

Expression of Ladakhi Cultural Regionality: Viewed from Language and Local Rituals

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Abstract

Ladakhi culture cannot be discussed without reference to its relations to Tibet and Tibetan culture. The Ladakh dynasty started its rule by one of the three sons of Skyid lde nyima gon (or Nyima gon), the great-grandson of Lang Darma who was the last emperor of the Old Tibetan Empire, also known as an anti-Buddhist king. Later, various Tibetan Buddhist schools have spread subsequently to Ladakh and converted its residents to Tibetan Buddhism. However, when viewed in terms as its polity as a kingdom, Ladakh has not always maintained friendly relations with Tibet, as exemplified by the war that took place in the 17th century between Ladakh and a joint Tibetan-Mongolian army. Rather, Ladakh has been ruled by an independent polity different from that of Tibet, and has maintained its cultural identity. This paper aims to reveal the regionality of contemporary Ladakhi culture as well as its Pan-Tibetan aspects, dealing with how the cultural identity of the Ladakhi is expressed in terms of language and religion, specifically basing on local ritual tradition as well as activities engaged in by the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) in order to maintain Ladakhi culture and language.

Keywords

Ladakhi culture, regionality, language, local rituals

ラダック文化にみる地域性の表出 —言語とローカルな儀礼実践から—

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ラダック文化, 地域性, 言語, ローカルな儀礼実践

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1. Introduction

Often called Western Tibet or Little Tibet, Ladakh has been an area that has developed historically with a close relationship with Tibet. However, when viewed in terms of its polity as a kingdom, Ladakh has not always maintained friendly relations with Tibet, as exemplified by the war that took place in the 17th century between Ladakh and a joint Tibetan-Mongolian army. Moreover, the Leh District in Ladakh has a history of majority Buddhist Ladakhi living side by side with a minority of Ladakhi Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and Christians (Moravians). Therefore, it is better to consider that Ladakh has been ruled by an independent polity different from that of Tibet and has maintained its cultural identity, while it maintains a cultural and economic relationship with Tibet.

The independence and partition of India and Pakistan has greatly changed the religious and political landscape of Ladakh. The closing of the border between Ladakh and Tibet has stopped the communication between them, while the incorporation of Ladakh into the Jammu and Kashmir State of India caused a revolution in the political dynamic between Buddhists and Muslims. The Ladakhi became under political control of the dominant Kashmiri Muslims. Thus, the Buddhist Ladakhis have often launched heated political campaigns calling for Union Territory Status for Ladakh and Scheduled Tribe Status for the Ladakhi while the Jammu and Kashmir government has promoted a policy with disproportionate emphasis on Muslims.

On the other hand, the establishment of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the influx of Tibetan refugees into India have reactivated communication between Ladakh and Tibet. In 1969, a Tibetan refugee settlement was opened in Choglamsar in the precinct of Leh town, and

another was opened in the Changtang area in 1989. Although contact between Ladakh and Tibet was formerly confined to such occasions in which a Ladakhi novice monk would learn Buddhism in the great monastery or that a lay Ladakhi would visit Tibet with a trading caravan, the opening of Tibetan refugee settlements in Ladakh has made Ladakhis come into contact with Tibetans in their everyday lives.

Taking the historicity of Ladakh into consideration, I discuss the expression of regionality of contemporary Ladakhi culture in terms of its intimate relationship with Tibet, dealing with how the cultural identity of the Ladakhi has been expressed in terms of language and religion. Specifically, the focus is on local ritual traditions as well as activities engaged by the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) to maintain Ladakhi culture and language.

2. Historicity of Ladakh and its Relationship with Tibet

Western Tibet, which includes the Ladakh, Zaskar, Baltistan, and Purig areas, has a common history and culture where local populations speak dialects of the Tibetan language and Buddhism once flourished. The history of Ladakh has a close relationship with the Old Tibetan Empire. The Ladakh dynasty began with one of the three sons of Skyid lde Nyima gon (or Nyima gon), the great-grandson of Langdarma who was the last king of the Old Tibetan Empire and known as an anti-Buddhist.

