

Local Gods, *Karma*, & Morality: Religious understanding of the environment in Ladakh

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LADAKH

Ladakh, situated in the Himalayas on the far northern frontier of India, is one of the coldest regions of the world. Ladakh has been known by many names: - Maryul, Moonland, Broken moon and last Shangri-la. As the names suggest it was completely inaccessible, relatively being isolated among its high mountains and often politically closed off. According to the popular belief, King Ashoka missionaries are believed to have penetrated into Ladakh and propagated Buddhism in about 3rd century B.C. and later Buddhism is said to have been firmly rooted in Ladakh from 1st century A.D. Kanishka sent five hundred Buddhist missionaries for the propagation of the faith in Tibet and Ladakh. Fa-hien, the Chinese pilgrim makes mention of the flourishing condition of the religion in Ladakh in 400 A.D. According to the him, the doctrine of Hinayana form or lesser vehicle of Buddhism prevailed in Ladakh. However, Mahayana form of Buddhism was also introduced later on. Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo was one of the great religious figures and translator. He was primarily

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responsible for the revival of Buddhism in Tibet and Ladakh. He is still remembered as the great founder of the Stupas and monasteries both in Ladakh and the ancient kingdom of gauge.

There is a prevailing tradition of Ladakhi living in harmony with their natural environment before modern development struck, which is grounded in a more general Western interpretation of Buddhism as being “rich in resources for ecological thinking” These analyses have tended to draw upon enchanting fantasies of Ladakh and religious philosophy rather than actual observations of local practice. Practically, however, does not always follow directly from Buddhist precept and evidence from observable behavior and discourse is required to understand human relationships with the environment. This article aims to provide a contemporary and empirical perspective on Ladakhi Buddhist environmental relationships. I explore the religious dimensions of environmental norms and representations in the case study community of Leh Ladakh examining both religions as a local cosmology and as a system of moral guidance, and the relationship between these aspects. Which fulfills the United Nation Millennium goal 7 under which discuss the preservation of ecosystem and healthy ecosystems support human well-being through the provision of ecosystem services. These include the supply of food, fresh water, clean air, fertile soil, biological diversity, and the ability to regulate the climate through energy transfer and the carbon cycle. Therefore, I would like to connect this article via three elements of Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh, and how they may shape people’s notions about the environment: 1) local gods and spirits in the landscape 2) *Karma* 3) Buddhist moral doctrine.

“We need to live as the Buddha taught us to live, in peace and harmony with nature, but this must start with ourselves. If we are going to save this planet we need to seek a new ecological order; to look at the life we lead and then work together for the benefit of all; unless we work together no solution can be found. By moving away from self-centeredness, sharing wealth more, being more responsible for ourselves, and agreeing to live more simply, we can help decrease much of the suffering in the world,” from the *Buddhist Statement on Ecology 1961*.¹

1. Palmer and Finlay, Faith in Conservation, World Bank 2002 pp77-82.

Ladakh is a high altitude desert region in India's northern most state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). It is divided into the districts of Leh and Kargil, with predominant Buddhist populations. The region has short but hot summers with a commensurately brief agricultural season, and long, cold winters. Located in the rain shadow of the high Himalaya, Ladakh receives little rainfall. Agriculture, is the major source of income and material wealth for Ladakh and dependent upon glacial snowmelt for irrigation; therefore the "proper" flow of water is critical, and the management and control of water and respecting the nature earth is an object of ritual activity. Social agency in Ladakh is determined by relationships with a living landscape, or chthonic beings, that control the flow of water and good crops; and human behavior is directed towards keeping these relationships pure. Correct social, moral, and ritual activity determines the condition of water, with a disturbed, unnatural state being attributed to incorrect human behavior. Water may become sparse as the flow is withheld, leaving the land dry and barren; or it becomes a flood, (*chulok*), a destructive force that destroys villages and fields, and takes life. Monastic ritual specialists of sufficient merit, however, can use their expertise and innovation to mediate between humans and chthonic beings, ensuring their protection and diverting disaster. Religious and productive life in Ladakh is thus dependent upon the protection and participation of the beings who act as guardians of territorial domains. They are the focus of Buddhist offering and pacification, Mills asserts that, rather than "people" being the focus of Buddhist authority, "it is instead a matrix of chthonic forces and sources of symbolic power; within which 'people' are both constituted and embedded".²

There are several stories, examples, and explorations of just why the Buddhist living in the *Ladakh* region and the monasteries have such potential to achieve so much within the environmental movement which address the aims for achieving sustainable natural resource its management, biodiversity conservation, and protection. Further aim is to

