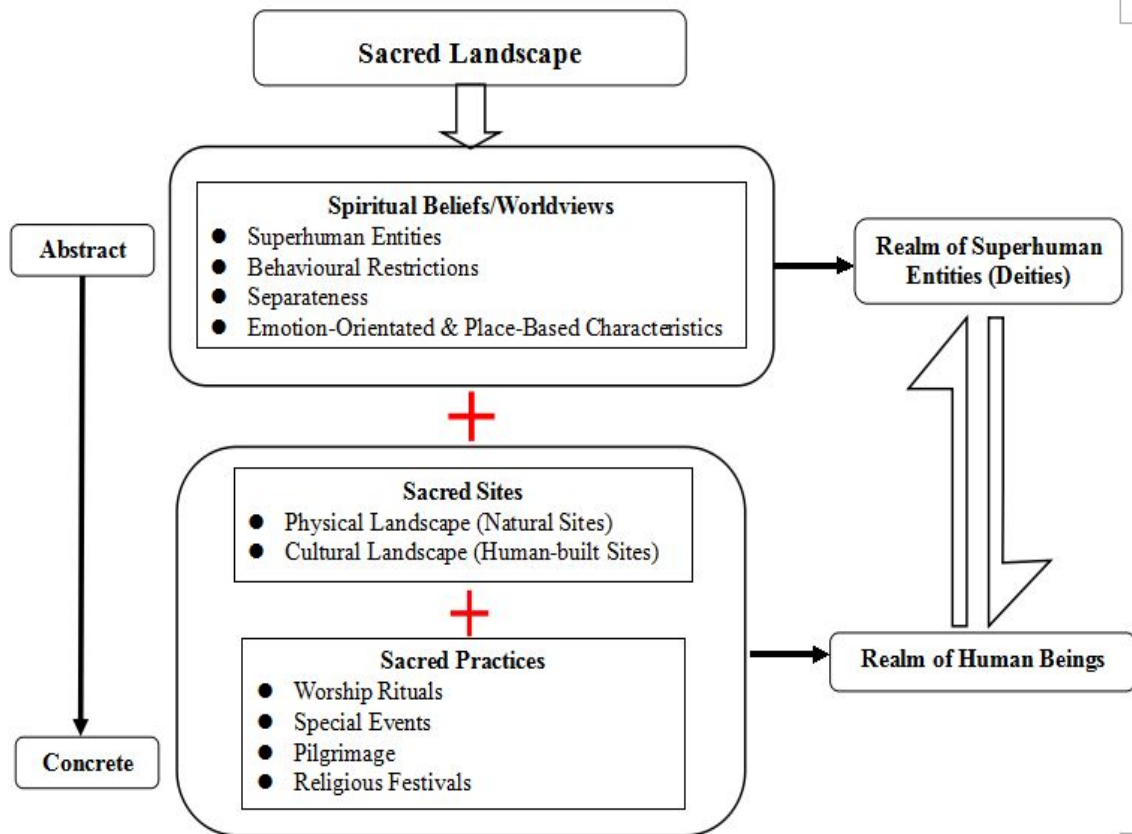


Figure 2. Conceptual map of a sacred landscape. Synthesized from literature review by author.

2.2.6 Local Perspectives of Sacred Landscape

As mentioned earlier, local people are considered as insiders who are part of the landscape (Tuan, 1974). For locals, the landscape is embodied with personal and social meanings, and their livelihoods are closely intertwined with the physical, cultural and spiritual aspects of the landscape. It is argued that insider status and local ancestry play an important role in developing a “rooted sense of place” among local long term residents (Hay, 1998, p.5). Local perspectives toward the occupied landscape are influenced by shared worldviews, cultural values and kinship (Timms, 2008), as well as personal experience and connection with community and place (Relph, 1976, as cited in Brown & Raymond, 2007, p.91). Insiders’

perspective of landscape emphasizes individualistic, subjective dimension of place. Insider perspective toward a landscape is usually place-bound (Knudsen, et al., 2008). Certain landscape features are regarded special only to the locals. A sacred landscape, in particular, embodies mythological stories, legends, religious rituals, and spiritual values that are deeply rooted in the local culture and tradition (Shinde, 2012). Strong emotional attachment and spiritual connection locals have toward the landscape derive from their routinized contact and experience with the landscape on a daily basis (Aasbo, 1999, as cited in Knudsen, 2008, p.111). They understand the landscape as its participators rather than spectators who lack deeper knowledge of the local culture (Knudsen, 2008). Locals' perspective toward a sacred landscape goes beyond tangible landscape features and towards the underlying spiritual ideologies as a connection to their shared cultural identity and heritage (Knudsen, et al, 2008). However, individual differences in education, lifestyle and exposure to other culture and religion can influence local perceptions toward various sacred features in the landscape (Allendorf, et al, 2014). Traditionally, landscape studies have mostly used the outsiders' objective perspective for understanding the geographical forms and features of landscapes. However, understanding the meanings and values embedded in the landscape requires insiders' subjective perspectives, who can intimately read and know the landscape from their personal experiences (Cosgrove, 1998).

2.3 Influence of Tourism at Sacred Sites

2.3.1 Changes in Cultural and Spiritual Values

There is no doubt that many sacred landscapes around the world today are witnessing rapid economic, social and cultural transformations brought by tourism development (Hubert,

1997). Commodification, exploitation of natural resources, imported religion, formal education, increasing migration and other factors were argued to contribute to the degradation of the traditional values and social structures that once helped to protect the sacred sites (Shackley, 2001; Barre, Grant & Draper, 2009; Rutte, 2011; Levi & Kocher, 2013; Allendorf, et al. 2014). Rutte (2011)'s study summarized three major conflicts in sacred natural sites undergoing rapid development: competition over natural resources among different shareholders, modern development against local traditions, and changing spiritual values. Locals used spiritual values to enhance the effects of social arrangement and reduce the need for community monitoring in sacred sites as they believe in the supernatural punishment regarding inappropriate behaviours (Rutte, 2011). However, these spiritual values often conflict with the economic and ecological values in the process of development. When a sacred site becomes an open-access resource, such as a tourist destination, spiritual values and cultural traditions might be overshadowed by economic values due to new market needs. Researches have shown that tourism at sacred sites lead to the commercialization of religious practices and festivals for tourist consumption, and could lose their original meanings and values (Orbasli & Woodward, 2010, as cited in Levi & Kocher, 2013, p.913). The change in spiritual values disconnect the supernatural beings from nature, which means that traditional nature worship at sacred natural sites gradually turn into an "icon worship" (Rutte, 2011, p.2392), and certain features are protected for their spiritual values only while other features in the sacred sites are neglected or even destroyed. In other words, changes in spiritual values result in changes in preference for sacredness. For example, the sacred groves in South India were cut down in order to make space for constructing more temple buildings (Kalam, 1996,

as cited in Rutte, 2011, p.2392). Furthermore, local people's spiritual values are easily influenced by cultural assimilation, especially in remote sacred sites (Rutte, 2011). Although local communities still practice their traditional beliefs and determine the use of sacred natural sites, the animistic traditions in many sacred natural sites are gradually shifting to more formal religion, and this change of values influences locals' perceptions of their own culture (Allendorf et al., 2014). Other scholars like Zurick (1992) and Greenwood (1989) examined the impacts of cultural assimilation (or "acculturation" as identified by Zurick) in their studies. They argued that indigenous culture in remote destinations is particularly sensitive to the influence of outside culture introduced by the tourists. Greenwood (1989) claimed that when culture is exploited like a commodity or a natural resource, its original value and authenticity is lost as local people cannot believe in it in the way it was before. The cultural practices used in everyday life become paid performances, a part of the tourism package catered to the needs of tourists. The spiritual values of the host community therefore, are dominated by the economic values created by tourism and thus result in social inequity, lifestyle change and frustration in the host community (Zurick, 1992). However, other researchers believed that tourism does not necessarily make the sacred sites inauthentic (Bremer, 2006; Shackley, 2006). Bremer argued in religious destinations, touristic spaces usually coexist with religious spaces, and touristic concerns do not clash with religious interests *per se* (2006). Tourists brought regional, even global attention to sacred sites, which enhances and sustains the local claims of the sites as important places in their religious tradition. At the same time, the maintenance and conservation of the sacred sites attract more tourists. Tourist interests and religious interests therefore, respond to and reinforce each other

and produce a meaningful sacred place (Bremer, 2006).

2.3.2 Hybrid of Tourism and Religion: Sacred Tourist Sites

As Bramham (2000) stated, “myth, fantasy and imaginations are essential and integral elements in the social construction of all tourist sights” (as cited in Knudsen et al., 2007, p.228), many mysterious sacred sites around the world are also popular tourist destinations. When a sacred site becomes a tourism destination, it involves different contexts of places simultaneously. Under the influence of tourism, sacred sites become both religious and touristic, and are occupied by both religious people and tourists who have different religious backgrounds and respective experiences of the site (Bremer, 2006). There is no clear distinction or boundary between the tourist space and the religious space within a sacred site. Together, they overlap and produce a hybrid place. Levi and Kocher (2013) agreed with Bremer’s argument, and further claimed that people’s interrelation with these hybrid places determine the real meaning of the place. However, it has been challenging for sacred tourist sites to maintain its perceived sacredness while benefiting from tourism. In order to retain the intrinsic sacredness, many practical approaches have been used to manage the social and cultural impacts of tourism on religious communities at sacred sites (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Gatrell & Collins-Kreiner, 2006; Levi & Kocher, 2013). The separation of tourists and religious adherents proved effective to avoid conflicts at sacred religious sites in Israel and Thailand (Levi & Kocher, 2013) Tourists were not allowed in certain areas when private religious activities take place, and sacred events are opened to tourists and religious followers at different times. This separation allowed the host community to keep their religious routines

while getting economic benefits from tourism.

Chapter Summary: Evaluating Landscape and Sacredness

This chapter reviewed literature pertinent to the meaning and classification of landscape, the creation and uses of sacred places, and the interrelation between tourism and sacred religious sites. Previous studies of landscape showed that the meaning of landscape is multi-layered and subject to personal understandings and experiences. A landscape embodies not only physical and cultural features, but also values and philosophies. The interpretation of landscape is based on subjective readings, and therefore varied largely among different individuals. Sauer (1963) categorized landscape into physical landscape, which is area prior to the introduction of human activities, and cultural landscape, which represents the modification and transformation done by human upon the natural landscape. This conceptualization of cultural landscape as the product created by culture working on the natural landscape is argued to shape the research direction in landscape study (Knudsen, et al, 2008). Two main perspectives of landscape studies appeared in this literature review: a systems perspective which provides quantified explanations and classification of landscape features, and a humanistic perspective focused on socially constructed elements in landscape. The former takes a morphological approach and emphasizes the tradition of quantification while the latter views the landscape more than just physical forms, but a complex expression of a dynamic system including culture, social structure and values.

Researchers like Tuan (1974) and Knudsen (2008) emphasized that cultural landscape is

closely associated with the physical forms of a landscape, and create distinctive and meaningful places. These places have symbolic meanings derived from the historical, cultural and physical contexts of the landscape. Some researchers argued that a tourism landscape, which embodies various tourist places and sites, is a sub-category of the cultural landscape. Most tourism landscapes have local and insider meanings, as well as more general and outsider meanings. Personal experiences associated with the same landscape are largely different between insiders and outsiders, thus resulting in salient differences in the interpretation of landscape. Traditionally, landscape studies used the outsiders' objective perspective for understanding the geographical forms and features of landscapes. However, understanding the meanings and values embedded in the landscape requires insights from locals' subjective perspectives, which offer intimate readings and knowledge of the landscape based on personal experiences (Cosgrove, 1998). Combining the two prevalent approaches, this research aims to: 1) classify various landscape features by using outsiders' perspectives (systems perspective), and 2) interpret the meanings of landscape from locals/insiders' perspectives (humanistic perspective).

Previous research regarding sacred places and sites demonstrated the concepts of separateness, respect, and strict prohibition and restriction on behaviours. Hubert (1997) and Stump (2008) asserted that there is universally agreed concept of sacredness among different cultures. Regardless of their forms, functions and religious contexts, sacred places all symbolize an interaction between the adherents and the superhuman entities, and they all demonstrate and reinforce the worldviews of the adherents. In order to construct a

comprehensive understanding of the term “sacred landscape”, both tangible and symbolic elements in the landscape should be included. A sacred landscape is a complex concept that transcends the religious context and embodies all the spiritual, physical and cultural features within a landscape.

More recent researches regarding sacred places have focused on those that became popular tourist destinations. These sacred tourist sites were found both religious and touristic; there is no clear distinction between the two spaces. It has been challenging for these sites to maintain its perceived sacredness while benefiting from tourism development. Many researchers argued that traditional spiritual values and religious practices often conflict with the economic values in the development process. Tourism has changed the authenticity in sacred sites, and also local people’s lifestyle and their perception toward their own culture. Other researchers like Bremer (2006) and Shackley (2006) argued that tourism does not necessarily affect sacred sites negatively. Touristic spaces can coexist with religious spaces and they actually respond to and reinforce each other to produce a meaningful sacred place. Sacred places can be used as conservation mechanisms by reinforcing specific rules of conduct among people. Implications for conservation and management policies which reflect local religious belief and spiritual values were widely advocated by researchers. Based on the existing literature pertinent to landscape studies and sacredness, a conceptual framework depicting the relationship between human and sacred landscape is presented, which puts emphasis on multiple dimensions of landscape, an abstract-to-concrete classification framework, and human frailty to superhuman power.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The first part of this chapter provides background information of Khumbu region, focused on its physical and socio-cultural contexts, and development of mountaineering and trekking tourism. The second part includes a detailed description of the research design and methods.

3.1 Study Area: Khumbu Region, Nepal

3.1.1 Physical Context

The Khumbu Region, where SNP is located is in Nepal's Solukhumbu District (administrative unit), in northeastern Nepal, bordering Tibet on the north. The entire region covers an area of 1148 km², and is surrounded by massive snow mountains, which uplift Khumbu from approximately 2800 meters at its southern boundary to 8848 meters on the peak of Mount Everest (Spoon, 2010). Besides Mt. Everest, some of the highest mountains in the world such as Lhotse (8516m), Makalu (8485m) and Cho Oyo (8153m) are located in Khumbu as well, which have made it a dream destination for both professional mountaineers and adventure-seeking trekkers from around the globe (Stevens, 2003). Glaciers descending from the snow mountains of Khumbu flow down into rivers like Bhote Koshi and Dudh Koshi, creating deep valleys separated by rugged ridges and draining toward the south end of Khumbu, where the two rivers join together and flow further south through Nepal's middle hill regions, then into the low-land of Indian plain. Khumbu region has diverse fauna and flora despite challenging physical conditions. Broad leaf, conifer and birch forests dominate the forests at lower elevation while scrub vegetation is prevalent near all major villages in Khumbu. As the elevation rises and temperature drops, forests are replaced by

ground-clinging grasses, lichens and mosses above 4000m (Brower, 1991). Wildlife includes bats (*chiroptera*), Tibetan wolf (*Canis lupus chanco*), jackal (*Canis aureus*), Himalayan snow cock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*), musk deer (*moschus*), tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*), black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) and snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*). Domesticated animals and herds are more easily observed along the trekking routes, include yak, zopkyo (hybrid of cattle and yak), cows, goats, sheep and horse (Sherpa, 2008). Large part of Khumbu region was designated as a national park (SNP) in 1976. Its name “Sagarmatha” comes from the Nepali name for Mt. Everest, which literally means the “forehead of the sky”, indicating its unprecedented height (Bernbaum, 1997). The villages inside the park and the southern region along the Dudh Koshi river, also known as the Pharak region, were designated as a buffer zone in 2002 (Figure 3).

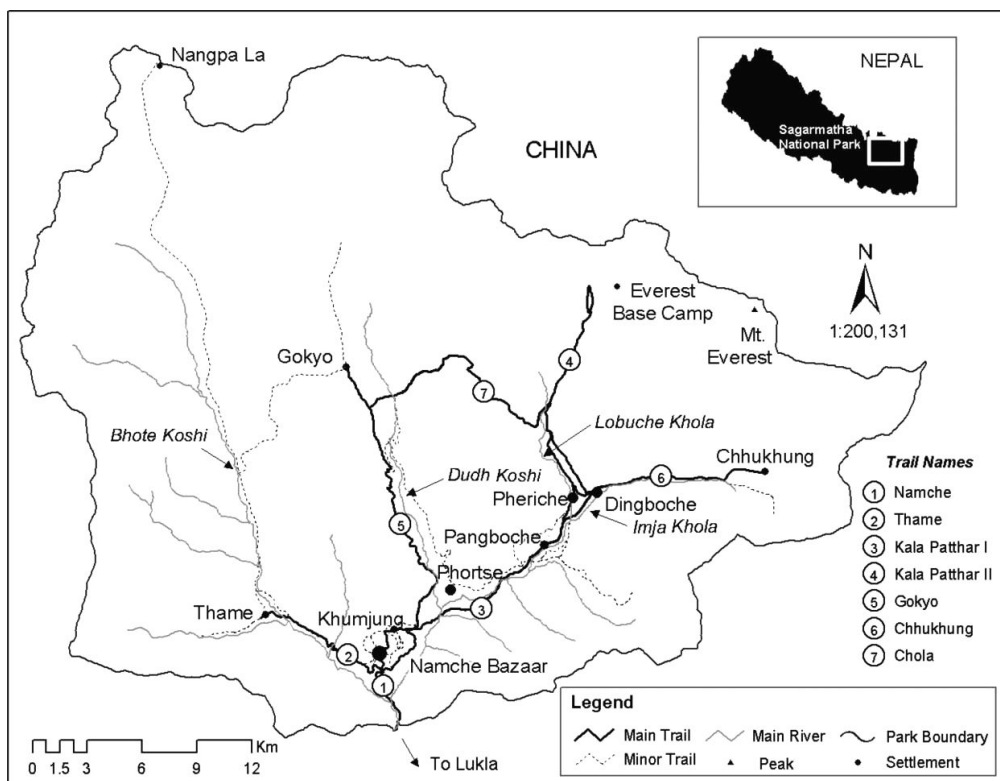


Figure 3. Map of SNP in Nepal showing trekking trails and main villages and Mt. Everest.

Adapted from Nepal (2005, p.209).

3.1.2 Socio-Cultural Context

3.1.2.1 Sherpa People:

Roughly 3,500 people currently live in the SNP and some 2500 in its buffer zone, with about 90% of the population belonging to the ethnic group Sherpa (Spoon & Sherpa, 2008). Sherpa, or “people of the east”, are believed to have migrated from Kham in eastern Tibet to Khumbu more than 500 years ago. There has been some speculations among scholars and chroniclers regarding Sherpas’ original motivations for leaving Tibet. Some suggested Sherpas migrated because of the religious persecution by Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which threatened other religious schools and especially the pre-Buddhist Bon religion (Sherpa, 2008; Zangbu & Klatzel, 2011). Nyingmapa, the “old translation school”, practiced by Sherpa ancestors, might have been subdued by this persecution as the result of their close association with the traditional Bon practices (Stump, 2008; Sherpa, 2008). Scholars like Ortner (1999), attributed the Sherpa migration to Khumbu to the invasion of Mongol army. According to religious leaders of Tibetan Buddhism, the Kham Sherpas migrated to Khumbu believing it to be a *beyul*, a sacred valley founded by Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche, where Sherpas can use it as a sanctuary in times of wars and conflicts. The first Sherpa who is believed to open the hidden valley of Khumbu was Phachen, who departed from Kham-Salmo-Gang to Shripal, which is north of Khumbu in Tibet. He then entered Khumbu by passing through Rolwaling valley and over Tashi Labtsa pass. Phachen is thought to repelled many bad spirits along the way (Zangbu & Klatzel, 2011). More Sherpas came to settle in Khumbu from the Nangpa-la pass, which is still used today as a trading route between Tibet and Khumbu (Sherpa, 2008).

