

# みんなのポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

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## Preface

This report contains part of the results of the COE Symposium “New Horizons in Bon Studies” hosted by the Ministry of Education, Japan. Held from August 23 to 27, 1999 at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, this symposium examined general aspects of Bon culture that underlie Tibetan culture.

*Bon* is one of the pre-Buddhist religions in Tibet. By the term ‘pre-Buddhist’ here I mean that it existed in Tibet before Buddhism was imported into the area and that it has survived into the present. However, when one refers to Bon, various definitions of it have been proposed. Some particularize Bon as a whole body of folk beliefs, including divination, offerings, curses, beliefs in local deities, shamanistic concepts of souls and the cosmos. Some refer to Bon as a religious complex of ancient Tibet led by its priests called Bonpo, who were believed to have supernatural power and conducted the royal funeral rites. And yet some others say that Bon is the later non-Buddhist religion of Tibet embodying all kinds of beliefs and practices that began to appear in the eleventh century and became well established by the fifteenth century. This ‘organized Bon’ has characteristics which closely resemble or are even identical to those of Buddhism, and has developed a highly sophisticated metaphysics, philosophy, doctrine and cosmology. Bon boasts a huge scriptural canon equal in size to the Tibetan Buddhist canon.

Regardless of how we define Bon, it could be properly said that, in the Bonpo culture, we perceive something essential or basic, that has penetrated Tibetan culture from ancient times to the present day. In fact, the indigenous beliefs held by the Bonpo are even universal to humanity.

For linguists, research on the Zhangzhung language which is thought to have been spoken by Bon believers presents an interesting challenge. The attempt to understand Zhangzhung, a language which has been dead for hundreds of years is appealing in and of itself, but linguists also expect that this language will yield important clues for understanding the formation of Written Tibetan which has characteristics quite different from those of other Tibeto-Burman languages. It may also clarify Zhangzhung’s historical relationship with the other Himalayish languages.

To deepen our understanding of the Bon culture, we must first grasp its religious, cultural and organizational aspects, lay the groundwork for the study of Bon culture, and develop a means by which scholars can share that groundwork. At the same time, we must work to establish a network among researchers and promote well-organized, interdisciplinary joint research which covers a wide range of fields such as cultural anthropology, Buddhism, religious studies, linguistics, and history, through an effective combination of philological methodology and fieldwork. It was with this in mind that I started a Bon culture research project in close cooperation with Dr. Samten G. Karmay, Directeur de Recherche, C.N.R.S.,

Paris.

Unfortunately, the study of Bon culture has lagged far behind that of Buddhism. Although several outstanding studies have been published by Western scholars and our symposium featured leading researchers, far fewer researchers have been engaged in the study of Bon than in the study of Buddhism, especially in Japan. Japan boasts a long tradition and high standard in the study of Tibetan Buddhism, but other areas of Tibetan studies have remain neglected with the exception of a few superior linguistic and historical studies. In the study of Bon culture, no outstanding achievements have been since the translation and annotation of *Klu-'bum dkar-po* (十万白龍) by Enga Teramoto.

To improve this situation, a Bon culture research project was launched in 1996 with funding for joint research from the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, and a subsidy from the Ministry of Education for overseas survey. Because the project started virtually from scratch, most of these funds were allocated to the survey of the actual conditions of Bon culture and to the development of the groundwork for research.

The survey of actual conditions was conducted mainly in China and Nepal. Thanks to the generous support of China Centre for Tibetan Studies, Beijing, and Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, Lhasa, many valuable research materials were collected, which were previously unknown to researchers.

In an effort to develop the groundwork for research, we obtained Bonpo Kangyur, Bonpo Tangyur and other valuable texts of non-Buddhist origin. We also acquired some newly drawn iconographical materials based on texts, through the cooperation of Tritan Norbutse Bonpo Monastic Centre in Kathmandu and Bongya Monastery in Qinghai Province. Our collection also includes a catalogue of Bonpo publications issued after 1960 in India and copies of F. W. Thomas' research notes on the Zhangzhung language discovered in the British Library. We will accelerate the editing of these materials in order to publish them within two years and make them widely available for use by researchers of Bon culture.

Over these three years that were spent in the construction of the groundwork for research, many important discoveries were made, and the requests increased for a meeting at which scholars could compare and examine these materials. This report contains an intermediate review of the results of that meeting.

I would also like to add that the human network developed in the process of carrying out this project has been invaluable. The network consists of leading scholars currently studying Tibet who share the premise that the study of Bon culture is indispensable for understanding the basis of Tibetan culture. It is a great pleasure to have been able to provide a venue for discussion among these outstanding scholars and to publish this report on the results of the discussion. I am also proud to note that this report will set a new world standard in the study of Bon culture, and I sincerely hope that it will prove to be an important milestone for future studies of Bon culture.

I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Japan, the National Museum of Ethnology and the Daido Foundation for their continued support of this project and for their cooperation in making the symposium a success.

The following is a list of publications issued or soon to be issued under the same series as this volume as results of this project:

Bon Studies 1

*Mandalas of the Bon Religion*

Editors: Tenzin Namdak, Y. Nagano and M. Tachikawa

Bon Studies 3

*A Linguistic Approach to Zhangzhung and Some Related Languages in the Indian Himalayas*

Editor: Y. Nagano and R. J. LaPolla

Bon Studies 4

*A Catalogue of the Bonpo Publications*

Editors: Samten Karmay, Tenjin Wangyal and Y. Nagano

Bon Studies 5

*A General Survey of Bon Monasteries and People*

Compilers: Tsering Thar, Phuntsog Tsering, Dondrup Lhagyal and C. Ramble

Editors: Samten Karmay and Y. Nagano

Bon Studies 6

*A Study of the Zhangzhung Language*

Author: F. W. Thomas

Editors: T. Takeuchi, G. Qessel and Y. Nagano

Bon Studies 7

*A Catalogue of the Bonpo Tangyur*

Editors: Tempa Yungdrung, Samten Karmay and Y. Nagano

Finally, let me again express my heartfelt appreciation to the National Museum of Ethnology for allowing us to publish this report, and to Mrs. Junko Nakamura and Mrs. Yūko Matsumoto for their devotion to the editing of this report.

Yasuhiko Nagano

May 5, 2000

