Rethinking the Recently 'Discovered' Bon/Zhangzhung Traditions: the Case of Yungdrung Shon Dance (g.yung drung shon rtsed)

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Yu-Shan Liu[*]

National Chiao Tung University

The Bonpo constitute approximately 3% of the total Tibetan refugees in India. They are, through their adherence to the Bon religion, a distinct minority group among the Tibetan population. The Bonpo claim a different religious founder to Buddhism, but acknowledge that they share many similarities, both in doctrinal theories and ritual practices. These similarities have generated a long-term debate between Bon and Buddhist monastics on the authenticity of their respective religious 'traditions.' The Bonpo frequently claim that their religious doctrines have been developed and prevailed in pre-Buddhist Tibet, during the time of the kingdom of Zhangzhung and the early period of the Yarlung Dynasty. They believe that when Buddhism arrived in Tibetan society in the seventh and eighth centuries, it incorporated many indigenous elements which had been absorbed and reformed into the practices of the earlier Bon. However, for the followers of Buddhism, the above statements should be viewed in contraposition, that is, Bon today came into existence only by borrowing the doctrines and monastic system from Buddhism. Because of this contradiction between Bon and Buddhism, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, established in North India in 1959 and under Buddhist control, declared the Bonpo to be *non-Buddhists* (*phyi pa*, literally the Outsiders) and excluded them from participation in Government affairs in the 1960s-1970s. Even after Bon was formally recognised by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in 1977, the political influence of Bonpo monastics, compared to the four Buddhist denominations, is still marginal in the Tibetan community in exile.

This paper is generated from the complexities embedded in the relationship between the Bonpo/Buddhists and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. Taking the Bonpo's 'discovery' of the Yungdrung Shon Dance (*g.yung drung shon rtsed*) as an

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[*] Yu-Shan Liu is currently a postdoctoral researcher of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan.

example, the aim of this paper is to gain a greater insight into comtemporary Bonpo narratives which tended to emphasis the relationship between Bon and Zhangzhung. The Yungdrung Shon Dance had long been regarded by the Bonpo monastics as a 'lost tradition,' but was recently discovered to be still performed by the people in North India and in some parts of West Nepal. Since the early 1990s, this dance has been incorporated in the annual festival of masked dance (*'cham*) in the Tibetan Bonpo community in Dolanji, North India. The dance is now regarded by the Bonpo monks as a 'living tradition' from Zhangzhung.

This paper will present the background of how this dance was 'discovered' by the Bonpo in exile, and the importance of this dance to the Bonpo. It will address whether the concept of distinctive Bon traditions is a 'retrospective invention' (Trevor-Roper 1983: 15), which has only recently been emphasised in response to the marginalisation of the Bonpo by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. Theoretically, I shall argue that the claims of 'traditions' and identity involve a crucial process of selectively remembering and connecting pasts and presents. Moreover, assertions of 'tradition' are usually aimed at manifesting and fulfilling the needs of identity, which articulate differentiations between 'us' and 'them,' and which defines how people interact with others. With the above concerns in mind, this paper is aimed to understand the way the Bonpo monastics address the concept of 'tradition,' how they selectively 'discover', re-organise, interpret and standardise 'the Bon traditions' from textual materials, and represent them in public events to the laity, the next generation, and the foreign audience. Through the case of Yungdrung Shon Dance, this study is an attempt to unravel the historical and social contexts in which the Bonpo monastics reconstruct the knowledge of Zhangzhung, and the way they revalue and adjust the Bon identity in this process.

Background: from Tibet to Exile

The Bonpo of the 1960s might have had a very different experience of their religious identity, and Dolanji might never have been exclusively established as a settlement of the Bonpo, had the Tibetan Government-in-Exile not formally excluded Bon in their representation of Tibetan religious traditions. When the Tibetan Government-in-Exile was established, it emphasised a 'shared' Buddhist heritage as being central to the Tibetan national identity. This version of Tibet as being uniquely Buddhist marginalised followers of non-Buddhist religions, including Bon. As a result, the Bonpo faced the dilemma of positioning their religious identity between the categories of Buddhist and

non-Buddhist. It is in this context that the Bonpo began to negotiate their religious affiliation with Buddhism in order to fit into the emerging Tibetan national discourse, whilst simultaneously coping with the marginality applied to, and embedded in, their refugee status.

