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Bon, Buddhist and Hindu life cycle rituals: A comparison

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Introduction

In this paper it is intended to analyse the Bon life cycle rituals as a set and point out their main characteristics by comparing them with those of several other societies. The groups that I take up for comparison are: the Newars, the Maithils and the Japanese¹⁾. Among them, I have either conducted research or lived as a member. Sets of life cycle rituals of those groups are listed in the Tables at the end of this paper. A list of 'classical' Hindu *samskāras* (life cycle rituals) is also added as the Newars and the Maithils often refer to them as an ideal.

Taking up Hindu and Buddhist life cycle rituals for comparison in this study can be justified by the close relationship of the Bon religion to Buddhism and of Buddhism to Hinduism. The reason I don't take up Iranian or other west Asian societies is solely because I have no firsthand information on them.

Expressions such as 'rites of passage' and 'life cycle rituals' tend to make us presuppose religious or supernatural connotations in matters related to the various stages of life. Needless to say, everyone experiences birth and death, and marriage is found in almost all societies. But the demarcation of life cycle stages and what connotations to give them differ from one society to another. We shall see, as a comparison, that the way the Bonpos organize life cycle stages is flexible and rather secular. This leads us to conclude that organization of life cycle stages in a religious way is not universal.

The present comparative study, as far as Bon life cycle rituals are concerned, is quite preliminary mainly because of time limitations. My field research on Bon rituals was carried out from 5th March to 25th March, 1997, and 29th July to 18th August, 1998, in the Kathmandu Valley. My main method of research this time was interviewing a Tibetan (Bonpo) who had fled Tibet and finally settled in the valley, though some data collection and observations in a Bon monastery in the Kathmandu Valley were also conducted.

Preceding works

There are two kinds of work dealing with Bonpo life cycle rituals. Those works by P. Kvaerne, M. Brauen and C. Ramble (on death rituals) are based on observation and combined with other oral and written information. On the other hand, those which study other life cycle rituals, mainly concerning birth and

marriage, tend to utilize texts written by Tibetans. The works by Samten Karmay and T. Skorupski and C. Cech and the translation of the work of Thubten Sangay by G. Kilty are examples.

I will not go into the details of these works here, but will refer to them later as needed (There are works which depend on secondary sources, to which I do not refer here).

Needless to say there are many works dealing with Tibetan Buddhists' life cycle rituals, some of which are found with annotations at the end of Skorupski and Cech's paper.

1. Bonpo life cycle rituals

Table 1 lists Bonpo life cycle rituals as described by the above mentioned informant. Tables 2 and 3 contain those of the Newars and Maithils. Table 4 is a list of 'classical' Hindu *samskāras* (life cycle rituals) which are 'purification rituals' when translated literally. In Table 5 are summarized the Japanese life cycle rituals of the Tokyo area mainly from pre-1940 surveys.

Comparing the tables, we find that most of the life cycle events of these societies, except the Bonpos, have specific names. But not many such names are found among the Bonpo life cycle rituals at least to my present knowledge. Only in those concerned with death can we find clearly named rituals among the Bonpos. For other events, I had to give descriptive titles.

Another point concerns the difference in the number of major categories. Among the Bonpos, we find only three major categories of life cycle rituals, namely Birth, Marriage and Death. However in other societies we can see more, such as Initiation, Old age etc. In some societies there are Initiation rituals conducted two or three times for both boys and girls. Among the Newars (Table 2) they are *bwaskhā* and *kaytā-pūjā* for boys, and *ihī* and *bārā taygu* for girls, while in Mithila it is *munḍaṇ* and *upanayan* and in Japan are found *shichigosan* and *seijin-shiki*. The absence of initiation is conspicuous among the Bonpos.

In the following, I briefly describe the life cycle events of the Bonpos and make some comparisons.

1.1. Birth

1.1.1. Bonpo Birth customs

When a woman becomes pregnant, good food like sheep, goat or yak meat is fed to her, but pig and chicken are avoided. It is said to be good for her to keep herself warm and to take a walk provided she does not fall.

There is no special midwife for assistance at the time of birth. Any kin, neighbour or friend with experience may help. It is said that the birth will become harder if the husband is present, but he may help if nobody else is available.

The umbilical cord is cut after being tied and is buried, together with the placenta, in ground near the house. No specific place is reserved for their disposal.

It is customary to put butter on the back of the top part of a baby's head until it grows to be one or one and a half years old.

There was no custom to bathe a baby or to cut its hair when the informant's family lived in Tibet. But it is said that Tibetans living in Kathmandu tend to go to hospital for delivery these days (where they bathe babies), though some don't out of fear of an operation.

After delivery, the mother changes clothes, incense is burnt and the house is purified with holy water infused with saffron and blessed with a mantra. What is emphasized most after delivery is the food which should be given to the mother and child. Everyday she eats *rda ko* (Lhasa: *rda ka*) or dough consisting of refined *rtsam pa* (ground barley flour), butter, salt and milk or water. It is also said that it is good for the mother to eat *rtsam thug* or cooked food consisting of *rtsam pa*, meat (some with bones) and dried cheese, and to drink hot butter.

A stillborn baby or a baby who has died soon after birth (even after sucking its mother's milk) is buried near a river instead of being cremated.

The mother gives *rda ko* (dough) to her child about two months after birth if the child is strong. Otherwise, the time to feed it for the first time depends on the child's strength. For feeding this food, the mother puts a small portion of it into her own mouth, softens it by chewing and then gives it to the baby using a spoon. This act of first feeding has no name and no accompanying ceremony, worship or invitation to relatives. According to the informant, the kinds of food used on such occasions are good for the health of the mother and child. In this sense, events concerning birth are quite pragmatic and not regarded as religious matters.

About one month after childbirth, the mother and child may visit a lama and ask for the child's name. The father may go without taking his child if the lama lives far away.

After eight months to one year after childbirth, the father (or another person) pierces the child's ears for putting ornaments. They consider that a man without an earring is not good. No specialist (like a barber) is there to pierce ears, nor is any lama invited for this occasion.

It was not a custom for the Bonpos to celebrate their birthday. It was not usually remembered before. But in Kathmandu nowadays, a birth certificate is given by the hospital and the birthdays are celebrated among the children of refugee families who learn about it in school.

Initiation rituals as can be seen among the Hindus do not exist among the Bonpos. But at the age of seven to ten some may enter monasteries. It is considered desirable that at least one of the family members should become a monk.

1.1.2. Comparison with other works on the Bonpo birth

Thubten Sangay writes that pregnant women should pay a visit to a lama once

a month in order to be sprinkled with holy water and request him to perform the *tshe dbang* (life-empowerment) ritual (Skorupski and Cech 1984:7), but this is not compulsory according to the present informant. This kind of difference may be attributed either to local differences or to that between lay informants and written texts²⁾.

