

When One Woman Marrying Several Men Makes the World¹

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Abstract

This article illustrates the relationship among kinship, the religion of reincarnation, and cultural logic, on which polyandry continues to be embedded. Through this, the author represents a structural-symbolic approach to the relation, toward a cross-civilization study of polyandry and its cultural background.

Cultural Logic of Polyandry in Mustang

First, let me illustrate the cultural logic of polyandry in Mustang. In his book, *Development of Buddhism at Lo*, Khan-po Tashi Tendzin implies a theory about “Yul,” a sublimation of folk theories by his fellow countrymen. He is not the first, nor the last, to discuss this theory. His book is not even the most outstanding development of this concept. Many others have expressed their opinions on “Yul.” Yet his vital contribution is in recording his countrymen’s opinions so that they could be traced, compared, and commented on, and thus further developed.

In his theory, the word “Yul” is powerful in constructing related words and can be expanded to similar expressions. Local theory about “Yul” has a long history and is embedded within an historical dimension; it connects firmly with nature and Lo Mustang (Lo, henceforth) people’s beliefs; it is a supportive and core clue both for Lo people and for the present study; it bears a sense of evolutionism that is based on the transformation of the same basic contrast and is a process from material to mental, from tools to sacrifice, which has evolved even during the last century from 1900 to 2000 (p.224); it is a world view, interpreting the whole universe.

However, as a Buddhist, Kanpo unconsciously neglected many cultural facts that are necessary and that serve as critical complements to the dominant and orthodox mind of the Lo people. His books continued the historical conflicts between Buddhism and the Bon-po religion. The author takes the Buddhist perspective, disparaging Bon-po practitioners, which makes Bon-po lamas angry. In short, there are two versions of the “‘Yul’-theory,’ one is in written language and the other is in their subconscious or unwritten oral tradition—both of which, taken together, constitute the total picture of the cultural symbolic system and, thus, play structural and dialectical roles. It is here that polyandry, polygyny, and monandry function, embodying the dominant characteristics of the “Yul” system. In Lo, it is the male lineage that plays the dominant role, with the custom of Nav-ma, or in western terms, daughter-in-law. The other version of the “‘Yul’-theory’ is embodied by a dynamic transitive mechanism, female inheritance, with its Mag-pa, or son-in-law, custom. Thus a heterodox element including that of female lineage and of Bon-po is added; the Lo formula of the orthodoxy

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and the heterodoxy is in contrast to the dominant pattern or formula of Tibetan civilization, so that both patterns can reflect each other's characters and thus interpret each other.

Let me now relate how my fieldwork illustrates the 'domestic circle of marriage' in Lo. Tiri Sangphel la, age 81, treats himself as "nga-ek-number among the people of Pakling, Kag, and Tiri."

"Nga-ek-number" means "I am the eldest."² When I reminded him about additional villages, he always responded, "nga-ek-number." Tserin Tondrup, his grandfather, has a younger brother called Lama Tsang Nangpa, or "the great achiever in Buddhist meditation." Nangpa meditated in Tibet for years, during which his hair grew very long and he became quite powerful. Sangphel la never met him, however. Tserin Tondrup, who died at the age of 85 at a time Sangphel was too young to memorize, married Gyamo of Dhakarjung and had four children. Lha Nyer, the eldest, married Dhakarjung. Tserin Sangdrup, the second child, was Sangphel's father. Tserin Butri, Tserin Sangdrup's wife, was from Dhakarjung. Nyima Padzom, Tserin Tondrup's only daughter, died without marrying, as did the youngest son, Akhu Spen-pa, who worked for people around the villages. When Sangphel la was four or five years old, Akhu Spen-pa died at Tulkuche.

Sangphel la has five *spun-cas* or siblings. Tserin, Sangphel's wife, is 74 years old. When I paid him a visit in late April 2008, she was still in Kathmandu and was about to return to Tiri. They have three children. Tashi Lhunpo, their eldest son (age 46), has a birth year sign of the hare. The second child is a daughter named Tsang Chodron, who is three years younger than Tashi Lhunpo. She is now living in Kathmandu. The youngest is named Jamyang. With a birth year sign of the cock, he is three years younger than Tsang Chodron.

