

# The Body of the Spoken Word: The Interconnection of Ritual, Text and Manuscript in Bon and Naxi Traditions

**FRIDAY-SATURDAY, 24-25 MARCH 2023**

**A workshop hosted by**

**THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES,  
UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG**

WARBURGSTRASSE 26  
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REGISTRATION LINK: [HTTPS://WWW.CSMC.UNI-HAMBURG.DE/REGISTER-WORKSHOP38](https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/register-workshop38)





Through the series of workshops devoted to Bon and Naxi manuscripts organized in the years 2016–2020 we aimed to create and to reinforce a network of scholars who are known for their work on both traditions. The topics included the different collections of Bon and Naxi manuscripts, the concepts and history of both traditions, the science and technology of book studies and its possible application to Bon and Naxi manuscripts, the relationship between text and illustrations, writing materials used in both traditions, and the historical and archaeological context of the manuscripts' places of origin. At the last workshop, we were able to formulate the key topics that had emerged from our extended investigation of the Bon and Naxi manuscripts. Thus, for this workshop we ask our participants to present their research developed within the framework of one of a dozen possible topics, as follows:

- One or more Bon rituals that may only be fully understandable in the light of Dongba sources;
- The Nyen Collection (*gNyan 'bum*) text, which has a parallel in Dongba manuscripts;
- The Sadak Collection (*Sa bdag 'bum*) text, which has a parallel in Dongba manuscripts;
- The figure of King Kong (Kong tse);
- The Donak ritual;
- The biographies of Shenrab Miwo;
- Llü rituals in the Naxi tradition, and their connection with the Bon Walchu ritual;
- Book format and binding in Bon, Naxi, Yi and other groups of Highland Asia;
- Surveys of extant Bon, Naxi and other Asian Highland manuscript collections available for material analyses;
- The book as a physical object in Bon, Naxi, and other related rituals: relationship between form and specific functions;
- Papermaking traditions in relevant regions;
- Associations / relationship between Bon, Naxi and Daoist rituals;
- Drawings, symbols, iconography: similarities and connections across Bon, Naxi and other manuscript cultures.

# Programme

## FRIDAY

- 10:00–10:10 Welcome
- 10:10–10:40 **Dan Martin:** *Mnemonic Keys for Generating Scripture Recitations (with and without Reading) that Simultaneously Evoke the Body of the Enlightened One: An Exploration of Techniques in Both the Khams-brgyad of Bon and the Prajñāpāramitā of Chos*
- 10:40–11:10 **Marc des Jardins:** *The Cosmogram of the Sa bdag 'bum: Chinese Versus Indic Models*
- 11:10–11:30 Coffee break
- 11:30–12:00 **Charles Ramble:** *The Origin of Glory: A Bonpo Myth from a Manuscript Collection in Mustang (Nepal)*
- 12:00–12:30 **Agnieszka Helman-Ważny:** *Causal and Casual Links between Form, Materials and Function in the Drangsong Ritual Manuscripts*
- 12:30–14:30 Lunch
- 14:30–15:00 **Amy Heller:** *Drawings, Symbols, Iconography: Similarities and Connections across Bon, Naxi and other Manuscript Cultures*
- 15:00–15:30 **Kalsang Norbu Gurung:** *Biography of Tonpa Shenrab Miwo in an Aya Monpa Ritual Text*
- 15:30–15:50 Coffee break
- 15:50–16:20 **Daniel Berounský:** *Notes on Common Elements of Joseph Rock's Naxi Manuscripts and Tibetan Pagan Myths from Eastern Tibet*
- 16:20–16:50 **Uwe Niebuhr:** *René Nebesky-Wojkowitz: His Text Collection in the Weltmuseum Wien and the Collaboration with the Naxi Researcher Joseph F. Rock*
- 19:00 Dinner

## SATURDAY

- 9:30–10:00 **Naljor Tsering:** *Ge khod, rGya 'od or rGya rgod: An Element of Zhangzhung Connecting Tibetan and Naxi Sources*
- 10:00–10:30 **Duncan Poupard:** *A Naxi Phur ba Rite and its Implications for Comparative Study*
- 10:30–11:00 Coffee break
- 11:00–11:20 **Charles Ramble:** *Remarks on a Yi Manuscript in the Société Asiatique, Paris*
- 11:20–11:50 **Barend ter Haar:** *A First Look at the Use of Classical Chinese Writing in Yao Culture*
- 11:50–12:20 **Valentina Punzi:** *The Tibetan-script Manual of a Baima Ritual Specialist*



