On Tibetan's view of nature
—— seen from a Tibetan dialect spoken in Langtang valley ——

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1. Introduction

That Tibet has a rich stock of the language is not surprising. Over the centuries, Tibetans have produced a highly complex religious and philosophical or Buddhist conceptual vocabulary, with which it is now capable of coining new words corresponding to any technical terms of modern times. On the other hand, the Tibetan speaking groups of Nepal Himalaya, the other Tibetans who are Nepali citizens, seem to have had a different line of the culture from the Tibetans.

Those groups, dwelling in the high Himalaya, had been far from the center of Tibetan history and out of direct contact with Nepalese civilization until the middle of this century, while there certainly existed some political pressures and cultural influences from the north and the south. They are on the whole frontiers of both Tibet and Nepal. The most striking feature of those groups lies in that they have adapted their socio-economic lives into an environment isolated culturally and geographically from the outer world and they have cast a model there, and created a culture that is sufficiently unique unto itself that it would not be wrong to call it "of Nepal Himalaya".

This paper attempts to examine how such a cultural and environmental isolation had influenced upon their language by giving an example of the Langtangwas (literary glang-' phrang-ba, people of the Langtang valley, the term designated by the people themselves), one of the Tibetan speaking groups of Nepal Himalaya, focussing on their viewpoints of nature and natural phenomena.

2. Background

The Langtang valley is a small and steep valley of the Langtang Khola. It is surrounded by high mountains in three directions. The valley opens only to the west where it meets the Bhotekoshi (later the Trisuli Khosi), in the far northeast edge of Rasuwa District in Central Nepal, to which a communication network is opened. Langtang Gaon Panchayat (village community/88 householders and 446 inhabitants according to a census Dec. '85) occupies three-fourths of the full length of the valley. The socio-economic lives of the Langtangwas are based on the transhumance of Yak, cattle and their hybrids and small scale agriculture; a few cereals, potato and turnip on the terraced plain located in the middle of the valley.

3. Tibetan's view of nature and natural phenomena

As presented in Langtang Vocabulary attached to the end of this paper, their viewpoints of nature and natural phenomena are closely connected with geographical features of the valley. There can be observed some peculiar expressions and some categories rich in vocabulary implicating their geographical backgrounds. Their viewpoints can be classified into two: one based on a religious conception and the other based on their agro-pastoral lives.

3. 1. Viewpoints based on a religious conception

A religion of the Langtang valley is a complex one which harmonized Tibetan Buddhism with Shamanism. Since a fairly long time before the first settler group, who were pre-Buddhists, arrived in the valley, the valley of Langtang had been one of the Buddhist's sanctuaries. This tradition is often concerned in some kind of natural phenomena, for example, a snow avalanche khūyū (cf Langtang Vocabulary II) is believed to take place when the valley is defiled by immoral behavior such as
intrigue, sexual intercourse or pregnancy before marriage. The sanctity of the valley is conceived by the Langtangwas to be guarded by the numerous good and evil spirits inhabiting the elements of nature such as rocks, ponds, and mountains. The Langtangwas then address these elements using the names of the personified spirits. When asked the name of a certain mountain, if a villager replies using the general name khaŋ or khaŋrī, we thus understand that the mountain is not believed to be possessed by a spirit.

3. 2. Viewpoints based on agro-pastoral life

The space of the Langtang valley is geologically classified into seven categories; glacier, debris-covered glacier, rock wall (upper parts are often covered with ice), Little Ice Age moraine, Betula-Rhododendron forest, Abies-Tsuga forest and grazing grass land (Ono and Sadakane (1986). Only the last three categories are adaptable for agro-pastoralism, while the larger part of the surface of the valley is useless for them as signified by themselves (cf I, II, and III). It is obvious that this geocological feature places a physical limitation on their socio-economic lives and has a great influence on their occupations. A rich Langtang vocabulary concerning glacier, for example, and on the contrary a very poor on time and astronomy (cf V) may suggest Langtangwas’ viewpoints of nature based on their agro-pastoral lives.