Phachen's descendants then settled in Khunde, the oldest village in Khumbu. By the mid-1500s, Sherpa population dominated most of the Khumbu region, and gradually built six main settlements among the rugged landscape including: Khumjung, Khunde, Namche, Thame, Pangboche and Phortse. Pangboche and Dingboche were later built as secondary settlements at higher elevations (Ortner, 1999). Small villages which were located approaching 5000 meters usually served as summer pastures; some of these locations now have turned into permanent tourist settlements such as Gokyo and Lobuche (Nepal, 2005). During the main trekking seasons, the guesthouses and lodges in these small settlements are usually packed with tourists and guides from around the globe, but remain largely vacant during winter and monsoon seasons. For centuries, Sherpas sustained their lives by engaging in yak herding, farming, and trading with the people in Tibet and in the southern low land of Nepal. However, the rise of trekking and mountaineering has largely changed Khumbu's subsistence economy (Byers, 2005).

3.1.2.2 Sherpa Religious Worldviews:

Most Sherpa residents in the SNP still practice the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism while some Sherpa clans in other regions of Nepal follow the Gelug School. Nyingmapa combines all three forms of Buddhism: "Hinayana to improve one's character, Mahayana to think about others, and Vajrayana to follow a short cut to spiritual liberation" (Zangbu & Klatzel, 2011, p.10). Sherpas place Guru Rinpoche, familiarly known as Orgyen Rinpoche or Padmasambhava at a status near to the Buddha himself and believe that he brought Buddhism to Khumbu and Tibet in the eighth century (Zangbu & Klatzel, 2011). Guru Rinpoche was

believed to have created numerous *beyuls* in the Himalayan region and hide numerous treasures (or *ters*) for Sherpas to discover in times of need (Klatzel, 2009). Sherpas strictly follow certain sets of rules in *beyuls*, such as not harming or killing any living things, respecting local spirits dwelling in natural landscape, refraining from violence and negative thoughts, and keeping a peaceful and compassionate mind (Spoon, 2010).

Like other Buddhists, Sherpa people believe in reincarnation of various state of being, which can be positive or negative depending on the amount of sin and merit accumulated in a lifetime (Ortner, 1989). Sufficient merit and good deeds help one's chance of being reborn into a higher state of being and ultimately escaping the cycle of life, death and rebirth. In addition to Buddhist concepts such as merit, rebirth and compassion, Nyingmapa also focused more exclusively on a fusion of Tantrism and Tibetan Bon practices which involves animistic and shamanistic rituals of protection, veneration and exorcism (Ortner, 1989). Sherpas see the world as a place occupied by a variety of supernatural beings, including spirits (both good and bad) and deities who reside in trees, soil, water, mountains and rocks. Offerings must be made in order to please the deities and spirits, and to receive their protection. Sherpas' spiritual values therefore are closely associated with the natural landscape and influence more sustainable decision-making such as taboos on cutting trees in certain area, contaminating water sources and soil, and killing animals (Sherpa, 2008).

3.1.3 Mountaineering and Trekking Tourism in Khumbu

Tourism has been considered as the most important export industry and foreign currency

earner for Nepal's economy as it accounts for about 5% of the GDP, and creates more than 250,000 direct and indirect jobs (Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation or MoTCA, 2013). The predominant form of tourism in Nepal is mountain tourism, thanks to Nepal's ecological diversity and cultural richness (Zurick, 1992). According to recent statistics, 13% of the tourists visit Nepal in 2012 to engage in trekking and mountaineering activities (MoTCA, 2013). The extensive network of protected areas in Nepal has played a significant role in driving Nepal's tourism industry (Nepal, 2002). The unique geological formation and rich natural and cultural heritage of the Himalayan region have long lured trekkers, mountaineers and other pleasure seeking tourists from all over the world. Since the 1960s, especially after the designation of SNP as World Heritage Site in 1979, this remote and largely inaccessible region has transformed into a popular trekking designation. Number of foreign visitors has grown dramatically, from 20 in 1964, the year when the Nepal government first allowed foreign visitors to make multi-day hiking tours in the region, to 18,200 during the 1997-1998 seasons (MoTCA, 2013). The escalating civil unrest throughout the country caused major decline in tourism during 2001-2002. After 2003, the number of visitors in SNP fully rebounded and has kept growing steadily ever since. In 2013, around 36,750 foreign trekkers visited the national park (MoTCA, 2013).

More than four decades of intensive tourism development in SNP have had various positive influences such as development of modern infrastructure, increases in household incomes and improved living conditions, international exposure and recognition of local culture, as well as cross-cultural exchanges (Fisher, 1990; Stevens, 1993; Adams, 1996; Nepal, Kohler and

Banzhaf, 2002). Many studies on tourism impacts in this region have focused on the negative influences of tourism on the environment, especially highlighting ecological problems associated with waste disposal, deforestation and changes in land use and agricultural practices (Jefferies, 1982; Nepal & Nepal, 2004; Byers, 2005). In recent years, some scholars have started to examine the social and cultural changes brought by tourism development in this region. They found that tourism has created visible changes in Sherpas' lifestyle, economic patterns, education, marriage and location of residence (Sherpa, 2008; Klatzel, 2009). Language, family ties and cultural traditions are losing importance among younger generation of Sherpas (Luger, 2000; Nyaupane, Lew & Tatsugawa, 2014). However, other scholars have argued that the negative impact of tourism on local environment, cultural and society has been exaggerated. They believe that Sherpas demonstrated strong resilience toward changes brought by outside forces, and the traditional relations of production, cultural order and religious routines largely persist, although some of these might have been transformed through adaptations to modern technologies and ideologies (Stevens, 1993; Spoon & Sherpa, 2008). Others have suggested that Sherpa's have been very successful in negotiating between tradition and modernity, and have largely kept the essence of their culture intact despite their deep involvement in tourism (Nepal, 2015).

3.2 Research Paradigm and Methods

This section first discusses the implications of the epistemological stance in this study and explains researcher's role in designing the research methods in collecting and analyzing data. Positioned in a constructivist worldview, this study is an exploratory case study which applies

qualitative research methods including a two-stage fieldwork, site observation, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with locals. This section ends with addressing the potential biases and limitations in the research methods.

3.2.1 Epistemological Stance and Researcher's Role

This study holds a constructivist worldview, which is typically seen as a research approach to qualitative study. The idea of constructivist epistemology came from works such as Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry* and Crotty's (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research*. The constructivists emphasized the complexity of reality and argued that people build meaning and understanding within a situated social context, from multiple points of view (Levy, 2004). These individually constructed meanings are relative and subjective (Creswell, 2014), based on personal experiences and interpretations. As a researcher using constructivist worldview, I position myself in the research to recognize that "there is no objective truth to be known" (Hugly & Sayward, 1987, p. 278), and I am aware of my own role and background in shaping my interpretations. As Creswell (2014) identified, the goal of a constructivist research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' view of the study object/situation and attempt to understand the meanings *others* have about the world. In this research, I purposed broad and general interview questions so that participants can construct their own meanings and interpretations of the sacred landscape (see Appendix A). Besides taking detailed notes during all interviews, I also kept a research journal to record my everyday activities in SNP and my interactions with not only my participants, but also other locals and tourists I encountered. I also aspired to keep reflective notes when transcribing and

analyzing the qualitative data collected. By reflecting upon my own observations and the information participants provided, I was able to think about possible assumptions I made and capture issues that might be forgotten.

3.2.2 Research Design

A qualitative design was chosen for this study because the aim of this study is to establish an in-depth understanding of local residents' perspectives toward the sacred landscape and how their perceptions have influenced by tourism. This study is not to develop scales, but to explore complex ties between landscape perceptions and tourism. A qualitative research design has a flexible and inductive nature which encourages the participants to provide deeper, more comprehensive responses through active conversations with the investigator, and allows new information that could not have been anticipated to emerge (Creswell, 2014). This research, which takes place in SNP, Nepal, is an exploratory case study, in which the researcher develops in-depth analysis of a case over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995), and aims to explore topic and themes that are unfamiliar to the researcher, and not fully examined in existing studies (Mason, Augustyn & Seakhoa-King, 2010).

3.2.2.1 Exploratory Case Study

This study was placed as an exploratory case study. First, an exploratory study has been defined as “a broad ranging, purposive, systematic, pre-arranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social life” (Vogt, 1999, as cited in Mason, et al, 2009, p. 433). It is used when the

researcher is not very familiar with the context and topic of the research, and there is a lack of sufficient information available (Sanrantakos, 2005, as cited in Mason, et al., 2009 p. 433). Exploratory study allows the generation of new ideas, conjectures and hypotheses, helps in interpretations of complex concepts, and provides a platform for further investigation on the subject (Neuman, 2015). It could be used as the first stage of a research followed by a second quantitative phase using the data and concepts generated in the exploratory phase (Creswell, 2014). This exploratory stage of a research often applies a case study research strategy (Rowley, 2002). As described by Yin (2009), a case study investigates a specific case in its contemporary real-world context and it could be a preferred research design when the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions and when the researcher has little control over the behavioural events. SNP was chosen to be the single “case” for this study because of the following reasons: 1) the primary research question of this study is to examine how local residents’ perceive sacredness embedded in the multiple aspects of a landscape and how these perceptions are influenced/reshaped by tourism development; 2) the social, cultural and religious contexts of the study region Khumbu is very unique; and 3) tourism-introduced changes in this region is a contemporary phenomenon, and its influence on local spiritual values and religious practices are largely understudied in current literature, which makes it a distinct case in the studies of landscape and cultural geography. A single case study can also be used as a preliminary for a multiple case study at a later stage (Rowley, 2002).

3.2.3 Research Methods

This study uses multiple methods in the data collection process. Semi-structured interviews

with local residents and key informants, my own observations in the field, and secondary literature are the main vehicles of inquiry employed in this study. Triangulation, in terms of both primary and secondary data, as well as research methods (field observation, interviews, literature) are used wherever possible to limit personal and methodological biases (Patton, 2002).

3.2.3.1 Fieldwork in SNP, Khumbu, Nepal

This study was conducted in two stages. In 2014, I made two trips to SNP from April to May, and again from October to November. My first trip to SNP, which lasted about 20 days, allowed me to gain a broad overview of Khumbu, including its geographical and human contexts, main settlements, and the dynamics of trekking tourism industry in the region. During this trip, I wrote a trekking journal and made some preliminary observations along the trails, including the layout of major villages, locations of important religious institutions, and Sherpas' daily religious practices. I also established some personal contacts with several local Sherpas who became my initial participants in my research. When I returned to Canada, I started preparing research proposal and other documents for ethics applications (see Appendix B), arranging travel agenda and contacting trekking guide and interpreter. From October to November, 2014, I returned to Khumbu during the busiest trekking season. I visited 11 villages in SNP, conducted 33 in-depth interviews with local Sherpas, and observed several community rituals and religious festivals. As a lone researcher, I followed the popular teahouse trekking routes in SNP, hiking for several hours and resting overnight in one of the lodges/teahouses operated by locals (see Appendix C). Along the trekking trails, I counted as many cultural and physical features I can observe and took notes of their location, numbers,

forms and functions. By counting and making notes of different landscape features I encountered during my fieldwork, I developed some ideas about the distribution and concentration of sacred sites in Khumbu. My on-the-route observations also helped me to engage with participants during interviews, as I referred to what I had observed during the trek. I also compared my own observations of the sacred features with participants' knowledge to see if there are any consistencies or discrepancies. Information I gathered were verified for accuracy by consulting Sherpa's (2008) and Klatzela dn Zangbu's books (2011). Usually, I spent 3-5 days in one village, visiting local families and monasteries, making observations around the site, making arrangement for interviews and organizing interview notes. In each village, lodge owners and their families were usually the first group of people I encountered. Many of them participated in my research and assisted in directing me to other local residents and key informants. I visited local monasteries and negotiated with residing monks and nuns for their participation in this study and scheduled time with them for in-depth interviews.

3.2.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with local residents were used as the main data collection method. In this study, I was an "outsider" with limited knowledge of the local community, religion and culture, therefore, semi-structured interviews allowed for issues to emerge that I had not considered fully or I was unaware of. This allowed for flexible and further probing of certain themes during the interview process. Interview questions were open-ended in order to encourage active conversations. The original plan was to electronically record the

conversations with all participants. However, only 10 interviews were recorded. Many Sherpas I approached were uncomfortable facing the hand-held recorder. Instead I took detailed written notes both during and right after each interview. My trekking guide also helped me in note-taking and organizing. This method is proved adequate in representing the breadth and depth of the participants' responses. However, I acknowledge the potential loss of details implicit in this technique, including the lapsing of memories, lack of interviewing and note-taking experience and language limitations when discussing complex concepts in a mix of English, Nepali, and Sherpa. Interviews that were recorded electronically were transcribed and organized in Nepal and China after the field trip. Throughout this thesis I use pseudonyms in all written materials to ensure anonymity of research participants.

The length of semi-structured interviews varied between 45 and 90 minutes. Interview questions focused on: a) local residents' identification and interpretation of sacred sites in the national park, b) Sherpas' understanding of the *beyul*, and their personal experience and interactions with various features in the sacred *beyul*, c) perspectives concerning the role of tourism in influencing their daily lives and religious practices, and d) their perceptions of sacredness of *beyul* under the influence of tourism and globalization. After a brief introduction of myself and purpose of research, I started my conversations asking general questions about the participants, including their age, occupation and length of residency. After settling into several cups of tea that my hosts offered me, I probed further with open-ended questions about nearby sacred sites, such as a monastery forest or public *Lu* (water spirit). From this initial question, I continued asking the participants to identify

features that they considered sacred in their villages, and also in other villages in the SNP. The reasons for their sacredness were then discussed in a conversational manner. I encouraged participants to elaborate on the concept of *beyul* and asked what it meant to them personally. Then I directed the conversation toward exploring the relationship between identified sacred features and participants' daily lives. I let the participants to talk about some of the cultural and social changes they observed in their villages, and asked whether they felt that Sherpa religion and cultural practices were affected by the increasingly commercialized and westernized lifestyle in the mountains. Participants' perspectives of sacredness of *beyul* in today's society were then discussed. I concluded the interview by talking about my own travel experiences and observations in SNP and Nepal. All interviews were conducted in a comfortable and safe environment for the participants. In most cases, I met with participants in local lodges and restaurants or in the village *gompas*, accompanied by my trekking guide who was also my translator. After the interview was completed, in appreciation of their time I gave each participant a small souvenir brought from my hometown, Shanghai, China. I gave the gifts as a kind gesture, and not to influence the outcome of the interview.

3.2.3.3 Participants

I interviewed a total of 33 Sherpas residents from 11 villages. Their age ranged between 19 to 78 years old (Table 2). Ten participants had a monastic background, either were serving or previously served in monasteries and nunneries (Table 3). They were grouped as "religious key informants". Religious key informants were mainly above the age of 50, the group demonstrating the greatest knowledge about Khumbu's sacred landscape (Spoon 2008). The

other 23 lay participants were local residents of SNP. The majority from this group was involved in tourism-related businesses, while five were farmers. Young Sherpas under the age of 18 were excluded from this study. All participants were long term residents of Khumbu. Most of them were born and raised in the Khumbu region. Seasonal residents who originated from other Sherpa communities outside of Khumbu might not have as much understanding of the landscape as long term residents, which could have influenced the validity and accuracy of their responses. Since I had visited the research area in April and May, 2014, personal connections with several local residents were established. These residents were first approached in my second trip. Through them, I was able to reach other community members by using snowball sampling (Bernard 2011).

Table 2. Age of Participants

Age	# of Participants
≤ 19	1
20-30	6
31-40	10
41-50	10
51-50	3
>60	3
Total	33

Table 3. Interview Locations, Participants' Gender, Lay/Monastic

Location	Lay Participants		Religious Key Informants	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Phakding	1	1	2	0
Monjo	1	0	0	0
Namche	3	2	1	0
Khumjung & Khunde	2	1	0	0
Thame	1	0	0	0
Thamo	1	0	0	0
Machherma	1	0	0	0
Phortse	2	0	1	0
Pangboche	1	1	3	0
Debuche	1	0	0	2
Tengboche	2	2	1	0
Total	16	7	8	2

3.2.3.4 Language Issues:

Most Sherpa residents in SNP speak Nepal's official language Nepali, along with their local Tibetan dialect. Since the vast majority of local population in the SNP is now involved in tourism-related businesses, they also speak various levels of English and other languages. During my initial visit, I observed that many local residents (especially lodge owners, businessmen, monks) in larger tourist hubs like Namche Bazaar, Tengboche and Pangboche

spoke fairly good English. However, the majority of participants in this study had difficulties explaining complex notions in English. Only a few interviews were conducted entirely in English. In many cases, a mix of Tibetan, Nepali and English were used during the interviews. Therefore, my Sherpa guide, who spoke good English and Tibetan helped me in the oral translation whenever necessary. Interview notes were taken both during and after each interview. The recorded interviews were transcribed at the end of field research, and the accuracy of the translations was verified by a Sherpa friend from Kathmandu, who was fluent in both English and Sherpa dialect.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

After returning from my fieldwork in November 2014, I started organizing and transcribing the interview data. Qualitative content analysis and coding techniques were used in analyzing the interview scripts (See coding examples in Appendix D). It is a common method in qualitative research to generating trends and conclusions by identifying the patterns and themes and then grouping the characteristics from data (Neuman, 2015). First, I labeled my interview scripts in different colors according to original interview questions. I grouped the segments with the same color together and using “constructed codes” identified the main topics and subtopics that emerged from the texts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Then I started line-by-line reading and analysis, highlighting and grouping the keywords and key phrases throughout the scripts, synthesizing similar information, generating more layers and examining deeper meaning in the texts. After that I began drawing trends and themes from the data. The frequency of the sacred sites mentioned by participants was noted separately, as

a supplementary means to construct the classification of the sacred landscape in SNP. In this research, I gave my participants the primary authority to the descriptions and interpretations of sacred landscape. Only when responses were are contradicting, such as the interpretation of the residing deities on certain sacred peaks, I turned to existing literature examining the sacred places and sacred texts in Khumbu region to fill in the gaps.

3.2.5 Limitations and Biases in Research Methods

This research, which was carried out in a relatively brief and segmented period, was subjected to constraints in time, money and physical condition. First of all, not all settlements in SNP were visited, including some important sacred sites in the park such as Gokyo lake (4900 meters above sea level). I recruited as many participants as I could to offset the geographical limitation. I made detailed observations along the trekking route only, and therefore those away from the main trails were excluded. Although I reached 11 villages along the main trekking routes, the number of interviews conducted in each village was relatively small. This research could only offer a snap shot of the sacred landscape interpreted by a small number of Sherpa people. Also, the age variation among my participants may have generational difference within my data, which were not accounted for. During this research, I was unable to talk to many female Sherpa residents in SNP. The reasons for this lack of female participation include: 1) the monastic communities in Khumbu are dominated by males; this was true also among the lodge owners, trekking guides and porters, and 2) female residents in common households were more reluctant to be interviewed. Instead, many of the

female participants let me talk to their husbands or sons. Therefore, female voices are underrepresented in this study.

During field research, I experienced warm Sherpa hospitality and friendliness which touched me deeply. However, the enthusiasm expressed by participants also raised certain alarms because locals might intend to please an “outsider”, a temporary guest like myself by giving responses they thought would meet my needs. Bott (2009) also mentioned this ethical concern in her research with the Sherpas in Khumbu region. She noted that the “wish granting” culture among Sherpas might result in power dilemmas, thus further affect researcher’s subjectivity (p. 294). My multiple identities as a Chinese, female, a student researcher from Canada and a trekker might also have influenced on the data collection and analysis process. I attempted to document the structural components of sacred landscape in SNP and understand how locals perceive, interpret and interact with the landscape in changing economic and social contexts. But a non-native researcher’s inquiry into a remote region with unfamiliar culture might result in biases. My own world-view, cultural and educational background might have influenced my subjectivity in terms of interpreting participants’ narratives. Probably I can never perceive the landscape and understand the spiritual values as local Sherpas do.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings, which are presented in six subsections. The first section is focused on the typology of sacred features in Khumbu's landscape based on author's on-site observations and participants' identification. The second and third section is focused on the subjective understanding and personal interactions with the sacred landscape. The remaining three sections examined the perceived influences of tourism on local spiritual values and religious practices.

4.1 Typology of Sacred Features in Khumbu

In general, author's first-hand observations made during the two-stage fieldwork were consistent with the identifications made by local residents. Sacred features are identified into three main categories. "Spiritual figures" refer to gods, goddesses, spirits and other metaphysical beings, who either are believed to reside in natural features, or play significant roles in the establishment of the *beyul* in Khumbu. "Physical features" are natural sites in the physical landscape which are considered as sacred by Sherpa religion and culture. Their sacredness is usually associated with certain supernatural entities. "Cultural features" refer to those constructed establishments built by Sherpas for religious purposes such as worshipping local spirits, seeking protections and blessings from supernatural beings, and commemorating ancestors or historical events. Components of sacred landscape can be understood as macro, abstract concepts down to practical, micro-level objects that the Sherpa use or interact with on a daily basis.

