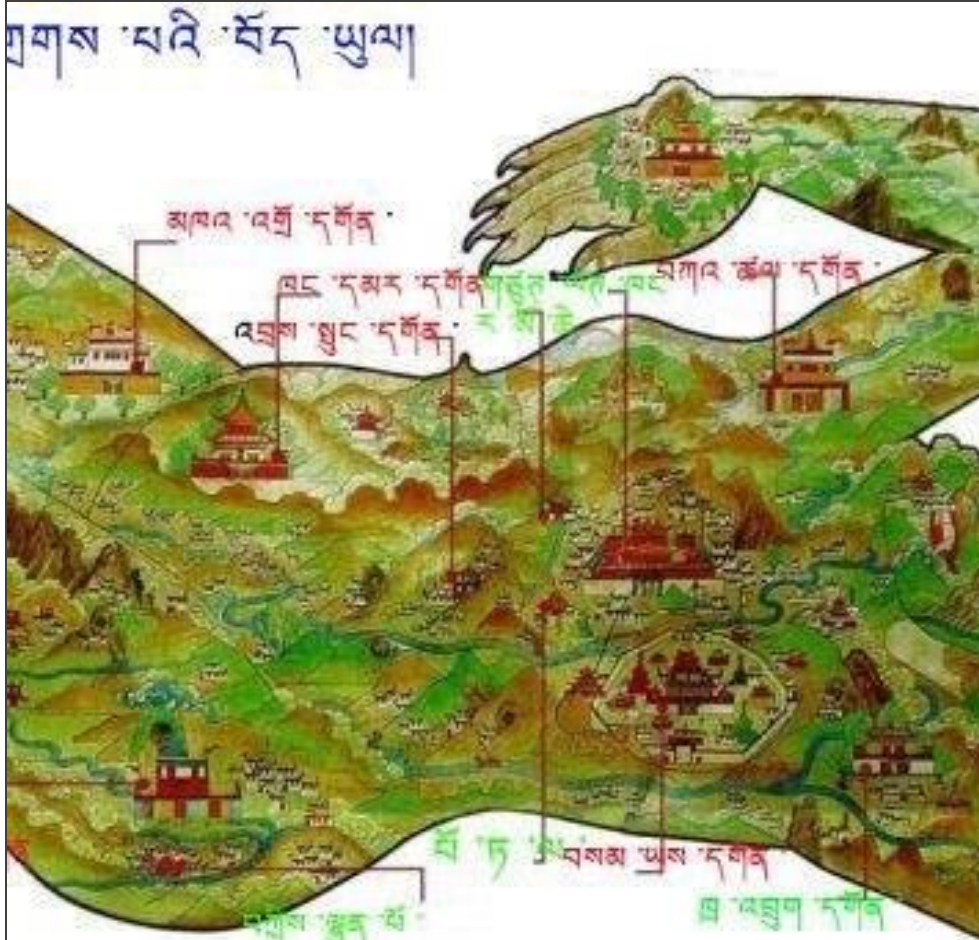




Dark Green Religion and Engaged Buddhist Practice

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Greening of Religion / the Paranormal

- The power that religion can have can be exercised if it is 'greened' (Bron Taylor)
- In similar fashion, the power that those who believe in the paranormal can have if that power is 'greened' (Jack Hunter)
- In relation to Indo-Tibetan and Himalayan cultures, what is 'the paranormal' and what would it mean to 'green' it?

Greening the Paranormal

EXPLORING THE ECOLOGY OF
EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE





Indo-Tibetan and Himalayan Cosmologies

- The whole mandala-like structure of Mount Sumeru constitutes a cakkavala, or world system
- Mount Meru, 84,000 yojanas high (a yojana is c. 3-17.5 miles)
- Halfway up Mt Meru is the Heaven of the Four Great Kings and at its peak Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods presided over by Sakka, their king and the overlord of the terrestrial realm.
- Surrounding Mt Meru are 7 circular ranges of mountains, each one half the height of the preceding one, separated by circular seas
- The whole area is surrounded by the world ocean and by a steep range of iron cliffs, forming the wall of the world
- In the outermost ocean are the four great continents, too far apart for human navigation – we inhabit the southern continent of Jambudvīpa, the Rose-Apple Land