Sangphel told me that he had his first sexual intercourse when he was 14 years old. Seven years later, he said farewell to his partner, because he wanted to marry someone else. Telling me about these memories joyfully, and moving his hips back and forth, he showed me his gestures of kissing and thrusting. He said he used to do this very ardently. When he married, he was 21, and his wife 14.

Their firstborn was a son. But the son died when he was six or seven years old. At that time his business was at Dolpo. Their second child was a girl and died when she was three. When their third child, Tashi Lhunpo, was born, they were already depressed by the two unlucky early deaths. They went to the Lama in Tiri Monastery and pleaded for his direction, saying, "Our first two children died already. He is our third child. Please help us." The Lama then named the boy Tashi Lhunpo. The lama told them that Tashi Lhunpo is the name of a monastery in Tsang, Tibet and this name will protect him from dying young and that he will have longevity.

When the child was still nursing, his mother brought him on a pilgrimage to India to Gyaba Rinpoche. Then he was taken on a pilgrimage to the Padma Lake. Finally, Tashi Lhunpo was brought to Oranasa in India, a sacred place for Bon-po believers, before they returned to Yambu, or Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. To teach him to walk, Sangphel led Tashi Lhunpo around the complete circumference of the big stupa to the east of Yambu.

² "nga-ek-number". "nga" in Tibetan means "I." "ek" in Nepalese means "one."

When he talked about these events with me, I could feel his satisfaction for such achievements done so long ago. He said that his son is now 46 years old. From conversations with him I found that in order to have a child, and especially for the survival and longevity of the first son, Lo people work very hard. All, however, was done to embody the cultural logic of patrilineal primogeniture/ultimogeniture. I. e., all their efforts for the first son was organized by the cultural logic. Stories that took place later in his household illustrate this logic more vividly. Twenty-five years ago, his elder son married Tashi Lhamo who was from his same village. Age 43, she was three years younger than her husband. Years after their marriage, no child had been born. Tashi Lhunpo then had sexual intercourse with his wife's younger sister, Yudron. She is as old as Tashi Lhunpo's younger brother Jamyang. Yudron didn't give birth either. Then Jamyang took part in, with four of them living together, in the form of polygyandry, or multi-husband-multi-wife. After years of trying and living together, no child had been born. What else could they do?

When I asked when his younger son got 'married,' Sangphel la said, "How can I know when they slept together?" During our talk, he repeated the gesture of making love using his fingers two times. His words demonstrated an alternative way to understand 'marriage.' That is, it is just one of several ways to embody their cultural ideas. Marriage for him was a scale of behaviors from the simplest sexual relations to the most formal and ritual way that "chang-sa" (marriage) is observed.

Ten years ago, Jamyang found an opportunity to work in America and he is still working there. About four years ago, leaving Tashi Lhamo to their aging parents, Tashi Lhunpo and his younger partner Yudron went to Delhi and operate the Delhi Gunga Hotel.

The above model of the 'domestic circle of marriage' is identified as a process and also as a model of the changes in 'marriage' over time. This is further isolated as a model of the 'domestic circle of marriage.' Separated from a given culture, any interpretation of marriage is impossible. Since the middle of the 19th century, western studies on marriage and its history are largely undertakings to adapt different forms of marriage practices into a table given by the European notion of relationships between the sexes. When notions of kinship, in general, and marriage with its ideal of monandry, in particular, are given universal positions and treated with no sense of cultural relativism, this European cultural egocentrism becomes regrettably consolidated. Evolutionists will definitely use my findings reported here as proof of an ongoing remnant of group marriage within so-called 'primitive societies.' Treating evolutionism as a theory evolved in the context of western Christian religion and western European capitalism, I will let it pass.