The anti-Buddhism of Langdarma had dissipated within the family by Nyima gon's time and Buddhism began to restore gradually in the Guge Kingdom. As a result, Tibetan Buddhist schools spread throughout Ladakh and residents converted. Today, the major Tibetan Buddhist schools of Gelug, Sakya, Drikung Kagyu, Drukpa Kagyu, and

Nyingma prevail in Ladakh. The history of Ladakh suggests that these schools were introduced due to the following close linkages with Tibet:

- 1) 'Jig rten mGon po, the founder of Drikung Kagyu, who constructed Drikung Monastery in Central Tibet in 1179, sent monks to Ladakh in 1215 to establish Drikung monastery (Jina & Konchok, 1995: 21, 24; Petech 1977: 166). When the Drikung school was introduced in Ladakh during the thirteenth century, the king of Ladakh became an adherent. Lamayuru Monastery then became a center of the Drikung Kagyu school in Ladakh.
- 2) During the reign of King Lhachen nGorub (ca. 1300-1325), novice monks to Central Tibet were first dispatched (Francke 1998[1907]: 68).
- 3) The Gelug school was introduced during the reign of King Trak Bunde ('grags 'bum lde) (ca. 1410-1440) who received a mission sent to him by the great reformer Tsong ka pa (Petech 1939: 114). Lama Lawang Loro (lha dbang blo gros) rebuilt Spituk Monastery, which was a monastery of the Kadampa school, as one belonging to the Gelug school; therefore, Gelug was greatly influential in Ladakh during Trak Bunde's reign (Petech 1939: 114). Today, the Gelug school, encompassing the monasteries of Tikse, Rizon, Saspol, Saboo, Sankar, and Spituk, has competed against the Drikung Kagyu school in Ladakh.
- 4) During the reign of King Trashis Nyamgyal (ca. 1500-1530), the Drikung Kagyu monastery of Phiyang was constructed. The king contributed greatly to disseminate Buddhist teachings: namely, introducing the formality of Drikung Kagyu liturgies, transcribing complete Buddhist sutras of Kangyur and Tengyur, and constructing stupas (*mchod rten*) (Yoritomi 1982: 48).
- 5) King Senge Namgyal (ca. 1590-1635) invited

the great lama of Drukpa Kagyu, Taktsan Rachen, to Ladakh, who opened monasteries in Hemis, Chimle, Tashigon, and Hanle (Francke 1998[1907]: 97; Sato 1982: 19). Since Hemis was the royal family's monastery, it had become the most important Drukpa Kagyu monastery in Ladakh. However, after the death of Lama Taktsan Rachen, the Gelug school backed by its flourishing in Central Tibet had gradually gained more power than Drukpa Kagyu in Ladakh.

- 6) In the latter half of the fifteenth century, the Sakya school was introduced by the opening of Matho Monastery, which is the only Sakya monastery in Ladakh.
- 7) It can be said that the Nyingma school was introduced when Padmasambhava visited Ladakh; however, the only Nyingma monastery was built in Taktak village by Lama Padma Thinley in 1430.

The religious homogeneity of Western Tibet drastically changed after the Islamization of the Balti people who lived in the lower Indus River region and then of the Purig people in the Suru River region. Islamization is considered to have started in Baltistan around the late fourteenth century. Thus, Ladakh was bordered by the Tibetan Buddhist state in the east and Islam chiefdoms in the west. In fact, in Ladakh and Zaskar districts today the majority are Buddhists while Muslims are the majority in Baltistan and Purig districts.

Since the establishment of the Islamic kingdoms of Baltistan, Purig, and Kashmir, Ladakh kings had faced several wars against them. Between 1560-1590, King Jamyang Namgyal was defeated by the Skardo King, Ali Mir Sher Khan, and was forced to marry his daughter (Franck 1972[1926]: 106-107). Many Shia Muslims accompanied her and settled to build a village now named Chushot, which was the

first Muslim village in Ladakh. During the reign of King Deldan Namgyal, father of Delegs Namgyal, a peace treaty was contracted with Sultan Aurangzeb of the Mogul Empire, promising him to construct a mosque in Leh which was completed around 1666-7 (Jina 1999: 19; Srinivas 1998: 21).

Although trade also played an important role in the forming of a relationship between Ladakh and Tibet, there were violent conflicts between them over trading interests. At the time of King Delegs Namgyal (ca. 1640-1680), Ladakh was invaded by a joint Tibetan-Mongolian army led by a Mongol lama named Tsang. The great Mongol wars lasted from 1679 to 1685. The Ladakhi army was driven back to Basgo and King Delegs fled to the fortress of Tingmosgang. The Ladakh Kingdom was divided into two for at least three years; Basgo was on the boundary between the Ladakhi army and the Mongol army.

