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LHACHÖ [LHA MCHOD] AND HRINÄN [SRI GNON]:
THE STRUCTURE AND DIACHRONY OF A PAIR OF
RITUALS (BARAGAON, NORTHERN NEPAL)

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This paper relates to a wider inquiry into a category of Tibetan religious specialists, most often called *ngakpa* [Tib. *sngags pa*] in Tibetan, and which, following Stein (1962:65), I call 'tantrists'.¹ Although they constitute an important part of the Tibetan religious sphere, they have so far been to a large extent ignored by religious anthropology.² Actually, the very notion of a tantrist still has a problematic status in Tibetan studies. The difficulty lies to a great part in capturing under a single denomination a considerable variety of Tibetan names, but also of socio-religious forms. The very fluid nature of the profiles and personal itineraries of Tibetan religious specialists and practitioners is a well-known fact, particularly outside the more institutionalised monastic sphere.

In line with both Tibetan perceptions and external descriptions, I would give the following working definition.³ A tantrist, or *ngakpa*,

¹ The local pronunciation of the Tibetan terms is given in italics (when necessary), and the Tibetan spelling in square brackets, at the first occurrence of the term. Terms for which no Tibetan spelling could be established with certainty are preceded by an asterisk (e.g., **pikar*).

² Interest in various types of non-monastic religious specialists has so far been centred mainly on issues of socio-economic organisation, with but a few lines devoted to properly socio-religious aspects of these priests' specificity. One may refer notably to the work of Nakane (1966), Aziz (1978), chapter 4 and *passim*, Clarke (1980), Ramble (1984) or Stutchbury (1994).

³ I will here not go into the issue of the terminology in 'Western' languages. One may simply point out that the expression 'tantric householder priest' does not encompass all types of *ngakpas*, although it is rather fitting for the *ngakpas* this article is centred on. 'Lay tantric practitioner' is sociologically less restrictive, but the term 'practitioner' has received unwanted connotations by its use in varieties of discourse that highlight, and sometimes overemphasise, soterio-logical pursuits—an aspect that may not be particularly relevant at the village level. Finally, the conveniently shorter term 'tantrist', which does render some of the Tibetan perception of the *ngakpa*, is sociologically neutral. It might be perceived as somewhat problematic in the sense that monks also practice tantric rituals; however,

can be seen as primarily defined by a complex of sociological and religious factors. Sociologically, they are non-monastic religious specialists, living *in the world*, in Dumont's sense (1966:App.B). They are generally married householders and constitute, often hereditary, lineages. Religiously, whether Buddhist or Bönpo, they are characterised by their strong specialisation in various tantric practices. They are often depicted as engaging more precisely in the use of mantras, weather-magic, exorcism, or sometimes sorcery. Both of these aspects—living, as a religious specialist, in the world and specialising in such activities—can be problematic from the point of view of Buddhist ideology. My research is based on the study of these two aspects and their interrelations.

Here I will address from one particular angle the issue of their religious specialisation. Due to the lack of ethnographic data concerning the tantrists of different Tibetan areas, it remains impossible to assess precisely the extent of regional variation. I will therefore base my discussion on the case of one particular Tibetan society, that of Baragaon in central northern Nepal.⁴ I will concentrate here on two household rituals performed by Baragaon tantrists. More precisely, I will examine the place these rituals occupy in the religious activity of one particular village community of tantric priests, called Ch'ongkor [Chos 'khor]. This Buddhist community, like its Bönpo counterpart, Lubra [Klu brag], which lies in an adjacent valley to the south, is simultaneously a village community and a religious community, in which ideally the eldest son of each household becomes a tantrist and succeeds his father.⁵ The pair of rituals I will discuss are highly significant in the local perception of the Ch'ongkor priests in particular. They constitute the two main

tantrists are clearly more exclusively orientated towards tantric practices than monks.

⁴ Among Tibetan-speaking peoples in general, the area is known as (Lo) Ch'umik Gyatsa [Glo Chu mig brgya tsa], after the Tibetan name of the sacred site which the Hindus call Muktināth. Lo-mā [Glo smad], or 'Lower Mustang', is sometimes also used, the area lying immediately to the south of Lo (or Mustang) proper. Between 1995 and 1997, I carried out in that area a year and a half of fieldwork, thanks to a doctoral scholarship from the French Ministry of Education, Technology and Culture, as well as grants from the Laboratory for Ethnology and Comparative Sociology (CNRS / Nanterre University) and from the CNRS research team 'Environments, Societies and Cultures in the Himalayas' (UPR 299).

⁵ In practice, in 1997 Ch'ongkor counted some twenty households but only eight tantrists, as opposed to fifteen some fifty years before.

focal points of the patronage relations which over generations have linked Ch'ongkor tantrists and lay households in the surrounding villages. One is the *lhachö* [lha mchod], the worship of the household's *p'o-lha* [pho lha]. In Baragaon, I would argue the notion of *p'o-lha* is generally best translated by 'domestic deity' (rather than the more literal 'clan, or lineage, deity'), but I will not go into this issue here. The other ritual is an extremely violent exorcism, called *hrinän* [sri gnon], literally 'pressing down the *hri* [sri] demons'. It is aimed at suppressing the *hri*, which are responsible notably for recurrent deaths, be it in the household itself or among the livestock.

My argument runs as follows. The two rituals are often performed one after the other, and constitute a very interesting pair from a structural point of view. In particular, this pair presents quite a degree of structural completeness. Recent changes in local patronage patterns, and in particular the replacement of tantrists by monks of a neighbouring sakyapa [sa skya pa] monastery, have entailed changes in the nature of the rituals performed for the laity. The aforementioned pair of rituals has been replaced by another, both quite similar and, to a certain degree, lacking the completeness the former one had. I will conclude by suggesting what these transformations tell us about the Ch'ongkor tantrists' religious specialisation and their changing place in the Baragaon society.