The renowned supine Demoness of Tibetan Lands

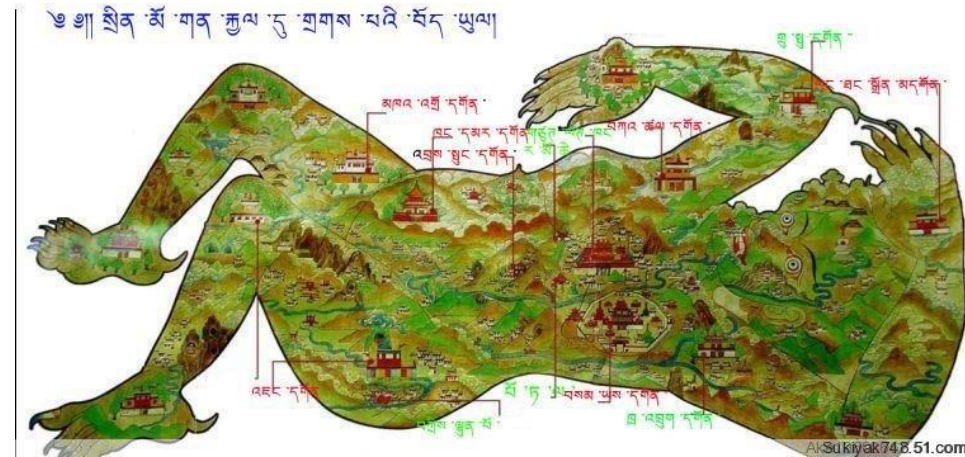
demoness (srin mo)

supine (gan rkyal du)

known/renowned/famous (grags pa) of

Tibetan lands (bod yul)

<http://petroleumengineerings.blogspot.com/2010/05/damming-tibet-yarlung-tsangpo.html>



- Tibetan landscape is mapped in terms of spirited agency.
- A whole community can also be connected to a lake or mountain through a 'la-lake' or 'la-mountain', and its wellbeing will be connected to the wellbeing of the lake/mountain.
- Damage to these natural phenomena can therefore threaten the individual or community.
- Environmental concerns are hence intrinsically linked to those of community and individual health and to relationship with spirited agencies.
- Buddhism adopted, incorporated or fused with Tibetan traditions of land as it spread.