4.1.1 Spiritual Figures as Abstract Embodiment of Landscape

Spiritual figures in Khumbu's sacred landscape include deities, spirits and other metaphysical beings who either are believed to reside in natural features, or played significant roles in the spread of Buddhism and the establishment of *beyul* in Khumbu. Results of the 33 in-depth interviews with local Sherpas revealed five types of spiritual figures: Buddhist deities and saints; *yul-lha* (mountain deities); *lu* (water spirit); *sadak* (soil spirit); and reincarnated high lamas. While participants mostly referred to Buddhist deities and saints as well as mountain deities, religious key informants and older lay participants also indicated additional knowledge of local spirits in water and soil, as well as reincarnated high lamas.

4.1.1.1 Buddhist Deities and Saints

Participants often ranked the Buddhist deities and saints higher in the hierarchy of the spiritual beings and worshiped them on a daily basis. As stated in the literature, Sherpas place *Padmasambhava* (or Guru Rinpoche, meaning lotus-born) at a status almost close to the Buddha himself (Figure 4). He is the founder of Tibetan Buddhism and is believed to have created the *beyul* Khumbu. According to a teacher at the monastic school in Phakding, Guru Rinpoche came to Khumbu and meditated in a cave above Khumjung. He realized that this valley could be a *beyul*, a sanctuary for future Buddhist adherents. He instructed students to write his teachings into *ter* (special books) and concealed them along with other sacred objects in rocks and soil, and made them invisible. Guru Rinpoche predicted that some people (as known as *tertons*) would find this sanctuary in times of unrest, and they would use the hidden treasures to benefit all beings in the world.



Figure 4. Portrait and Statue of Guru Rinpoche in Thame (Left) and Pangboche (Right).

Photos taken by author.

Phakpa Chenrezig, the deity of compassion, is another important spiritual figure identified by participants. Chenrezig is mentioned in every major religious book written by Guru Rinpoche and worshiped not only by the Sherpas, but also by followers of Hindu religion. Most Sherpa homes I visited in Khumbu present offerings to the statue or painting of Chenrezig in their private chapels (Figure 5). Participants identified that Chenrezig gives direct teachings through his incarnations, many of whom are Tibetan high lamas, including the 14th Dalai Lama. The biggest religious festival in Khumbu, Mani Rimdu, is dedicated to worship Phakpa Chenrezig. His blessings are put on *rilbu* (the long life pill) and distributed to everyone at the event. The masked sacred dance (*chham*) performed by monks at Mani Rimdu shows different manifestations of Chenrezig, along with many other spiritual figures including Tseringma (one of the five long life sisters), and Maha-kala (the protector of Buddhist faith) (Figure 6 & 7). The knowledge of Buddhist deities and saints varied among

participants. Older participants, especially those over 50, and who had obtained monastic education, demonstrated greater knowledge of Buddhist deities and saints, while younger participants were comparatively less familiar with the legends and stories related to each deity.



Figure 5. Left: a portrait of Chenrezig along trekking trail. Right: a statue of Chenrezig in monastery near Phakding. Photos taken by author.



Figure 6. Maha-kala, the protector of Buddhism faith. Mani Rimdu Mask Dance. Photo taken by author, 2014.



Figure 7. Left: Maha-Deva, the action form of Chenrezig. Right: Tseringma, one of the Long-Life-Sisters. Mani Rimdu Mask Dance. Photo taken by author.

4.1.1.2 Mountain Deities (*Yul-lha*)

Yul-lha refers to deities and protectors who live on mountains. They are believed to exist before the arrival of Buddhism in the region. The most commonly referred (31 of 33 participants) mountain deity was Khumbu-Yul-Lha, or Khumbila, the country deity of Khumbu who resides on the mountain named after him. Some old participants stated that Khumbila used to be a “bad spirits who did lots of bad things” before Guru Rinpoche came (Figure 8). Guru Rinpoche converted him into a good warrior and commended him to protect the people and land in Khumbu. The central location of Mt. Khumbila makes it the most sacred mountain in Khumbu valley. Most participants emphasized that climbing it would enrage the deity and result in serious consequences. Some participants said if they offend this deity, even in minor ways, he will punish the people by invoking avalanches, earthquakes, droughts and landslides. *Puja* (ritual ceremony) and offerings which are made to venerate Mt. Khumbila and the residing deity occur in both daily lives and religious festivals (e.g. Dumji festival during the monsoon season in May or June). Jomo Miyo Lang Sangma, the female deity who resides on Mt. Everest (or *Jomolungma* in Tibetan) were mentioned by 27 participants (Figure 9). She is one of the five sisters of long life in traditional Tibetan mythology who gives food and wealth. Although the deity is widely considered an important spiritual figure in Khumbu, Mt. Everest itself has less religious significance for Sherpa participants. Offerings and *puja* for this deity usually take place before a climbing expedition but not on a daily, regular basis. Other mountain deities that were mentioned by participants include: Tseringma, the leader of the five sisters of long life; Tawuche on Mt. Taboche; Si

Chu, Khumbila's gamekeeper (some said minister); and Khumbila's wife Tamosermu who lives on Mt. Thamserku east of Namche. Several participants indicated that there are *yul-lhas* on every mountain peak in Khumbu but their names are unspecific. Both lay participants and religious key informants, young and old, were able to identify at least one example of mountain deities. The geographical proximity to certain mountains appeared to influence participants' familiarity of *yul-lhas*. Sherpas usually mentioned the sacred mountains near their home villages first because they were more familiar with the associated deities and the names of the mountains. For example, six lay participants in Pangboche referred to the deity on Mt. Taboche while lay participants from other villages did not mention this deity at all. However, Khumbila and Mt. Everest were two exceptions, and were referred to by almost all participants.



Figure 8. Khumbi Yul-Lha and Mt. Khumbila. Photos taken by author.



Figure 9. Jomo Miyo Lang Sangma and Mt. Everest (Jomolungma). Photos taken by author.

4.1.1.3 Local Spirits

In addition to the mountain gods, participants also acknowledge the presence of water spirits (*lu*) and soil spirits (*sadak*). These spirits are believed to live in water, trees, rocks and earth. Their habitats are sensitive to contamination and defilement, therefore, keeping these areas clean are deemed crucial. Veneration for these minor spirits usually occur at the origin of water sources, or inside and outside individual households. Although most participants were aware of these spirits, the exact dwelling locations of these spirits were unknown to the participants except for some elders. Some participants identified several *lu* spots in their villages during interviews, but they were unfamiliar with *lu* in other villages.

4.1.1.4 Reincarnated High Lamas

The other sub-category of the spiritual figures in Khumbu is not actually supernatural beings *per se*, it includes high lamas and respected Buddhist teachers who contributed significantly to the establishment and spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Khumbu, and are believed by Sherpas to have reincarnated or achieved enlightenment after their death. Lama Sangwa Dorje, along with his two brothers Ralpa Dorje and Khyenpa Dorje are examples of this type of spiritual figures. They were three important religious leaders who taught Tibetan Buddhism, built monasteries and communities throughout Khumbu more than 350 years ago. Lama Sangwa Dorje was the founder of Pangboche Monastery and he foretold the construction of the Tengboche Monastery. In many Sherpa homes I visited, paintings and photos of reincarnated high lamas were placed in the family chapel or hung on the walls in living rooms. In some wealthy households, I observed a decorated seat with yellow and red cushions in the chapel. According to one participant, the seat is dedicated to those living reincarnated lamas in case they come to visit their house. Reincarnated high lamas are the least identified spiritual figures comparing to Buddhist deities, *yul-lhas* and spirits in soil and water.

4.1.2 Physical Features:

As mentioned earlier, Sherpa people mainly practice the *Nyingmapa* sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which emphasizes mysticism and the incorporation of local spirits and deities shared by the shamanic pre-Buddhist Bon religion. Sherpas believe in numerous local deities and spirits who reside in natural features such as mountains, forests, and water sources. They consider those natural features as sacred and therefore respect and appease them through

various religious rituals and practices.

4.1.2.1 Sacred Mountains

Mountains were found to be the most recognized and significant feature in the sacred landscape of Khumbu. All 33 participants were able to identify at least two examples of sacred mountains. Mt. Khumbila and Mt. Everest were the two most frequently mentioned sacred mountains (referred to 31 times and 27 times, respectively). Other sacred mountains identified include: Ama Dablam, Kusum Khangkaru, Thamserku, Kangtega, and Tawoche/Taboche (Table 3). Interviews with locals revealed that there was a lack of consistent knowledge among participants regarding the reasons for their sacredness. Some participants could identify the names of the residing deities and spirits, but many others were not certain. Seven participants stated that all mountains in Khumbu region are sacred, or used to be. According to these participants, the loss of sacred status of some mountains is attributed to commercial mountaineering, which had caused the deities to leave the mountains. Mt. Khumbila received an incomparable degree of respect and awe among all sacred mountains. Climbing Khumbila is still strictly prohibited for both locals and foreign expedition teams. Mt. Everest, regardless of its global fame, does not hold a special spiritual significance. Participants indicated no particular preference or ranking of mountains based on their spiritual preference. Geographic proximity appeared to influence their familiarity with the sacredness of these mountains, for example, participants from Monjo and Phakding were more familiar with the deity residing on the adjacent mountain Kusum Khangkaru, and considered it as a sacred mountain. But beyond these two villages, no other participant

referred to this mountain as sacred.

Table 4. Sacred mountains and their associated deities identified by participants and number of times they are identified.

Sacred Mountains Identified by Participants	Associated Spiritual Figures	Total Number of Times Identified
Khumbila	Khumbila	31
Mt. Everest	Jomo Miyo Lang Sangma	27
Taboche/Tawoche	Tawuche	7
Ama Dablam	Si Chu, Khumbila’s gamekeeper (some said minister)	6
Thamserku	Tamosermu, Khumbila’s wife	4
Kusum Khangkaru	“Three snow-white gods”	3
Kangtega	Not identified in particular	3

4.1.2.2 Sacred (Monastery) Forests/Groves

Forests are indispensable resources for livelihood in Khumbu. Monastic forests in particular, were considered as sacred territories by the Sherpas. More than half of the participants stated that forests near all monasteries or gompas are sacred (Table 4). Cutting trees from these forests is considered a serious offense to the spirits living in the woods and will result in misfortunes and natural disasters like landslides and droughts. Several participants mentioned that monastery forests are shrinking in size because land is acquired by locals for building

new lodges and shops. Permission from the local monastery for cutting trees is mandatory and *pujas* must be held to venerate spirits in the earth for preventing negative impacts. All participants were familiar with at least one sacred forest, in addition to forests surrounding important monasteries such as Tengboche, Khumjung and Pangboche. The sacredness of these forests is not only granted by their proximity to religious institutions, but also their association with legends of some Buddhist saints. According to one key informant in Phortse, the sacred forest around Pangboche monastery was blessed by Lama Sangwa Dorje himself, who threw his hair on the ground causing big juniper trees to grow abundantly in that area. In Monjo and Thame villages, five meditation sites are located beside big trees. One participant explained that some big trees near springs and rivers are protected and worshiped because they are capable of revealing the signs of the hidden *Lu*. The size and longevity of those trees were attributed to supernatural power.

Table 5. Frequency of references to sacred forests

Sacred Monastery Forests Identified by Participants	Total Number of Times Identified
All Monastery Forests Are Sacred	18
Tengboche	7
Khumjung	5
Pangboche	4
Thame	2
Phortse	2
Phakding	1

4.1.2.3 Sacred Waters

Water sources like springs, waterfalls and lakes receive the highest level of protection by Sherpas in Khumbu. They worship and appease the unseen spirits, or *Lu*, who inhabit the water. Many participants mentioned *Lu* is bad tempered and easily disturbed. An unhappy *Lu* can desert its home, causes the water to dry up and bring suffering to people in the form of drought. *Lu* is also adverse to contamination of their territories, requiring very clean surroundings. The majority of participants indicated that all water bodies, especially those coming out of stone or emerging from the ground are signs of *Lu* and should be protected with great care. A bigger body of water is considered the manifestation of the snake god (*Nag Devata*). For example, Gokyo lake, situated at 4750 meters above sea level, was referred to as the most important sacred water in Khumbu by seven participants. Some participants from Pangboche and Deboche considered Imtse Lake near Chhukung as sacred. In Khumbu, worship of the *Lu* can be observed everywhere: hanging bridges are covered by layers of prayer flags, a gesture to seek for blessings from the water spirits for peace and harvest; the origin of spring is usually surrounded by short stone walls wrapped with *khatas*, the white ceremonial scarf symbolizing purity and compassion (Figure 10). Some private households designated a special stone shrine at the corner of their house for the *Lu* (*lukhang*). Private *Lu* can influence the family's health and luck, hence needed to be maintained with great care and respect.



Figure 10. Big trees beside a public Lu near Thamo are sites for local worship. Photo taken by author.

4.1.3 Cultural Features:

Sacred cultural features are human made features built by local people for the purposes of worship and memorial. Six types of sacred cultural features were identified during field observations and also reflected during interviews with participants: monastery, *stupa*, *kani* gate, mani wall and mani stone, prayer wheel, and prayer flag and pole. Cultural features are clustered in villages with a bigger population. Villages off the main trekking routes generally have less cultural features. The following sections explain the function and distribution of each type of cultural feature in Khumbu.

4.1.3.1 Monastery

Monasteries, or *gompas*, are important sacred structures where prayers, veneration, religious education and festivals take place (Figure 11). The location of each monastery is carefully

selected: it is usually situated at higher ground, separated from residential and commercial areas, and marked by sacred features around the monastery building and its periphery. Impious behaviours are strictly forbidden in and near the monasteries. Among all the monasteries, Tengboche Monastery, Khumjung Monastery and Thame Monastery were identified as the three most important religious institutions in Khumbu, and thus were mentioned far more frequently by participants than other monasteries. Many participants narrated stories of their establishments as directly associated with Buddhist saints and legendary Buddhist leaders. Also, the above-mentioned three monasteries host two biggest religious festivals in Khumbu. Mani Rimdu is held in Tengboche and Thame monasteries. Dumji festival is held in all three. People travel to Tengboche, Khumjung and Thame from all around Khumbu to participate in various religious events. Smaller villages often invite monks from these three monasteries to perform religious rituals for locals. Other monasteries have a smaller influence but are also deemed important for local villagers. For example, Pangboche monastery was identified as a sacred site by eight participants from Pangboche and Phortse villages. It is the oldest monastery in the Khumbu valley, established by Lama Sangwa Dorje. In general, participants recognized the sacredness of all Khumbu monasteries; however, the significance attributed to each was influenced largely by personal interaction and attachment. Monasteries are not only religious institutions, but more importantly, places of community assembly and celebration. Participants were apparently more familiar with local monasteries because of the religious activities they engaged in which helped them build stronger ties with the monasteries. Big monasteries of Tengboche, Thame and Khumjung had a larger and wider influence in Khumbu, and therefore received Sherpas' high recognition.



Figure 11. The Tengboche Monastery in Tengboche village. Photo taken by author.

4.1.3.2 Stupa (memorials or *chortens*)

I counted roughly 100 stupas along the main trekking routes in Khumbu. These stone memorials, also called *chorten* by Sherpas, varied in shape and size (Figure 12). Some big *stupas* are object stupa, which contain sacred scripts, prayer books or relics of important lamas and saints. The majority of *stupas* in SNP are memorial stupa, which are constructed to commemorate deceased lamas or to gain *sonam* (merits). Typically, *stupas* are built with Buddha eyes on four sides, preventing the evil spirits from entering the village. Big stupas are generally found at the entrance to a village or near the village gompas, along with other cultural features such as mani wall and mani stone. Circulating a stupa is one of the religious routines Sherpas practice in their daily lives as a way to venerate Buddhist deities and accumulate merit for personal spiritual development. Stupas also function as geographical

landmarks for villages in Khumbu. They are more concentrated near villages with a denser population, such as Pangboche, Namche and Phortse. At least 23 stupas I counted were memorial stupas dedicated to foreign climbers and Sherpas who died in mountaineering expeditions. These memorial stupas are scattered along major trekking routes, but mostly concentrated near Lobuche (Figure 13), a village where most trekkers must pass to get to the Everest Base Camp (EBC).



Figure 12. Typical stupas/chortens in SNP. Photos taken by author.



Figure 13. Memorial Chorten of Scott Fischer, in Lobuche. Photo taken by author.

4.1.3.3 Mani Wall and Mani Stone

Mani wall is an alignment of mani stones engraved with the sacred invocation “Om Mani Padme Hum” which invokes spiritual powers from Buddhist deities (Figure 14). Mani walls are usually found near major monasteries and big *stupas*, or piled in front of households. They are the second most commonly found cultural feature, after prayer flags and prayer poles, which are found almost everywhere in Khumbu. I counted roughly 190 mani walls and big mani stones along the trekking trails. They are also most concentrated in big tourist hubs like Lukla, Namche and Tengboche, and are less seen in remote villages such as Dole. The longest mani wall was found in the village of Khumjung, leading its way to the Khumjung Monastery, where the legendary skull of Yeti the abominable snowman is displayed. According to several participants, mani walls and mani stones are common properties of the village, built with donations from local Sherpa families. Building mani walls and stone is regarded as a great contribution to the village as well as a compassionate gesture which benefit the builders/donors. People are expected to cross mani walls and stones from the left side to show respect and gain merits. The contribution of foreigners to the building of cultural features can now be seen in some villages, for example, a newly built mani wall near Khumjung School has a small bronze plate on it, stating its donors from a non-profit, mountaineering-related organization in South Korea.



Figure 14: Left: The long mani wall near Khumjung Monastery. Right: Sacred invocation “Om Mani Padme Hum” on Mani stone. Photos taken by author.

4.1.3.4 Prayer Wheel

Prayer wheel is a common religious feature in Khumbu. It can be built as an individual feature or aligned with many smaller wheels and mounted in the outer walls of monasteries. Inside the prayer wheels are rolls of religious scripts which contain sacred invocation of prayers. In this study, I only counted big prayer wheels which stood by themselves. I counted roughly 65 big prayer wheels along the trekking route. These are mostly concentrated near local monasteries, leading visitors to the main prayer room inside. In some villages, local residents had built a separate communal building to shelter these giant prayer wheels. Prayer wheels are colorfully painted and engraved with the mantra “Om Mani Padme Hum” on the surface. Near Lukla and Phakding, several newly constructed prayer wheels have a plate with specific instructions for trekkers, inviting them to turn the wheels for purifying their minds and gaining *sonam* for themselves and for others (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Prayer wheels with instructions for trekkers, near Lukla. Photos taken by author.

4.1.3.5 Kani Gate

Kani is a small gateway built at the entrance to a village settlement. It represents the boundaries of a village. With its ceiling and walls delicately painted with religious figures, mantras and mandalas, *kani* serves as a protective feature to stop bad spirits which can follow a person from entering the terrain of a village. I counted 12 *kani* in Khumbu. Most villages have one *kani* at their entrance, while Namche bazaar, the biggest tourist hub in Khumbu has two at each of its entrances. *Kani* functions more like a geographical landmark. According to my participants, the interior paintings of deities and religious symbols have exorcising power which can dispel negative forces and bless passers-by (Figure 16 & 17). At the national park entrance gate in Jorsale, a renovated *kani* stands along with huge mani walls. On the bronze plate it warns trekkers about the sacred realm they are about to enter. It also lists certain behaviours and attitudes that should be avoided in this sacred landscape (Figure 18).



Figure 16 & 17. The exterior and interior of a kani gate. Photos taken by author.

