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## A comparative study of the *yul lha* cult in two areas and its cosmological aspects

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In my previous works on the *yul lha* cult in Shar-khog and rGyal-rong I mainly tried to show the social and political dimensions of the cult, but did not have a chance to compare it to the practice in other regions of Tibet (Karmay 1998: Nos. 21-25).

However, in 1997 I was able to make some observations of the same cult at a village in the river valley of Rebkong (Reb-skong) in Amdo. The Rebkong area now falls within the Thurin rDzong of the Chinese administrative setup in mTsho-sngon (Ch. Qinghai). It lies to the south of Ziling (Ch. Xining) at a distance of 194 kilometers. I noted that the ritual was very well organized and more elaborate than the ones I observed in Shar-khog and rGyal-rong.

Here, I shall first give a short ethnographic description of the cult in Rebkong<sup>1</sup>. This will be followed by more descriptions of the same cult in Nyemo (sNye-mo) in Tsang, Central Tibet. In June 1999, I was able to go there under the auspices of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences and observe the cult in that place.

At the final stage I will make some remarks on a recent text concerning the construction of *la btsas*. It is written by A-lags Bon-brgya dGe-legs lhun-grub rgya-mtsho, a highly revered lama from Bon-brgya monastery which is situated to the west of the main valley in Rebkong<sup>2</sup>.

I witnessed the *yul lha* cult in Rebkong in the village sMad-pa'i Khyung-po, that is, the village Khyung-po situated to the north of the valley. There are about thirty householders in the village. As in other parts of Amdo, the villages in Rebkong are called *sde ba*. The term for this cult in Amdo is *la btsas gsol ba*, 'making offerings to the *la btsas*'. The ritual usually takes place around the day of 'Dzam gling spyi bsang, the 'common purificatory ritual for the Universe'. It is 'common' (*spyi*) in the sense that it is celebrated by people in many parts of the country around that date in the Tibetan calendar, but this is not always the case in all the places. In the village Khyung-po it was carried out on the 9th of the 5th month in the Tibetan calendar (15th of June 1997) which was not the exact date of 'Dzam gling spyi bsang.

I was accompanied by A-lags Bon-brgya [Plate 1]. Because of his presence, early in the morning of the day when the ritual began we were received as guests of honour in the village temple. After this, we were then led ceremoniously to the site where the *la btsas* stands. It is situated to the west of the village on a plain with abundant woods and on the same level as the village itself. The way in which it is

located is unusual, because in regions including Rebkong itself the *la btsas* are mostly on a higher level than that of the village. I shall return to the question of the location of *la btsas*.

The *la btsas* of the village Khyung-po is a solid construction. The structure of the base is square and built with stones. Its wall is about 3 meters wide on each side and about 2 and half meters high all round [Plate 2].

Monks normally do not participate in the *yul lha* cult with laymen. However, it was evident that the presence of A-lags at the performance of the ritual was much appreciated by the laymen though the A-lags did not officiate the rite. I was told it was the headman of the village who would lead the ritual in normal circumstances.

The head of each family brought a ritual arrow made of pine tree. The arrows were of various lengths. Some boys brought small short ones. The arrow is the male symbol in Tibetan culture. Everybody also brought *rlung rta*, the 'wind-horse', symbol of fortune, printed on a piece of cloth with the colour corresponding to one's 'birth element' (*'byung ba*). I shall call this the 'cloth wind-horse'. They also brought the *rlung rta* printed on a tiny white paper which is normally square. I shall call this the 'paper wind-horse'.

Then the ritual proper began. It was signaled by the blow of a conch. All the subsequent stages of the ritual were likewise punctuated by the blow of the same conch. The fire of the *bsang*, burning of the juniper twigs, was lit and was continuously replenished by more juniper twigs in order to keep it burning and smoking through out the ritual. All the *sngags pa* sat in a row and began to chant and play the *damaru* and *sil snyan* bell. All the rest of the people including the A-lags stood till the end of the ritual that finished around midday.

All the while, the women folk stood and watched the ritual process from a distance as spectators. They obviously have no part to play in this male dominated ritual, but this is not always the case in other parts of the country as we shall see.

The local deity is called dGra-'dul thogs-med-rtsal and his icon is painted on the wall in the vestibule of the village temple [Plate 3]. It is a normal practice in Tibet that the *yul lha* representation is relegated to the vestibule of a temple unless his/her status is raised to that of a religious protector. The cult of the deity is celebrated only by the people of the village just mentioned. People from the neighboring villages have no right to join in.

#### 1. Purification of the ritual arrows

Each person began to attach his 'cloth wind-horse' to his own arrow which was then 'purified' in the smoke of the juniper fire. The *bsang* in its origin was part of a purificatory ritual, but later it was converted into an incense-like Buddhist offering (*bsang mchod*) (Karmay 1998: 381-82).

#### 2. Planting of the arrows

After the 'purification' the planting of the ritual arrows into the *la btsas* began.

They were fixed among the old arrows which were protected by a thick layer of dried birch branches all round their lower parts. The arrows and birch branches were also tightly bound by a thick woollen cord called *dmu thag*. We shall come back to this term.

### 3. Placing the fresh birch branches

The dried birch branches were replaced by the fresh ones which were cut and brought to the site of the *la btsas* on a previous day. They were placed close to the old and new arrows covering the lower parts of them on all sides [Plate 4].