Having succeeded in obtaining the powerful assistance of the great Mogul Empire, King Delegs could push back the Tibetan-Mongol army to Trashisgang beyond Lake Panggon. Thus, peace negotiations between Ladakh and Tibet finally took place at Tingmosgang to settle (1) the boundary between Central Tibet and Western Tibet and (2) trade regulations with Lhasa (Francke 1998[1907]: 106-113; Petech 1939: 158-159). Upon the requests of the Moguls, however, King Delegs had to accept Islam and assumed the Muslim name of Aqabat Mahmud Khan. He also accepted other terms imposed by the Moguls: the king should give one of his sons as a hostage, repair a mosque at Leh, and grant to the Kashmiri Muslim merchants the monopoly of the raw wool (cashmere) trade (Petech 1939: 160). Thus, Kashmiri merchants began to settle in Leh.

The eighteenth century was when Christian missionaries began to visit Ladakh (Jina 1995: 176-

177). In June 1715 during the reign of King Nima Namgyal, Jesuit Ippolito Desideri visited Ladakh on the way to Lhasa in Tibet (Franck 1998[1907]: 118). Desideri was received warmly by the king and stayed in Ladakh for two months (Yakushi 1991: 119-129). The incorporation of Ladakh into the colonial polity of the British Empire made it easier for Christian missionaries to access Ladakh. In the mid nineteenth century, the Moravian Church began missions in the Himalayan Region. A Moravian missionary named Wilhelm Heyde visited Leh in 1855, established a missionary station at Keylong in Lahul district bordering Ladakh in 1856, and constructed a church in Leh with the permission in 1885 of the Maharaja of the Dogra (Bray 2005: 264-265). Since then missionization of Ladakhi has slowly progressed.

The history of Ladakh has thus made it religiously diverse. However, based on the commonality of language and religion, the majority of Ladakhi have kept their cultural and religious identity of Tibetan Buddhists societies, which I describe in the following section.

3. Commonality of Ladakhi Society with Other Tibetan-Buddhist Societies

Ladakh has a commonality with Tibet in terms of language as well as religion. If we view Tibetan society macroscopically as a society of those who speak the Tibetan language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages, as their mother tongue, it includes a variety of populations from the Himalayas to the Tibet Plateau. It actually covers a vast area including the Baltistan and Ladakh areas in the west, Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces of China in the east, and the hill areas of the Himalayas in the south, which corresponds almost to the area controlled by the Old Tibetan Empire.

Reflecting the vastness of the area, the language

can be divided into five or six different groups of dialects. Nishida suggests five groups: Central Tibetan, Southern Tibetan, Amdo, Kham, and Western dialects (Nishida 1987: 111), while Nishi suggests six groups: Western archaic, Western Innovative, Central (dBus-gTsang), Southern, Kham, and Amdo dialects (Nishi 1987:188-189). The Ladakhi language belongs to the Western archaic dialects.

According to Nishida (Nishida 1987: 110), the Tibetan language group, which has thus diversified, can be considered a language form that has developed from a common prototype. However, what I have experienced during my fieldwork in Ladakh of northwestern India and the Kham region of Tibet is that it is quite difficult and almost impossible for these groups to verbally communicate with each other. The differentiation between the dialects is so great that communication is only possible by writing down what one wants to say. It can be said that the commonality of the Tibetan language has been barely sustained thanks to its script and the reading of Tibetan Buddhist texts.

As for the diversification of the Tibetan language, Nishida (Nishida 1987: 125) also commented that the Balti and Purig of the Western dialects can be considered as belonging to the Tibetan language that spread among indigenous Balti and Purig populations by Tibetans who came from the eastern part of Tibet. He suggested that a dialect can be formed by the hybridization of the Tibetan language and an indigenous language. Moreover, Aten, a Tibetan from the Nyaron area of the Kham region, tells such a legend that according to the father people of the Nyaron, and possibly of the whole Kham region, are the descendants of the Tibetan army once stationed in the border area dispatched by the king of the Old Tibetan Empire (Norbu 1986: 24). In the eastern and western borders

of Tibet, Tibetan societies were thus formed by the mingling of indigenous populations and Tibetans who migrated into these areas, which might have caused the diversification of dialects.

The diversification of the Tibetan language into a variety of dialects indicates that Tibetan society involves regionality based on historical, cultural, and regional variation. It is better not to consider one Tibetan society but Tibetan societies to fully understand the populations who speak the Tibetan language. However, irrespective of the variation in their dialects, Tibetan societies, with the exception of the Balti society, have kept commonalities based on Tibetan Buddhist culture. Ladakhi society is one of such societies, which has maintained a strong Ladakhi identity based on regionality as well as a Pan-Tibetan identity based on Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

4. Conflicts between SECMOL and Ladakh Buddhist Association

As mentioned above, the Ladakhi language differs remarkably from that of Central Tibetan dialects, e.g., the Lhasa dialect, especially in terms of not only pronunciation but also vocabularies. Phanday states that there are countless Ladakhi special words and endings which are not found in Tibetan dictionaries and grammars (Phanday 2017: ix). Therefore, it is commonly said that a Ladakhi who has little knowledge of the orthography of the Tibetan language may often make a mistake in writing Tibetan script what one would say in the Ladakhi language. I often noticed during my field work a Ladakhi informant making a mistake of writing Ladakhi vocabularies in Tibetan script.