When I asked Sangphel la if Tashi Lhunpo has two "skyeg-smad" (wives), he responded, "It is two husbands, and two skyeg-smads." For the predicament his household suffers, he said, "Tashi Lhunpo lived with his skyeg-smad's younger sister, they didn't give birth to any child; after Jamyang took his part in, [sic] still no child was born. What could we do with this situation? Now we got my so-grub (grandchild). She was adopted from Pokhara."

When I first came to his household, I saw a girl about two or three years old, with a chocolate candy and a small bag of instant noodles in her hands. She walked unsteadily to the place where her

adopted grandfather sat. Sangphel la took the plastic-wrapped candy, and got a long needle from the wall and opened it. He then gave the candy back to her. Lovely in appearance, as only a child of this age can be, she stood between him and me, and I began to play with her. When I took the instant noodles away from her, she turned to look at me, checking with a pair of suspicious and hateful eyes. I could not afford this resentful treatment and quickly gave them back to her.

Later on I learned that her parents are all Rongpas who abandoned her. “We are not clear whether her father eloped with a woman, or her mother eloped with a man. We got her at Jomsom when nobody wanted to accept her.”

The child would sometimes stare at me with suspicious and reproachful eyes, especially when she was dissatisfied with my behavior. I could not withstand the resentment and hostility they expressed. I did all she asked, rationalizing that she was only a little more than two years old. At the time she was abandoned and in a stranger’s arms with no affection from her parents, or when her adoptive mother could not nurse her, she suffered from her life experience, which was so different from other children’s.

This Rongpa child, only two or three years old, is destined to be the heiress of the entire household. She was not even born in Lo and has nothing to do with Tibetans in the sense of a blood tie either. What will her future be? With a Tibetan name of Tserin Sangmo, she owns a world, a world comprised of her courtyard, her house, the Tiri village and the people there.

Notion of lineage as the ideology of history at Mustang

The longest patrilineage recorded at Mustang is the Mustang King’s royal lineage. The literati class is responsible for recording royal lineages, as is the case in many civilizations. Recently scholars turned their attention to Tibetan materials for a better understanding of Lo’s history. The first western scholar who systematically studied this topic was David Jackson. He based his researches on *Molla of Tsarang*,³ which listed a lineage table of the royal family at Lo starting from the later part of the 14th century and continuing through the middle of the 19th century. There are 15 generations recorded, plus three generations before the foundation of the Lo Kingdom. (Jackson, 2000: 133-137) The most complete lineage is provided by Ramesh K. Dhungel, a Nepalese historian. For this project he invested twenty years of his life. The lineage goes from male to male, generation by generation, according to his publication, *The Kingdom of Lo*. (Dhungel: 2002: 77-8;120)

In 1964, when Michel Peissel paid his visit to the king, he was told that “The state of Lo was founded by a certain Ama Pal, a warrior who had built the great fortress of Ketcher Dzong, which we had seen standing upon the steep mountain dominating Lo. The King then proudly told us that he had the same ‘bone’ as Ama Pal. In Tibet, when you have the same ‘bones’ as someone, you mean that you are his descendant, and the King went on to say that he was the twenty-fourth ruler in direct line since Ame Pal.” (Peissel, 1992: 124)

When I interviewed the present Raja (King) of Lo, ‘Jig-med dpal-‘bar (1945), and his families,

³ Mola or Molla. Writings according to oral history.

Prince ‘Jig-med-seng-ge dpal-‘bal told me that: “Long time ago our father collected many government documents, and documents from other places such as the world, Pokhara, Mangyu as well. My father told Ramesh K. Dhungel, ‘Now all documents are collected. But now in the history book of India, and the history books of the world, no book contains such documents. Now I have all documents from all places. Now I gave all materials to you, please write a complete history.’ Dhungel said ok. After that he began his writing on the basis of those historical documents.”⁴

The coincidence of the Lo king’s concept of the importance of his lineage and the Nepalese historian’s interest in studies of the geographic area resulted in the recording of the complete royal lineage.

