

The Early Tibetan Tradition of the Dong (Ldong) People

The *Nyen Collection* and its Connections with the *leu* Ritualists of Amdo

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1. Introduction

This contribution presents an attempt to summarise the main points of research conducted during the past years.¹ It focuses on diverse and little-explored textual sources related to the Bon religion of Tibet. These texts, however, cannot be identified with the core doctrines of the monastic Bon as known from the contemporary tradition and its numerous scriptures. It will firstly introduce the *Nyen Collection* (*Gnyan 'bum*), which is an exceptional voluminous source with ancient traits to be found in the Bon Kanjur. There appear a number of names in Tibetan and in the language of Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong) in it, which make clear that this collection of myths is related to this particular branch of the Dong clan. My paper focuses on the ritual tradition from north-eastern Tibet known as *leu*. A tradition and divinities of the same name are reported in the older Bon sources, and the presence of a lay ritual tradition of the same name is attested in the mountainous and mostly forested areas of Thewo (The bo), Drugchu ('Brug chu), Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu) and Zungchu (Zung chu) prior to the Cultural Revolution in China, but since then it has reached the point of extinction. What is surviving are hundreds of little-researched manuscripts recently collected from the households of these areas. These texts are difficult to read, the *leu* ritualists were apparently subject to suppression from the dominant monastic traditions and far from immune from incorporating new rituals over the centuries. The concrete examples of the ritual of *Smoke Purification by Fox* (*wa bsang*) and a myth on the retribution for killing a *nyen* spirit (*gnyan stong*) provide examples of clear, but not straightforward connections between the *leu* tradition and that of the *Nyen Collection*. But some new and surprising links with the Mongols, Naxi people, etc., suddenly appear. It is argued that the tradition of the Dong people goes back to these ritual traditions that until recently were present in Amdo and the neighbouring regions. As a living tradition of lay

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people, probably primarily based on oral tradition, the Dong (Ldong) remained hidden and silent in the official documents and histories.

2. The *Nyen Collection*

The most extensive version of the *Nyen Collection* (*Gnyan 'bum*) appears in the Bon Kanjur.² It is a vast collection of myths which mostly deal with the origin of the *nyen* spirits (*gnyan*) and the origins of the people of the Dong clan (Ldong). It was first mentioned by Samten G. Karmay, who also translated a myth contained in this collection (Karmay 2010). A few articles by me then followed (Berounský 2016, 2017). At the current state of knowledge, one can state the following facts concerning this collection.

There are reports about its origin contained in the chronicles of the Bon religion related to the story of one of the earliest discoveries of the Bon texts by the turn of 10th and 11th centuries near Purang (Spu rang) in western Tibet. These reports, however, appear only in sources that are dated several centuries after the event described; to the best of my knowledge, the earliest is datable to the eighteenth century.³

The volume of this collection is presented as a part of the *Fourfold Collection* (*'Bum bzhi*) containing also separate volumes dedicated to spirits called *lu* (*klu*), *sadak* (*sa bdag*) and *tö* (*gtod*).⁴ Yet the evidence is relatively clear that the content of these volumes comes from different times and places.

Quite significant are two features. The first is the personage of Shenrab Miwo (Gshen rab mi bo), the mythical founder of the Bon religion as known from the contemporary monastic tradition. The second are the mentions of various languages that apparently played a role in consciously broadening the self-understanding from merely local tradition to a universal one.

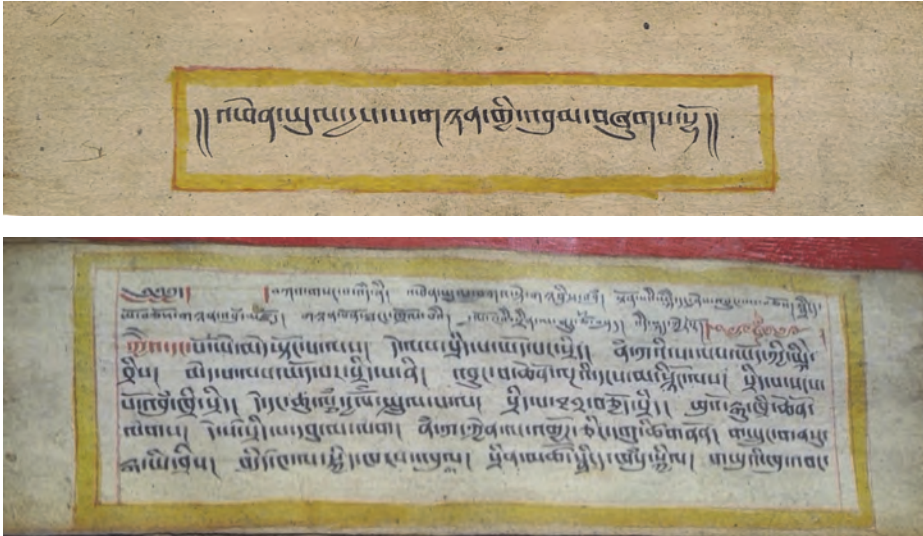
The personage of Shenrab Miwo appears in all the four volumes of the collection. In three of them – the *Lu Collection* (*Klu 'bum*), the *Sadak Collection* (*Sa bdag 'bum*) and the *Tö Collection* (*Gtod 'bum*), his appearance mostly resembles that of the Buddha – his appellation is teacher / Buddha (*ston pa*). While the *Tö* and the *Sadak Collections* mostly mention Shenrab Miwo as universal teacher, but contain also parts that probably predate this development, it is solely the *Lu Collection* that contains scenes clearly inspired by the Mahāyāna sūtras in which the teacher Shenrab Miwo appears in the opening parts of the individual chapters surrounded by the retinue of his followers. By contrast, the *Nyen Collection* is the only of them which has almost no allusion to the universal role of Shenrab Miwo as Buddha. He simply figures among the ritualists to be invited for the ritual resolving of the

² *Rnam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rin po che gnyan gyi 'bum bzugs so* (i.e. *Gnyan 'bum*). Bon Kanjur (1999 edition), vol. 141, 165 ff. There is a confusion caused by re-editing the Bon Kanjur in different text order. I am following the edition from 1999, which contains the same texts, but in different order when compared with the earlier edition, where this text appears as vol. 78. For details and charts enabling access to these editions, see Martin, Kværne and Nagano 2003.

³ *Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi 'byung khungs*, 310; written by Kundrol Dragpa (Kun sgröl Grags pa) in 1742. For more details see Berounský, forthcoming.

⁴ These form the volumes 139, 140, and 142 of the 1999 edition of the Bon Kanjur.

conflict between the *nyen* spirits and the Dong people. One can assume that, despite presenting the *Fourfold Collection* as a single unit, the actual time of composition varies for the individual volumes in the collection.



Figs. 1-2: First folio of the *Nyen Collection* found in Amdo among the *leu* texts. (Photo: Ngawang Gyatso)

The occurrences of different languages support the findings mentioned in the previous paragraph. The *Sadak Collection* presents itself as a Chinese lore that was transformed or translated from Chinese.⁵ There are several cases of names given both in Chinese and Tibetan in the text. The *Tö Collection* represents a not very sophisticated and not very organised attempt to include the use of various languages in order to present the tradition as grand and universal. It contains some bilingual names, but in some cases, it gives names in several languages (Sumpa, Tangut, eternal language of gods, etc.). This becomes much better organised in the *Lu Collection*. In this text, the chapters are typically introduced in the style of Mahāyāna sūtras and the title of the respective chapter is given in several existing and fictive languages. This follows the custom of the Buddhist translations where the title is given in the original language first, followed by its translation into Tibetan.⁶

⁵ The colophon states so (Bon Kanjur, vol. 140, f. 125): The propitiation of *sadak* of the first, middling and last (parts) are concluded. This is a tradition of Ston pa lha bdun. These are rituals (*gto*) composed by eastern Chinese and translated (“transformed”) on the request of A nga’i gser ston. It is beneficial for both teachings for deceased and living, for both relaxed and violent behaviour, for (treating) death and loss, diseases and disturbances. Virtue! (*sa bdag bsgyur bcos/ rab ’bren* (= ’bring) *tha gsum rdzogs so/ ston pa lha bdun gyi gto rgyud lags so/ de la a nga’i gser ston gyi* (= gyis) *zhus/ shar phyogs rgya yis mdzad pa’i gto bsgyur lags so/ gson chos gshin chos gnyis/ spyod pa dal drag gnyis/ shi chad na tsa’* (= *tsha’ khrgus long kun la bon no/ dge’o/*).

⁶ There are quite a few versions of the *Lu Collection* available since recently and some general conclusions would be thus premature before some research on their comparisons is undertaken. What is stated here is valid for the Bon Kanjur versions, but for example the version found in Phenchu by Ngawang Gyatso

This apparently aims to present the tradition as a universal, following the pattern of Tibetan translations of Buddhist texts, but including several languages in order to strengthen its universality in a much wider way. The *Nyen Collection* is in sharp contrast to it. There are some 25 occurrences of bilingual names in Tibetan and the language of the Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong), the people of the Dong clan. Besides that, there is one longer myth giving names in Tibetan and in Tangut (Mi nyag), which is addressed below. In this case, the text presents itself as a specific and local tradition connected with the Dong people.

Thus, one can clearly discern that the *Fourfold Collection* does not contain texts from the same period and provenance, but that these texts reflect a development from a local tradition (the tradition of the Dong clan in case of the *Nyen Collection*) towards a universal doctrine of eternal Bon (it probably incorporated freely rendered expressions from the Chinese tradition and finally presented the most developed *Lu Collection* as a universal doctrine). The same is valid for the figure of Shenrab Miwo. While he is simply one of the priests summoned for the performance of ritual, containing often animal offerings in the *Nyen Collection*, we encounter him as a universal teacher and Buddha (*ston pa*) in the *Lu Collection*. Both the *Tö Collection* and the *Sadak Collection* lie in between of these two extremes.

It is particularly interesting that the Dunhuang document ITJ 371, containing the name of Shenrab Miwo, has similar occurrences in the Nampa Dong language. The same language use can be attested also for the Dunhuang document ITJ 372. We do not know exactly where to locate the people of Nampa Dong, but the *Nyen Collection* conveys a connection to the north-east of the Tibetan Plateau and wider area of the Mount Machen Pomra range including the upper reaches of the Yellow River. An interesting idea about the possible origins of the tradition connected with Shenrab Miwo from eastern Tibet immediately comes to mind.⁷

The *Nyen Collection* thus features the oldest elements when compared with the other three volumes of the *Fourfold Collection*. However, the *Nyen Collection* itself is probably also of composite nature, which might be deduced from the fact that parts of it are written in different style and language. The text itself mentions that there were various such collections of myths dealing with *nyen* spirits.⁸ In fact, there are currently three different texts available. The most extensive is the one contained in the Bonpo Kanjur. There is also a shorter text as part of the “treasure revelations” by Ponse Khyung Gotsal (Dpon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal, born in 1175).⁹ Another

seems to retain some older features. The topic of the *Lu Collection* is currently researched by Zeren Bazhen (Tshe ring Dpal sgron) as her Ph.D. project at EPHE, Paris.