The significance of this tree in the ritual is obscure. The birch tree in Tibetan ritual texts is classified as *pho shing*, the ‘male tree’ and this was the only reply I received when asking about its presence in the ritual. In other regions the tree has no part to play in the same ritual.

### 4. Placing the symbol of wealth

A few participants brought with them a small sack made of white cotton containing all kinds of grains. Its mouth was fastened with stitches. Outside it was painted with the figure of a swastika or a jewel. This was called *g-yang rdzas*, the ‘items of the quintessence of wealth’. They were deposited into the *la btsas*. The local deity is the guardian of wealth of the community [Plate 5].

### 5. Winding of the ‘*dmu cord*’

A number of the participants in the ritual had brought pieces of woollen yarn about ten meters long which they call *dmu thag*, the ‘*dmu cord*’. The manner in which this part of the ritual took place is of special ritual significance. It symbolises the unity of the community under the headman’s leadership.

Each member gave one end of his yarn to the A-lags. (I was told that it would be the headman of the village if the A-lags had not been there on that day.) The A-lags stood in the same place and held firmly all the ends of yarn given to him by the participants whilst each man spun his own yarn at a further distance from the A-lags and kept moving away slowly backwards as he twisted the yarn. They kept a certain distance between themselves as they spread out allowing themselves to form a crescent shape that in the end looked like a half of an umbrella. When all the yarn was sufficiently twisted the A-lags began to spin all the strands together from his end into one thick and strong cord assisted by two men. When the whole length of the cord was well spun, the A-lags then handed over the end of the cord with which he had spun to a man who had climbed up the base of the *la btsas* [Plate 6]. The man assisted by two other persons began to wind the cord round the arrows and birch branches very tightly in three rounds [Plate 7].

The *dmu thag*, of course, plays an important role in the origin myth of the king gNya’-khri btsan-po. It astonished me to see a ‘material *dmu thag*’ of that size and length in such a ritual. In fact, its association with *la btsas* is mentioned in the

epic text entitled 'Dzam gling spyi bsang. While Gesar, the epic hero, and his men are engaged in the *bsang* ritual on a mountain side, he feels threatened by the great demon of the north who, in this particular account, appears in the form of a terrifying wild yak. The beast is eventually shot and killed by the hero. The killing of this yak evokes the sacrifice of yaks that was a frequent practice in the *yul lha* cult till very recently. In the epic text the beast dwells in what seems to be a Bonpo place:

"In the country of the black demons where the tops of mountains and rocks are piercing upwards, the forests are impenetrable; lakes and rivers are in disharmony. On the right hand side of Mount of the demon A-chen rNa-ba khra-leb, on the left hand side of the rising mountain Kong-po Bon-ri and in front of the black mountain with nine stages, there is an awesome *la btsas* built with human heads. It has the *rlung rta* made of (human) skin which flutters in the wind, the winding of the *dmu thag* made of fresh (human) intestines and the pendulous *cod pan* made of (human) fat. This frightening red *gsas mkhar*, which is in motion, is comparable to the palace of Yama, the Lord of Death..."<sup>3)</sup>

I did not see the use of *cod pan* in the ritual in Rebkong, but it was present in the ritual in Nyemo as we shall see. The term *cod pan* denotes a kind of crown, but in Buddhist rituals it is made of several pieces of cloth with syllables written inside (cf. Karmay 1998: Pl.1, No.16).

The *dmu thag* was absent in the same ritual I observed in other places. Here some comments may be necessary concerning the highly interesting description of *la btsas* in the epic text just quoted. The association of the demon yak with Bon and setting the *la btsas* in a Bonpo place obviously betrays the sectarian inclination of the author. The passage is certainly inspired by the description of the dwelling place of the demon Khyab-pa lag-ring in the *gZer mig*<sup>4)</sup>.

However, there is a serious oversight that perhaps indicates the author's ignorance about the *yul lha* cult. No part of the dead human body can ever be used in the *yul lha* cult (cf. Karmay 1998: 383-85).

#### 6. Throwing of the 'paper wind-horse' into the wind

This was the last stage of the ritual as was the case in other places. As the *la btsas* was situated on low ground there was little wind such as otherwise might carry them into the sky [Plate 8].

When the ritual was completed we were again treated to a banquet under a beautiful tent among woods. Now and then either a man or woman came up with the *ka btags* scarf in hands and sang a song, but there were no dances or any other games as was the case in Shar-khog.

After the meal we drove to the village rGyal-po spyi-rtong about 20 km away. There again we saw the same celebration taking place. The village people made a procession for the A-lags. The *la btsas* is situated on a high ridge of a mountain range. The local deity is called A-myes Thar-smug [Plate 9]. The ritual process was

exactly the same, but here it was somewhat less rigidly observed by the participants than at the village of sMad-pa'i Khyung-po.

The *yul lha* cult I observed in Rebkong was therefore in only two different villages. They do not belong to one political federation. It is not uncommon for one village to have even three local deities. This is the case of the village called sPos-te'u and its local deities are sPos-te'u spun-gsum, the "Three sPos-te'u brothers" [Plate 10-12]. The local deity A-myes Bya-khyung in Rebkong is said to be the 'common local deity' (*spyi lha*) of all the people in Rebkong, but there is no organized celebration of the cult of this deity [Plate 13].

The political formation of the people in Rebkong in the pre-communist era is little known. In the 1920s they fought against the hegemony of Ma Pu-fang, the Muslim warlord of Ziling. The story of his cruelty is told in some detail in a book of collected articles written in Tibetan<sup>5</sup>. The articles are mostly written under the Chinese Marxist inspiration, but they do contain historical material relevant to research into the local history.