On the whole, the participation of lamas in events concerning birth is minimal. Naming is one of the rare occasions, but even for this, it is not compulsory to ask a lama. Another occasion is when bad luck like an illness afflicts the mother or child; lamas may be invited for religious treatment as such knowledge is not shared by laymen.

There are comparatively fewer specialists to deal with birth. Whereas we find midwives, astrologers, personnel to dispose of placenta or purification specialists among other groups such as the Hindus, those roles are taken up by close kin, neighbours and friends and not by specialists among the Bonpos.

Skorupski and Cech refer to the use of incense relating to the cleaning of the house and of scented water to wash a newborn baby (1984:8-9). The same materials are said to be used by the present informant. Their use no doubt points to the existence of the notion of impurity attached to delivery and birth and to the belief that the impurity can be removed by using such materials. But overall, the notion of purity versus impurity does not appear in a strong way in matters concerning birth among the Bonpos. This is especially true compared with Hindu customs. Also notable in comparison is the flexibility in choosing the time of certain life events (such as when to begin to give food other than mother's milk); unlike among the Hindus they are largely left to the judgement of the people concerned, though there are vague rules.

Events concerning birth among the Bonpos can thus be considered as flexible, pragmatic and secular.

1.2. Marriage

1.2.1. Bonpo marriage

Engagement

Among the Bonpos, any side can propose marriage. In the following, I give a description of a marriage procedure in which the initiative is taken by the groom's side.

When parents or close kin of a boy want to marry him with a certain girl, they ask a lama to make divination (*mo*) for the future couple's congeniality and to determine when to begin discussions. If a day is set for the engagement, the groom's father, paternal uncles and friends (sometimes the mother's brother) go to the girl's house taking *chang* (rice beer), Tibetan tea, ornaments of precious stones etc. which the girl's side would not accept if they were to refuse the proposal.

About twenty to thirty days later, people on the boy's side go to the girl's side with such presents as *kha btags* (auspicious white scarf), Tibetan tea, ornaments of

precious stones etc. and give them to the family members of the future bride.

A lama on the groom's side determines the wedding day also.

Wedding procession, ceremony and party

In order to fetch the bride in a procession, several people from the groom's side go to the bride's house carrying clothes, golden ornaments etc. Before they depart, a lama (lamas) prays in an altar room and the groom's parents put *kha btags* on all of them.

When the groom's party arrives at the bride's house, the bride's family treat the visitors to *chang*, yoghurt, tea, '*bras sil* (rice mixed with butter, sugar, raisins, cashew nuts etc.). Then the party returns with the bride in procession. The bride joins it carrying an arrow with streamers of five colours (*mda' dar*) on her back. She takes with her *nor skal* or wedding property consisting of clothes, ornaments, utensils, carpets, cattle etc. (recently electrical gadgets also).

The bride's parents do not take part in this procession but stay at home. It is said that good luck would be lost if they leave their house. Formerly in Tibet, people used to ride in this procession on horses including the bride, but Tibetans living in Kathmandu these days use cars.

On the way to the groom's house, women on the groom's side wait in groups and sing auspicious songs at three places. A hundred to two hundred meters before the groom's house, three women stand with bowls of *chang* and *rtsam pa* and butter put in utensils. Singing auspicious songs, they give them to the bride and people in the procession.

Just before arriving at the groom's house, a man on the groom's side lets the bride grasp one end of the *kha btags* he holds and leads her to the house chanting good verses. At the same time, women on the groom's side sing songs.

Members of the groom's family give *kha btags* to all of the bride's party in front of the groom's house. The bride stands on a small carpet which has a Bon swastika drawn with barley or wheat flour. There the groom's mother gives wheat and salt to the bride, who throws them in the air. Then the former puts butter on the top hair of the latter who holds the *mda' dar*.

Gift giving and drink party (*chang sa*).

Chang sa, 'rice beer seat', not only means the drink party forming the core of the wedding, but also the whole process of the wedding. The drink party is held in a room where there is an altar for worship. When the bride enters, the people on the groom's side sing songs. The groom and the bride sit side by side (the groom takes his seat first). A bridesmaid sits next to the latter. Then the bride's kin sit. The groom's parents and kin sit on the other side. When all are seated they are served tea, *chang*, yoghurt and '*bras sil*.

Gift giving is an important part of the *chang sa*. Firstly the bride's mother's brother reads a list of *nor skal* property brought by the bride. Then the groom's kin

give gifts to the new couple, which consist of ornaments, clothes, brass utensils, money, cattle, *kha btags* etc. and are collectively called *rngan pa*. Thirdly, the groom's kin give clothes, utensils, money, *kha btags* etc. to the bride's kin. And lastly, the bride's kin give clothes, utensils, cattle, *kha btags* etc. to the groom's parents. These days, they may give chairs, tables, sofas, carpets, cupboards, etc. also.

After finishing the gift giving, they begin eating and drinking which last all day. Men also play games such as mahjong, *sbag* and *sho*, and sing songs. When the time comes to leave, guests burn incense and utter a short prayer throwing up *rtsam pa*.

In the evening of the wedding day, a Bon swastika is drawn with wheat flour on the new couple's bed and is covered by bedding. The bridesmaid helps in its preparation. The next morning, people come to see the mark destroyed.

The groom's family holds feasts on other days also inviting close kin and friends. These may continue for several days.

1.2.2. Comparison with other works on the Bonpo wedding

Samten Karmay writes about marriage rituals utilizing written texts. There he refers to seven (or eight if prayer-making is included) main parts of the marriage ritual described by Kong-spul Yon-tan rgya-mtsho in the 19th century (Karmay 1975:212-213). (Skorupski and Cech also refer to the same work (Skorupski and Cech 1984:14).) These do not clearly correspond to those of the marriage ceremony process told by the present informant. For example, it is stated that, as the fifth part, a new name is given to the bride, but this is not the case according to my informant. The procedure for a wedding in this century cited by Skorupski and Cech naturally has more aspects shared by the present material.

As we have seen above and as summarized in Table 1, the marriage process mainly consists of divination, engagement, the procession to fetch the bride, gift giving and a drink party. Important aspects observed in the process are: concern for the congeniality of the couple (and the two sides that become related), that of the property given to the bride and gifts made from each side to the other, auspiciousness expressed in the giving of *kha btags*, in the songs sung and verses uttered on several occasions and while making offerings, symbols specific to the wedding such as an arrow, the creation of a social bond between the new relatives and of course between the couple which is expressed in many procedures including the gift giving, merrymaking and a few ritualistic procedures.

As for the arrow, Samten Karmay and others refer to three arrows, stating that the first symbolizes divinity, the second manhood and the third unknown (Karmay 1975:211, Skorupski and Cech 1984:17). But my informant could remember only one arrow. Combined with a spindle referred to in the above work, they seem to have played a more important role before. But the custom of placing the spindle (on the pillow) cannot be seen today and the symbolic meaning is largely forgotten.

