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Competition for the Mountain Landscape: the Ritual Territories of *feng shui* and the *yul lha* Cult in the East Frontier Region of Amdo

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1. Introduction

1.1 Studying the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet

This paper explores the formation of multi-religious practices and complex cultural interactions by plural ethnic groups living in the same village in a peripheral zone of eastern Tibet—that is, the fringe part of Amdo.

For area studies researchers, this part of Tibetan society may be fascinating because it has historically been a buffer zone between the cultural spheres of the Tibetan High Plateau and the Chinese plain area. This area at the edge of the plateau contains many ecological/physiographical differences and is spread over thousands of kilometers. The multiethnic mosaic in the belt includes Tibetans, Mongolians, Muslims, and Han-Chinese. This place has constantly experienced the political and economic changes often found in frontier governance, from the last stage of the Qing Dynasty, to the Republic of China, to the current Communist Party. Especially after the foundation of the People's Republic of China, this region has been exposed to a series of revolutionary ideologies, characterized by socialist collectivization that has been aimed at integrating it into mainstream Chinese society. Currently, the power of integration has shifted to economic and regional integration since the beginning of the “reform and opening-up policy” after the 1980s.

It is important to study the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet to look at its ethnographical contrasts with the southern foot of the Himalayas, which form the south edge of the same Tibetan High Plateau (cf. Samuel 1994). A small number of approaches to such a study, mainly from researchers of mainland China, have used the macro concept of inter-ethnic relations, such as *zu ji guan xi*¹ from a perspective of regional culture (*qu yu wen hua*) for studying the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet (cf. Liu 2003; Qiepai 2009).

¹ In the main text of this paper, Tibetan words are marked with the Extended Wylie Method and Chinese words are marked with the italic letters of Pinyin.

Such an approach, however, does not take into account the practical cultural fusions at the micro level of ethnic representations in local and daily village life contexts. In the framework of the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet, multiple meanings are interwoven with each other in daily rituals; thereby, the representations of a single “ethnic culture” cannot be accepted theoretically. Categorizing such a complex cultural phenomenon in the field as “interaction” (*hu dong*) or even “mingling” (*jiao rong*) is too simple for describing adequately the level of daily practices and the changes in the context of multi-ethnic society.

In order to overcome the perplexities presented here, it would be better to focus on the dynamism of daily practices at the local level as they relate to the macroscopic changes under the concept of “regional culture.” Such an approach may also lead to an understanding of such important topics as the mechanisms that extend the formation of the Tibetan Buddhism society, and the roots of Tibetan ethnicity. This paper examines the inner context of local religious practices based on the case of a multi-ethnic village located in the northeast corner of the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet and examines the issue of the “mountain cult” in relation to the burial practices in the village.

1.2 Background

As mentioned earlier, ethnic “hybridity” is a universally observable phenomenon in the buffer zone of peripheral eastern Tibet where the ecological environment and geographical features change dramatically.

As shown by the conceptual outline given in Figure 1, four major groups are distributed over the Amdo district in eastern Tibet along the S-shaped flow of the upper part of the river: Amdo Tibetans, Mongolians, Muslims, and Han Chinese.

At the uppermost part of the river, which is more than 4000 m in altitude, live the shepherd people of Amdo, who are devoted to yak (nor) and sheep herding. In the middle belt of the upper part of the river, which has an altitude of around 2500–3500 m, most people are engaged with the agro-pastoral economy. People called rong ma ‘brog, whose economy and livelihood are based on semi-agricultural/semi-pastoral work, reside here. Farmers, who are called rong pa, also dwell generally inside of the river valley in this area.

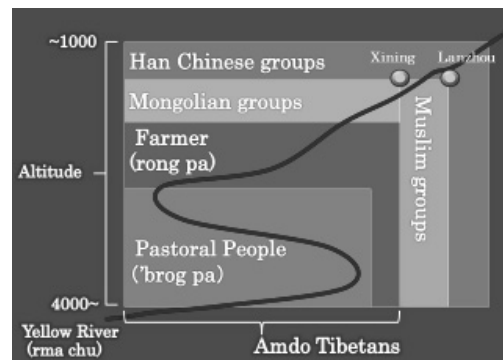


Figure 1: Ethnic configuration and geographical background in Amdo

Around the lower part of the river at an altitude of 2000–2500 m, the Tibetan features begin to fade away because of an increase in the farming settlements of non-Tibetans, who settled there in the pre-modern period. Mongolians live in the steppe of the western side of this part, and the Muslims' homeland, including that of the Hui people, is a belt of land connected to a plains area on the east. Furthermore, at the fringe zone of the area occupied by these two groups, the flat crop land of the Han-Chinese, from the Western Corridor of the Yellow River to the Ocher Plateau, constitutes a thick belt. Moreover, the hybrid Tibetan groups called *rgya ma bod* (which is a person of mixed Chinese and Tibetan parentage) and *ka che* (Tibetan Muslims) are located in the middle among four major groups, especially around the Xining (*si ling*) area.

The peripheral zone of eastern Tibet is multi-ethnic, and the places where people live are at an altitude of less than 2500 m. This area is variegated by eco-geological variations adjoined with the crop land belt of southern Gansu from the Western Corridor of the Yellow River. Two or more ethnic groups form the community in the area; however, these groups cannot be completely divided. The distribution of agriculture and stock-raising varies according to the differences in altitude in the area. Therefore, it is usual for the Tibetan dwellers to maintain a pastoral life near the mountain ridge where the altitude is high while non-Tibetan farming life is carried on in the lower part of the same valley.

1.3 Previous work

In the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet where hybridity is a usual phenomenon, the “mountain cult” has attracted academic interest as the key to interpreting the reality of the hybrid situation. Previous studies of the practice of the mountain cult and its god, called *yul lha*, at the village community level were initiated by European researchers using field surveys in the early 1990s (cf. Blondeau & Steinkellner (eds.) 1996; Blondeau (ed.) 1998).

On the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet, S. G. Karmay, who traveled to the Shar khog valley in 1985, produced an epoch-making work. He focused on the role of the exclusively indigenous aspect of the *yul lha* cult as an old custom for maintaining Tibetan's territorial persistence, practiced as a secular form of Tibetan cultural identity against different ethnic groups as well as against the formidable “Sinification” process on the border zone, especially in Amdo (Karmay 1994; 1996). He presented the mountain cult as being a non-Buddhistic indigenous tradition that promoted exclusive territorial consciousness as the autonomous foundation of secular identity.