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| 12:20–13:30 | Lunch break   |
| 13:30–14:00 | <b>Silpsupa Jaengawang</b> : <i>A Ritual Leader's Manuscript: Manual of Interaction Prayers</i>     |
| 14:00–14:15 | <b>Agnieszka Helman-Ważny</b> : <i>Presentation of the Asian Highland Manuscripts Working Group</i> |
| 14:15–15:00 | Round table discussion  |

# Abstracts

## Notes on Common Elements of Joseph Rock's Naxi Manuscripts and Tibetan Pagan Myths from Eastern Tibet

DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, CHARLES UNIVERSITY, PRAGUE

The paper will focus on common elements of the manuscripts dealt with by Joseph Rock in his monumental work *The Na-khi Nāga Cult* and Tibetan manuscripts of the pagan tradition. The mentioned Tibetan pagan tradition is represented mainly by texts of ritual traditions called *leu* (*le'u*), but also by a collection of myths entitled the *Nyen Collection* (*Gnyan 'bum*, the *nyen* being some of the spirits that Rock calls *nāga*). Examples of the correspondence will focus on the figure of the Nyen ritualist Thangthang Drolba (*Gnyan bon thang thang srol ba* – the main ritual specialist communicating with the *nyen*), myths touching on purification rituals (*sel*, *bsang* in Tibetan, and <sup>3</sup>*Ch'ou* in Naxi), or the myth of a purification ritual using the burning of the fox (*wa bsang* in Tibetan).

## Biography of Tonpa Shenrab Miwo in an Aya Monpa Ritual Text

KALSANG NORBU GURUNG, UNIVERSITY OF BONN

In this presentation, I will explore a story of Shenrab Miwo from a ritual text titled: *Lha gzhung gter ma yid bzhin nor bu* (published in the *Collection of Ancient Bon Manuscripts Newly Discovered in the land of Mon (Arunachal Pradesh)* by Yung Drung Bon Monastic Center, Dolanji, 2018, pp. 173-208). This text is said to have been hidden and later discovered from Khoting temple in Lhodrag (near Bhutan) and is currently in the custody of an Aya Bonpo family in Zemithang (*bye ma'i thang*) village in Tawang region. The ritual text consists of about 35 folios and contains several sub-sections including a section with a short biography of Tonpa Shenrab. Some details in this biography are different from the well-known accounts, and therefore I will present these details and where necessary, compare them with related stories from the well-known accounts of Shenrab Miwo.

## A First Look at the Use of Classical Chinese Writing in Yao Culture

BAREND TER HAAR, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

Yao communities over the centuries (how many is still uncertain) have been using classical Chinese for ritual purposes, but also to create identity, to communicate over larger distances, and sometimes to produce legal texts. They maintained these practices even

under political systems where Chinese was not otherwise spoken (“Chinese” as a language family) or written (i.e. mostly classical Chinese), such as Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. I want to do several things:

- a. Provide a brief survey of the different types of texts or genres that I am aware of (on stone and paper).
- b. Say something about the possible chronological depth of these written practices (Yuan period or 13<sup>th</sup> century at best).
- c. Think through the role of writing in a culture that did not speak “Chinese” or a language variant that is recognized today as part of the “Chinese” language group (in Western terms a “dialect”), but otherwise not that different in having a written (and recited) ritual language and a distinct spoken language.
- d. Make inferences about the role of writing and written objects (not the same thing!!) in local or regional cultures in traditional China.

This will not primarily be an empirical paper, but an attempt to think (talk) through issues.

## **Drawings, Symbols, Iconography: Similarities and Connections across Bon, Naxi and Other Manuscript Cultures**

AMY HELLER, UNIVERSITY OF BERN, CRCAO

In the 2022 Bon and Naxi manuscripts workshop, my presentation concentrated on representations of birds and deer among archaeological artefacts of the Tibetan Empire and the Silk Route as well as the Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang. Their representations in diverse archaeological artefacts help to contextualize drawings of birds and deer among the Tibetan manuscripts, in particular the enigmatic drawings of Pelliot Tibétain 37 and Pelliot Tibétain 60, with dancers wearing deer- or antelope-headed masks. In these two manuscripts, there are also drawings of anthropomorphic figures, some of which may be deities while others appear to represent ritual specialists (female and male). The appearance of these ritual practitioners may present parallels, in terms of their costumes and attributes, with ritual specialists painted in the the illustrations of the Mokotoff manuscript as well as ritual specialists in line drawings of the Naxi traditions. This presentation will pursue the exploration of the visual parallels in the of the representations of the ritual specialists, how they encounter and interact with representations of birds and deer.