Let me now take up the subject of the *yul lha* cult in Nyemo, Tsang, Central Tibet. The Nyemo valley, 150 kilometers to the west of Lhasa, is famous for its craftsman. The general term for the *yul lha* cult is *lha gsol*. I shall return to it below. For the purpose of a comparison, the *lha gsol* ceremony has interesting features though its procedure is totally different from that of the ritual practice in Rebkong.

The observation of the ritual I made was in the village called bZang-ri<sup>6</sup> that counts 112 households – one of the largest villages professing the Bon religion in Central Tibet. [Plate 14]. It is situated at the foothill to the north of the level land in the main valley of Nyemo. Above the hill behind the village there is an imposing monastery called lHun-grub mthong-smon-gling that has a view of the whole local area [Plate 15]. The centre of the valley is a fertile plain with fields where barley and mustard were growing with their green foliage and yellow flowers making a sharp contrast with the barren landscapes of the surrounding mountains. In the pre-1959 era, the family rMe'u-tshang had the duty to look after the affairs of the village as well as the monastery (Karmay 1972: 10-11). It was known as rMe'u-tshang bla-brang<sup>7</sup>. It still commands much respect from the village people. It was in the house of this family that I lodged during my stay in bZang-ri and it is the only place where foreign visitors are welcomed without awkward constraints from the local authorities.

There are five *la btsas* for the village of bZang-ri. They are sometimes called *lha phebs* in Nyemo. They are all situated on the hill behind the village. I will return to the appellation of *lha phebs*. The *la btsas* in Nyemo is made up of two things: a small square stone construction about two meters in height and about one meter in width. It is painted in red and normally called *lha tho* or *btsan khang* [Plate 16]. It does not contain arrows. Beside it, there is a bunch of tree branches often held together by a pile of stones. From the top ends of tree branches the *cod pan* are suspended. They are pieces of paper carrying some mantra. In front of the

*la btsas*, there are two poles, one on each side. They are used for stretching the *dar rdang*, a rope on which a special type of 'cloth wind-horse' is attached. This is made up of five pieces of cloth. Each piece has its own colour: blue, sky; white, cloud; red, wind; yellow, earth; green, water. Its presentation has therefore a cosmological significance.

1. On the eastern ridge of the hill behind there is the *la btsas* for Zhi-zhi dBang-lan, the local deity of the rMe'u-tshang family [Plate 17]. The deity has the character of a religious protector rather than that of *yul lha* as can be gleaned from the description in the hymn composed in his praise (Hymn II).
2. Further to the north, there is the *la btsas* for A-bse rgyal-ba (Karmay 1998: 198), a traditional Bonpo religious protector. He was chosen to be the special guardian of the rMe'u-tshang family's lineage by its ancestors. This guardian is mentioned in a Dunhuang manuscript as *srin ag se rgyal ba*<sup>8</sup>). It indicates that the spirit was considered as belonging to the class of *srin*. In a forthcoming article I have discussed concepts of the *lha* and *srin* within the context of the classification of the eight types of spirits (*lha srin sde brgyad*).
3. A little further up on the hill at the back, above the monastery, there is the *la btsas* for sPrel-dkar rgyal-po whose origin is Buddhist as is clear from the hymn devoted to him (Hymn I). A member of the rMe'u-tshang family had a connection with the monastery of bSam-yas and he is said to have imported the deity from there. He is probably identical to Pehar (Karmay 1998: 350-64).
4. On the mountain that is a long way up from the hill behind the village is rKun-ma la-btsas. It is a curious name which is connected with a story of a thief (*rkun ma*). The real name of this *la btsas* seems to have been forgotten. In my view, this was the *la btsas* for the real local deity of bZang-ri, but it seems to have lost its prominence a long time ago.
5. The *la btsas* for Shan-pa mched-bzhi, the 'Four Butcher Brothers', is situated outside and at the base of the back wall of the main building in the monastery. They are said to be the retinue of A-bse rgyal-ba. The female oracle called Nyi-la in the bZang-ri village is said to become possessed by one of the Four Butcher Brothers when she enters into trance. She was about 70 in June 1999.

The *lha gsol* ritual in Nyemo took place on the 15th day of the 5th month in the Tibetan calendar (28th of June 1999). This time it was the exact date of 'Dzam gling spyi bsang. The ceremony started early in the morning. All the participants in the ritual carried the *sle mo* basket on their backs full of the fragrant *ba lu* leaves and other aromatic shrubs. They carried a small bag on their shoulders containing the *bsang rdzas*, such as *rtsam pa* and grains [Plate 18]. Each person also carried in their right-hand a ladle containing fire which was kept burning with dried dung [Plate 19]. When I reached the site of the first *la btsas*, there was nobody yet. After a short while, a man and a woman arrived, apparently they were not a married couple. They immediately set about performing the ritual. First they took down the

*sle mo* and then started making fire without waiting for the others who were on their way up to the same *la btsas*. They put some of the juniper twigs on the fire as well as some of the *bsang rdzas*. Then they did the *dkar thig* which consisted in pressing with the thumb a pinch of *rtsam pa* on the surface of the fire place (*bsang khang*). After this, they chanted a hymn together: it begins with the words: *bsvo lha gsol lo*, repeated 3 times; and then *lha gsol lo*, again repeated three times. On the last time it is said with the throwing of a handful of *rtsam pa* up into the air by the right hand. This was the end of the ritual.