Similarly, a paper by Chinese scholar Wang Xingxian, presented at the 7th Seminar of IATS, shows that the mountain cult had achieved a social function in a different

dimension but under universal Buddhism. Wang summarized a situation in which various ethnic groups living in the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet, such as the Han, Tu (hor pa), Mongolian, and Yugur simply worship a single mountain god as kind of “multi-cultural configuration” (*duo yuan wen hua xing tai*). He argued that this multi-cultural configuration originates in the mountain god’s subordination to the doctrine of Tibetan Buddhism and that this universalistic character of the mountain god could serve as the platform of integration among various ethnic cultures in the marginal area. Unlike Karmay, Wang contends that the mountain cult has an inclusive aspect corresponding with those younger scholars who use the *zu ji* (inter-ethnic) concept to interpret the cultural phenomenon of multiethnic area. Wang seems to be the forerunner of Liu and Qiepai, who contended for similar views later.² According to Wang, the mountain cult serves the function of negating the boundaries among ethnic groups since the secular aspect of the mountain god had already been transformed by Buddhist universalism, while Karmay paid more attention to the exclusive aspect of the mountain cult as the key to the dividing boundaries. Undoubtedly, we cannot overlook the significant social implications of the mountain cult in the boundary region, as pointed out by those scholars.

However, from the perspective of the macro context of daily practice, it is not clear how the “boundary” is constituted in the interaction and adaptation of the people living in the same land and located in a historically situated buffer zone. To explore this question, it will be necessary to look at the daily practices of the village people in terms of the mountain cult to ascertain if such practices actually lend themselves to division. That is, it seems important to conduct research in the actual daily context.

1.4 Perspective: The concept of “Ritual Territory”

The ritual territory concept as explicated by Toni Huber is important here. Huber researched the sacred mountain that exists at the edge of the Kham district, and examined carefully the process by which the context of the historic site of revolution overcame the traditional context of pilgrimage (Huber 2004). Here, one mountain is described as a multi-layered space wherein two kinds of forces, internal and external ones, interact. The internal space is the old context of the pilgrimage site from the beginning, and the other is the new context of the tourism attracted by the historical event of the Chinese Red Army march. This perspective has merit because it becomes possible to look into the local affairs in the

² Especially in speaking of the work by Wang, the affirmative opinion on “negating a boundary” may be related to a view of the higher political requirement, which grants the positive implication of a “touchstone of national integration” to a multiethnic region in frontier.

context of the land itself and to arrive at another interpretation besides that possible through the bird's-eye view. Huber's concept makes it possible for us to gain a dual viewpoint with which we can see the natures of both the internal components of the ritual territory and an external intervention upon the same territory.

Following this perspective, I attempt to depict the inter-cultural dynamism on a single mountain in the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet. In the village of Dpa' ris (Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), which experienced an influx of Han-Chinese immigrants, two kinds of ritual territory appear on the mountain, both of which have a place in daily life. One is the *yul lha*³ cult, remaining in the form of Buddhist practice and the routine of daily work on the mountain. This is the primary ritual territory, and it originates in the old belief of Tibetan dwellers who were originally engaged in pastoral life in this region as the native people. As reported by Ekvall, even if the village has been "Sinicized" and there is a multiethnic mixture in the marginal territory of the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet, nothing but the shrine of *yul lha* (*la btsas*) is used for worship on the mountain for maintaining the vestiges of the old religion (Ekvall 1939).

However, the Han-Chinese who immigrated to this village have viewed the same mountain from a different cultural perspective with their own traditions. Their belief involves the "graveyard feng-shui" as a secondary ritual territory. The Han-Chinese brought the notion of "ancestor worship," which connects the ritual for a dead person to the living condition of the descendants. Graveyard feng-shui is the idea that the place where a dead person's bones are worshipped affects a descendant's life. The effect of graveyard feng-shui is decided by a unique scheme of landscape interpretation, regardless of the context of the primary ritual territory of mountain. After a long period of mixed ethnic settlement, the Dpa' ris pa who live in the 'Je lag River (*da tong he*) valley also adopted this Chinese custom, and they practice ancestor worship, which cannot be found in the inhabited area of southern Tibet.

In this paper, I assume that the dwellers who live in the valley of Dpa' ris are affected by the impact of these two sets of cultural beliefs, which coexist on one mountain, and they also approach articulate specific representations of their beliefs through their daily life on the mountain. Both the *yul lha* and feng-shui beliefs will be analyzed in parallel with the historical landscape, which has been built by local dwellers. I mainly examine the

³ The name for the indigenous god that makes its abode on a mountain is not uniform in the area. In Amdo, the names *gzhi bdag*, *sa bdag*, etc. are also commonly used in addition to *yul lha*. Since the Tibetan language does not have this word for "mountain god," "yul lha" is used for indicating the mountain god in order to avoid the confusion arising from the use of several names.

application of graveyard feng-shui as it relates to the disposal of the dead bodies of close relatives by focusing on how the Tibetan dwellers accepted this tradition in their village life.

2. Research Area

2.1. Historical background

Dpa' ris, which means "heroic tribe," refers to an ancient Tibetan tribe that spread along both sides of the 'Je lag chu River. The Tibetans who live in this region call themselves the descendants of a border defense army whom the ruler of the Tibetan empire (bod chen po) sent to the border between the Tibetan empire and Tang dynasty like other areas of Amdo (cf. Qiaogao 1998). Dpa' ris is located nearest the Western Corridor of the Yellow River in the areas that constitute Amdo. The Dpa' ris people and dpa' ris pa have been on the front line of a contact zone with the Han-Chinese (see Map 1).



Map 1: Location of the Dpa' ris region (Qiaogao 2004, revised by the author)

A wide ranging political intervention occurred in Dpa' ris, which was traditionally a pasture region, by the Qing Dynasty immediately after the war of the Mongolian Imperial Prince, Lobsang Tenzin. In 1753, a tea-horse trading station was established in Zhuang lang and the Tibetans of this area were subjugated. In the thinly-populated region of Dpa' ris (cf. Qiaogao 2004) at this time, a rule was established whereby preferential treatment for exemption from conscription, namely *yi ma dai ding*, was established in which in which a horse could be presented in lieu of military service. There were 36 tribes (tsho ba) in Dpa' ris under the jurisdiction of the Tea-Horse Administration Agency in Zhuang lang as of 1909, and its total population was 2256 (cf. Qiaogao 1998:135). From this time, the Hor pa and Han-Chinese people, who were oppressed by the Muslim rebellion in the last stage of the Qing Dynasty, frequently escaped into the Dpa' ris region in order to avoid military service.