As a whole, the wedding today appears mainly as a social occasion in which exchange of good words, gift giving and merrymaking stand out.

1.3. Death rituals

1.3.1. Funeral

When a death occurs, the dead person's name, age, time of death, animal corresponding to the year of birth etc. are told to a lama, who makes a divination on the deceased's condition in the afterlife as well as on the necessary rituals, time and directions to carry out the corpse and the proper people to touch it. Notice of death is sent to the Rinpoche(s) with *kha btags*, money and paper on which the dead person's name is written. He (they) pray(s) in his (their) own monastery.

Family members put the dead person's cherished belongings outside of the house lest their soul should come back. Fear of the dead person's soul seems to be great among the Bonpos, as it is among other Tibetans. Lamas purify the corpse with holy water into which a prayer has been chanted and the corpse is put in a sitting position in a kind of coffin (a carton box is used as a 'coffin' in Kathmandu these days).

In order to convey their condolences, the kin, friends, etc. visit the dead person's house with money, butter lamp and incense. (They may ask other people to carry these things.) They express condolences and help prepare for rituals and meals. People other than Bonpos, even including non-Tibetans, may come for it. Ten to twelve lamas are invited to make prayers; they continue chanting sutras and making offerings for three days.

The 'coffin' on which *kha btags* is put is placed in the corner of the room facing inside. Close kin prostrate themselves twice a day in the altar room or in the room where death occurred.

For the cremation, males make preparations by piling firewood in the north-western foot of Swayambhu (a Buddhist sacred place in Kathmandu), where there is a cremation ground for Buddhists. The corpse is laid on the pyre face upwards. Unlike in Hindu custom, there is no specification about who should set it on fire, but any kin can do it. Many lamas read sutras and offer *gtor ma* to the pyre.

Into the cremation fire, lamas put numerous pieces of wood on which sutra are written, miniature umbrellas (*gdugs*) and flags (*rgyal mtshan*) as in *homa* (Hindu fire sacrifice). But my informant says that this is mostly obsolete these days.

Ashes after the cremation are gathered and thrown into a river. Some people take them to Benares. Some of the ashes are mixed with soil and bones and moulded into *tsha tsha* (hemispherical small images).

After returning from the cremation, people purify themselves by sprinkling holy water and by receiving incense smoke on their bodies and heads.

1.3.2. Post-mortuary rituals

In a ritual called *bdun tshigs* (literally 'segment of 7') which is performed

every week after death, the deceased's family distribute food (*rtsam pa*, sweets, etc.) to their kin and friends.

In the *bzhi dgu* ('49 days') ritual, the dead person's family put an iron pan outside the house. In this pan, they burn food (*rtsam pa*, butter, etc.) on charcoal. It is said that the dead person's soul comes to eat it. Lama(s) read sutras while playing instruments.

In the *tshogs brgya* or '100 offerings', many pieces of bread made of *rtsam pa* and *gtor ma* are offered to goddesses.

A ritual called *zhi khro* ('tranquillity and wrath') is held three days after the deathday every year, in which lamas read sutras and make offerings in the altar room. This is repeated for five to ten years). [This is said to be unique to Bon by the informant.]

The mourning period usually lasts for one year. Family members and the family of a married out woman's birthplace refrain from wearing ornaments, new clothes, playing and listening to music and holding festivities.

1.3.3. Comparison with other works on the Bonpo death rituals

C. Ramble gives a detailed description and analysis of the mortuary rites in a Bon village called Lubra in Nepal. Though there are differences between his material and the present one, such as the absence here of the rotation of the role to take care of the funeral, breaking the back of the deceased and of the absence of the Sky Burial (only cremation is done here), there are also many similarities. Placing the body in a sitting position, the existence of the notion of death pollution and making of *tsha tsha* are a few examples. Among them, I take up here the notion that the deceased's soul stays in the 'intermediate stage' for forty-nine days. Ramble refers to the deceased's forty-nine-day sojourn in *bar do* (Ramble 1982:339). My informant, who is not very explicit about the notion concerning death and tends to say 'it's better to ask a lama about it', still thinks that the deceased's soul stays in and around the house and eats what is offered for 49 days. So, offerings should be made during this period, after which it ceases to be so. Though a vessel is used for the offering, the informant denied that the spirit takes up residence there, unlike the notion in Lubra (ibid:340).

On the other hand, Kvaerne's and Brauen's description and analysis mainly concerns the part which is played by the religious specialists. What they deal with corresponds to only a small part of the list of the mortuary procedure in Table 1 here, namely that which concerns prayer.

According to Kvaerne (1985:12, 25), in the ritual which takes place before the cremation, 'the final liberation of the deceased will take place...' and 'the fact that rebirth in the six states of existence within the round of birth and death is no longer possible must be demonstrated ritually'.

Now the transcendental notion of Salvation, though people know such exists, is almost monopolized by the lamas, while lay people are mainly concerned with

forms. Thus, there prevail different levels of explanations and interpretations and some discrepancies between explanations and practice.

Concerning the rituals conducted by lamas with prayers, my informant seems to be content to leave it to religious experts. Though the explanations by specialists are clear-cut, the structuring of the rituals (which is similar to Buddhism) is not based upon such clear ideas and contains parts such as making offerings to the dead which are related to the notion of intermediate stages and the afterlife, which might not be necessary if final Salvation could be attained before cremation.

This kind of difference of knowledge-levels can also be seen in Buddhism and Hinduism. Bon religion shares it in a clearer way.

2. Life cycle rituals among the Bonpos and other peoples

If we compare the Tables and take preceding works into consideration, we can point out that among the Bonpos, births, marriages and deaths are the three occasions in which most of the life cycle events are concentrated, which is parallel to what Skorupski and Cech remarked concerning the Tibetan life cycle rituals based on written texts. An exception may be boys' initiation into monks or girls' into nuns. But this should be treated at a different level as it is not a stage passed through by everyone.

Unlike other societies listed, where there are considerable numbers of life cycle stages marking the growth, transition or transformation of a person, Tibetan Bonpos (or Tibetans in general) don't divide their lives into many named stages nor have many rituals to make demarcations in the otherwise more continuous life process. From a comparative perspective, they perform much less elaborate rituals after birth, during the growth period including puberty, or in the course of old age. When dealing with the life cycle rituals of other societies, we tend to think that it is more common to have a system of rituals to demarcate life cycle stages thickly coloured by religion. But we see here that this is not the case in Bonpo society.