Most members from none-noble lineages, however, never keep a clear memory of their lineage back to more than four generations. I knew that Yu-thog, the head of a family of doctors at Dzar, once traced their lineage back seven generations. When the son, Nyima, tried to recite his lineage, he could not remember one of his ancestors. Even Yu-thog could not remember them again when I requested that he recite them for me, until his younger son brought out a paper on which those names were recorded years ago when Yu-thog could still recite them. Me-Tog, Nyima’s mother, said, “Long time ago there’s no written record. All depended on memory and many were thus forgotten. If there’re written records, all shall be revealed.” Her two husbands nodded to her.

Mag-pa: son-in-law

Let us turn now to the household that has no son. If there are three daughters, it’s the responsibility of the eldest to take a mag-pa (husband); if she prefers marrying and then living outside her mother’s home—to be a mnav-ma—or, using the western term, to be a daughter-in-law, it’s the responsibility of the second eldest daughter to take a mag-pa; if she marries and also becomes a mnav-ma, then it’s the third daughter’s responsibility to take a mag-pa. Once they marry as a mnav-ma, their parents will give them fields and other dowries, but the main part of the household’s properties, including fields, houses, wealth, Tsankhang (family shrine,)—if they have one—chapel, and the ritual name-list of their guests, are all kept for the daughter who marries and remains living at home.

In the *yul* or village of Dhakarjung we have an example of the above situation. After Tashi died young, he left four sons and two daughters behind. The second son was sent to be a lama and has since died. The third son, named Hridar, married and died ten years ago, shortly after he held his mthar-chang (becoming old) ritual. The eldest son, Lhapa, and the youngest, Namgye, polyandrously married a girl named Shes-rab from the village. The two shrines of the family lineage went to them. Unluckily, both Hridar and Lhapa did not father any male children. Hridar has three daughters. The eldest is called Sonam Pamo, now 51 years old; she took a mag-pa called Dala from the village; Hridar’s wife is Dala’s aunt from his father’s side, while Shes-rab is his aunt from his mother’s side. Pamo’s two younger sisters married to be a mnav-ma. Lhapa and his younger brother gave birth to eight daughters. The eldest, Paden, is 45 or 46 years old. Her husband is Padma Rindzin from Dzar.

⁴ December 23, 2007, 9: 00-10: 00 AM. Boudha. Interview with the Crown Prince Jigme of Lo.

We located a case where a mag-pa was not able to father a child: “At Kag, Ongdi’s daughter Lhensum married Norbu, who came as a makpa, a son-in-law from Dangardzong. When Lhensum went off with a Khamba, Norbu took her younger sister as his wife. After they, too, had no children, she also left him. After a legal dispute, Lhensum reclaimed the drongba title and her father’s house, which now belongs to her son Gyurme. Norbu bought a drongba title of his own and retained the house he had newly built in 1985 in continuation of his wife’s property.” (Gutschow, 1998: 82) At Ladakh, when no male heir is available, “the eldest daughter, the heiress, will take a mag-pa, who would usually be a younger brother in his own family. He enjoyed no rights over his wife’s property; his only role was to work for his wife’s interests, and to help her to produce heirs. Her sisters were given the same rights in the mag-pa as were the younger brothers in a polyandrous marriage.” (Rizvi, 1996: 133-4)

At Lo, the practice of nNav-ma and mag-pa occupies a structural position in both Yul-mi’s logic and social representation, as shown here:

mNav-ma : Mag-pa :: dominate : being dominated

“I would like to be your Tulku, next life.”: Reincarnation practice

In Gara Gompa, close to Chongkhor, the Tulku or reincarnation system was founded many generations ago. It is unlikely that the patrilineal system, which supports the lineage-lama system, give birth to the Tulku system. The precondition of the Tulku system is the possibility of the exchange of males between two families, which is very common in central and eastern Tibet, where bilateral inheritance (treating sons and daughters equally) and bilateral marriage prohibition dominate to make mag-pa the usual way for inheritance to be open to outsiders. The kinship system at Lo excludes the exchange of male children between two families to a great degree and contributes to the domination of the lineage lama system, especially the Sakya pa practice of lineage reincarnation.

