

みんなくりポジトリ

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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Introduction

In August 1999 an international symposium entitled “New Horizons in Bon Studies” was held in the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan. It was organized by Professor Yasuhiko Nagano in a milieu that could not be more appropriate for such an international gathering. A number of outstanding specialists attended it. Indeed, the presence of these scholars obviously gave it an extra dimension and the symposium itself was as much a pleasant occasion as it was a time of serious reflection for all the participants including the non-initiated observers. It truly widened horizons for Bon studies.

The symposium dealt not with just a specific theme but it also strove to view the aspects of the religion from all angles. The process through which the Bon religion developed over the centuries has certainly proved problematic for researchers since it has adopted such a variety of elements of different origins in order to adapt itself to various situations and times. In this connection, I am tempted to cite here a passage by Professor David Snellgrove, because it rightly puts in a nutshell the whole problem that the participants of the symposium endeavored to disentangle during a whole week. Here is his verdict on it: “We are thus concerned not only with pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, but with Tibetan religion regarded as one single cultural complex..... Regarded in this way, Bon might indeed claim to be the true religion of Tibet. Accepting everything, refusing nothing through the centuries, it is the one all-embracing form of Tibetan religion” (*The Nine Ways of Bon*, London Oriental Series, Vol.18, London: Oxford University Press, 1967, p.13).

If this has any truth, it should not surprise us to find the mass of material Buddhist or otherwise, written or oral, that has been collected and interwoven into its philosophical and religious fabric during its long process of growth and change. Indeed, the whole gamut of Buddhist learning is reflected in it and yet it has not entirely detached itself from the early indigenous beliefs and practices. On the contrary, it professes under its name what one calls “nameless religion” or “popular religion.”

One third of the symposium was devoted to the linguistic study of the Zhang-zhung language to which Professor Nagano will introduce our readers in a separate volume.

The first section of the volume opens with a most lucid exposition that takes a bird’s eye view of Bon studies from the past until the present time (P. Kvaerne). It is followed by an enlightened philological study of a fairly old text (D. Martin). This is succeeded by a clear analysis of an extract of a fourteenth century encyclopedic work (K. Mimaki). The section then ends with an article that investigates with insight the origin of a group of deities (H. Blezer). The works in

this section are mainly orientated towards a comparative study between Bonpo and Buddhist works that has never been undertaken on such a scale before.

The second section starts with a vivid account of an important work on Dzogchen, but unknown until now to Western students (D. Rossi) followed by a thorough examination of another work rarely cited in modern studies on Dzogchen (A. Klein).

The third section commences with a soul-searching discussion on the notion of meditative visualization and spirit possession (M. Tachikawa) that leads to a perspicacious analysis of a ritual in which representation of the universe is the main topic (A.-M. Blondeau). This is followed by an analysis in depth of the inner workings of an unknown local ritual (Ch. Rambe). Then there is an attentive scrutiny of the ritualized economic relation between monastic establishments and their lay patrons in a local area (M. Schrempf). This is followed by an interesting comparative presentation of cycle rituals (H. Ishii). This section closes with a short comparative description of the cult of local deities in two areas (S. Karmay).

The fourth section begins with a work that considers critically the change of roles played by the lamas in Bonpo society in two regions (TseringThar). This leads to a detailed historical review of the five sacred family lineages in Central Tibet (Dondrup Lhagyal). This is followed by an observant iconographic description of murals and *thangka* paintings in a monastery (M. Mori). The section then ends with a minutely detailed account of the daily life and training courses of monks in a recently established monastery in Kathmandu (S. Yamaguch).

The Fifth section commences with a pristine study of a little known annual festival performed by Buddhist adepts in village communities in Amdo (S. Nagano). There comes next an article that contemplates the possible connection of Bon beliefs with Indus valley civilization (G. Samuel). This is followed by a precise account of a popular ritual in Eastern Bhutan that features a phallic symbol in its ritual construction (U. Pelgen). The section then terminates with an interesting commentary on a stupa found in the Himalayan foothills (B. Bickel).

As we review briefly all the themes that have been dealt with in this volume, it is evident that the diversification of approach is as wide as the length of time-span covered. However, this is just a beginning and let us hope more symposiums on the subject similar in scope will be held. As Professor Nagano has pointed out in his preface, it would be vain try to understand Tibetan culture without being fully aware of the underlying factors such as popular beliefs which are often more manifestly expressed in the Bon context than the purely Buddhist.

An attempt is made by the editors to homogenize various features, such as Tibetan transliteration or the form of proper names in this volume. However, it has been daunting to cope with the length of the articles, the diversity of the ways in which each contributor has made his or her presentation and the time limit that was

set for bringing out the volume. It is therefore still possible that irregularities may persist and we take full responsibility for them.

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