When I visited the SOS Kinderdorf International Tibetan Children's Village (SOS-TCV) school in Choglamsar in 2003, which was established in 1975, the school had around 2,560 students, 20% of whom

were Ladakhis (Yamada, 2005a). The principal of the school aptly expressed to me his impression of language education in Ladakh as follows, “Since in Ladakh the orthography of the Tibetan language is not correctly and fully taught at school, this school has become a place to educate Ladakhi children the right orthography of the Tibetan language.” The Tibetan refugee society in Ladakh seems to have made efforts to create a symbiotic relationship with Ladakhi society through accepting Ladakhi students into the SOS-TCV school in Choglamsar, which may in turn contribute to disseminating Tibetan orthography among Ladakhis.

Therefore, the establishment of Ladakhi orthography has become a serious concern among Ladakhis in order to maintain their cultural and ethnic identity. There are two opposing opinions regarding the orthography of the Ladakhi language: one claims to maintain the orthography of the Tibetan language while the other is to create and disseminate a new standard of spelling based on spoken Ladakhi.

The NGO SECMOL, which was established in 1988 to address the endangerment of Ladakhi ethnicity, took the side of the latter opinion. Mr. Wangchuk, the leader of SECMOL, being seriously concerned about the damage by government school education to Ladakhi's self esteem, had tried to change the government school system. He opened a school in 1999 in Saspol where children are taught in the Ladakhi language on the basis of Ladakhi culture. In particular, he tried to disseminate language education based on spoken language, not what is in the monasteries. He also published a newsletter called “Ladags Melong” (Ladakh mirror) to popularize the writing system of spoken Ladakhi. Their efforts, however, brought about serious conflicts with the Ladakhi Buddhist Association (LBA) who believe the correct orthography of the

Tibetan language, finally resulting in the cessation of “Ladags Melong” in the summer of 2007 (Tsering Angmo 2007).

The movements pushed by SECMOL in terms of language can be regarded as the restoration of the Ladakhi dialect as an ethnic language. However, since Tibetan orthography is indispensable for the education of novice monks and the maintenance of Buddhist tradition, Ladakhi scholars and intellectuals, most of whom are responsible for promoting Tibetan Buddhism, had thus made a decision to disagree with SECMOL and to move forward on the integration of their language with the Tibetan language: Tibetanization of the Ladakhi language.

The expression of Ladakhi identity at times creates conflicts and requires negotiations with Tibetan Buddhist tradition. However, as is suggested by Phanday's statement, “Writing should be English to English speakers and Ladakhi to Ladakhis”, in the introductory part written in English of his recent book written in Ladakhi (Phanday 2017: xii), the movement for popularizing the writing system of spoken Ladakhi has not died out but has been steadily developed by reflective Ladakhis.

5. Relationship between Ladakh Buddhist Monasteries and Tibetan Government-in-Exile

Because Tibetan monasteries have been reestablished in Tibetan refugee settlements since the exodus of the Dalai Lama to India, Ladakhi monks have also entered these monasteries for learning Tibetan Buddhism. Previously, novice monks went to large monasteries in Lhasa, but they now go to monasteries rebuilt in south India or Dehra Dun in Uttarakhand State for learning Tibetan Buddhism. For example, in Sera Je Monastery rebuilt in the Bylakuppe Tibetan Refugee Settlement of Karnataka, the

number of Ladakhi monks has increased so much as to have their own *khang tsen* (dormitory for novice monks). Moreover, a Ladakhi monk was the president of Drikung Kagyu Monastery's college at Dehra Dun when I visited in 2009. Ladakhis say that the Dalai Lama himself visits Ladakh more often than other areas. The establishment of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in India has thus advanced communication between Ladakhi monasteries with their head monasteries in Tibetan society-in-exile, forging the tight relationship between the two.

