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Preliminary Remarks

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Preliminary Remarks

Yasuhiko Nagano

This volume is based on the results of a study that is part of a larger research project titled *Objects and their Sacred Power in the Tibetan Religion*, which was funded by the JSPS fund for the promotion of joint international research B (20KK0021). This is an ethnological monograph of a Tibetan Bön ritual named *Khalong Sangdöo* (WT mkha' klong gsang mdos: KKSD hereinafter: pronounced as [kʰalɔŋ] san̄døːʋ]), which was held in August 2023. We will present the details of the ritual structure, its actual procedures and the meaning of main ritual objects through fieldwork observation and philological analysis.

This ritual is non-periodically performed by the Bön monasteries and followers to pacify and/or to avoid disasters and pandemics and to repel evils and demons. Bön is a Tibetan religion practiced since before the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. The study aimed to understand the essence of religious beliefs that make the substratum of Tibetan religious culture. To achieve this goal, we investigated the structure of Bön rituals and collected materials that explain the meaning of objects related to their rituals (ritual/magical instruments, iconography, natural objects, etc.) to understand the essence of these rituals and the role of such objects. By presenting these ethnographic descriptions and corresponding illustrations, this paper serves as a foundation for future research on the Tibetan religious culture.

Regarding the study of religious culture in the Tibetan cultural region, a vast amount of research on Tibetan Buddhism has been accumulated. In terms of Bön religion, on the other hand, although a limited number of significant studies on its doctrine and philosophy can be found, little research has been conducted on its rituals, practices, and universal characteristics of it.

In view of this situation, we analyze the offering and repelling rituals in Bön, which are all considered to have played an essential role in the formation of Tibetan spiritual culture. For this purpose, we use data collected through both fieldwork and close examination of protocol texts. By collecting various objects (ritual instruments) that play important roles in rituals and describing their meanings in detail, we aim to develop a basic and comprehensive monograph that will serve as a foundational study of the Bön religion.

The Tibetan religious and cultural region extends across China's Tibet Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, Sichuan Province, Gansu Province, Yunnan Province, and the southern foothills of the Himalayas. This region has a shared religious culture formed through the multi-layered combination of folk

religions characterized by shamanism at the base layer, Bön religion forming the next layer, and Tibetan Buddhism, forming a widespread and thick top layer. For a long time, this has been an area of difficult access for researchers to conduct fieldwork due to various circumstances. Tibet was in a state of isolation for many years, and it was indeed a mysterious world until 1985, when foreigners were allowed to enter the area. However, despite this situation, the eyes of the world turned to Tibet as early as in the mid-nineteenth century. This was due to the recognition that it was possible to reconstruct Sanskrit Buddhist texts that had then been lost using Tibetan Buddhist texts. Tibetan texts were found to be faithful literal translations based on the authorized grammar and lexicon established in the ninth century, in contrast to Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, which are characterized by bold paraphrased translations.

Later, with the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the trend in Tibetan studies changed significantly. As many Tibetans fled to countries such as India and Nepal, foreign researchers gained access to valuable documents and living Tibetan culture brought by Tibetan refugees. Among such documents, the non-Tripitaka texts (a group of texts that are a unique collection of Tibet and not part of the Tripitaka translation from Sanskrit language) contain commentaries on various sutras, procedures of rituals, and writings related to the study of history, calendar, and iconography. Such texts have greatly contributed to the subsequent interpretation of Buddhist teachings.

In this way, the mainstream of Tibetan studies was still the study of Buddhism. However, the recognition of the existence of Bön religion in the wake of the uprising marked a considerable step forward for the conceptualization of the framework of Tibetan religious culture. Bön had been widely spread in Tibet since before the introduction of Buddhism, and it was dominant in Tibet until Buddhism became associated with the ruling power. While maintaining close ties to indigenous folklore and customs, Bön has developed its own unique doctrine and logic system. British scholar of Tibetan studies, D. Snellgrove, conducted joint research at the University of London in 1961 with three Bön monks who had escaped the conflict in Tibet, and clearly stated that Bön represents the foundation of Tibetan religious culture.