HRINÄN AND LHACHÖ: A RITUAL SEQUENCE

One of the most common classifications of Tantric rituals known from scholarly literature or Tibetan texts is the fourfold classification *lä shi* [las bzhi]. It distinguishes four types of ritual purposes, or in Beyer's terms 'functions': rites of pacification or appeasement, *shiwa* [zhi ba], rites of increasing, *gyäpa* [rgyas pa], rites of overpowering or subduing, *wang-wa* [dbang ba] and finally rites of destruction, *ḍakpo* [drag po] (cf. Snellgrove, 1987, p.238). However, the main ritual typology in use, both by the laity and religious specialists, is a simpler one, based on the opposition between *shiwa* and *ḍakpo* rituals.⁶ This duality is not, however, just an abridged version of the previous classification, and the terms *shiwa* and *ḍakpo* do not take

⁶ This is probably quite generally the case in the Tibetan world (see, for instance, Ortner, 1978, p.183, n.9 concerning the Sherpas).

exactly the same meaning in the two contexts. In this binary scheme, we have an opposition between ritual *modes* (and not functions), where *shiwa* and *dakpo* respectively take the meanings of 'peaceful' and 'violent' modes of activity. For instance, all *dakpo* rituals do not aim at destroying hostile forces; some may only be intended to repel them. We will see that the two rituals to be discussed here, the *hrinän* and the *lhachö*, which the Ch'ongkor *ngakpas* traditionally perform in a two-day sequence, embody a graphic model of the *dakpo* vs. *shiwa* opposition. I will argue this is a fundamental point in terms of their local relevance.

If both of these rituals are important, the *lhachö*, the annual offering ritual directed to the house's *p'o-lha*, or domestic deity, wields a somewhat preeminent character. One may note that in Baragaon, at least in the recent generations, only the Ch'ongkor *ngakpas* have been performing a *hrinän* with the annual *lhachö*. Most importantly, beyond the purpose of propitiating the *p'o-lha*, this latter ritual is also particularly significant sociologically, due to its central position in local patronage relations. The patronage patterns vary according to the type of ritual concerned. For most ritual services, a household may resort to any available ritual specialist. However, the main funerary rituals must be performed by the monks of the monastery to which one's village is attached. The villages of southern Baragaon, in terms of monastic recruitment and ritual services, are organised in 'parishes' around the three *sakyapa* monasteries of Kag [Bkag], *Dzar and Dzong [Rdzong] villages (cf. Ramble, 1993, p.56). Finally, for the *lhachö*, the officiating priest is linked to his patron by a formal and perennial relationship, that is not only renewed annually, but also, if possible, from generation to generation. As far as memory goes back, and until quite recently, such positions have been held to a very large extent by hereditary lineages of tantrists. When the main Baragaon ritual specialists talk about 'their' patrons (*jindak* [*sbyin bdag*]), they generally mean the households for which they perform the *lhachö* ritual.

The *hrinän* and *lhachö* are performed by the Ch'ongkor tantrists as a sequence mainly in autumn, at the occasion of the yearly propitiation ritual of the domestic deity.⁷ This sequence shall now be

⁷ At other times, if one of the two rituals is deemed necessary, it is generally performed alone.

briefly described. A more detailed description, taking more fully into account the ritual texts and their local interpretations, is included in my forthcoming doctoral thesis.

THE *HRINÄN*: PRESSING DOWN THE *HRI* DEMONS

The sequence begins with the *hrinän*, which is performed in the evening of the first day, extending well into the night.⁸ Like all exorcisms, it should take place on an astrologically 'rough', or 'bad' day of the week, *sa gyo-nga* [*gza' gyong po*] (a day that for most other purposes would be considered unfavourable). The *lhachö*, which will be carried out on the following morning, must however take place on a 'good' day of the week, *sa ga* [*gza' dga'*]. A suitable pair of days must therefore be chosen. The particular qualities of the days of the week are however not the only factors that are to be taken in account. A local saying states:

*Tak-gi nyima-la lha ma-ch'ö,
nyilda nyima-la hri ma-nän.*⁹

"Do not worship the *lha* on a tiger day, do not press down the *hri* on Sunday or Monday". The first part of this saying refers to the association of the twelve animal signs to the days of the month, a count in which the first days of the months are linked alternately with the tiger and with the monkey. This saying is particularly relevant for our topic: the *lhachö* and *hrinän* appear in local discourse as a culturally constructed, and contrasted, pair.

The officiant starts the preparations in the late afternoon, in the patron's altar room or in another, large room of the house, where a simple altar is set up for the occasion. He asks the patron to provide two ceremonial scarves—a specificity of this ritual. These are attached, as a sort of propitiatory offering, or worship (**sügän* [*gsol(?) mkhan*]), to his ritual dagger, *p'ura* [*phur pa*], and to his hat,

⁸ This ritual, as carried out by the Ch'ongkor tantrists, was observed six times in a year and a half of fieldwork. So far, to my knowledge, only brief mentions and partial descriptions of the *hrinän* or similar rituals exist (mainly Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1956, pp.300–3 and 483–85; Mumford, 1990, pp.144f. and 157; Boord, 1993, pp.204–6; Blondeau, 1997, pp.201f. and 208–10 and Draper, 1994, pp.116f.).

⁹ *Stag gi nyi ma la lha ma mchod / nyi zla(i') nyi ma la sri ma non //*.

called *Urgyän päsha* [*U rgyan pad zhwa*].¹⁰ The latter will be worn on certain key moments of the ritual, such as when the main effigy is cut up. The scarves are called *p'urä* [*phur ras*] and *urä* [*dbu ras*].¹¹ The priest then shapes the ritual cakes, *tormas* [*gtor ma*] associated with the tutelary and protective deities he will invoke in a first, rather general, phase of the ritual. As in close to all violent (*ḍakpo*) rituals of the Ch'ongkor tradition, the main tutelary deity (*yidam* [*yi dam*]) is here Jampäl Shinje(-she) ['Jam dpal gshin rje gshed, skt. Mañjuśrī Yamāntaka].