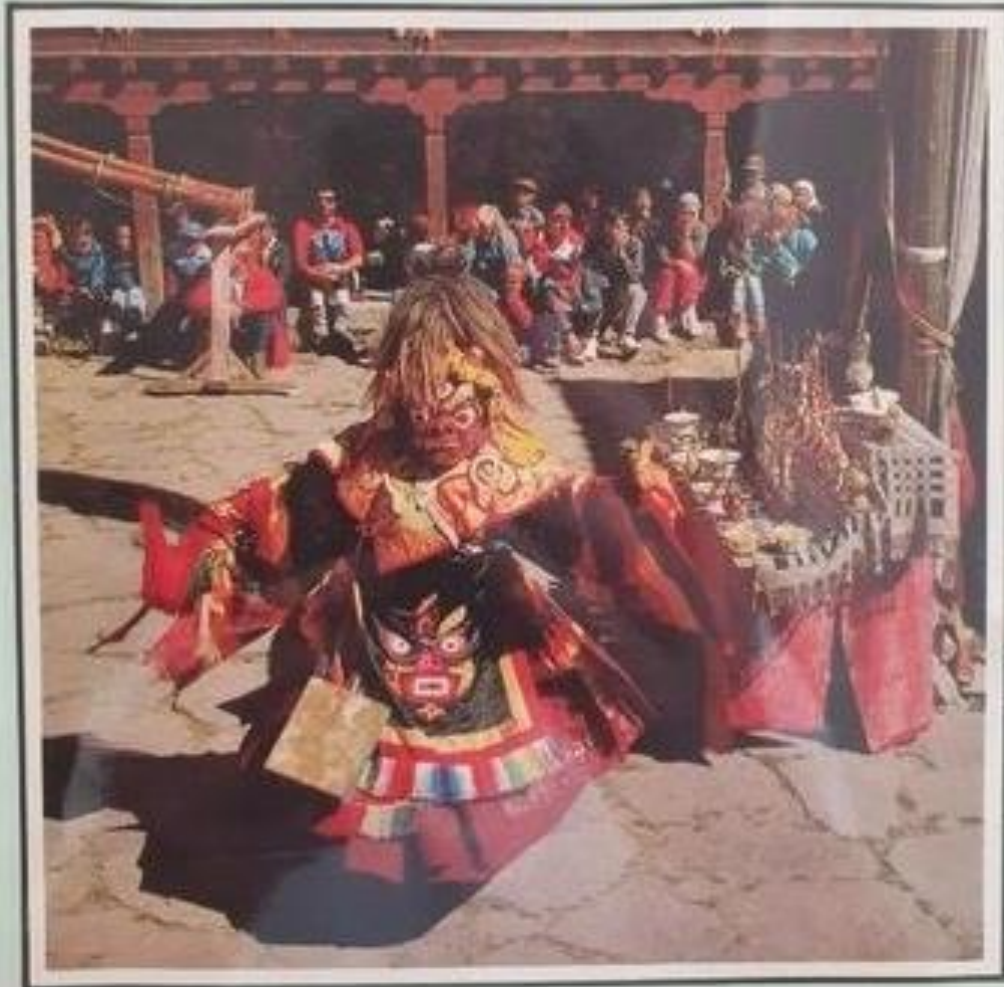


A Fish-Eye View of the Cosmos—Mount Meru

- This image depicts the view a fish might have from its habitat in our Jambudipa, the Rose-Apple Land, ocean.
- This illustrates how each inhabitant of the cosmos sees their world from their perspective – which doesn't negate the existence of other dimensions of the cosmos they cannot at this point in cyclical (moving through cycles of reincarnation) existence 'see'.

OF TIBET

THE CULT AND ICONOGRAPHY OF THE TIBETAN PROTECTIVE DEITIES



RÉNE DE NEBESKY - WOJKOWITZ

Protective Deities of Tibetan Regions

- protective deities associated with individuals and communities include:
 - Nāga (नाग) : member of an Indo-Tibetan class of mythical semidivine beings, half human and half snake (cobra-like). They inhabit *nāgaloka* and also various parts of the human-inhabited earth - some are water-dwellers, living in streams or the ocean; others are earth-dwellers, living in caverns
 - Yulha: local area deity/god
 - Payul: patriarchal deity or lineage
 - Malha: matriarchal deity or lineage, attached to the homestead
 - Dralha: warrior god



Nāga (नाग) – Spirited agencies in ancient India

- In traditions originating in Indian, such as Hindu, Buddhist and Jain, a *nāga* is a member of a class of mythical semidivine beings, half human and half snake (cobra-like).
- They can assume either wholly human or wholly serpentine form and are potentially dangerous but often beneficial to humans.
- They live in an underground kingdom called *nāgaloka*, or *patalaloka*, which is filled with resplendent palaces, beautifully ornamented with precious gems
- The deity Brahma is said to have relegated the *nāga* to these underground places because their population was overrunning earth, commanding them to bite only the truly evil or those destined to die prematurely. They are also associated with waters—rivers, lakes, seas, and wells—and are guardians of treasure

Indo-Tibetan spirited agencies of land

- Nagārjuna, around the 2nd Century CE, is attributed as founder of Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy
- As can be seen from the image, he taught *nāga* along with human students and this is not considered paranormal within the context of Indo-Tibetan understandings of identity and existence. Rather, it is considered to be a normal occurrence for humans with realization.





The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara,
known as Karunamaya by Newars
and Chenrezig by Tibetans

The Tantric Theory underlying Delog Travels in Other Realms

- In Buddhist thought, the individual mindbody complex is not separate from its environment. These exist in interdependence.
- The way in which this is taken into account in Buddhist Tantric practice is that meditators do not just identify themselves with the deity. They also imaginatively transform their environment into a transfigured universe that represents the world as it is perceived and operated on by that particular divine form--This is the tantric maṇḍala.
- 'Seeing' on this model is 'non-sight dependent' (Collins 2020)



Leru

- The Leru is a spirit medium festival held across Tibetan Buddhist villages of the Rebgong Valley (site of my doctoral field research) at harvest time
- It is predominantly aimed towards appeasing and receiving advice from the local Mountain Gods - warrior figures and yullha (local deities, regional area gods) based in ancestral legends of the region and considered to be protectors of the lands and communities
- Each village has a designated spirit medium who enters trance and receives offerings/gives predictions as the Mountain God during the festival

Liangjia Leru



As can be seen in this video clip, such practices indicate the continuance of indigenous ‘non-Buddhist’ traditions in tandem with Buddhism.

Here the possession is not that of a Buddhist protector deity, but of a mountain deity; a local deity. Yet this practice is performed by Buddhist villages and their local lamas acknowledge the influence of the Mountain deities on pragmatic levels.