Two Tulku religious orders were born out of the context of the local history of lower Mustang: the Gara Nunnery and the Lubra Bon-po Gompa.

According to Tiri Lama Tserin Padma, the Gara Gompa was originally one of the Nyingma sect’s nunneries. For a long time the root lama was absent, which brought them difficulties—so they shifted to the sect of vBrug-pa Ka-brgyud. According to Tashi Tenzdin, Gara Gompa was built by Lama bsTan-vdzin Re-ba, whose reincarnation was born at Ding-ri and was taken on a pilgrimage to Bal-yul where he saw two people from Lo before he held their hands, saying, “I see my two patrons.” Thus, he was identified as the Tulku. (PBKG, n.d.:191) The present Tulku is the seventh reincarnation. (PBKG, n.d.:191) The last Gara Tulku is from Khyung-po, Kham, Tibet, and is called Khyung-po Rinpoche, or “Lama Tulku,” whose father is a Bod-pa. His father died 46 years ago at age 65 or 66. Tulku has one wife named Sremo Norsang. They have one daughter called Sremo Padma who married Karma of Dzong. Both have died already leaving behind four sons and one daughter.

After the last Tulku died, Rindzin Wangdu, with the secular name of Magar (a lower caste name,)

was reincarnated to be the present Tulku. He is a Srewo from Tsarang of upper Mustang. When he was about 8 months old, he saw a ritual ring (dril) and he said, "That's my dril-lu." Thus he was identified as the reincarnation. His father, however, was reluctant to give him to the Gompa, which caused the absence of a Tulku at Gara Gompa for decades and other difficulties as well. In those years, the Gompa was managed by its 'reciting director,' a nun. Magar's father, named Srewo Norsang, is one of seven brothers. Magar is the only surviving son of Srewo Norsang's first wife. At the time Magar was identified as Gara Tulku, his mother had already died.

As for the identification process of the Tulku named Magar, the Gara Jomo Tsampa Khandro said, "The Gompa gave his name to be identified by the 18th Khri-chen Rinpoche, telling him the fact that Srewo Magar of Tsanrang claimed that the last Tulku's dril-lu (ritual ring), bowl, and clothes were his. Hearing this, Rinpoche gave his recognition and, after talking to the 16th Kama pa, informed Jomos at Gara that Magar was the right reincarnated Tulku. After this being done, [sic] Gara Gompa sent people to welcome Tulku to the monastery, mostly two or three delegates. My father and other senior Jomos all were sent to Tsarang many, many times, but all were rejected by Tulku's father. Traveling with business friends, I have been there to plea Tulku's father when I was 25. That time Tulku was not at Tsarang, but was studying at the school at Jomsom. I didn't have the opportunity to meet Tulku. His father Srewo Norsang didn't give his permission, saying: 'I will not give him to you. He is the eldest son in the household. Please.'"

Another Jomo of Gara Gompa, Tsampa Mudi of Dzong, said: "Our lama is no one else, but the Tulku Magar of Tsarang, Srewo Magar. We went to say, 'He is our lama, please let him come (to our Gompa). Please, Please.' I have been to Tsarang as well as Monthang unaccountable times. No way. Then my elder sister went to Tsarang many times too! 'Please come to Chumig Gyatsa. This is my Tulku, my lama. Please come to build your enterprise there.' 'No!' His father quarreled with nuns, 'My son is not your Tulku. Don't say any more that my boy is yours. The child's mother died. This is what his father said. He said, 'My child has been sent to Monthang. Don't say my boy is your Tulku. Don't come to me any more.' Then we got a written material (to show Tulku will not be given). After that, we stay at Gompa quietly, without lama. For this reason, we offered it to the Tshogs-gnyis Rinpoche. He became the root lama of and was placed in the Gompa. Now we are building new Gompa. We feel happy."