The Langtang Vocabulary of nature and natural phenomena presented below has the following contents:

I. Landscape & Geomorphology
   - soil and stone
   - hill, mountain and field
   - water, river, valley and others

II. Glacial Geomorphology

III. Agriculture & Natural Disaster

IV. Meteorology
   - seasonal period
   - snowfall and rainfall
   - wind
   - temperature

V. Time & Astronomy

LANGTANG VOCABULARY

Notes
1) One Tibetan dialect spoken in the Langtang valley is the so-called Kyirong (literary skyid-grong) Dialect, the distribution of which extends to the right upper bank of the Langtang Khola, contiguous to the left upper bank of the Bhote Khosi (later the Trisuli Khosi from its confluence of the Langtang Khola) from around the former Skyid-grong Rdzong. A study of the Kyirong Dialect was detailed by R. Beilmeier (1982), and the phonetical transcription presented in this paper follows basically his system.

2) The vocabulary corresponding to the basic terms of natural science suggested by the members of GEN-LP (Glaciological Expedition of Nepal-Langtang Project 1985–86), were collected while walking with villagers through almost all the territories of their agro-pastoral lives covering from 3000 to 5000m in elevation.

3) The written Tibetan form corresponding to a Tibetan dialect spoken in the Langtang valley is put in parentheses. In some cases, a noun may refer to a specific geophysical feature only in certain locations. In these cases, we have given one or two typical examples, separated from the English definition by a slash. The common usage and other additional explanations to the vocabulary are given after an oblique-line. The entries are arranged its order to show the derivation of the vocabulary.

4) Transcription of the written Tibetan follows the system of Kitamura and Nishida (1960).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tibetan Alphabet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ka kha ga nga</td>
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<tr>
<td>ca cha ja nya</td>
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<tr>
<td>ta tha da na</td>
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<tr>
<td>pa pha ba ma</td>
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<tr>
<td>tsa tsha dza wa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zha za 'a ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ra la sha sa</td>
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<tr>
<td>ha a</td>
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</tbody>
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5) The followings are frequently referred to; Chang and Shefts (1964), Das (1902), Goldstein and Nornang (1978), Jäschke (1881), Les Missionnaires Catholiques du Tibet (1899), Turner (1981) and Zhung (1985).
I. Landscape & Geomorphology

soil and stone
sā (sa): soil, earth, ground
sāpcā (sa cha): land, country, place
sāthāktāk: ground which has a flat surface or terraced field
peṃā (bye ma): sand
pebons (bye stings): sandy terrace, river terrace

Tsondu; also place-name of the terraced field lying between Kyangchen and the Langtang Khola—(cf. Appendix) Syn: peṃā dīndīng (—stings
stings)/upper Gomna—

thālā (thal): fine sand, soil, dust
dō (rdo): general term for stone
phāmō: a block of rock

braṅ (brag): rocky hill, rock
braṅgō (—mgo): top of rocky mountain
braṅkē (—skad): voice of rock, viz., echo
braṅkāyān (brag gyang): rock wall /Brangtshang in Yul; south-facing rock wall of the valley
braṅšer (brag ser): yellow rock, yellow band

hill, mountain and field
kangū (spang rgyud): ridge, a chain of mountains
rji (ri): general term for hill, mountain but not snow-capped cf. II. khāk (gangs)
rjigsēn (ri gi btsan): peak of mountain, tsen of mountain cf tsēn (btsan): a species of demon class inhabiting a given locality and sometimes entering into a person visiting the place for a brief period and causing thereafter serious illness. (Das p. 1003)

rjigsā (ri 'gag): highlands
lā (la): mountain pass
ldāppā (la du pā): mountain sickness
ldāppā lāŋ (—langs): to rise mountain sickness
ldā lāng (la du gung dgu): nine passes and nine valleys or an expression for the long and hard journey to the mountainous country being away from home.