Many Han-Chinese people immigrated from Da tong, Gu lang, and other places. Their ancestors originally were people who settled in Qinghai from the Ocher Plateau in Shanxi and Shaanxi. Although they are amicable to Buddhism, their funerals are very

dependent on the priest, which were called *yin-yang*, instead of the lama of Tibetan Buddhism.

On the other hand, the Hor pa (the Tu people, whose alleged name is “Chagang Mongolia”) from the west bank of the ‘Je lag River (today, the Huzhu Tuzu autonomous prefecture) are those displaced people who were compelled to escape the Muslim military clique in the early 20th century. Although their language belongs to the Mongolian language family, a character that is lost, they are very familiar with Tibetan Buddhism because they were former devotees of the prominent Dgon lung Monastery before they came to this place.

Cultivation began in the rangeland of this valley soon after the arrival of the immigrants. On the other hand, the pasturage that the Dpa’ ris pa had continued from generation to generation was also accepted by the Han-Chinese and Tu people who depended on farming in their homeland. A part of tenant farmers also acquired livestock and pastured them as well as farming.

The Tianzhu Tibetan autonomous prefecture was started after the foundation of the PRC in May 1950 as the earliest autonomous unit for the Tibetan people in the entire state. At that time, according to the Ethnic Groups’ Identification (*min zu shi bie*), the official ethnic group categorizations of *Zang zu*, *Tu zu*, and *Han zu* materialized. Because of the geographical and historical reasons mentioned earlier, the number of people recognized as “Tibetan” was only 30 percent of the total population, despite the existence of the Tibetan autonomous prefecture.⁴ Then, the shift to a collective agricultural commune began, and the social positions of both indigenous dwellers and immigrants were completely reversed totally when the Dpa’ ris pa were overthrown by the revolutionists as feudalistic landowners. After the People’s commune was disassembled in 1982 and individual subcontracts were enacted, farmland and livestock were distributed to each household of the village. This caused clear a divergence in that the Han-Chinese and Tu people tended toward farming, whereas the Tibetans aimed at a pastoral livelihood on the mountain. Under this circumstance, exchanges of livestock and farmland were widely practiced. However, in recent years, seasonal labor away from home has come to represent a big part of peoples’ livelihoods and household income owing to a fall in the prices of pastoral and farm products. In today’s villages, household incomes and the economy depend on livestock in addition to work away from home.

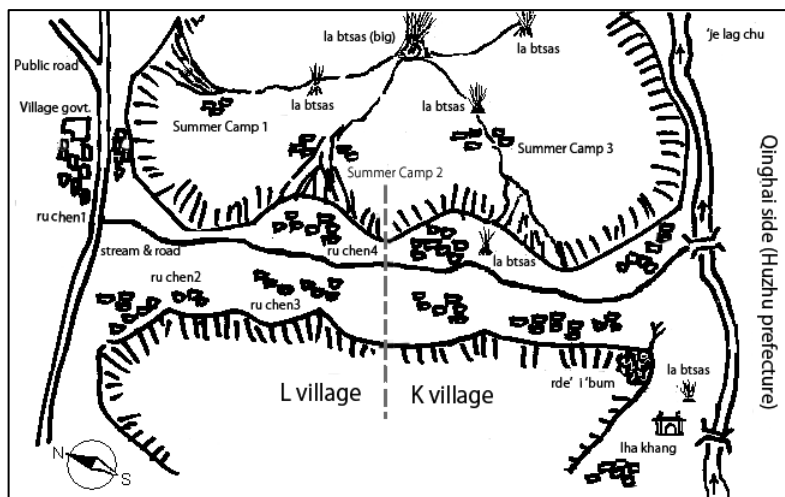
⁴ In the prefectural demographic statistics in 2000, the Tibetans (*Zang zu*) are 29.87%, the Han zu are 62.88%, the *Tu zu* are 5.71%, and the others are 1.54%.

2.2. General conditions of the village

The fieldwork for this research was conducted in L village, which is located in the upper part of the valley (about 8.5 km width) along the 'Je lag River (see Map 2). The altitudes of the winter dwelling place are around 2300 m, and the population is about 780 persons. Among these, 23 households are Tibetan dwellers, also called the M clan (tsho ba).⁵ The local people's ethnic ratio is 19% Tibetan, 42% Tu people, and 39% Han Chinese. Thus, Tibetan is less than 20% of the entire population.

The inner part of this M clan is divided mainly into three lines of paternal lineage (phar ting). Since the M clan in this village lacked a male heir, especially after the modern period, the family line has been maintained by intermarriage with the males of other neighboring Tibetan clans and Tu people. However, intermarriages with the Han Chinese are very few. Relatively, the complicated intermarriage relationships exist mostly between the Tu people and Han Chinese, and neither group's cultural gap is as big as that between the Han-Chinese and the Tibetans.

At least one linguistic change has been brought about by the long-term mixed ethnic settlements. People who belong to the Cultural Revolution generation, mainly Tibetan males in their fifties in the village, have lost the ability to speak the Tibetan language. In other villages located at a higher altitude than this village, the Dpa' ris Tibetan dialect is still maintained in daily oral communication. Therefore, the condition of the language depends on pastoral living conditions and on the difference in the height of the localities.



Map 2: Location of the community and mountain

⁵ In addition, this tsho ba group is also widely ranged over the Qinghai side, which is separated by the river, and their total number is around 60 households.

3. Primary Ritual Territory: Yul Lha Cult

3.1 Land use in the mountain and the agro-pastoral composite

Even now, pasturage is the main means of livelihood in this valley. The economic activity cannot be comprehended without an understanding of the aspects of the mountain that lend themselves to such an economy. For this purpose, at least a summary knowledge of the natural environment is required.

Here, the predominant pasturage maps a way of life in which people collect materials for subsistence from the environment via livestock and through the highland ecosystem. Life is divided into the winter and summer seasons. In October and afterwards, all the livestock except for yaks of a certain age are moved to a lower altitude grassland area around a dwelling space called the *dgun sa* (winter rangeland).