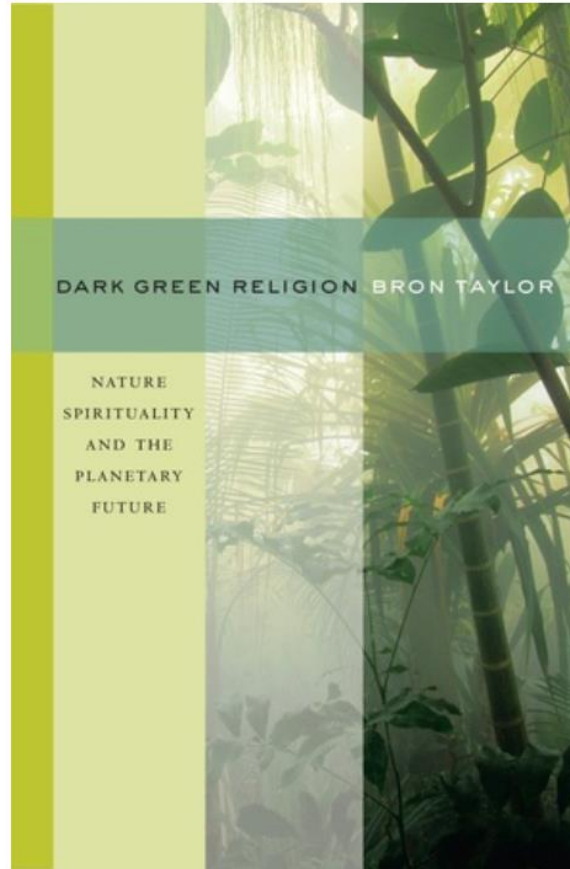
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlB5gAlmu_g

(5.30 mins) – dance for the le 2.10 on this clip

Impulse Towards 'Dark Green Religion.'

To recap from Jack
Hunter's presentation...

- “This value system is generally (1) based on a felt kinship with the rest of life, often derived from a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related; (2) accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of human moral superiority, often inspired or reinforced by a science-based cosmology that reveals how tiny human beings are in the universe; and (3) reinforced by a metaphysics of interconnection and the idea of interdependence (mutual influence and reciprocal dependence) found in the sciences, especially in ecology and physics” (Taylor, 2010, p. 13).



Bron Taylor.

- Makes a distinction between **Green Religion** - which suggests that 'environmentally friendly behaviour is a religious obligation.'
- **Dark Green Religion** - 'nature is sacred and, has intrinsic value, and is therefore due reverent care.' (Taylor, 2010, p. 10).



Dark-Green Religion for Indo-Tibetan Religions

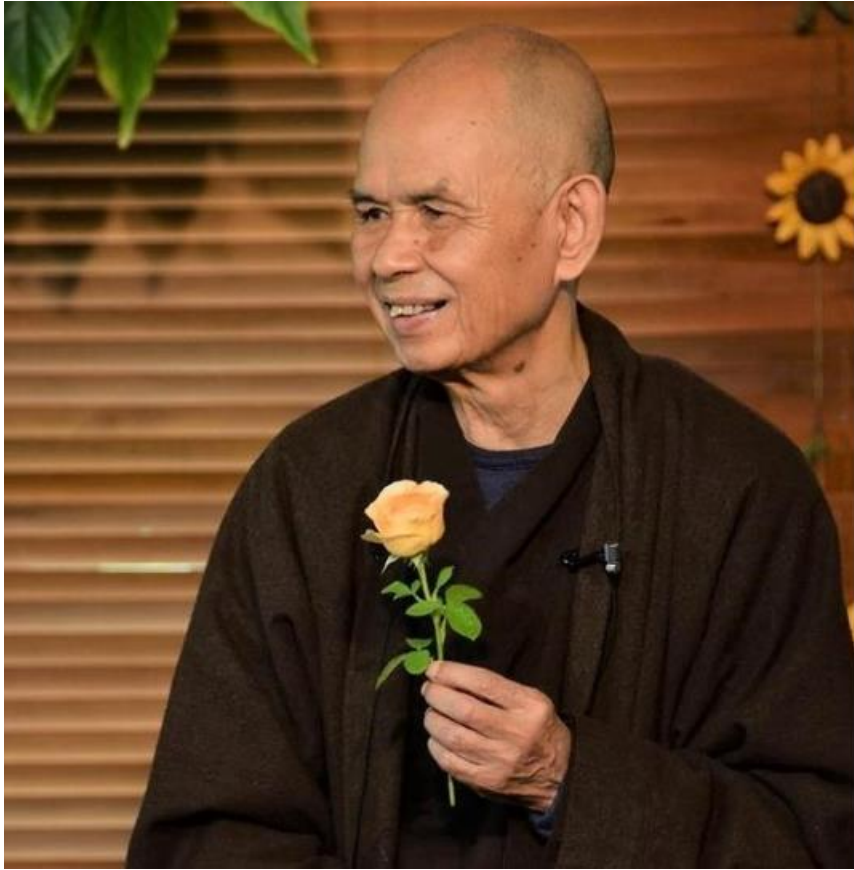
- For Indo-Tibetan traditions the cosmological landscape is inhabited by spirited agencies who interface with humanity with some, such as the *nāga*, shape-shifting between human, demi-human and non-human forms – these are born and reborn across many dimensions within a Mount Meru model of the cosmos—making life sacred across human and non-human alike since to be human is temporal.
- The body, on both tantric and Indo-Tibetan medical understandings, has correspondence and interdependent relationship with the environment through the elements of existence: earth, wind, fire, water, air – it is not discrete nor an entity but rather empty of inherent, separate existence.
- Dreaming, waking, dying and passing from existence to existence taking different forms in the passing makes deep ecology embedded in Indo-Tibetan cultural norms.
- Therefore, Indo-Tibetan cosmological understandings underlying religion are dark green in nature; this is embedded.