2. Mills, Martin. 2003. *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism*. Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, p-243.

ensure that climate information needs are considered in supporting the UN Millennium Development Goals and disaster risk reduction through their own beliefs, teachings and structures and an outline of the potential of these communities for future environmental work. The residents of the Lalok valley of *Changthang*, Ladakh requested *Taklha Wangchuk*, local protector deity to visit through his oracle. The deity complained that increasing ritual and physical pollution in Ladakh was disgracing the abodes of the gods the *lha* (protector deity) and warned that they were angry. He instructed those present that in order to restore good relations, Ladakhi's should perform extensive *Sangsol* ritual offerings to purify the atmosphere and "remove" the dirt from the gods' shrines. Under the supervision of Togdan Rinpoche, one of eminent monk and head of the Drigung Kagyu in Ladakh, the people of the area performed the prescribed ritual action, and well-wishers were sent to warn the Ladakhi Buddhist Association (LBA) Leh, of the oracle's prophecy and ritual prescription. The LBA did not paid any attention the prophecy and took no action. Later that summer in August 2010, villages on the banks of the Indus river were devastated by severe flash flooding and mudslides, the extent of which had not been witnessed according to recent memory. This was an unprecedented event, leading to massive loss of life and extensive damage and destruction to property and farmland³. On the other hand, the Lalok valley was unaffected, which its residents believe to be a result of the ritual action undertaken there. Those who were affected angrily insisted that the LBA to arrange the necessary *Sangsol* immediately to prevent further misfortune, and Ladakhi's everywhere lamented the decline in moral values: people are no longer good, they no longer listen to the *lha*, they behave incorrectly. "*Taklha Wangchuk* is no ordinary village god," the local's began to say. "He is a powerful *Srungma* (guardian) and his prophecies are accurate. We should respect him."

3. In its Disaster Management Plan for 2011-2012, The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council's official figures give the total loss of life for the Leh District as 233, with 424 people injured and approximately 79 people unaccounted for. The totals include foreign tourists, but do not account for the migrant workers from the states of Bihar and Jharkhand, or from Nepal.

This one of the tale emphasizes the interdependence between Ladakhi moral discourse and the maintenance of correct order, indicated by the condition of water as a life giving and a life-destroying element. Commercial endeavour, disaster prevention models, and empirical ecology discourse that constructs the natural world through precise scientific measurement, all operate to dislocate people's cultural encounters with water and nature⁴ therefore, narratives linking climate change with the *shamanic* belief and pollution concerns help to reveal the localized and contextualized explanations of disaster and environmental management in transforming landscapes in ways that empirical ecology studies cannot accommodate. In Ladakh, knowledge of the local state, flow, and abundance of water is produced through particular ways of knowing the sentient landscape and its susceptibility to polluting practices. Social, economic, and religious changes are ushering in new experiences of pollution, creating events seen as impacting upon abodes and temperaments of water spirits. Thus, ritual experts are facing new challenges for maintaining correct human relations with the spirit world, for diagnosing the removal of pollution, and restoring and maintaining order. In contemporary Ladakh, therefore, water's flow and movement are used to explain the transformations initiated by the incursion of the "modern" world into the region and of local and religious ambivalence towards development. This paper considers human encounters with the guardians of water and earth ritual authority and innovation in responses towards economic progress, climate change, and the dynamics of locally owned disaster prevention strategies, which is one of the UN goals under the theme of United Nations Environment Programme and Ecosystem Management of the Himalayas Mountain Range⁵.

The authoritative narratives of the monastic scholarly elite asserted that the flood was borne from *Karmic* consequence, *lasgyudas*, and visits from the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Twelfth Drukchen Rinpoche (head of the Drukpa Kagyu School) gave great comfort to Ladakhis, particularly

4. Cruikshank, Julie. 2005. Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination. Vancouver: UBC Press.

5. <http://www.unep.org/ecosystemmanagement/UNEPsWork/tabid/315/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

the more traumatized victims. Both told the Ladakhis that they had borne the *Karmic* consequences of actions taken in previous lives, that with this misfortune, their suffering had been dispelled, and now they could begin building better lives both materially and spiritually. The demonic narrative cited the agents of the flood to be the *lha-lu*, and the *sadag*: the mountain gods, water spirits, and earth guardians that inhabit the mountains, trees, rocks, and water. For the *lha-lu*, the majority of my respondents declared that he sent the flood as retribution for the increase in ritual, physical pollution, and decline in moral values. They declared it to be a time of demerit, and noted that Padmasambhava prophesized that this time would come.

