

Introduction

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Introduction

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This lexicographic work contains terms described as being of Zhangzhung origin in the texts of the Bon tradition alongside Tibetan terms that have a specific meaning in the context of Bon religious texts. It is the first time that such an attempt to collect them has ever been made. The terms are collected from only a few texts regarded as authoritative, and by no means can the present work be considered as exhaustive even within the texts from which the terms are collected. The present work is simply a tentative start, because the Bon literature is so vast that it would take at least decades to make a complete and thorough review of all the terms to be entered.

The question may be asked why it is so necessary to do this work in the first place as there are a number of dictionaries that already exist such as that of H. A. Jäschke (*Tibetan-English Dictionary*, Kegan Paul, London 1881 and subsequent reprints) and Sarat Chandra Das (*Tibetan-English Dictionary*, Calcutta 1902 and subsequent reprints) not to mention the most recent major works like the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1993 and subsequent reprints). To answer this question we need to look further afield. It is only in recent years that linguists began to take an interest in the Zhangzhung language and this again is only a beginning. Furthermore, there has been some work on the language, but there has never been a systematic and reliable endeavour to index the Zhangzhung terms apart from the work by Zhu Nyi ma grags pa, a Bonpo scholar of an unknown date, whose short work was worked on by Erick Haarh (*The Zhang-zhung Language: A Grammar and Dictionary of the Unexplored Language of the Tibetan Bonpos*, *Acta Jutlandica*, XL:1, 1-43 [Humanistisk Serie, 47]). This work was followed by Dan Martin: *The Zhang zhung Dictionary; electronic edition at zhangzhungstudies@yahoogroups.com*).

As for the Bon terms all scholars know that no sooner than they open a Bon text they stumble over an unknown vocabulary which makes the existing dictionaries mentioned above either entirely useless or involve present a term wrongly defined. It is not so hard to know why this situation has arisen. The early lexicographers such as Jäschke simply had no access to Bon texts. Das seems to have consulted some Bon texts, but his definitions fall into the category which I will now describe. The compilers of the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, whose project was sponsored by the Chinese state and is relatively complete to a very high degree, were mostly Tibetan Buddhist-orientated scholars. It is no wonder then that they had simply shut their eyes to the existence of the Bon literature. Their perception of Tibetan vocabulary is mainly viewed from the Buddhist angle. They therefore naturally attempted perhaps unconsciously to define even indigenous terms with an Indic interpretation. For example, the word *smrang* is defined as *rig byed dam ngag skad*, “veda or word”. In the indigenous literature it

simply means “archetypal myth”. The indigenous term *bla* whose meaning can only be given as “soul” is strangely interpreted as *dkar rtsis las bshad pa'i srog rten*, “the support of life as given in astrology”.

In view of this incongruous situation it is necessary to have a separate lexicological work for the terms of Zhangzhung origin which are extensively used in Bon texts and the Tibetan terms that have been entered, but without regard for their Bon context meaning and the majority of specifically Bon terms that have never been entered at all in the existing dictionaries.

When the editors put forward the idea of the present project to Ven. bsTan pa g-yung drung, the Abbot of Khri brtan nor bu rtse (Triten Norbutse) Monastery in Kathmandu, he readily agreed with us and began to appoint those of his monks who would be eligible for collaboration on the project. At the beginning four monks were selected thought to be suitable for the job. However, one of them soon dropped out, but the remaining three steadfastly adhered to the project. They were sPa sar Tshul khri ms bstan 'dzin (b.1968), the abbot of the sGrub grva section of the monastery, dGe bshes Ga tsha Blo gros rab gsal (b.1971) and dGe bshes sPyang ru Khri gtsug nam dag nyi ma (b.1971). These monk scholars have had no experience in lexicographic work, but all the three are highly versed in Bon texts and are the sort of people needed for such a project. However, when one comes to think of defining a term, it is altogether a different matter. Nevertheless, they quickly grasped the importance of the work they had undertaken and made strenuous efforts throughout the whole work to stick as faithfully as they could to the traditional understanding of each term. Each monk undertook the reading of a certain number of texts to collect the terms and had periodic meetings at which each presented what he had collected and the definitions given to them. Every word and its definition in Tibetan was therefore jointly discussed among the three and then, only then, were the terms and their definitions kept when all three had agreed upon the selection of the term with its appropriate definition. The three compilers are therefore jointly responsible for whether the definitions are correct and accurate.

It is earnestly hoped that this lexicographic work will be followed by Bonpo monk scholars in the future either for improvement or extension by consulting more texts or both, because as stated earlier, the present work is far from complete. Only about 16 texts were touched upon and the collection of terms from these texts had to be done within limits of time and resources.

To publish the lexicon without an English translation of the definitions in Tibetan would have been a drawback. The editors therefore greatly appreciate Dr Heather Stoddard, Professor at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris, for the superb and reassuring English translation. Although the definitions of terms given in Tibetan were purposely kept short and to the point, the translator has taken the

trouble to give a variety of choices in English. When there were cases whose meanings were unclear or too vague she personally consulted Geshe sPang ru Khri gtsug mam dag nyi ma and made sure what she had translated agreed with the definitions given in Tibetan.