lāptṣ (la rts): summit of a mountain pass and also stones piled up at the pass, cairn
lāptṣ tṣāptṣūr: inflection point of a mountain and also cairn piled at the point
thāṅkā (thang ka): plain, flat field, alluvial plain/
Nesapari Thangka—
pāṅkā (spang ka): greensward, hill meadow /pāṅ melōŋ (—me long): meadow of mirror and also place-name—

paṅrī (spang ri): gentle grassy hill /Yala—
kyūrtān (skyur thang): shrubbery plain /Chadang—
or very commonly seen alongside the river or swamp of the valley
thālnūmp: level land, plain, lower land /Kathmandu
bāptā bōptā: uneven land, ups and downs of flat path, or an expression for the difficult path where big stones and rocks hinder the traveler from walking.

bodō: small hill, projecting hill
dīnjā (sdings cha): mountain foot
deplōn: inclination, slope
khēmā: steep acclivity
thértī: steep declivity

water, river, valley and others
chū (chu): general term for water and river
tsaṅbo (gtsang po): large river /Kyirong Tsangbo:
the local name of the Bhot Khosi, Tsangbo: the local name of the Langtang Khola
yārcū (dybar chu): Summer river, intermittent river /
Chubar Chu, Sangme Chu—X gūfū (rgyun chu)
dawā dūn'bē chūtēgā (zla ba bdun pa'i chu ldang sa): a spot where the river rises during the 7th Tibetan month (Aug.-sept.) and also the place-name locataed near Numothang Syn; nāmcū (gnam chu)
nāmcū (gnam chu): river which rises during the rainy season X gūfū (rgyun chu)
gūfū (rgyun chu): constant river X yārcū, nāmcū
chiṅdāṃ (chu 'gram): bank of a river
chiṅdāṅbā (chu phran pa): place where many tributaries are gathered; fan /Tsondu—

chūṃjāl (chu gcal): waterfall, water spread
chēgār (chu dkar): river of white turbid color /upper tributary of Chubar Chu near Mundro—
Syn; gmačū (‘ma chu): river of milky color
luppō (lu po): pool containing spring
lukču (lu chu): stream which rises from luppō X khāncu (gangs chu)
tupčū (sgrub chu): self-originated water (/in a religious sense)/the water, which is dropping from the surface of rock in a cave, is regarded as a holy water by the villagers.
tuppō (sgrub po): self-originated spring (/in a religious sense)/Chadang Tuppo: spring of Chadang, which is one of the pilgrim sites of the valley.
chūlī (chu ling): small sands in a river
chūdzēn (chu tshan): hot spring
chūlēp: swamp /Chorten Thangka in Yul
II. Glacial Geomorphology

dzaq : debris covered glacier, barren land / Lirung Gl., Langtang Gl., etc.
dzaľing : ablation area where big stones and rocks accumulated obstructing people and cattle to pass. / around Yangphu, hillside of Nesapari→
dzapsal (rdzab bshal) : landslide, landsliding slope / upper P’tung, Menchamsa→
dzargö : old ablation area where big stones and rocks are fixed with soil, grass, shrubs and the like / side moraine / Chargampa→
dzargū (rdo rud) : breccia
pesā (bye sa) : sandstone / those place-names like Tarchipesa and Dopesa may have derived from the nature of the soil→
ūlūn : cirque / P’tung, Jonongbo located to the west slope of Tserko, Tsangbu→
khārū (kha rud) : snowslide, debris or avalanche, which falls only during the summer time
khāyō (kha g-yog) : avalanche which falls together with strong wind, rocks and stones / This does harm to men and cattle when the valley is defiled by the immoral behavior, but generally falls from Mt. Langtang Lirung to the rivers Peebe Chu and Chu Barma during the winter time; powder snow avalanche?
khag (gangs) : glacier-ice, general term for snowy mountain Syw ; kha₄rig (gangs ri) : snowy mountain
khagcā (gangs chu) : melt water of glacier ice, river which rises from snowy mountain X lūkcā

III. Agriculture & Natural Disaster
tōntō (ston thog) : autumnal crop, harvest
tōntō कार्ण तस सों : The crop was damaged by the long spell of dry weather. tōntō yag sōŋ : The autumnal crop was abundant.