After this they continued to do the same ritual at the other sites of *la btsas*. People came up in a group of both men and women or a group of men or a group of women. There were also individuals either a man or a woman. In one case, there were only two young girls who performed the ceremony with a surprising deftness. Each group came to the sites consecutively giving me no chance to take a picture of all the people in one place. Whether the fire made by the preceding person was extinguished or not everybody carried the ladle.

At the site of the *la btsas* for sPrel-dkar rgyal-po, a *bsang* was offered which was intended for the deity sPrel-dkar rgyal-po and another one was made separately on a little rock near by. They were just content with this for the deity of rKun-ma la-btsas since the *la btsas* is situated on the mountain too far up to climb. After having accomplished the ritual, all the people simply returned to their homes separately.

The phrase *lha gsol* is generally used in Central Tibet to designate the *yul lha* cult. It is often used with the verb *byed pa* or *gtong ba*, for example *lha gsol byed pa*. It is a contraction of *lha la gsol mchod byed pa*, ‘making offerings to deities’. The term *lha* in the phrase obviously refers to the local deity. The phrase occurs in old sources such as the *bKa' chems bka' khol ma*<sup>9)</sup>. A legend tells of the famous minister mGar being detained by the Chinese emperor as a ‘substitute’ (*skyin tshab*) of the princess Ong-cong (Kong-co) in order to have offspring of him in China. However, the minister refuses to marry the woman who is proposed to him. He thinks out a way to escape. He pretends to be ill and tells his keeper that he needs to do the *lha gsol* ritual to recover from his illness. For the ritual he must go to a place from where one can see the summits of mountains in Tibet. Accompanied by guards he arrives in a place and exclaims: “There is the summit of the *lha ri* Gyang-to! It is a great place for doing the *lha gsol* (in Tibet).” He is then allowed to perform the ritual and eventually manages to escape. In the origin myth of the first Tibetan king, Mount *lha ri* Gyang-to is the place where the king lands when he comes down from heaven (Karmay 1998: 220-23, 301).

I noticed that only one man brought a ‘cloth wind-horse’ in bZang-ri. There were neither the ritual arrows nor the ‘paper wind-horse’. As we have seen, these items were indispensable for the same ritual in Amdo. The reason for the absence of the ritual arrows is obvious: there are no forests of pine trees in Nyemo. There



were neither songs nor dances nor any other game such as often feature in the same ceremony in other regions. As can be seen from the above description, the festival of the *yul lha* cult in Nyemo is not an organized communal occasion. This probably does not mean that it is the general pattern everywhere in Central Tibet.

As we have seen, the local deities in bZang-ri are a hybrid host. The celebration devoted to these deities had none of the vitality and warlike aspect that were characteristic features of the same cult in Amdo.

The traditional religious protectors being styled as a *yul lha* with a distribution of *la btsas* is mainly evident in Central Tibet. This is certainly due to the Buddhist influence. The concept of *yul lha* is replaced by the cult of Buddhist religious protectors. The *lha mkhar* of dPal-ldan lha-mo on one of the roofs of Jokhang is a conspicuous example of this. She is the object of the *bsang* ceremony that is now a daily event at three points in the Barkor of Lhasa.

Let me now take up the question of the text that I mentioned earlier. As I have already indicated, its author is the A-lags. It is entitled *Lab tse dang dpa' mkhar sogs srid pa'i gsas mkhar gnyan po bzhangs par nye mkho phyogs bsgrigs* and has 13 folios. A detailed instruction on how to build a *la btsas* is given. It incidentally contains valuable insights into the tradition and cult of the local deities. The work is not published.

During the Cultural Revolution, most of the *la btsas* were destroyed in Rebkong like everywhere else in Tibet. The *yul lha* cult was singled out as *rmong dad*, 'inane faith' and its practice forbidden for two decades or more in many cases. At the beginning of the 1980s people wanted to rebuild *la btsas*, but only a few old people remembered how to do it. The A-lags was one of the people whose help was much sought. He therefore thought it would be useful to write a few pages giving guidelines for the reconstruction of *la btsas*.

His work is divided into thirteen brief parts. It begins with a general explanation of the term *lab tse*.

According to the author (f.1a), the term *lab tse* is of Zhang-zhung origin. He affirms that it denotes *pho brang*, palace or *rten gnas*, 'dwelling'. He further states that in some sources *lab tse* is presented as one of three types of 'cairn' (f.1b): *lab tse* is built on the top of a mountain, *dpa' mkhar* on the shoulder of a mountain and *cis te*<sup>10)</sup> on a plain.

It is uncertain, however, whether *lab tse* is a Zhang-zhung term. The author does not give any source for his statement. It is to be noted that the term *lab tse* is very common in recent writings by authors who live in Kokonor regions.<sup>11)</sup>

The earliest source, in which the form of *la rtsas* is found, is the *lDe'u chos 'byung* (Karmay 1998: 298):

*mtho la rtsas kyi lha/ sma (dma') gru rtsas gyi lha/* (p.231)

"On the high level, there is the deity of the *la rtsas*, on the low, there is the deity of the *gru rtsas*."

In another passage of the same work the terms occur with a relatively clearer

meaning:

*chu la gru (-rtsas) btsugs/ la la lab (la) rtsas brtsigs/* (p.254)

“On the river (side) the *gru rtsas* is established; on the pass the *la rtsas* is built.”