# Causal and Casual Links between Form, Materials and Function in the Drangsong Ritual Manuscripts

AGNIESZKA HELMAN-WAŻNY, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG AND UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

This talk will explore the interconnections between the form, materials used and function of the ritual manuscripts from the Drangsong collection from Lo Monthang in Mustang, Nepal. The collection belongs to the Bon religion of Tibet and represents the ritual repertoire of the priests of the kings of Mustang. The collection was assembled from different parts of Tibet and the Himalaya over six centuries, and was used till the priestly line ended in the 1950s or 60s. The manuscripts will be discussed in the context of their use in particular rituals, notably the following: 1) A ritual for acquiring “prosperity/glory” (Drangsong 002q); 2) A ritual for protecting the fields from pests - rodents, birds, caterpillars and grasshoppers (Drangsong 006); 3) A ritual for the subjugation of vampires (Drangsong 088); 4) An exorcism ritual entitled the “Iron Arrow” (Drangsong 134). The selected group will be discussed for their form and function, and all possible correlations between format, binding, layout, and materials.

## The Cosmogram of the *Sa bdag 'bum*: Chinese versus Indic Models

J.F. MARC DES JARDINS, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

In continuation with last year's research presentation, the present paper furthers inquiries into the relationship between the Daoist and Chinese Spirit-Cults pantheon on the one hand, and that of the *Sa bdag 'bum*. It investigates the possible Chinese versions of the Tibetan names of the spirits, their attributions, and examine the differences between the 28 lunar mansions in the Chinese versus the Indic systems. It questions the current Indic-derived cosmological attributions of the *sa bdag* and contrast it to the Chinese attributions that may have been the intended original template used in the *Sa bdag 'bum* cosmogram.

## A Ritual Leader's Manuscript: Manual of Interaction Prayers

SILPSUPA JAENGSAWANG, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

At the quarter of Ban Vat Saen in the inner town of Luang Prabang, Laos, a paper manuscript written has been produced by a senior laywoman who had been writing religious texts in a blank notebook. That woman is a local expert who leads laypersons to pray and join chanting activities at several religious ceremonies organized at the monastery of Vat Saen Sukharam. In view of a declining willingness of young men to enter monkhood as they are seeking their own professional career instead, laywomen can more easily become a ritual leader, playing a role which traditionally was a male domain. Due to the lack of monkhood experience in practicing and memorizing Buddhist Pali chants, it is not unusual that female ritual leaders read Pali prayers from printed books or manuscripts.

The laywoman and scribe of this case study manuscript selected frequently chanted prayers from various printed sources and copied them into that manuscript for her own use. Guidance phrases suggesting proper habits in chanting were also noted. The manuscript is thus used as a manual for praying and interactions. Evidenced by her selection of texts, the paper manuscript reveals which prayers in what kinds of religious ceremonies are chanted led by the laywoman. In the workshop, texts and para-contents of the manuscript will be discussed in terms of manuscript studies. Production, use, setting, and pattern will serve as heuristic tools to clearer understand the interconnection between the manuscript and those rituals, where the copied texts are involved.

## **Mnemonic Keys for Generating Scripture Recitations (with and without Reading) that Simultaneously Evoke the Body of the Enlightened One: An Exploration of Techniques in Both the *Khams-brgyad* of Bon and the *Prajñāpāramitā* of Chos**

DAN MARTIN, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR, JERUSALEM

The *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Khams-brgyad* scriptures are precisely the ones that are found in the most lavish manuscript productions in Tibet. This is in some part, I'd argue, because of what is said about sacred Volume making in the scriptures themselves, along with their ideas about how the written texts might best be preserved and circulated (I've presented on these subjects in our previous meetings). However, both bodies of scripture reveal within their pages their prehistory prior to their being written down. This means, in the former case, the Dharma-bhāṅakas (Chos Smra-ba-po), who preserved them through recitation practices when manuscripts didn't exist yet. I hope to demonstrate to a skeptical world that those recitation practices entailed the use of syllabic 'letter' codes for keeping large, and sometimes extremely large, scriptures in memory.

But beyond that there is something even more remarkable. Most visibly in the *Bdal-'bum* scriptures (but also in other scriptures of the *'Bum-sde* section of the Bon canon), there is an idea that the very same key letters that generate the entire text [in its differing lengths] can at the same time act as seeds that 'flower' into the major and minor marks of the Buddha, creating a vision of the Enlightened One's form.