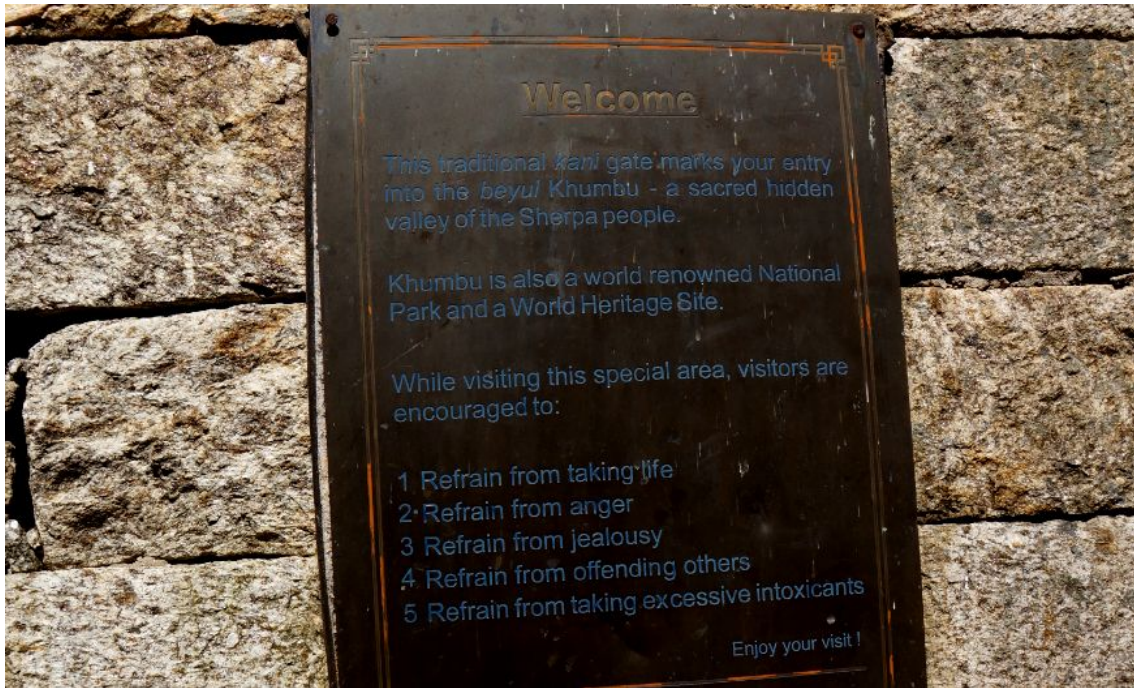


Figure 18. Welcome remarks at the entrance gate of Sagarmatha National Park. Photo taken by author.

4.1.3.6 Prayer Flag and Prayer Pole

These colorful rectangular clothes hanging along strings and poles are the most commonly seen cultural objects in Khumbu (Figure 19). They are everywhere, along mountain ridges, on tops of monasteries, hills, households, *stupas*, trees and fields. Piles of prayer flags can be found on steep slopes and hanging bridges, as people pray for safety at these dangerous locations. They are used to bless the surroundings by taking the prayers on the flags up to the sky and then spread the good will and compassion into all-pervading space, thus bringing benefits to all beings. Compared to other cultural features, prayer flags and prayer poles are more evenly distributed in Khumbu. Even in remote areas where visitors are scarce, almost all Sherpas households have prayer flags hanging in their backyards. I counted more than 660 sites with prayer flags and poles, and this is only a rough estimate. According to a monk at

Tengboche Monastery, the prayers on those wind horse flags and poles are permanent part of the *beyul*. As the images on the prayer flags fade away, and the fabric torn to pieces, they are replaced on a regular basis. Sherpas treat prayer flags with great care and respect because the religious symbols and mantras on them are sacred and powerful.



Figure 19. Left: Prayer pole in front of a Sherpa home. Right: Colorful prayer flags on a hanging bridge. Photos taken by author.

4.1.4 In a Sherpa House

Visual manifestation of the Sherpas spiritual beliefs can be observed at a micro scale inside and outside a Sherpa home. The structure, layout and orientation of Sherpa houses embody religious symbolism and reflect local religious values. The family *sangkhang* (or *lhasu*), is a commonly seen feature in a Sherpa household. It is a small fireplace located outside of the

house. Sherpas erect a small bundle of bamboo with prayer flags beside the *sangkhang* (Figure 20). Inside the house, most Sherpa families have a separate room for *Lhakhang*, or *Lhang* (private chapel, Figure 21). It's usually the most heavily decorated room in the house and typically contains statues of Guru Rinpoche, Sakyamuni Buddha, and Chenrezig. Sacred texts and ritual objects are placed on the altar, usually accompanied with photographs of important high lamas such as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, the 17th Karmapa and Tengboche Rinpoche. Seven small water bowls called *tying* line the front of the altar, along with butter lamps, each ritually filled and lit every day. By pouring water into the *tying*, Sherpas remind themselves how painless it is to make offerings. Many Sherpa families like to hang beautiful *thangka* paintings and display family photos in their living rooms. In Khumbu villages, Sherpas construct their homes facing away from the sacred mountains and springs so that they do not disturb the resident deities (Sherpa, 2008). This pattern is most evident in Khumjung, Phortse and Thame, where the buildings are all oriented away from Khumbila. Elder Sherpas imply that the structure of a Sherpa house embodies religious meanings: short door frames and small windows are built to prevent bad spirits and zombies from entering the houses as these creatures cannot bend.



Figure 20. Sangkhang (or lhasu) outside a Sherpa home. Photo taken by author

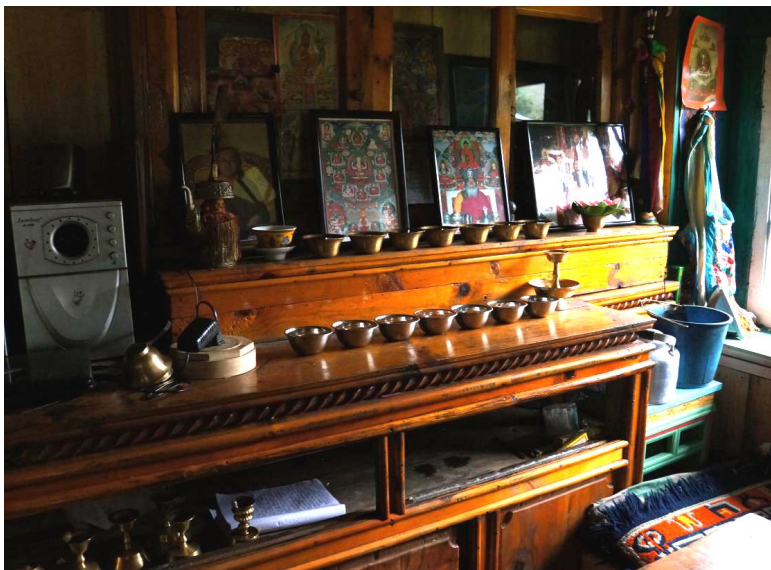


Figure 21. Typical lhang in a Sherpa home near Phakding. Photo taken by author.

4.2 Sherpas' Subjective Understanding of the *Beyul*

The majority of participants identify Khumbu as a *beyul*, a sacred valley hidden by Guru Rinpoche (or *Padmasambhava*) to protect the Buddhist people in future times. The interviews

revealed the story of the establishment and rediscovery of the beyul was widely known among both lay participants and religious key informants. Sherpas recognize the entire Khumbu region, including SNP and its peripheral areas in the lower land, as *beyul Khumbu*, one of the many sacred valleys hidden by Guru Rinpoche across the Himalayan mountains. Two of the religious informants also indicated to the existence of beyuls elsewhere in the Himalaya, including in Rolwaling, Langtang, Yolmo and the unopened *beyul Khenpalung* east of Khumbu. Other beyuls were believed to be located in Tibet, India, Bhutan and China. According to one older participant, a beyul can only be opened to “the right people at the right time”. Here, right people refers to those who achieve certain level of spiritual development. Right time refers to times of unrest, indicating the times when Tibetan religion is under threat from outside forces. When I informed the participant that the *beyul Khenpalung* has been promoted as a view spot along the EBC trekking trail by some foreign agencies, Nagwang, the old *ngagpa* (lay lama) in Pangboche stated:

“Khenpalung has not opened yet! I’ve heard some foreigners went there, but they didn’t reach the real Khenpalung. They might find the [physical] place, but that’s not the real *beyul*. They are not the right people to open the beyul. Only devout, spiritual people can open it in the future, but we don’t know if the time is right yet.”

To some high lamas, the concept of *beyul* goes beyond the sacred physical landscape - it also embodies higher levels of meanings. Geshe, the head lama of Pangboche, explained that the *beyul* is both a physical landscape and a spiritual realm. What people see is the physical form of *beyul*, including mountains, forests and lakes, but the imaginary level of *beyul* can only be

accessed through deep meditation and by advanced spiritual practitioners. Lama Ningma expressed the same understanding of *beyul*: a metaphysical territory in addition to the physical domain. He stated that the most powerful *beyul* exists in highly enlightened mind. In order to open up the spiritual *beyul*, people should “always learn to keep a peaceful mind, and practice good deeds for a purer heart.”

Beyul Khumbu, has been “opened” for about five hundred years. To some participants, *beyul* represented an utopian place where people’s hearts and spirits are “pure”. Negative activities and thoughts must be avoided such as violence, killing, desecrating the supernatural power, disturbing the land and wildlife, polluting the water and soil, and disrespecting human beings and spirits. Some participants believed that *beyul* is a powerful place because the sacred land can “purify people’s soul”, and “eliminate their sins”. In general, religious participants identified a broad range of sacred features spread across Khumbu, and reiterated that Khumbu is a sacred landscape. They believed that all lives within *beyul* are sacred and protected by supernatural spirits. Lama Nawa in Phakding stated:

“In *beyul Khumbu*, gods and spirits are everywhere. The entire *beyul* is a sacred place. If we treat them [the spirits in *beyul*]with respect, they will protect us. If we offend them, these spirits can get angry and give us many troubles. ...”

Both lay participants and religious informants were well aware of the codes of conduct in *beyul*, and considered it as a precious space which needs to be carefully preserved. A *beyul* can be destroyed by “negative forces”, referring to conflicts among people, and harmful thoughts within people’s mind. Supernatural powers in the *beyul* would not protect people if

they become “selfish”, “uncompassionate”, “hateful” and “do not cooperate with each other”. Participants believed that when the guarding spirits in the land, water and forests leave, a *beyul* can be desecrated and lose its sacred power.

4.3 Sherpas’ Interactions with Multiple Aspects of the *Beyul*

4.3.1 Daily Interactions

Sherpas interacted with spiritual, physical and cultural features within the sacred landscape of Khumbu in many aspects of daily life, demonstrating their strong religious belief and desire to participate in the paths toward enlightenment. Even the mundane affairs in daily life reflect a Sherpa’s reverence to both Buddhist and local supernatural deities. Ama, a local housewife in Pangboche described her daily routine:

“Every day I get up at 6 o’clock, I light the butter lamps in our *lhang* and change water in the silver bowls. Then I recite prayers for my family, for my daughter in Kathmandu and her family, [for] their health and well-being. After that I start my busy day. I repeat the same routines before going to sleep. My husband and I visit the *gompa* every month, not very often. Usually we pray at home. It is important to keep the family *Lhang* clean and active so that the spirits protect our family.”

In addition to praying at the family chapel, regular rituals of venerating the *yul-lha* outside the dwelling were also performed. As Nyingdigy stated:

“Every morning, I burn incense and butter at the *hasu* in our backyard; it’s a respect for the land deities. Then I go to the *lhapso* (village shrine) to burn some juniper as offering to the gods in mountains (Figure 22). At night I pray in *lhang*

and make offerings to Buddha...[We] make offerings to mountain gods because they are very easy to get angry and cause avalanches. My husband works as a porter in April and May. During that time, I pray a lot for his safety in the mountains. Every time he returns safe, we go to *gompa* together and thank all the deities for their protection.”



Figure 22. Communal praying site facing Khumbila in Thame. Photo taken by author.

Sherpa participants practiced religious routines in their own chapel more often than visiting local monasteries. Around ten lay Sherpas stated that they go praying at the village monastery regularly, once every month or two months. Seven lay participants stated they do not regularly visit monasteries unless there are big events going on, or they need monks to assist in funerals and weddings. According to three lay participants in Phortse, monks are invited when locals want to build a new house. The monks examine the soil and stone from the ground and judge whether building houses in this location will disturb the *sadak*. If the monks decide the piece of land is auspicious, new house will be blessed by performing a *puja*

at its completion. Permission from lamas is mandatory when building lodges, campground and shops near the domains of monasteries. Large infrastructure projects like power station can only be built on the “non-sacred land”, meaning far away from any religious institutions.

4.3.2 Religious Festivals and Events

Sherpas’ interactions with the sacred landscape reflect their distinct spiritual values, which are not just embedded in daily lives, but also reflected in religious festivals and events. Major religious festivals like Mani Rimdu and Dumji are both celebrative events dedicated to certain Buddhist deities: Mani Rimdu celebrates the completion of ten days of prayers dedicated to Chenrezig who brings peace and harmony to all beings, while Dumji celebrates Guru Rinpoche’s birthday. Both festivals begin with a *puja* dedicated to mountain deities and spirits in the land of four directions, and consecrate the place where religious ceremonies and performances will take place. During ceremonies, spiritual figures and Buddhist deities are personified in painted masks and colorful costumes. Monks perform sacred dances to imitate the body of the gods. Audiences, including both lay villagers and senior monks, chant specific prayers for each dance. As explained by Tengboche Rinpoche, these mask dances are the portrayals of the Buddhist and local deities and aim to evoke the spiritual powers within both performers and audiences (Klatzel, 2009). It is believed that the performances can evoke positive spiritual power and generate merits for all participators. In November 2014, I had the opportunity to attend the entire Mani Rimdu ceremony and sacred mask dances in Tengboche Monastery which lasted for 3 days, with 16 dance performances in the courtyard of the monastery (Figure 23). Since November is the peak season for trekking tourism, audiences of

Mani Rimdu included local Sherpas and Sherpas who had traveled from other regions of Nepal, foreign visitors and documentary film makers. The large gathering made the monastery and the villages nearby more crowded. After the official religious ceremonies end, social festivities begin with all Sherpas joining in all night group dancing and singing.



Figure 23. Left: Locals receiving blessings from Tengboche Rinpoche at the Mani Rimdu festival. Right: Opening ceremony of the sacred mask dance in Tengboche Monastery.

Photos taken by author.

Mani Rimdu and Dumji provide social opportunities for Sherpas to get together as families and communities. At Dumji, the celebration is sponsored in rotation by five to eight families in each village. The hosting families cooperate together to provide food and drinks for the entire community. It is also the time of year when Sherpas return from the city to Khumbu and celebrate with their extended families. As Lama Fumu stated:

“At Dumji, rich people, poor people, young Sherpas and old Sherpas all celebrate together, singing and dancing together! We also invite monks from Tengboche Monastery to perform *puja* and mask dances to chase away bad spirits and bring prosperity to the village. We ask the mountain gods and other spirits to protect us

and the crops in the coming year. In other days, we have a lot of things to do.

Many of us have to look after their children in Kathmandu or running lodging business here. But at Dumji and Mani Rimdu, we all give up our own businesses for a while and celebrate together. All Sherpas cooperate together and have a good time with families and relatives in their own villages. It's the best time of the year!"

Both Mani Rimdu and Dumji are dedicated to certain protective deities and Buddhist saints, and involve festive celebrations and interactive activities. *Nyingne*, another major religious event in Khumbu, is a fasting retreat held in local monasteries. It aims to cleanse the sins of people and help them gain more *sonam* by performing several days of abstinence from worldly matters. Pemba described:

"...[We] bring fruits, *tsamba*, and biscuits as offerings to the village *gumpa*. Lamas are invited from Tengboche monastery to perform the rituals. On the first day, we watch the rituals performed by lamas and nuns and then we eat a big meal together as a community. In the next two days, people do not eat, drink or talk to each other. We sit together and recite prayers silently. On the last day we receive blessings from lamas and the fasting ends. Sometimes we do *Nyingne* on special days too, like Buddha's birthday. Now we have many foreign visitors in our village. We welcome their participation if they like to join. It's good for our body and mind."

4.3.3 Mountaineering Guides' Experiences with the Beyul

For those Sherpas who work in dangerous, physically demanding occupations like high

mountain guides and porters, interaction with the *beyul* is somewhat different. Given the high mobility of their career, mountain guides and porters are not able to participate in some ritual routines practiced by many Sherpas on a daily basis. Some of them have to travel around Nepal, working for foreign expedition teams in high mountains throughout the year. However, interviews with four mountaineering guides made me realized that they have a much deeper understanding of the *beyul* than many lay participants in this study. Their perceptions of the spiritual aspects of the physical landscape came directly from intensive interactions with the nature itself. Lhakapa, a climbing guide I met in Thame, was leading his French expedition team back to Lukla. They had just finished a 40-day climbing trip and summited five peaks over 6000 meters in upper Khumbu. When talking about his spiritual experience in the mountains, Lhakpa claimed that strong faith had helped him overcome harsh environment and avoid many dangerous situations in the mountains:

“[Before an expedition], I always encourage my clients to go visit a local *gompa* with me and receive blessings from lamas. We also perform a simple *puja* and make offerings to the mountain gods before every important ascent. We ask their permission and protection by saying things like ‘please allow us to approach you, we are all good and humble people...’ If something is wrong [during the climb], like...a sudden weather change, or an unusual obstacle appears, we give up and go back to camp. That means the gods don’t want you to climb today! You will get to the top at a right time, but not today!... I say prayers in my heart as we climb higher and higher, it makes me stay calm and focused....I know that my wife and mother are praying for me at home every day when I’m in the mountains. Their

prayers protect me too! At the summit, we hang prayer flags and *khatas* on the stones, as a thank-you gift for the gods. I believe if people show enough reverence, gods will help you achieve your goals.”

Another climbing guide, Zangmu, had retired few years ago. He had successfully summited several 8000 meters high peaks including Mt. Everest. Zangmu stated that people can be spiritually changed by *beyul*:

“I think people like us [porters, climbing guides] are particularly religious! I know many young Sherpa guides who grew up in the cities, and when they come working with us, they don’t understand anything we do here, like *pujas* and prayers all that...although they join us in the rituals, they didn’t really believe in them! However, after few years working as climbing guides, they all became very religious and humble. After witnessing so many accidents in the mountains, you just had to believe that there is something above us, and our fate is in their hands!”

Participants’ narratives demonstrate that sacred *beyul* is closely intertwined with many aspects of Sherpas’ life. It is the fundamental component of Sherpas’ spiritual values and beliefs. Since the 1960s, Khumbu region has undergone major economic, social and environmental transformations brought by the development of international trekking and mountaineering tourism. What role does tourism play in influencing locals’ everyday routines and spiritual values? How Sherpas perceive the sacredness of the *beyul* under the influence of tourism? These questions are examined in the following section.

4.4 Perceived Influences of Tourism on Religious Practices and Spiritual Values

In the second part of the in-depth interviews, participants were asked how trekking tourism influenced their daily lives and religious practices. More than half of the participants felt that tourism-introduced changes in Khumbu were more beneficial than harmful. Four positive outcomes of tourism were referred to, including economic prosperity, improved infrastructure and living standard, greater accessibility to the world, and higher levels of education.

However, the influence of tourism on spiritual values and religious practices were perceived differently by the participants. Thirteen lay participants and most religious informants stated that Sherpa people are less religious today as they have become more westernized and profit-oriented. For instance, prior to tourism, Namche and Pangboche used to be small settlements. Today, these are major tourist hubs. The majority of residents are now involved in tourism-related businesses rather than engaging in traditional farming and pasturing activities. Irish pubs, internet cafes, coffee shops and western restaurants introduced a completely different lifestyle to local Sherpas. As described by lama Fumu, traditional values change when people get involved in profit-making activities:

“We built westernized facilities to satisfy tourists. They want to have hot shower, wifi, burgers and alcohol so we provide these. We want them to stay comfortable here. Even though it is not our traditional lifestyle, people can earn more money this way! When people are busy making money, they tend to forget to follow the old rules.”

Religious informants implied that few families are willing to send their children to receive monastic education, and people participate less in religious events than in the past. However,

several key informants argued that tourism development is not responsible for these changes, Sherpas themselves were.

“Things are changing fast here in Khumbu. Few people want to become monks or nuns these days. Many Sherpas want to leave Khumbu and run businesses in the cities...I don't think we should blame tourism for these changes. Most foreign visitors are very respectful and polite. They contributed a lot to our monastic communities. We are the one who changed. Now, many Sherpas do not have strong faith, they no longer care about enriching their heart but only enriching their material possessions. (Lama Geshe, 70, Pangboche).

