NON-ANIMISTIC ELEMENTS IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

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Without entering into the question of the relative age, Fr. Krause has investigated the differences between animistic and non-animistic elements in two smaller works. He speaks of two ideas of life, of which the non-animistic one shows an inseparable unity of body and soul which can not be destroyed even by death. There is a life after death in form of corporeality, that is to say, the unity of soul with the bodily frame. At least the nature of an individual can not be separated from a visible form. If we rightly want to speak of a non-animistic idea of life we must recognize the significance of the body within the psycho-somatic unity in the different forms of spiritual and, above all, religious culture.

Krause's researches are helpful in bringing light into the probably oldest epoch of Tibetan culture, whose complex nature always confronts us with new riddles. A typical idea within Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) is the Bar-do state which is strange itself in the Buddhist conception of death and rebirth. According to this conception the consciousness of the deceased still exists 49 days or in exceptional cases 30 years. Sometimes the dead is not conscious of the fact that he has died. The dead thinks that his life on earth goes on in form of a human body. This intermediate state (Tib.: Bar-do) is finally ended by the dissolution of all psychic functions of man, which are capable of creating a new functional unity which is psycho-somatic with the help of the element (Tib.: Ehung-po) gZungs (the body aggregate). The self in Bar-do is consciousness and contains the whole of experiences which were collected during the life which came to an end by the death of the body.

Only in this intermediate state, according to the theory of Tibetan psychology, is it possible for the deceased to come back as a ghost (Tib.: sGyur-lus, Yid-kyi-lus) in which case consciousness temporarily appears in form of a visible body which can be materialized. Apparitions of deceased persons, who are dead more than thirty years, are interpreted as images of thoughts of the living person.
The different stages of the other world through which the deceased has wandered in the Bar-do are described in the so-called Book of the Dead² and interpreted as merely psychic events which can be experienced in meditation during the lifetime. A reinterpretation of the pre-Buddhistic ideas of travelling into the other world took place in Lamaism. According to that interpretation the Bar-do is as illusionary as life on earth. The difference between the experiences in the Bar-do and those of the earthly life is, that the Bar-do states are only psychical reflexes of the past life of a man who was not conscious enough of the nature of existence. The Lama (Tib.; Brahma) becomes the guide for the deceased on his way to the other world in reading the Book of the Dead at the death-bed in order to enlighten the deceased on the true nature of the appearances in the different stages of the Bar-do, and in order to accelerate the dissolution of the individual existence and its unification with the superindividual universe, the origin of the life, or to effect at least a favourable rebirth in a new body.

The theory of the Bar-do is obviously very old. We already meet it, in a changed form, in pre-Indo-German ideas of the Mediterranean culture, according to which the travel of a Mystagogue into the other world passes some stages to reach at last the Unio mystica. We recognize the relations with an archaic grossis. The branches of the Shamanistic cosmic tree represent the stages of the other world, which we find again in the rings of the conical spire on the Lama pagoda (Tib.; wChad-ri), representing the different heavens of the Buddhists. The Shonma climbs on the tree and leads the deceased through the other worlds as the Lama leads the dead through the Bar-do states which end with the unification of the deceased and the universal spirit if the latter succeeds. The expansion of Shamanistic ideas into the ancient Asia Minor and the unification of Shamanistic ideas with old oriental ideas in Central Asia³ are well-known. In this connection the question arises: Can we suppose that remains of a non-animistic idea of life persist in the Buddhist theory of rebirth on earth? This Buddhist theory of rebirth could lead to the same origin as the Lamaistic Bar-do tradition, which can not be said of the Hittistic metempsychosis, for there the soul as an independent integral thing leaves the material body and goes into a new body while according to the Buddhist theory, after the dissolution of all psycho-physical functions of the individual a new complete psycho-physical being can be
rebuilts. But we can not enter here into some ideas of Lamaism which are akin to the Hinduistic ideas, e.g. in connection with the theory of a Tulku (Tib.: gSPrul-sku). They are exceptions.