The forging of this tight relationship with the Tibetan Government-in-Exile is not considered irrelevant with regards to political movements calling for Union Territory status under the leadership of the LBA after Indian independence (Yamada 2009: 179-180). Previously, relations between Buddhists and Muslims were not so hostile as to bring about conflict (Srinivas 1998: 22). However, the independence of India resulted in the marginalization of Ladakh, by putting it the control of the Muslim Kashmir Government in Srinagar: the first time Ladakh has been under actual control of Muslims. It is often suggested that backed by this turnover of the political relationship between Buddhists and Muslims, Ladakhi-ness (identity of being Ladakhi) split into Buddhist and Muslim identities, creating religious conflicts between them (cf. van Beek, 1996).

As the notion that being Ladakh is identical to being a Buddhist has been strengthened, religious conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims have regenerated. With the pamphlet *Why Union Territory for Ladakh*, which was published by the LBA in 2000, Ladakhi Buddhists have regarded the LBA as a representative institution for Ladakh and promoted political movements for demanding local autonomy as Union Territory status, separate from Jammu and Kashmir State (Sampel 2000).

Since the very beginning of these movements, the former Kushok Bakula, the highest incarnate lama of the Gelug school in Ladakh, also expressed his ethnocentric comments that Ladakh, at least Leh Tehsil, is a cultural area for Buddhists (Sampel 2000; Srinivas 1998).

A series of violent conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims finally came to an end in 1989, when the "Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order", which defines eight populations/tribes in Ladakh as Scheduled Tribes, was issued. These eight tribes are (1) Balti (originally from the Skardo area of Baltistan and now living in Kargil District), (2) Beda (musicians originally belonging to the lower cast in Ladakh society), (3) Bot, Boto (Tibetan speaking Ladakhi and Zankari), (4) Brokpa, Drokpa, Dard, Shin (those who live in the lower Indus River region), (5) Changpa (nomadic people who live in the high plateaus of the upper Indus River region such as Rupshu, Kharnak, and Karzok), (6) Gara (blacksmiths in Ladakh society), (7) Mon (those whose occupations are musicians or carpenters in Ladakh society), (8) Purigpa (those who live in the Suru River Valley in Kargil District).

Later, in May 1995 the "Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act, 1995" was signed by the President of India, and in March 1996 council regulations for the execution of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDcC) were enacted. Thus, conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims have resulted in a step towards peaceful coexistence, although the establishment of LAHDcC has not entirely addressed the dissatisfaction of Buddhist Ladakhis. A pamphlet published by the LBA in 2000 lists the cases of injustice and discrimination in terms of social recruitment such as an appointment of government officers, education, and the serious problem of conversion of Buddhist girls to Islam (Sampel 2000).

The most serious problem is said to be the decrease in the population ratio of Buddhists in Ladakh. Previously, Buddhists were 70-80% of the population in Ladakh. In 2003 the Buddhist population in Ladakh is almost equal to that of Muslims. The second is the problem of conversion. Ladakhis often say that Muslim men are so seducing that Buddhist girls are easily allured to become their wives and convert to Islam⁽¹⁾.

The LBA is worried about the future of Buddhist Ladakhis due to the on-going social and political discrimination and the conversion of Buddhists to Islam. This sense of anxiety still drives LBA members to continue calling for Union Territory status, as well as to monitor corruption among state government members.

Thus, it has become the responsibility of the LBA to integrate and solidify all the Ladakhi Buddhists against Muslims. Under these political circumstances of Ladakhi Buddhists, they have clamied their identity as a member of pan-Tibetan societies and tried to reconstruct solidarity with Tibetan society. The involvement of Kushok Bakula in setting up a stone monument in Ulan Bator⁽²⁾ in 1990 and founding Pethub Stangey Choskhorling Monastery in 1999 can be considered as an attempt to restore the relationship with the Mongols in order to solidify relationships among Tibetan Buddhist societies. The political movements of the LBA have thus strengthened the sense of commonality with Tibetan culture and the normalization of Ladakh culture based on Tibetan culture.

6. Incorporation of Formalism of Tibetan Buddhism into Shamanic Tradition

Ladakhi shamanism is characterized by and based on an idea of spirit-possession (Kaplanian 1981; Day 1990; Yamada 1993, 1995, 1996, 2009). Although the idea of spirit-possession is incorporated

theoretically in Tibetan Buddhism as well as in the theory of *am chi* medicine (i.e., Tibetan medicine), Ladakhi are more deeply concerned in the idea of spirit-possession, regarding it as the very root of a variety of misfortune.

