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## AJG Library 6

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# Himalayan Nature and Tibetan Buddhist Culture in Arunachal Pradesh, India

A Study of Monpa

 Springer

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# Preface

I learned for the first time that there was a mysterious area called the state of Arunachal Pradesh when I was still a high school student. We were being taught about the McMahon Line in a high school geography class. National borders normally appear as solid lines on maps, but extensive sections of the borders of Arunachal Pradesh were dotted on my atlas, which indicated the area was under dispute between India and China. I did not have any further information about the environment, people, or society in that region. It was a closed-off zone that foreigners were not allowed to enter, and I did not imagine that I would ever visit that part of the world.

During the British rule of India, the area was known as the North-East Frontier Tract (NEFT). India became independent from Britain in 1947. The NEFT was renamed the North-East Frontier Agency in 1951. It was renamed Arunachal Pradesh in 1972 and was considered a peripheral region with no particular value for development and was thus left untouched. The region was long regarded as nothing more than the unimportant southern outer edge of the Tibetan administrative territory. However, that peripheral area suddenly became the focus of political attention after the Chinese military invasion in 1962. The Chinese Army cut through Arunachal and almost reached Tezpur in Assam. The Indian government undertook regional economic development and reinforced its military defenses in Arunachal Pradesh. This change made the area even less accessible to foreign visitors.

I participated in a research project conducted by Dr. Kiyohito Okumiya called “Human Life, Aging and Disease in High-Altitude Environments: Physio-Medical, Ecological and Cultural Adaptation in Highland Civilizations,” operated by the Research Institute for Humans and Nature of Japan. One of its study areas happened to be Arunachal Pradesh, which provided me with the opportunity to visit that mysterious region.

My first visit was in early July 2007. My main study area was an area occupied by the Monpa people, and I was captivated by the features of the region. In the early stages of my fieldwork, I investigated agriculture, forests, and rangelands. I then

moved the hub of my research to the village of Thembang [them bang] in the Thembang Circle Area of the West Kameng district. This led to a shift in my research interests.

One of the stories that the villagers told me was astonishing. I heard how Thembang Dzong [them bang *rdzong*] was built in the village of Thembang as the second fort for a prince who had moved there from Tibet; however, the previous fort, Dirkhi Dzong [bde skyid *rdzong*], remained somewhere deep in the mountains. The older fort was feared by the villagers since they believed that their ancestral souls occupied the surrounding area. I then trekked through the mountains and located Dirkhi Dzong. The villagers also informed me that the present senior and junior clans were, respectively, descendants of the royal family and their subordinates.

That encouraged me to investigate the background and details of the clan histories. In addition, the information I received that some forts—*dzong* [*rdzong*]—were originally built as tax offices by the Tibetan administration encouraged me to conduct studies of local taxation systems. That necessitated my travel not only across the Thembang region but also into the wider area of the Tawang [rta wang/ dbang] and Kalaktang [kha legs steng] regions. The journey revealed the ways in which the Tibetan administration governed the area. The accumulated knowledge suggested further areas of investigation, and the state of Arunachal Pradesh now constitutes an exciting zone of exploration for me as a field researcher.

I summarized the findings of my fieldwork, which were published by Showado, Kyoto, in a book titled *Arunachal Pradesh, India: Nature of Assam Himalaya and Tibetan Society* (in Japanese) in March 2012. After the book's publication, I felt it was highly important to inform people about the features of the area. That book was reviewed by several academic journals. Lobsang Tenpa, a researcher from the Tawang region who is currently based at Leipzig University for his doctoral thesis, encountered one of the reviews. His research was focused on the taxation system used by the Tibetan administration for the Monpa people, and he took interest in me as a Japanese field researcher working on a similar theme. I happened to be working at Regensburg University when he sent me his first e-mail. I visited him in Vienna, and we had some interesting discussions. His knowledge of the topic and the area was clearly far-reaching. I was immediately convinced of the potential significance of collaborating with him. We agreed to revise and enhance my Japanese book and publish an English edition. To enhance our collaborative effort, we undertook further fieldwork separately in 2012 and 2013. Additionally, Lobsang Tenpa has been conducting fieldwork in the region since 2009, and we compared and shared our findings.