As many researchers (Cech 1987, 1993; Karmay 1998; Kværne 2001; Lopez 1998; Thargyal 2001) have noted, prior to exile, the Bon and Buddhist lay populations seldom found it necessary to articulate separate religious identities in their daily lives, given that members of the same local community usually shared the same religious identification. It was not until exile, where Bonpo and Buddhists were mixed together in the Tibetan refugee camps, and when the Tibetan Government-in-Exile excluded the Bonpo from participation in national affairs, that people began to notice the differences between their religious identities. However, for most of the Bonpo laity, the differences between their religious practices and Buddhism are still very subtle and easily confused (Cech 1987, 1993). Many Bonpo laity, in particular, the elders, distinguish Bon from Buddhism specifically in terms of their founders, the ways of circumambulation, and the mantras they chant. In many of my conversations with the Bonpo elders in Dolanji, these three main differences were often brought out when they explained to me what it meant to be Bonpo and how being a Bonpo (*bon po*) was different from being a Buddhist (*chos pa*). However, for ordinary Bonpo laity, the similarities with Buddhism, for example, in the style of monastic robes, the monastic system, images of deities and forms of ritual practice, usually outnumbered the differences. This is very different from the perspective of the monastics, who claim that the differences and similarities between Bon and Buddhism can be more rigorously explored, as well as contested.

According to Cech (1987), in addition to the official ignorance of the Bon religion, intolerance of the Bonpo was also increasingly encouraged among Tibetan refugee settlements in the 1960s (cf. Cech 1987: 148). As a result, in order to survive among the exiled Tibetans, many Bonpos had no choice but to follow Buddhist practices (for example, adhere to the Buddhist direction of circumambulation), or completely suppress their Bon identity. Being worried that the boundary between Bon and Buddhism could become blurred over time and the next Bonpo generation in exile would lose their Bon identity, the Bon monastics embarked upon the search for an appropriate site for a Bon settlement in 1964 (Cech 1987). Dolanji was therefore founded in 1967 as a settlement for the Bonpo, and Menri monastery was established two years after (Lhagyal 2003; Kværne 1990). The name 'Menri' was adopted from the former Menri monastery in Tibet, referring to the fact that the monastery in Dolanji was

to be the continuation of the former Menri monastery. The Menri monastery in Dolanji has not only succeeded in being a religious centre of Bon monastic studies in exile, but most crucially, it has also soon served to enact and invoke the sentiments and solidarity of the Bon identity among all of the Bonpo.

'Rediscovered' Yungdrung Shon Dance at the Annual Cham Festival in Dolanji

In 2007 and 2008, when I was in Dolanji doing my PhD fieldwork, the Yungdrung Shon Dance (also called Shon) was performed at the very end of the Cham festival, which is one of the annual ceremonies held by Menri monastery. Cham is made up of a series of masked dances performed by monks dressed in colourful costumes and masks. It is the dance of religious protectors and deities; and it has a ritual purpose. The Yungdrung Shon Dance, which has been incorporated in the Cham festival over the past decade, however, has no ritual purpose. Also, the Yungdrung Shon Dance is performed by the Indian residents of Kinnaur, rather than by the Bonpo monks. In brief, Shon was performed as a separate set from the whole Cham series. However, it is included within the festival, and marks its end.

When the last set of masked dances finished, around ten to fifteen residents from Kinnaur, wearing Indian dress and distinctive green and grey woollen caps (*thepang*), were invited to the foreground by the monastics. The Kinnauri performers joined hands in a long line, which, according to the Bonpo monks, represented a chain of swastikas (Yungdrung, *g.yung drung*) (see Plates 1 and 2), and began to sing and dance. The tone of the song was low, and when I asked the monks nearby about the language the performers were singing in, they answered me, "*That was Zhangzhung language, but we don't really know their lyrics. They [Kinnauri performers] don't know either, because the written language of Zhangzhung is almost lost.*" The dance leader held a yak's tail and waved it during the dance. The dancers moved in a counter-clockwise direction, which, again according to the Bonpo monastics, was identical to the direction of the Bonpo's circumambulation.