Generally in rituals we can observe repetitive, symbolic, and formal actions. To a certain extent we can find them in Bonpo life cycle events also. Life cycle rituals are so organized in some societies that they, as a total set, serve to get rid of the impurity of and enhance the sacredness of the person who goes through them. A typical example is the Newar life cycle rituals (Table 2). There, the child is purified after birth and goes through an initiation before puberty which confers the child with the purity of the caste it belongs to (the child can no longer receive certain foods from other castes as he had done before). Marriage is consecrated by religion, and in the 'old age ritual' (*budhā jankwa*) an old man (or woman) is worshipped as a god. Further, in the caste societies, rituals are organized in such a way that specific roles in them are allocated to certain people who occupy specific social positions.

By contrast, ordinary human life is basically considered secular in Bonpo society, in which a contrast between the profane and sacred and between purity and impurity is not utilized so extensively in structuring the life cycle stages. This does not mean the absence of a notion of the above contrasts. They exist if we take a wider scope; a typical example is the contrast between the life of lay people and the monastic life in which initiation into sacred life and knowledge constitutes one of the important aspects. Also among the Bonpo society, there is a high flexibility in organization as well as in the way events in life take place. Only in rituals associated with death can we find a certain degree of rigidity concerning time, materials or division of roles.

3. Life cycle events and religion

The scarcity of religious colour in the Bonpo life cycle rituals is quite comparable to what Skorupski and Cech point out regarding Tibetan Buddhists' life cycle events. Though Bonpo life cycle rituals by no means totally lack religious and symbolic aspects, we can still say that they are not central to them. For example, there are acts of house purification after birth (which points to the existence of the notion of purity versus impurity), and divination by priests as regards the congeniality of the couple and the date of a wedding (see Table 1). But these are only marginal events. The wedding is not structured in such a way that worshipping deities by priests constitutes its core. Rather the worship is performed in the morning before the departure of the procession for fetching the bride and the main body of the wedding consists of gift giving, eating and drinking and merrymaking in which parties from both the bride's and groom's sides participate.

Comparative materials show that Hindu or (Newar) Buddhist rituals at birth, initiation and marriage and the Newar old age ritual are structured around the *homa* (fire sacrifice) performed by priests. In Japan, on many occasions from birth to death, people visit various religious places and it is common that they worship and make offerings to deities of different religions (Table 5). It is noted that funerals and post-mortuary rituals in Japan are strongly Buddhism oriented. This aspect shows a parallel to Tibetan customs.

If we go through the Tables from South Asia to East Asia, we notice that there are certain similarities. As pointed out, birth, marriage and death are all celebrated in some way or other, though the extent to which they are related to religion differs considerably. Among them, the ritual of feeding a child for the first time is noticeable. We can find this as *annaprāśan* in the Hindu *saṃskāras* and also in the sets of life cycle rituals in Mithila. Among the Newars, it is *jā nakegu* (to feed rice). In Japan there is a ritual called *kuizome* (to eat for the first time) or *kuwashizome* (to feed for the first time). Thus, we can conceive a chain of societies in which they practise similar 'first feeding rituals'.

It is true that there is an event of feeding *rda ko* for the first time among the Bonpos. But as we have seen above, it is quite secular and not ritualistic. A contrastive case is the Newar *jā nakegu* which has a well-defined name as a ritual and, if performed in a formal way, needs the presence of a priest who worships Hindu or Buddhist deities.

Out of the above contrasts we can say that the Bonpo (or more inclusively Tibetan) life cycle rituals other than the funerals or post-mortuary rituals are not formalized and seldom have names (as events). In them, flexibility predominates over rigidity and formality and priests seldom participate in the core events. Overall they can be said to have a rather vague religious characteristics.

4. Food, preservation of culture and adaptation in a foreign land

It is normal in many societies that food plays a very important role in rituals. We can see that offering of food is quite commonplace among the Bonpos, too. However, if we look at gift giving, we notice that they don't use food so much, at least comparatively. For example the Newars have a custom of frequent exchanging of gifts after childbirth (see Table 2), which is quite foreign to Bonpo society. It is only in the post-mortuary rituals that we come across gifts of food among them. Whereas the gift exchanges among the Newars after childbirth serve to strengthen affinal relations, in Bonpo society, it is during the wedding that gifts are exchanged and both parties associate closely in a long feast.

The symbolic meaning of *rtsam pa* and butter seems to have become more distinct among Tibetans living in Kathmandu than among those in Tibet. In their ordinary life in Kathmandu these days, it is quite usual that they eat *dāl-bhāt* (rice with lentil soup) which is the staple food of many Nepalese. However, they never use *dāl-bhāt* in rituals but use *rtsam pa*, butter etc. in many ritual occasions. When they wish for the healthy growth of children or good social bond or make offerings to the deceased, what they think effective is the materials they have been using for those purposes traditionally rather than newly adopted things. Ritual in this way is related to conservativeness to some extent.

Though customs tend to be preserved when they are related and sanctioned by rituals, they are by no means changeless. Problems may occur in foreign settings like Kathmandu. When someone dies among the Bonpos, they ask a priest (lama) about the proper time to carry the corpse out. And it is usual that they keep the corpse inside the house while chanting for a few days. This is unbearable for such neighbours as the Hindus or Newar Buddhists. Knowing that their custom is unwelcome to the neighbours, Bonpos hide the occurrence of death and pretend that the chanting is being done for some festival or something else. It is not easy in Kathmandu to preserve the corpse as it is, especially in the hot season. On such occasions, they make efforts to preserve it by using ice etc. (Other Tibetans are said

to take similar measures.)

In the Kathmandu Valley, cremation is the only method to dispose of a corpse among the Bonpos or other Tibetan people. This again is related to the fact that they are now living in a different place surrounded by other cultures. However, the adoption of cremation is not necessarily the result of influence from Hindus, but the result of their selection in which they have taken up the only possible way among the traditional methods. Despite its desirabilities, they had to give up Sky Burials in this foreign land. Their adaptation was made in such a way that they have lost one aspect of their unique culture.

5. Life cycle rituals of the Bonpos and other Tibetans

It is difficult to discern differences in the life cycle rituals of the Bonpos and other Tibetans unless we go into details of their rituals. As examples of such details, we can take up the chanting of holy hymns at the time of death and post-mortuary rituals and *sbyin sreg* or the fire sacrifice on the spot just after cremation. In the latter, 108 pieces of carved wood on which sutras are written in gold and silver are thrown into the fire with other ritual objects just after cremation. The sutras written are specific to Bon. But what is written in them is not known to ordinary participants like the present informant, who simply says that he doesn't know the content of the sutras but lamas know them; a common reply when dealing with laymen. Unless we resort to other research methods and ask specialists, it is difficult to discern the real difference between Bon and Buddhist customs.

In this context, the following remark by Kvaerne is quite relevant.

'To the casual observer, Tibetans who follow the tradition of Bon and those who adhere to the Buddhist faith can hardly be distinguished. They all share a common Tibetan heritage. In particular, there is little distinction with regard to popular religious practices. Traditionally, all Tibetans assiduously follow the same method of accumulating religious merit... Such practices include turning prayer wheels... It is only when these practices are scrutinized more closely that differences appear; ...' (Kvaerne 1995:12-13).