Some two hours later, after the reading of the basic *shung* [*gzhung*] texts, the part really specific to the *hrinän* begins. The tantrist prepares a set of seven or eight small effigies, which are placed in a flat-bottomed metal pot. The central one actually represents a head, or more precisely a mouth.¹² The others are arranged in pairs, in which one is 'lead away' (*loktu t'i* [*logs su 'khrid*]) by the other: a 'monk' (**pikar*)¹³ leads a dog (*kyi* [*khyi*]) away, a man (*kyewa* [*skyes pa*]) leads a wolf (*chong-gu* [*spyang khu*]) away, and a woman (*püme* [*bud med*]) a rabbit or hare (**porang*).¹⁴ The pairs are interpreted as representing (the repelling of) various types of *hri*: respectively, the 'hri of young men' (*darma-gi hri* [*dar ma yi sri*]), the 'hri of the livestock' (*ch'uk-hri* [*phyugs sri*]) and the 'hri of the children' (*ch'ung-hri* [*chung sri*]).¹⁵

¹⁰ This action is also described as *umpang sügän* [*dbu 'phangs gsol mkhan?*], 'propitiating the power (?)' (literally, *umpang* refers to the notion of 'head held high', a classic image of kingship: cf. Stein, 1962, pp.138f.; Tucci, 1970, p.237; Karmay & Sagant, 1987, pp.253f.).

¹¹ Simple strips of cloth are sometimes also used. In the case of the dagger, they are often left attached to the handle. Some particularly active tantrists' daggers end up with an impressive black bundle of old pieces of cloth.

¹² The Ch'ongkor tantrists call this figure by various names, such as **sanling-ma*, **sanling-k'a* [the root being: *zan ling*, literally 'dough *linga*'] or also *miga* [*mi-kha*, 'people's mouth (talk)']. Its purpose could therefore be the repelling of harmful, envious talk.

¹³ One ritual manual spells this term [*pe dkar*]. The tantrists insist however that *pikar* is to be understood as a 'monk', and indicate no link with the deity Pekar (or Pehar).

¹⁴ The term is spelt [*bo rang*] in the above-mentioned ritual manual.

¹⁵ The effigies' symbolism, such as the association of the dog with the *hri* harming the young men, is not always clear. The wolf however is quite an evocative image for the *hri* of the livestock. The hare appears in some Tibetan tales as a cruel animal, but I know of no specific association with children. The woman who leads the hare away could understandably represent the averting of danger from children.

A larger, anthropomorphic effigy, called *ḍao* [*dgra bo*], 'enemy', or *ḍalchok* is also prepared. According to a learned nyingmapa [rnying ma pa] informant, this latter term is probably no other than the one which usually describes the ritual itself, namely a 'ritual [in which demons are] liberated', *ḍalchok* [*bsgral chog*] (see also Stein, 1957:219). The *ḍao* is set aside for the moment, and the pot containing the set of small effigies is placed in the centre of a pan in which a symbolic diagram, *linga* [*ling ga*], has been traced in a fine layer of flour. The diagram represents two superposed triangles (forming a six-pointed star), at the centre of which a short text lists various categories of *hri*, ending with the injunction: "May all [*hri* demons] that have arisen be attracted here!" [*langs ba thams cad khug cig*].

The reading resumes with a text named *Den-dar* [*Bden bdar*], *Enunciating the Truth*. This text does not specifically mention *hri* demons, but is based on the principle of the inherent power of words of truth (see for instance Beyer, 1973, p.343; Cantwell, 1997, p.113). The entire pantheon, from the *buddhas* of the three times down to various worldly deities, is mobilised in this process. Then the tutelary and protective deities are exhorted to take action, each through their specific text.¹⁶ During the recitation, an assistant, *shapchi* [*zhabs spyi*], taps with a knife on the edge of the pot containing the effigies. The officiant stops several times in order for himself and the assistance to drink a cup of beer, *chang* [*chang*]. These sequences are called **tamka* [cognate to *gtam*, 'to fill'], and constitute a form of *temḍel* [*rten 'brel*], or auspicious action. After exhorting finally the fierce protector Dorje Lawa [Rdo rje legs pa], the pot containing the effigies is briskly turned upside down in the pan. The clamour of the instruments, drum and cymbals, and especially the vehemence of the recitation reach an impressing climax at this point. Should any of the effigies still be standing upright after this manoeuvre, then the preceding section of the ritual is repeated.

Asked to comment on this phase of the ritual, the tantrists say that upsetting the effigies is already killing the *hri*. The ritual however continues, with a text called *Duk-dzä gi ch'oga* [*Dug mdzas kyi cho ga*], *The Ritual of the Toxic Substances*. Like the preceding ones, this

¹⁶ These texts are called *Exhortation of ...* (for instance Jampäl Shinje) ['Jam dpal gshin rje skul].

text is not directed at the *hri* demons specifically. It mentions only the general categories of the 'enemies', *da* [*dgra*], or 'enemy-obstacles', *da-gek* [*dgra bgegs*]. The deities protecting the enemies [*dgra la skyobs pa'i lha srung*] are first separated from them, then the enemies are bombarded with various 'toxic substances'. While reading or reciting this section, the officiant showers the upset effigies with the prescribed substances (or convenient substitutes): grains of bitter buckwheat, twigs of thorn-bushes (*ts'erma* [*tsher-ma*]) and *Ephedra* (*ts'e* [*mtshe*]), etc. The effigies will then be pressed with the tip of a knife into an animal horn or skull, the type of which depends on the type of *hri* to be suppressed. Great care is taken to avoid direct contact with the effigies: if they bore traces of one's *dima* [*dri ma*, 'smell, filth'], one would risk to be 'pressed down' oneself by the ritual.