Plate 1.   The Shon Dance by people from Kinnaur (2008)

Plate 2.   The performance of Shon

Plate 3.   The Indian audience of the Cham Festival (2008)

During this performance, the Abbot explained the dance and its relationship with the Bonpo to two Indian officials who sat next to him. A senior monk, representing Menri monastery, went to each Kinnauri performer to offer him/her a silk greeting scarf. However, many of the older settlers began to pack their bags, and left during the Shon performance. Some of them explained to me that they were tired and were in a hurry to go home to cook dinner. Some said that it was a 'Kinnauri dance,' which was presented because the monastery wanted to give Indians a chance to display their traditions too, and if I hadn't seen it before, I should stay to watch. Only some of the second generation laity, along with almost all of the monks, stayed until the end of the Shon performance. So, what is this dance, which does not quite fit into the Cham series, and in which many laity, in particular the first generation, seem to have no interest? Also, why is it performed by people from Kinnaur instead of the Bonpo?

In Cech's ethnography (1987), there is no reference to a dance called Shon in the annual Cham festival. The monks from Menri monastery confirmed to me that Shon had only recently been included in the Cham festival by the Abbot, in the past few years.

Dechen and Sangmo,[1] two girls who were attending Year 8 classes in the CST Dolanji, tried to explain the dance to me:

"This is a very old dance in Zhangzhung. Our Bon religion is from Zhangzhung. In ancient times, we danced this, but now we have lost it. Now only people from Kinnaur still have knowledge of this dance. They were actually from Tibet. A long time ago, they moved to Kinnaur, so they share elements of ancient culture with our Bonpos."

Yung Drung and his monastic colleagues also provided me with an explanation which, according to them, was based on the Bon texts. According to them, the Bon texts recount that, wherever Tonpa Shenrab (the founder of Bon) went, his followers would perform a dance called Shon in their ceremony to welcome him. The Bon texts also detail how this dance should be performed.[2] However, this dance has long been regarded by the Bonpo monastics as a 'lost tradition,' which had vanished after Zhangzhung was annexed by the Yarlung Dynasty. It was not until the Bonpo fled to India that Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche visited Kinnaur in North India and found that Shon was still being performed by the people of Kinnaur. According to the Bonpo monks, although the people of Kinnaur did not know the origins of this dance, they regarded it as being a traditional dance which had survived from antiquity (see also Bellezza 2005: 184). In their words, it was not until Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche and some Bonpo monastic scholars from Dolanji cross-examined the style of this dance in Kinnaur with the description in the Bon texts that its connection to the Bon religion was confirmed and the relationship between Bon and the culture of Zhangzhung was further

[1] All the particiapants' names which appear in this paper have been replaced by pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy.

[2] An article entitled 'The Performance of Yungdrung Shon' (Yungdrung Shon-tse, *g.yung drung shon rtsed*) (2005), written by Geshe Nyima Woser Choekhortshang, was published in Bon-sGo (*bon sgo*), the annual journal of Menri monastery. Geshe Nyima Woser Choekhortshang graduated from the Menri dialectic school in 2008, and specialises in research on Zhangzhung. In this article, he details the origin, the way of performance, and the historical context of Shon, based on the Bon texts, and co-examines the texts with the performances he saw and the interviews he conducted with elders from the border areas of Nepal and India. In the article, Shon was referred as 'Yungdrung Shon-tse.' 'Yungdrung' indicates the form of swastika presented in the way the dancers joined their hands, and 'tse' (*rtsed*) means performance. I translated part of this article from Tibetan into English during my visit to the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, 2011. Permission to translate it was granted by Geshe Nyima Woser Choekhortshang, who also agreed to double check the completed translation. Moreover, the work for this translation relied on advice and invaluable assistance from Professor Yasuhiko Nagano and Dr Shinichi Tsumagari who helped me to read the article, and co-checked my translation. The findings from this short-term research are likely to be developed into a further project over the next one to two years.

demonstrated. This is why the Abbot invites the people of Kinnaur to perform the Shon dance, which is now regarded by the Bonpo monastics as a 'living tradition' from Zhangzhung. Yung Drung remarked, "*We also call this dance the Zhangzhung dance, since Zhangzhung is the place from which Bon religion and culture originated.*"

The remarks made by the Bonpo students and monks are representative of Zhangzhung's role as a key element in Bonpo narratives on the origins of their religion, adopted in order to substantiate a clear distinction between Bon and Buddhism. Moreover, the monastics' explanations also indicate that textual materials have been used as authoritative sources in order to authenticate the dance. It seems that textual materials have become the main source from which 'Bon traditions' are rediscovered (and sometime reconstructed), and the authenticity of these traditions has been cross-examined and confirmed. Is it true that the people of Kinnaur today share cultural roots with the Bonpo, through Zhangzhung culture? Why do the Bonpo have to insist on their religious connection to Zhangzhung in order to emphasise their distinctive identity?