The form *rtsas* is an old spelling for *btsas*. The term *gru rtsas* refers to the toll that was originally collected from the people crossing rivers with a coracle. It is probable that the term *la btsas* also refers to a landmark on a mountain top before it became a ritual term. In a Dunhuang manuscript, the term *btsas* is used as an honourific term for *yon*, ‘fee’:

*la (lha) la ni btsas phul/ myi la ni yon phul nas/*<sup>(12)</sup>

“To deities an honorarium is offered; to men a fee is given.”

The spelling *lab tse* is therefore evidently a corruption of *la rtsas/btsas*.

In ritual texts other terms are also used for *la btsas*, for example, *dpa' mkhar*, *gsas mkhar* and *lha mkhar* which we have already met. The term *lha phebs* for *la btsas* in Nyemo is unusual in that it seems to suggest the connection between the local deities and their oracles.

The A-lags laid much emphasis on the importance of building the *la btsas* properly:

“If the *dpa' mkhar* is correctly built, men will live long, women will be glorious, the merits of men and women will be abundant, their power and prosperity will expand, they will have fewer enemies and thieves, less risk from wolves and there will be benefits to their posterity”(f.4b).

The following two hymns were dictated to me on the 27th of June 1999 by bsTan-'dzin rnam-rgyal, the man who reconstructed the lHun-grub mthong-smongling monastery in 1986 in bZang-ri. bsTan-'dzin rnam-rgyal is famous for his skill in calligraphy. Neither the authors of the hymns nor the dates of their composition are known.

#### Hymn I

*sPrel dkar rgyal po'i 'dod gsol*  
*sngon tshe bod yul bsam yas dbu rtse ru/*  
*gsang ba'i dkyil 'khor rol pa'i pho brang du/*  
*rdo rje slob dpon guru pad 'byung gis/*  
*che mchog skur bzhengs dregs tshogs dbang du bsdus/*  
*chos srung zhal bzhes dkor bdag srog gi bdag/*  
*gnod sbyin gtso 'khor sprel dkar rgyal blon 'bangs/*  
*tha tshig ma bsnyel rang mthun gser skyems bzhes/*  
*dam rdzas gsang gi mchod gtor 'di bzhes la/*  
*rnal 'byor ci bsam don rnams sgrub par mdzod//*

## Translation of the hymn I

The appeal to sPrel-dkar rgyal-po, the White Monkey King  
 Formerly, at the main building of bSam-yas in Tibet.  
 When the secret *mandala* of the palace was opened  
 Padmasambhava, the *vajra* master,  
 Manifested himself in the form of the divinity Che-mchog and overpowered all the  
 arrogant ones.  
 They promised him to protect Buddhism and became lords of wealth and souls.  
 Oh! sPrel-dkar rgyal-po and your retinue who are of the *yaksa* spirits  
 Do not forget your vow, and now drink the tea that is suitable for oneself and  
 Feast on the sacrificial cake which was the secret item when you pronounced the  
 words of vow;  
 Accomplish all wishes of mine, the yogin!

## Hymn II

*zhi zhi dbang ldan gyi 'dod gsol*  
*nye mo yul dbus dpal ldan bzang ri ru/*  
*gsas mkhar nam lang bkra ba'i dus zhabs su/*  
*sgrub gnas byin rtags gsas mkhar dkar po ru/*  
*rme 'u brgyud kyi bka' srung drag rtsal can/*  
*rgyal po chen po zhi zhi dbang ldan la/*  
*'khor du btsan phran du ma mang pos bskor/*  
*klu mo na ra la sogs yul sa'i sman/*  
*dam rdzas dkar mngar rgyun gyi gtor ma dang/*  
*rtsi sman gser skyems gtsang ma 'di bzhes la/*  
*bdag gis ci bcol las rnams sgrub par mdzod/*  
*bar chod bstan dgra myur du bsgral bar mdzod//*

## Translation of the hymn II

The appeal to Zhi-zhi dBang-ldan, The Mighty Zhi-zhi  
 At the glorious village bZang-ri situated at the center of Nyemo  
 At the divine castle that has the aura of daybreak light,  
 A place endowed with the sign for spiritual realization  
 There dwells the fearful protector of the lineage of the family rMe'u  
 Called the great king Zhi-zhi dBang-ldan  
 Together with your entourage that includes many minor *btsan*  
 And *klu* including Nara who are the female types of the local deities.  
 Feast on the sacrificial cake which is garnished with the white and sweet items of  
 the vows,  
 The tea that is brewed from pure medicinal crops.

Accomplish all the work that I entrust you to do.  
Kill immediately the stumbling enemies of the doctrine!

It may be useful to point out the contrast in language and concepts in these two hymns. The first hymn involves the usual way in which Padmasambhava subdues the local spirits by transforming himself into divinities such as Che-mchog, a divinity of the *rNying-ma-pa* ritual cycle of the *sGrub pa bka' brgyad* (Karmay 1998: 19). It reminds the deity of the Buddhist vows he has taken and is urged to actualize the wishes of the yogin.

The second hymn is devoted to a deity who is identified as a protector of the rMe'u-tshang family, but propitiated by all the people of the village as their local deity. This hymn is markedly more autochthonous. It contains the concept of *yul sa*, a term that is found in Dunhuang manuscripts with the meaning of 'local land' and 'estate', but in Bonpo texts it has come to mean both local land and deity (Karmay 1998: 442). The hymn also has local spirits such as the *btsan* and *klu* as the entourage of the deity. Although the *yul lha* is generally associated with the cult of height its relation with subterranean spirits such as *klu* is often attested in propitiation texts such as the hymn II.