Tibetans believe that the mountain god is a natural spirit embedded in the environment that accompanies them when they move from one place to other. This belief gives rise to a relationship between the mountain god and agro-pastoral life, especially with reference to the spatial structure of the mountain as it connects with the rituals of A myes gdong btsan (fictitious name), who is the yul lha of the M clan.⁶ A myes gdong btsan is one of a divine group that are called “the thirteen highest mountain gods” (*‘je lag mthon po bcu gsum*) representing the chieftains (*dpon po*) of 13 clans who are believed to have held their territory in the ‘Je lag River valley a long time ago. Texts of prayers (*bsang mchod*) remain for each of the 13 mountain gods, and there is a description of the figure of each god. According to the description, A myes gdong btsan has a white face, wears red silk clothes on his body, and rides on a brown horse. The Tanka paintings are also based on this description. L village and K village, where people make their living through an agro-pastoral way of life, are formed in the valley at the foot of A myes gdong btsan. Here, the cultivated land and dwelling places are located in a belt at an altitude of 2200-2500 m from the foot of mountain (see Figure 2).

On the other hand, one person per household, at least, spends six months (May to October) in the summer rangeland (*dbyar sa*) (altitude 2500-3000 m) on the mountain. His task is to pasture the sheep, goat, cattle, and yaks on the grass of the highlands during the summer, and to produce good dairy and livestock products, such as cashmere. For the dwellers that do not wish to depend on work away from home, livestock products still serve as an important means of their cash income today.

⁶ All the local proper nouns used in this paper are pseudonyms.

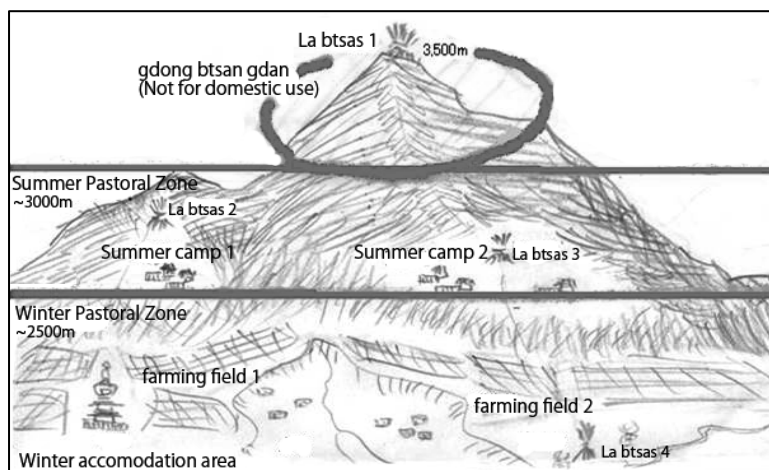


Figure 2: Spatial configuration of the mountain

The top part, centering on the large shrine (la btsas 1) at the summit of the mountain, is called *gdong btsan gdan* (the seat of A myes *gdong btsan*), a place where people cannot come freely other than at the festival time (following a lunar calendar) on June 15. It is said that the fate of the livestock that wanders around the mountain in quest of grass is in the hands of the mountain god and that all the animals on the mountain are the children of the mountain god. Unless the ceremony necessary for obtaining consent from the mountain god is performed in advance, if someone kills or hunts the animals immoderately, the god will be angry with that person. As a result, the person may be hit with an unexpected injury or may suffer head disease and paralysis. Those who do not fully pay their respects to the mountain god will suffer damages caused by the disappearance and disease of the livestock. The taboo of hunting and gathering becomes more severe in higher altitudes, and the daily activities allowed in lower places are restrained there.

Nonetheless, it is clear that a higher altitude benefits the herders. It is said that the grass grown in *gdong btsan gdan* is completely unlike that in the winter rangeland. If the herder can graze the livestock there during the summer, the animals are less likely to suffer from such infection as foot-and-mouth disease, and the livestock's hair or fur will be of a higher quality. Yaks, in particular, become more resistant to the cold by eating a grass called "Se rug," which grows only there, and their physical fitness is better. The grasses of this place, which are also used to feed sheep, can reduce the mortality rate of the cattle, especially in winter when fresh grasses are not available. There is a stream called 'O ma'i chu (Milk River) in *gdong btsan gdan*, which is believed to be effective against the sickness of livestock. Livestock with sickness or injury and the livestock that has difficulty

gestating receive treatment there, and the animal can recover at an early stage rather than caring for it at the foot of the mountain.

During the seasonal transition, important livestock events take place, such as birth, castration, mating, and wool-shearing. In particular, birth is an important event in winter, and it requires careful attention. Thus, in the three-dimensional subsistence space of the agro-pastoral composite from gdong btsan gdan to the boundary of the accommodation space, the activities and cooperative work for garnering resources are maintained in parallel with the farming process and based on the cycle of the year. Corresponding to the knowledge and experience for using these limited resources well, the mountain god shrine (la btsas) is set at an important place on the mountain, and use of the surplus natural resources is controlled around it.

3.2 The hierarchy of space

As mentioned above, the shrine of the yul lha (la btsas), plays a role in representing the spatial hierarchy according to altitude. Usually, after a suitable spot is decided upon by a high monk and the “treasure bag” (‘bum gter) has been buried underground, the village people set a bundle of long wooden arrows, called g.yang mda’ on the spot, and activate it through an enlightenment ceremony done by a high monk. All the la btsas (both large and small) were revived after the 1980s to re-activate the protection power of the mountain god. The inner part of L village is divided into four working units (ru skor, *sheng chan dui*), and the small-scale la btsas are fixed in each summer rangeland (summer camps 1 & 2) to be used for daily and periodical festivals. In this village, the fumigation ritual (bsang) for A myes gdong btsan is normally performed in every household on the lucky days of every month: 1, 8, 15, and 25. Besides, there are the annual festivals, summarized as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1: Annual festivals of A myes gdong btsan

Date (Lunar calendar)	Contents
Lucky day in January of the new year	People go to a nearby la btsas, burn the incense of juniper tree, and offer various kinds of gifts.
7th day of January in the new year	People accumulate 108 black stones (symbolic of bullets) per person, and put them on the cairn (rde’i ‘bum) at the lowermost part of the valley.
During February	People invite a sutra recitation monk to home and read various Buddhist scriptures, including the prayer for the mountain god.
28th May	A horse race festival is performed near la btsas.
15th June	La btsas gtod pa festival. People bring arrows to the summit of the mountain and perform the renewal ceremony for the la btsas.