According to Tsampa Khandro, "Tulku's father didn't give him to us. He sent him to learn rung-chos (Nepalese education,) instead of Bod-chos (Tibetan education). It was said that Tulku's rung-chos was very excellent, and went to study at Pokhara or Yambu. In the past there's a Jomo Gompa at Tsarang, which was rebuilt by Tulku later on and set up a school there. It is said there're more than 20 Jomos today."

A Gompa without a lama suffers extreme difficulties. The difficulties and harsh conditions they suffered in the transforming process from the last Tulku to the present Tshogs-gnyis Rinpoche were extreme. During this liminal period of time, a lama assisted, helping the Jomos to restore and manage the Gompa. He was named Klu-ri Lama and was from upper Mustang.

When Tsampa Mudi did construction work on the Gompa, she suffered from the harsh conditions.

She smiled as she said, “Now it is Tshogs-gnyis Rinpoche, we feel happy. All nuns recite Mantra pleasantly, and are given clothes, food, and butter lamps. In the past, our clothes were in bad quality. When the Gompa was in restoration, we labored ourselves on all jobs like mixing muds, picking stones, carrying woods, were done by nuns. We carried stone bricks, at least each of us 500 bricks. Extremely hard. Now all are done by Rongpas.”

Two crucial elements contributed to the Tulku’s inability to take over the Gompa’s throne again. First, when he was recognized as the Tulku, he was the only son in the household he was born in. His other brothers all died young. He was the only survivor, and was therefore given a lower caste name to protect his longevity. In such circumstances, how could his father be willing to give his only son away? Second, under the leadership of the Hindu King of Nepal, the government was on its way to ‘Nepalize’ or ‘Hinduize’ the country’s minorities through educational institutions across the country, thus, cutting off these minorities’ connections with their traditional cultures. At this time, Srewo Magar was sent to study in these government schools and learned Nepalese, English, arithmetic, etc. from the government schools, but not Tibetan. Because of this, Srewo Magar cannot stay as the Gara Tulku culturally.

Dawa Sangmo, a Jomo of Gara Gompa, told me: “Tulku Magar didn’t say he would not like to be our Tulku. At that time he was too young to have power to say any. It’s his father’s decision. He did say before, however, that since the monastery has been offered to other Tulku, he would like to pray for his next life to be a lama and to be reincarnated as the Tulku of Gara Gompa.”

Offensive words

When a woman marrying several men runs the household, she impacts many aspects of her culture. One direct result observed is in daily language in which offensive words are used quite differently from that of other peoples around the world.

For instance, it’s interesting that a man I observed at Dzar, to offend his enemy, used idioms like “You are a man whose A-ma has no master!” The focus is on the A-ma’s (the mother’s) master. Actually, villagers care about this more than others. At the opposite bank of Lubra, a stone ‘worship-wall’ was erected. One of its stones was sculpted with words: “The master of A-ma is rightly Pa-pa himself (A-ma-bdag-po, Pa-pa-rang-lags.)”

The usual offensive words used among villagers are ranked from most offensive to least offensive as shown below: The first are “nyolo” and “nyomo,” to refer people who have no formal father, and are similar to my Sichuan Chinese dialect’s “Si-wa-tsi.” The second are “Do-na” and “Do-mo,” which originally meant “ox,” as a result of the mixture of the words Ba-chu and mDzo, but refers to people who were born without their mothers being married. “Yu-tsa-mo” means a prostitute whose husband has died already; in the Rongba language, it is “randi.” They use also “A-mavi-ro” and “A-pavi-ro,” which mean the mother’s or father’s dead body respectively. However, they don’t have any phrase similar to the widely geographically distributed “go fuck your mother.”

The nearest big city in the south to Lo is Pokhara, where Chhetri and Baun castes, although dominated by monogamy, still practice polygamy and marriage between cousins. They put priority

on sons, instead of daughters, and would like to try all possible methods to get a male descendant. As an example, consider the following household consisting of a poor couple. When the wife gave birth to two daughters, the husband, unable to afford a second wife, just let her have babies for six years, during which they had additional six children, all being girls. This household shares the same situation with the family from Dagadzung, which had eight daughters before they stopped having children.