IV. Meteorology
seasonal period
pikā (spyid kha) : spring
yārkā (dbyar kha) : summer
yārkā tshōō sōŋ (―tshos song) : Summer has ripened, i. e., Summer has come (to crop)
sērkā (ser kha) : hail season, autumn
günkā (dgun kha) : winter
jūntō (nyi ldog) : summer and winter solstice
snowfall and rainfall
nám (gnam) : sky, heaven, weather, rain
námān thāṅgē duḥ (—sngon mtha’ yas ‘dug) : The azure sky extends endlessly. 
ī, e., very fine weather, nām kyānūn khāwā kyākk duḥ (—brgyab na kha ba rgyag gi ‘dug) : If it rained, then
it become snowing.
nām kārnān : long spell of dry weather, drought
ja (‘ja) : rainbow /If it happens after the rain-shower
in the afternoon, then it is fine next day. If it
appears above the plains, then it rains soon. If it
bridges over the Tsangbo, then fine days last for
a month long.
piṅ kém (nyi ‘khyims) : halo, circle around the sun
āmā piṅmā piṅ kém phup sōn : The mother sun has
put on halo, “/it will rain after one fine day”.
dakim (zla ‘khyims) : halo, circle around the moon
ā ā dagār dakim phup sōn : The uncle moon has
put on halo, “fine day will last for a month”.
bru (<brug) : dragon, thunder
bru duṅkk duḥ (— grul gyi ‘dug) : The dragon is
passing, the thunder rolls or an expression for the
thunder
tshiānam (tshig lam) : lightning
tshiānam krūṅkk duḥ (— ‘khyug gi ‘dug) : the
lightning is rapidly running.
piṅbā (sprin pa) : high cloud of fine weather
piṅmar (sprin dmār) : morning glow /If it appears
early in the morning, it rains in the evening.
mārvaṅ (dmār dbang) : sunset glow /If it appears, it is
fine for a month long.
phāmō : haze, mist or clouds which creep on the ground
phāmō gaṅ sōn (—bgaṅs song) : The haze has
screened from view.
braprēṅ (sbrang sprin) : cloudy
nām braprēṅ duḥ (gnam— ‘dug) : The sky is
cloudy. cf (sbrang char) : drizzle
bāṅ khāssēṅ (‘bang kha gse ba) : fog thickened
zhā (bza‘a) : damp, moisture
zhā zhū phoṅ (—zhugs song) : [cloth or food] has
got damp.
ṣībā (zi‘ bal) : dew
dip la sībhā chā phāṅ : Dew has fallen on the grass.
mūpā (smug pa) : dense fog, cloud
mūpā kāmpō (—skam po) : dry fog ; mūpā
nakpo (—ng po) : rain cloud ; mūpā thum sōṅ
(— ‘thums song) : (we) were wrapped up by the
dense fog.
ṣēmbā (zim bu) : drizzle /but only of the summer
season at high altitude (higher than villages)
lāgbā (rlangs pa) : vapour
khāwā (kha wa) : snow, snowfall
khāmōcōr : sleep
tārtān (dar sdom) : formed, icicle
dōp : phenomenon that the surface of snow is hard-
ened by wind or the sun ; crust
phāmō (ba mo) : frost, hoar frost
sērā (ser ba) : hail
wind
lāhābā (lhags pa) : wind
lāhābā marōṅ kyākk duḥ (—mar rong rgyag gi
‘dug) : The wind blows downwards in the ravine
[in the morning] ; mountain wind
lāhābā yarōṅ kyākk duḥ (—yar ron–k) : The wind
blows upwards in the ravine [in tce even-ing] ;
valley wind
yurtṣu (bu ‘tsub) : snow-storm, storm, gust of wind
lākōr (rlung ‘khor) : tornado, whirlwind