Among these events, an especially an important one is the la btsas gtod pa festival, in which representatives from every household in the village send big arrows to the large la btsas at the top of the mountain. Thus, the mountain god's festivals range from the household level to a joint celebration at the summer camp, where daily subsistence activities are performed, and furthermore to the dwellers in the entire village, who pray for good breeding for their livestock, abundant crops, and the stability of village life.

3.3 The features of the ritual territory of the yul lha cult

Earlier, these festivals were concerned with the "internal solidarity" of the male members of the village. Ever since the bandits that escaped from the Muslim military zone had gathered in the neighboring area from the last term of the Qing Dynasty, the mountain god's rituals had been performed solemnly. The ritual on the 7th day of the New Year is actually the vestiges that remain from that time. The necessity for a fighting unit of males for the purpose of protecting the village has decreased sharply today. However, it is clear that the practice of the yul lha cult for livestock breeding and rich crops is connected to the different altitudes of the land.

On the other hand, as discussed above, the mountain god, as a guardian deity, also can become a vengeful spirit, depending on the treatment of villagers. Therefore, they need to pay close attention so that the mountain god is not offended. The following stories about the taboo connected with the gdong btsan gdan are told with credibility by the people still living in the mountains, and they often talk about the role of the mountain god as one who surveys the villager's behaviors.

1) Case 1: A hunter who came from outside the valley transgressed against a prohibition: he shot a splendid buck deer with his rifle in the gdong btsan gdan. When he approached and looked at the deer, he found a pattern on its back like the marks of a saddle. He thought, "I have killed the animal on which the mountain god rides!" and he fled from the spot. Several days afterward, his head suddenly swelled up unusually and he died with symptoms like those of brain infarction.

2) Case 2: When a villager was grazing his livestock, he unexpectedly found a high-quality herb that customarily grew on the hill of the gdong btsan gdan. He could not bear not to have it, and he started secretly digging up the plants. While he was digging, a big rock suddenly hit him on the head, and he was squashed under the rock on that spot and died.

From the beginning, yul lha has been a god who manages not only humans but all sentient beings within his territory. In this aspect, yul lha does not have the stability and

universality that belong to the Buddhist idea of divinity. Rather, people believe in the yul lha of the village as a special feature of a fixed territory that is connected to an indigenous means of livelihood and the membership of the village.

4. Secondary Ritual Territory: Feng-Shui

4.1 Tibetans' funerals

Qiaogao (1998: 283) says that although the mainstream burial practice in the Dpa' ris area has been sky burial since pre-modern times, it has gradually changed to cremation and inhumation. When a person dies in this region, the dead body is placed in a vertical coffin for crouched burial. The instant hearth, which is called ro khang, is used for cremation. Relatives and friends visit the dead person's home and offer a white scarf and grain breads, etc. to the deceased for several days after the death, and the family of the deceased goes into mourning for 49 days. Four or five monks are called for the funeral from a neighboring Tibetan monastery, and the family of the deceased concentrates on making sure the deceased has a prompt rebirth by having a memorial service in his or her honor.

According to the old Tibetans in the village, before the settler population increased in numbers after the beginning of the 20th century, when a person died, the bereaved family used to go to see a lama or an astrologist to divine the proper time and direction for entombment; then, they would carry the crouched burial coffin to the mountain and bury it deeply in an adequate spot. The corpses were not gathered together in one place (such as a cemetery), and because each burial spot was divined by a lama or an astrologist, the spot where they buried the coffin has been forgotten over the course of time.

Even today, there is a remarkable difference between the Tibetans and the Han-Chinese in terms of their funeral services. Tibetans do not expose the corpse to condolence callers; instead, they place a statue of the *bodhisattva* in its place, and the condolence caller holds a memorial service (phyag 'tshal) and offers incense called tsha gsur for the deceased. The coffin itself is concealed in the Buddhist altar room and is not seen by anyone other than the inmates of the household. At a Han-Chinese funeral, in contrast, a condolence caller goes to the coffin of the deceased first, holds incense sticks, and kneels to pray to the deceased. At this time, a condolence caller offers a yellow fake-money paper in the incense-burner stand.

Although certain practices are thus quite different for the funeral services, Tibetans follow the tradition of graveyard feng-shui that originated from Han-Chinese ancestor worship in how they treat the bones that remain after processing the body. The graveyard feng-shui is a concept of lasting fortune through worship of the ancestral bones. There are

three main features of graveyard feng-shui: 1) financial fortune, 2) fortune of promotion, and 3) long prosperity of the family. The foundation of feng-shui is “landscape interpretation.” A professional feng-shui master, called a *yin-yang*, is able to find the Qi (Han-Chinese’s characteristic notion of natural power) stream by applying his expert knowledge of landscape interpretation. In this context, the natural environment is mechanically converted to an individual landscape element in order to find the ideal Qi stream and to determine the appropriate site for burying the bones.

At that point, the mountain where the yul lha cult is practiced as the primary ritual territory of the mountain, which was explained in the preceding section, is also regarded as a “landscape component” of graveyard feng-shui from the perspective of the Han-Chinese dwellers in the same village. This typical Chinese tradition has permeated the Tibetan dwellers’ culture for many years. It can be explained as a secondary ritual practice on the same mountain. The fact that I could not find more than four generations in the graveyard of the M clan of this village demonstrates vividly that the Tibetans adapted to the Han-Chinese’s funeral tradition after the immigrants came to the village. The case of the relocation of a graveyard, as described below, is an example that may also verify this change in practice.

4.2 The graveyard feng-shui

In the following, I recount, based on personal observation, the relocation of a graveyard as carried out by the N family of the M clan on May 13 and 14, 2006. There were two reasons for the relocation of the graveyard. First, it had become too small because more than 60 years had passed since its establishment. The other is that the bank near the graveyard had collapsed from flood, and the N family was afraid that the graveyard feng-shui had been affected. Thus, the family head of the N family, NT, sought advice from a lama who lives in Lanzhou, and the lama introduced the family to a feng-shui master, who is one of his disciples in there. The N family requested that this master check their graveyard and, as a result, they decided to relocate it. This feng-shui master was born in Lanzhou in the 1950s, and he is famous for his skill in judging feng-shui in Lanzhou. Although he works mainly as a chauffeur at a public office with a monthly salary, his work as a feng-shui master is increasing these days. He has a deep knowledge of Buddhism because of his friendship with the lama in Lanzhou, and he has become familiar with the Tibetans’ way of thinking. Hence, NT assigned this responsibility to him.