People said that if a Pandit meets a girl during the day time, he would teach her how to be good girl and be a virgin, be honest and meek to her husband, etc. However, if he meets her in the night, he would try to seduce her. This takes place in some context. One girl got her education in the subject of medical science and has been in a hospital for her interim. The last stage to become a nurse is to meet the doctors, dominated by males, who decide whether interim nurses are passed or not. Some doctors require that the interim nurses have sex with them as a precondition for letting them pass. They know that students spent lot money on their medical education and if they don't pass, they would suffer quite a lot.

With this background, let's turn to their offensive words. In Rongba area the usage of "Machimni" (pronounced as "ma-chi-ni") is quite usual and is always heard spoken between men's teeth. "Machimni" means "mother-fucker." "Tero Bau," which means "your father," referring to "I am your father," is used quite often and could be regarded as a continuation of "Machimni." "Sa-le" means brother of wife, or "you are my wife's brother," referring to, "I fuck your sister." This usage is quite similar to the Sichuan dialect of "xiao-jiu-zi." Although they rarely use "batase" (children born without their mother being married), and "batase chhora" and "batase chhori" (son/daughter born outside of marriage); however, "Aputra," not having a son, is used.

At places around Lhasa, people do not use "go fuck your mother." If you said, "I am your father," or "I am your grandfather," it doesn't matter because it only denotes relative connections. If we examine the use of these root phrases in adjacent cultures, in Sichuan, China, for example, where Han Chinese are adjacent to Khampa people, "ri-ni-ma," or "go fuck your mother" is in use. My fellow Han Chinese men would add another usage, "ri-ni-xian-ren-ban-ban," or "I fuck the wood board on which your ancestors' names are sculpted." In northern China, people use "cao-ni-da-ye," or "I fuck your grandfather," which focuses on the action of "fuck," instead of its connotation of sex with a family member. Or they would say, "ni-ma-na-ge-bi," or "your mother's vagina," which is similar to "fuck your mother," more interestingly, "Si-wa-zi," meaning "the son who was born without mother's marriage," similar to nyolo or nyomo. If a woman "tou-nan-ren," or "steals a man," this means that she has sex with a man outside of marriage.

Han Chinese idioms of "xiao-jiu-zi," or "mother's younger brother," and "jiu-zi," or "mother's brother," which is close to the Nepali "sa-le", are used. "I am your father or grandfather," or "you are my son or grandson" is quite popular too. To destroy a person, the best way is to locate his/her shortcomings in sexual ethic and aggregate them before making them public. A very typical usage comes from "duan-zi-jue-sun," "no son and no grandson." It is used to curse another's lineage, professing the hope that it will end because no male descendants are born. Han Chinese culture is famous for its patrilineal primogeniture and cross-cousin marriage traditionally.

All these idioms or usages are based on the same logic of the binary contrasts of male-female, me-male and you-female, and male-bullies-female. We find similarities of this nature between peoples on both sides of the Tibetan plateau. Another similarity is that both groups emphasize a women's virginity. To keep one's purity and be a virgin until marriage, is a basic ethic for women in both Nepal, who are of the orthodox Hindu ethic, and inland China, where until recently, non-virgins were considered ethically bad and not suitable for marriage. Men from both places care very much that their wife-to-be is a virgin, too. Polygamy (the one husband and several wives system) is allowed, and men who can afford more than two wives are highly valued by people in both places. Polyandry, however, was, and is, strictly forbidden for them. A woman, who has several husbands in her life, even in strict sequence, is a proof of her 'dirtiness' and baseness. Inland China and the sub-continent of southern Asia are both dominated by the patrilineage system.

At Mustang, an area that is characterized by its patrilineal inheritance system, the reasons behind the fact that there is no use of the phrase "mother-fucker" among the people surprised us.