On the level of the present analysis, as my informant remarked, the Bonpos' and the Tibetan Buddhists' customs are quite similar. It can be added also that the acts of accumulating religious merit do not include life cycle events except death rituals. Tibetans, laymen and scholars alike, do not consider many of the life cycle events in religious terms. For example, the wedding ceremony is called *chang sa* in which drinking and merrymaking is emphasized, while marriage is characterized by Karmay as 'a mundane affair' (Karmay 1975:207). These characteristics seem to be shared by Tibetans in general.

6. The influence of the Hindu *saṃskāra* and written works

There is no large discrepancy among the Bonpos between the normative set of rituals and the set of those which are actually performed, which is quite commonly observed among the Hindus or Buddhist Newars. Among them, when I asked about rituals, answers sometimes differed between religious specialists and laymen as well as between men and women; there were people who tended to give information they had acquired from written texts or specialists, which largely corresponded with *saṃskāras*. For them 'classical' *saṃskāras* are not old or obsolete but ideal for the rituals actually performed. They were written in Sanskrit for use by religious specialists, but these days are published in other languages also. They differ from what people perform but still exist as a normative set side by side with actual practices.

Written works on Tibetan life cycle rituals by Tibetans are not absent; the works by Thubten Sangay published in Dharamsala which Skorupski and Cech (1984:6) depended on and Kilty translated (Thubten Sangay 1984) and the work by Kong-sprul Yon-tan rgya-mtsho to which Samten Karmay refers (Karmay 1975:207) are examples. In any event, the position of such written materials against actually performed rituals is quite different from what Hindu *saṃskāras* stand in relation to the actual life cycle rituals. Though they seem to have been written in order to give religious significance to life cycle events, they don't seem to serve as norms for actual practice. They are more like academic works and are distant from those who conduct or practise rituals. (Skorupski and Cech remark that Thubten Sangay's work was made 'with the concern of preserving the traditions connected with these events among Tibetans in exile' (Skorupski and Cech 1984:6).)

Other than these, I failed to find any normative set of Bonpo rituals. That kind of set, if such exists, may be kept and inherited among specialists, but as far as life cycle rituals are concerned, there seem to be no such specialists on the spot.

When I asked a Bon priest for advice on my research into Bonpo life cycle rituals, he unhesitatingly answered that it is better for me to ask lay people about them. This attitude is quite different from what is expected of Hindu Brahmans or Newar Buddhist priests (Gubhāju, Vajrācārya) when they answered the same question. These priests are specialists on ritual matters including life cycle rituals and think that it is they who can provide proper knowledge on those matters. Their attitudes are in stark contrast; among the Bonpos (or rather among the Tibetans), not only is there no monopoly by priests of knowledge on ritual matters, but also they are quite uninterested in them.

While it is true that lamas are asked to play some role in certain rituals, most of them concentrate on those related to death and hence final salvation or afterlife. Otherwise, their participation is quite partial, being limited to preparatory worship, divination or some optional roles. They don't seem to be expected to play a part for

the (spiritual) welfare of the people in various life stages in this world. This is quite in line with the Buddhist way of dealing with the matter (we will come back to this point in the conclusion).

The main performers of life cycle rituals are laymen, and rituals other than those concerned with death are not religious. Though I have used the term 'ritual' for the events at and after childbirth and in marriage, it is only in the broader sense of the term (which includes stereotyped social behaviour like traditional etiquette and convention) that I use it here. The term may not be applicable if used in its narrower definition (e.g. stereotyped behaviour concerned with phenomena and entities that lie beyond normal human control or are of a supernatural character).

Conclusion

It is widely observed in South and East Asia that life is divided into many named stages loaded with religious and ritual meanings. Tibet, though neighbouring both of them, does not show a marked continuity as far as life cycle rituals are concerned; Tibetan society is different from any of the societies taken up here for comparison in that it lacks the elaborate system of demarcating various stages of life with rituals. The relation between classic or written material and actual practice concerning life cycle events is also very different.

We briefly summarize the relationship between religion and life cycle rituals in the societies taken up here.

Among the Bonpos, the rituals of death (e.g. funeral and post-mortuary rituals) are highly religious, but religious overtones are very thin in other life cycle events. By contrast, among the Hindus (including the Hindu section of the Newars) and Newar Buddhists, life cycle rituals as a whole are religiously organized. The Japanese system differs from all of them. Though Japanese life cycle rituals in general are religious, it is characteristic that different kinds of religion are practised in different stages; namely Buddhism for funeral and post-mortuary rites and mainly Shintoism in other life cycle rituals such as marriage, initiation and birth. In wedding ceremonies these days, Christianity, at least in form, is also becoming popular.

In this respect, it has been discussed that Buddhism, as far as its doctrine is concerned, does not lay emphasis on life cycle rituals. Iwao Shima compares Theravada and Hindu rituals and asserts as follows. 'Whereas Hinduism has had the tradition of Hindu law stipulating the rites of passage to be performed in social life and preserved a complex system of formalized rituals in the form of more than ten *samskāras* such as for initiations, marriages and funerals, the Theravada Buddhism in which monastic life is the basis, has not positively dealt with the rites of passage to be conducted in various stages of social life' (Shima 1995:69, translated by Ishii). David Gellner considers the relationship between Japanese

Buddhism and rituals in his paper on syncretism by utilizing Gombrich's scheme on Theravada Buddhism. There he asserts that Buddhism did not aspire to fulfil the sanctification of the stages of the life cycle and other human needs and depended on other systems to fulfil those needs and hence has remained accretive (Gellner 1997:281).

If we are to use the above term and compare life cycle rituals of societies dealt with here, we can see quite distinctively the accretion from Hinduism among the Newar Buddhists' life cycle rituals and mixed form of accretion among those of the Japanese but little accretion in those of the Bonpos. Among the latter, life cycle rituals except for the death rituals are scarcely religiously organized. It is rather better to apply another term than 'ritual' if this were used with a religious connotation. They may be called secular customs that carry little connotation of the sacredness in relation to the stages of life. In this sense, this analysis on Bonpo 'life cycle rituals' may express that Bon religion does not even have to be accretive and can do without the sanctification of the stages of life. Thus we can conclude that it is not universal in human societies to organize life stages in a religious way; Tibetan society including that of the Bonpos, providing one such example.

As to the relation between Bon and Tibetan Buddhism, G. Samuel asserts that 'Bonpo and *chos pa* were, in effect, two groups of Buddhists who for historical reasons became rivals and adopted contrasting identities' (Samuel 1993:326). The materials and analysis in this paper does not contradict his point.

* I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Sadako Nagano who generously gave me information on preceding works and to Prof. Yasuhiko Nagano and Dr. Izumi Hoshi who kindly checked the spelling and meaning of Tibetan words.