## Conclusion

The concept of *yul lha* is an important component of Tibetan culture. It is not just simply a question of primitive belief in spirits. It is about the land surrounding one's habitat which one shares so to speak with the local deities who are often referred to in parental terms such as *a myes* indicating the inhabitants' closeness to them.

However, here the concepts of local land and deity are somewhat blurred by the term *yul sa*, since it connotes both the land and its deity as if they are the same phenomenon, and indeed in many respects it also expresses the telluric relation between man and his natural environment.

The *yul lha* oversees the local terrestrial domain above, intermediary and below as is indicated by the placement of the three types of 'cairn'. This cosmological layout is in line with the concept of the vertical axis of the 'three worlds' (*srid pa gsum*): *sa 'og*, 'under the earth', *sa steng*, 'on the earth' and *sa bla*, 'above the earth', a division of the terrestrial space which is the cosmological basis in propitiatory rituals of earth.

## Notes

- 1) For other ritual events in the area see the article by S. Nagano in the volume.
- 2) For an account of this monastery see the article by M. Mori in the volume.

- 3) *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung 'dzam gling spyi bsang*, Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1980, p.56:  
*nag po'i bdud kyi sa cha/ sa ri rtse dang brag rtse rno ba/ nags btsan sa/ mtsho dang chu phran 'khrugs sa/ bdud a chen rna ba khra leb kyi g-yas phogs/ gong (kong) po'i bon ri mthon po'i g-yon phyogs/ ri nag po dgu brtsegs kyi mdun ngos/ mi mgo'i lab tse (la btsas) rngams pa/ pags pa'i rlung rta g-yo ba/ rgyu rlon gyi dmu thag 'then pa/ tshil pa'i cod pan 'phyang ba/ 'chi bdag gshin rje'i pho brang la 'gran bzod pa'i gses (gsas) mkhar dmar po 'jigs rngams g-yo ba....*
- 4) Cf. Drang-rje btsun-pa gSer-mig, *mDo gZer mig*, Krung ko'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991, p.498
- 5) *rMa lho'i rig gnas lo rgyus kyi dpyad yig/ deb dang po*. mTsho sngon zhing chen rma lho bod rigs rang skyong khul srid gros kyi rig gnas dang lo rgyus dpyad yig u yon lha khang nas bsgrigs/ 1992. For a general account of Rebkong see Marshall and Cooke, 1997.
- 6) The name of the village is sometimes spelt Zangs-ri (*sNye mo rdzong gi lo rgyus*, *Bod ljongs zhib 'jug*, 1990, No. 2, pp. 151, 157, 161), but in Bonpo texts it occurs as dPal-Idan bZang-po-ri, cf. Hymn II, below and *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay 1972: 138).
- 7) For a detailed account of this family see the article by Dondrup Lhagyal in the volume.
- 8) Macdonald, Imaeda 1979: Pelliot tibétain 1194, Pl.479, l.6.
- 9) Kan su'i mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989, pp.186-92.
- 10) This term, whose origin is unknown to me, is spelled *kye tu* in a recent article by rDo-je rin-chen. According to him, however, *kye tu* is built on the top of a mountain, *lab tse* on the shoulders and *dpa' mkhar* at the foot. His article is to be found in brTson-'grus rab-rgyas ed. *Krung ko bod kyi rig gnas sgyu rtsal kun 'dus zhal thang chen mo'i rnam bshad mthong grol kun gsal me long*, Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999, p.610.
- 11) For example rDo-rje rin-chen, referred to above.
- 12) Macdonald, Ariane, Imaeda 1978: Pelliot tibétain 126, l.131.

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**Plate 1** A-lags Bon-brgya lHun-grub rgya-mtsho