We conclude that the Mustang culture, as part of the southwestern pattern of Tibetan civilization, and with the impact of Hinduism from the south, is different from Han Chinese culture to its east. Although we could locate usage similarities between the Lo people, on the one hand, and Hindu peoples and Han Chinese on the other as far as offensive words are concerned, such similarities don't come from their cultural connections, but from their structural relations, both having patrilineally dominated societies. As a part of Tibetan civilization, the Lo region shares more similarities with its eastern counterpart in China. Lo people desire to make sure that patrilineage is not in disorder and could still maintain their social order as it has been for thousands of years. Han Chinese civilization, as well as the civilizations of south Asia, however, is accustomed to using offensive words that target 'rag women' ('rag pickers,') especially women from other ethnic groups, with the mother as the specified target. Civilizations at both places are organized by patrilineage, and, thus, are closed 'societies,' while Lo villagers are open to the whole world. However, Lo, with its openness, is half-closed due to its core value of patrilineage.

Conclusion

In this study of polyandry in Lo, I employed a symbolic-structure approach to culture, through which I argue that a culture at some time has a backbone of patrilineal descent (and marriage between cousins) with fixed symbols, essential content and meaning. All of these are carried down by its people who are endowed with passions, ideas and other cultural tools that endow them with the power to carry on their lives. This structure is embodied by its patrilineal vs matrilineal descent, as well as the contrast between religious reincarnation and patrilineal descent. Broadly speaking, I argue that Lo is further structured by its contrast to the other model of Tibetan culture and to the Sino-Indo model of culture as well.

As we know, marriage between cousins is not shared by most of those from central and east Tibet. According to my initial investigations and field reports by other scholars, I deduce that there are two sub-patterns of Tibetan culture, the dominant of which is characterized by its bilateral marriage taboo and bilateral descent system, and occupies an area west from the major part of mNgav-ris

prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Area (TAR), central part of U-tsang, to the east Kham, and the north-west Amdo. I call this the dominant or central pattern of Tibetan culture. The other pattern, and a necessary supplementary pattern, is famous for its patrilineal descent and bilateral marriage between cousins, with the additional prohibitions of marriage between the children of two brothers and between the children of two sisters. This pattern occurs in an area including Ladakh, Humla, Dolpo and Lo and adjacent areas including the mNgav-ris prefecture of the TAR, which I will refer to as the ‘southwest pattern’ of Tibetan culture. The positions of both patterns could be reversed in fact, with the possibility that the Southwestern pattern could once again play the central role in Tibetan culture.

Firmly connecting these kinship systems is the Lo people’s religious system in general and the reincarnation system in particular. The latter is a relatively rare phenomenon in the southwest while it flourishes in the central areas. The southwestern area displays its mixture of the reincarnation system and the lineage lama system, with the dominance of the latter. In the central pattern of Tibetan culture, however, there is a mixture of the reincarnation system and the lineage lama system, with the dominance of the former.

We could not have a better apprehension of Tibetan culture without these structural patterns—patterns consisting of the dual elements of male and female. In the Lo sense of the word, “reincarnation” means “a boy from a different family;” he must come from a household other than his immediate predecessor’s. So, in the Lo practice, if the reincarnation system is about to ‘operate,’ it must deal with two critical issues: first, people from certain temples must be willing to give the temple to a boy from outside; second, the family to whom the boy belongs must be willing to give the boy up. In another words, if, at Lo, in the practice of marriage, if in some families there is no son to take on the role of heir, but only daughters, the family must obtain a boy from outside of the family to be the Mag-pa. Similarly, some families have more than two sons and are willing to give up one of them, which will not affect the family’s inheritance. Thus, we can isolate the similarity in relationship between the reincarnation system and the Mag-pa son-in-law system: the general position of Mag-pa to the local kinship system as a totality is the same as the general position of reincarnation to the local religious system as a totality—both are representations of one and the same local symbolic system.

Once we build direct connections between forms of marriage and economic activities, then human beings and their thinking about marriage, family and economic activities all vanish. If there are no agents acting and no thoughts, anthropology would be a discipline about social materials, instead of a discipline about cultures of human beings and a discipline about symbolic systems.

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