⁷ For more arguments and details see Berounský 2017.

⁸ For example, on f. 178 it is said: [...] this is explained in a certain tradition of *Nyen Collection*. (*.../gnyan 'bum rgyud cig las bshad dof*).

⁹ The date of his birth is given by Nyima Tendzin (cf. Karmay 1972: 173, fn. 3). There are some sources, which consider him to be identical with Rigdzin Godemcan (Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem can, 1337-1409). This is also stated by Karmay (*ibid.*). This appears in the eighteenth century-chronicle *Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi 'byung khungs* (329-336, 371-375) by Kun srol grags pa, where his name is given as Ponse Khyung Thog or Ponse Khyung Thog Godempa (Dpon gsas Khyung thog rgod ldem pa). His surviving hagiography contains names of his contemporaries, which are in agreement with the suggested year of birth (1175) and

version was found by Ngawang Gyatso among the so-called *leu* scriptures in the Thewo region of Amdo.¹⁰ This version is by no means a copy of the Bonpo Kanjur edition. It contains myths on similar topics, but their wording is different.¹¹ There is second-hand information about another manuscript version kept in the Lanzhou Museum, but it is inaccessible to researchers for the time being.¹²

3. The *leu* or *legu* tradition of the older Bonpo texts

The following chapters focus on the relationship between the tradition of the Dong as represented by the *Nyen Collection* and the recently discovered lay ritual tradition of Amdo called *leu* (*le'u*). But before coming to the *leu* in Amdo, the mentions of *le'u* or *le gu* in older Bonpo texts will be touched upon first.

There are several older Bonpo sources containing some enigmatic mentions of certain *le gu* or *le'u*. One finds, however, hardly any clear-cut explanation what this term implies. In the following I present those mentions of greater significance.

A group of sources speak about *leu* or *legu* divinities in the context of virtuous conduct. One of the early examples is to be found in a work ascribed to Azha Lodroe Gyaltzen ('A zha Blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1198-1263). The text is entitled *Dromgon Azha Lodroe's prayer for knowledge* ('*Gro mgon 'a zha blo gros kyi mkhyen gsol zhe bya ba*). Azha Lodroe Gyaltzen came from a family based in Azha principality of the time, i.e. from the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau. In one passage of the text he lists bad deeds against the doctrine of Bon to be avoided and asks the protectors of the Bon doctrine to destroy them. It contains also the phrase *le'u lha log*:¹³

since the dates of Rigdzin Godemcan are relatively well established, it is impossible for them to be one and the same person.

¹⁰ Entitled '*Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum*'; the text comes from a household in the Phenchu ('Phan chu) valley near the Thewo (The bo) valley of the border region of Amdo along the border of the Kansu and Sichuan provinces of the PRC. It has been photographed by Ngawang Gyatso who is a native of Thewo. It is contained in the recently published 10 volumes of reproductions of the texts (Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso eds.), most of them forming the lay tradition of *le'u* ritualists of the given region.

¹¹ This is unlike the cases of the *Tö* and *Sadak Collections*, which are mostly identical with its corresponding parts in the Bonpo Kanjur version.

¹² Personal communication with Ngawang Gyatso during summer 2018. He was given permission to see it (but not make a copy of it) and according to him this version is not identical with that of the Bon Kanjur.

¹³ 'A zha Blo gros rgyal mtshan, '*Gro mgon 'a zha blo gros kyi mkhyen gsol*'; available from the online text repository of the *Zhang bod rig mdzod kun snang khyab pa* (象藏文库衮郎恰巴), URL: <http://xxb.qiongbuwang.com/index/category.html?tid=12843> (accessed: 20.08.2019): [...] *bon gyi bstan pa bshig pa/ gshen rab dbu phang smad pa/ rnga thog bkor (= dkor) la 'bag pa/ zab mo'i dam la ldog pa/ slob pa'i slob bu dam log/ nyos pa'i chung ma brang log/ bcol ba'i le'u lha log/ rus kyi pha tshan sde log/ dam la 'das pa'i las ngan log/ g.yung drung bon gyi spyi dgra/ gshen po bdag gi dgos (= sgos) dgra/ sgral ba'i zhing du gyur ba/ kha ngan du smra ba/ lag pa sdiag tu bsngo ba/ bsam pa ngan du byed pa/ bon dgra dam nyams 'di lo dang zla bar ma bzhang par/ zhag dang za mar myur du sgrol/ tshe phyi ma la dus ma 'debs par/ nam mkha' stong pa la mtshan ma ma 'dzugs par/ las kyi rnam par smin pa la/ khungs ma 'byin par dus da lta nyid du sgrol cig/ [...]*

“[...] Destroying the Bon doctrine; lowering the high position of Shenrab; stealing harvest and property; violation of profound vows; violation of vows by a disciple who is in training; a wife’s betrayal of her [husband at] home (?);¹⁴ rejection of the *leu* divinity with whom one has a relationship of trust; betrayal of the community of one’s patrilineal kin; wrong actions through violation of one’s commitments; general enemies of eternal Bon; personal enemies of us, the priests; those in the category of people who are to be ‘liberated’ (i.e. ‘killed’); speaking ill with one’s mouth and dedicating one’s hands to non-virtue: may these enemies of Bon not remain for years or months, but may they be ‘liberated’ within days or the duration of a mealtime; without a time being allocated to them for a future life, or without a sign being established for them in the empty sky, may their deeds come to ripening, and may they be uprooted from their source and ‘liberated’ at the very moment! [...]”

It is notable that the mention of *leu* divinities appears within the context of family ties in this extract. What precedes in the list is “a wife’s betrayal of her [husband at] home” and it is followed by “betrayal of the community of one’s patrilineal kin”. The *leu* divinities are mentioned between these two actions and somehow stand out from the rest of the list, which is either more general, or concerned with the doctrine of monastic Bon. This could well indicate that *leu* divinities appear in the proximity of very intimate ties, perceived to be similar to family relationships.¹⁵

What the *leu* divinities might be is further indicated in the following extract. It appears in the large fourteenth-century compendium of the *Ziji* (*Gzi brjid*) and narrates a story of a king of a country called Hōmo Lingdrug (Hos mo gling drug), whose wife becomes ill. The illness is caused by a *lu* (*klu*) spirit (i.e. an underground or serpent spirit). Various diviners and physicians are invited and a diviner learned in the *jutig* divination (*ju thig*) appears at the court. After several interesting narrations on the origin and details on *jutig* divination, which is based on the use of cords from divine sheep, the story eventually addresses the state of the king and his wife:¹⁶

“All the illness of the queen and the epidemics of the kingdom must have appeared because of turning your back on the *leu* divinities who are related to you. Then, from what appeared

¹⁴ The meaning is uncertain. Here, the expression *brang* is taken as meaning ‘home’. *Brang log* could mean ‘cheating’ (lit. ‘turning the breast away’) as well.

¹⁵ Ngawang Gyatso (Ngag dbang rgya mtsho 2005, 2016, Ngawang Gyatso 2016) cites a similar passage from the *Ziji* (*Gzi brjid*) – a compendium systematising the Bon teachings, which was revealed as a ‘treasure’ in the fourteenth century. It contains the slightly different phrase *bcol ba’i le’u lha log mkhan*. Ngawang Gyatso suggests the spelling *le’u lta log mkhan* (i.e. *leu* - the one with wrong view) and understands it as a polemic with regard to the *leu* ritualists. The evidence presented here – and other occurrences in the *Ziji* speaking about *leu* as certain gods – show that *leu* divinity is most probably meant here (*le gulle’u lha*), and not a practitioner or proponent of some tradition (*le’u lta*). It might thus more probably mean “the one with wrong *leu* divinity entrusted”.

¹⁶ *Gzi brjid*, vol. *cha*, p. 449: *btsun mo’i nad dang rgyal khams kyi yams thams cad/ rang gnyen le’u lha la rgyab kyis phyogs pa las byung bar ’dug go/ da le’u lha’i gnyen phyas’i nang nas/ gto phyas’i g.yas (= yo) bcos kyi nang nas/ ston pa spyang drangs nas nyes ltung gi bshags pa dang/ nyams bskangs kyi cho ga rnams byas na/ gtos phan cing dpyad rtsis ste/ [...]*

in the prognosis of the divination concerning the “friends” (*gnyen*)¹⁷ of *leu* divinities, and from what rituals might be performed for straightening the crooked, if the teacher is invited, and confession of the misdeeds along with performance of the ritual of remedying faults will be performed, such a ritual would be beneficial, and the diagnosis would be substantially better [...].”

Bearing in mind that *lu* (*klu*, underground or serpent spirit) was mentioned as the primary cause of the illness, it follows that the *lu* spirit is considered to be one of the *leu* divinity in this case.

Another interesting mention of *legu* divinities appears in a tantric text of the Bon Kanjur being entitled *Mkha' klong rab 'byams bskang ba'i 'phyong bzhugs*. This text is, however, difficult to date. It is ascribed to a certain master Ma (Rma) from the Dru (Bru) family. Master Ma might be one of the masters otherwise known as Maton (Rma ston – “teacher from Ma clan”), but there were several persons with this name living in 11th-13th centuries.¹⁸ The text is dedicated to the ritual of ransom offering (*glud*) and consists of several stories presented in a series of narrations (*rabs*) recited customarily in the Old Tibetan rituals. Many of such narrations contained in this larger text are pronounced by or related to Shenrab Miwo, the founding figure of the monastic Bon. *Legu* divinities are mentioned only in one story, which is also specific to the divinities it mentions. These are unknown in other parts of the text. The composite nature of the text leaves us with the question what the source for the following part might have been:¹⁹

“Again, there was one named Camdel Thangpo, who was a king of the country. His fortress was high; he was of virtuous conduct and possessed many riches. But he forgot about the gods above to be propitiated. The protective power of the *legu* divinities faded away. The [balanced] state of the eight classes [of spirits and divinities] terminated. [The king] thought of himself as

¹⁷ This is a category mentioned earlier in the text for which the divination is cast. It resembles *grog*s (“friend”) of more common astrological calculations and is the opposite to “enemy” (*dgra*) in both cases.