Meanwhile in Japan, the Tōyō Bunko Foundation began joint research with two senior Tibetan Buddhist monks and a civilian woman from an aristocratic background who were invited based on the 1960 agreement adopted at an international meeting held in Italy. As a result, previously unknown documents and iconography were brought to Japan, which made it possible for Japanese researchers to come into contact with authentic Tibetan culture. While these efforts made a substantial contribution to the understanding of Tibet in general, entry into Tibet-related areas remained difficult. Therefore, researchers at the time had no

choice but to focus on an “alternative ethnography” that reconstructed Tibetan language, history, society, and religion through accounts from refugees. In 1985, the Tibet Autonomous Region was opened to foreigners, who were gradually allowed to enter other Tibetan cultural areas, coming into direct contact with the people living there. However, conducting research and research activities freely continued to be extremely difficult, and it is hard to argue that researchers were in touch with the actuality of Tibet in its true sense.

Snellgrove stated that “the foundation of Tibetan religious culture is Bon.” We agree with Snellgrove in that “the shared substratum of religious culture can be found in Bön,” but our concern is not whether the foundation of Tibetan religious culture is Buddhism, Bön, or folk beliefs. Instead, we are concerned with identifying commonalities not only in terms of doctrine and theory but also in terms of the interaction between religious practice and ritual and the meaning of the objects used for these. In Tibet, Buddhism, Bön, and folk beliefs intertwine in a skillful manner, and they are equally alive among the people. This is because in each of them, religious practices, including rituals, and the objects used are at the center of their religious life.

In this religious culture region, transcendental principles (shamanistic possessions and the ideas and practices derived from them) and secular principles (principles that correspond to the desires of the general public) are intricately interwound. We believe that the interrelated meanings of objects function as a mechanism that connects these two principles organically. We focus on five types of objects: 1) objects that mainly function as the objects to which guardians, deities or spirits are summoned (Namkha [WT nam kha’], Gyangbu [WT rgyang bu], Gyangpen [WT rgyang ’phan], Gyangdar [WT rgyang dar], etc.), 2) objects which are offered to deities or spirits (Shingri [WT shing ris], etc.), 3) objects that accumulate (and later discard) impureness (Torma [WT gtor ma], etc.), 4) objects that search for and capture souls and “fortune” (Namkha, Döo [WT mdos], etc.), and 5) objects that protect people from disasters (Sungkhor [WT srung ’khor] = amulet). All of them are mediums of transcendental principles and secular principles and have the role of bridging the sacred and the profane. It is only by comprehensively understanding how these objects are produced, used, and the ideological background regarding their functions that we can approach the universality of religious activities. Such understanding can also serve as the foundation to better understand the social context that maintains these practices. Among the five ritual objects mentioned above, we will mainly deal with those except Torma and Sungkhor. As for Sungkhor, we have already worked in our 2019 publication mentioned below, and for Torma, we wish to focus on it in a future project.

However, to confirm the above viewpoint, we must first understand exactly

what Bön is. The development of research infrastructure for the study of Bön, which has lagged far behind that of studies of Buddhism, has improved somewhat from the aspect of published works with the publications of the Tibetan Bönpo Canons including Kangyur [WT bka' 'gyur] and Katen [WT bka' bstan] in China starting around 1990. And the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, published fourteen volumes of the *Bon Studies* series, which were the result of joint research projects supported by JSPS. The fruits are:

- 2000 *Mandalas of the Bon Religion*. “Senri Ethnological Reports” (SER hereafter) No. 12.
- 2000 *New Horizons in Bon Studies*. SER No. 15.
- 2001 *New Research on Zhangzhung and Related Himalayan Languages*. SER No. 19.
- 2001 *A Catalogue of the New Collection of Bonpo Katen Texts*. SER Nos. 24–25.
- 2002 *The Call of the Blue Cuckoo*. SER No. 32.
- 2003 *A Survey of Bonpo Monasteries and Temples in Tibet and the Himalaya*. SER No. 38.
- 2003 *A Catalogue of the Bon Kanjur*. SER No. 40.
- 2005 *Feast of the Morning Light*. SER No. 57.
- 2006 *Bonpo Thangkas from Khyungpo*. SER No. 60.
- 2008 *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*. SER No. 76.
- 2009 *A Lexicon of the rGyalrong bTsanlha Dialect*. SER No. 79.
- 2011 *Bonpo Thangkas from Rebkong*. SER No.95.
- 2011 *Research Notes on the Zhangzhung Language by Frederick W. Thomas at the British Library*. SER No. 99.

(All these materials above are downloadable from <https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/research/publication/research-publications/ser>)

Nevertheless, little progress has been made in the study of religious activities in Bön temples and worship groups, and the field has barely left the stage of relying on alternative ethnography. To get closer to the fundamentals of Tibetan religious culture that we aim to elucidate, it is necessary to come into direct contact with living religious practices, including folk beliefs, but we cannot help but accept that this is difficult under the current political circumstances. Therefore, in this study, we focused on the texts describing Bön ritual procedures, which Bön believers themselves acknowledge as texts that were established in the “institutionalized stage (from the 11th century onwards).” The research project was a collaboration with researchers from China, England, and France, who contributed with textual analysis. We also requested the performance of the ritual at a Bön academic temple in the southern foothills of the Himalayas and attempted to observe the ritual process in detail. Fortunately, we were able to obtain a high-

quality Bön ritual text, *mKha' klong gsang mdos*, through the above-mentioned research project funded by the JSPS fund. This document is a compilation of rituals, and the title can be translated as “Sacred Rites in the Expansion of Universe.” The writings are based on the unique view of the universe in Bön (comparable to Abhidharmakośa in Buddhism) and describe the meanings of rituals, the ritual procedures, and the ritual instruments used (= the above-mentioned objects) in detail.

In view of the above academic background and current situation, this study analyzes the KKSD philologically. At the same time, we describe its rituals and ritual instruments in detail through detailed participant observation. In this way, we contribute to future research by providing a monograph that can serve as a foundational work for the study of Tibetan religion.

Japan has a long tradition of Tibetan studies (especially Buddhist studies). As mentioned above, the fact that it is possible to reconstruct the lost Sanskrit Buddhist texts through the Tibetan texts has now been recognized worldwide. However, for this reason, European and Russian powers with the political intention of invading Asia extended their hands to Tibet in search of Buddhist scriptures, and Japanese expeditions were no exception. The inquiry that began in this way certainly brought about considerable progress in the study of Indian philosophy and Buddhism, although interest in Tibetan religion and culture was little. The path for an understanding of Tibet beyond the study of Buddhism proper was being paved by works such as J. Bacot’s study of the literature excavated in the western marches of China and Central Asia, a pioneering study of Bön literature by A. H. Francke, R. A. Stein’s detailed reading of Tibetan texts excavated from Dunhuang, and R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz’s fieldwork in the southern foothills of the Himalayas. Nevertheless, the findings of these studies did not become public until the late 1950s. The Tibetan uprising of March 1959 and the joint research with Tibetans organized by the Toyo Bunko (Oriental Library) Foundation in 1963 were major contributions in broadening the base of Tibetan studies. However, due to the difficulties of field research, we were forced to settle for “alternative ethnography,” and Tibet and its culture remained a blind spot within our understanding of Asia.