I think it is possible to show that the Tibetan translations of *Prajñāpāramitā* have this same 'complex' embedded in corresponding parts of their texts, just that it wouldn't be easily drawn out without the help of the Bon texts where things are better spelled out (or



at least it is because of the *Bdal-'bum* I could become conscious of an identical pattern in the Chos scriptures).

In a very vivid way the memory letters serve simultaneously as sources for both the Body and the Speech of the Enlightened One. So from the devotionalist point of view, both the Body and Speech receptacles, as two types of holy objects that could serve as sources of blessings, are fully embraced and entirely covered, with only the Mind receptacles (most likely to mean Stūpas or Chorten 'memorials') suffering apparent neglect (there may be reasons for this internal to the dialectic contained in those scriptures). There are a lot of mysteries in the practical applications at various points in history. It may be supposed that the *dhāraṇī* codes would have lost much of their meaning when written scriptures were available to be *read aloud* in ritual recitations.

Nevertheless and unexpectedly, certain handbooks were made by both Bon and Chos authors during the past millennium that supply some kinds of 'direction' to the reciters who in earlier times did *not* have writings in front of them. I'm not sure how much I can go into those handbooks or make sense of them but a start ought to be made.

## **René Nebesky-Wojkowitz: His Text Collection in the Weltmuseum Wien and the Collaboration with the Nazi Researcher Joseph F. Rock**

UWE NIEBUHR, UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA, CENTER FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION OF INNER AND SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL HISTORY (CIRDIS), VIENNA

The text collection of the Tibetologist and ethnologist René Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1923–1959) in the Weltmuseum Wien was assembled on three research trips to the Eastern Himalayas between the years 1950 and 1959. A detailed description of the manuscripts and blockprints was made by Nebesky-Wojkowitz himself and comprised 105 titles (Wien: Archiv für Völkerkunde 13, 1958, pp 174–209). The cataloguing and reorganization of the collection as part of an ongoing research project at the University of Vienna brought to light 94 additional, previously uncatalogued items, including those from his last journey and from his private collection acquired from his estate in 1961. Among them are Nazi manuscripts that Nebesky-Wojkowitz received from the Austrian-American linguist and botanist Joseph F. Rock (1884–1962) during their collaboration in the early 1950s. In the presentation I will go into the history and content of the Nebesky-Wojkowitz Collection of the Weltmuseum Wien, which is to be published in the form of a catalogue in the near future. Furthermore, I will discuss the collaboration between Rock and Nebesky-Wojkowitz, which began as early as 1948 and ended abruptly in a dispute in 1951.

# A Naxi *Phur ba* Rite and its Implications for Comparative Study

DUNCAN POUPARD, THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Two manuscripts discovered in the Leiden University Naxi manuscript collection have a special value for comparative study between the Tibetan and Naxi traditions: OR26037 and OR26042 are both thought to be manuscripts written in the Naxi dongba script that record Tibetan language syllabically. OR26042 has a decipherable title page, as well as a first and last panel which appear to include traditional logographic Naxi writing. These clues suggest that the text describes the ritual slaying of demons with the *phur ba* magical dagger. This is a manuscript tradition not described by Joseph Rock or any of the Chinese catalogues of Naxi manuscript collections presently available, and further could not be deciphered by Naxi dongba ritualists in Sanba Township, Yunnan. It therefore presents something of an enigma.

While the manuscript probably dates to the late nineteenth century, it nevertheless suggests the possible continuation of practical, non-Buddhist *phur ba* rites for slaying malevolent spirits that are mentioned in the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts. Indeed, it may be the most complete such text to be discovered, for other shamanic cultures across the Himalayas that also use the *phur ba* have not recorded such rites in a written form. Or26042 presents what appears to be a full length *phur ba* text of a type that seems focused on the ritual suppression of evil forces, i.e. a type that probably predates canonical Buddhist *phur ba* rites that describe motives of attaining enlightenment connected with a “*phur ba* deity”. Studying this manuscript will help in seeking affinities between *phur ba* rites and early Tibetan religion across the Himalayan region, and its existence reinforces the need for broader collaborative action between scholars of both Tibetan and Naxi traditions.

# The Tibetan-script Manual of a Baima Ritual Specialist

VALENTINA PUNZI, UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

Following up on last year’s presentation concerning the use of Tibetan-script ritual manuals in the Baima community, I will introduce the specific case study of the manual used by Cidanji, a young ritual specialist who operates in a Baima village in north-west Sichuan.