If it is typical of non-animitic idea of life that the dead dwells in a country of the dead, where he lives according to earthly conditions and has the possibility of coming back now and then to those living on earth in a bodily form, we only need remember some Tibetan death-ceremonies. During the time, in which the deceased body remains in the house, he gets food from the survivors. His dish is filled with beer or tea up to the 49th day after the death, the ordinary end of the Bar-do time. Before the dead is taken out of the house, the Lama speaks to him and explains that he is now dead, that he has been entertained well and that the survivors do not want him to come back. As it is possible, that the dead comes back in a bodily form, the dead is bound up, sometimes he is weighted with stones, and his eyes are covered with dust. All this is intended to prevent the dead from rambling during the Bar-do time in his old body which he left at the end of his life. We only comprehend the binding and the weighting down of the dead with stones if we know the very old kinds of burial in Tibet: the burial in earth and the burial in water. This taming of the dead (Tib.: gShin-dre-dul-va, gShin-po-dul-va) to prevent them from disturbing the living can be traced back to the pre-Buddhistic customs. As the dead are regarded to be dangerous when they appear among the living, people do not call them, for they are on account of bad Karms only restless ghosts (Tib.: gShin-dre), which can transform themselves into the feared Tsam-demons which send illness, especially when they have had a violent death.

The day, when the corpse is taken out of the house, a kind of doll or effigy is made of the clothes of the deceased and of a printed paper which is to represent him (Tib.: m'Tshan-byang/ spyang, Byang-bu/ spyang-pu). The effigy represents the tied up dead, in front of which are sometimes put some bones of the corpse that has been set out or the animals to be eaten. This serves as a magical representation of the dead. Here we see the identity of our individual existence and bodily form which is typical of a non-animitic idea of life. Food and beverages are put out in front of the effigy.
The community of the dead with the living persons, above all at meals, is, according to Fr. Knauss, a typical symbol for a non-animistic idea of life, as the intermediate rites for the deceased, by which the dead is led into another, yet bodily form. These rites are remembered in the Bar-do ceremony, when the deceased is led by the Lamas into the other world and the Book of the Dead is read out to him or to his effigy as in order to guide him on his way. This will be done until the unification with the source of all things, the clear light, or the formation of a new individual has been achieved that is to say, a kind of transformation of the old psycho-semantic unity.

For the time of an eventual return there is as mentioned before according to the opinion of the Tibetans, the possibility that the dead becomes a bodily ghost, a demon. The bodily apparition of a deceased, the real presence of the dead, occurs according to our representations, either with the body of the former earthly life, into which the dead moved again, or with the body of a phantom (Tib.: sGyur-lus), sometimes materialized, or with an effigy which represents the dead, responding with his symbolic portrait. The latter possibility is especially typical of the non-animistic conception.

Proceeding from the idea of a unity which can not be divided into body and soul, it is an essential feature of the non-animistic conception, that the body in a complete aspect of this unity. The possession of parts of the body or things which come in contact with the body can therefore be of great importance. This explains many of the magic rituals and customs of Lamaism connected with charms and amulets. We only remember the so-called Tsha-Tsha which are made by mixing the ashes of a burned corpse or a burned paper-picture of the deceased with clay. These plaquettes, cast in iconographical forms, are put up on the altar at home, in reliquaries and in amulet cases to represent the blessings of the deceased. The physical remains of the dead or of living persons play a big part also in the so-called “Black Magic” of Lamaism. Human existence can be prolonged if one appropriates certain parts of a living person or organism (Tib.: stong-btu-byas-na). While realizing the blissful beneficial forces of a deceased with the help of a Tsha-Tsha, in the performance Black Magic one can get power over something or somebody (man or beast), whose physical substances one possesses, so that one can improve one’s own vitality with the help of the another’s vital power while at the same time one may be able to
destroy him. The physical substances recreate the presence of the former possessor."

Is the non-animistic ideas of the Lamaism we can probably distinguish between an older and a younger conception. According to the younger one it is enough to have the form as expression of the essential nature of a force or to appropriates the qualities of the matter which is connected with the matter or form of an individual as Fr. Krause has pointed out. The essential aspect of matter and form is always to be considered.

We remember once more the effigy or mask, especially the symbolic picture of the deceased and its function after the corpse has been taken out of the house. Without any doubt there are relations to the figures of ancestors in the non-animistic attitude. The presence of the deceased is never merely symbolized. The effigy which has direct, bodily relations with the deceased, as for instance through the clothes, which had been worn by him and the picture, printed with the help of wood-blocks, though unrelated to the material body of the deceased, are considered as representing the real existence of the dead; which is also demonstrated by the offering of food.