Some lodge owners in Khumbu admitted that running tourism business has taken away part of their time practicing spiritual matters like praying, visiting monasteries and participating in religious events. They generally expressed that their livelihoods are heavily depended on the business so they simply “cannot walk away”. One lodge owner in Phortse said he only has several months in a year when the lodge business is good and he can earn some “good money”. That is the main reason he missed many religious festivals in the village and sometimes forgot to pray.

While acknowledging that people are becoming less religious nowadays, most participants indicated that the presence of tourists in Khumbu did not negatively affect their daily lives and religious practices, and they are accustomed to the presence of foreigners in various cultural and religious activities.

“When we pray in *gompas*, foreigners are there watching; when we sing songs, do

pujas during festivals, foreigners are there taking pictures. My children are in Khumbu School, and they said there are foreigners hanging around at school almost every day during trekking season. I don't think they are affecting our lives. They are here to watch mostly, and they help us in many things. Foreigners make life in Khumbu much easier than before, Sherpas are richer because of tourism. So I don't mind tourists watching at all." (Nima, 35, Pangboche)

While the majority of participants perceived foreign trekkers more as observers and patrons rather than intruders, two participants in Tengboche and one in Phakding indicated that they felt disturbed when too many foreigners show up during religious festivals. They said some foreign trekkers do not show enough respect and patience, and the monasteries are now so crowded that locals have to stand throughout the ceremonies.

4.4.1 Concerns Raised by Sherpas

When asked about the influences of tourism on Sherpa spiritual values, many lay participants and key informants raised their concerns about the loss of traditional values, culture and language among younger generations. A Tibetan teacher at Khumjung School stated that students learn Tibetan history, religion and writing from Grade 1 to Grade 4. After that, Tibetan courses are offered as selectives and very few students take these courses. Most courses at Khumjung School are offered in Nepali and English. "Everyone takes English, math, and computer courses because they are more important nowadays." Ningma said. Monastic Tibetan, a language used in writing religious scripts, is only taught in religious institutions such as monk schools. Young Sherpas can also learn it from parents and

grandparents. However, very few parents are now teaching their children religious scripts or are sending them to receive monastic education. Therefore, many participants said that young Sherpas today do not have sufficient knowledge regarding the history and religion of their ancestors.

Another concern raised by many participants was the out migration of young people in Khumbu. Western education in cities is often the preferred choice among Sherpa parents. Most lodge owners who participated in this study send their children to boarding schools in Kathmandu, even abroad if they could afford it. As mentioned above, very few families are willing to send their children to monk/nun schools now. Only one of the lodge owners had sent his child to receive monastic education. Even young monks and nuns are leaving the monastic life, and are pursuing opportunities in tourism, or obtaining education elsewhere.

“Maybe you have noticed, there are not many young people in your age (in their 20s) here. Some young people work in lodges, or work as porters. But when the trekking season ends, they return to cities! Young people learn English and go to universities and that’s a good thing! They learn new knowledge, and they learn how to communicate with foreigners. If they come back here, Khumbu will be better! However, life in the mountains is so hard, and young people want to experience the world outside.” (Lama Nurbu, 46, Phakding)

Several participants also stated that it is normal that young Sherpas are becoming more westernized and less religious these days. One participant expressed that he did not care if his children inherit Sherpa religion and language as long as they receive a better education and

live a better life than him.

4.4.2 Younger Generations in Khumbu

Although many participants felt that young Sherpas are losing traditional values, language, and remain out of touch with their religion, some of the younger participants in this study had a different opinion. In this study, seven participants were under the age of 30 years. They argued that young Sherpas are aware of their lack of knowledge and participation in daily religious routine, but that does not mean they have no reverence and respect for religion and tradition. Dawa, a 28-year-old lodge owner in Phortse said young Sherpas' passion about religion is largely underestimated by the older generation:

“Frankly, I rarely go to *gompa* or religious festivals. I don't do long chanting like my parents used to do every morning and night. Sometimes my parents are angry at me because I don't pray, but I think god is in my heart! Visiting monasteries, fasting and praying all day is not the only way to prove that I have faith! I'd rather make donations to monasteries and monk schools to help them do better.”

Another young Sherpa guide, Tsering, grew up in Namche and moved to Kathmandu with his parents at the age of 12. After finishing college, he returned to Khumbu and started working for a local trekking agency. Tsering stated that his family still participates in many religious activities in the city, but traditional rituals have been simplified and young people even incorporate western elements to their celebration of religious events:

“I learned everything about the *beyul* and the *yul-lhas* from my aunt and my parents. In Kathmandu, my parents and I celebrate religious festivals with other

Sherpa families. We simplified many of the rituals.....it's more like a reunion event with relatives and friends. After I returned to Khumbu, I made new friends... [during religious festivals] we gather together singing and dancing. We sing Tibetan songs, Nepali songs and English pop songs too. I learned some hip hop dancing in Kathmandu and I'm teaching my friends here! They all love dancing.”

Family plays an important role in influencing young Sherpas' spiritual values and also their sense of identity. If family members, especially parents, attach importance to the education of traditional values and religious practices, their children tend to have a strong attachment to the *beyul*. Tenzin is a 34-year-old lodge owner in Thame. His father was a well-known climbing guide in Khumbu. Tenzin went to school in Kathmandu and then got his college degree in India. In Tenzin's lodge, photos of the entire family with high lamas and famous climbers are displayed in the living room, indicating their influence in the region. Tenzin sends his second son to a monk school. He stated that it's a family tradition; his father and uncle all studied at monk schools until the age of 15. “I want one of my sons to study in the monasteries for several years and I will let him choose if he wants to stay in monasteries or return to secular life.” Tenzin explained. He emphasized the importance of passing on the Sherpa heritage to the younger generation:

“Others might think it's useless to study Tibetan language and religion now. I don't think so. If we don't teach our children about Sherpa culture and language, they won't be Sherpas anymore! Although my kids did not grow up in Khumbu, all of them can speak and read Tibetan! And we taught them all the stories about the deities and spirits just like how my father had taught me. No matter where my kids

go in the future, they won't forget their roots here.”

By contrast, the owner of an Irish Pub in Namche, Pasang was raised by relatives in cities and went back to Khumbu for work, showed little interest in talking about sacred sites and deities in Khumbu. Pasang stated that his parents were busy doing business and spent little time with him when he was young therefore he was unfamiliar with most of the sacred features in Khumbu.

4.5 Perceived Sacredness of the *Beyul* in “Modern” Khumbu

Although participants felt that Sherpas are becoming less religious today, and tourism is changing people's religious practices and spiritual values, the sacred *beyul* still held a very special status in Sherpas' hearts. Two thirds of the participants believed that Khumbu region remains as a sacred place under the influence of commercialization and westernization. A sacred *beyul* can exist in the modern society as long as Sherpas make efforts to preserve their culture and religion.

“The *beyul* will be destroyed by ourselves if we lose our traditional values. The environment will become so bad that nobody wants to stay here....I still believe our culture and religion will be inherited by many generations as long as we keep teaching children about our religion and language.” (Lhkapa, 44, Thame)

Some key informants viewed the transformation as inevitable and uncontrollable, and emphasized on Buddhism's principle of impermanence, the idea that “nothing remains the same forever”.

“Everything is changing, what can you do about it? Change is the only thing that

wouldn't change! All we can do is try to accept it with peace, and find a way to coordinate with new things. To me, Khumbu is indeed becoming less sacred because people are less religious. Young people learn English instead of Tibetan, maybe after 30 years, you will come back and find everything here is written in English, even in monasteries too! Monks may sing English prayers![laughing]... As long as people have good hearts and respect the Buddha, and keep helping each other, gods will keep protecting us. I don't think there's a problem." (Lama Geshe, Pangboche, 70)

4.6 Cultural Conservation Efforts

Local efforts for conservation and revitalization of Sherpa culture were cited by some participants, especially by lamas and lay Sherpas with higher education. Lama Ningma and Lama Nawa said that they are offering adult lessons for lay people during monsoon season when there are fewer tourists in Khumbu. These seminars cover a wide range of topics including proper performance of religious rituals, correct meditation methods, Buddhist philosophy and Sherpa traditional culture. According to Lama Ningma, locals need a systematic and standardized education about Buddhism and its practices in order to avoid misunderstanding.

“Many Sherpas in Khumbu misunderstand some important religious principles and concepts, so I think it is part of my duty to teach them how to pray and meditate properly. I also teach them how to maintain peace in heart and how to treat people around us. I'm surprised that these classes are quite popular! I thought only old

people were interested, but I was thrilled to see young people too! ” (Lama

Ningma, 33, Khumjung)

Pemba Tsering and some Sherpa intellectuals are setting up a Sherpa Cultural Conservation Committee to promote traditional culture among Sherpa youth in Khumbu region. Pemba described that their group will provide a series of after-school programs for young Sherpa students, including dancing class, singing class, drawing class and poem reading class. All courses will be taught in Tibetan. Another area this committee is working on is to set up a special training program for Sherpa guides and porters. This program aims to enhance young guides’ knowledge of Sherpa culture and the codes of conduct in Khumbu. Pemba said, as more visitors come to SNP, it is important that trekking guides can educate them about Sherpa culture and religious values, so that foreign visitors can be more aware of their behaviours and attitudes in the *beyul*.

Summary of Major Findings

This chapter presented research findings in two separate sections. The first section included an attempt to classify Khumbu’s sacred features, based on my own observation and participants’ identification and explanations. A hierarchical classification of three categories of sacred features (spiritual figures, natural features, cultural features) were presented reflecting the abstract and macro conceptions to micro, localized and concrete examples of Sherpas’ religious practices in daily lives. The second section examined local Sherpas’ subjective interpretations of the multiple perspectives of the sacred landscape. Following the same hierarchical order of the sacred landscape classification, participants’ understandings

toward the macro and abstract concepts of beyul were presented first, followed by their interactions with different sacred features in daily lives and religious events. Finally, the implications of trekking tourism on changes in local spiritual values and religious practices were presented.

Based on my own observations and interviews with local residents, the following key observations can be made:

- Five types of sacred figures exist in Khumbu: Buddhist deities and saint; *yul-lha* (mountain deities), *lu* (water spirit), *sadak* (soil spirit), and reincarnated high lamas. *Yul-lha* is the most recognized sacred feature. Khumbila is regarded as the most important mountain deity by all participants. Participants' familiarity and geographical proximity influences their ranking of other *yul-lhas*.
- Three types of sacred physical features - mountains, monastic forests, and water bodies - are recognized. In general, all participants demonstrate adequate knowledge of sacred mountains. However, there is a lack of consistent knowledge regarding the reasons for their sacredness. Mt. Khumbila and Mt. Everest are the two most frequently mentioned sacred mountains. The sacredness of Mt. Everest is more recognized among lay participants than religious informants.
- Geographical proximity influences participants' knowledge regarding the location of sacred natural sites like forests and sacred water bodies. The majority of participants demonstrated a general sense of sacredness of all natural features in Khumbu. Both lay participants and religious key informants, regardless of their age, are well-aware

of the rules of conducts applied in these sacred natural sites.

- Six types of sacred cultural features - monastery, stupa, mani walls and stone, prayer wheel, *kani*, and prayer flags/poles – were frequently referred to. Sacred cultural features are concentrated along major trekking routes and in villages with bigger population. Newly constructed sacred cultural features are concentrated in tourist hubs.
- Gaining merits is the main purpose for Sherpas to build and use sacred cultural features. Respectful behaviours and gestures are expected for both locals and visitors. Building religious cultural features is considered a great contribution to the village and a compassionate gesture which benefits the builder/donator. Sherpas encourage the involvement of foreign visitors in the construction and use of sacred cultural features.

In-depth interviews with participants revealed the following:

- *Beyul* (sacred valley) is a well-acknowledged concept among Khumbu Sherpas. Both lay participants and religious informants are familiar with the legend of the establishment of *beyul* in Khumbu region, and the rules of conduct they should follow. Key informants and older participants show more knowledge regarding the location of other beyuls and the concept of metaphysical realm of beyul.
- Sherpas' interactions with the sacred *beyul* take places in both worldly mundane affairs and specific religious events. Most daily religious routines are done in private households. Land use and zoning is heavily influenced by Sherpas' spiritual values and rules of conducts.

- Gompas/monasteries serve not only as religious institutions, but also, more importantly, as community centers for gathering, celebration and commemoration. Monasteries provide performing stages for religious festivals and events, which enhance community cohesion.
- Participants' responses indicate that besides age and religious background, personal experience and family influence play important roles in participants' perspectives of Khumbu's sacred landscape.
- In general, the majority of participants consider tourism-introduced changes in Khumbu more beneficial than harmful. Four positive outcomes were determined: economic prosperity, improved infrastructure and living standard, greater accessibility to the world, and higher level of education.
- Influences of tourism on local religious practices and spiritual values are perceived differently among participants. Thirteen lay participants and most religious informants feel that Sherpas are becoming less religious and more profit-oriented. However, most participants do not regard tourism development and tourists as threats. A sense of acceptance and tolerance toward foreign visitors and culture is shown in most participants' narratives.
- There is a general concern about the loss of traditional culture and language among young Sherpas. Monastic education is no longer widespread and there is a lack of formalized training of Tibetan language and religious history at schools. Young people are also leaving Khumbu to receive western education in cities.
- Younger participants argue that young Sherpas' do respect and show reverence toward

their own culture, tradition and religion. They feel the older generation has a misconception about the younger generation. Parental influence plays a crucial role in influencing young Sherpas spiritual values and sense of identity.

- A general optimism toward the future of Sherpa culture and faith is demonstrated in participants' narratives. Most participants still regard Khumbu as a sacred beyul and believe that this religious landscape can coexist with the increasingly commercialized and westernized Sherpa communities.
- Influential and educated Sherpas are taking initiatives in local communities promoting cultural conservation and revitalization. Educational programs for locals and special training programs for trekking guides are highly advocated.

The next chapter provides a discussion of these findings taking into consideration the literature review provided in Chapter 2.

CHPATER 5 DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to answer the research questions by analyzing the key findings and examine them in relation to existing literature for consistencies, discrepancies and research implications. This chapter discusses five major themes: 1) objective identification of the sacred features in Sagarmatha National Park, 2) subjective interpretation of the sacred *beyul* in Khumbu region, 3) structure and classification of the sacred landscape, 4) role of tourism in influencing local spiritual values and religious practices, and 5) challenges in conserving a sacred landscape.

Two main perspective of landscape studies were addressed in the literature review: system perspective and humanistic perspective. The former focuses on objective interpretations of a landscape by providing quantified measurements and morphological patterns of sacred features. It is worth mentioning that objective interpretations of landscape are still influenced by personal judgment. As Sauer explained in his morphological approach to landscape studies (1963), meanings of a landscape derived from people's observation of different physical scenes in a place, and personal preference and selection influence their identification of the characteristics of a landscape. In this study, participants' personal knowledge influenced their objective identification of the sacred features. The humanistic perspective attempts to understand the socially constructed elements of a landscape by examining the meanings of various landscape features to each individual. Interpretations of a landscape are largely subjective, influenced by different perspectives constructed by personal experience and attachment. Landscape is viewed as a unique place, a dynamic system, which involves not

only tangible physical elements, but also the embedded culture, custom, social structure and values (Knudsen, et al, 2008). These values and meanings people attach to the landscape make it distinct from other places (Cosgrove, 1998).

5.1 Objective Interpretation of Sacred Landscape

The first section of Chapter 4 documented local residents' objective observation and identification of the sacred features. The objective interpretation of sacred landscape is based on the collective recognition and shared knowledge of spiritual figures, and sacred natural and cultural sites. In addition to first-hand observation of landscape features conducted by the author, and aided by secondary literature that described the meanings of these features, participants were asked to identify as many sacred features as possible during interviews. Based on these two sources, a hierarchical classification of the sacred landscape and its various components was developed.

5.1.1 Identification of Spiritual Figures and Sacred Natural Sites

According to participants' identification, spiritual figures in Khumbu have two categories: deities and saints associated with the Buddhist faith; and local deities and spirits related to animistic beliefs. Spiritual figures in Buddhism and indigenous Bon religion construct the religious worldviews of Sherpas together. However, Buddhist deities and saints received the highest level of collective recognition because of their influence in both religious and secular lives of Sherpas. Sherpa religious festivals either celebrate the defeat of evil spirits by Buddhism, or commemorate important events in Buddhist history. Primary Buddhist

principles and philosophy of living are practiced by Sherpas in daily lives. Local spirits and deities were perceived as second-tier superhuman entities because they were subdued and converted by the power of Guru Rinpoche. Religious faith has a profound influence on people's perception of the physical landscape. To Sherpas, the physical landscape of Khumbu embodies intrinsic sacredness because its creation was directly linked to superhuman powers. The entire Khumbu valley is regarded a special place and distinct from other "ordinary" regions. People identify certain natural sites sacred because they are either directly (as dwelling places) or indirectly (as manifestations of supernatural powers) related to specific deities and spirits. These sacred natural sites also contain important social meanings, which embody restrictions and regulations on behaviours. These social meanings people attach to the natural sites validate and reinforce their sacredness. Furthermore, physical features in landscape are not something external, but could be integrative components in locals' lived experience (Woodhouse, et al., 2015). Sherpas frequently encounter the realms of superhuman entities when walking through valleys, rivers and monastery forests. These active interactions between people and sacred natural sites contribute to the formation of an unique place identity (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983). The symbolic relationship between people and the physical landscape is formed by people collectively attaching emotional and social meanings to certain sites (Low & Altman, 1992).

5.1.2 Identification of Sacred Cultural Sites

Six types of sacred cultural features were identified: monastery, stupa, *kani* gate, mani wall and stone, prayer wheel, prayer flags/poles. These cultural features all embody religious and

symbolic meanings which reflect local spiritual values and religious beliefs. The monastery buildings contain many religious symbols, which celebrate the supernatural powers, inspire awe and evoke reverence among all visitors. Stupa and *Kani* gates both serve as geographical and religious landmarks of Khumbu villages. Similar structure can be found in Japanese Shinto shrines where the ceremonial gateway called “*torii*” divides the sacred territories of the temples from the ordinary world (Clarke, 1993, as cited in Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004, p. 390). Mani walls, prayer wheels and prayer flags/poles are all cultural features symbolizing supernatural power. The reasons for constructing these sacred cultural features are two-fold: to pay homage to the Buddhist deities and supernatural entities residing in the physical landscape; and to bestow peace and bountiful harvest to local people. In short, sacred cultural features reinforce the sacredness embedded in the physical landscape of Khumbu. Although not regarded as intrinsically sacred as many physical features, cultural features are the special nodal points in the physical landscape where people feel both spiritually and spatially close to supernatural entities (Elon, 1989, as cited in Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993, p.233). They are also visual reminders for locals when they enter into a sacred domain occupied by superhuman entities. Through frequent use and interactions, local residents repeatedly informing themselves of their religious beliefs and their connection to the landscape are even more solidified (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004).

5.1.3 Factors Influencing Objective Interpretation of Sacred Landscape

Participants’ objective identification showed different levels of knowledge of spiritual figures, sacred natural and cultural sites. While the overall sacredness of Khumbu region was

recognized, participants' familiarity of different sacred features was influenced by their geographical proximity to sacred sites, age and religious background.

5.1.3.1 Geographical Proximity to Sacred Sites

When identifying sacred natural and cultural features, participants tended to identify features closer to their places of residence first. Sherpas showed greater familiarity toward the sacred natural and cultural sites in their own villages, and were able to provide detailed information regarding the locations, associated deities/spirits and legends. Lay participants had limited knowledge of sacred features in villages far away from their homes. Frequent use of the cultural and natural sites in their own villages enhanced Sherpas' familiarity. However, geographical proximity did not seem to influence participants' knowledge of the Buddhist deities and saints. Sherpa people in Khumbu region shared the same cultural history and religious belief system; the Buddhist deities and saints are worshiped and recognized collectively. A few sacred natural sites were the exceptions: Mt. Khumbila and Mt. Everest were the first two identified sacred mountains by participants throughout Khumbu because their associated deities have a larger influence in Khumbu. The perceived sacredness of Mt. Everest has been amplified due to her attraction as the world's highest mountain which draws a high number of mountaineers and trekkers to her feet. This popularity has also influenced the views of younger local Sherpas who see the mountain through the eyes of the visitors, not only as a place to climb but also as a place of reverence. Locals Sherpas' familiarity with the goddess Jomolongma has increased because of how foreigners have defined Mt. Everest, reflecting the recreating power of the foreign "gaze" (Moran, 2004). In general, findings

supported earlier studies which have indicated that sacredness is a largely place-based concept which is perceived and defined locally (Levi & Kocher, 2013). However, local values and cultural expressions cultivate corporate experiences and preferences (Brown & Raymond, 2007), sacred features with a larger range of influence receive more collective recognition by people and less affected by geographical locations.