Lobsang Tenpa, a researcher in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies, was indispensable to the publication of this revised edition in English. Today, Monpa people learn Hindi at school, and most of them do not understand Tibetan. Tenpa studied at the Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, and two other universities in Delhi and is fluent in Tibetan language and literature. Moreover, his research interests include various topics related to Tibetan culture. He kindly agreed to my idea of collaboration on the book, and we started working on it in Vienna in 2012. His input

filled gaps in my knowledge, and he corrected my misunderstandings. I invited him to my research office in Kyoto in July 2013. We held daily discussions over a week to compare and examine findings we had each collected from the field, and those efforts led to the completion of this book.

Not many books have ever been published about Arunachal Pradesh, and even fewer have been published on the Monpa people and their area. This is largely because international research collaboration has been scarce for the following reasons: First, the area was inaccessible to foreigners until the 1990s, and even today foreigners need to obtain special permission to enter the state. Second, there are a limited number of reports written by Indian researchers on the Monpa people, phonetic notations of Monpa terminology are often erroneous, and romanized Tibetan spellings are very rare.

In this English edition, we felt it necessary to present the terminology used by the Monpa people in Tibetan transliteration. The Monpa people belong to the Tibetan ethnic group, and the original Monpa words are presented in Tibetan orthography. The original Monpa (i.e., Tibetan) spellings include many unpronounced prefixes, and only written Tibetan can clearly and accurately convey their meanings. For example, “Dirang Dzong”—“Dirang Fort” in the Monpa language—is “*rdi rang rdzong*” when the Tibetan words are written using the Latin alphabet. With the exception of place names and proper nouns, the terminology used by the Monpa people is italicized in this English edition. The phonetic transcriptions of Monpa terminology used in the Tawang and West Kameng districts are followed by standard Tibetan, according to Wylie’s (1959) transliteration, in square brackets. Some important terms are transliterated in every chapter for emphasis. See the glossary for further details about the transcription and transliteration of these terms.

All the contents of this book that are presented without references were based on interviews or participant observations undertaken in the field. The findings of many previous studies are at variance with what we observed. We present the findings from our fieldwork and references to those studies in this book. All uncredited photographs were taken by K. Mizuno.

We hope that this book will assist those with an interest in the area of the Monpa people in Arunachal Pradesh and will introduce its wonders to the outside world.

Kyoto, Japan

Kazuharu Mizuno

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Several people helped me with my fieldwork for this book. Regrettably, it is not possible to mention all of them here. However, I would like to express my gratitude to the following people: Mr. Dorjee Sonam [rdo rje bsod nams], the *tsorgen* [*gtso rgan*], village mayor, of Gyangkhar [rgyang mkhar] village; Mr. Lama Gombu [bla ma mgon po], the commissioner of the Tawang Monastery Museum; Mr. Yeshe Tsering [ye shis tshe ring] and Mr. Lekig Gombu [legs skyes mgon po], the first and third *tsorgen* of the village of Senge Dzong [seng ge *rdzong*], respectively; Mr. Jam Tsering [byams pa tshe ring], the second *tsorgen* of the village of Yewang [yid dbang]; Mr. Ahuja [a hu ja], the *tespa lama* [rtsis pa bla ma] of the village of Gunthung [gung thung]; Mr. Pema Gombu [padma mgon po], the first *tsorgen* of the village of Lhou [lha'u]; Mr. Urgen Tsering [u rgyan tshe ring], the chairman of Lhou Junior High School; Mr. Tsering [tshe ring], the *tsorgen* of the village of Aodung [a'o gdung]; Mr. Rinchin Tsering, the *koenyer lama* [dkon gnyer bla ma] of Taklung Gompa [stag lung *dgon pa*]; Mr. Tashi Phuntso [bkra shis phun tshogs], the first *tsorgen* of the village of Lubrang [lu'brang/ grangs]; Mr. Netan [gnas brtan], the *minakpa lama* [mi nags pa bla ma] of the village of Aodung; Ms. Yeshe Wangmu [ye shis dbang mo], a teacher at Singzur Buddhist Nunnery [sing zur a ne *dgon pa*]; Khenpo Nyima Tashi [*mkhan po* Nyi ma bkra shis], head of Jangdokpalri Buddhist

Monastery [zangs mdog dpal ri *dgon pa*]; Mr. Phurpa Tsering [phur pa tshe ring], the *tsorgen* of the village of Manpat [sman pag], a village in the Lumla [klung la] Circle Area; and Mr. Pijush Kumar Dutta, a landscape coordinator for the World Wildlife Fund for Nature India (the Western Arunachal Landscape Program). These people as well as all those people whose names could not be mentioned here always welcomed my visits and questions. I also owe a very important debt to the people of the village of Thembang.

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Kazuharu Mizuno

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