¹⁸ The colophon states that the text was revealed as a “mind treasure” by Bla ma Rma in Khyung rdzong and that it was faithfully copied from an old original by Bru btsun Rgyal mtshan 'od zer, who is from the lineage of transmission [...] *gyer gyi bka' gter khyung rdzong la/ dngos slob bla ma rma la bab/ rgyud du bdag la'o/ bru btsun pa rgyal mtshan 'od zer gyis dpe rgan la zhal bshus so/*.

¹⁹ *Mkha' klong rab 'byams bskang ba'i 'phyong bzhugs pa'i dbu phyogs lags+ 'o*, pp. 19-73, 26: *yang 'brel lcam dal thang po zhes bya ba/ yul gyi rje byed/ mkhar gyi bzang mtho/ bzangs (= bzang) spyod kyi skor (= dkor) ldan te/ steng du gsol ba'i lha yang brjed/ le gu lha bsrung kyi mthu rnal/ sde brgyad stabs la bcad/ dmu bdud btsan gsum bas kyang nga che/ gnyan klu gtod gsum bas kyang nga btsan par dgongs pas/ de la lha srin sde brgyad kyis bka' chad dam ste/ mi de la bdud kyi than babs/ dmu'i (= dmu yis) byin bsnyil/ btsan gyis khroms 'grol / brnyen (= gnyan?) gyis zer 'phros/ bdud kyis byad rdol/ mi la nad byung/ phyugs la god babs/ ci bsam yang char song te/ 'di ci cho ci 'brang snyams nas/ srid pa'i bon mo ting ber shel lcags zhes bya ba la/ gto byas pas bon mo de na re/ 'di phyi ma cis kyang ma len te/ 'go ba'i lha spang/ le gu sles la bor bas nongs/ lha srin sde brgyad stabs la bcad pas nongs/ 'go ba'i lha bas med/ lha srin za lam skyes pas/ da lha la yon 'bul/ bgegs la glud thongs/ mi nor gyi phywa g.yang skyob cig skad do/ der 'bel 'bang rkang phran gribs/ thar bon dang/ klu bon zor gnyer nas/ lha la rten btsug/ bgegs la glud btang/ le gu'i srungs btsugs te/ che bar gser dang g.yu gzi/ spug/ g.yag/ lug/ rta/ dar zab 'bru bang rnams phul/ chung bar sku glud rings (= ring?) tshad dang/ gnam bya ri dwags 'phen/ dud 'gros na tshogs rnams/ gzugs dang gsob du byas nas phul bas/ rgyal po de yi mi nad dang/ phyogs nad yams nad chad do/*.

being greater than *mu*, *dü* and *tse*n spirits, the three. He thought of himself as being more powerful than *nyen*, *lu* and *tö* spirits, the three. The eight classes of spirits and divinities pledged themselves to punish it. Bad omens of *dü* demons fell down to the people. The malevolent charisma of *mu* spirits caused destruction. A violence was released by the *tse*n spirits. The *nyen* spirits projected the pain.²⁰ The harming power of *dü* demons broke out. Sickness appeared among people; loss befell the cattle. All thinkable trouble came to them and they thought: What is the reason of it? What should be pursued?

A female ritualist named Tingber Shelcag was asked to perform the ritual and she said: “Such [conduct] should not be adopted by anyone in the future.²¹ Enveloping divinities²² diminished. It was fault that the *legu* [divinities] were left abandoned. It was fault that the power of the balanced state of the eight classes of divinities and spirits was terminated. Nobody except for enveloping divinities is here.²³ The livelihood²⁴ of the divinities and spirits should be produced. Now, present valuable gifts to the divinities. Send ransom offerings to the spirits of obstructions. Protect the good destiny of people and well-being of cattle!” Thus she said.²⁵

The ritualist Tharbon and Lubon Zornyen erected the supports of divinities. They sent the ransom offerings to the spirits of obstruction. They established the protection of *legu* [divinities]. They presented large treasures of offerings of gold, turquoise, onyx, coral, yak, sheep, horse, fine silk, grains. Then ransom offerings of the body of the smaller proportions: birds of the sky and wild ungulates were cast. The bodies of the various animals were stuffed and offered. And the human sickness of the king and the loss of cattle were stopped.”

I would like to turn the attention to a seemingly minor detail. The *legu* divinities appear in the proximity of so-called “enveloping divinities” (*'go ba'i lha*) and spirits named as *lu* (*klu*), *nyen* (*gnyan*) and *tö* (*gtod*). It is namely the mention of *tö* spirits – otherwise very little known in Tibet – that again indicates its proximity to the *Fourfold Collection* mentioned in the first chapter. Unfortunately, the various categories of the spirits and divinities mentioned in this extract are of mixed-up nature and are often ambiguous. Typically, the lists of the particular spirits and divinities

²⁰ The text mentions *brnyen* (for *brnyan*), “images,” and *zer*, “beam of light.” It is, however, probable that the text speaks about the *nyen* spirits (*gnyan*) and “pain” (*gzer*). *Gzer* is also a disease listed among those caused by *gnyan* (*gnyan rigs bco bgyad*), but it at the same time means “pain”.

²¹ The translation is only tentative. The expression in Tibetan is so general that it could be rendered in a number of ways.

²² These divinities are considered to reside in the body of individuals and according to the Buddhist sources consist of the male-divinity (*pho lha*), female-divinity (*mo lha*), warrior divinity (*dgra lha*), maternal uncle-divinity (*zhang lha*), etc. Older sources of Bon, however, include more divinities. I am translating their designation *'go ba'i lha* here only provisionally as “enveloping divinities”. Later Tibetan sources understand them to be attached (*'go ba*) to the individual’s body as shadows. For more information, see Berounský 2007; for the term *'go* in Dunhuang documents, see Dotson 2017.

²³ The sentence is strange and gives the impression that some part is missing.

²⁴ Literally “food and path” (*za lam*).

²⁵ The next sentence is omitted since its meaning is altogether not clear: *der 'bel 'bang rkang phran grib*s.

representing them vary to a high degree in the textual sources. Yet, there is an indication in this extract that the *legu* divinities are perceived as representing the sphere lying in between the gods (connected with the sky) and the demons (probably bound with earthly characteristics), or standing between the extremes between distant gods and demons. Their protective power for people is stressed. In the beginning of the text three categories are mentioned: gods above, *legu* divinities, and eight classes of divinities and spirits. These seem to be a symbolic representation of the three vertical layers of the world. At the conclusion, again, it is mentioned that offerings were presented to the gods, ransom offerings to the spirits of obstruction. These are clearly two extremes. Only then it is stated that the “protection of *legu* divinities was established,” which implicates that the *legu* divinities are seen as very close to the people and at the same time as being somewhere between the gods and demons (or spirits of obstruction). It is, however, not clear, what the relationship is between the “enveloping divinities” (perceived as divinities present in the bodies of the individual), the *nyen*, the *lu*, the *tö* on the one side and the *legu* divinities on the other side. Since all of them are seen as divinities and spirits closely connected with people, it could well be assumed that there is some overlap in these categories. Nevertheless, the text lacks any further indications of details which would provide some basis for better understanding the relationship between them.

Yet another interesting text passage speaks of not only the *leullegu* divinities, but of *legu bon* (be it the ritual tradition, doctrine, etc.). This occurrence appears in an extracanonical text exposing the doctrine by Shenrab Miwo entitled as *Mdo rnam 'grel bar ði ka*, which must be dated earlier than the fourteenth century.²⁶ The text mentions the “Bon of the *legu* of ten knowledges” (*le gu shes bcu bon*) and it is apparent that this is to be understood as the basis of the doctrine of Bon. It is not clear whether *legu* means divinities here. It might well be that the meaning expanded in this case and that practises and rituals connected with *legu* divinities are meant here. This expression appears in the context in which 12 bon(pos) of various points of compass address their questions concerning the practice. The *legu* is mentioned only in the answer to the 12 bon(pos) of the East, which is an interesting detail:²⁷

“Again, twelve *bon* of the East asked the following unanswered questions: “After the demise of the sole father Shenrab Miwo, who will be the teacher of Bon? Who will be the friend of the Doctrine? Who will further expose arts (*gtsug lag*)? How will the traditions of narration on origin be differentiated?” Shenrab said: “Knowledgeable ones will be the teachers. Search friends among those of loving attitude. When the **bon of *legu* of ten knowledges** will be enacted to the disciples of body, speech and mind, great core treatises of arts (*gtsug lag*) will

²⁶ This text is cited in *Bon sgo gsel byed*, which is from fourteenth century; see Mimaki 2000. For the Tibetan text, see *Mdo rnam 'brel (= 'grel) bar ði ka*.

²⁷ *Mdo rnam 'brel bar ði ka*, chap. 30, fols. 108a-108b, *Sangs po 'bum khris ston pa spyin drangs ba bstan pa*: [...] yang shar bon bcu gnyis kyi zhal na re/ ma byung ste 'di skad zhus/ gshen rab yab cig 'das 'og tu/ bon gyi slob dpon su la bya/ bsten pa'i grogs po su la bya/ gtsug lag rgyas par su la bshad/ smrang rgyud dbye ba ji ltar dbye/ gshen rab yab kyi zhal na re/ shes pa can la slob dpon gyis/ brtse gdung can la grogs po tshol/ sku gsung thugs kyi slob bu la/ le gu shes bcu bon byed na/ gtsug lag gzhung chen de la bshad/ gyer thabs re zhing smrang rgyud dang sprad/ 'on tang srid pa kun gyis go/ [...]

be exposed there. The specific way of recitation will be passed on in each tradition of narration on origin. And thus, all the creation will be understood.”

Quite surprisingly, *legu* is presented here as the principle means of continuity of the practice of Bon. One, however, must bear in mind that this concerns the twelve bon(pos) of the East. It is also clear that the extract addresses a certain tradition of *legu*, which is called bon, although it might mean a tradition related to *legu* divinities. The *legu* is described as containing “arts” (*gtsug lag*), a Tibetan term often understood as related to the art of astrology. It is interesting to notice that the *Nyen Collection* and the *Sadak Collection* (Bon Kanjur versions) mention the term *gtsug lag* often when referring to the practices related to these spirits in general. The extract also says that *legu* is bound with recitation of myths on original events and specific ways of reciting them. Although it might be valid also for other pre-Buddhist ritual traditions on the Tibetan Plateau, it is still the very core of the practices related to these collections.

Coming back to the *Fourfold Collection*, there is at least one mention of *leu* in the *Sadak Collection*, and one mention in the *Nyen Collection* of the Bon Kanjur.²⁸

These mentions do not reveal much, they are typically located in the conclusive parts of the narrative where suddenly an exclamation wishing prosperity and happiness to the “*leu* and donors” or “donors of *leu*” (*le’u yon bdag*) appear. It does not seem that divinities are meant by *leu* in these cases. Similar to the Bon and Buddhist texts one would expect the ritual master to be addressed by this term in analogy to similar (and frequently occurring) phrases referring to *yogis* (*rnal ’byor pa*) and sponsors in Buddhist texts, and priests (*gshen*) and donors in the Bonpo sources.