*“The symbols of body, speech and mind, temples and so on are [produced through] the power of the merits of beings, and that being so, the time when temples and holy symbols are constructed is the time when the merits of beings are at their highest. When offerings and circumambulations are made at these temples, the merit is medium, and finally, when these temples fall, the merit of beings will be greatly diminished.... Conflict in the land will disturb the gods and spirits (lha srin). Disturbed gods and spirits will agitate the elemental spirits (byung po), causing more conflict... freakish flood waters will arise”*⁶. (Prophecy of Padmasambhava, cited in Akester 2001: 16-17).

There are two distinct but interdependent explanations of retribution operating in Ladakh. The authoritative monastic discourse of retribution is the Buddhist principle of *Karma*, or *lasgyudas*: the universal law of cause and effect that arises from the intentions and actions of all sentient beings. Harmful intentions and actions toward others result in the accumulation of negative *Karmic* merit, the fruits of which must eventually be reaped in a future life. However, there is equally significant retributive mechanism governed by the chthonic beings infected by bad *Karma* (*Dip*) ritual pollution is a distinct but not wholly unrelated explanation of retributive action. *Dip* describes the presence of either “dirt” or mental defilement that disturbs the proper order⁷. *Dip* occurs when human activity subverts

6. Akester, Matthew. 2001. “The ‘Vajra Temple’ of gter ston zhig po gling pa and the Politics of Flood Control in 16th Century lha sa.” *Tibet Journal* 26.1: 3-24.

7. Day, Sophie. 1989. “Embodying Spirits: Village Oracles and Possession Ritual in Ladakh, North India.” PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, p-138.

socially prescribed rules that result in territories becoming impure, polluting the deities and their shrines, and causing them to become retributive. Unlike *Lasgyudas*, the creation of *Dip* can be unintentional and the effects are immediate, requiring remedial ritual action to remove the pollution, restore order, and avert retributive deeds. One of the main functions of monastic activity is the performance of *Sangsol* and additional rituals aimed at removing the pollution that harms the chthonic beings. Nevertheless, *Lasgyudas* and *Dip* can be related if the cause of the gods' anger is attributed to actions borne out of mis-conception (*Namtog*), mental confusion, or affliction, states caused by the arising in the mind of ignorance, greed, and hatred that cause *Karmic* suffering⁸.

In Ladakh as in other Himalayan Buddhist societies, the phenomenal world of experience (as distinct from the ultimate reality of unchanging consciousness) is divided into a three-tiered cosmology. At the apex, are the abodes of the *lha*, the mountain *srungma* who offer protection to those living in the realms below. Powerful *lha* is protector of the Doctrine, or *choskyong*; they assist *Rinpoche* in temporal affairs, appearing through oracles to give prophecies and declarations, or confirming the abilities and activities of *Rinpoche*, thus increasing the legitimacy of their authority⁹. The most prominent is Tibet's state oracle, the Nechung Oracle, who continues to be a principal protector of the Tibetan Government in Exile. Their shrines are located in high places associated with certain kinds of power and blessing: mountain tops and passes, or the roof of houses and monasteries. *Lha* control the cycles of weather, bringing snow in the winter and sun to melt the snow in the spring, giving life and fertility to the fields below¹⁰.

The *lu* are associated with the underworld. They inhabit in the ponds,

8. Mills, Martin. 2003. *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism*. Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, p-224. & Mumford, Stan R. 1989. *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p-163-164.

9. Mills, Martin. 2003. *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism*. Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, p-241.

10. Day, Sophie. 1989. "Embodying Spirits: Village Oracles and Possession Ritual in Ladakh, North India." PhD Thesis, London School of Economics p-58-61.

streams, and the green fertile fields and take the form of fish, snakes, and lizards. *Lu* are the guardians of natural and productive wealth, and are associated with fertility. If kept happy, water and wealth are in plentiful. However, they are capricious creatures and respond angrily if polluted or injured, sending disease or withholding water¹¹. The mighty *lha*, however, are the agents of large scale retribution, sending floods, avalanches, or earthquakes when they are displeased with human action, both ritual and moral. The activities of the humans inhabitants of the middle realm therefore have consequences; if one does not treat the physical environment or moral universe with care, pollution results. One has to be cautious not to dirty streams, cut trees, plant seeds, or construct buildings without asking the owner's permission. Whilst the *lha-lu* are the agents of retributive action, the *Rinpoche* authorize the rituals that remove *Dip* and ensure the protection of the *lha-lu* through their power and status as incarnate beings.