On that day, May 13, the Master arrived at NT’s home in the morning with his pupil. The pupil always carries a black briefcase containing the kit for the Qi stream

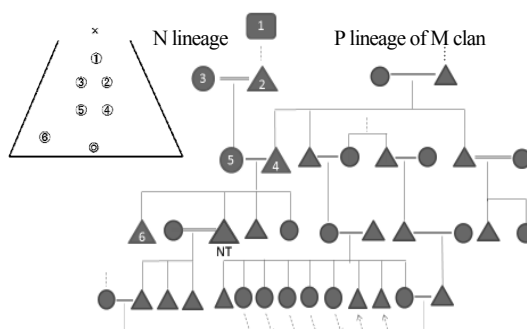
measurement, which is called *luo pan*. The outline of the events for relocating the graveyard extended over two days, as follows.

1) 1st morning: Digging up the graveyard

At 7:30 a.m., after prayers to the mountain god, 20 persons (all of whom were members of the M clan, either naturally or through intermarriage) gathered at the graveyard and began digging up the tombs. There were six tombs arranged from top to bottom according to the generation order (see Table 2). To guard against the noxious vapors that were likely to come out of the tomb, they were wearing masks and gloves, and keeping distilled liquor in their mouths when they entered the grave.

Table 2: Contents inside the N lineage's graveyard

No.	Contents	Death age
×	Incense stand for divine	--
⊙	Incense stand for the dead	--
(1)	One unknown's ash bone	Unknown
(2)	Grandfather (with coffin)	1940
(3)	Grandmother (with coffin)	1950
(4)	Father (without body)	1959
(5)	Mother (with coffin)	1980
(6)	Elder brother (raw burial)	1968



After a while, the human bones of seven bodies had been unearthed: (2), (3), and (5) were inhumations in the crouched burial form in coffins; (1) was a cremation with unidentified ashes (NT said they were probably the great-grandfather's ashes). A mortuary tablet had been put in (4) as a substitute item because the person had been sent to forced labor in 1958 and had never returned home. Finally, (6) was NT's eldest brother. Because he was sick and died at a young age without having a child, the spot for his entombment was separated from the main line of graves (see the figure with Table 2). Because it was in the Cultural Revolution period, he was buried without the use of a coffin. The bodies in (5) and (6) still had some flesh remaining on the bones, but (2) and (3) were eroding, and the bone was wet.

The soil was carefully sorted with a mesh so that no bones were left in the graves. When everyone needed a break for a meal and had to go home, juniper incense smoke was burned at the front gate of NT's house, and a cleaver was placed at the side. The 20 people purified their bodies by walking through the incense smoke, and they simulated slicing off their feet with the cleaver before entering the house.

2) 1st afternoon: Deciding the location of the new graveyard

Two feng-shui masters went to the new graveyard, measured the Qi stream by using the feng-shui compass (*luo pan*), stretched a thread on the ground, and divided the graveyard into several parts that would be dug up the next day. At home, the female family members were busy preparing many offerings for the next day's re-entombment. Because their father's mortuary tablet had already completely decayed, NT was making a new one according to the feng-shui master's instructions. For making a new mortuary tablet, the feng-shui master inscribed the father's name on the surface of a small cement block first. Then, blood extracted from NT's finger was used for indicating the father's family name. The blood activates this new mortuary tablet, and it can then be considered as a substitute for the person himself.

At the graveyard, the unearthing was completed, as well as the arrangement of all the bones, which were stored in six hemp sacks. That night, because the bones could not be carelessly moved from the spot without following appropriate procedures, NT's second son pitched a tent in the graveyard and watched the hemp sacks closely all night long.

3) 2nd morning, early: Moving all the bones to the new graveyard

Before sunrise, the bones that had been watched at the old graveyard overnight were moved to the new graveyard. In order to keep the ancestors' souls following the procession, a special flag was used to indicate the proper way to reach to the new graveyard when the bones were moved physically. The Chinese characters *Tai yi xuan min shen hu bao fan yin ling wang guo N* (family name of this lineage) *shi xian zu zhu wei* were written on the flag, and NT held it up as the other family members followed him, holding the hemp sacks. The sutra recitation monk of the neighboring monastery was also invited on that day.

4) 2nd day morning, later: digging the pits and set up the bones

The new graveyard was located where the two mountains are joined, in the break ridge of A myes gdong btsan. A stream flowed in front of the graveyard and a cliff stood behind it, features that the feng-shui master said demonstrate a uniquely good feng-shui, indicating the "long prosperity of family." Although the master had also discovered a place of "financial fortune" on the outskirts of the same mountain, NT did not select it because he hoped for the everlasting prosperity of a male descendant in his family rather than financial improvement.

The work of digging six pits in the location specified by the feng-shui master continued throughout the morning. Once a pit was dug, NT and his younger brother entered into the pit, and put the skull of the dead body in the direction of the cliff, arranging the other bones in order. So that the human bones in the pit might directly receive the Qi

stream, the operator had to arrange the dead body exactly under the median line measured with the thread. After the body had been arranged in the pit, many offerings were attached to it as burial goods, such as a pair of chopsticks and a pottery bottle filled with grain and dairy products. Finally, it was covered with a white sheet.

5) 2nd day, afternoon: Covering the graves and making offerings

To keep the balance of yin and yang in the pit, all the work had to be finished before the sun reached its zenith. The two feng-shui masters conducted the final check for the location of the bones. The monk recited the sutra of the auspicious at the side of the graveyard for some time. At that time, aside from the feng-shui master's direction, NT independently buried eight treasure bags ('bum gter) at the four corners and four cardinal points of the graveyard. He said that the goods were gifts for the spiritual land owner, such as yul lha and the other god beneath him, and he also said that those bags could activate the force of the land. In the late afternoon, when the sunlight fell on the upper half of the pit, the unearthed soil was quickly returned to the graves. They piled up the earth on each grave, and the various offerings were offered in front of them. Finally, a memorial service was performed by all the members.