Engaged Buddhism: Manifestations of the Dark Green in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Practices

- An imperative for Buddhists to be environmentally engaged is arguably driven by the dark green aspect of the cosmologies underlying and embedded in Indo-Tibetan religions.
- Nature is sacred and has intrinsic value for Buddhism because the interconnectedness of all things and beings means there can be no disconnect between humanity and all illusory non-human 'other'.

Please Call Me by My True Names



- Socially Engaged Buddhism is the leading international activist approach for social causes in Buddhism.
- So important in contemporary Buddhism that it has even been suggested it should be considered a new yāna (vehicle).
- One of the largest movements is the *Buddhist Peace Fellowship*.
- Two main issues focal to Engaged Buddhism are Human Rights & Ecology.
- Activities include projects such as Hospice Volunteer Programmes and Meditation in Prison programmes.
- One of the greatest exponents of Socially Engaged Buddhism was the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, who founded the *Order of Interbeing* in 1964.
- His poem 'Please Call Me by My True Names' encapsulates the deep sense of interconnection and kinship underlying his religious philosophy.

<https://plumvillage.org/articles/please-call-me-by-my-true-names-song-poem>



Sulak Sivaraksa

- Thai peace activist
- Formed the International Network of Engaged Buddhists
- INEP now has groups in over 30 countries
- Supports inter-buddhist and inter-faith cooperation towards peace
- Human rights, non violence, the environment, women's issues, alternative education integrating spirituality and activism
- Also founded the Spirit in Education movement in 1995 - promoting alternate education addressing issues such as ecology and consumerism



Thich Nhat Hanh

- Nominated by Dr Martin Luther King for the Nobel Peace Prize
- Coined the phrase 'Socially Engaged Buddhism from the French & referring to Vietnamese terms:
 - awareness in daily life
 - social service
 - social activism
- Founded the 'Order of Interbeing in 1964 – an organisation run along the lines of Engaged Buddhism
- Extended the traditional 5 vows of the laity a series of 14 precepts or guidelines for living--mindfulness trainings for engaged Buddhism (no. 13 particularly relates to ecology)
- Currently running a Buddhist community in France known as Plum Village along these lines