When looking into the short version of the *Nyen Collection* rediscovered by Ponse Khyung Gotsal (b. 1175), there are seven mentions of *leu* in this relatively short text.²⁹ Again, these mentions do not reveal much, they appear in phrases addressing the “donors” at the conclusion of some myth or in sections dealing with rituals. It is striking that one of the most frequent early references to the *leu* are again associated with a source that deals with the *nyen* spirits and comes from the tradition of the Dong people – the *Nyen Collection*.

4. The *leu* tradition of Amdo

It is not known in greater detail what *leu* or *legu* means in the older Bon sources. But it is used to refer to a type of spirits or divinities, who are perceived as intimately related to the individual. *Nyen*, *tö* and *lu* spirits seem to be identified with them and “enveloping divinities” appear in their proximity. In one of the texts presented above the term designates also a tradition, which might reflect tendency towards creating a universal tradition out of the local one. The term *leu* or *legu* probably expanded its meaning and designates a ritual tradition related to *legu/leu* divinities. The mentions of *leu* in the *Nyen Collection* then demonstrate that the meaning of *leu* refers to a ritual

²⁸ *Gnyan ’bum*, p. 317: [...] *le’u yon bdag* [...]; *Sa bdag ’bum*, chap. 11, p. 57: [...] *le’u yon bdag ’di dag gis* [...].

²⁹ See *Nye lam sde bzhi’i gnyan ’bum*.

specialist dealing with *leu* divinities. Eastern Tibet is alluded to as a source of origin and it has been shown above that the *Nyen Collection* is somehow related to it as well.

Apart from the mentions in the written sources, there was a living tradition also called *leu* present in Amdo until the time of the Cultural Revolution. Until recently, the existence of it was totally unknown to modern scholarship. It was only in 2005 that a Tibetan article by Ngawang Gyatso (Ngag dbang Rgya mtsho) in the Amdo Research journal (*Mdo smad zhib 'jug*) revealed sensational information about this local ritual tradition of lay priests called *leu* or *amnye leu* (*a myes le'u*).³⁰ Although Ngawang Gyatso himself comes from the area of Thewo (The bo), where the tradition was present, he did not know about its existence until his adult age. He spent years collecting manuscripts related to the *leu* from households of this area.³¹ Today, this tradition has vanished and what remains are hundreds of cryptic manuscripts difficult to understand, and a few very old individuals knowing about the rituals from the times predating the Cultural Revolution. Given the fact that Ngawang Gyatso's article is written in Tibetan and published in Amdo, the new findings on the *leu* tradition have not spread to Western scholarship either.

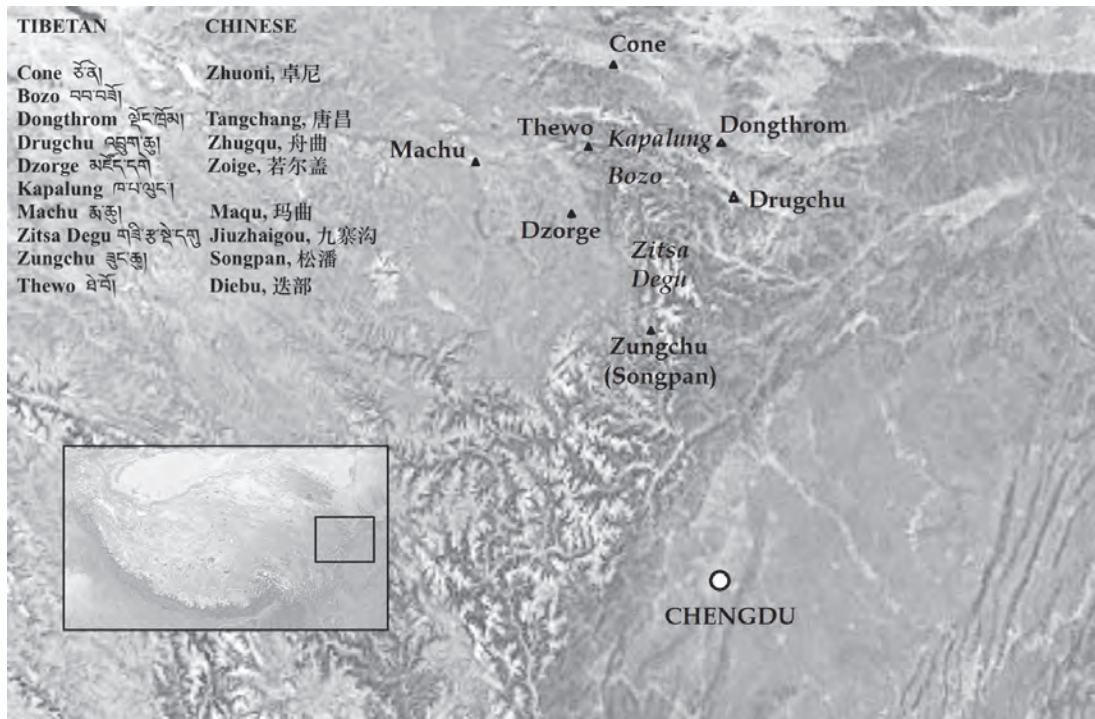


Fig. 3: Distribution of the *leu* tradition in Amdo. (Map prepared by the author, based on Google Maps 2019).

Hundreds of *leu* manuscripts have been collected and published in the last decades. Facsimiles of the texts from Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu), Thewo (The bo) and other places were published in

³⁰ For this text published in Tibetan, see Ngag dbang rgya mtsho 2005, 2016. For a similar article by the author, see Ngawang Gyatso 2016 (translation by Charles Ramble).

³¹ Personal communication in summer 2017.

60 volumes in 2003. This large collection contains not only *leu* texts, but is a mixture of manuscripts of various provenance including monastic Bon.³² The editors, however, did not recognize that parts of the texts are connected with this specific tradition. Then news about the sensational discovery of ancient texts from Amdo from the imperial period appeared in the Chinese media and 30 volumes of texts from the area of Dongtrom (Ldong khrom) to the east of Thewo were also published as facsimile. Confusingly, the title mentions Datshang (Mda' tshang) as its place of provenance.³³

Ngawang Gyatso's research on the topic resulted in his Chinese language dissertation (submitted in 2011, Sichuan University in Chengdu) and facsimile reproductions of texts belonging to the *leu* tradition collected by him in Thewo (published in 10 volumes in 2016).³⁴ Recently another discovery of similar texts has been announced from the Drugchu ('Brug chu) area southeast of Thewo and another 20 volumes containing facsimiles of the manuscripts are being published at the time of writing this paper.



Fig. 4: Younger *leu* ritualist during a ritual dedicated to the *nyen*. This is an attempt to revive the tradition. Note the typical headgear formed by a strip of bear's wool (*dom ral/ral*), Khapalung. (Photo: Aben, June 2018)

The area where *leu* ritual specialists were present until the time of the Cultural Revolution comprises the wider region stretching south from Cone (Co ne) to the south through Thewo (The bo), Phenchu ('Phen chu), Drugchu ('Brug chu) and Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu). These areas are mostly forested. The tradition has received almost no mention in the written sources of the Bon, the Gelug

³² *Mdo khams yul gyi bod yig gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba 'dzum bzhad*. 60 vols.

³³ Mda' tshang is an attempt to render in Tibetan its Chinese name Tanchang (宕昌). To Tibetans it is known as Ldong khrom. See *Mdo smad mda' tshang yul gyi gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba don ldan*, 30 vols. The volumes are poorly edited and do not list the manuscripts they contain. For a list of the texts and other *leu* scriptures contained, largely unpublished, see Charles Ramble's website on Bon rituals, *Kalpa Bön*, URL: <http://kalpa-bon.com> (accessed: 16.12.2020).

³⁴ *Gna' rabs bon gyi dpe dkon bris ma*, vols. 1-10.

and the Sakya tradition in the area, despite its strong influence in the vast areas of Amdo at the edge of the Tibetan Plateau. We know now that the term *leu* (*le'u*) or *amnye leu* (*a myes le'u*) was used in the Thewo region and Phenchu area where the term *gompo leu* (*mgon po le'u*) refers to those familiar with Buddhist tantric rituals. Similar specialists are named *shipa* (*srid pa*, sometimes written as *shes pa*) in Zitsa Degu and *kongpa* (? *kong pa*) in Drugchu. The specific texts from Cone region, which were edited by Gelugpa monks, are called *tshe bcu yi ge* there. The term *leu* (written also as *lhe'u*, *le gu*, etc.) is nevertheless the appellation appearing in the texts themselves.³⁵

So far, the efforts concerning the exploration of these traditions – with an exception of the research by Ngawang Gyatso – lay on preserving and publishing the surviving texts. This is a highly urgent task, since many of these texts were sold to private collectors in China and their disappearance deprives researchers of studying the last traces of this remarkable tradition and its socio-religious context. The texts collected mostly come from the possession of households in the vast area mentioned above.

For a number of reasons these manuscripts are very difficult to deal with. They are mostly written in classical Tibetan, in the “headless” *dbu med* script, often with a very distinctive shape of letters, and they retain many features of the Old Tibetan orthography. They contain frequent subscribed *ya* to the syllable *ma* (*myi*, *mye*, etc.), they frequently add *a chung* to particles such as *pa* (*pa'*) and the genitive particles (*gi*) are frequently used instead of the ergative (*gis*). The texts contain many contractions, some of them rather specific for these texts, for example the number 2 for *gnyan* or the letter *sa* with an above stroke added to it for *sa bdag*. Certain numbers unknown to the classical Tibetan script are also specific to the texts.

Although these texts are mentioned as coming from the imperial period in the facsimile publications, their physical appearance and palaeographic features do not correspond to such a statement. The manuscripts themselves are certainly of a much later date. Some of them are almost unintelligible, with incorrect spellings according to the classical orthography. This might be due to the local spellings in the various dialects present in the area, but seems to witness a strong influence from the oral tradition. There are indications that the tradition was transmitted mostly orally.³⁶

When dealing with the origins of this tradition, Tibetan authors and the editors of the abovementioned facsimile collections connect it again with the Imperial Period of Tibetan history and the presence of soldiers from Central Tibet in the area. This repeated explanation based on legendary narrations projected back to the ancient past does, however, not satisfy a critical researcher.

³⁵ This is partly based on discussions with Ngawang Gyatso, cf. also Ngawang Gyatso's introduction to the 10-volume facsimile edition of the texts from Thewo, i.e. *Gna' rabs bon gyi dpe dkon bris ma*.