We may further think of the stone pillars (Menhir, Tib.: rDo-rin) of the 8th and 9th century in the oldest Lamaistic temples, which represent the dead ruler or the still living king with his whole authority and majesty (Tib.: mNga-chang) and with this the order of the world. We find here partly megalithic traditions. We do not know whether phallic ideas, are connected with this, but we cannot exclude this possibility.

We should especially appreciate the monsters in which beast and man are united. The Tibetans think that animals have a greater vital power. The essential distinction between man and beast is however more or less denied here. Both are different aspects of the same vital principle and the one aspect is always present in the other. According to the non-animistic conception a human being turns into a beast or a beast into a human being by changing the bodily form whereupon the being whose form has been assumed is present with all its qualities. According to the non-animistic conception man and beast can transform into one another.

25
In these non-animistic ideas we can see the origins of the Lamaistic mask-ceremonies, especially the cult-dances whatever is represented by the assumed bodily appearance becomes reality. The human being becomes a divine or demonical being, or a particular animal by wearing the corresponding mask. Even one part of the body or only the emblems which point to the new being are sometimes enough. Speaking about these monsters not only when they are represented by masks of the Lamaistic cult-dances (Tib.: 'Cham), but also when they are images of the pantheon, we should realize that the transformation of a human being or a divinity into the nature of an animal with all its qualities and capacities, is an act of magic, brought about by putting on the appropriate masks and costumes. Fr. Krause calls this the principle of the effective form. The dance-masks represent an actual form of reality, they do not only point to it. Transformations experienced in meditation only are a later stage of development, beside which the older magical practice of materialisation continued.

We clearly recognize the very old pre-Buddhist traditions of the Tibetan mask-ceremonies still in the masked-processions, the nocturnal, noisy masquerades during the New Year’s Day, in the bagging-rounds of youngsters which find their counterpart in the excesses of the monks during the Monlam festival (Tib.: Lo-gar-smon-lam-chen-po) together with New Year ceremonies in I-lha-sa. Their original aim was to represent the army of the dead and of demons in connection with the magic of fertility for the new year. This troop, mythologically known in Europe as the “wild hunters”, is found in the Lamaistic pantheon too, namely as the reitume of the Tibetan rider of the white horse dGri-ma with his dogs and birds as messengers of death and as reitume of the famous white old man (Tib.: sGron (rgan) po-dkar-po, Mi-tha-ring) who is known all over Europe and Asia (cf. Eckart). Formerly this white old man as the master of life and fertility was an important figure of the Lamaistic Cham, and not a comic one. The pre-Buddhist relations of the Cham to the occurrences of the psyche in the Bar-do are well known.

Besides all these visible practices there are also many meditative exercises in Lamaism, influenced by an archaic, non-animistic conception and therefore above all connected with the body. During the corresponding exercises the transformation of the anastrigogue into the absolute emptiness

26
recurs only together with the bodily aspect. Above all we point to the practices of the conjuration of divinities (Tib.: sGrub-pa, sPyin-dren-pa), which are considered as aspects of the absolute and who carry the meditator after his identification with them into the last unification. According to the theory of Tantrism the participation of the body supports the successful, preparatory meditation, a method which is known as the so-called Yoga with form (Tib.: 'Dzim-lam), by gestures (Skr.: Mudra) and sound symbols (Skr.: Bja, Mantra, Dharami). Painted and pastic icons can serve as supporting meditative instruments. First the mystagogue (Skr.: Sadhaka) identifies himself with the chosen divinity and he sees in it the first transformation of his own unity of body and soul. This occurrence is called bDag-skyed. The divinity, now the self of the meditator, becomes visible to the mind's eye. This projection, which is called mDun-skyed, is said to be seen as partly materialized. At last the Sadhaka attentively observes the disappearance of this apparition into emptiness, which finishes the whole process of his own transformation into emptiness which, in its effects, means a parallel to the favourable end of the Bar-do: Dissolution of the unity of body and soul.

