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*Moravian Christianity in the Tibetan Buddhist World of the Western Himalayas*

The first Moravian missionaries to the Western Himalaya set out from Herrnhut in 1853. Their original objective was to travel from northern India to Mongolia. However, having been prevented from crossing the border into Tibet they instead decided to settle in India with a view to expanding into Tibet when the border was opened. Their first two stations in Kyelang (1856) and Pooh (1865) closed in the first half of the 20th century but the Moravian Church is still represented by communities in Ladakh (since 1885) and, more recently in the Indian states of Uttarakhand and Assam as well as in neighbouring Nepal.

The German, Swiss and English missionaries who served in the Himalaya brought with them a distinctively Moravian view of Christian practice and governance. However, it was always their intention to prepare the way for an indigenous 'Tibetan' church (using the word 'Tibetan' broadly to include a range of peoples in the border regions). Most obviously, and from the earliest days, this task required a focus on translation and the church's historic achievements include the translation of the Bible into Tibetan, a project that took nearly a century to complete. Translation was far from straightforward because they were working in a culture with an established literary tradition which was associated with the dominant Buddhist culture and vocabulary.

This paper will review the challenges of translation in its literal linguistic sense before looking at other aspects of cultural transmission, adaptation and eventual adoption (or rejection) by the host communities. One of these concerns architecture. As may be readily understood, there are no Moravian buildings in the Himalaya that resemble the classic Moravian settlement architecture celebrated by the recent UNESCO World Heritage site recognitions. Instead, the paper will argue that Moravian builders adapted local materials and techniques that nonetheless reflected distinctively Moravian ideals.

A further aspect of cultural transmission concerns the Moravians' musical heritage. The first German missionaries brought with them an established tradition of hymn singing, and the hymns that they translated, sung to the original tunes, are still part of Moravian culture in Ladakh, alongside other musical forms. However, in the 1950s, the Ladakhi Christian leader Eliyah Tsetan Phuntsog (1908-1973) experimented with Christian hymns sung to local tunes. Although these are rarely sung today, they still represent a valuable resource that may in the future take on renewed greater resonance.

In this paper, I propose to offer a broad and concise overview as a basis for cross-regional discussion in the course of the conference, and deeper analysis as the proposed collective project on Moravian heritage continues.