³⁶ We are mostly left with the published editions which do not give details on the manuscripts' origins. During my fieldwork in Thewo in 2017 and 2018 I tried to find out about the background of the collection of the *leu* texts coming from the Khapalung (Kha pa lung) area of Thewo. The owner of the manuscripts said that they were written down by Bonpo monks of the monastery before the Cultural Revolution. There is an old *leu* in Thewo, probably the only ritual specialist surviving there, who possesses almost no texts but knows them from memory. These are clear indications for the primacy of orality, which also explains why similar texts are written down in different ways and phonetic rendering.

Despite the absence of any detailed survey of the texts, one can generally notice their diverse background. There are some *leu* texts with stronger influence of the monastic Bon, some of them are only fragmentary with apparently missing parts and many of them bear signs of being censored; this concerns mostly texts related to animal sacrifice. Some of the texts are shared with the monastic tradition of Bon, but many seem to be specific to this tradition, albeit mostly in an unintelligible and fragmented manner. One could hardly postulate a single origin of the surviving texts. Doubts also concern the identity of texts that mention the *leu* or *legu* from the older Bon sources. It is known that the tradition was subject to persecution, but at the same time also open to various influences throughout the centuries.

It is striking that this lore is strongly permeated by a layer connected with the worship of the *nyen* spirits. This could in turn be related to the Dong clan and the *Nyen Collection*. The following part of this paper will try to highlight some evidence for this hypothesis.

A *leu* text from Thewo entitled *Abo Ya-ngal* (*A bo ya ngal*),³⁷ for example, lists in its conclusive part the names of divine stones (*gsas rdo*) in two different languages. In this case not the language of Nampa Dong, but the “Nyen language of the Tanguts” (*mi nyag gnyan gyi skad*) in addition to the Tibetan. This can be considered as a further elaboration of the “Dong language” via the Tanguts (as one of the Dong tribes) and apparently associated with the Dong clan through the worship of *nyen* spirits.

If one leaves aside, for a moment, the surviving *leu* texts and looks into what *nyen* means for the people living in these areas nowadays, one would recognise an enormous influence of the *nyen* spirits in society there, which I think is extraordinary on the Tibetan Plateau.³⁸

Most mountains in the area are considered to be abodes of *nyen* and a common term used for high mountains is “*nyen*-mountain” (*ri gnyan*). According to Sherab Dragpa, a younger *leu* ritualist from Bozo, the *nyen* represent an area of higher elevation and outside the reach of the habitat of the people – in contrast to the living space of the people represented by *yulsa*, “divinity of the living place” (*yul sa*). *Nyen* are distinguished from *yulsa* by their fierce and self-willed nature which makes it difficult to appease them. An old *leu* named Gendun (Dge ’dun, aged over 80), one of two *leu* ritualists from Bozo who remember the time before the Cultural Revolution, burst into laughter when recalling how Bonpo monks attempted to make *nyen* into the protectors of their monasteries. He said that this shows their ignorance about the real nature of the *nyen*, who are naturally fierce, headstrong and follow only their own mind.

The worship of *nyen* is a business carried out by males who address the spirit through the propitiation ritual mostly called *brngan*, which takes place at *labtse* (*la btse*), although many of such places are also addressed by names associated with birds (*bya bskyal*, *bya shing*, *bya bro*).

³⁷ This text is not yet published. I am indebted to Ngawang Gyatso who generously provided me with photos of the manuscript.

³⁸ The following information was collected during research trips to the areas of Thewo, Phenchu and Bozo in 2017 and 2018. For most information I am indebted to Ngawang Gyatso, but also to the younger *leu* ritualist Sherab Dragpa (Shes rab Grags pa) from Bozo, who had learned the rituals from the 95 years old *leu* ritualist Walse (Dbal gsas).

Birds represent the *nyen* in general, they are messengers of the *nyen* and when speaking about *nyen*, people use the word “bird” as a synonym for the *nyen*. The *leu* ritual texts frequently mention the “artemisia bird” (*mkhan bya*), which used to be an effigy of bird made from the artemisia plant. It was offered to the *nyen*. This ritual seems to influence another frequent ritual called “bird-poles” (*bya rdang*) addressing primarily “warrior divinities” (*sgra bla*). In the numerous ritual texts of “bird-poles” the *nyen* are frequently mentioned. The texts leave the impression that the *nyen* have been mixed up with “warrior divinities”. During the ritual a ritual construction is used, on which depictions of birds appear.³⁹



Fig. 5: “Bird-poles” construction (*bya rdang*) in use during a ritual dedicated to *nyen*. There are depictions of various birds on the paper, the Garuda is on the top; Khapalung. (Photo: Aben, June 2018)

The position of the *nyen* is juxtaposed with the worship of *lu* (*klu*) spirits. Females make offerings to the *lu* spirits through the *bsang* ritual. Customarily, women used a spindle during the worship of *lu* in contrast to the arrows and spears used for the propitiation of the *nyen* by males. According to informants from various places, each household had several specific places where the *lu* were worshipped by females in the past. Such places of worship did not have a single common name, but were designated as “tree of *lu*” (*klu shing*), “place of *lu*” (*klu sa*) and others (*klu skyel*, *klu bro*, etc.). This tradition of specific female rituals is nowadays disappearing. The importance of the *nyen* and *lu* is also stressed by the fact that according to Gendun, *leu* ritualists used to employ two different styles of chanting during the performance of the ritual – the “voice of *nyen*” and the “voice of *lu*” (*gnyan skad*, *klu skad*), the “voice of *nyen*” being the most common style employed.

Both *lu* and *gnyan* were intimately connected with society. It had been the custom that childless women addressed their prayers to the *nyen* for granting them a child (*gnyan la bu slong ba*). When the child was born, it received a name in which *nyen* figures. This explains why

³⁹ This again is very much in agreement with the texts of the *Nyen Collection*. For my article presenting examples of the offerings of birds to the *nyen*, see Berounský 2016.

frequent names in the area are “Child of *Nyen*” (Gnyan phrug), “One Achieved by *Nyen*” (Gnyan grub), “One Protected by *Nyen*” (Gnyan skyab), “One Released by *Nyen*” (Gnyan thar), “Pleasure of *Nyen*” (Gnyan dga’), “Virtue of *Nyen*” (Gnyan dge), “*Nyen*-Män” (Gnyan sman), “One Reared by *Nyen*” (Gnyan ’tsho), etc. It also had been custom to consider extraordinary males – typically brave and fierce characters – to be *nyen* in fact. Some people were believed to understand the language of the *nyen*.



Fig. 6: Gendun (aged over 80), one of the two surviving old *leu* ritualists from Phenchu and Bozo, with Sherab Dragpa to the right and Ngawang Gyatso to the left. (Photo: author, June 2017)

The might and influence of the *nyen* is eventually illustrated by events that took place in the village of Khapalung in Thewo about seven years ago. The village was flooded by a usually small creek and several people died. The collecting and selling of Yartsagungbu (*dbyar rtsa dgun ’bu*; caterpillar fungus), which grows abundantly in the area and fetches a high price on the market, had become a major factor for the increase of wealth of the otherwise poor village. The flooding was interpreted as a manifestation of the anger of the *nyen* who is believed to reside in the steep mountains above the valley. Despite the enormous profit Yartsagungbu had brought to the village people, the collecting of the medicinal mushroom was banned and stopped.⁴⁰

5. The case of the “Smoke Purification by Fox” (*wa bsang*)

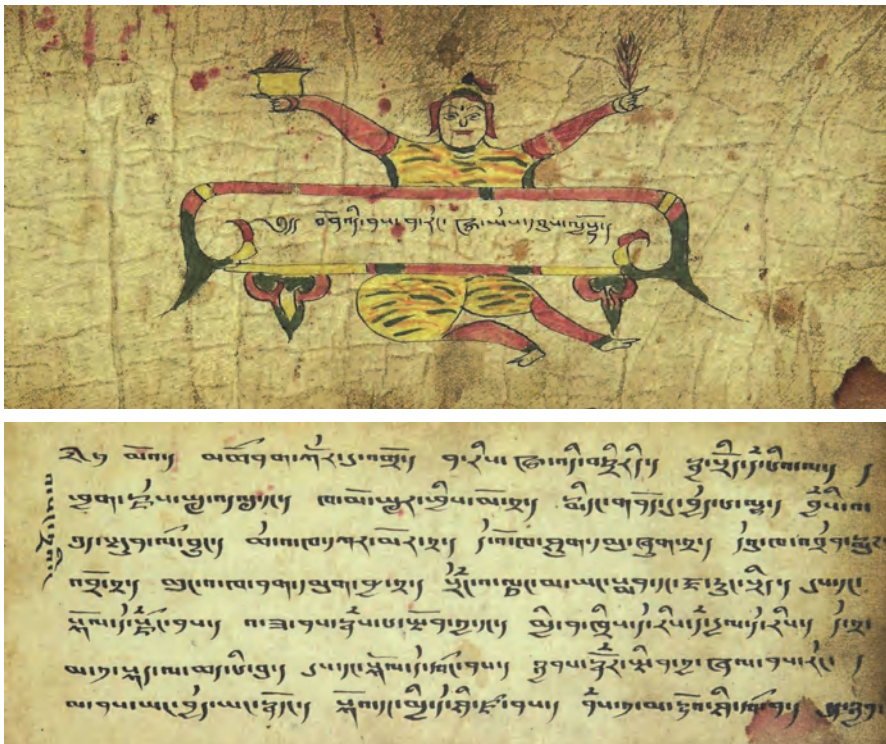
In order to exemplify the connections between the *leu* tradition of Amdo and the *Nyen Collection*, two examples will be given. Both demonstrate that the situation is much more complex and that the above-mentioned relationship is not simply linear.

The first example touches on the ritual tradition of burning foxes (*wa bsang*), which has been addressed elsewhere in detail (Berounský 2019). Here, a very brief description of it will be given to show the connections with the *Nyen Collection* and the *leu* tradition of Amdo.

To begin with, there are rather brief and enigmatic mentions of the smoke-purification ritual by [means of the] fox (*wa bsang*) in each of the three versions of the *Nyen Collection*. The mentions

⁴⁰ Aben, native of the village, personal communication, August 2018.

are rather sporadic and lacking details. The first version of the *Nyen Collection* from the Bon Kanjur contains a mention of the *Smoke Purification by Fox* in its very first myth entitled the *Smoke Purification of the “Nol” Pollution of the Nyen (Gnyan mnol bsang)*.⁴¹ The text is only fragmentary, and the context of the ritual is not fully revealed. It narrates a story of Kula Machen Pomra (Sku bla Rma chen bom ra) – the famous mountain divinity of Amdo – who is one of the eight Ma (Rma) brothers. Machen Pomra searches for his bride and a lady called Lharimo (Lha ri mo), related to the *nyen* spirits, becomes his spouse. Nevertheless, she gives birth to an illegitimate child, whose father seems to be one of Machen Pomra’s brothers. This causes Machen Pomra’s anger and eventually pollutes all divinities and spirits. The pollution is then ritually treated by lustre (*tshan*) consisting of the blood of birds and finally by a fox that is ritually killed with a golden sword.