5.1.3.2 Age

In Spoon's (2010) quantitative study of Sherpas' place-based spiritual values, age was one of the major factors influencing Sherpas' religious knowledge of the sacred landscape of Khumbu. He argued that older males who live in remote villages were the most knowledgeable about Sherpa spiritual values and religious history (2010). This study also found that older participants, especially those older than 50, demonstrated a higher level of religious knowledge, as they were able to identify more sacred natural and cultural than others. They were also more familiar with the religious history associated with sacred cultural sites and the establishment of the sacred *beyul*. Older Sherpas have a higher level of "insiderness" as they hold more knowledge of the physical details of the landscape and have more personal experience and connection with the place (Relph, 1976, ac cited in Brown & Raymond, 2007, p.91).

5.1.3.3 Religious Background

Religious background of Sherpas also influenced their levels of knowledge of sacred features. In this study, religious informants showed greater familiarity toward Buddhist deities and

local spirits. The informants were not only well-informed about the local features, but were also knowledgeable about sacred sites throughout Khumbu. Key informants' level of knowledge of sacred features was less influenced by their geographical proximity to sacred sites and age. The monastic education they received at young age and long-term practicing of Buddhism constructed a solid religious knowledge of the sacred landscape in Khumbu, which in turn influence their knowledge of the embedded values, legends, and history associated with different sacred features.

5.2 Subjective Interpretation of Sacred Landscape

The meaning of landscape is multi-layered (Meinig, 1974; Cosgrove, 1998). In the earlier section, Sherpas' objective identification of sacred features reflected a collective perception of the sacred landscape which mainly derived from shared religious worldviews and cultural history. However, individual experience and engagement construct subjective understandings toward the meanings of landscape (Milligan, 1998). In this study, Sherpas' subjective interpretations were considered by examining different meanings locals attach to specific features in the *beyul* and their individual interactions with the landscape. According to Spoon (2010) and Sherpa (2008), the concept of *beyul* is the most important Sherpa spiritual value and the fundamental component of Sherpas' religious worldview.

5.2.1 Understanding of the Sacred Beyul

In Spoon's study (2010), the most well-known spiritual values among Sherpas included: the taboo against climbing Mt. Khumbila, knowledge about mountain deities, and values of

kindness toward wildlife. He found that knowledge regarding the concept of *beyul* was the least known, especially among the younger generation. However, participants in this study were generally familiar with the legend associated with the establishment and rediscovery of *beyul Khumbu*. A distinct character of the sacred *beyul* was highlighted: they are hidden Shangri-la in the Himalayan region, conserved for devoted Buddhist adherents to discover/open at predestined times. However, the concept of the metaphysical realm of *beyul* was only mentioned by few key informants who demonstrated higher level of contemplation of *beyul*. This spiritual level of *beyul* was confirmed by both western and Nepali researchers (Reinhard, 1978; Wangmo & Ngawang, 2008; Klatzel, 2009). Here again, the religious background of participants influenced their depth of understanding of the landscape. Local residents comply with a set of rules based on religious and spiritual values to maintain the sacred and distinctive status of *beyul Khumbu*. These rules of conduct are not only behavioural standards, but also requirements of people's mindsets. Sacred *beyul* can be destroyed by "negative energies", referring to conflicts and harmful thoughts. Selfishness, hatred, violence and corruption were regarded even more destructive to the sacred *beyul* than disrespectful behaviours at sacred sites. To Sherpas, the *beyul* is a complex cognitive structure. On one hand it reflects local spiritual cosmology, on the other it is characterized by a host of cultural values, beliefs, social norms and behaviour tendencies, which all contributes to the formation of place identity of Khumbu (Proshansky, et al., 1983). This study found that recognition of the rules of conduct, family influence, and personal experience and attachment all play important roles in shaping local residents' subjective interpretation and perception of the *beyul*.

5.2.1.1 Recognition of Rules of Conduct

Religion plays a crucial role in constructing local residents' spiritual worldview and subjective perception of the landscape. Sherpas' understanding of the *beyul* revealed that Sherpas orient themselves toward the sacred landscape of Khumbu by relying on two important religious notions: 1) local deities and spirits in the physical landscape, which influence Sherpas' perception toward sacred natural sites, and 2) Buddhist concept of non-violence and compassion, which guides Sherpas' behaviours at sacred cultural sites and in many aspects of life. Participants' narratives indicated to a strong local awareness of the restrictions on behaviours in *beyul Khumbu*. Many participants emphasized the disastrous consequences caused by the violation of the rules of behaviour at sacred natural sites, reflecting people's fear and awe toward the superhuman entities, who can be both protective and destructive (Horster, 2010). Earthquake, avalanche, landslide and drought were frequently mentioned by participants as the signs of the infuriating deities and spirits punishing people for showing disrespect and dishonor. Breaking the rules of conduct at sacred sites in the landscape was directly associated with misfortune. This linkage between natural disasters and divine retribution can be found in many other religions as well (Mitchell, 2000; Gaillard & Texier, 2010). Spiritual belief and values are considered important factors in influencing people's responses to natural hazards (Mitchell, 2000). In the face of natural disasters, people attempt to search for explanations and meanings in religious context. Natural disasters are frequently referenced as warning "acts of god" for misdeed and poor faith (Gaillard & Texier, 2010), while good deeds can mitigate and reduce potential

environmental threats in some religions such as Tibetan Buddhism (Salick, Byg & Bauer, 2012). In order to prevent natural disasters and misfortune, Sherpas consistently appease the deities and spirits dwelling in mountains, forests and waters, reflecting Shamanist spiritual beliefs that gods need to be supplicated (Salick, et al., 2010). Rules of conducts associated with natural features also reflect that Sherpas intend to separate the space of superhuman entities and space of human beings by keeping distance from the dwelling places of the deities and spirits. Taboos against sacred mountain climbing, logging in sacred forests and polluting the water sources represent Sherpas' awareness and respect for the superhuman domain. Previous research has found that frequent use of natural sites enhances personal connections, which lead to stronger place attachment and also a stronger response to potential environmental threat (Ryan, 2005). More emotionally attached people feel more responsible to keep the natural site clean in order to prevent possible hazards. On the other hand, complying with the rules of conducts associated with sacred cultural sites reflected Sherpas' willingness of bringing benefits for not only themselves, but all living beings in the *beyul Khumbu*. Sherpas believe that these small actions and efforts they make will influence their status in the imagined sacred spaces that exist beyond the material world (Stump, 2008). Buddhist doctrines and philosophy of life which focuses on concept of karmic retribution influenced Sherpas' attitudes toward life and other sentient beings.

5.2.1.2 Family Influence

Previous research has noted that younger generation in Khumbu has much less interest and knowledge regarding their religious heritage (Spoon, 2010, Nyaupane, et al., 2014). This

argument was partially supported in this study. Younger Sherpas participated less in both daily rituals and religious events. Unlike their parents and grandparents, the proportion of time spent on religious matters largely decreased. However, research results indicated that family influence plays an important role in shaping young Sherpas' perceptions and knowledge of the *beyul*. If family members put a high value on the early education of Sherpa traditional values and religious history, their children tend to develop a higher level of attachment toward Khumbu and demonstrate deeper understanding of *beyul*. Parents usually play an important educative role in forming the religious identity of youth (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Those young Sherpas who learned about prayers, religious rituals and symbols, as well as legends and stories from older family members formed a strong personal connection to the landscape.

5.2.1.3 Personal Experience and Attachment

Levi and Kocher (2013) argued that sacred places embody emotion-oriented characteristics. This study found that Sherpas' emotional attachment toward *beyul Khumbu* is particularly strong. As Tuan (1974) argued, the meaning of place is influenced by experience and emotions people attach to the place. In this study, individual experience with the spiritual aspects of landscape forged a strong emotional connection toward the *beyul* and influenced subjective interpretations. For example, the unique personal experience of Sherpa mountaineering guides and porters facilitated a higher level of contemplation of the sacred *beyul* than many participants. Mountaineering guides identified themselves as "particularly religious" during interviews. Strong religious faith not only helped them overcome stressful

and dangerous situations at high altitude, but also strengthened and enhanced their personal attachment toward the mountains, as well as the larger landscape (Bott, 2009). This correlation between religious faith and strong attachment toward the land is also reflected in Low (1992)'s typology of cultural place attachment, in which cosmological and religious experience are identified as the constituents of the ideological aspects of place attachment.

5.2.2 Sherpas' Interactions with the Sacred Beyul

The sacred landscape of *beyul Khumbu* is constructed through Sherpas' consistent interactions between natural features and human-built cultural features, echoing Schluter's definition of the construction of cultural landscape (O'Hare, 1997). Sherpas actively interact with the spiritual, physical and cultural features in *beyul* on a daily basis through religious practices done at private space such as chanting Buddhist sutra, burning incense and making offering to deities and spirits, and behavioural routines when encountering sacred cultural features such as turning prayer wheels, walking from the left of mani walls and prayer poles. These daily religious practices and routines have evolved from oral traditions which are passed down from generation to generation. Although the original intention of practicing these routines is to accumulate merits and good deeds for personal spiritual achievement, Sherpas did not seem to regard their actions particularly special and formal as other religious rituals practiced in monasteries. Sherpas conduct daily religious practices and routines so frequently that these became more like spontaneous acts and social norms rather than serious rituals with strong religious orientation.

Festivals and events are important component of Sherpas' religious life in Khumbu. They are grand celebrations of the Sherpa religious faith which involve formal rituals and prolonged prayers, and also are reunion events for all Sherpa families in Nepal, including those who live outside of Khumbu. The spectacular performances in religious festivals embody strong symbolic meanings as the sacred dance depicts the victorious defeat of evils by Guru Rinpoche and establishment of Tibetan Buddhism in Khumbu. Through collective ritual practices, religious messages are transmitted and spiritual benefits are attained for every participator. The meanings of such festivals extend far beyond religion. They are important social events which enhance cultural cohesiveness and place attachment among Sherpa communities. The values of family, sharing, compassion and harmony are promoted through religious festivals. Sherpas interactions with the sacred *beyul* also reflected a scale of perceived accessibility of various sacred features in Khumbu. Various ways of interactions with the sacred *beyul* all demonstrated Sherpas' strong emotional ties to the landscape. The emotional bond with the landscape is created and reinforced through repeated place interactions and experiences which occur in the larger social context (Kyle & Chick, 2007).

5.2.2.1 Perceived Accessibility of Sacred Features

Participants' interactions with the sacred landscape in Khumbu revealed a scale of perceived accessibility of different sacred features. In general, participants perceived sacred cultural sites more accessible than sacred physical features. Monasteries, stupa, mani walls, prayer wheels and prayer flags blended in public spaces and can be accessed by both locals and visitors. Frequent interactions with sacred cultural features were encouraged as they generate

merits for better outcomes in people's lives and next lives. The action of turning a prayer wheel, for example, is considered equivalent to reciting the prayer scrolls stored inside. Interaction between Sherpas and the prayer wheel reflects the "hierenergetic" characteristics identified in Stump's categorization of sacred places as the interaction potentially invokes spiritual power and protection from deities (2008). Making contributions to the construction and maintenance of sacred cultural features are compassionate gestures which benefit the donors, therefore are highly promoted in Khumbu. Although most sacred cultural sites in Khumbu are accessible, a few hermitage centers, meditation caves and cremation sites are rare exceptions. These places were perceived by locals as isolated places dedicated for special uses or higher level of spiritual development, therefore "should not be disturbed by people".

Sacred physical features in Khumbu were often regarded as less accessible and distanced from people's mundane lives. Sacred mountains are strictly banned for climbing and even approaching. Worshiping activities for mountain deities are usually done at designated spots in the villages and on special days of year. Sacred monastery forests and water sources are more accessible, but behavioural restrictions are applied to prevent these sites from exploitation and contamination. Sacred natural features were perceived less accessible because they are directly connected to superhuman entities, which have intimidating and destructive powers. By contrast, the function of sacred cultural features implies engagement and interaction. They are places where Sherpas are allowed to interact with the realm of superhuman entities indirectly.

5.2.2.2 Formation of Place Attachment and Cultural Identity

The sacredness embedded in the physical landscape in Khumbu reaffirms people's religious faith solidified through interactions with different aspects of the *beyul*. This process of "internalization" occurs when religious rituals are repeatedly practiced and conducts of behaviour are consistently followed (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). In a sense, daily rituals and practices are "reminders" of locals' spiritual values and religious belief (Berger, 1967, as cited in Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004, p.390). As Tuan stated (1974), active interaction with a place can arouse strong emotional and spiritual connections, Sherpas' emotional bond with the landscape and their beliefs toward the meaning of the landscape are reinforced through routinized contact with the cultural features and consistent compliance with the rules of conduct at sacred natural sites. Through everyday practices, Sherpas unconsciously reminded themselves about the spiritual values and rules of conduct associated with the physical landscape. The social interactions in religious festivals and events are opportunities for Sherpas to learn about their cultural identity and spirits. Grand celebrations bring all members of the community together through rotating sponsorship, regardless of their social and economic status. Sherpas' strong cultural identity and community spirit can also be reflected at times of tragedies. After the deadly earthquake in April, 2014, donations were collected from communities for families who could not afford decent funerals. Through personal contribution and active involvement in community activities, both emotional and spiritual bonds with the landscape are formed and people's sense of identity is enhanced at both individual and collective levels (Levi & Kocher, 2013).

5.3 From Macro to Micro: Structure and Classification of the Sacred Landscape in Khumbu

Combining objective identification and subjective interpretation of the sacred features, I attempted to create a classification and structure of the sacred landscape in Khumbu (Figure 24). Reflecting on Singh's definition of "faithscape" (2005) and existing literature on landscape classification framework, a sacred landscape could be conceived as a hierarchical structure with multiple elements within it, ranging from an abstract and intangible element in the superhuman realm to a concrete feature in physical and cultural landscape, and further down to specific rituals and objects which serve to reflect and reinforce the spiritual faith. In Khumbu, the sacred landscape can be classified at a macro level, which involves abstract spiritual concepts, to a micro level which embodies localized practices and religious objects. *Beyul Khumbu*, depicted by Sherpas as a sacred valley, has both physical and metaphysical territories. The physical realm of *beyul* embraces all the spiritual, physical and cultural features. The metaphysical realm of *beyul* is a sacred imaginary domain which exists only in enlightened mind. The physical landscape in Khumbu is inseparable from the superhuman realm as it provides dwelling places for local deities and spirits. Human-constructed cultural features are situated within the physical realm of *beyul*. They are constructed for venerating the Buddhist deities and local spirits residing in the landscape. Cultural features also provide venues for Sherpas to interact with superhuman entities. Through daily interactions, religious rituals, meditation, feasting, and festivals, Sherpas' religious belief and spiritual values are strengthened and promoted, and strong emotional bond and attachment toward the *beyul* are established. Finally, the most localized or personal level of the sacred landscape exists within

Sherpa households. Sherpas' spiritual values and philosophy of living are reflected in daily religious routines and practices, which connect them to all three higher levels of the sacred landscape in Khumbu.

The sacred features in Khumbu conform to all seven categories of sacred places as conceptualized by Stump (2008). *Beyul* is a *cosmological* place which exists in the spiritual realm, and is also a *theocentric* place where superhuman entities live. It includes sacred natural sites revealing religious miracles (*hierophanic*), and important cultural sites which influence the development of Tibetan Buddhism in Khumbu (*historical*). Sacred cultural features such as stupa, mani walls, and prayer wheels are sites containing *hierenergetic* characteristics, as Sherpas believe the interactions can invoke divine power and bestow protection and blessing. Major monasteries like Tengboche, Khumjung and Thame are *authoritative* sacred sites as they hold important roles in transmitting the religious doctrines to Sherpas through religious festivals and events. *Ritual* places are scattered around in Khumbu, in both public and private spaces. They are venues for performing religious practices on a daily basis. As described by Stump, categories of sacred places in Khumbu overlap with each other significantly, indicating the complexity and dynamics of the sacred landscape of *beyul Khumbu*.

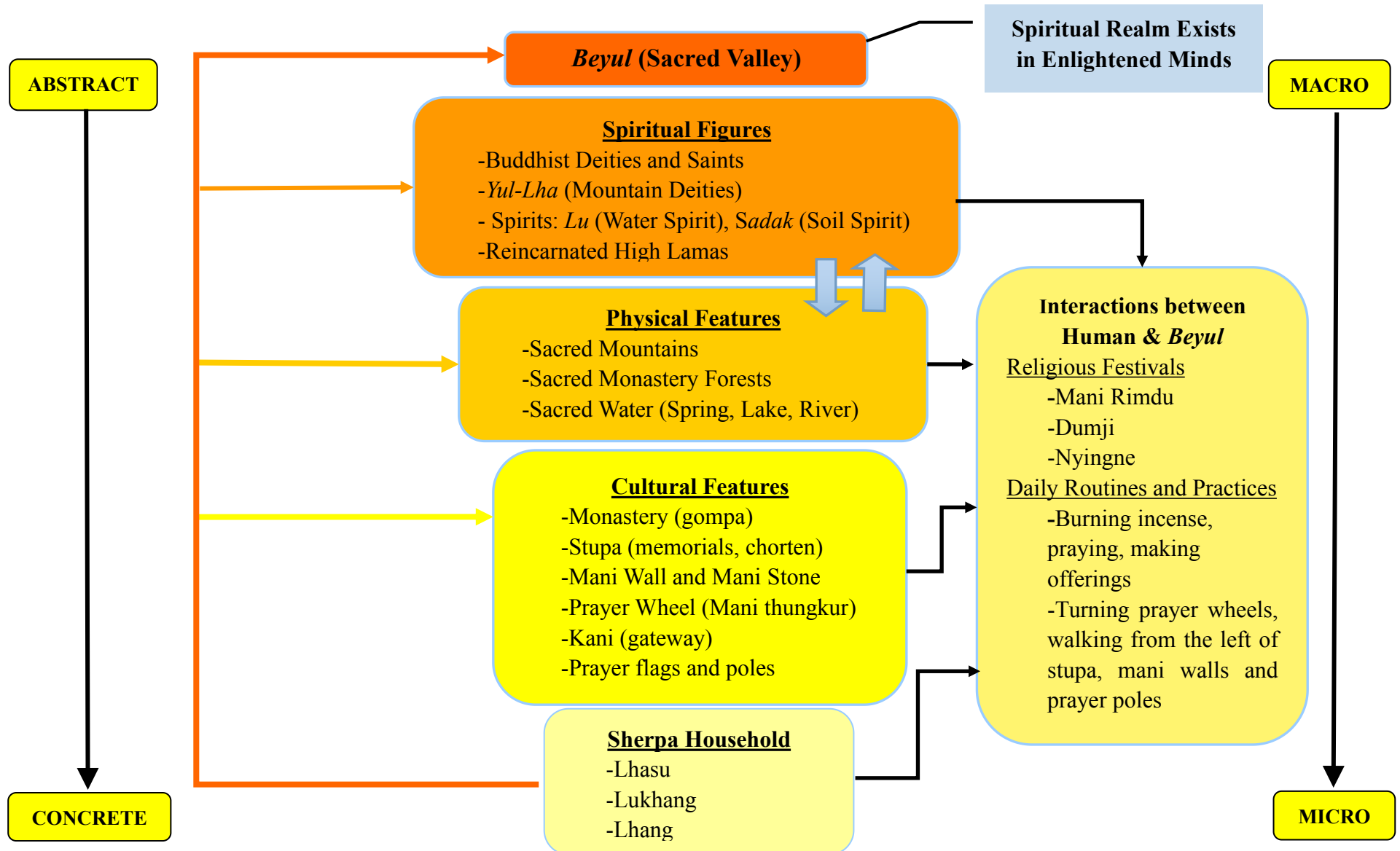


Figure 24 The Structure and Classification of the Sacred Landscape in Khumbu, Nepal. Created by author.