Table 1 Bonpo life cycle rituals

During pregnancy: Good food, walking and keeping warm are said to be good for pregnant women.

Childbirth

Birth - No special midwife. Any experienced woman can help.

No special place for disposal of umbilical cord.

After delivery - Purification by changing clothes, incense and holy water.

Mother eats special food.

About one month after childbirth - Naming by lama.

About two months after childbirth - Feeding baby for the first time with food other than milk.

Eight months to one year - Piercing of child's ears.

Seven to ten years - Some may enter monasteries.

Marriage

Divination (*mo*) by lama on couple's congeniality etc.

Engagement - Groom's kin visit bride's house with presents.

20 days to one month after - People on the groom's side visit the bride's side with presents.

Wedding procession, ceremony and party

Procession to fetch bride

- Groom's side people visit bride's house with presents and are entertained.
- Groom's party returns in procession with bride and her bridal property.
- Groom's side women sing auspicious songs at three places on the way.
- Bride and others receive food from three women some distance before groom's house.

Greeting

- Man on groom's side leads bride with *kha btags* into groom's house.
- Groom's family give *kha btags* to all of bride's party in front of groom's house.
- Groom's mother gives wheat and salt to bride, who throws them in air.
- Groom's mother puts butter to bride's top hair.

Gift giving and Drink party (*chang sa*)

- Groom's side people sing songs when bride enters altar room.
- After some food is served, *nor skal* (bridal property) list is read by bride's mother's brother.
- Giving gifts from both sides.
- Eating and drinking all day. Men may play games.
- Next morning, people come to see Bon swastika drawn with flour on bed is broken.

Funeral

Death - Lama makes divination on the deceased's afterlife and necessary procedure etc.

Dead person's cherished belongings are put outside the house.

Corpse is put in coffin and placed inside house. Notice is sent to Rinpoche(s).

Condolences - Kin, friends etc. come for condolences and help with rituals and meals.

Prayers - Lamas chant sutras and make offerings in a room where coffin is placed.

Prostration - Close kin prostrate themselves twice a day.

Cremation - Males prepare for cremation. Lamas read sutras and offer *gtor ma*.

sbin sreg - Lamas perform fire sacrifice like *homa*. (Mostly obsolete.)

tsha tsha (hemispherical small images) are made with ashes, soil and bones.

Ashes are thrown into river.

Purification - People purify themselves with holy water and incense smoke.

Post mortuary rituals

bdun tshigs - Every week after death, dead person's family distribute food to kin and friends.

zhe dgu - Dead person's family cook food for the deceased. Lama(s) read sutras.

tshogs brgya - Pieces of bread are offered to goddesses.

zhi khro - Lamas read sutras and make offerings three days after death day every year.

Table 2 Newar life cycle rituals [castes: Shrestha (Shr) and Maharjan (Mhj)]

Childbirth:

Macā buigu - *Didi aji* (midwife) helps delivery and purify room and clothes.

Piḥ dhenegu [3(6) days after childbirth] - *Nāy* (Butcher) caste woman) cuts umbilical cord and throws it to *chwāsa* (ritual disposal place).

Macābu bēkegu (4-7 days after childbirth) 'childbirth purification' - The newborn child, mother, family members and *didī aji* take purification bath and cut nails. Some family members shave heads. Exchange of gifts between relatives. Feast.

Various affinal gift exchanges and feeding of mother and child until *Jānakegu*.

Dhau-baji nakaḥ wanegu (*dhau-baji nakegu*) - Pregnant woman is fed by her parents with *dhau-baji* (beaten rice with curds).

Macā buḥ kanke chwayegu - Messenger to tell of childbirth (with gifts in some cases) is sent to new mother's natal family.

Ghyaḥle siyā baji nakaḥ wanegu (*cāku baji nakaḥ wanegu*) - Women of new mother's natal family come to feed her one or two days after birth.

Macā buḥ bēkegu - Several days after birth, family members purify themselves by bathing and cutting nails. House is purified by midwife. Mother and child are given food (plus clothes and utensils in some cases) by mother's natal family.

Several kinds of food are distributed to neighbours at the door. Family and close kin hold feast.

Lā nakaḥ wanegu - Baby's maternal grandmother comes with meat and other food one or two weeks after birth.

Cāku nakaḥ wanegu - Baby's maternal grandmother comes with molasses and other food two or three weeks after birth.

Macā buḥ swaḥ wanegu - Baby's maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother's siblings come with food about one month after birth. In some cases, feast (*dāmrā bhway*) is held for the first-born child.

Macā buḥ swaḥ wayegu (*māju lā nakaḥ wayegu*) - Baby's paternal grandmother visits the child and its mother staying in the latter's parents' house with meat and other food (one month and several days after birth).

Jā nakegu, *Macā jankwa* (son: 7 months, daughter: 5-6 months) - Feeding rice for the first time (with worship).

Early age:

Bwashkhā (*Busākhā*), *caurā* / *cuḍākarma* - Boys' (3-7 years old) heads are shaved and ears pierced.

Initiation (boy):

Kaytā pūjā 'loincloth ritual' - Boys (up to about 15 years old) worship deities with fire sacrifice (*homa*) led by a Hindu (in case of Shr) or a Buddhist (in case of Mhj) priest, have heads shaved, start for a learning trip but stopped at seven steps by mother's brother.

Initiation (girl):

Ihi 'wedding' - Girls (about 5 to 10) undergo mock marriage with god *Nārāyaṇ* or *bel* fruit (Buddha) in group, led by Hindu or Buddhist priest(s) conducting *homa*.

Bārā tayegu: Girls just before menarche stay in rooms without sunshine and without

seeing males for 12 days.

Marriage:

Gway biyegu 'giving of betel nuts' (marriage contract) - Betel nuts, food and cloth are given by the bridegroom's side. *Lami* (go-between) hands betel nuts to bride.

Bihā (Wedding):

Gway kāyegu - Bride's kin, neighbours and friends give goods and money to bride and receive betel nuts. Feast.

Janta - People on the bridegroom's side go to the bride's house in procession. Feast and exchange of gifts. Procession returns to the bridegroom's house with bride.

Du kāyegu 'to receive inside' - Worship by priest in front of the bridegroom's house. Seniormost woman of the groom's agnatic group leads bride inside.

Hwākegu (Main part of marriage ritual) - Bride's and groom's heads are banged against each other after worship of gods. New couple eat from one plate. Feast.

Old age ritual:

Budhā jankwa - Celebration of old age at 77 and twice after. Gods are worshipped with *homa*. Old man is carried on palanquin as god. Feast.

Funeral:

Sithā yenkegu - *Sanā guthi* (funeral organization) members in charge carry dead person on bier to riverside cremation ground accompanied by other members. Dead person's son sets fire to firewood.