Figs. 7-8: First pages of the text on fox entitled *Bon 'di nas na ro wa yi dbu lags+ho* (reading emended). From *Mdo smad mda' tshang yul gyi gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba don ldan*, vol. 26, p. 1.

The second version of the *Nyen Collection* from Phenchu⁴² ('Phen chu) narrates a myth on the creation of various beings including the *nyen*, who are then subject to the intrusion by demons (*bdud*). They have several *nyen* as wives and with the killing of the demons, pollution appears –

⁴¹ *Rnam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rin po che gnyan gyi 'bum bzhugs so* (i.e. *Gnyan 'bum*), pp. 4-17.

⁴² *'Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum bzhugs s+ho*, ff. 13-17. The whole section is entitled *wa bsang* (smoke purification by [means of the] fox).

probably due to the killing of relatives (*dme*). Birds are used for purification and eventually also a fox is used for the smoke purification ritual (*bsang*) related to Shenrab Miwo.

The third version comes from the revelation by Ponse Khyung Gotsal and contains only a longer myth on the killing of a son of *Nyen* by a son of the Dong clan. In the parts dealing with the ritual (which is not necessarily connected with the myth), a fox is mentioned along with other animals (badger, cow, goat, etc.) to be offered for the smoke purification ritual (*bsang*).⁴³

The *Smoke Purification by Fox (wa bsang)* is known to all the versions of the *Nyen Collection*, although the details are unclear and the context varies. The ritual can nevertheless be considered as a ritual purifying improper sexual behaviour (*mnol*, or incest, *nal*) and the killing of relatives (*dme*). It appears in the context of worship of the *nyen* spirits.

Looking into the facsimile edition of *leu* texts from the Dongtrom (Ldong khrom) area of north-eastern Tibet in Amdo (30 vols.), one finds five Tibetan texts dealing with foxes. The titles of the texts are mostly given as Naro Fox (Na ro wa; containing obvious scribal errors such as Na res wa, Na ris wa, Nas reng wa, etc.). The enigmatic term *naro* designates a group of animals such as fox, badger, flying squirrel, bear and others.⁴⁴

These texts are introduced by a myth on the creation of seven (or nine) foxes, who originated from the mating of the ancestor figure Yabla Daldrug (Yab lha 'Dal drug) with Khamo Yarla Chimo (Kha mo Yar la phyi mo). According to the text the intercourse was polluted by incest (*nal*) and the murder of relatives (*dme*), without giving further details. This explains that the foxes originated from a polluted relationship and this probably explains their efficiency regarding pollutions.

The text then continues with a story on seven sons of the *nyen* and two humans, who came from a single mother. Their mother passed away and a fox is sent as a messenger to warn the people not to bury the mother among the *nyen* – this would provoke pollution. The fox, nevertheless, forgets to deliver the message and the burial of the mother pollutes the *nyen*. The fox is then caught, its back is ripped off by the golden sword and turned into an offering to be burnt during the smoke purification ritual. During the ritual the wool of the fox is said to purify the *nyen* of trees, the bones to purify the *nyen* of the rocks, etc.

The same elements are present here, but there is a clear development of the details. There are more ritual texts dealing with the *Smoke Purification by Fox (wa bsang)* both among the *leu* texts and beyond (cf. Berounský 2019), but this version seems to be the most widespread. It was used for the purification of incest and murder of relatives and it is nowadays reported that only a small bunch of wool from the fox is burnt instead of the whole animal.

⁴³ *Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs swo*, p. 631.

⁴⁴ *Mdo smad mda' tshang yul gyi gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba don ldan*, *Wa'i dbu lhags+ho* (vol. 22), *'No'di nas na res wa yes dbu lags+ho* (vol. 2), *Na ris wa yin dbul+s+ho* (vol. 10), *Na ris wa ba'i dbu lags+ho* (vol. 24), *Bon+ 'di nas reng wa yes dbus lya+s+ho*, vol. 26. The titles illustrate that they were written down phonetically which makes it almost impossible to understand the texts. After publishing an article on the topic (Berounský 2019) I came across more related texts. Among them is one from the Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu) region, generously shared with me by Sherab Dragpa (Shes rab Grags pa), which enabled me to understand the meaning of the text.

Over the centuries, there was certainly some development in the *leu* texts from Amdo and various versions of the *Nyen Collection*, which itself contain several unclear versions of it and cannot be considered as a single coherent source. But the connection between them seems clear. They deal with the purificatory ritual over the pollution caused by incest and the murder of relatives and the context remains the worship of the *nyen*.

Most surprising is that until recently – before the Tibetan versions became available – the myth contained among the *leu* texts had existed in translations into Mongolian and had been the subject of discussions in Mongolian studies for decades, without noticing its Tibetan origin, which now seems to be an established fact.⁴⁵ The Mongolian translations frequently speak of the “seven fierce stars” instead of the *nyen*. The *nyen* are not known to Mongols and since this expression can designate also something like ‘fierce’ (*gnyan po*), they became “fierce stars”. Ten Mongolian versions are known from all across Mongolia. This might reveal the surprising influence of the *leu* texts, which until recently were totally unknown to scholarship on the Mongols. The ways of their diffusion to Mongolia probably avoided the Buddhist or Bon clergy in this case.

6. The case of the myth on retribution for killing the *nyen* spirit

Coming to the second example, a single myth from the *Nyen Collection* is investigated.⁴⁶ Although the different versions bear different titles, the most common title points to its content being titled *Retribution for Killing the Nyen (gnyan stong)*. This text again is contained in all three versions of the *Nyen Collection* and each version is different. The basic plot of the myth is very similar in all versions, although the wording is different. In addition to the *Nyen Collection*, a very long version is also included in the *Tö Collection*. This version is rather exceptional in the sense that it occasionally speaks about the *nyen* as *tö* spirits. Nevertheless, it describes the *nyen* not very consistently (here, it was the son of *Nyen* who was killed, yet, the *tö* being leads the armies of the *nyen*, etc.). It seems that *tö* beings have simply replaced the *nyen* in parts of this version.

A connection with the *leu* manuscripts can be observed by the fact that one of the main characters – the Old Nyen Darba (*Gnyan rgan Dar ba/de ba*) – is a mountain god from Thewo, the region from which many of the *leu* ritual texts come. One of the versions locates the geographical context of these events in Thebchu (*Theb chu*), which is an alternative spelling for the Thechu river (*The chu*) flowing through the Thewo region.

There is no space for details here and thus the core of the myth will be introduced without diving into the ocean of specifics of the different versions.

The myth starts with the creation of the land of the *nyen* and the land of the people of the Dong clan. The ancestors of the *nyen* and the Dong are mentioned in the texts. Each couple gives birth to a son and a daughter who are mostly referred to in the text by the appellations “son of Nyan” (*gnyan*

⁴⁵ For studies on Mongolian versions of these texts, see Serruys 1970, Heissig 1976, Bawden 1976, 1978, Beffa and Hamayon 1984, Coloo 2001, Sárközi and Sazykin 2001.

⁴⁶ Although written some time ago, an article by me on this topic with more details still awaits publication. See Berounský, forthcoming.

bu) and “daughter of the Nyen” (*gnyan lcam*) and the “son of Dong” (*ldong sras/bu*) and “daughter of Dong” (*ldong lcam*).



Fig. 9: The Old Nyen Darba (Gnyan rgan Dar ba) in Thewo. (Photo: author, July 2017)



Fig. 10: The Old Nyen Darba depicted on a mural in the Gelugpa Lhason monastery near Dongbo village.

The son of *nyen* then descends onto the earth. There is an interesting detail describing the son of Dong climbing up to graze yaks and the daughter of Dong descending to work on the fields. This allows for a geographical location at the borders of the Tibetan Plateau, which also (besides many other places in Tibet) fits Thewo, where people keep yaks in the higher pastures and cultivate fields in the places of lower elevation at the same time.

The son of Nyen encounters the daughter of Dong at the field and they fall in love. They make love in the field and, according to some versions, the world order becomes reversed: the beasts of prey start to take care of the cattle, the birds are weeding the field, etc.

The message about these strange events happening reaches the brother – the son of Dong. According to the different versions it is delivered to him by his servant or by a mythical creature of a wise bat (*pha wang sgam po*); the other versions are silent on this.

The son of Dong then approaches the couple making love in the field and becomes very furious. The son of Nyen transforms himself into a snake and the son of Dong cuts him with his sword into many pieces. The daughter of Dong reveals to her brother that the snake was in fact the son of Nyen. Worried about the consequences they bury him deep under the ground and thereby pollute the surface of the place (according to some versions the daughter steps on the spot; in other versions this is not clear).

Meanwhile, the father of Nyen – the Old Nyen Darba (Gnyan rgan Dar ba) – starts to search for his son everywhere, but due to the pollution of the site where his son was buried, he cannot find him. He gathers the armies of the *nyen* and descends with them to the land of the Dong.

Then all versions have a rather unclear part in which the son of Dong's murder is identified and the father of Nyen gets to know about him. This is connected to a dice game, but the sources are rather unclear about who played the dice and for what purpose. According to the version from Phenchu the sons of the terrestrial divinity (*sku bla*) play the dice game for the inheritance of the father. The son of Dong empowers the dice of the younger brother who wins the game. The older brother gets angry and the son of Dong realises that the empowering of the dice by his spell was caused by the demons who were involved in the act of murder. He reveals that it was him who killed the son of Nyen and the wind carries this to the ear of the father of Nyen.

Then comes a longer part of the myth in which the son and the daughter of Dong are chased by the armies of *nyen*. The order of events and some details are not identical in the different versions, although they bear similar features and characters.

The texts also describe why the *nyen* are considered to dwell in lakes, trees and in rocks: Being chased, the son of Dong throws a mirror, comb and golden ring behind himself. These turn into lakes, trees and rocks. Parts of the armies of the *nyen* then get attached to them. The text mentions that this is the origin for *nyen* residing in lakes, trees and rocks. Other versions speak about *lu* (*klu*) being stuck to lakes, *tö* (*gtod*) to the rocks, etc.