To remedy this situation, the National Museum of Ethnology (Osaka), which opened in 1977, has focused on promoting Tibetan studies from a position of questioning the state of society as a whole from its foundation, combining both on-site participant observation (including material cultures) and research methods that utilize local languages and literature. The outcome of this joint research was a series of “research on Bön religious culture,” which subsequently led to the emergence of studies about the “description of amulets in folk customs.” Regarding the former area of research, studies such as “Research on Bön culture in the Tibetan cultural area” (by Yasuhiko Nagano) and “Cultural historical

considerations of Tibetan Bon iconography” (by Masahide Mori) have been supported by the JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research. The results were published in the Senri Ethnological Reports (of the Museum) forming a total of fourteen volumes in the Bon Studies series, as was mentioned above. Regarding the latter research area, the National Museum of Ethnology purchased the “Tibetan Buddhist painting collection” in 1979, but most of the items in the collection were religious monochrome wood-block prints and amulets that were widely circulated among laymen. Therefore, Nagano organized a joint research project titled “Descriptive Study of the Amulets in Tibetan Buddhism and Bon,” leading to the publication of the “Tibetan Religious Iconography Database” in 2021 (<https://htq.minpaku.ac.jp/databases/tibetaniconography/>). In addition, detailed analyses of individual iconographic materials and related theoretical research on Tibetan folklore have been presented to the world through the book, *Tibetan Religious Iconography and the World of Faith* (2019 Fukyosha, Tokyo).

As a result of the studies mentioned above, the contents and uses of many amulets and religious plain sketches have been clarified, but many unclear points about the blessing and sanctification rituals and the relationship between psychics and temples and recipients remain due to the lack of field research and archival research. To improve this situation, we organized another project supported by the above-mentioned grant-in-aid for promotion of joint international research B (20KK0021) and initiated joint research with Professor Tshering Thar of Minzu University of China in the latter half of 2020. As a result, we succeeded in finding a high-quality book from Dingqing Temple about KKSD, which was optimal but difficult to obtain, and became connected with local temples and psychics, in addition to advancing in the interpretation of the ritual and sharing awareness of the research topic. This ritual book is the basis of the KKSD ritual held at Triten Norbutse Bön Monastery in Kathmandu in August 2023. It describes, in detail, the basic content and structure of sacrifice rituals performed in Bön religion (and in some sects and classical schools of Tibetan Buddhism), as well as the structure, meaning, mannerisms, and creation methods of the fetishes and ritual instruments used for such performances. Thus, the book is also an important key in understanding the dynamics of objects and sacredness.

Previous research directly related to the current study has analyzed the issue with a philological approach, such as in the works of A.-M. Blondeau, ‘The mKha’ klong gsang mdos: Some Questions on Ritual Structure and Cosmology’ (2000 *New Horizons in Bon Studies*, SER No.15, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka); Samten Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle* (1998 Mandala Book Point, Kathmandu); and D. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon* (1967 Oxford University Press, Oxford). Others have approached the matter through iconographic research, such as in the works of T. Skorupski, *Tibetan Amulets* (1983 White Orchid Press,

Bangkok), and N. Douglas, *Tibetan Tantric Charms and Amulets* (1978 Dover, New York). Blondeau's paper is the first in the world to focus on KKSD, but it mainly discusses the Abhidharmakośa cosmology behind the ritual rather than its content. Karmay and Snellgrove were the first to discuss the fundamental concepts of Bön ritual: *To* [WT gto], *Döo* [WT mdos], and *Lüü* [WT glud]; however, many questions about the distinction between these concepts are still unanswered.

Skorupski (1983) provides a comprehensive overview of fetish objects that circulate in Tibet. This work marked the beginning of research that focuses on the relationship between religion and objects. Douglas (1978) describes 230 amulets based on field research in the Dolpo region of Nepal. The artifacts documented in this work is very similar to those held at the National Museum of Ethnology, which we discuss in more detail in the "Tibetan Religious Icon Database" mentioned above. G. Samuel's *Civilized Shamans* (1995 Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.) provides a theoretical study on the practice of divine spiritual possession in Tibet, and M. Goldstein & M. Kapstein's *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet* (1998 University of California Press, Berkeley) offers a study on folk rituals; however, descriptions about objects are rather limited in both works.