Bicā phayegu 'receiving of condolence' - *Sanā guthi* members gather in front of the deceased person's house and offer condolences the day after death.

Post-mortuary rituals:

Lwaḥcā (6 days after death) - Married out daughters come crying with food to offer to the deceased.

Nhaynhumā (7 days after death) - Married out daughters and agnates offer food (rice, *dāl*, milk, curds, liquor etc.) to the deceased.

Du bēkegu 'purification of inside (sorrow)' - Agnates shave heads and cut nails. Priest offers *piṇḍa* (rice ball) to the deceased and reads *veda*.

Jā pwa khā wanegu - The main mourner cooks rice in front of the house and offers it to the deceased on a leaf on a tree branch along a river.

Ekādaśī (11 days after death) - Offering of food to the deceased inside house.

Ghaḥsu (12 days after death) 'House purification' - Agnates bathe, purify floor and let priest conduct *homa* (fire sacrifice). Mourning period ends except for the main mourner.

Śrāddha [*lattyā* (1.5 month), *khulā* (6 months), *dakilā* (1 year), *niḍathiti* (2 years)] - Deceased person's family members offer food (*piṇḍa* etc.) to the deceased. Feast.

Table 3 Maithil life cycle rituals**Childbirth:**

Baccā janma 'childbirth' - Astrologer gives baby a name (kept secret afterwards).

Chatiyār (6 days after birth) - Goddess writes child's fate on its forehead.

Annaprāśan (7 months after birth) - First feeding of cereals (rice).

Jivikopārjan - To foretell child's fate by which of various tools it picks up.

Early age:

Kānchedāi (*kānchedī*) / *karṇavedh* (1-3 years old) - Piercing ears (by Goldsmiths).

Mūraṇ (*muṇḍaṇ*), *nichāur* (3-5 years old) - Child's hair is cut for the first time after worshipping goddess Bhagvatī.

Initiation:

Upanayan (only for boys) - Brahmans perform *homa* (fire sacrifice) and give sacred threads and yellow robes to boys (with heads shaved), and teach them mantra in a specially made ritual house (*maṇḍap*). Complex preparatory rituals are performed a day before (for gathering soil, spinning thread, sacrificing goat (*kumran*) and for tying boys' hair).

Marriage:

Siddhānt (marriage contract) - Exchange of written marriage contract with worship by a priest.

Sādī, *byāha* / *vivāha* - Wedding.

Barātī (*bariati*) - Procession for visit and feast (made by each side).

Āmmau byāha 'marriage of mango and *mau*' - Bride ties red paper on mango and *mau* trees.

Parikṣan - Examination of groom (with naked torso) by women of the bride's side.

Aṭhoṅgar (*oṭhaṅgar*) - Brahmans and groom husk rice in mortar with pestles.

Kanyā nirikṣan - A ritual game in which the groom is expected to point out his bride.

Kanyādān - Father of the bride gives her to the groom, after worship with fire sacrifice and mantra by a Brahman.

Lava ciriyā - New couple encircle fire altar offering parched rice (*lava*).

Sindur dān (*matiyā sindūr*) - Putting vermilion by the groom on the bride's parting of hair.

Dahī maṅgal (*mauhak*) - Taking of auspicious food by the new couple.

Gaurī pūjā - Worship of goddess Gaurī by the new couple.

Cumāun - Giving auspicious goods and food to the new couple.

Nainā jogin - Women of bride's side go around in *kohvar ghar* (marriage room) holding groom's nose.

Siḍhar - Next morning, the new couple fetch water in two *siḍhar* (clay pot).

Mauhak - Husband and wife give food to each other's plate.

Ahivāṭak pātil - Women of the bride's side mock the groom.

Caturthī (4 days after main rituals) - Fire sacrifice with mantra by Brahmans. Marriage is consummated.

Dvirāgmān (6 months to 7 years after marriage) - Bride finally moves to her husband's house. Ritual trial of her strength. Mocking.

Bharphorī (4 days after above) - Bride is mocked. She makes large wheat flour cakes.

Funeral:

Go dān - It is desirable to die grasping the tail of a cow, which is given to a Brahman as *dan*.

Dāh saṃskār - Cremation. Corpse is carried on a bamboo bier. Deceased person's son shaves head and bathes, puts fire in the dead person's mouth and to the pyre.

Asthi sañcay (2-4 days after cremation) - Deceased person's son goes to the Ganges and throw part of ashes. A mound (*sārā*) is made from remaining ashes and soil at the cremation spot.

Post-mortuary rituals:

Piṇḍa dān - Offering of *piṇḍa* (rice balls) to the deceased by a son (until *ekādaśa*).

Ekādaśa śrāddha (11 days after death) / *dvādaśa śrāddha* (12 days after death) - Offering of *piṇḍa* to the deceased and ancestors and gift giving to priests.

Chāyā (every month, at least for a year) - Deceased person's family gives feast to more than five people of the same caste.

Māsik śrāddha (on the day of death, every month) / *varṣik śrāddha*, *ekodiṣṭ* (on the day of death, every year) - Deceased person's family invites priest(s) and gives offerings to the deceased.

Table 4 Saṃskāra ('classic' life cycle rituals)

Before birth:

Garbhādhāna - Ritual of conception.

Puṃsavana (3 months after above) - To pray for son's birth.

Sīmantonmayana (4, 6 or 8 months after conception) - Ritual to part pregnant woman's hair.

Childbirth:

Jātakarma - Birth ritual.

Nāmakaraṇa - Naming ritual.

Niṣkramaṇa (4 months after birth) - Baby goes outside for the first time to see the sun.

Annaprāśana - First feeding of cereals (rice).

Early age:

Karṇavedha - Piercing of ears.

Cuḍākarma - Ritual of shaving head.

Initiation:

Vidyārambha - Beginning of learning.

Upanayana - Ritual of approaching the true self.

Keśānta - Ritual to cut hair.

Vedārambha - Beginning of learning *veda*.

Samāvartana - Ritual to return home (after completing study in guru's house).

Marriage:

Vivāha - Wedding.

Funeral:

Antyoṣṭi - Death ritual.

Table 5 Life cycle rituals in Tokyo before the 1940s

Childbirth:

Pregnancy - On the day of 'dog' five month after conception, go-between and pregnant woman's parents are invited and husband's mother puts wide belt on her daughter-in-law. The day is celebrated by making red rice with beans.

Delivery - The first delivery usually takes place on the wife-taking side in a hut at the back of the house or a storeroom where *tatami* (straw mats) have been removed.

Delivery used to be made in a sitting position.

Abstinence - 7, 14, 21, 30 to 33 days. After 7 (or other numbers of) days the mother purifies her body by washing and is allowed to cook after purifying hearth by salt. She is not allowed to approach 'well deity' for 21 days after delivery.