The idea of spirit-possession may have its origin in the very remote past. In reality, to explain why they become ill, the Ladakhi generally say, “*zug mo yong nga rag ga*,” (i.e., an illness is coming from the outer world of his body). They may have an idea from of old to consider an illness as the result of an operation from the outside (cf. Yamada 1999: 6–10; Yamada 2009: 199). The belief that an unstable and abnormal psychic state is caused by spirit-possession and the regard of this as a calling to become a religious functionary known as a shaman may have been the fundamentals for Ladakhi shamanistic tradition since early times,

Once we observe current shaman's practices, however, it can be seen that Ladakhi shamanism is inseparable from Tibetan Buddhist tradition in terms of modality and formality. The types of shamanic functionary in Ladakh are almost equivalent with two of typologies of Tibetan oracles described by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993[1956]: 410–414). One is the *btsan*⁽³⁾ (a species of spirit/demon) class, referring to those who would mainly give a divine message during a monastery festival while being possessed by a higher deity such as the monastery's *dharma*-protector. The other is the *yul lha* (village god) class, referring to those who would heal or give divination to the villagers while being possessed by a lower deity of *yul lha*.

The practices of village shamans who are possessed by *yul lha* suggest the incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist modalities into their performance, especially in terms of shamanizing and shaman's *séance*. High spiritual lamas, *rinpoche*, play a significant role in the shamanizing process.

Without their acknowledgement, shamans-to-be cannot follow further the initiation rituals under senior shamans, although formerly the initiation was not necessary for shamans since they could be possessed by *lha* easily from the very beginning. In reality, the initiation ritual, in which I participated in 1990, shows that the whole initiation process has an educational role where the novice shaman can learn about different types of deities and spirits fundamental to Tibetan Buddhism as well as the way to properly perform necessary liturgies including *gser skyems* (lit., offering golden wine) (Yamada 2009: 341-358).

An informant of middle age said that in the early 1980s when he was a child, he saw a shaman performed simply dressed in traditional coat with no special Buddhist implements. There was not common at that time for a shaman to wear special clothing like a Tibetan Buddhist monk. However, the incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist paraphernalia to the shaman's *séance* had become popular in the 1980s. For example, the *rigs lnga* (a five-lobed crown), each lobe representing a *dakini* or one of the Buddhas known as *dhyani-buddhas*; a *da ru* (a small drum shaped like an hourglass); a *dril bu* (bell), or a *rdo rje* (a thunderbolt or mythical weapon used in Buddhist rituals) were commonly used by shamans (cf. Waddell 1978). Again, Tibetan Buddhist liturgies are accepted in the procedures of a shaman's *séance*: the burning of *juniper* leaves for purification of the place; the way of arranging an altar; and the recitation of the prayers of *spyān 'dren* (inviting deities) at the beginning, *gser skyems*, *bsangs* (purification by incense), and then *gshegs gsol* (sending-off the deity) at the last moment.

However, all those shamanic characteristics that are widely common in shamanic tradition beyond cultures remained intact (Yamada 2005b). The introductory process of a *lha*'s embodiment is

expressed by the following body transformations:

- 1) Praying in a relaxed and monotonous rhythm;
- 2) Followed by uniquely rhythmical scripture recitation, the change into a trance state is suggested by rather "spontaneous" hiccups, occasional screams, whistling and heavy breathing;
- 3) The beating of the hand drum in a violent manner;
- 4) The recitation in a high-pitched voice; and
- 5) Change in vocal sound and tone and speaking in incomprehensible languages -- glossolalia.

Furthermore, a shaman's supernatural power and spirituality is demonstrated by the revelation of the cause of a disease in an instant; the sucking out of black liquid that represents impurities taken out of the body; the applying of a heated knife to the tongue; and a scene of interaction with possessing spirits.

The application of Tibetan Buddhist elements are confined to the liturgical aspects, while shamanic techniques are preserved basically unchanged. Ladakhi shamans have refined the modalities of their shamanistic practices on the basis of Tibetan Buddhism by keeping unchanged the essence of techniques specific to their practices.

7. Ladakhi New Year, *Lo Gsar*, as Expression of Ladakhi Cultural Identity

New Year, *lo gsar*, is celebrated in Tibet on the 1st day of the first month according to the Tibetan calendar, while it has become tradition in Ladakh to celebrate New Year on the 1st day of the eleventh month. The celebration of *lo gsar* in Ladakh starts with the ritual of *dgu thug* on the 29th day of the tenth month, and then *gnam gang* and *mgal me* on the 30th day of the tenth month. The 1st day of the eleventh month is New Year's Day when relatives visit to gather with each other. The changing of the

lha tho is held on the 2nd or 3rd, and *tshes tshes tshog* is on the 3rd day of the eleventh month. New Year used to be celebrated with a variety of events lasting for about a month, although it has recently become simplified. I discuss how a family today celebrates New Year by keeping local tradition based on the participant observation in 2010 on three different local New Year's rituals: *dgu thug*, *gnam gan*, and *tshes tshes tshogs*.