The Relationship between the Bon Religion and Zhangzhung

Although the second generation of Bonpo in exile have always emphasised that Zhangzhung is the origin of their religion, it seems that the relationship between Zhangzhung and Bon has only recently been promoted in the Bonpo community, and in particular, narrated and understood by the Bonpo laity. Zhangzhung is the name of a kingdom which thrived in Western Tibet until the seventh and eighth centuries (Karmay 1998; Kværne 2001; Nishi & Nagano 2001; Rossi 1999). The Bonpo monastics in exile stress that Zhangzhung represents the 'golden age' of Bon in Tibetan societies before the introduction of Buddhism. However, there are few records left of the history of Zhangzhung, and researchers of Zhangzhung suggest that the languages of Zhangzhung may have died out by the eleventh century (Nishi & Nagano 2001). For many decades researchers have tried to unravel the area, languages, and way of life of the people of Zhangzhung (see Bellezza 2005; Driem 2001; Honda 2009; Jacques 2009; Karmay 1998; Kværne 1972; Martin 2000; Nagano 2009; Nagano & Karmay 2008; Nishi & Nagano 2001; Ramble 1999; Rossi 1999; Takeuchi & Nishida 2009). Although the majority of these scholars relied heavily on archaeological evidence, some of them have studied literature from neighbouring areas, for example, Central and Eastern Tibet, China and India (Honda 2009; Jacques 2009; Kværne 1972; Nagano 2009; Takeuchi & Nishida 2009). However, until recently, the history of Zhangzhung, and the relationship

between the culture of Zhangzhung and the Bon religion, have remained a subject for debate among Tibetan and non-Tibetan scholars. To date, the only point of consensus is that the kingdom of Zhangzhung covered the Western part of Tibet (including the whole Tsang region), and that its influence may have extended to areas of West Nepal and North India (Karmay 1998: 114-115; Nishi & Nagano 2001; Rossi 1999).

According to the Bon texts, Zhangzhung consisted of three parts: the Inner (*phug pa*), the Middle (*bar ba*), and the Outer (*sgo ba*) (Karmay 1998: 114), and the capital of the kingdom was located around Mt Kailash. The kingdom of Zhangzhung was said to include the whole of Western Tibet and part of Central Tibet to the east, North India (Ladakh, Kinnaur and Lahoul Spiti) and Western Nepal (Mustang) to the south, and Central Asia to the west and north (Driem 2001: 32; Karmay 1998: 114). The descriptions of Zhangzhung found in Bon texts are still being investigated by researchers, given that most Bon literature was written or 'rediscovered' in the tenth and eleventh centuries, or even later (Bjerken 2001; Karmay 1998; Snellgrove 1967). However, contemporary Bonpo monastics have adopted these textural descriptions to show evidence of Zhangzhung, and also to investigate the development of Bon during the Zhangzhung period (Kværne 1972; Ramble 1999).

As can be seen, Kinnaur in North India falls into the area which was described in the Bon texts as being influenced by Zhangzhung culture (see also Samuel 1993a; Stein 1972; Takeuchi & Nishida 2009). According to the monks in Menri monastery, before Zhangzhung was annexed by the Yarlung Dynasty, those people under the influence of Zhangzhung were adherents of the Bon religion, and they spoke the Zhangzhung language (see also Kværne 1972).[3] After Zhangzhung was incorporated into the Yarlung Dynasty, the people of western Tibet became gradually assimilated into Buddhism, and the language of Zhangzhung was replaced by Tibetan. However, the Bonpo monks believe that those areas which were at the frontiers of the Yarlung Dynasty's control may still have preserved some of the customs of Zhangzhung, and their dialects may also have traces of Zhangzhung (Kværne 1972: 26). When the Bonpo

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[3] The term 'the Zhangzhung language' may need more careful examination. According to Donatella Rossi, the kingdom of Zhangzhung seems to have been divided into three provinces and the people spoke different languages (Rossi 1999: 18). As Rossi mentions, among these languages, one called *smar* (or *smrar*) was the language from which many Bonpo texts are said to have been translated into Tibetan. In recent research into Zhungzhung, Yoshio Nishi and Yasuhiko Nagano also point out that the Zhangzhung language, which is associated with the Bon religion by Bonpo believers today, was the language spoken by the *dMu* tribe in lower Zhangzhung (in the areas of Mt Kalish and Upper and Lower Mustang) (Nishi & Nagano 2001: 1-30; Driem 2001: 32). Nishi and Nagano argue that people of this tribe believed in Bon, which is why the Bon religion is considered to be related to Zhangzhung.