The son of Dong and the daughter of Dong seeking refuge with a mountain divinity, which according to some versions, is related to them. All versions recount that the refuge is provided by Kula Machen Pomra (Sku bla Rma chen pom ra), the famous mountain god of Amdo. In some versions, Machen Pomra is presented as the lord of the terrestrial gods (*yul sa'i rgyal po*), who are described as different from the *nyen*. In another version the mountain divinity Kula Kyongte Dongdra (Sku bla Skyongs te Ldong bra) plays a similar role being presented as the lord of terrestrial gods (*yul sa*). According to some versions, the conflict is mediated by the mountain divinity Nyenje Gong-Ngon (Gnyan rje Gong sngon), who invited ritualists to appease the *nyen* and to decide the payment for killing the *nyen* (*gnyan stong*). Two versions, the one from the *Nyen Collection* and the *Tö Collection* of the Bonpo Kanjur, continue in a series of narrations added to this story. There is also a short text included in the conclusive part of the *Nyen Collection* of the Bonpo Kanjur (i.e. contained in a different part of the collection), which provides some addendum

to the story. It describes how the wise bat visits the deceased son of Nyen and reveals to him that he begot a son from engaging with the daughter of Dong. The bat then carries him back to the living ones.

What matters, apart from the plot, are the toponyms connected with the story. The area where the events of the myth take place cover large parts of Amdo.

The name of the father of Nyen whose son is murdered is given as Nyen Gen Deva or Nyen Gen Darba (Gnyan rgan De ba/dar ba, i.e. “Old Nyen Darba/Deba”) in most manuscripts. A mountain with the same name Nyen Gen Darba is located close to the Thewo valley. Remarkably, the nearest village that worships the mountain is called Dongbo (Ldong bo), pointing clearly to the background of the Dong clan.



Fig. 11: Nyenje Gong Ngon (Gnyan rje Dgong/Gong sngon) as seen from Amchog (A mchog). (Photo: author, June 2017)

Another divinity mentioned in the myth is Nyenje Gong-Ngon (Gnyan rje Dgong/Gong sngon). He figures as a heavenly priest, but at the same time appears as a maternal uncle of the Dong brother and sister in another version. A mountain with the same name is located not far from the Thewo and Phenchu regions in the higher pastures west of Thewo, close to the area nowadays known as Amchog (A mchog).

Two other mountain divinities of the myth can be identified. Machen Pomra is frequently worshipped in Thewo and surrounding valleys. He is one of the main protectors of the Bon monasteries there, but more important is that also lay people worship him as a personal protector divinity. The large number of surviving *leu* manuscripts dedicated to this divinity point to the popularity of the Machen Pomra cult in the region.

Another divinity present in most of the manuscript versions is Kula Gyogchen Dongdra (Skubla Skyogs/Sgyogs chen Ldong bra).⁴⁷ This divinity appears in the list of Thirteen Gurla divinities (Mgur lha bcu gsum) or gods (cf. De Nebesky-Wojtkowitz 1993 [1956]: 213; Karmay and Nagano 2003: 171). He is nowadays better known as Gatö Jowo (Sga stod Jo bo) and can be located in the remote area of Yushu (Yu shul), on the border between Chumarleb (Chu dmar leb) and Trindu (Khri

⁴⁷ In the later Tibetan texts his name is mostly written as Sgyogs chen Gdong ra.

'du) counties of Qinghai Province, some 300 km west of Mount Machen Pomra, close to the place where the Yellow River issues.

The identification of these mountain divinities enables us to locate the itinerary of the son of Dong's escape from the armies of *nyen*. It starts in the Thewo region and leads north-west to Machen Pomra and further west. This region is called the "homeland" (*pha zhing*) in one version and it can be deduced that the geographic origin of the Dong clan was considered to lie in this area.

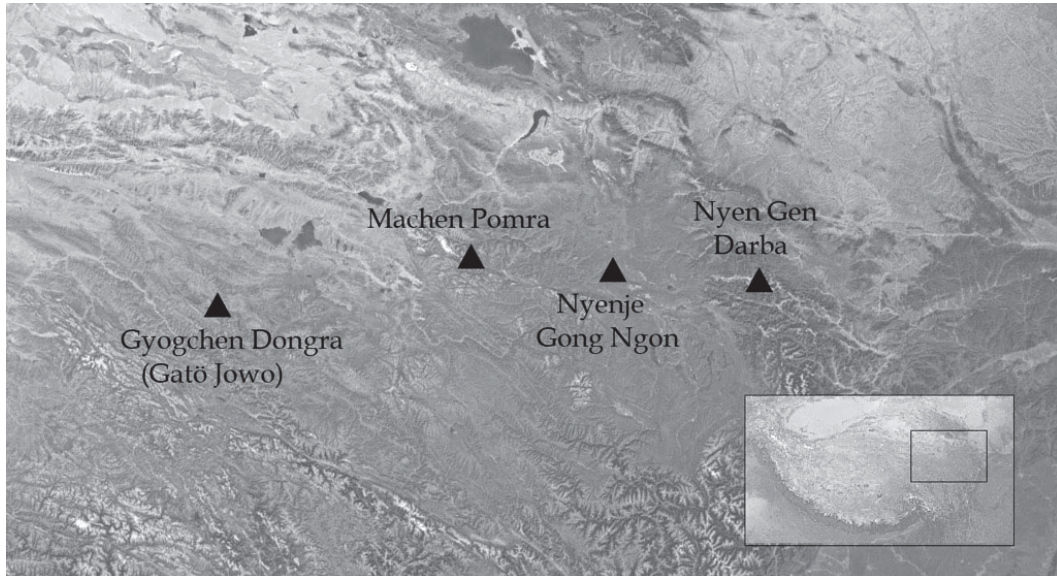


Fig. 12: Map of the mountain divinities appearing in the myth. (Map prepared by the author, based on Google Earth 2019).

It is surprising that the version contained in the *Nyen Collection* from the Bonpo Kanjur provides many names in Tangut (Mi nyag), but not in the language of the Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong) as is the case in other myths. This is the only myth from the *Nyen Collection* where Tangut names appear. This illustrates that the text sees its origin related to the Tangut people. The Tangut kingdom (1038-1227) did not encompass the localities presented in this myth but was situated to the north of them. Nevertheless, the Tanguts see their origins in the area where the Yellow River originates, and this is the place of Mount Gyogchen Dongra mentioned in the myths (see Kepping 1994: 363. It might be that the myth reflects the tradition of a particular branch of the Dong clan, which had settled in the Thewo region, but whose original homeland lay in the Yushu area and was related to Tanguts.

Two more surprises come to light with the other versions of this myth. The manuscripts found in Gathang Bumpa stūpa (Dga' thang 'Bum pa) of southern Tibet include a version of the myth with a very similar plot.⁴⁸ These manuscripts are of uncertain date, but can hypothetically be dated to the

⁴⁸ For the original text, see *Gtam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdams bsgrigs*. For a rendering into English, see the two, in many respects, different translations by Karmay (2009) and Bellezza (2010).

eleventh century or earlier (Karmay 2009). In this version the conflict does not occur between the *nyen* and the Dong, but between *lu (klu)* underground spirits and the people designated as Ma (*smra*). The two existing translations of the myth into English do not recognise that the main character called Maphodra (Rma pho 'bra) is none other than Machen Pomra (Rma chen pom ra), the famous mountain god of eastern Tibet. This narration was incorporated into a series of myths (*rabs*) dealing with *byol* rituals (probably averting the “bad omens”, *ltas ngan*), otherwise situated in Central and western Tibet. The fact that Machen Pomra figures here as a main character points to the transfer of this myth from eastern Tibet to the area of Gathang Bumpa in southern Tibet.



Fig. 13: First folio of the Naxi manuscript B-42 with the son of Dong Ngothur to the left. (Mss. kept at the Harvard-Yenching Institute).

Joseph Rock's two volumes on the *Na-khi Nāga Cult* contain yet another version of the same myth in Naxi's pictographic script, which the author paraphrased with the help of a Naxi ritualist (Rock 1952: 307-14). Another version of a similar manuscript in pictographic script is part of the Harvard-Yenching collection.⁴⁹ In addition, three more Naxi versions of the myth are to be found in the collections kept in Berlin (Janert 1977: 861).⁵⁰ In these versions the core of the narration is well preserved (compared to the Tibetan versions), but due to the pictographic script the identity of the main characters is obviously blurred. The fact that it primarily concerns the *nyen* beings is not apparent from Rock's English translation and the identity of the mountain god Machen Pomra remains unnoticed too, etc.

The name of the main protagonist that appears in the title as ¹Ddo-³ssaw-¹ngo-²t'u is evidently a phonetic rendering of Dongse Ngothur (Ldong sras Ngo thur/thung) of the Tibetan versions.⁵¹

⁴⁹ These are the manuscripts B-41 and B-42; for digital versions, see *Naxi manuscripts collection, 1826-1910 and undated* (collection identifier: hyl00002), Harvard-Yenching Library, HOLLIS for Archival Discovery, URL: <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/25/resources/4415> (accessed: 17.12.2020).

⁵⁰ I am indebted to Michael Friedrich (University of Hamburg) for pointing out to me the existence of three other versions kept in Berlin.

⁵¹ The transcription system employed by Joseph Rock is no longer used among scholars. I am relying on his rendering of the myth and therefore follow the transcription employed in his book.

Ngothur is the proper name and Dongse means “son of Dong”. The Naxi version of the myth thus speaks also about the ancestors of the Dong clan.

Moreover, the main character of the story, who is killed by the son of Dong, is mentioned as Nāga ³Nyi-²ssâ-²kyo-¹lo. This is apparently Nyen se (Gnyan sras) in Tibetan, i.e. the “son of Nyen”.

The whole myth therefore addresses the conflict between the ancestors of the Dong clan and the *nyen* beings. This information is missing in Rock’s translation of the story.

Puzzling is Joseph Rock’s translation of the different classes of beings that are referred to by the collective term *nāga*, the term ¹ssu in Naxi pictographic writing. Although it seems to stand for the Tibetan *lu* (*klu*) in a number of cases, which is *nāga* in Sanskrit (denoting underground or serpent spirits). Unlike in the Tibetan tradition the term ¹ssu is applied as a general term comprising the following divinities and spirits:

- i. *sadak* – Tibetan: *sa bdag* – Naxi: ¹ssaw-³ndaw
- ii. *nyen* – Tibetan: *gnyan* – Naxi: ²nyi
- iii. *tö* – Tibetan: *gtod* – Naxi: ²dtü

This is rather confusing, since *lu*, *sadak*, *nyen* and *tö* beings are considered as a fourfold group of spirits in the Tibetan texts. Apparently, they can take on the characteristics of another class from time to time, but there is no indication in the Tibetan texts that *sadak*, *nyen* and *tö* are a subclass of a more general group of *lu*, i.e. *nāgas*. In light of this new evidence deriving from the Tibetan texts, the title of Rock’s monograph *The Na-Khi Nāga Cult and Related Ceremonies* should be reconsidered. It can be assumed that the Naxi (Na-khi) term ¹ssu is a rendering for the Tibetan term *sä* (*gsas*). This is a general term used for divinities and the expression *sä-nyen* (*gsas gnyan*) is attested in Tibetan texts. The title of the Rock’s book should more correctly read the *Na-khi Sä Cult*.