The officiant now turns to the *dao* or *dalchok* effigy. Reciting a section of the text entitled *Binding* (*Dilwa* [*'Dril ba*]), he binds the effigy with a string and stabs it with a small wooden stake (also called *p'ura*). The *dao* is then threatened with a set of fearsome weapons, the *T'owo gi ch'ak-tsän* [*Khro bo'i phyag mshan*] or 'attributes of the Wrathful ones', and finally slain with the ritual dagger and a knife (described as a 'sword', *ralṭi* [*ral gri*], in the text). In the officiants' comments, the notion of really killing a being is very present at this point. They often liken this sequence to killing a 'person' (*mi* [*mi*]). They sometimes conclude: "Now the sin is committed", *ta dikpa ch'ezong* [*da sdig pa byed song*]. The theme of the *hrinän*'s 'sinfulness' has become a major component of local discourse on this ritual after a Tibetan monk, who lived several years in Baragaon, condemned this practice in the 1960's. Today, half of the Ch'ongkor tantrists have abandoned this ritual. Those who still carry it out are, to a certain extent, those who are the most engaged in patronage relationships.

Pieces of the cut up effigy are offered to the tutelary deities' *tormas* and the officiant swallows one himself.¹⁷ The latter then reads or recites the *Hrirap t'örap* [*Sri rabs thod rabs*], *The Story of the Hri and Story of the Skull* (often simply called *Hrirap*), the last major text of the ritual, and the only one to deal specifically with *hri*

¹⁷ The officiants do not provide any exegesis for this gesture. In a similar context, it is analysed by Stein as implying the absorption by the officiant of the enemy's life-span (*ts'e* [*tshe*]), or 'life', or vital force (*sok* [*srog*]) (1957:222,230f.).

demons. It starts with a 'prophecy' (*lungtän* [*lung bstan*]) of the defeat of these demons, then goes on to the question of the suitable garment (*gö* [*gos*]) and belt (*kerä* [*sked rags*]) for the *hri*. While this is being read, the skull or horn, filled with the remains of the set of small effigies and the toxic substances, is wrapped up by an assistant in a piece of coarse, black cloth, and bound into a sort of package with a rope that is black and white on half of its length, and entirely white on the other half. This asymmetry is a sign of the victory of the 'white side', *karchok* [*dkar phyogs*], that of religion. The officiant presses his foot on the package, in a gesture termed *wangkur* [*dbang skur*], 'consecration'. Then all the members of the household, one by one, take the tantrist's seal and apply nine seals on the rope binding the package. After that they all press their feet nine times on the package—the right foot for males, the left one for females. During this procedure, the officiant reads a long section of the text, which tells the origin of the *hri* and indicates the types of skulls and sites of disposal that are required according to the kinds of *hris*. The structure of this passage is rather complex, with a number of inconsistencies and incomplete accounts. The Ch'ongkor tantrists have not retained any of these elements in their (rather limited) exegetical discourse.

The officiant then carries out a rite formally quite similar to a *p'owa* [*'pho ba*], or ejection of the consciousness principle. The assistant holds the packed skull over a twig of *Ephedra* (*ts'e*), itself placed above the flame of a lamp, while the officiant touches the package with his ritual dagger and other ritual objects. The heat makes the twig crackle: *p'ak!*, a sound that is likened to the syllable *p'ä!* [*phaṭ*] (or, according to another source, *p'o(y)e!* [*bhyo*]), which is pronounced during a *p'owa* rite. The tantrists explain this sequence as supposed to send the slain demon to a higher rebirth, *yando-la tang-gän* [*yar 'gro la btang mkhan*], but admit that they do not carry out a real *p'owa* (a practice for which nobody is qualified in the Ch'ongkor community).¹⁸

After a final sequence of 'repelling', *dokpa* [*zlog pa*], the package is carried off in a procession to a junction of three paths, where a deep hole has been dug—this is now in the middle of the night. The

¹⁸ They actually call this rite *gyä-tap*, 'imposing the seals, or *mudrās*' (*rgyas brab*). In the text, these *mudrās*, numbering eight, appear as aiming mainly at keeping the *hri* trapped in the package.

tantrist first carries out a dance around the hole, in order to 'press down the earth', *sa nön* [*sa gnon*]. The package is then put in the hole. Straw, which is set ablaze, water and earth are thrown over it: the elements (here, fire, water and earth) thus contribute to preventing the *hri* from returning. The hole is filled up again and the earth is strongly pounded down, nine times, with a large, flat stone. Before the ninth and last time, a *vajra*-cross is drawn on the lower side of the stone—a common device for immobilising or sealing (cf. Beyer, 1973, pp.396 and 422). Two other heavy stones are placed on top of the first one and a fire is set ablaze over them. The officiant then dances around the fire, invoking the Tänma Chu-nyi [Brtan ma bcu gnyis] deities. At last the ritual's violence abates: all participants drink a cup of beer, the officiant blows his thighbone trumpet (*merkang* [*mi rkang*]) thrice and the victory of the gods is proclaimed: *lhä gyalol*! (sic) [*lha rgyal lo*]. The participants return home and the ritual is quickly over.

As an exorcism, the *hrinän* is notable for the very explicit and graphic way in which it displays a redundancy of modes of slaying the enemies. The power of truth is evoked, and the deities are urged to accomplish their fearsome activities. Amidst the clamour of the instruments, the *hri* effigies are upset, showered with 'toxic substances' and stuffed into a skull. The 'enemy', *dao*, is threatened with various weapons, bound, stabbed, cut up, offered to the deities and ingested by the officiant himself.¹⁹ The skull is wrapped, bound, sealed and pressed down. The trapped *hri* is submitted to a form of *p'owa*, which is followed by a *dokpa* ('repelling') rite. The package is finally buried, pounded under the earth and imprisoned under heavy stones and fire. The ritual's redundancy is both a highly convincing manifestation of violent power and a sign of just how hard it is to get rid of *hri* demons—by definition, agents of recurrent misfortune. It is quite telling that the demons are both 'killed' (actually, several times) and repelled, or prevented from returning. As Mumford observed, concerning a somewhat similar exorcism carried out by a Gurung shaman, "[the] double sentence of both death and exile allows for uncertainty in the outcome of the rite" (1990:143).

¹⁹ The ritual appears redundant also in the presence of separate representations of the enemies (the set of smaller effigies on the one hand, the *dao* on the other), that are submitted to distinct ritual procedures.