Dgu thug is the day of eating special food called *dgu thug*, a noodle soup made of meat, dried cheese, dried peas, wheat flour, greens, salt, onions, chili, and butter. A special dough, which contains a small piece of coal or paper, is also prepared and baked. The bread is divided into pieces; each family member eating a piece in the evening. It is said that if one gets the piece with the coal, he/she will have bad fortune. Thus, this is an event of divination in which people used to divine the fortune for the next year. On the same day a figure of an ibex is made of dough for another ritual event.

Gnam gang, which literally means "sky full", signifies the thirtieth day of a Tibetan lunar month. It is the day for holding a memorial religious service for ancestors, *si mi*, to present offerings to the ancestors. Before dawn, family members go to their family's *spur khang* (a structure for burning the dead) in the community burning place and perform *si mi*. Special food and drink are prepared as offerings for the ancestors including butter tea, *chang* (wine made from barley), butter lump, bread (*ta gi thug mo*), fried cakes (*kab tse*), thick barley porridge with butter (*mar zan*), and mixed rice with raisins. After burning juniper leaves to purify the place, each ancestor is prayed to and entertained with these offerings. Finally, the *gsur* (dough of barley flour mixed with butter and milk) is put and burnt in the *spur khang* for the ancestors. After finishing the religious service for the ancestors,

those who came there for the *si mi* gather together and stay until daybreak.

When I participated in the *si mi*, not all families who have their *spur khang* in the community burning place came there for the *si mi*, but several families did. Now, many families perform the *si mi* in their house. The tradition of the *si mi* seems to have gradually transformed into a new style, although those who were there seemed content with spending time together with ancestors and praying for the coming of a good year.

In the evening of *gnam gang*, the ritual of *mgal me* (lit., a burning piece of wood) is performed. The purpose of the ritual is to expel all the misfortune and ill luck of the previous year. Special food is prepared as offerings to the local deities: barley flour, *chang*, special *papa* (barley porridge mixed with peas, pigeon peas, and wheat flour), *ta gi thug mo*, *kab tse*, butter tea, rice, cooked vegetables, and main dishes of meat.

Reciting the names of twenty-two different local deities each by each starting from the name of *lha chen lha rgyal*, offerings are given to each one. After placing a portion of the offerings on the main beam of the house (*ma gdung*), roof, grass on the roof terrace, and kitchen, family members eat *papa* first and then the other dishes. Then each member takes a handful of *papa* and holds it tight in his/her left hand to make a stick-like form, with which he/she wipes off all the defilement from his/her body. The head of the family also does the same for their cattle and other livestock. All these *papa* sticks are placed on a plate, onto which *chang*, butter tea, and barley flour is poured.

Then, the plate with sticks rubbed with defilement was placed on the floor before the head of the household. While a bundle of straw is burnt, the head stamped out the fire on the floor twice, shouting "*mGal me*". At the third time the head with

a bundle of burning straw and his son with the plate run out together from the house to throw a bundle of burning straw outside. After throwing it all away outside the house, they return back with a big piece of ice and the following conversations are generally held with other family member:

“What have you brought back?”

“I have brought a big piece of gold.”

“Take it into the treasure room.”

Thus, on New Year’s Eve all evil is expelled, restoring good fortune.

The last example is specific to Ladakhi culture: the “*tshes tshes tshogs*,” a ritual of dedicating offerings to the family deity. It is performed in the evening of the 3rd day of the New Year, the 3rd day of the eleventh month. Offerings of butter lump, juniper leaves, ibex-shaped bread, *chang*, butter tea, and barley flour, which each member holds while reciting prayers, are offered to the family deity (*phas lha*). After the offering, a man shoots an arrow at a piece of *taki* (pancake) thrown into the air. Then, the ibex-shaped bread is cut and divided into pieces. The head of a family offered a piece to the deity in the prayer room, while family members eat the other pieces divided amongst them. Then all the family members return to the kitchen and the ritual ends. It should be noted that although the offering of ibex today is an substitution made of wheat flour, cooked liver of a sheep is offered as if a live ibex was offered to the deity.

As described above, New Year’s celebration consists of extremely local rituals. It used to be the tradition that Ladakhi man went hunting ibex to offer the meat to the family deity on the 3rd day of the New Year. Today, since hunting ibex is prohibited by law, people try to keep this tradition by using bread imitations. Shooting a piece of pancake is a representation of the hunting of the ibex. Ibex-hunting used to be one of the major

sources of meat, the memory of which is kept woven in the performance of this New Year’s ritual.