First, I will analyze the manual as a physical object with regard to its material form, the position it occupies during the ritual performance, and the contemporary production of new copies. Second, I will show how Cidanji’s organization of the texts contained in the manual is linked to ritual actions and further fulfils the need to facilitate memorization.

Finally, I will juxtapose some of Cidanji's explanatory labelling of the texts with the Tibetan titles they bear.

## Remarks on a Yi Manuscript in the Société Asiatique, Paris

CHARLES RAMBLE, ÉCOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES, PARIS

Among the collections of the Société Asiatique in Paris are three Yi manuscripts, two of which are gifts from the Marquise Arconati-Visconti (1840-1923) and one from the eminent sinologist Emmanuel-Édouard Chavannes (1865-1918). This presentation will discuss one of the former, which was presented to the Société in 1910. Of the six groups in the Yi nationality there are four that have distinct logographic traditions: the Nuosu, the Nasu, the Nisu and the Sani. The differences between the four main traditions include the direction in which the script is written. Sani and Nasu are written in vertical columns that run from right to left; Nuosu runs horizontally from right to left, and Nisu vertically from left to right. The manuscript to be presented here, in which the script runs vertically from right to left, is therefore likely to be of Sani or Nasu provenance.

## The Origin of Glory: A Bonpo Myth from a Manuscript Collection in Mustang (Nepal)

CHARLES RAMBLE, ÉCOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES, PARIS

Tibetan religion contains a number of concepts that appear not to be derived from Buddhist beliefs but seem to belong rather to the stock of non-Buddhist notions that might best be understood as “pagan”. These include ideas such as *yang* (*gyang*) and *cha* (*phy*a), qualities related to prosperity and well-being that are mysterious and ill-defined but have nevertheless been discussed in a number of scholarly works. This paper deals with a related, though more obscure, force known as *pal* (*dpal*), which may be understood as “property” or “glory” according to the context. According to Toni Huber, in the Himalayan borderlands, specifically the Kurtö region of northeast Bhutan, “*dpal* can more rarely occur as a synonym for *tshe*, *gyang* and *phy*a in some ritual texts” (Huber 2020, vol. 1: 50). The Drangsong Collection, an assemblage of manuscripts kept in the house of the former Bonpo chaplains of the royal family of Mustang, in Nepal, contains two works that deal with the theme of *pal*. One is part of an archaic Bonpo marriage ritual, and recounts the division of property (*pal*) between a brother and a sister; and the other, a short work of just six folios, relates the myth of the celestial origin and descent of *pal*, which is here depicted as a more subtle quality than just material property. This text, entitled simply *dPal rabs zhes bya ba*, which may be glossed as “The so-called ‘Myth of the origin of *pal*,’” will provide the focus of this presentation.

# **Ge khod, rGya 'od or rGya rgod: an Element of Zhangzhung Connecting Tibetan and Naxi Sources**

NALJOR TSERING, ÉCOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES, PSL, CRCAO, PARIS

Ge khod, a deity associated with Zhangzhung kingdom at the time of the Tibetan Empire (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries), was depicted in many different forms in later religious histories from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The name Ge khod is generally considered to be a Zhangzhung word in the Yungdrung Bon tradition. However, numerous texts have alternative spellings such as *dge rgod*, *rgya rgod*, *ke kod*, *gyer 'od*, *rgya 'od*, etc. Links between Naxi Dongba texts and Tibetan scriptures dealing with Ge khod will be considered through an examination of two extant Ge khod-themed ritual texts in the Naxi Dongba literature, namely, *Invitation to the Deity Ge khod*, and *Prayer for the Extermination of the Enemy by the Deity Ge khod*, in an attempt to provide a larger space for the formation of ritual texts relating to Ge khod in a non-Buddhist framework, within the broader context of a mythological narrative. This presentation also seeks to elucidate the significance of the mythological context for understanding Yungdrung Bon and the Buddhist narrative system's recasting of the deity Ge khod as an important symbol in the sacred geographical space of Tibet following the later spread of Buddhism. Like a large number of texts of the Zhangzhung tantra tradition (*Zhang zhung bon skor*) of Yungdrung Bon, the Ge khod cycle was revealed in the form of treasure-texts (*gter ma*) from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The dwelling place of Ge khod gradually shifted from Ru thog in the far west of Tibet to the holy mountain of Kailash, making Ge khod the predominant Zhangzhung deity. At the same time, Ge khod was also transformed by Buddhists from an early deity who was subdued by the Padmasambhava to become a divinity who is considered to be the supreme god of all the sacred mountains of Zhangzhung (the lord of 360 deities) and is worshipped in their tradition.