monastics fled into exile, they embarked on research into the traces of Zhangzhung in the border areas of India, Nepal and Tibet. Therefore, Kinnaur became one of the target places where the Bonpo tried to 'discover' clues to their religious origin.[4] This brings us to the context in which Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche 'discovered' that the dance performed by the people of Kinnaur today corresponds to the Shon dance detailed in the Bon texts. Although it may not be surprising that Bonpo monastics have made an effort to investigate this performance in Kinnaur in order to demonstrate the relationship between Bon and Zhangzhung, the question of why Zhangzhung is so important to the Bonpo still remains.

The Bonpo believe that the kingdom of Zhangzhung is where the Bon religion developed before Buddhism became the dominant religion of Tibetans. According to Bon textural narratives, the first Tibetan version of Bon scripture was translated from the language of Zhangzhung (Driem 2001: 34; Karmay 1998; Nishi & Nagano 2001; Rossi 1999; see also *Tibetan Zan-Zun Dictionary*, published in 1965 by Tibetan Bonpo Foundation). Also, Bon texts represent the belief that Zhangzhung royalty were not only followers of Bon, but also the main patrons of the Bonpo masters. Although Zhangzhung may have had a rhetorical function in conjuring a nostalgic image of the 'golden age' of the Bon religion as depicted in Bon textual materials, I suggest that it was not until the 1960s, when the Bonpo experienced being marginalised by Buddhists in the Tibetan refugee community, that they adopted Zhangzhung as an important source of validation for their position within the Tibetan nationality.

As already mentioned, contemporary Bon and Buddhism share a great number of similarities in terms of their practices and religious philosophies, and these similarities usually blur the distinction between Bon and Buddhism, and add confusion to the relationship between the two. As a result, in their early years of exile (the 1960s-1970s), the Bonpo faced the dilemma of attempting to position their religious identity. Some Buddhists in the Tibetan refugee community subordinated the Bon religion to Buddhism, arguing that it was a derivative and plagiaristic 'version' of Buddhism (Cech 1993: 40; Karmay 1998: 159; Kværne 1972: 23-24, 1985: 3). Some Buddhists excluded Bon completely from Buddhism, given that the Bonpo followed a different founder to

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[4] The possible connection between Kinnaur and the language of Zhangzhung is briefly mentioned in R. A. Stein's *Tibetan Civilization* (1972) and Geoffrey Samuel's *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (1993a: 111). Yoshiharu Takahashi (2001) in a recent study of the Kinnauri language also suggests that the dialect of Kinnaur seems to possess some similarities to the Tibeto-Burman languages. However, as Samuel points out, research into Kinnaur and Spiti is still limited because the access to this area has been restricted to foreign researchers by the Indian Government.

Buddhism. Accordingly, the Bonpo monastic leadership were compelled to re-interpret the distinction between Bon and Buddhism, and locate the equal importance of Bon and Buddhism in Tibetan culture and history.

Buddhists in Tibetan societies had long established historical narratives linking the origin of Tibetan Buddhism ultimately to India (Bjerken 2001; Huber 2008). Buddhist historians depicted the introduction of Buddhism to Tibetan societies as a turning point which turned 'uncivilised' Tibetans into civilised ones (Bjerken 2001). The three kings of the Yarlung Dynasty, Songtsan Gampo (*srong btsan sgam po*), Trisong Detsen (*khri srong lde btsan*), and Ralpacan (*ral pa can*) were designated as being three Dharma Kings (*chos rgyal*) (or three Religion Kings, Mills 2003: 17) by Buddhists, given that they had played an important role in introducing and disseminating Buddhist teachings in Tibetan societies. In contrast, the Bon textual narratives placed the origin of Bon in the west of Tibet, and maintained that it had flourished many centuries before the arrival of Buddhism (Dakpa 2005; Karmay 1972, 1998; Kværne 1972; Namdak 2007; Snellgrove 1967). Additionally, in many of the Bon texts, the kingdom of Zhangzhung was usually described as playing a key role in the development of the Bon religion. When the Bonpo fled into exile, these textual narratives on the origin of Bon and the relationship between Bon and Zhangzhung became significant historical reference points and evidence on which they could rely to claim their religious distinctiveness to Buddhism, and further, validating their religious position within Tibetan national identity.