Another ritual of *si mi*, an occasion of dedicating offerings to ancestors, illustrates a much more local character of Ladakhi-ness. This ritual is contradictory to the philosophy of Buddhism, in which every human is in the process of transmigration of the soul (*samsāra*). One Ladakhi whom I interviewed commented that according to the Buddhist doctrine the soul of the dead would transmigrate into another body; therefore, performing a memorial service for ancestors contradicts Buddhist teachings. However, he continues to say that it has been Ladakhi tradition for a long time and that even if the ancestors transmigrate into another body, they are still ancestors. With this mind and attitudes, Ladakhis maintain this ritual of *si mi* to this day.

There is also a discourse popularly narrated among Ladakhis concerning the reason Ladakhis celebrate *lo gsar* two months in advance. The discourse is somehow to make the Ladakhi ethnically and culturally elevated. Before going off to invade a Muslim chiefdom in Baltistan, King Senge Namgyal (ca. 1590-1635) celebrated the New Year. Since he came back victorious, he asked then his people to celebrate New Year in advance. Since then New Year has been celebrated earlier.

However, reviewing the climatic conditions during the 11th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar, the time is when all the passes surrounding Ladakh region begin to be blocked with snow. Since it is not normally possible to cross the pass into Baltistan in this season, some scholars say the above discourse has no historicity.

Other scholars say, however, that it was after the war against a joint Tibetan-Mongolian army ended that the Ladakhi started to celebrate New Year earlier like today. History shows that after the Mongols won a victory, they forced Ladakhis

to celebrate the Mongol victory. Therefore, it is also likely that Ladakhis strategically celebrated the Mongol's victory by locating it their New Year celebration.

The celebration of New Year on the 1st day of the eleventh month connotes certain metaphorical meanings, which contributes to solidifying and integrating Ladakhis as an ethnic group. Maintaining Ladakhi tradition is an expression of ethnic and cultural identity of the Ladakhis, which also contributes to strengthening their ethnic self-esteem. Although Ladakhis recognize the close relationship with Tibet, they also try to maintain their cultural and ethnic originality.

8. Conclusions

In concluding, the following conclusions are put forward. First, SECMOL – an NGO established in response to Ladakhis' self-awareness of their ethnic crisis – provides school education based on traditional culture and tries to promote the standard spelling of spoken Ladakhi language, among other activities. However, from the 2000s onward the pursuit of radical Ladakhi cultural identity initiated by SECMOL, including the provision of Ladakhi language education, began to clash with the views of the LBA, which values its connections with Tibet. Finally the movement was terminated before completion in 2007. The expression and maintenance of cultural regionality in Ladakh can be sustained only through a delicate balance that can sometimes cause confrontation regarding unity

with Tibetan culture.

Second, conversely, local rituals and practices that preserve the identity of Ladakhi culture have been upheld; for example, Ladakh celebrates *lo gsar* (the Tibetan New Year), which serves as an opportunity for expressing traditional faith in local deities and ancestral spirits while healing rituals performed by shamans are kept as expressions of Ladakhi traditional culture. In reality, the veneration of ancestral spirits is practiced as a Ladakhi custom, although it runs counter to the Tibetan Buddhist doctrine of *samsara* (the endless cycle of death and rebirth), while shamanistic rituals incorporate Tibetan Buddhist modality and etiological ideas. By positioning Ladakhi local rituals different from Tibetan cultural tradition, attempts have been made in order to keep local rituals as traditions of Ladakhi culture.

Third, expression and claims regarding the identity and regionality of Ladakhi culture are premised on avoiding confrontation with Tibetan Buddhist societies under religious and political motivation held by the LBA. As a part of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural area, Ladakhi society tries to maintain its cultural identity while seeking to preserve their symbiotic relationship with Tibetan Buddhism.

Acknowledgements: This paper is partly based on the research conducted with the support of the JSPS KAKENHI (C) (Grant Number 20520705, 2008~2010).

Notes

- (1) P.D., interview on 2003.09.23
- (2) The following phrases are inscribed on the monument. “It is my firm belief that Buddhism and Mongolia’s glorious culture which suffered long and brutal suppression shall prevail again and bring peace, harmony and prosperity to the people of Mongolia. Bakula Rinpoche 15.07.1990”. (personal communication with T. Fujimoto)
- (3) The *btsan* are believed to ride a red horse with a white spot on the forehead (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993[1956]: 13).

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