Third day celebration - Rice balls covered with sweet bean paste are offered to protective deities with prayer for the health of the newborn child. (Protective deities of the newborn child and its mother : *Ubusuna-(no)-kami*, *Suitenguu* etc.)

Seventh night celebration - A name is given to the baby. When no agreement is reached, it may be determined by lot in a Shinto Shrine.

First toilet visit - The baby is taken out of the delivery room for the first time and taken to the toilet. Deity of delivery and deity of toilet are worshipped.

First visit to a shrine - Boys visit a Shinto shrine on the 31st day after birth and girls on the 33rd day.

First feeding (of rice) [*'kuwashizome'*, *'kuizome'*] - On the 100th day after birth, red rice with beans is cooked, offered to the deities in the miniature shrine in the house and prepared for serving. In some places people try to let the baby eat. In others, only pretension is made.

First new year - A boy is given a set of bow and arrows (to defeat evils) and a girl a battledore, each by the go-between, child's mother's parents' family and other kin.

First birthday - Cooked rice is made into paste and then to cakes (*mochi*), which are put in the *tokonoma* (alcove) and near the child's bed.

Seven-Five-Three (Three, Five and Seven years' celebration) - Children are taken to Shinto shrines by their parents.

Coming of age - Boys are regarded as grown-up at the age of 15, from when they are allowed to drink. Menarche is celebrated within family with red rice with beans.

Yado (lodging together) - Young men drink or study together in a vacant house, shrine or temple. Problem sometimes occurred when they sneaked in a lodging of girl weavers late at night.

Marriage:

Beginning - Mostly arranged marriages. Cases of marriage for love also exist.

Engagement - Men who serve as two kinds of go-between (*hashikake* and *sewanin*) visit the houses of both sides and arrange the wedding date. They carry lists of engagement gifts.

Wedding - In the early morning, go-betweens, representatives of the groom's side's kin and local associations (in odd numbers) go to the house of the bride to fetch her. Both sides sit in lines facing each other and bride's parents and groom exchange a cup of sake (liquor) to make them in-laws. Next the cups are exchanged to make brothers-in-law and affines. People on the groom's side visit bride's kin. The bride visits a shrine for worship.

Wedding procession - Marrying-in procession from the bride's side starts after the departure of the groom's party. The bride enters the groom's house from the kitchen door.

Driving out evils - 19 and 33 for women, 25 and 42 for men are considered as unlucky years. They may visit Buddhist temples and/or Shinto shrines.

Old age celebration - 61 years of age is said to be '*honkegaeri*' (return to the original fortune). The old man celebrates it by putting red clothes and cap.

Funeral:

Death - The dead person's family and kin calls his/her name in a loud voice. They put water on the dead person's lips with cotton or with fingers. News of death is sent to next door houses, to other neighbours and then to associations. Men and women of various associations prepare for funeral (making rice balls to put near the pillow and a bowl of rice and clothes to give to the deceased).

Change of pillow - The deceased is moved to a room deep inside the house and laid there with head toward the north.

Bathing - *Tatami* (straw mats) are removed, hot water is put in a washbasin in which cold water has been put first (opposite to normal) and close kin bathe the deceased.

Putting into coffin - The corpse is put in a coffin in a sitting position. A pen and ink and cigarettes for men or sewing things for women are put in the coffin.

Pall-bearers - Nephews used to carry the coffin, but in many cases people from village associations carry it.

Offerings - In the morning of the funeral procession, a bowl of rice and several kinds of rice balls made outside by assisting women are offered to the deceased.

Funeral procession - Gongs, lamps, torches, coffin, canopy, mortuary tablet, meal set, flags, paper flowers are carried. Kin and association members follow. Straw sandals worn by kin in the procession are thrown in the cemetery.

Post mortuary ritual days:

(First) 7th day, 35th day and 49th day - Family, kin and others worship in a Buddhist way and visit the new tomb. The deceased's family makes rice cakes and sweets and distribute them to kin and families belonging to associations.

Yearly rituals - After the 49th day and the 100th day, Buddhist rituals are conducted. After that are observed the first *higan* (spring and autumn equinoctial weeks when Buddhist ancestor worship is done), *bon* (a period in summer when, it is believed in Japanese Buddhism, the ancestors' souls would come back), and ancestral rituals of 1st, 3rd, 7th,

13th and 33rd years after death.

Notes

- 1) The Newars (Nevārs) are the indigenous population of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. They have been deeply influenced by Indian civilization though their mother tongue is Tibeto-Burman. The Maithils are proud Hindus living in Mithila (Mithilā) extending from northern Bihar (Bihār) to the eastern Nepalese Tarai (Tarāī, the southern plains). For the Japanese (Tokyo) material, I depend upon the study of Miyamoto (1975).

- 2) Concerning birth, I will add one interesting point concerning dreams as regards the spread of cultural elements here. It is noted by Thubten Sangay that auspicious dreams which the mother has during pregnancy include ‘those of picking and eating fruit, of certain auspicious objects such as a white conch shell, of wearing fine jewellery, of seeing and receiving representations of the body, speech and mind of the Enlightened Ones, of sun-rise, of wearing fine clothing, of playing musical instruments etc.’ (Sangay 1984:3, there is a similar sentence also in Skorupski and Cech 1984:6-7).

When I asked a Bonpo (male) informant about such dreams, he simply answered that it would be natural to have a good delivery if one had good dreams. After that I had the opportunity to ask the same question to a Newar woman and a Parbate (Hill) Hindu woman in Nepal respectively and was surprised to find similar beliefs to what is cited above among both of them.

According to the Newar woman, a good child will be born if a pregnant woman dreams of fruits, radish, chilli, a white conch shell, god or Buddha, or sun-rays.

According to the Parbate Hindu woman, good dreams during pregnancy are those of fruits, radish, chilli, the sun, the sky, god or Buddha, or a cow.

Thus with some differences in details, two Nepalese groups and Thubten Sangay’s material share the same notion about dreams during pregnancy, though my Bonpo informant does not.

Different interpretations may be possible concerning this point. One possibility is that my informant, being male, wasn’t sufficiently versed about pregnant women’s dreams, though the above notion is widespread in Tibet and sub-Himalayan areas including the Hill Hindu areas. In this case, we may be able to postulate a broad culture area covering the north and south of the Himalayas.

Another possibility is the flow of information to (or borrowing by) Thubten Sangay’s informants’ group from some of the sub-Himalayan groups. In some points, information compiled by Thubten Sangay contains elements that are not genuinely Tibetan. For example, concerning a *gto* performed to encourage a baby to walk if it has not done so after becoming one year, a white cow to put the baby astride facing backwards, is mentioned (Skorupski and Cech 1984:11). But my informant did not know of this and simply said “We don’t have cows in Tibet”. The way of cultural contact seems to differ greatly among Tibetans of various places of origin.

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