The *hrinän* also shows how fine a line there can be between an exorcism and sorcery. 'Before', I was told, one inserted sometimes into the skull also some *ḍima* (literally 'filth', or 'smell') of one's private enemy, for instance through a fragment of clothing belonging to him. The *Hrirap t'örap* text actually begins with the following instructions for the drawing of the *līnga*:²⁰

First, concerning the shape of the *līnga*: with his right [hand], he pounds his chest, with his left he pulls his hair. Blood is dripping from his mouth. His eyes are the eyes of a dead man.²¹ His legs and arms are bound in iron fetters. He is surrounded by nine syllables *DZA*. On the four muscles (the calves and the biceps), write *MA RA YĀ RBAD*;²² on the top of the head, the clan name (understood, of the enemy); on the heart, the name; on the navel, the soul;²³ (...) [the indications end with a list of mantras to be inscribed].²⁴

Thus the text provides clear indications for the attack of human beings. The 'pressing down of the *hri*' can obviously be understood (and practised) in a wider sense.²⁵ The 'enemy' (*da*, *dao*) is an interesting category in this respect. It remains conveniently vague and can be easily applied to a variety of (demonic or human) entities.

²⁰ This passage is not intended to be read, and the Ch'ongkor tantrists actually draw on the pan a simplified version of the *līnga*. However, they shape the *dao* effigy exactly as is described here.

²¹ One will note the highly inauspicious features of this figure.

²² Compare for instance with Boord (1993:135).

²³ This probably refers to the animal sign (yak, sheep, goat, etc.) linked to the person's *la* [*bla*], and called *lortak* [*bla rtags*] in Baragaon, a sign which plays a role notably in rituals for calling back the soul (*long-guk* [*bla 'gugs*]), where it is represented by a small butter figure. Jest, basing himself on Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:481-83), suggests this animal could be an external support of the soul (*lanä* [*bla gnas*]) (1975:321-23, 347-50).

²⁴ *Thog mar lingka'i* [*lingga'i*] *gzugs ni* / *g-yas brang rdung ba* / *g-yon pa bkra bal* [*skra 'bal*] *pa* / *kha nas khrag 'dzag pa* / *smigs* [*mig*] *shi mig lta ba* / *rkang lag* [*lags sgrags cing*] [*bcings*] *pa* / *dza* / *dgu'i* [*dgus*] *mtha' bskor ba* / *nya bzhi* [*bzhir*] / *ma ra yā rbad* / *ces* 'bris [*bris*] / (*spyi por*) *rus* / *snying khar ming* / *lte bar bla* / (...).

²⁵ It should be stressed that this use of the *hrinän* ritual (the actual extent of which is probably impossible to determine with certainty) is not just a 'village *ngakpa*' practice. Very similar rituals are carried out in monasteries of various schools. More generally, the use of sorcery by important Tibetan masters is a well-known fact, of which we are informed in their own biographies (cf., for instance, Stein, 1957, pp.200f.; Boord, 1993, pp.4f. and 120f.; Cantwell, 1997, pp.1f., in particular n.5). On sorcery rituals making use of procedures very similar to those of the *hrinän*, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1957), chapter 25, or for instance Ramble (1984:58f.).

Similarly, the *dao* effigy is vaguely anthropomorphic but devoid of any clear, distinctive features that would indicate a precise category of hostile agents.

Although in other contexts a *hrinän* ritual may be carried out by monks, in Baragaon and in a number of places the tantrists are clearly designated as its main, or sole, specialists.²⁶ The Ch'ongkoras [Chos 'khor ba] quote a saying, the exact wording of which is subject to variations, but which amounts to: "the *ngakpas* press down the *hri*; the *bönpos* [*bon po*] call prosperity (*yang* [*g-yang*])".²⁷ Thus the Ch'ongkor tantrists' religious identity is explicitly linked to the powerful and somewhat ambiguous *hrinän* ritual. Their religious activity does not however confine itself to the sphere of violent, *ḍakpo* rituals, as is clearly shown by their strong association with the cult of the domestic deity.

THE *LHACHÖ*: WORSHIPPING THE DOMESTIC DEITY

The annual *lhachö* ritual carried out by the Ch'ongkor tantrists, classically in association with the *hrinän*, is shorter and less complex than the latter.²⁸ It is performed on the second day, in the morning, and is generally over at about noon. As in all peaceful, *shiwa*, rituals of the Ch'ongkor tradition, the central tutelary deity is Padma-sambhava in his eight manifestations, Guru Ts'än-gyā [Gu ru mtshan brgyad]. The priest starts by preparing the *tormas* necessary for this second ritual. For the deities that are evoked in both rituals, he simply keeps the previous day's *tormas*, just adding some 'butter ornaments', *kar-gyän* [*dkar rgyan*] (actually just dabs of butter), in order to 'propitiate the *tormas*', *torma sügän*. He also prepares small effigies of a yak, a horse and a sheep, *yak ta luk sum* [*g-yag rta lug gsum*]. Textually, the ritual is a rather common sequence, including basic texts (*shung*) and notably a fumigation ritual, attributed in its

²⁶ Concerning Gyasumdo [rGya gsum mdo], to the east of Baragaon, see Mumford (1990:147,148,n.12).

²⁷ In the present context, '*bönpo*' refers mainly to the Bönpo tantrists of Lubra. The ritual specialisation that is here ascribed to them corresponds probably more to a certain ideological view of the Bönpos than to hard facts.

²⁸ Conceptions concerning domestic deities or *p'o-lhas*, as well as their worship, show substantial regional variations. Comparative elements can be found in N. Norbu (1966), Brauen (1980:21–29,106–8), Karmay & Sagant (1987:245–50), Dollfus (1987:74–80) and (1989:138f.) or Diemberger (1997).

title to Padmasambhava, the *Guru ter-sang* [Gu ru gter bsangs], *Terma* ('Treasure') fumigation of the Master. Short libation texts (*serkyem* [*gser skyems*]) and a condensed rite for calling prosperity are inserted into the main fumigation ritual.

