

**About the human propensity to “visual metaphors”: the  
Darsan of lHa-bTsun Nam mkha’ Jigs-med in Tholung  
monastery, ’Bras ljongs (Sikkim, India), 2003**

*Brigitte Steinmann*

*“Lha btsun Nam mkha’ Jigs-med (Lhatsun Chenpo), the founder of the rdzogs-chen sect in Sikkim (...), was born in a Southern province of Tibet called Jarpa, in the village called Lha-yul zhi-rab. He was born of the celestial race. His father was one Cho-skyong mgon-po, his mother’s name was Yig-dbang buga. He was born in the me-bya year (1597 AD), and received his instructions under the saints Bsod-nams dbang-po, Rig-’dzin ’Ja’-tshon snying-po and the learned Padma-legs-grub” (...)*

Thus starts the story of the most revered saint of Sikkim, Lhatsun Chenpo, as it is retold in the *’Bras-ljongs rgyal-rabs* or “History of the Kingdom of Sikkim”, composed by the 9th Chögyal, Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshe Dolma (1860–1914). It is said also that *Lha btsun Nam mkha’ Jigs-med*, who started from Kongbu in Tibet, reached Yoksum (West-Sikkim), with 35 followers, where it is well-known that he consecrated the first chögyal of ’Bras ljongs in the 17th century. This place should have a sacred destiny, by becoming the core of the Buddhist Tibetan kingdom of Sikkim, which declined and fell with its annexation to India in 1974.

Nowadays, many pilgrims (Northerners, Easterners, Southerners, Westerners, and among them, Bhotias and Lepchas), converge every three years to Tholung monastery in Dzongu (reserved and restricted area of India), in order to see again the prestigious figure of the Saint, whose iconography is richly and abundantly displayed all over Sikkim, through many ancient or more modern monasteries.

This paper intends to retrace the living myth of the saint, through the experience of his “darsan” in Tholung (April 2003), and further, to re-scrutinize the “metaphoric mania” of a very human habit : “visualizing”, for believing.