5.4 The Role of Tourism in Influencing Local Perspectives of the “Sacred”

Like many other sacred landscapes in the world, Khumbu is primarily a tourism destination. The sacred landscape of Khumbu is simultaneously a tourism landscape. Tourism landscapes have symbolic meanings which separate them from other ordinary cultural landscapes (Knudsen & Greer, 2008). As identified in the literature review, these symbolic meanings of tourism landscape have outsider meanings, interpreted by visitors who do not have personal connection to the landscape, and insider meanings, interpreted by locals who consistently use and interact with the landscape (Lowenthal & Prince, 1972, as cited in Knudsen, et al., 2008, p.5). In this study, participants expressed their insider opinion of the influence of tourism on Sherpas’ religious practices and spiritual values, and their views of what is sacred. These insiders’ interpretations are largely subjective, deriving from participants’ personal attachment and emotions, and influenced by shared cultural values and kinship (Timms, 2008). Results indicated that local residents perceived trekking tourism in Khumbu more beneficial than harmful to their lives. This finding is consistent with previous research done in the region (Furer-Haimendorf, 1984; Stevens, 1993; Adams, 1996). In recent years, scholars have started to shift their attention to the increasing evidence of social and cultural changes in Khumbu region. Weaker family ties, loss of traditional language and cultural customs were prominent social changes found by several studies (Luger, 2000; Nyaupane, et al., 2014; Nepal, 2015).

5.4.1 Shifts in Sherpa Spiritual Values

Sherpas’ unique religious belief system intermixes Buddhism, indigenous Bon religion and

folk traditions (Tucci, 1988, as cited in Spoon, 2011, p. 659). Buddhist philosophy of reincarnation of beings in various states and forms influences Sherpas' attitude toward life to a significant extent. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in order to obtain more satisfying states in next life and achieve the ultimate goal of enlightenment, meaning the eventual escape of the cyclic existence over a series of lives, deaths, and rebirths (Figure 25), Sherpas have to store up sufficient good deeds during this lifetime. Compassion, tolerance, generosity and forgiveness were some of the merits repeatedly mentioned by participants in this study. Compassion, which refers to the respect and empathy toward all sentient beings, was regarded the most important merit. This particular spiritual value can be easily observed in Sherpas' interactions with the landscape in Khumbu and their ways of treating people and wildlife.



Figure 25. Six Realms of Cyclic Existence. Photo taken by author at Khunde Monastery.

The motif depicts all forms of existence in the “Wheel of Life”, showing all beings circling in the six realms of samsara (the unsatisfactory cycle of death and rebirth) including gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, hot hell and cold hell. According to Buddhist philosophy, a physical body can be cast off but the soul is thought to be indestructible and will be reborn again and again, except in the case of the enlightened, who may be liberated from the cyclic existence, such as the Bodhisattva standing on the top right corner.

In a study on the influence of tourism on local Sherpas’ spiritual values and practices, Spoon (2010) found that tourism appeared to negatively influence Sherpas’ spiritual values, especially among younger generation. My study found tourism’s influence on Sherpa spiritual

values in three different aspects: changes in mountain deities worship, shift in human-land relationship, and alterations of religious routines.

5.4.1.1 Changes in Mountain Deity Worship

As Rutte (2011) argued, changes in spiritual values could lead to a change in preference for sacredness. In Khumbu, local worship for mountain deities was found to be somewhat influenced by tourism development as the purpose of worship had changed. As trekking tourism flourished in Khumbu region and Sherpa society became more diversified, the protection of the mountain deities is no longer needed for the same reasons as before. Sherpas used to pray to mountain deities for harvest and good weather, now they are praying for a wider range of matters: more businesses and profits in their lodges and shops, safety of their family members in mountaineering expeditions, well-being of their children in cities and so on. The perceived sacredness of Mt. Everest is increasing in recent decades because of tourism development. As several key informants explained, Mt. Everest was traditionally a sacred mountain because of the dwelling goddess *Jomo Miyo Lang Sangma*, but it was not regarded as the most sacred and influential as Mt. Khumbila. Mountaineering and trekking tourism development promoted the influence of Mt. Everest. Taboo against sacred mountain climbing was lifted only for Mt. Everest to satisfy the growing number of mountaineering expedition teams and trekkers. Since *Jomo Miyo Lang Sangma* was traditionally in charge of wealth and food, it is now linked to prosperity in tourism industry. Many Sherpas, especially those who involve in tourism industry, now pray to *Jomolangma* (the shorter name for *Jomo Miyo Lang Sangma*) for more tourists as they bring wealth and prosperity. Mountaineering

guides pray for their safety on Mt. Everest by conducting *pujas* at the base camp before ascent. This shifting attitude toward what is sacred, and what is not, indicates that Sherpas' perspectives too are evolving, and are subject to different social contexts (Woodhouse et al., 2015). As mountaineering tourism expanded and flourished in Khumbu, climbing sacred mountains like Mt. Everest have been negotiated as a morally acceptable act. However, Sherpas' submissive attitude and utmost respect toward superhuman powers in general have remained strong. In this study, participants' narratives reflected that contemporary materialistic values did not seem to clash with Sherpa spiritual values, yet they added new perspectives to the existing traditions and norms.

5.4.1.2 Shift in Human-Land Relationship

As many Sherpas in Khumbu region became increasingly involved in tourism, the relationship between human and the landscape has changed. Sherpas perceptions and values toward the landscape are now more dynamic. Traditionally, the relation between Sherpas and the land was a symbiotic one. Strong religious beliefs and place-based spiritual values constrained and regulated people's use of the land and its natural resources. In a sacred *beyul*, realms of human, landscape and supernatural entities are closely interconnected. In other words, *beyul* symbolizes the "umbrella that links humans to each other and the land" (Spoon, 2010, p.95). Now, the sacred landscape of Khumbu provides for the locals in a different way than it once did. The natural and cultural landscape in Khumbu become products, sold as commodities to foreign tourists, as Lama Geshe of Pangboche commented: "...our religious festivals, traditional clothes and arts, everything can make money now!" Although most

participants in this study demonstrated fair amount of knowledge regarding the concept of *beyul* and its related rules, their changing values toward nature were well-recognized. This shift in human-landscape relationship is a result of economic change. Khumbu is now one of the more developed regions in Nepal which has successfully transitioned from subsistence to a cash-driven economy (Nepal, 2015).

5.4.1.3 Alterations of Religious Routines and Practices

As revenue generated from tourism-related businesses became their major source of income, Sherpas' participation in religious practices and activities significantly decreased. Participants attributed this to “too busy at the lodge”, and “only few months to earn good money” arguing that they cannot walk away from their businesses. Also, western education is now widely preferred by the Sherpas, the number of people receiving monastic education has dropped drastically. The inheritance of traditional language and religious knowledge is becoming more challenging today as less people dedicate their lives in pursuing spiritual development, and more people seek to expand their material consumption. However, during monsoon season when the number of tourists is markedly lower, local Sherpas' involvement in religious activities seemed to be stronger. For example, Dumchi festival during Monsoon season provides an opportunity for Sherpas outside of Khumbu to reunite with their extended families in Khumbu. Sherpas in cities remain active in many religious events as well. Although some of the traditional rituals and practices have been simplified and deformed, Sherpas' passion and devotion toward their religious and cultural heritage has remained strong. In Khumbu, young Sherpas are creating new forms of interactions with the sacred

landscape, integrating new ideas into the old and familiar religious routines. These changes can be seen as alterations of tradition, and not its elimination or transformation (Fisher, 1990, p.166). Furthermore, incomes from tourism are partially donated by many Sherpas to the construction of new stupas, monasteries and other cultural features, demonstrating their efforts in retaining the essential components of Sherpa spiritual values and cultural identity (Nepal, in press).

5.4.2 Perception of the Sacred Beyul under the Influence of Tourism

Previous research on sacred tourist sites found that sacred places can be perceived less sacred if there is strong presence of commercial activities and tourists (Terzidou, et al., 2008; Levi & Kocher, 2013). It could be argued that trekking tourism has driven the process of commercialization of local culture, religion and landscape. The sacred landscape of *beyul Khumbu* is no longer a “hidden valley” reserved for devout Buddhists; it is now a hybrid, dynamic and complex space. The power of sacred *beyul* is declining, because sacred landscape is an intangible concept and vulnerable to outside influences such as westernization, tourism and cultural assimilation (Rutte, 2011; Allendorf, et al., 2014). However, my study found that Sherpas are able to hold on to the claim of sacredness in this place and believe that a sacred *beyul* is able to coexist with modern development and westernization as long as locals conserve their faith and cultural heritage. Religious faith is what makes the *beyul* sacred in the first place. If local people lose their faith, the landscape of Khumbu will be indistinguishable from other ordinary landscapes. However, under the influence of tourism development, the boundary of sacred space and profane space has been blurred due to the

modern process of dedifferentiation, as argued by Kraft (2010). Many sacred tourist places around the world are now places with multiple contexts. As indigenous people continuously apply their spiritual values and religious beliefs in the conservation and use of natural resources, tourism development injects contemporary materialistic views into locals' perspectives toward the landscape. In Khumbu too, local cosmology and Buddhist doctrines are incorporating with modern ideologies, creating a hybrid place where tourist space and sacred space coexist (Bremer, 2006; Woodhouse, et al., 2015). Previous research regarding the influence of tourism on sacred sites has ignored the potential for indigenous culture and people to absorb tourist demands in creative ways while maintaining the essence of their traditional culture and value. As Levi & Kocher (2013) identified, some local inhabitants of sacred sites performed their traditional rituals to meet tourist demands rather than retain their original purposes. In return, local communities receive monetary benefits which can be used in the conservation of traditional culture and help the maintenance of the site's sacred status. In Khumbu, Mani Rimdu festival has been transformed from a religious festival to an universal celebrating event involving the participation of both locals and tourists. The monetary benefits gained from tourism are used by Tengboche Monastery in its renovation and conservation projects. Tourism and commercial activities would not influence the sacred status of this religious institution. To some extent, Tengboche Monastery benefited from these "mundane" activities because its regional and global influence escalated and global attention has drawn to Sherpa religion and culture.

5.4.3 Emergence of New Sacred Features in Khumbu

The sacred landscape of Khumbu is continuously evolving under the influence of tourism development. New sacred features have added new elements to the sacred *beyul*. These sacred features are not necessarily related to religious faith, but can arouse strong emotions and personal attachment as well (Vukonic, 2006). The memorial site for deceased high mountain climbers and Sherpa guides near Lobuche is an example of this new form of sacred feature. Its sacredness is obtained through means other than Sherpa religious faith, but serves as a commemorative place for the global mountaineering community. However, the majority of memorial graves at this site belong to foreign mountaineers. Only few famous Sherpa mountaineers have their memorials there. The memorial site was more often perceived as a sacred site by trekkers but not by local residents (Mu & Nepal, 2015). The construction of new sacred features in Khumbu seems to be geared to the needs of foreign tourists rather than locals, which supports the claim that tourists are seeking more self-related emotions at sacred sites (Knudsen et al, 2008). Other new cultural features, such as the huge statue of Guru Rinpoche in Pangboche, big memorial statues for Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzin Norgay near Khumjung (Figure 26), and mani walls with engraved foreign donors' names on bronze plates, are all located steps away from major trekking routes.



Figure 26. Left: Memorial statue of Sir Edmund Hilary at Khumjung School. Right: Memorial statue of Tenzin Norgay north of Namche. Photos taken by author.

One could speculate that the original cultural features might be replaced by these new features which are designated for gaining tourists' attention. For example, a participant in Pangboche commented that lay Sherpas' memorials (*chhurung*) are sometimes relocated to remote areas in order to provide space for building new sacred features. To some extent, foreign perceptions and preferences help in the construction of new aspects of the sacred landscape. The participants interviewed in this study did not seem to oppose these changes in Khumbu sacred landscape. Foreign tourists were generally perceived as generous patrons and observers of Sherpa culture and life rather than intruders. New sacred features were not regarded as threats because they equally reflected Sherpas' core spiritual value of compassion. There was a general sense of acceptance and tolerance toward the new components of sacred landscape in Khumbu.

5.5 Challenges for Conserving the Sacred Landscape in Khumbu

The importance of protecting traditional language was repeatedly mentioned by participants

in this study as the most pressing issue. Several key informants expressed their concerns that Sherpa culture and religion could disappear one day if the core cultural values such as the language and religion are not upheld. As Sherpas in Khumbu are now heavily dependent on revenues generated from the tourism industry, cultural conservation, especially the conservation of religion and language have to confront numerous challenges. Scholars have pointed out that the biggest challenge for a sacred tourists site is the balancing of benefits from tourism and cultural conservation, while retaining the intrinsic sacredness of the site (Olsen, 2006). Conservation of a sacred landscape is not only about preserving the historical relics and the vulnerable physical environment, but also consolidating the sense of identity and social interactions among locals. Four major challenges for cultural conservation in Khumbu were identified by this author: outflow of young Sherpas, over dependence on external financial aid and tourism, and threats from outsider intervention.

5.5.1 Out Migration of Young People

Out migration of Khumbu's young generation was deemed a potential threat to cultural survival. More Sherpas send their children to schools in Kathmandu and even abroad. While learning English, computer and business is popular, formal training in Tibetan language and Sherpa religion is less common. Even the schools in Khumbu region fail to integrate local language and culture in their curriculum. It is also hard to retain young educated Sherpas in Khumbu because of the harsh environment in the mountains. Even though many educated young Sherpas have returned to Khumbu and work in family businesses during trekking seasons, they spend most of their time in cities (i.e., in Kathmandu). To many young Sherpas,

big cities in Nepal and overseas offer better prospects in education and career (Nepal, in press). Western education has opened up more career options for young Sherpas; they are now involved in a wide variety of occupations and not geographically confined to Khumbu region and Nepal. It will be difficult for young Sherpas to have the same understanding of Sherpas' spiritual values and cultural traditions if they do not live in Khumbu. As young Sherpas' life drift further away from the Khumbu landscape, the place-based spiritual values which directly influence Sherpas conservation ideologies might be dissolved rapidly (Spoon, 2010).

5.5.2 Dependence on External Financial Aid

High dependence on external financial aids from foreign visitors and organization is another threat for cultural conservation in Khumbu. Construction and maintenance of schools, clinics, power stations and other infrastructures are heavily depended on financial contributions from foreign donors. Although some locals and Sherpas from other regions of Nepal make donations regularly to monasteries in Khumbu, the major source of financial support of monasteries comes from foreign visitors and international charitable organizations. One major problem with over dependence on external financial aid is the imbalance of resource allocation. Donations from foreign organizations and individuals usually concentrate in bigger villages along the main trekking routes. Famous monasteries like Tengboche and Thame have recently renovated buildings and interiors. New constructions of schools, Buddhist statues and stupas can be seen in Pangboche, Khumjung and Lukla. Relatively remote villages receive very limited attention from foreign donors. Other monasteries, for

example, Deboche nunnery, do not draw external attention and is poorly maintained.

Dependency on external aid also discourages bottom-up conservation initiatives (Stevens, 2013).

5.5.3 Dependence on Tourism

Khumbu villages are very vulnerable to uncontrollable factors because they have put all their economic opportunities into one basket, which is mountaineering and trekking tourism. Over dependence on tourism development has made the region's economy susceptible to unpredictable influences. Nepal's Tourism Statistics revealed that the number of visitors to Khumbu dropped dramatically in 2006 when the country went through a political crisis. Recently, major natural disasters like avalanche and earthquake have negatively affected the tourism industry in Nepal, and in Khumbu; their consequent impacts could be devastating. The avalanche incident in 2014 resulted in the cancellation of the entire mountaineering season, and caused huge economic losses for local Sherpas. Earthquake in April, 2015 was the most deadly accident on Mt. Everest and as a result, the climbing season got canceled for the second consecutive year. The livelihood of Sherpas is thus highly dependent on forces beyond their control. By neglecting other economic opportunities, Khumbu Sherpas may sacrifice more than loss of family income. Previous research has shown that as the demand for mountaineering and trekking guides grows, more and more Sherpas are exposed to the risks associated with these activities (Nepal & Mu, 2015).

5.5.4 Threats from Outsiders' Intervention

The designation of Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone (SNPBZ) transformed *beyul* Khumbu into an official protected area. Although traditional and modern conceptions of nature protection share many values, the national park as a modern idea uses a different tool of implementation. The protection of sacred *beyul* relies on local residents' voluntary and religion-based support and commitment, while a designated protected area requires powerful legislation and justifications from different levels of governance (Sherpa, 2005). The outsiders, in the discourse of Sherpa cultural conservation, refer to policy-makers, scientists, western scholars and researchers who are less personally connected to the local landscape and as such ascribe less recognition to the values of time-tested local traditions in ecological and cultural conservation. Insiders' customary implementation methods might be overshadowed by untested policies and regulations, as has been the case in the past where nationalization of Khumbu forests resulted in undermining of indigenous forest stewardship (Nepal, 2003; Stevens, 2013). Current management policies in SNP do not sufficiently acknowledge and appreciate Sherpas' customary land management practices and conservation achievement (Sherpa, 2005). It is vital to implement management planning and policies which reflect Sherpa self-reliance and self-governance, in order to effectively maintain local culture, social solidarity and responsibilities for caring for the sacred *beyul* (Stevens, 2013). Previous research regarding another renowned trekking destination in Nepal, Annapurna region suggested that local people's participation effectively reduced tourism-induced problems in ecological and cultural conservation (Nepal, 2000). The success achieved in Annapurna signals the need for a participatory approach to cultural and ecological conservation initiatives in Khumbu.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Major Findings and Implications

This study attempted to understand multiple aspects of Khumbu's sacred landscape and explore the role tourism plays in influencing local residents' place-based spiritual values and perceptions toward the landscape. Khumbu was selected as the context for this study because the region is perceived as a sacred *beyul* by Buddhist Sherpa population and is undergoing tremendous economic, social and environmental changes brought by international tourism.

Research objectives of this research included: 1) document local residents' objective observation and identification of sacred features; 2) explore residents' subjective interpretations of, and personal experiences with, the sacred landscape; and 3) examine whether trekking tourism plays a role in influencing/ re-producing the sacred landscape and place-based spiritual values. Given the exploratory nature of the topic, a qualitative approach based on field observations and 33 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Sherpa residents was applied in this study. Participants were asked to identify sacred natural features and cultural sites to the best of their knowledge, and then describe their personal experience and perceptions of the sacred *beyul*.

The study found that objective interpretations of sacred landscape derived from local's collective recognition and shared knowledge of the spiritual figures, sacred natural and cultural sites in Khumbu has a hierarchical structure (refer to Figure 24). Multiple aspects of a sacred landscape can be ranged from an abstract, metaphysical level which involved spiritual concepts and entities, to a concrete, physical level which embodies localized

practices and ritual objects. The close interconnections between the spiritual, physical and cultural elements in a sacred landscape are manifested in various forms of interactions practiced by humans. Sacred features also reveal a level of influence, scaling from a particular sacred site like *lu*, to localized sacred place like monasteries and forests, to a sacred venue which receives regional, and even global recognition, such as Mt. Khumbila and Mt. Everest. Local Sherpas' knowledge of sacred features was influenced by their geographical proximity to sacred sites, age and religious background. A sacred landscape comprised of a complex array of local natural and cultural features, which reflected local spiritual values and beliefs. Physical elements in the landscape confirmed and reinforced cultural elements and vice versa. Place-based meanings and values were re-produced as natural and cultural features interact in a socially connected and increasing globalized world.

Subjective interpretations of sacred landscape were constituted by individual experiences and understandings which revealed the embedded meanings and values in a place. This study found that strong awareness of the rules of conduct, family influence and personal experience all played important roles in shaping Sherpas' subjective interpretation of the sacred *beyul*. Rules of conduct which were constructed based on local spiritual values were not only behavioural standards, but also requirements of people's mindsets. Buddhist doctrines and philosophy of life which focused on concepts of non-violence and karmic retribution influenced locals' attitudes toward life and other sentient beings. Place identity and strong emotional bond with the landscape were forged and reinforced through routinized contact and consistent compliance with the rules of conduct at sacred natural and cultural sites. Religious

festivals were important social events where cultural cohesiveness and attachment among Sherpa communities were enhanced. Locals' subjective interpretations reflected that meanings of sacred landscape are both communal and personalized. People's experience with the landscape can take place in both public settings (e.g. monasteries, religious events) and private, personal settings like households. Meanings and importance attached to certain landscape features or symbolic spiritual values are place-based and subject to social attributes and personal experiences. However, these ascribed meanings and understandings are not static, but are constantly evolving and changing, as in the context of tourism.

