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Preface

Yasuhiko Nagano

Gyalrong Studies, a new series forming part of the Senri Ethnological Reports, aims at publicizing the research results of the "International Field Survey of the Gyalrongic Languages," a project supported by a fieldwork grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (A-21251007: 2009-2012 fiscal years) .

Since 1995 when the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, launched a Bon culture research project, we have accumulated fundamental research materials, such as iconographies, statues, Bonpo canons and related documents, and, at the same time, we have carried out fieldwork projects to understand the actual situation of the Bon religion. Although this project was established with the purpose of raising the general research standard of Bon studies in Japan, it was also designed to clarify the linguistic substrata in Tibetan languages.

When the project began, I, as a linguist, considered Zhangzhung and other unstudied Tibeto-Burman languages as targets of the survey. Zhangzhung is a dead language that is thought to have been spoken a thousand years ago by Bon followers in the Zhangzhung kingdom located in West Tibet, and yields important clues for understanding the formation of Written Tibetan. The Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and the British Library keep several undeciphered Zhangzhung manuscripts from Dunhuang that represent Old Zhangzhung, while around the fourteenth century, the Bon people reconstructed a New Zhangzhung, which is very different from Old Zhangzhung. The still unstudied Tibeto-Burman languages include some Himalayan languages which are thought to have a genetic relationship to both Old Zhangzhung and Gyalrong (WT: rgyal rong) a language that may have influenced the formation of New Zhangzhung.

Those studies were made possible by the three consecutive Monbukagakusho/JSPS grants: 1) An International Interdisciplinary Field Survey of the Bon Culture in Tibet (1996-1999 #08041040); 2) Reconstruction of the Zhangzhung Language and the Formation of Written Tibetan (1999-2001 #A2-11691050); and 3) Linguistic Substratum in Tibet (2004-2008 #16102001). The results of these projects have been published as Bon Studies and form part of the Senri Ethnological Reports of the National Museum of Ethnology. Bon Studies 13 and 14 will appear by the end of 2010.

Towards the end of the third project, the researchers involved gathered at the National Museum of Ethnology to join an international symposium, "Linguistic Substrata in the Tibeto-Burman Area," (September 9-11, 2008). We discussed the status of studies on the Zhangzhung language, both old and new, the formation of Old Tibetan and the surrounding Tibeto-Burman language family, and deriving from that, methodological problems associated with historical linguistics. The result of the gathering has been published as *Issues in Tibeto-Burman Historical Linguistics*, Senri Ethnological Studies No. 75.

Through the discussion at the symposium, it became clear that the following research areas concerning Zhangzhung need to be focused on:

1. To clarify the entangled language situation of Zhangzhung that appears to have been brought about by various linguistic substrata, we need to be well aware of which historical level we are dealing with.
2. In order to decipher the six Old Zhangzhung texts, we must develop a more sophisticated software program based on mathematico-statistics, since the number of samples is rather limited.
3. To supplement the philological approach mentioned above, linguistic fieldwork on the Garhwal Himalayish languages, Kinnaur above all, is indispensable, since they might be direct descendents of Old Zhangzhung,
4. To deepen the understanding of the formation of New Zhangzhung, we need to have more precise and detailed descriptions of Gyalrongic (and Qiangic) languages, which are believed to constitute significant substrata of New Zhangzhung.

Based on these, the new project mentioned at the top of this preface has been initiated.

The Gyalrong (WT: rgyal rong) language has attracted many scholars' attention because of its striking similarity to Written Tibetan. Looking into the lexical items and grammatical systems, however, the language appears to occupy a closer position to Proto-Tibeto-Burman than to Written Tibetan, and functions as a so-called 'link language' along with Jingphaw. A non-linguistic fact that is relevant is that the Gyalrong area has been one of the main shelters of Bon followers since the Zhangzhung political power was expelled from Central Tibet in the 8th century.

Thus, Gyalrong and other Gyalrongic languages can provide crucial

clues for Tibeto-Burman historical linguistics in general and probably constitute one of the substrata of New Zhangzhung. In this new series, Gyalrong Studies, we plan to publish the research results from the field survey of Gyalrong dialects, their folklore, and related manuscripts. I hope this series of publications will be an impetus for continued research in Tibeto-Burman linguistics and Bon studies.