While the tantrist starts officiating, a member of the household performs a purificatory fumigation of the entire household, from the stables to the altar-room and finally to the roof, by carrying around a large pan with coals and juniper branches. He finally leaves the pan on the roof, next to the *tsan-kang* [*btsan khang*, 'house of the *tsän* deity'], which is the support or dwelling-place of the domestic deity, the *p'o-lha*.²⁹ The *tsan-kang* and the pair of horns that often surmounts it are given a fresh coat of paint (they are generally red or white, sometimes both), and the juniper branches, small prayer-flags (*darchok* [*dar lcog*]), etc. that crown the *tsan-kang* are renewed.

The following section, called *ts'e-lha *gyakgän* [*tshe lha rgyag(?) mkhan*, 'presenting offerings (?) to the long-life god'], is interesting for the rich symbolism it can display, in a visually very explicit manner. This is the case for instance when one young Ch'ongkor tantrist carries out his own household's *lhachö*. I'll base my description on one such occurrence. When he officiates at a patron's house, a person of the patron's family carries out this sequence while he is reciting the texts. This is basically a layman's, non-textual sequence, that may be carried out with a certain degree of personal variation. In this case, the tantrist, having completed the main textual sections of the ritual, takes then a plate containing a large lump of butter mixed with barley grains and heads for the roof. He prostrates to the *tsan-kang*, then starts daubing some of its more symbolically pre-eminent features, such as the horns, the small prayer-flags or the juniper branches, with little dabs of butter mixed with grain. He recites while doing so continually the same prayer, something like:

Lo gi ts'e-lha so! Long-life deity of the year, so!³⁰
Dawä ts'e-lha so! Long-life deity of the month, so!
Shak-gi ts'e-lha so! Long-life deity of the day [in the sense of one day and one night], so!
Nyin-gi ts'e-lha so! Long-life deity of the day, so!
*Ts'e-lha sangmo so so!*³¹ Good long-life deity, so so!

²⁹ A *tsan-kang* in the nearby village of Dzar is described by Harrison & Ramble (1998:27).

³⁰ The interjection *so* [*bswo*] aims at propitiating the gods.

He then moves on to the flagpoles that are erected on the roof for each member of the household, and puts small dabs of butter and grain on the poles. He gradually works his way around the entire house, invoking continuously the 'long-life god', *ts'e-lha*, from the roof to the altar-room, then to the adjacent roof-terrace, then down into the main room and into the store-rooms of the second floor of the house, ending finally with the stables on the ground floor, and pursuing sometimes even with small secondary constructions that may surround the house. In each room, at each door and window or ladder, symbolically pre-eminent objects and features are singled out by the dabs of butter: the pillars, water-containers, hearths, door and window frames, certain pieces of furniture, a whole array of religious paraphernalia in the altar-room (but not, for instance, the statues), etc. are all dabbed with butter and grain on their upper parts. The heads of all of those present are also granted a dab of butter (**yar* or **yarka gyapgän* [*yar(?) rgyab mkhan*]). We have here a lesson in domestic symbolism and spatial organisation in itself. Thus the door frames, including those deep inside the house, receive dabs of butter always on the outside. The auspicious *yarkas* appear to be signs, intended for the outside forces, of the secure and auspicious character of the inner domestic space. One of the main aims of the *lhachö* ('worship of the *p'o-lha*') is to reaffirm the house's integrity.³²

Finally, the tantrist returns to the altar-room, where he adds a very large number of dabs of butter and grain to a pyramid-like mound of old dried butter, obtained by yearly adding up successive layers. This pyramid of butter is called the *ts'e-lha*, and is stored in a locked cupboard beneath the altar. The ritual's final sequences involve also putting small effigies of a yak, a horse and a sheep (*yak ta luk sum*) into a long cylindrical container, which is used year after year, and also stored in the altar-room.³³ With the recitation of verses of auspiciousness (*tashi* [*bkra shis*]), the ritual comes to an end.

The *lhachö* deals thus centrally with worshipping the *p'o-lha* and preserving the house's integrity and its inhabitants' long life. A

secondary, but related concern is that for the household's prosperity. Tucci has stressed the fundamental role of the house, "that place where the Tibetan truly feels protected and secure, provided that he has not injured or offended the invisible powers living there alongside him" (1970:187ff.); see also Samuel (1993:151). These are the stakes of the ritual that lies at the core of the formal patronage relationship between a priest and a lay household. Finally, the *lhachö* is characterised also by one dominant tonality, auspiciousness (*tashi*), a tonality—or ritual mode—that is expressed most clearly through one pervading symbol: the white butter mixed with barley grain. In many respects, we are at the antipode of the terrible, nocturnal *hrinän*. What does it mean, for the tantrist, to be the specialist *par excellence* of these two rituals?

STRUCTURE AND DIACHRONY

The global ritual sequence, from *hrinän* to *lhachö*, illustrates on a number of different levels the central duality of *ḍakpo* and *shiwa*, violent and peaceful ritual modes. Thus the *hrinän* aims at suppressing vicious demons, while the *lhachö* deals with worshipping the household deity. Preserving the integrity of the house and the life-span of its inhabitants can be seen as purposes of both rituals. However, these are much more explicitly stressed in the *lhachö*, whereas the *hrinän* deals with killing and destroying (actually, as we have seen, maybe not always just demons). The rituals' names, morphologically homologous, illustrate the same duality on the semantic level. The rituals are also concerned with different cosmological strata and orientations. Offerings are made 'upwards' to the domestic *lha* [*lha*], while the lowly *hris* are pressed down and imprisoned under the earth.³⁴ The opposition includes the dimensions of time and space. A bad day, *sa gyo-nga*, is fitting for the *hrinän*, a good day for the *lhachö*. The first ritual is nocturnal and culminates in the dark of midnight, in the uncertain and threatening space lying outside the house. The second is carried out in the daylight, more precisely in the clear and peaceful morning hours,

³¹ *Lo yi tshe lha bswö / zla ba'i tshe lha bswö / zhag gi tshe lha bswö / nyin gyi tshe lha bswö / tshe lha bzang mo bswö bswö //*.