temperature
nāmsār : weather, climate
nāmsār tshōḇ sōn = yārkā tahāb sōn
dōṅ (dro) : warmth
sā la dōṅ kyē phoṅ (sa la — skies song) : The
warmth generated to the ground, i. e., it became
warm, dōṅtōn (— gtong) : to give warmth to
(water, liquor).
dōṅtōṅ (dro rlangs) : vapour from warmth ; tempera-
ture dōṅtōṅ tshāphō (— tshang po) : agreeable
weather or temperature
khyaābō (‘khyag po) : (to feel) cold, freezing
dañmō (grang mo) : chilly, cold
nām dañmō : it is cold.
domō (dro mo) : lukewarm
tshāndī : hot (by touch)
tshēpā (tshad pa) : heat, hot, fever
 tshēpā tshāndī : it is hot (weather) .
dzārī ( < Nepalese jāro : cold, chilly ?) : cold / but of
the rainy season
sīlpō (bsil po) : cold, refreshing
nām sīlpō : fresh air
lāngā (rlon pa) : wet, humidity, moist
V. Time & Astronomy

time
gonjō (dgon gong jo) : early evening, evening
gonmō (dgon mo) : night, late evening
nātō (snag dro) : early morning
chāpāā : beer time; about nine in the morning when the head of a family drinks beer before setting to work.
chojāl : for a few hours after dinner till asleep; about nine to ten in the evening
pijā (nyi ma) : day, daytime, the sun
pijā phēē (nyi ma phyed) : one half of the sun, noon, midday
pijēē dzērā (nyi ma’i dzad kha) : about the time when the sun is declining
pijēē shārā (nyi ma’i shar kha) : about the time when the sun is rising
nāmlāā (nam langs) : day break
nāmlāā sālāā chēē sōŋ dūō (— gza’ bdag chas song ‘dug’) : The sky waked up, the chief of planets, i.e., the sun, has appeared to set forth.
ngamsīmā (nam sad ma) : dawn, early in the morning
ngamsūmā (nam srod ma) : twilight in the evening time; dusk ngam sūkin dūō (nam sro skīn ’dug’) : The night is setting in.
nup phēē (nub phyod) : one half of the time during the sun’s disappearance; midnight
ngkōb : the latter half of nup, late night, three or four in the morning
belā (Nepalese belā) : time, leisure, opportunity
belā mīndūō ngamsūdīk dūō (— mi ’dug nam srod gyi ’dug’) : The night is about setting in, (we) have no leisure time.
rgōbēē dzarā (rong pāi’i dzar rag bza’) : lunch-time of the Nepalese people; about two or three in the afternoon

astronomy
kārmā (skar ma) : star, constellation, asterism, astrology, planet  cf. sā (gza’)
kārmā sān sōŋ dūō (skar ma sār song ’dug’): stars have come out. kārmā tsāppā (— btsog pa) : injurious day
kārmā mīndūō (skar ma smin drug) : the pleiades thörāŋ kārcēn (tho rangs skar chen) : big star of the dawn, morning star
chōgār (chu skar) : planet which presides over water element, i.e., Mercury
megār (me skar) : planet which presides over fire element, i.e., Mars
lēgtūspī (las grub bzhi) : Cygnus
dzamblīŋ (’dzam bu’i gling) : earth, world
dāwā (zla ba) : moon, month
dāgār (zla dkar) : moon, moonlight
tehēgyēē dāgār (tshes brgyad —) : the eighth day moon
nāmkāng (gnam gang) : new-moon
sā (gza’) : planet; the days of the week, viz., sā pijā (gza’ nyi ma) : Sunday, sā dāwā — zla ba) : Monday, sā mīnjā (— mig dam) : Tuesday, sā lhākpa (— lhag pa) : Wednesday, sā phērbār (— phur bu) : Thursday, sā pāsān (—wa sangs) : Friday, sā pēnbā (— spen pa) : Saturday
sāndzin (gza’ ’dzin) : planet-seizer, eclipses
āmā pijā la sāndzin qūkk dūō : The planet-seizer is coming to the mother sun, i.e., solar eclipses.
dāgār la sāndzin qūkk dūō : The planet-seizer is coming to the moon, i.e., lunar eclipses / When it occurs, villagers make a big noise to drive away the planet-seizer that is believed to be a kind of animal.

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