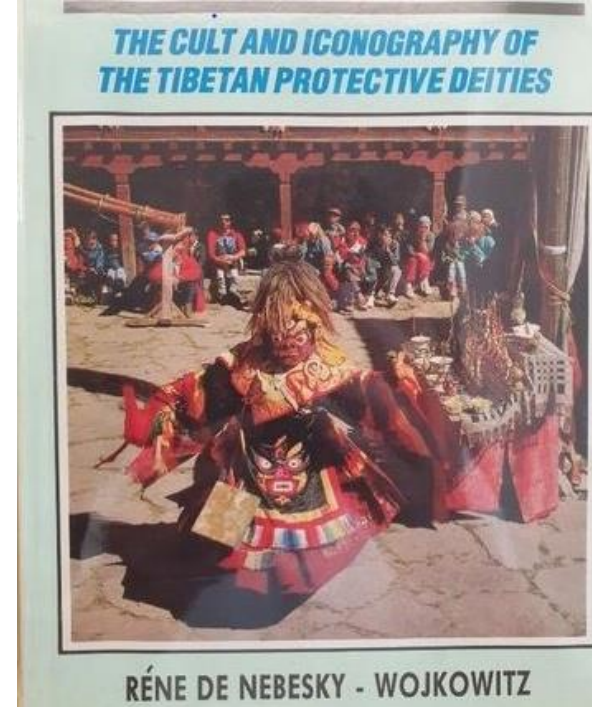
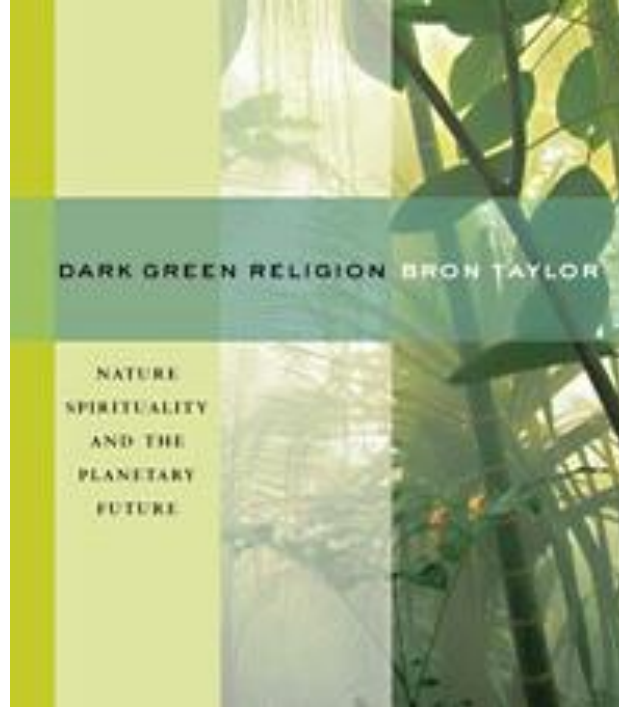
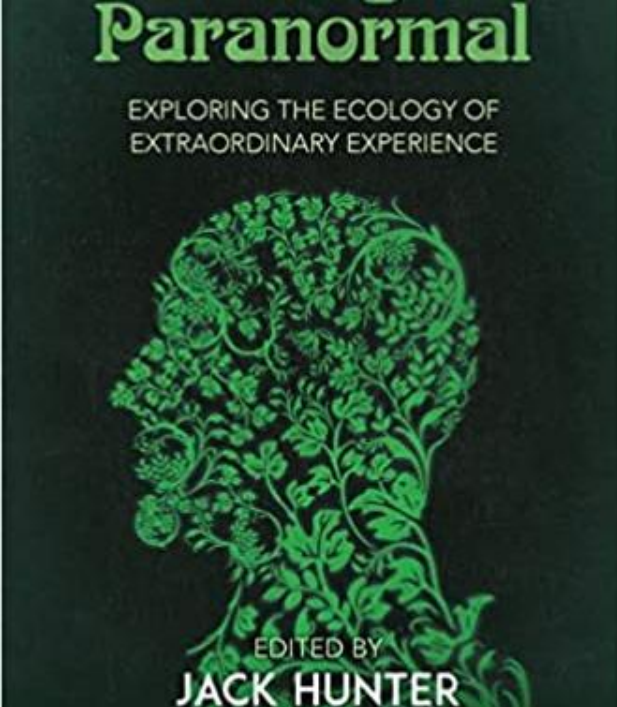
Please Call Me By My True Names

The poem by Thich Nhat Hanh was written in 1978 in response to hearing the news about a young refugee girl from Vietnam throwing herself into the sea and drowning after being raped by Thai sea pirates. After meditating all day on his anger in response to hearing this news and questioning what he could do if he was there, this poem was composed.

I am the pirate.

- Text from call me by my true names The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA 1999
- Audio is from 2009 when he recited this poem at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco during an evening of poetry recital and song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sI5LK3SzkCM>



For discussion...

- In relation to Indo-Tibetan and Himalayan cultures, what is 'the paranormal' and what would it mean to 'green' it?
- Do contemporary Buddhist practices demonstrate Buddhism as inherently being dark green in nature?

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