³² As for the notion of family lineage, it is relatively absent from the ritual. This is but one of the elements which justify, in the Baragaon context, that *p'o-lha* be translated as 'domestic deity'.

³³ I am not aware of any other uses of this container.

³⁴ A *ngakpa* I met in Central Tibet, when asked to define his activity, had a formulation that expresses a very similar cosmological ordering: *yar lha söl, mar de dung, bar yang guk* [*yar lha gsol / mar 'dre rdung / bar g-yang 'gugs //*], "upwards, worship the gods; downwards, beat the demons; in between, call prosperity".

and, by highlighting certain features (pillars, doors, etc.), it extols the qualities of the precious domestic space: stability, security, prosperity. The fundamental opposition of *ḍakpo* and *shiwa* is also expressed by the ritual procedures and symbolism. The *hrinän* presents a redundancy of modes of killing, of activity deemed sinful, of inauspicious symbolism, whereas the *lhachö* displays highly abundant signs of auspiciousness, the entire house being dotted with butter and grain. We have here a striking illustration of an observation formulated by Tucci, according to which the relations of man with things and events are fundamentally of two kinds: auspicious and inauspicious (1970:171). Actually, although the evidence of structural complementarity of these two rituals is—to the anthropologist at least—quite compelling, I was unable to obtain from my Ch'ongkor informants very much of an interpretation of the global ritual sequence, apart from a stress on the succession of *ḍakpo* and *shiwa*. As already indicated, the Ch'ongkor tradition is one of ritual performance much more than of exegetical discourse.

Beyond this set of oppositions, what is really striking in this ritual sequence is its completeness. This pair of rituals comprises everything: violent and peaceful action, nocturnal and daytime activity, suppression of demons and propitiation of deities, finally the dangerous, inauspicious, sinful on the one hand and the auspicious and purely beneficial on the other. I would suggest that the cognitive efficacy of the ritual sequence is substantially enhanced by its structural, cosmological completeness.

The order of the two rituals is also significant. The sequence of *ḍakpo* to *shiwa* activities makes sense, for instance if viewed in the light of the general practice of concluding a ritual by the recitation of verses of auspiciousness (*tashi*).³⁵ In a way, the extreme symbolical violence that is generated in the first ritual is appeased in the second half of the sequence.³⁶ One may note that the ritual sequence as a

³⁵ One may observe a certain similarity with another relatively common sequence, at least among the more sophisticated tantric practitioners, which consists in performing a long-life practice after a ritual aiming at 'liberating' demons (*ḍalchok*) (C. Cantwell and R. Mayer, personal communications).

³⁶ Not all ritual sequences necessarily follow this order. When peaceful and violent fire rituals (*jinsak* or *jindak* [*sbyin sreg*]) are performed together, the sequence is concluded by the *ḍakpo* ritual. However, the sequence is closed off, as always, with verses of auspiciousness.

whole is often just referred to as a '*lhachö*'; one tends to be more discreet concerning the carrying out of violent exorcisms.³⁷

Finally, the recent changes in the local patronage patterns offer us an opportunity to examine this ritual structure from a diachronic viewpoint. Until the early 1950's, in almost all households of Ch'ongkor, Dzong and *Puṭa (the three villages of the north side of the Muktināth valley), the *hrinän* and *lhachö* were carried out annually by the Ch'ongkor tantrists. Then a bitter conflict erupted between the Ch'ongkor priests and the neighbouring, large village of Dzong, where the former had their most numerous patrons. As a result, almost all of the Dzong and Puṭa households transferred their patronage (in terms of the formal relationship centred on the *lhachö*) to the sakyapa monks of the Dzong monastery, who until then had hardly ever taken up such ritual functions. Relations between Ch'ongkor and the two other villages have since then been restored, but the new patronage relationships cannot be readily changed. Today, only a handful of Dzong and Puṭa households have maintained or re-established their links with the Ch'ongkor priests.

In the process of transferring the patronage from the tantrists to the monks, the former *hrinän-lhachö* ritual sequence was transformed, adapted to the monks' ritual repertoire. Two rituals are still carried out, but they are not quite the same: first, a propitiation ritual of the tutelary deities, *kangso* [*bskang gso*], then, the next day, a ritual for the worship of the domestic deity called *lhapsang* [*lha bsangs*]. The latter, based on a fumigation ritual, is a fair and obvious substitute for the Ch'ongkor *lhachö*. As for the *kangso*, it is not an exorcism ritual *per se*. However, it is considered 'rather *ḍakpo*', due to the visually quite explicit 'repelling' (*dokpa*) sequence it contains. In the laity's perception, the *kangso* is mainly an apotropaic ritual.

In a way, the overall structure has remained quite similar. It remains based on the duality of violent and peaceful modes of action. The days on which the two rituals are held are determined according to the same considerations as before. For officiants and laity alike, the current sequence obviously reproduces the structure of the former

³⁷ We have also seen that it is the *lhachö*, which lies at the core of the formal patronage relationship between a priest and a lay household. It has also been mentioned that the *hrinän* has recently become a rather problematic ritual, equated with sin.

pair. When the monks took over the cult of the domestic deity, they had to respond to the expectations of the laity, which were based on the convincing complementarity of the *hrinän* and *lhachö* pattern. As they do not carry out *hrinän* exorcisms, another ritual had to be chosen. Their most violent exorcism, the *dakpo* fire offering (*jinsak*), could only be performed by the most experienced among them. Their most common exorcism, a *gyapshi* [*brgya bzhi*, '(exorcism of) the four hundreds'], required four officiants and therefore was not adapted to the usual pattern of a formal patronage relationship. The *kangso* however is quite convenient, as it can be performed by all monks with a basic training (the first retreat of the Dzong monastery's curriculum concerns this very ritual). The choice of a more sedate form of '*dakpo*' ritual is also consistent with the local monasteries' general orientation, which privileges rather peaceful modes of activity (producing merit, etc.). Replacing an extremely violent exorcism by a more peaceful ritual is also coherent with other recent attempts of the Baragaon sakyapa monasteries to reform local religious practices or achieve a more complete conversion to orthodox—or orthopractic—Buddhism.³⁸ Yet a *kangso* obviously does not fully replace a *hrinän*. Some laymen point out, and monks acknowledge, that it does not destroy harmful forces, but only repels them. The 'softening down' of the violent, *dakpo* half of the ritual structure has weakened its formerly convincing completeness. And thus it comes that Ch'ongkor tantrists are asked, this time outside of the established, formal patronage relationship, to resume their problematic *hrinän*, maybe not on a yearly basis any more, but for instance every three years.