The masterpiece by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (1975 Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz), is based on the author's fieldwork and attempts to elucidate Tibetan folk beliefs in relation to the doctrines, rituals, and folklore of the Bön religion. This work is closely related to the present research project. Nebesky-Wojkowitz conducted a long and intensive field research primarily in India and Nepal during the 1950s. Through his research, he identified many guardian deities and spiritual beings and their representations that have been part of Tibetan folk beliefs within Bön rituals (often involving divine possession) and left detailed descriptions of each. Although we may never be able to surpass his research accomplishments in terms of comprehensive and flat understanding of the guardian deities and spiritual beings of Tibet, we are eager to contribute with an understanding of the spiritual beings and their representations in Tibetan offering and purification rituals in a more organic and three-dimensional way within the framework of Bön religion. We may say that this volume is intended to supplement that great work by Nebesky-Wojkowitz. Our wish is that the present work may contribute to future studies of Bön and Tibetan religious culture.

The following is the concrete introduction of each chapter:

In Chapter I, Tachikawa outlines the process of ritual performed on the 16th through 24th days of August 2023 precisely, and then, tries to grasp the whole structure of the ritual. His analysis is based upon not only his own on-site observation but also the comparative insight obtained through his study of Hindu rites. It must be added, however, that his idea is not biased by the Abhidharma-

kośa cosmology. For the sake of readers' understanding, some of figures which explain the monks' carriage and conduct are in colors.

Plates in Chapter II are the photos of ritual utensils actually used in the summer of 2023. The ritual itself was performed in exact accordance with *Tibetan Bonpo Tenjur* (1998) vol.009–1 through –59 and it is backed up by numerous ritual utensils shown in this chapter. They are extremely important for us to understand what this ritual is for. These objects were made by the Triten Norbutse fellow monks according to the protocol manuscript shown in Chapter V. These are printed all in colors, because, just like in maṇḍala, color enrolls important religious function and meaning.

Chapter III is Layout Diagrams 1 through 7, indicating where the ritual utensils are located in the altar.

We are proud of Chapter IV where each ritual utensil is precisely described. The names, materials, location in the altar, deities and/or spirits to be invited and the religious meaning are described one by one. For Shingri and Sogshing, all the written texts on the utensils are translated into English. Readers are advised to observe concrete utensils making reference to the Layout Diagrams.

Chapter V is a translation of a Bön text which indicates how to prepare the *Khalong Sangdöo* ritual in details. The text specifies what kinds of deities and spirits should be invited and which deities, spirits and demons must be avoided/pacified, and what sorts of ritual utensils are used for those spiritual beings, as well as their religious meanings. The utensils used in the actual rite in 2023 were manufactured according to this text.

Geshe Tridhe Tsultrim defines the positioning of the *Khalong Sangdöo* in the Bön philosophy and religious practices from his Bön monkship. This original text in Tibetan was translated by Professor Charles Ramble.

Last but not least, we would like to thank H. E. Yongdzin Lopön Tenzin Namdag Rinpoche and Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung of Triten Norbutse Bön Monastery, Kathmandu, who had a deep understanding of ritual performance and spared no effort in supporting our field survey; Geshe Tridhe Tshultrim, a promising young scholar monk in that monastery, who toiled throughout the period from the autumn of 2022 to the summer of 2023 preparing the altar and all the ritual objects and making all the arrangements of ritual process; Geshe Pelki Wanchug and Mr Kemi Tshewang who were responsible for film-shooting; Dr. Samten G. Karmay (Professor Emeritus of CNRS, Paris), Professor Charles Ramble (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris) and Dr. Tshering Thar (Professor Emeritus at Minzu University =Central University of Nationalities, Beijing), who gave various advice from the planning stage of the research; and the Editorial Board of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, who made the publication of

this work possible. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the members and staff of the museum, including Mr. Hiroyuki Imanaka, Mrs. Atsuko Nishizaki, Ms. Yūko Okada, and Mrs. Atsuko Imatani, who practically assisted in the preparation of materials and complex drawings.

[A sad notice] Dr. Shin'ichi Tsumagari, the first author of this volume, passed away on the 17th day of September 2024, of ischemic heart disease. His pivotal role in the Bon studies was inestimably significant. We sincerely lament the sudden death of this talented and beloved young scholar. May he rest in peace.