Without entering into the problems of parapsychology, we could mention, in this connection, the materialized so-called 'second selves' presupposing a split personality, beside the phenomena of materialization during the conjuration of divinities by the Sadhaka (Tib.: sGrub-pa-po, sPrul-pa-mkhyen-pa).

In Tibet these materializations are interpreted as phantoms, connected with the body, of the conjurer who sends off the second self as a body of a second personality (Tib.: sPrul-pa = Phantom) or who visibly conjures the divinity (Tib.: mDun-skyed), creates a materialized psychogogus. Sometimes the conjurer is conscious of his primary personality which is possible during the conjuration. These phantoms of the second self or the materialized divinities in the meditations are controlled by the mediator and are connected with a coro like a navel-cord, not always visible, which feeds the phantom (Thugs-Kyi-sPrul-pa).

It is important for us that the way to the redemption from the visible, illusionary world, divided into subject and object, leads via the psycho-somatic change of the Sadhaka into a divinity (bDag-skyed) and finally via the bodily appa-
tition of the divinity (miDun-skyed). Redemption is dissolution of the unity of body and soul.

The trance of a medium (Tib. sKu-ten), possessed by a divinity known as Srung-ma'2 has a pre-Buddhist origin and is older than the above-mentioned meditation with the help of icons from a pantheon, whose character as instrument is well known. The visible transformation of the facial expression of the medium is inseparably connected with the transformation of his body as a suggestive support the medium puts on the clothes which are iconographically prescribed for the divinity in question. This corresponds the meaning of the mask and points to non-animistic elements, too. The man, clad in particular robes becomes a particular divinity or a temporary incarnation by the mask.

We also find old Shamanistic elements in the Srung-ma practice (of the theory of Bar-do)24. The penetration of Buddhism with Shamanistic elements in Tibet took place early. We still recognize a non-animistic component in Shamaism with its chiefly animistic structure. Here we also must speak of the meaning of the skeleton which is the fundamental condition for the psycho-somatic existence besides the mask for the transformation of the Shaman. The non-animistic idea of the decisive function of bones for the psychosomatic unity might be the basis for the use of diverse bony things in the Lamaistic cult25. We remember the meaning of the bone-trumpe, the skull-bowl or the bone-rosary with the help of which the deceased, often a man or a demonized by death, whose bones are used, or a demonical powerful animal, is forced into the real presence and into a magic service, like in the above-mentioned ceremonies connected with charm and amulet.

The skeleton turning into a skeleton in the lamaistic gCod-mysteries, imagined by the mystagogue, has probably its origin in a similar occurrence of Shamans as initiation for a new being; the turning into a skeleton is depicted in the myth of Dzo-ma-shi-lo among the Na-khi related to the Tibetans in the south-west Chinese-Tibetan cultural borderland. The idea of the vital function of the bones still survives in the Tibetan designation of succession as Rus (= bone)26. H. v. Sicard (I.c.) rightly calls attention to that fact, that the way leads from the preservation of the bones, in order to ensure the revival of the deceased, to the burial, which precedes the abandoning of the body of the deceased.
(as for instance in water, or by exposing) out of fear of the dead. Where non-anamistic elements, intended to ensure the life after death, have united with other funeral ceremonies, e.g. the cremating in Etruria, the anthropomorphic cinerary urn for the ashes can take over the function of the mask²⁴.

Perhaps in prehistoric times the funeral in several stages was known in Tibet, at which the bones were buried in vessels during the second funeral. The Mino-Tsü, for instance, who are related to the Tibetans know a burial in several stages with cleaned bones²⁵. The number of examples could be continued. They show us that the magic-observative and demonological basis of Lamaism with its bodily practices goes partly back to the stage of non-anamistic elements and here we have probably reached one of the oldest components of Tibetan culture.

NOTES


29
5. L.A. Waddell, The Buddhism of Tibet, London 1895, p. 490 ff. (the prebuddhist origin is to be seen).


20. cf. Tr. X. Oesterreich, Die Gottheiten, Langensalza 1921.


25. S. Hummel, Zentralasien und die Einwohnerfrage, 1. c.—Id., Die Leichensäugling in Tibet, 1. c., p. 269: The funeral as condition for the further bodily life of the dead (Siklim).