CONCLUSIONS

These elements confirm the strong relevance of the peaceful, *shiwa* vs. violent, *dakpo* duality in Baragaon perceptions of the ritual sphere. The pair of rituals the Ch'ongkor tantrists traditionally perform, the *hrinän* and the *lhachö*, are structurally very complete and thus appear as a sufficient whole. The monastic pair, generally

more peaceful, does not fully satisfy lay expectations, even if the monks have shaped their ritual services according to the model of the household rituals previously performed by the tantrists. The overall structure has been preserved, but has been weakened in the process, and the ritual sequence itself has thus lost a part of its efficacy.

This study of a central pair of rituals and its vicissitudes provides important insights into the specificity of the local tantrists and their changing place in local society. Through their strong, and formerly almost exclusive, association with the most violent exorcisms as well as with the cult of the domestic deity, they appear as the main local specialists for the handling of violent ritual power and of mundane, apotropaic activity. However, as a consequence of a somewhat contingent event—the conflict between the Ch'ongkor tantrists and Dzong—the monks have now gained a large degree of control over the important formal patronage relationships. To a certain extent, this is probably part of a larger process, which in the last two generations has seen the local monasteries gain prestige and assume an increasing importance in the local religious sphere (cf. Sihlé, forthcoming). But the principle that formerly ensured the continuity of these patronage relationships, namely the fact that among tantrists, the son generally succeeds his father in the function of the household priest, does not hold for celibate monks. Whether and how the monk community could create alternative principles of continuity remains to be seen. In any case, it appears quite clearly that in Baragaon, the formal patronage relationships centred on the worship of the domestic deity were in many ways geared to the socio-religious specificity of the main local type of household priest, namely the tantrists. And the handling of violent, *dakpo* rituals obviously remains a specific feature of the tantrists' activity. Actually, as the tantrists now perform less *lhachö* rituals but more *hrinän* rituals on an occasional basis, they (or at least some of them) have to a certain extent become more specialised in the violent, darker part of Buddhist ritual activity to which the *hrinän* belongs.

From a comparative point of view, the Ch'ongkor *hrinän* raises interesting questions. I know of no other Tibetan society in which one of the most violent forms of local household exorcisms is performed as a yearly, 'simply' prophylactic ritual. Similarly, I know of no other Tibetan society where the annual propitiation ritual of a domestic or lineage deity is (or was) more or less systematically

³⁸ Thus certain community rituals have been recently banned or transformed (cf. Ramble, 1993, p.54). However, it is striking that the most problematic local practices, namely animal sacrifices, have continued until the middle of the 20th century, after half a millennium of monastic presence.

associated with a violent exorcism. The case of Dolpo [Dol po] might prove somewhat similar, but without this systematic emphasis on extremely violent exorcism. Maybe a more detailed comparative study could offer clues as to why the latter should have a relatively central position in the Baragaon domestic ritual activity.

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THE RITUAL OF FREEING LIVES*

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The freeing of lives is a widespread practice throughout Buddhist Asia. There are references to it from Burma, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.¹ Despite its popularity, to my knowledge, no research has been done on this topic so far.²

I am following a combined textual and anthropological approach to investigate the ritual liberation of predominantly domestic animals in Tibet. After briefly examining its Buddhist origins, I will turn to the Tibetan literature devoted to this practice, its origin myths and the benefits of doing it. Then the ritual, as it is actually practised by contemporary nomads, will be described from observations and interviewing supplemented by information from Tibetan texts and other secondary sources. Finally, with the support of a text by Karma chags med (17th century), who distinguishes *sūtra*- and *tantra*-style

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¹ Spiro (1971:271f.) (Burma), Handlin Smith (1999), Welch (1967), pp.378–82 and (1968), pp.75; 306, n.8; 311, n.18 (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan), Visser (1935:177–215), de Groot (1893:53,110ff.), Williams (1992), Law (1994) (Japan), Sūchbaatar (1997:176f.), Njambuu (1993:51f.), Njambuu & Nacagdorzh (1993:43), Sarközi (1984:331), Vejnstajn (1978:459), Wajnschtejn (1996:250,254,27f.) (Mongolia, Tuva), Schmithausen (1998:195ff.) (Sri Lanka), Tambiah (1976:116) (Thailand). For Tibetan societies mention of animal liberations can be found in: Ahmad (1999), pp.282, 283, 293 and 341–43; Ashoe (1936:74); Belezza (1997:145); Das (1904:134); Delog Dawa Drolma (1995:97f.), 134; Diemberger & Hazod (1997:267,276); Duncan (1964:245); Ekvall (1964:178) and (1968:29f.); Funke (1969:75); Fürer-Haimendorf (1955:49) and (1964:209); Hermanns (1956:77,133f.); Huber (1999:242,n.39) and forthcoming, p.8; Hyde-Chambers (1981:84); Jerstad (1969:110); Li Anche (1994:215); March (1977:95); Marko (1994:144–146); Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:507); Parmee (1972:119); Paul (1982:98,112,115,129); Pema Tshewang (1995:150); Ricard (1994), pp.xxiii, n.53; 116; 193f.; 223; 328; 353; 355; 447; 478; 517; 524 and 542; Richardus (1998:128); Rinchen Lhamo (1926:150f.); Roerich (1949:987); Taring (1986:176f.); Tucci (1970:195,211); Waddell (1899:265,448).

² The only exception is Namkhai Norbu (1994) and (1997), who dedicated one chapter of one page to *tshe thar*.