The oracle Taklha Wangchuk told the villagers that the gods sent flashflood (*Chulok*) because people have become more selfish, more jealous, too concerned with money. They no longer have pure thinking and do not keep faithful relations with each other. They neglect their ritual traditions, continuously polluting the atmosphere through their actions, and neglecting the purificatory offerings. Now the *lha* who inhabit the mountains are very much polluted and have become dangerous. He told those present that in order to prevent such tragedies occurring again, they have to remain pure and practice the teachings of the *Rinpoche*. Whilst economic transformation has altered the way that Ladakhi's approach and use their natural environment, Flashflood (*Chulok*) as an expression of the gods' anger demonstrates the significance of water and its state or flow in determining the condition (material and moral) of the environment and its ability to support the beings that inhabit it. It highlights the interdependent relationship humans have with the guardians of water. Ethnographies discussing explanations of disaster from the perspective of morality and supernatural belief emphasize sin and survival prejudice that

11. Samuel, Geoffrey. 1993. *Civilized Shamanis: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, p-162.

foreground discourses of social and cosmic justice, sin and retribution, and the nature of the divine¹². Oliver Smith and Bode, both who have undertaken ethnographic research into disaster in the Andes, highlighted how encounters with a sacred, animate landscape in South America's mountain regions shed "the greatest light on these tensions, disclosing the vulnerable or weak points in the social fabric¹³" which are strengthened through restoration of correct relations with the deity.¹⁴ In Ladakh, narratives of fortune and misfortune continue to be determined by the chthonic response towards pollution and the disorder that results from human action. It is unsurprising then, that the majority of narratives about the causes of the flood were attributed to continuing human misadventure: carelessness with the Earth's resources; *Karmic* retribution resulting from a reduction in merit and a degeneration of faith in the doctrine; and the retributive action of the *lha-lu*, angered by a reduction in ritual observance and the resulting pollution. In the age of development, the power of the divine in actively and self-consciously using water either to give life or to punish is still the ontological reality.

The complex relationship between man and a specific group of local deities, called, water or Snake flit¹⁵(*Lu*), in the context of Tibetan-Buddhist dominated the villages in Ladakh. My field research conducted in Ladakh is based on the observation method and everyday knowledge of the surveyed Specialists and some laymen respondents. In Ladakh, major events in a person's life, birth, marriage, death, are commonly marked by ceremonial events which legitimate through both symbolic and economic processes the repetition in each generation of the means whereby the social structure is maintained. These events, are great

12. Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1996. "Anthropological Research on Hazards and Disasters." Annual Review of Anthropology, p-308.

13. Bode, Barbara. 1989. "Disaster, Social Structure and Myth in the Peruvian Andes: The Genesis of an Explanation." The Annual New York Academy of Science, p-263.

14. Ibid, p-264.

15. The translations, water or snake spirit 'and in English, water - spirit' are the most common in literature, of which they are misleading in my opinion, because these local deities mainly in Aquatic life, but by no means exclusively. Therefore, I would in the course of this work at the Tibetan or Ladakhi expression *lu* stay.

importance not only for individual but for also for the household for they presage or accompany cyclic shifts in family structure¹⁶. A death likewise entails heavy expenditure and sometimes economic risk. In Ladakh much of the organization of these events is provided by individual who are not members of the immediate family circle. These helpers belong in fact to a chain of families who provide each other with mutual services whenever in need of each other in happiness and sorrowful situation more especially the performance of funeral rites. Every family is a member of such a chain which is known as a *Phaspun*. *Phaspun* is defined as “several neighbors or inhabitants of village that have a common *lha*¹⁷ and thus become members of the same family. This common tie entails on them of responsibility of what they are in need of each other. The household cult of the *Pha lha* centers upon the god’s shrine (*Lha tho*) which in whole Ladakh is a small four cornered structure resembling a little house and placed in the household shrine room or chapel. By contrast in the Ladakh these *Lha tho* are placed on the roofs of houses and often several families may use the same one. The actual rituals of the cult are rarely written down and are learnt by direct transmission from father to son. The *lha* has a festival three times a year, at New year (*Losar*), at the time of spring ploughing and at harvest time. Around 15 years back in Ladakh the custom was that the *lha* is called to enter into a sheep which is later sacrificed; its head being placed at altar in the shrine room. Other animals may sometimes be sacrificed at the *lha.tho* which is then amply spattered with blood. Needless to say these worship of other gods of the village (*yul lha*), of the live stock (*Thab.lha*) and particular buildings of the household (*khyim. Lha*). The *lha* of places like passes, notable crags, etc. are also held to be present in *lha.tho* where the horns of sacrificed animals comprise the main decoration. A parallel can be seen in the placing of skulls and skins of fierce animals in the shine and rooms of the protector’s deities of monasteries.