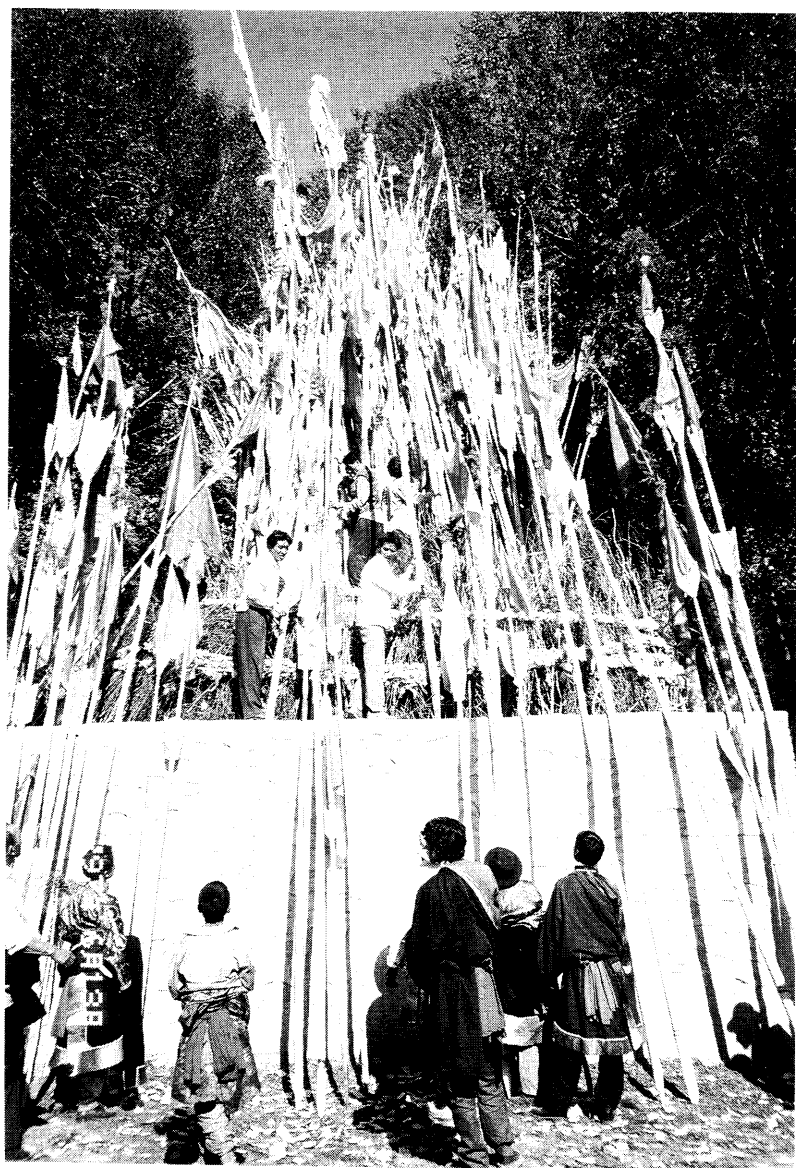
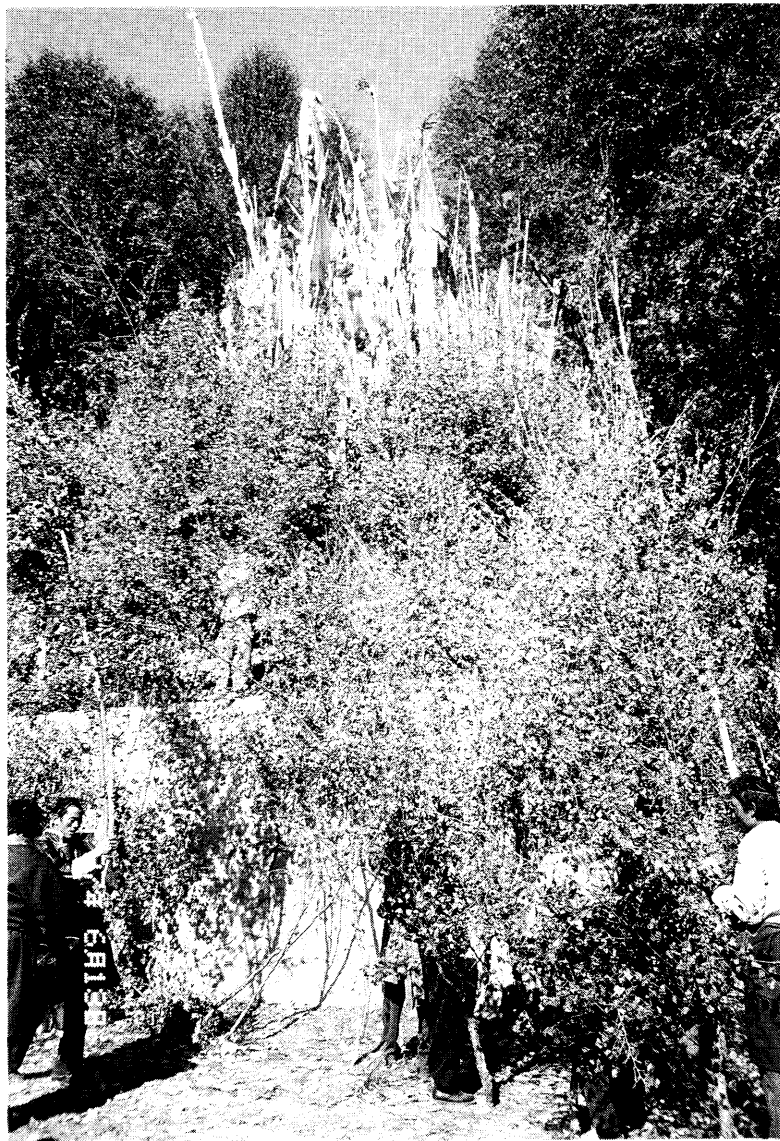