4.3 Features of Ritual Territory of "feng-shui"

The graveyard feng-shui functions only through the bones, and the auspicious power of the ancestor acts only within a certain family lineage through the principle of the patrilineal descent system. The impact of the graveyard feng-shui articulates the inner structure of Tibetan clans (tsho ba) in this valley according to the notion of rus pa, while the yul lha cult is opened to all villagers who live at the foot of A myes gdong btsan. The important thing is that participation in the feng-shui operation according to family lineage is influenced by face-to-face social relationships in the village. The three kinds of effects of feng-shui ritual are often reported by villagers as an explanation for economic and social inequality in the village.

For example, if a person in a specific family has passed an examination at a higher grade university, or has been promoted to a highly placed official post in the city, the villagers believe this good fortune is owed to the feng-shui ritual. In the valley that is beside A myes gdong btsan, since the landscape components having an effective feng-shui are limited, every family does its best to choose the best feng-shui. In order to select better graveyard feng-shui, potential competition is a constant in the village as evidenced by the trading or purchasing of land in private. The graveyard feng-shui that is believed to have the three kinds of effects mentioned above can be obtained only if a suitable spot is chosen

for placing the ancestral bones. Thus, graveyard feng-shui promotes activity that helps each family gain a ritual territory on the mountain.

It also functions as a force for the economic development of individual lineages with respect to the social trends after the beginning of the reform and opening up policy. Conversely, it has a psychological effect on the villagers, who are afraid of failure in performing feng-shui. As we have seen in the reason for relocating the graveyard in N's case, the possibility of "failed feng-shui" caused by a change in geographical features is regarded as a fatal error. Such fear strongly restrains villagers' mentality since one of the appeals of graveyard feng-shui is that, as a principle, it can explain inequality among the villagers.

5. Interior of Hybridity

5.1 Phase of differentiation

Watanabe, a feng-shui researcher, says that the key point of Han-Chinese ancestor worship is the "procedure of disposing of the dead for avoiding the impurity of death, for efficient segregation of flesh and bone, and for maintenance of the effectiveness of permanent protection from the ancestral bones" (Watanabe 2001).

By way of contrast, Tibetan Buddhism—which makes prompt rebirth the main point and explains the existence of the Samsara—is not at all accustomed to thinking about treating the corpse as a "tool" of destiny after its consciousness shifts towards rebirth.

In Tibet, which perfectly absorbed Tantric Buddhism, as Tachikawa contends, "not only the human but also the human's container—that is, The World—also contains the electric charge of 'Hierophany'... There is no distinction between a human and its container itself, and a globe, a mountain, and a river are all grasped as homogeneous as a human's body" (Tachikawa 1993: 33). The same thing is described by Onoda more directly in terms of the Tibetans' "mind-body dualism": "It is thought that the view of life and soul at the base of Tibetan Buddhism culture contains a strong feeling of difference between the 'mind' (or soul) and the 'body'... Tibetans admit in the social experience that only the body is limited and is not essence like the 'mind,' which dwells in this body temporarily" (Onoda 1993: 69).

These points of view are fairly obvious in Tibetan studies. Thus, the ancestor worship that associates the dead with the living directly confronts the view of life and death in Tibetan Buddhism, which performs sky burial and believes in the reincarnation lama. If this premise of confrontation between two social systems with opposite principles is accurate, it becomes clear that the Tibetans in Dpa' ris have deviated from the typical

Tibetan images described above. The existence of such a deviation will easily subject them to being judged as “Sinicized Tibetans” (i.e., the kind of people who have lost the special feature of A and have already shifted to B).

If one assumes such a “cultural sphere concept” from the beginning, as observed above, one may conclude that the Dpa’ ris pa, who are immersed in observing the rituals of bones like the Han-Chinese and who completely believe in the force of feng-shui, have been overwhelmingly absorbed into the scheme of ancestor worship. Such a judgment seems even more justified if they are compared with other Tibetans who live in the inner area of the Tibetan High Plateau.

I assume, however, that this ritual practice with its notions and formal behavior may be interpreted in a different context. In order to assume that a certain group has been Sinicized, the detailed relationships between behaviors of the dwellers as settlers who are actually living there and the force of assimilation in the macroscopic sense should be examined. The perspective of “interior hybridity” is illustrated in the following section, and I use it to examine how the scheme of ancestor worship has actually been received by Tibetan dwellers.

5.2 The restraint of the Han-Chinese cultural set

Some noted works on the cultural set of the Han-Chinese have considered the “ritual of death” as a central theme. Freedman (1956) has divided ancestor worship into two levels: the domestic and lineage levels. In the former, the “near ancestors” become the object of ritual under “memorialism,” that is, on an emotional and sentimental level. In the latter, “far ancestors” are regarded as guardian deities, becoming the object of ritual accompanied by feelings of awe. According to this perspective, two theoretical approaches were considered for feng-shui: a “mechanistic view,” which considers that ancestral bones can mediate the Qi stream automatically as a mere medium (Freedman 1967), and a “personalistic view,” which considers that the result of feng-shui for the descendants depends on the personal character of the ancestor (Ahern 1973).

Moreover, according to Cohen, who has examined the Han-Chinese’s coherence and the state of orthopraxy, “ancestor worship” is not merely a religious practice but also a means of broad sociality in connection with a family’s identity as a successor of Chinese civilization for the Han-Chinese (Cohen 1991). Based on the above discussion, I examine to what extent Tibetans are restrained at the “key point of ancestor worship” to which Watanabe refers.

1) Proper disposal of the dead and avoiding the impurity of death: When the graveyard was relocated, the bones were kept strictly in the tent because they could not be moved from the original spot where they had been buried until led in procession by the special flag the next morning. This practice indicates the idea that an ancestor's soul always stays with the bones. The people who unearthed the corpses cleansed themselves from impurities with fire (i.e., the incense) and a cleaver before entering into the house. In Tibetan, the impurity received from a corpse is called *sgrib*. In the context of village society, it is believed that the *sgrib* also remains in the spot where the person died in an accident or disaster, if that is the case, as well as in the graveyard.