More important in the context of the present paper is, however, that traces of the old tradition of the Dong clan are also abundantly found among the ritual texts of Naxi people.

7. Concluding remarks

The present paper has marked some spots and connections by having presented fragments contributing to the larger picture of the ritual and mythical tradition of the Dong people in Tibet. It has fleshed out a few instances and much more remains hidden.

The particularly early text material of the *Nyen Collection* contains by far the most detailed information on the *nyen* spirits available. There are many questions concerning the surviving manuscript versions. We do not know their history, the circumstances of their compilation, nor the possible changes the manuscripts might have undergone in the past. Yet, it has become clear that they present themselves as the lore of the Dong clan, largely the Nampa Dong, but also Tangut or proto-Tangut people (Mi nyag) related to the Dong clan. The Dong people can be identified with a larger group of people referred to as Qiang in Chinese by the Old and the New Tang dynasty histories (*Jiu Tangshu*, *Xin Tangshu*), and who are depicted as pastoralists inhabiting large areas of present-day Amdo. The fact that two old manuscripts of the *Nyen Collection* are reported to have appeared in western Tibet around the 10th and 11th centuries and in the 12th century, might point to

the large-scale movements on the Tibetan Plateau already in the early phase of the post-imperial period. Naturally, a question arises: is the pan-Tibetan cult of the *nyen* spirits heritage of the Dong tradition? The *nyen* spirits are known all over the Tibetan Plateau, but one hardly finds any detailed information on them in the Tibetan sources. The region of Thewo with its vivid cult of *nyen* spirits is exceptional, as well as the *Nyen Collection* as a unique textual source on the *nyen*.

The presence of Shenrab Miwo in the myths of the *Nyen Collection*, portrayed in the form of a priest (*gshen*) and not as a universal Buddha-like teacher (supported by the Dunhuang manuscript ITJ 731 that contains Nampa Dong language and likewise portrays him as a priest), leads to the question of whether the tradition of the Dong people might have been the source from which the founding figure of monastic Bon evolved with Buddha-like features.

The paper has presented some evidence for links between the *Nyen Collection*, the *leu/legu* divinities as mentioned in older Bon sources, and the *leu* tradition that existed in the forested border regions of Amdo prior to the Cultural Revolution. One cannot say that these are identical. The older text material seems to refer to divinities as *lu* and *nyen* with the broader designation of *leu/legu* divinities and relates them to the east of the Tibetan Plateau. This could concern the tradition of which the *Nyen Collection* possibly forms just a fragment.

The *leu* tradition present in Amdo until recently represents a tradition which underwent considerable change over the centuries. It was namely the custom of the bird and animal offerings which led to the suppression of such practices under the influence of the monastic milieu in these areas. At the same time, the tradition also integrated elements from the monastic traditions of Bon and Chö (“Buddhism”). Among the surviving *leu* material are many texts dealing with the *nyen*. Most striking, however, is the vivid cult of *nyen* among the lay people from which the *leu* texts come. The cult of *nyen* is exceptionally strong here.⁵² One can assume that the important (and probably older) layer of the *leu* rituals in Amdo is connected with the tradition of the Dong clan. There are clear common features shared by both the *Nyen Collection* and the local cult of the *nyen* represented mainly by the worship and offering of birds in connection with the *nyen*.

The first case study highlights that the traditions represented in the *Nyen Collection* are familiar with the ritual of *Smoke Purification by Fox* (*wa bsang*). The ritual was also popular in the *leu* tradition of Amdo but underwent some change and the myth surrounding it is different. What remains the same are the context of the worship of *nyen* and the context of the ritual for purifying the pollution caused by incest (*nal*) and the murder of relatives (*dme*). Surprisingly, this ritual somehow found its way to Mongolia.

The second case study presented a single myth on the retribution for killing the *nyen*. This myth was influential and is very well known in the oral tradition. It appears in several Tibetan versions. The main characters are mountain divinities either of *nyen* or *yulsa* type. Their names allow for the geographic mapping of events of this myth and for connecting them with the origin of the Dong

⁵² So far, I am not aware of any other Tibetan region with such a developed cult of *nyen*. This, of course, may merely be due to my ignorance about other such societies existing in Tibet. I have no detailed information about the regions of 'Brug chu, Zung chu, Gzi rtsa Sde dgu. My conclusions are solely based on observations and information concerning the The bo, 'Phen chu and Bab bzo regions.

clan. This territory stretches from Yushu through the Machen Pomra range, including nomad pastures to the north of Thewo and Thewo itself. It revealed that the Thewo region, where the *leu* tradition is widespread, has long been related to the Dong clan. Surprisingly, several Naxi versions of this myth were also identified. This opens a new field for research, which may help to determine to which degree the Naxi rituals are influenced by the *leu* tradition of Amdo and the tradition of the Dong clan that is represented by the *Nyen Collection*, but also in relation to the *Sadak*, *Tö* and *Lu Collections*.

It is hoped that further research into this field will lead to a better understanding of the pre-Buddhist past on the Tibetan Plateau, being more than a unified single Old Tibetan tradition. Having described here in some detail the tradition of the Dong clan might be helpful for understanding the early local specifics of other regions on the plateau. As a result, we could gain a more nuanced picture about the past of the societies of this fascinating place on earth.

Appendix

A list of texts containing the myth on retribution for killing the *nyen* spirit

Version A of the Bon Kanjur (vol. 141, eighteenth chapter (*le'u*) entitled *Chapter on Reconciliation of People and Nyen* (*Mi dang gnyan bsdum pa'i le'u*), pp. 122-201). This version constitutes various narrations of apparently diverse background. The shorter story under focus here appears only on pages 122-143, which, however, continues with some extensions up to page 180).

Version B of *Gtod 'bum* of the Bon Kanjur (vol. 142, chapter entitled *Breaking the Egg of Khyung* (*Khyung gi sgong nga bcag pa'i smrengs so*), pp. 378-400).

Version C, addendum to a longer version without title (*Gnyan 'bum*, Bon Kangyur, vol. 141(316)-17, *le'u* 25, pp. 316-318).

Version D, *'Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum*, found in Phenchu, introduced as *Yo chu'i gnyan stong*, ff. 29a-34a, in: Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso (eds.), *Gna' rabs bon gyi dpe dkon bris ma*, vol. 3, pp. 55-65.

Version E contained in the *Nye lam sde bzhi* corpus of texts (New Bonpo Katen, 253-25, pp. 615-623, *le'u gnyis pa of Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs so*).

Version F, G, H, I, J Naxi manuscript of *The Story of ¹Ddo-³ssaw-¹ngo-²t'u*. Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, manuscript B-41 (north of Li-chiang/Lijang), for a translation, see Rock 1952: 307-14; (F) Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, manuscript B-42 (west of Li-chiang/Lijang); (G) (For F and G, see URL: https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/25/archival_objects/1184068, accessed: 17.12.2020). Three versions kept in Berlin (H, I, J), for references, see Janert 1977: 861.

Version K, untitled narration forming a part of the *Byol rabs* cycle of myths found in Gathang Bumpa stūpa, see *Gtam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdams bsgrigs*; Karmay 2009; Bellezza 2010.

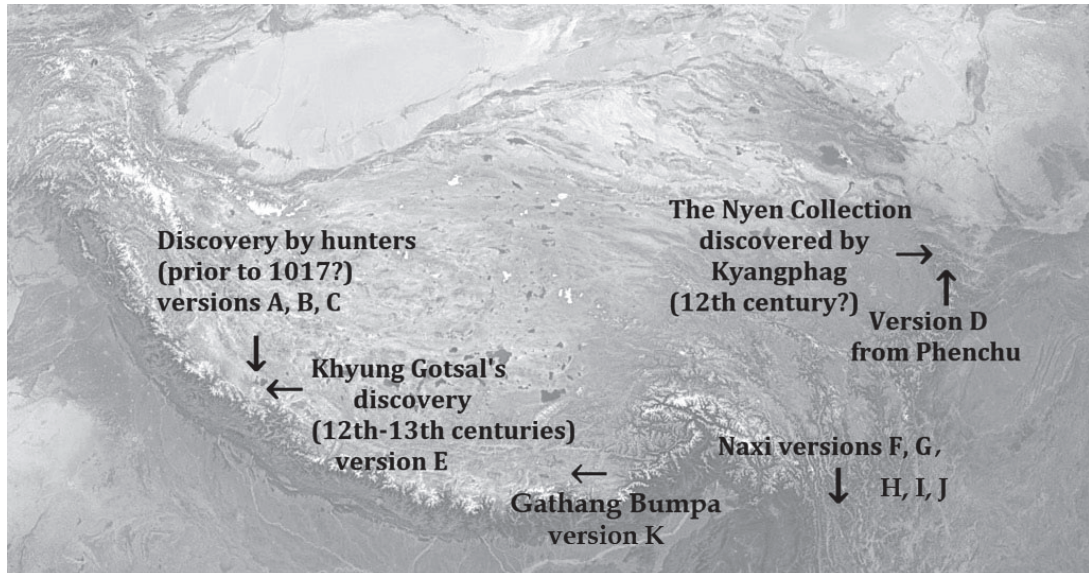


Fig. 14: Map indicating the places of origin of the manuscripts. (Map by the author, based on Google Earth 2019.)

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A bo ya ngal dbu bzugs pa lags+ho. Unpublished mss. from Thewo (belonging to Mgon po), photographed by Ngawang Gyatso, 10 ff.

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Online Resources

- Kalpa Bön*. URL: <http://kalpa-bon.com> (website of Charles Ramble containing ritual texts of Bon tradition).
- Old Tibetan Documents Online (OTDO)*. URL: <http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp/> (Old Tibetan Text Online, searchable database of transcribed Old Tibetan texts).
- Naxi manuscripts collection, 1826-1910 and undated (digital)*, part of the Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University Repository.
URL: <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/25/resources/4415> (Harvard-Yenching collection of Naxi mss. collected by Joseph Rock).
- Zhang bod rig mdzod kun snang khyab pa* (Chin. 象藏文库袞郎恰巴). URL: <http://xxb.qiongbuwang.com> (searchable database of Bonpo texts, a project by Khyung po monastery).