Plate 2 *La btsas* in sMad -pa'i Khyung-po

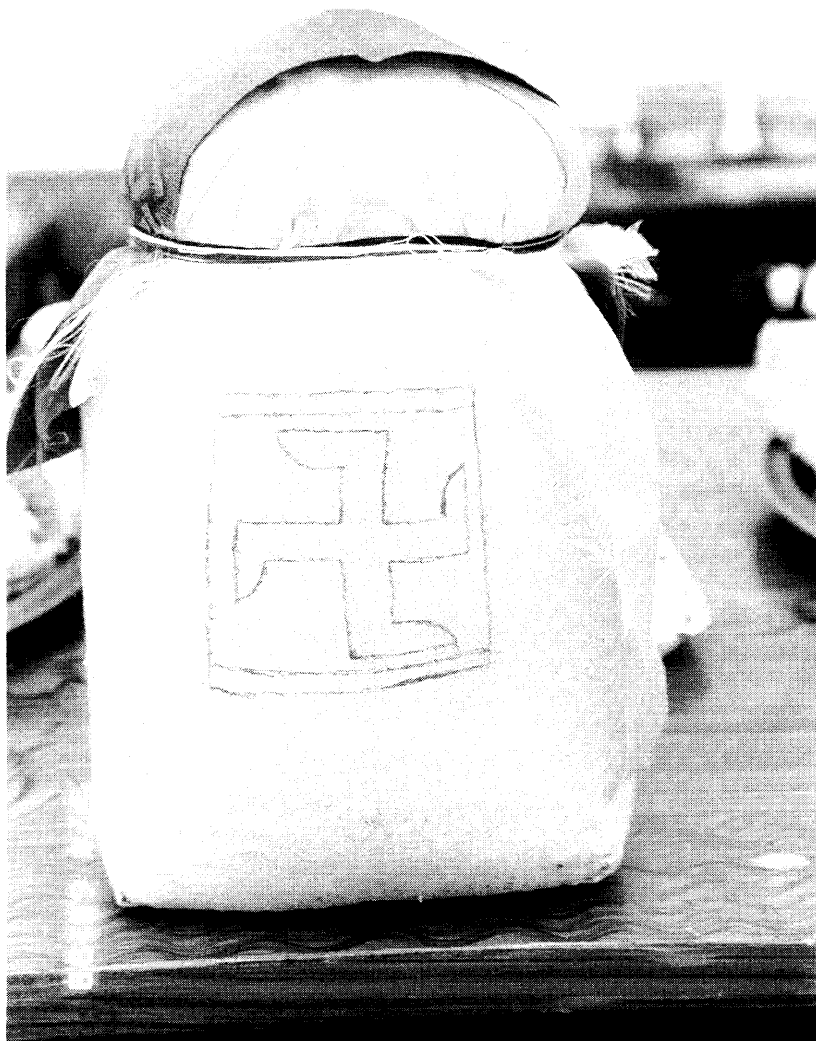


Plate 3 dGra-'dul thogs-med-rtsal





**Plate 4** Birch branches



**Plate 5** *g-yang rdzas*, “items of the quintessence of wealth”



Plate 6 Spinning of the *dmu thag*



**Plate 7** Winding of the *dmu thag* round the arrows and birch branches



**Plate 8** Scattering of the "paper wind horses" into the air



Plate 9 A-myes Thar-smug



Plate 10 One of the three sPos-te brothers (name is not known)



**Plate 11** One of the three sPos-te brothers (name is not known)





**Plate 12** One of the three sPos-te brothers (name is not known)



**Plate 13** A-myes Bya-khyung (Plates 1-13, Rebkong, Samten Karmay 1997)



Plate 14 bZang-ri Village



Plate 15 lHun-grub mthong-smong-gling monastery and bZang-ri Village



Plate 16 lHa-phebs (=la btzas)

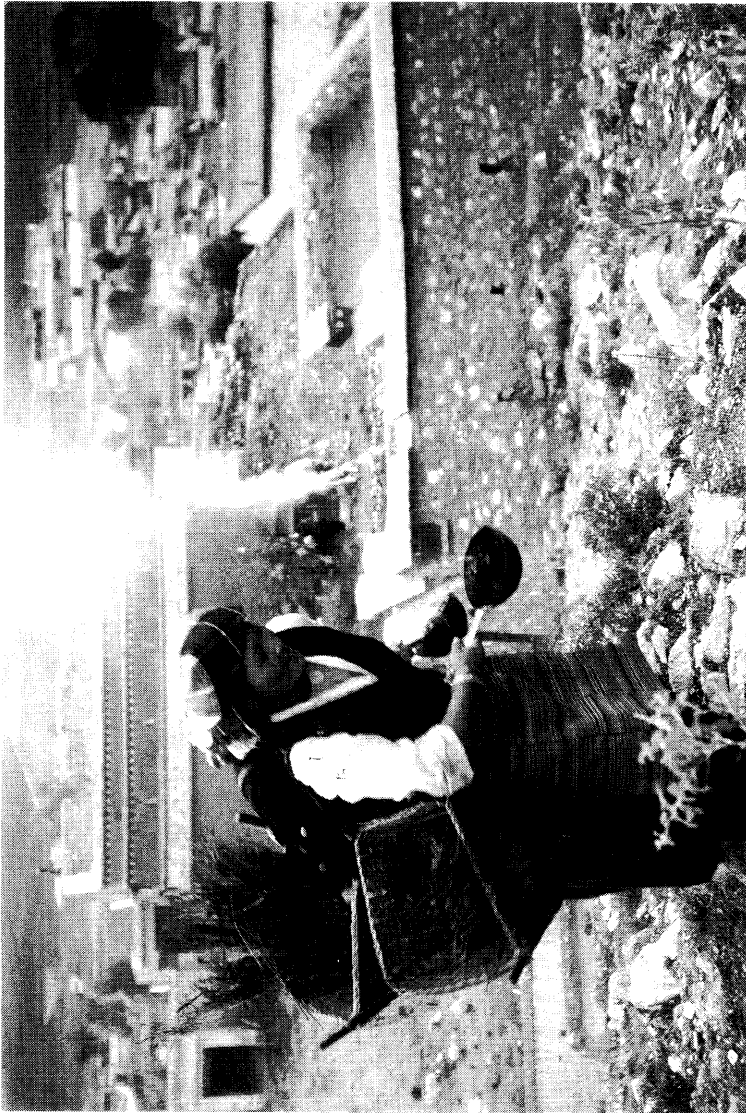


Plate 17 Zhi-zhi dBang-lDan



Plate 18 Women with *sle mo* basket





**Plate 19** Two women carrying *sle mo* baskets and ladles  
(Plates 14-19, Nye-mo, Samten Karmay 1999)