2) The context of “parental disobedience”: There were two irregular bodies in the old graveyard. As already noted, NT's father had been arrested in 1958 and sent to forced labor. Since his body was not returned home, the paternal lineage of the N family needed to be re-established with the use of NT's blood as a substitute. Because the eldest brother has died young, ahead of the mother, and was not able to leave a descendant, he was considered a problem in the context of “*xiao*”, undutifulness to his parents (parental disobedience). For this reason, his body was buried at a spot at some distance from the left-hand side, even in the new graveyard.

3) Arrangement of the bones: In the process of relocating the graveyard, the host family did not have much discretion except for choosing a spot with the best feng-shui. After NT had decided on a place for the new graveyard, everything in connection with the ancestral bones was managed by the direction of the feng-shui masters, who centered the control of the Qi stream by using a compass. This process allowed no room for the intervention of Tibetan Buddhism, except when an invited monk recited the sutras for blessing the land.

As shown here, except for the folk-customs manifest in removing the impurity of death, the management of the bones, the disposal of irregular dead persons, and the resetting of the graveyard, the orthopraxy according to the feng-shui master was followed completely. Moreover, in relocating the graveyard, for which the members of N's lineage assembled themselves, it is clear that the family members were reconfirming the relationship with their ancestors and experiencing a sense of togetherness with the whole family according to the idea of memorialism, as previously explained.

In several points, however, the Tibetans have maintained delicate differences in the actual ritual practice and representation even as they formally follow the orthopraxy of ancestor worship, as follows.

5.3 Divergence from the Han-Chinese culture

1) Tombstone: Generally speaking, the Han-Chinese place tombstones in their graveyards. After the tombstone is purchased, the deceased's name is carved on it along with the years of birth and death, and the tombstone is normally set at the grave on the day of the Qingming Festival. These actions are quickly carried out so long economic conditions allow. The tombstone is considered a representation that fixes the relation of the subterranean bones and the dead person. However, in Tibetan custom, only one tomb plate is purchased for each graveyard. It is placed at the top of the graveyard in order to mark where the graveyard begins. No personal names are written on it; however, there is a pattern of characters called *gnam gyi dbang ldan* for an offering to the land gods when they visit the graveyard. Thus, there is no personalization with regard to the ancestor.

2) Attribution of land: A Han-Chinese dweller sets the white stone plate of *hou tu* at the top of the graveyard, according to the guidance of the yin-yang in the town. This is the god in the world of the underground, who is respected by the owner of the graveyard. Tibetans, by way of contrast, do not build this monument. Since the property of the land used as a graveyard is in the care of various land spirits, including *yul lha*, bags of 'bum gter are buried as offerings to them around the graveyard, as seen in the behavior of NT.

3) The contents of the offerings: In the village, periodical visits are paid to a grave at Qingming, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day, etc. In this case, the Han-Chinese burn a lot of fake paper money and bring a pig head or a chunk of pork to the ancestor as offerings. On the other hand, the Tibetans' main offering would be *tsha gsur* incense or foods made of grain. A Han-Chinese offering of fake money and meat stems from the idea that the ancestor is a subject with the same feelings or character as the living person, but Tibetans do not use those kinds of offerings in their visits to the grave, which would seem to indicate that the deceased as a personality is not considered important. It may also demonstrate that the assumption of the subject as a receiver of an offering as a memorial partner is weak among the Tibetans.

5.4 Consideration: The intersection and divergence of two ritual territories

The two ritual territories considered in this paper, the *yul lha* cult and graveyard *feng-shui*, are common ways of constituting ritual territory on the mountain. The mountain god's *la btsas* and the ancestral graveyard each constitute a unified set of representations and ritual practices throughout the mountain land, and the structures are similar. Nonetheless, the former constructs a ritual territory in the context of the village's subsistence on the mountain itself, upon which it depends for its development, whereas the latter constructs a

ritual territory that has little to do with the indigenous context of the mountain but is concerned primarily with the development of the individual lineage. In the latter territory, A myes gdong btsan becomes the unique landscape composition for the judgment concerning the feng-shui that discerns the Qi stream. In addition, the placing of the ancestral bones in the territory benefits the family line.

However, as seen previously, the ritual practices and representations of ancestor worship do not fully involve the Tibetans, who do not assume an individual/substantial relation with their ancestors through graveyard feng-shui. Instead, they believe that the deceased's consciousness is converted to the next stage by a memorial service, as already shown in section 4-1. The deceased themselves are not regarded as recipients of offerings from the Samsara perspective of Tibetan Buddhism, even if they establish a graveyard in which to put the bones. Furthermore, because the Dpa' ris pa—who have worshiped on this mountain since the beginning of pasturage in this valley—are strongly bound by the context of the mountain as a place of daily life, they differ from the Han-Chinese in graveyard representations, shown in the difference between using tombstones or the *hou tu* plaque.

In summary, in terms of the construction of ritual territory, Tibetans practice graveyard feng-shui not in relation to the linear axis of “ancestor-descendant,” but in reference to Buddhist reincarnation theories and the context of the mountain, which has not completely receded into the background. In other words, although Tibetans will accept the function of Qi, they also accept the initiative of the mountain, whereas they do not accept the ancestral initiative.

Thus, this discussion has demonstrated the hybridity of the two ritual territories from an internal perspective in the Dpa' ris region.

6. Conclusion: Implications for Studies of the Peripheral Zone of Eastern Tibet

In this paper, I have attempted to depict the actual condition of “hybridity” in this marginal society using the concrete case of a confrontation between dual ritual territories. For future studies on the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet, the following two points can be considered, as indicated in this paper.

- 1) The village society of the peripheral zone of eastern Tibet needs a suitable analytical framework that corresponds to its locality.

- 2) In future work, I plan to focus on the micro practice level by looking at lower orders of representation and of ritual practice in particular. Religious facilities besides la btsas and the graveyard, such as a stupa and other relic containers (like the ‘bum khang),

also exist in the same village. I hope to build a theoretical model that includes these points and considers the official identity of the ethnic groups. In this paper, for example, I was not able to touch upon the Tu people, who live in the same village. Considerable variation actually exists among the Tu people family from what I have described here, as their practices of ancestor worship are not the same as those of the Han-Chinese. For example, although the deceased's name is carved on a tombstone, the worship style is prostration as opposed to kneeling, and they set up both mortuary tablets and a Buddhist altar room in their houses. These things produce deviations on the individual household level according to the grade of affinity with Tibetan Buddhism and the degree of intermarriage (between both Tibetan and Han-Chinese). These issues are subjects for future studies.

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