Contemporary Bonpo monastics interpret Zhangzhung as representative of the Bon religion, and *vice versa*. According to them, Zhangzhung is of crucial significance, not only because it was associated with the history of Bon in pre-Buddhist Tibet, but most importantly, because it also represents a highly-developed literate culture which belongs to, and is shared, by all Tibetans. Given this importance, in the past decades of exile, the Bonpo monastics have tended to promote the significance of Zhangzhung in Tibetan history and culture by interpreting it as a forgotten civilisation of Tibetans. As emphasised by Bonpo monastics, the Bon religion is the only key to unravelling the mysterious history of Zhangzhung and the role Zhangzhung played in framing Tibetan culture, in addition to the influence of Buddhism.

Put quite simply, the Bonpo monastics in exile have tended to argue that, long before Buddhism arrived in Tibetan society, the Tibetans had developed into a highly-literate society, largely due to the powerful influence of the kingdom of Zhangzhung and the Bon religion in neighbouring areas. This helps to understand why Bonpo monastics felt that it was urgent and essential to unravel the existence of

Zhangzhung by cross-examining their textual materials, recent archaeological research, and living evidence, for example, the Shon-like dance performed by the people of Kinnaur. If the Bonpo could find evidence to support the history of Zhangzhung in pre-Buddhist Tibet, and demonstrate that Bon had developed within, and contributed to, the culture of Zhangzhung, they could confidently locate the importance of Bon in Tibetan culture, history, and national identity. With this confidence, the Bonpo could therefore push ahead to negotiate their religious position in Tibetan nationalism. These contexts framed the majority of the Bonpo monastics' narratives on the relationship between Bon and Zhangzhung, and their research into the 'traditions' of Bon through Zhangzhung, and *vice versa*. The 'discovery' of the Shon dance is one of these examples. Although the relationship between the dance of Kinnaur and Shon in the Bon texts may still be argued and need further investigation, it has not affected the ways in which Bonpo monastics have emphasised their religious connection to Zhangzhung. For them, the 'discovery' of Shon in Kinnaur demonstrates two crucial points, which they have been struggling to negotiate with the Tibetan Government-in-Exile.

Firstly, this 'discovery' proves that Bon texts contain historical 'truths' linked to the period before Buddhism was introduced into Tibetan society in the eighth century. As is well-known, most contemporary Bon texts are said to have been 'rediscovered' in the tenth and eleventh centuries, at which time Buddhism had spread across Tibetan society. Therefore, many Buddhist monastics and historians have criticised the Bon texts for plagiarising Buddhist texts. In this context, the 'discovery' of the Shon-like Dance in Kinnaur, which represented a great similarities with what was mentioned in the Bon texts, and connected to the stories of Tonpa Shenrab in pre-Buddhist Tibet, means that Bon literature does contain authentic historical materials which are different from, and earlier than, Buddhist sources. Secondly, for the Bonpo monks, the correspondence between the dance of Kinnaur and Shon in the Bon texts demonstrates that the culture of current Kinnaur has a connection to the Bon religion. For them, this connection can only be built on their shared roots in the culture of Zhangzhung, given that Kinnaur had been influenced by Zhangzhung according to Bon texts. Therefore, the 'discovery' of Shon in Kinnaur proves what had been described in the Bon texts about the history of Zhangzhung, and also, the relationship between Bon and Zhangzhung. For the Bonpo, this 'discovery' is a big step forward in the negotiation of their religious history and their identity in terms of Tibetan nationalism. This is why the Bonpo leadership places a high value on the 'Shon' dance found in Kinnaur, and invites the people of Kinnaur to perform the dance annually in Dolanji.