The study also found that although generally regarded as beneficial, tourism development did influence local spiritual values and Sherpa's perspectives of various elements of the sacred landscape. Changes in mountain deity worships, shift in human-land relationship, and alterations of religious routines and practices were evident in Khumbu. Tourism development means that the geographical isolation of the past no longer exists. *Beyul Khumbu* today is no longer a "hidden place" from the modern world. The region is now a hybrid place which connected to the global economy and culture. The changes in preference of sacredness reflected that the relationship between human and sacred is dynamic and dependent on different social contexts. Symbiotic relationship with the landscape in the past has also changed as tourism economy displaced people from nature and injected contemporary materialistic values into locals' perceptions toward the landscape. As an alluring concept for promoting tourist destination, the value of the sacred *beyul* is losing its religious meanings for Sherpas. The *beyul* today contains commercial values and provides profitable commodities

catered to the expectations of tourists. However, Sherpas still regarded Khumbu as a sacred place and they demonstrated an attitude of acceptance toward the changes in the *beyul*.

Tourism plays a role in reproducing, preserving and celebrating the traditional cultural and spiritual values rather than undermining them. Modernity and globalization are factors that are continually shaping the socially constructed local meanings of place and space, and force local inhabitants like the Sherpas to search for and adapt to new meanings of self, identity, values, and constantly negotiate their place in the world.

This research intended to make contributions to the existing literature on landscape studies and cultural geography by examining local residents' perceptions of multiple aspects of a sacred landscape, and how people's understanding of sacredness and perceptions of landscape are influenced by tourism. Also, exploring changing indigenous spiritual values and religious beliefs contribute to studies in cultural and environmental conservation, as well as management policies in heritage preservation. Religious communities residing in sacred landscape conserve the natural environment through respectful behaviours and specific rules of conduct. They are crucial agents in implementing bottom-up cultural conservation initiatives. Understanding local residents' relationship with the sacred landscape helps to carry out more effective conservation and management policies.

Due to time and physical constraints, a small number of participants were recruited and some remote areas in Khumbu were not reached. Author's limited experience in field research and interview skills limited the comprehensiveness of data collection and analysis. These

problems could have been improved by spending a longer period of time in the study area, learning the local language, and gaining more research and interview experience in ethnography and anthropology.

6.2 Future Research

There are many research avenues relating to sacred landscape in and beyond Khumbu region. For example, this study covered the perceptions of local residents toward the sacredness of landscape under the influence of tourism. The experience of visitors could provide an interesting perspective toward the same topic. Visitors' perceptions and interests in indigenous religious beliefs are likely to be important considerations for the development and promotion of tourism in all sacred tourist sites around the world. More scholarly research on Sherpa spiritual worldview is needed as their culture and religion are exposed to growing tourism dominated economy. Exploring the changes in spiritual values and religious practices under the influence of tourism could provide valuable insights for environmental and cultural conservation. Also, there is a lack of academic research concerning Sherpa youth, especially their changing perspectives toward their own cultural identity and religion under the influence of globalization. The impact and effectiveness of current cultural conservation strategies is another topic worth examining.

6.3 Recommendations for Cultural Conservation in Khumbu

Since Khumbu is undergoing rapid changes due to tourism development, it is important to provide sustainable tourism planning policies and recommendations to protect this distinct

sacred landscape, which also happens to be a World Heritage Site. The goal of sustainable tourism is to support economic development without sacrificing the environmental and cultural heritages. A sustainable tourism destination should not only provide quality experience for tourists, but also maintain the environment and improve general well-being of local residents. Therefore, planning sustainable tourism at a sacred landscape requires balancing the needs for historic and cultural conservation, the maintenance of religious practices and community activities, and the quality of tourist experience.

Although many tourists are interested in observing and participating in local religious practices, overcrowding and inappropriate behaviours can still be disruptive to the local community, especially to serious religious practitioners. Monasteries can separate their times for religious practices from tourists' visiting hours to ensure a quiet and solemn environment for serious rituals. Tourists need to be informed about culturally appropriate behaviours in order to preserve the sense of awe at sacred cultural sites. There needs to be a certified professional training program for trekking guides focused on the delivery and dissemination of knowledge of local history, religion and culture. Professional guides can draw tourists' attention, and can act as role models for culturally sensitive and appropriate behaviours and attitudes visitors are encouraged to develop. Promoting tradition and language through educational programs targeting young Sherpas might be the key to cultural conservation in a sacred landscape like Khumbu. More emphasis should be placed on strengthening Buddhist conservation values, promoting cultural awareness and responsibilities to care for the sacred *beyul*.



Figure 27. Author in her second field trip to SNP. November, 2014. Snow mountains from left to right: Mt. Everest, Mt. Lotse, Ama Dablam.

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APPENDIX A: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Part A: Basic Information

- Age, gender, occupation, length of residency

Part B: Identification of sacred features and spiritual values

- Discuss a certain sacred feature with the participant, such as sacred mountains, forests, temples, monasteries, hermitages, or big mani stones and prayer flags.
- In your village, is there anything that you consider as sacred? (Record their answer in order. What is mentioned first? Is there a preference in identifying sacred landscapes? What are other sacred sites you recognize in the Sagarmatha National Park?
- Why it is sacred? For natural sites: represent what deities, protectors? For cultural sites: Was built by whom and why? What is their version of the “story” behind these features? (myths, legend)
- Define the term beyul. What does it mean?
- What is the relationship between the beyul and participant’s life? Do they visit these sacred sites/features mentioned? If they do, how often? For what reason? Any particular procedure/ceremony? If they do not, why? Do they consider the sacred features as approachable (welcoming to both local and visitors) or should be respected from a distance (or limited to local use, not welcoming to outsiders)?
- Can you name some unacceptable behaviours or actions in sacred sites? Why you think it is unacceptable?

Part C: Tourism Impacts and vision for future tourism development

- In your opinion, how tourism development have influenced/reproduce the sacred landscape in this region? (Do they view the landscape or do things differently because of commercialization, education, open to other culture and religion, etc.?)
- What are your opinions on the future tourism development in your community Do you expect more or less tourists, why? Is your community welcoming more tourists in the future? For the features you mentioned as sacred, do you think younger generations (under 18 years old) have the same view? If different, how?

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER & CONSENT FORM

Dear Resident,

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Tourism Policy and Planning at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada under the supervision of Professor Sanjay Nepal. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to participate.

As you know, many natural and cultural landscapes in the Sagarmatha National Park are considered as sacred by Sherpa people. These sacred landscapes play a crucial role in shaping Sherpa spiritual values and culture. In order to establish a detailed, descriptive documentation of the interpretations of sacred landscapes in the Sagarmatha National Park, local residents' knowledge and perceptions are needed for this study. The purpose of this research is to examine local residents' perceptions and knowledge on sacred features in the Sagarmatha National Park and explore whether trekking tourism plays a role in re-shaping these perceptions. Thus, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about this.

Participation in this study is voluntary and would involve a 45 minutes interview in your home or alternate location at a convenient location and time. There are no known or anticipated risks to your participation in this study. You may decline answering any questions you feel you do not wish to answer. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide will be considered confidential. Further, you will not be identified by name in my thesis or in any report or publication resulting from this study, however, with your permission, pseudonymous quotations maybe used. The data collected through this study will be kept for a period of 3 years in a secure location at the University of Waterloo.

If after receiving this letter, you have any questions about this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact me by email at y8mu@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Sanjay Nepal at snepal@uwaterloo.ca or phone at +1(519)-888-4567, Ext. 31239. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours. Should you have comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or Maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you for your assistance in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Yang Mu

I agree to participate in an interview being conducted by Yang Mu of the Department of Tourism Policy and Planning under the supervision of Professor Sanjay Nepal at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. I have made this decision based on the information I have received in the Information Letter and have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study. As a participant in this study, I realize that I will be asked to take part in an approximately 45 minute interview and that I may decline answering any of the questions, if I so choose. All information which I provide will be held in confidence and I will not be identified in the thesis, report or publication. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time by asking that the interview be stopped.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be tape recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be pseudonymous.

I acknowledge that this project has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University Waterloo and that I may contact this office if I have any comments or concerns about my participation in this study. I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at +1(519)888-4567, ext. 6005. Collect calls will be accepted and translators will be employed if necessary.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study

YES NO

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant's Name: _____

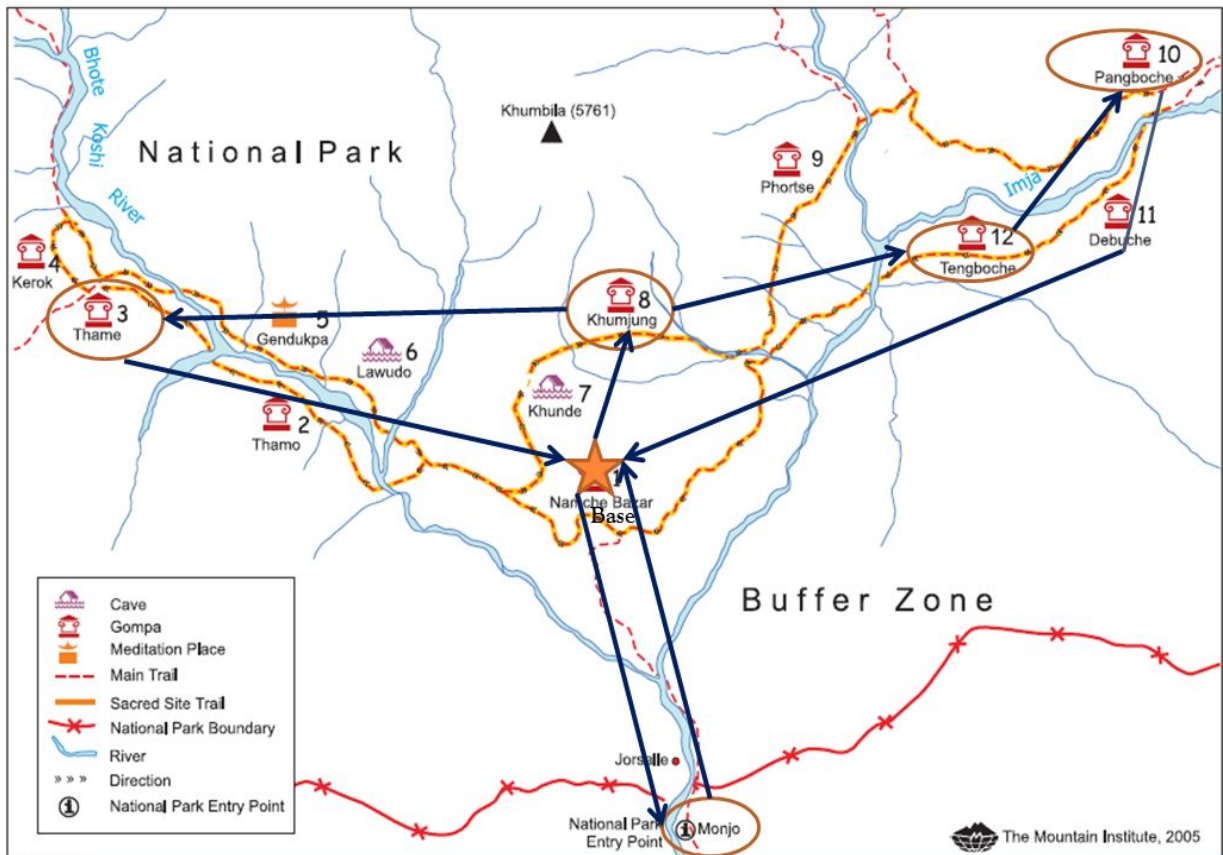
Participant's Signature: _____

Name of Witness: _____

Signature of Witness: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: AUTHOR'S TREKKING ROUTES



APPENDIX D: SAMPLE FIELD NOTES

(Summarized from hand-written field notes, transcribed in December, 2014)

October, 16th

Route: Namche--> Khumjung--> Namche

Number of cultural features observed:

Monasteries: 3 (Namche, Khumjung, Khunde)

Stupa/Chorten: 5

Kani: 3 (2 in Namche, 1 in Khumjung)

Mani Wall and Mani Stone: 19

Prayer Wheels: 11

Prayer flags and Poles: 147

Observations:

- One of the biggest prayer wheel in Khumbu located at Namche Gompa (built in 1905)
- Longest Mani Wall in Khumbu in front of Khumjung monastery. Influence of monastery: one of the three most important gompa in Khumbu.
- Memorial stupas for Tenzen Norgay and Edmund Hillary located near Khumjung, both are placed on top of hills so that traveling locals and trekkers can see.
- Big mani stone at both sides of Namche. Kani walls at the entrance of village. Interior painting: (left) Khumbi Yul-lha, Choomolangma, Tseringma; (right) Maha-Deva, Guru Rinpoche, Cherenzig etc. Ceiling: 6 manadala (signs warning tourists about entering sacred landscape)
- Porters chanting in front of mani stone when they take a rest (pray for their safety or just force of habit?)

Participants' Identification of Sacred Features

Namche

Sacred mountains: Khumbila (3), Everest (3), Ama Dablum (1),

Sacred monastery forest: Tengboche (3), Khumjung (1), Thame (2), not specified (1)

Sacred Waters: Gokyo lake (2), not specified (3), snake god praying places: huge trees near spring (2), water-driven prayer wheel (1)

Khumjung

Sacred mountain: Everest (4), Khumbila (4), Ama Dablam (1), Thamserku (1)

Forest: Khumjung (2), not specified (2)

Sacred waters: All waters are sacred (2), public Lu near Khumjung (2), Gokyo lake (1)

Important Monasteries: Tengboche (4), Khumjung, Thame, Pangboche

APPENDIX E: CODING SAMPLE

Interview #6. Lama Fumu (M, 52, Namche Gomba, Namche)

Q: In your village, is there anything (physical and cultural feature) that you consider as sacred? Why they are sacred (any legends, histories)

A: Most sacred mountains in Khumbu are: **Khumbila**. (Khumbila is the protector of the Khumbu), **Everest** (Choomolangma, one of long life sisters). I think **all landscape features (trees, rivers, waterfalls, springs, lakes, mountains)** are considered sacred. **This valley was hidden by Guru Rinpoche and there are many deities here to protect us from the evil forces.** **-reason for sacredness** (How about cultural sacred site)... **Tengboche Monastery** has a very high status among all the monasteries in Khumbu,. It is built by **Lama Sangwa Dorje, -spiritual figure** It is an important place for religious festivals like Mani Rimdu. **Khumjung and Thame monastery** are also very important. **Objective Identification and Shared Knowledge/values**

Q: Can you explain the concept of beyul for me? What does it mean to you?

Beyul means a **hidden valley**. Khumbu is **one of the hidden paradises (not the only one)** created by **Guru Rinpoche**. It is occupied by many spirits, **some spirits are evil but Guru Rinpoche converted to protect people (subdued by Buddhism)**. Beyul must be protected by people's appropriate behaviours. We don't **kill animals or hurt other people in a beyul (behavioural restriction)** People in the beyul are compassionate about other beings and not selfish (**mindset regulation**). **Subjective Understanding**

Q: What is the relationship between these features and your life? (do you visit sacred sites/features? If you do, how often and for what reasons? If you don't, why? Do you consider the sacred features as approachable (welcoming to both local and visitors) or should it be respected/worshiped from a distance (or limited to local use, not welcoming to outsiders)?

A: I have a **close relationship** with the beyul. I was born in Khumjung and became a monk at 15. I have been living in Namche Gumpa for more than **20 years. (years of residence)**. I'm the only monk here to **welcome tourists and help locals with some other religious matters.**(**Namche gompa is now more of a tourist place than retaining its religious function**) Every year I go participate in religious festivals like **Mani Rimdu** and **Dumji**. I will be performing a chham in the Mani Rimdu (**sacred mask dance**) this year. Here are some costumes and masks that will be used for the sacred dance at Mani Rimdu. **We don't usually show these to tourists, even lay people in our village.** (**sacred objects are kept away from mundane use**) I'm very proud to be apart of this festival (**Showed me some masks that will be used in Mani Rimdu and explained their meanings, very familiar with spiritual figures in Khumbu, very passionate about his monastery and proud of his role in Mani Rimdu**)

At Dumji, rich people, poor people, young Sherpas and old Sherpas all celebrate together,

singing and dancing together! (Collaboration of the entire community) We also invite monks from Tengboche Monastery to perform *puja* and mask dances to chase away bad spirits and bring prosperity to the village. (Purpose of the dance, exorcism) We ask the mountain gods and other spirits to protect us and the crops in the coming year (Purpose of the puja, pray to mountain gods, asking for harvest, relied on physical landscape for livelihood). In other days, we have a lot of things to do. Many of us have to look after their children in Kathmandu or running lodging business here. But at Dumji and Mani Rimdu, we all give up our own businesses for a while and celebrate together (Importance of religious festivals in Sherpas' life, businesses can be put aside) All Sherpas cooperate together and have a good time with families and relatives in their own villages. (family union event, enhance family bond) It's the best time of the year!

Q: In your opinion, what role does tourism play in re-shaping the sacred landscape in Khumbu? Prompt: do people do things/view things differently from before? What changes in the community do you observe as a result from commercialization, education, open to other culture and religion?

A: Nowadays, Sherpas don't want to be monks or nuns, they like to do business, earn more money (Shift in people's interests: religion and spiritual matters are losing importance). In the old days, we perform 2 *pujas* daily, but now since many monks left the monastery, we only do formal puja when tourists are here. (religious rituals became performances for tourists). They want to have hot shower, wifi, burgers and alcohol so we provide these. (Provide modern facilities to cater tourists' needs) We want them to stay comfortable here. Even though it is not our traditional lifestyle, people can earn more money this way! (Profit-oriented) When people are busy making money, they tend to forget to follow the old rules. But our villages have become more vibrant because of tourists, people are richer now and our children are much more educated (Benefits of tourism). We welcome all tourists and seems to me they are all very nice and generous people. (Perception of tourists)

GLOSSARY

Beyul: A sacred place originally set aside by Guru Rinpoche as sanctuary from the troubled world

Chham: Sacred religious dance

Chhurung: Lay people's memorial cairn

Chorten: Same as stupa. A stone monument symbolizing the Buddha's enlightenment

Gompa: Monastery. Temple in villages

Jomo Miyo Lung Sangma: Female deity residing on Mt. Everest. Also called Jomolungma/Chomolungma

Kani: Entrance gate to a sacred area

Khatas: A white or yellow scarf offered as a sign of respect or good wishes

Khumbila: Protective deity of Khumbu. Also called Khumbu-Yul-Lha (Khumbu-country-deity)

Lama: A highly realized spiritual teacher of Tibetan Buddhism. Not all Tibetan monks are lama, but it is sometimes used as a polite way to address a monk

Lhang/Lhakhang: "God's house", main room of a temple or an altar

Lhasu/Sangkhang: Prayer flag cairn, and incense burner

Lu: Water spirit

Lukhang: Shrine of the *Lu*

Mandala: A spiritual diagram. The circular space of an enlightened being at the center that is visualized during Buddhist practices

Ngagpa: Lay lama

Nyingmapa: The original and oldest sect of Tibetan Buddhism, also called the "Old Translation School". The followers of the first teachings translated and taught in Tibet

Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche: Buddhist saint who established Buddhism in Tibet over 1,250 years ago

Phakpa Chenrezig or Chenrezig: The sublime Buddhist deity personifying compassion of the Buddhas. Also called Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit

Puja: Religious ritual

Rilbu: Life-giving pills distributed by monks during Mani Rimdu festival

Rinpoche: Title for high lamas and reincarnates

Sadak: Spirit in soil

Sonam: Merit. Positive energy arising from wholesome action or virtue

Stupa: Same as *chorten*.

Ter: Special texts hidden by Guru Rinpoche

Terton: A discoverer of texts hidden by Guru Rinpoche in the early years of Buddhism

Thangka: Scroll paintings on canvas portraying important religious icons and deities

Tsamba: Flour made from roasted barley or other grains. A staple food in the Himalaya

Tying: water offering bowls

Yul-lha: Mountain deities