Moreover, it is worthy noted that the Cham festival has been promoted as a common public event in the areas surrounding Dolanji, and many Indian officials are invited to watch the performances on an annual basis (see also Plate 3). Given this, as many Bonpo monks have remarked, there is no better occasion than the Cham festival for the Bonpo to present their distinctive religious culture to the Indian public. This presentation, in my opinion, illustrates the Bonpo's attempt to stress a close relationship between Tibetans and Indians via the culture of Bon and Zhangzhung. That is, instead of utilising Buddhism as a key connection, the Bonpo leadership argue that the Bon religion is the key to understanding the historical and cultural links shared by Indians and Tibetans. Thus, by depicting the Bon religion and Zhangzhung as representative of Tibetan culture in front of Indian district and, sometimes, state authorities, the Bonpo leadership are attempting to pressurise the Tibetan Government-in-Exile into reconsidering and recognising the importance of Bon identity in Tibetan nationalism. This may explain why the Kinnauri dance, a seemingly odd association, has been consciously promoted, even though it appears to have no connection to the performance of Cham within the festival as a whole. However, if Zhangzhung is so important, and has been consciously employed by the Bonpo monastic leadership in seeking to reinstate their religious identity, why do many laity, in particular the older settlers, show no interest in this 'ancient tradition' of Bon?

Reactions of the Bonpo Audience

As noted, when the Shon performance began, most of the lay elders began to leave. Why? Did they not believe that this dance represents the 'lost tradition' of Bon and is therefore important? Passang, a lay man in his late twenties, explained to me that the elders, for example, his parents and grandparents, did not really know what the dance was about. This echoes what some elders told me when they said that it was simply a 'Kinnauri dance.' Passang's grandparents also remarked that they had never seen this dance in Tibet before, and therefore, they did not understand why they had to stay to watch it. At the same time, many of the elders stated that, unlike Shon, the Cham dances were very important. Passang explained, "*they [the elders] feel Cham is holy because there are many Bonpo protectors and deities in the performance, but they don't understand what Shon is*".

Unlike their elders, most of the younger laity (for example, Dechen, Sangmo, and Passang) knew what the Shon dance was about, and why it is important to the Bonpo. For example, they all pointed out that this dance was related to the culture of Zhangzhung, and Zhangzhung had a close relationship with the Bon religion. This

understanding of Shon and the relationship between Shon, Zhangzhung and Bon echoes the narratives emphasised by the Bonpo monastics. We may ask, therefore, why the younger generations of Bonpo, who were born and grew up in exile, seem to have understood the importance of Zhangzhung, and the distinction between Bon and Buddhism, as articulated by the Bonpo leadership.

The different understandings and reactions expressed by the elders and the younger laity to Shon reflect the fact that the concepts associated with Bon identity may have changed over time in terms of the lived experiences in exile, and are approached differently in terms of different generations. For the elders, the Cham festival invoked their lived experience of religious belief prior to exile, and re-enhanced their sense of continuity which may have been interrupted and affected by the flight into exile. However, for the second generation, their awareness of their religious identity seemed to be invoked through the concept of Zhangzhung, which declared the distinctiveness of the Bon religion, and the importance of Bon to the Tibetan national identity. Unlike the first generation, the second generation have learned their religious beliefs in exile, where conflicts between Bon and Buddhism have arisen; the Bonpo had become marginalised by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and the Bonpo monastic leadership has emphasised a Bon identity distinctive from Buddhism. Therefore, compared to their elders, the second generation seemed to have become more aware of their religious distinctiveness in relation to Buddhism, particularly via the concept of Zhangzhung and its relationship to Bon. In this respect, I suggest that the newly added Shon dance may have become an important 'medium' (Pommaret 2006) which imparts the connection between Bon and Zhangzhung, an idea which has only recently become important to the Bonpo in the formation of Bon identity.

'Traditions' and Identity

The argument that traditions are usually 'invented,' 'constructed,' or 'made' has become a subject of critical debate between anthropologists, and between researchers and indigenous scholars, concerning the authority and authenticity of the traditions in question (Briggs 1996; Clifford 2001; Friedman 1993; Linnekin 1991). Friedman (1993) argues that invention implies a sense of discontinuity, and therefore, to view the tradition as 'invented' would neglect the continuity and creativity of culture itself. He points out that the building of tradition is merely a practice of cultural continuity, which should be understood as a social action rather than "a rearrangement of the bits and pieces of a museum collection" (1993: 761). In his essay which rethinks the debates of

authority and authenticity in the study of tradition, Briggs (1996) points out that argument about whether traditions are invented is not simply a debate between the etic and emic perspectives which have long haunted anthropologists. From his perspective, the question is no longer whether or not traditions are invented, but rather, who are the authors and who are the audiences of the discourse of tradition.

Briggs' consideration points out that the fluid characteristic of identity reflects the contradictions involved in the representation of tradition. In order to fulfill different needs and address various audiences, a group may constantly modify what they claimed to be 'tradition.' As have been discussed in this paper, the impetus to define the Bonpo as a distinctive religious group has only recently arisen, from 1960 onwards. In order to articulate the distinctiveness of their religious identity, and negotiate their participation in the Tibetan national community, narratives of 'Bon traditions' have been developed and remade by Bonpo monastics in exile. I agree with Friedman that the Bonpo's claims for their religious traditions are a social action, which aims to resist their marginalisation by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and negotiate their cultural continuity in the emerging discourse of Tibetan nationalism. However, I also note that in the case of refugees, which applies to the Bonpo in Dolanji in particular and the Tibetan refugees in general, the process of self-identification involves rapid social changes, which are caused by a violently disrupted living environment. This radical change of living space has forced the refugees to adjust their practice of cultural continuity to a range of new political, economic and social factors over a rather short period of time. In this context, identity is expressed in communicating with both old and new relationships, and what are presented as 'traditions' represent "particular combinations of heterogeneous elements, old and new, indigenous and foreign" (Clifford 2001: 479). I argue that it is in these circumstances of rapid social change that the processes of selection, reconstruction, and standardisation become most visible and important in the refugees' discourse of tradition and their claims to cultural distinction.

This is why I use terms such as '(re)construction' and, sometimes, '(re)making' when addressing 'traditions' in this paper. By '(re)making' and '(re)invention,' I do not mean that the traditions in question are 'made up,' nor do I intend to challenge the authenticity of what the Bonpo claim about 'Bon traditions' or 'Tibetan traditions.' Rather, my usage of these terms is to emphasise that the discourse of tradition involves a process of selectively remembering and connecting pasts and presents (Clifford 2001: 475). The aim of this paper is therefore to unravel this process of reconstructing knowledge and revaluing and adjusting identities in situations of rapid social change.

Moreover, I believe that understanding the usage of these terms would also help to identify the interconnection between different forces, which affect and actively shape the way in which 'traditions' are understood and represented. In the case of the Bonpo in Dolanji, these forces include the involvement of the Bonpo monastics, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, the Indian state, and the international agencies.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that claims in respect of identity are usually manifested through the process of remaking traditions, and the reinvention of traditions is often aimed at negotiating and articulating the legitimacy of a particular identity. I suggest that the claim of a distinctive Bon identity has been closely associated with movements promoting 'the Bon traditions,' which consciously emphasise a connection between Bon and the history and culture of Zhangzhung. By stressing that Zhangzhung represents a historical and cultural heritage shared by Tibetans and the Bon religion alike, and in seeking to preserve 'traditions' inherited from Zhangzhung, Bonpo monastics are asserting the importance of Bon traditions in contributing to a distinctive Tibetan national identity. In this process of re-structuring the discourse of distinctiveness, Bon literature is drawn upon as compelling authority, and ritual practices and performances have become an important means of displaying and reaffirming the authenticity of Bon textual knowledge.

This study is only a starting point. There are still many questions about Yundrung Shon Dance which have not yet been fully explored in this paper, due to current methodological limitations. For example, the style and the purpose of the Shon performance in Kinnaur and today's West Nepal still require to be cross-examined with the descriptions in the Bon texts. Additionally, the findings of this study lead us to further important questions: Apart from the shon-like performances in Kinnaur and West Nepal, are there other newly discovered 'Bon/Zhangzhung traditions' proposed by the Bonpo in exile? Also, how do the Bonpo living in China view the connection between Bon and Zhangzhung? Do they also assert that Zhangzhung is the origin of Bon and try to find the 'traditions' of Zhangzhung to prove its connection to Bon? If they do, what have they found, and are their findings shared by the Bonpo in exile? Moreover, has the concept of Zhangzhung among the Bonpo in China become important only in the past decades, when the Bonpo leadership in exile began to emphasise the significance of Zhangzhung in the Bon identity, and the Chinese Government started to encourage Bon over Buddhism?

The above questions will be included into an ongoing project called 'Debating "Traditions": The Tibetan Bonpo's Movements of Promoting the Bon identity.' This project, developed from my Ph.D research, aims to compare the ways in which the Bonpo represent their 'Bon traditions' in different social contexts, and explore how important transnational networks have been to the practices of Bon identity and the promoting of 'Bon traditions' among these communities.

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