16. Kuhn, A.S.1994. Ladakh: A pluralistic medical system under acculturation and domination. In: D. Sich & W. Gottschalk (eds.) *Acculturation and Domination in Traditional Asian Medical Systems*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, p-31.

17. Lie to the nature have different translations and interpretations.

LHA

Ladakhi's call specialists in trance *lha* or gods and *Lamo/Lhaba* or god-women and men. They sometimes make a linguistic distinction between a trance state and a normal state by using the term *Luya (lus-gyar)* for the empty vessel, that is the human being out of trance. To be more accurate, this latter term means 'borrowed body' or just body (*lus*, body; *gyar-borrowed gyar-po*) and body (*gyar-khang, gyar-khams*). Most such specialists work in the village where their roles stand as intermediary of religion, magic and social system and gain its power from this position and asked to diagnose ills and perform cures. A few in monasteries and they are best known for their prophecies on the future.

The *lhamo/lhaba* neither chooses their status as healers nor desires it. Usually, a person starts with a ritual vocation, which usually goes along with mental disturbance, an acute life crisis, and general emotional distress. In the initial stages, the concerned person tries to reject the *shamanii* vocation. The crisis reaches its peak in a trance, which enables the appearance of a spiritual being and thereby only then sanctions the person's capability to be an oracle healer. The individual thus chosen must serve the community as healer of both people and animals. Although possession and vocation occur involuntarily and both *lha* (divine forces) and bad spirits may possess the person as both are always present in the body and can become active. He/she approaches a high-ranking lama for assistance. The high-ranking *lama* or *Rinpoche* approves the possession by one or many *lha*'s and separates them from other spirits who possess the body of the *lhamo/lhaba*. Subsequent teachings and initiations (*lha-pog*) takes place in consecutive stages by an elderly *lhamo/lhaba (ge-rgen)*. In this way, indigenous folk religion subjugated under the rules and premises of Buddhism. He or she must be trained first i.e. learn consciously how to go to into trance, a training which involves great effort and self-denial, both physical and financial. They experience great stress during this period. The burden connected with the office of oracle and healer does not delight all, instead they see it as the fate decreed by the spirits and the gods. Even the practicing *lhamo/lhaba* are under great strain, feel so severely beaten up after a healing session that they can barely perform

their daily duties at home and in the fields after a trance. Most *lhamo/lhaba* does not want their children to follow the profession. Yet in the *Ladakhi* context, not to accept this calling means life-long confrontation with the opposing powers of good and evil for the person. They also have the option to perform *tum*, a ritual to stop the deity from entering the body. This is how an individual threatened with life or death can enter a change state of consciousness with non-specific symptoms of illness, through a structured transformation reach state of best health and finally practice as oracle and healer. All *lhamo/lhaba* know the names of the particular deities who possess them, because they introduced themselves to their patients and their teachers by their names. Each *lhamo/lhaba* stays in meditation for specified time each year. There are polite and angry *lhaba and lhamo*. If someone in Ladakh wanted to visit *Lha* and if he smoke cigarettes and drink *chang* . They are afraid to appear before the *lhaba/lhamo* when they are in trance, because the *Lha* will scold and some bit them for contaminating their holy body.¹⁸

LU

Lu the water spirits are half human and half snake in physical appearance.¹⁹ They belong to the underworld beneath the domain of humans and live in water, sleeping in their shrines in the winter and awaking in spring time. They are mainly associated with fertility and considered capricious. As quite different beings, ritual attention to the water spirits, *lu*, was constructed in a different form. The *lu* are said to awake in spring after a winter sleeping in their shrines (*lu-khang*) and offerings were then made in June and July of the lunar calendar. Milk and wool were offered into the stream and sticks from different trees and crops were placed on the shrine and those from the previous year put on the edge of the farmland and on top of the houses to protect it. Water was taken from the *lu*'s stream and put in the house. The chief residents of the subterranean realm are the

18. Some young Buddhist likes to drink barley beer (*chang*) and smokes secretly cigarettes, so everyone is afraid of going in front of oracle because of impurity.

19. Dargyay and Gruber refer to a relationship of *lu* with the badlands and the mermaids German people toward faith. (1980: 189)

serpent spirits, demi-gods, male, and female (*lu* and *luma*). They can be conceived animistically as the spirits of earth, water, and everything that is contained within these elemental spheres. In a special way, they are the guardians of ecological balance, a highly conservative force inhibiting human interference with the earth and what is in the earth. They are the foot soldiers of a semi-divine natural authority that orders mankind's relationship with his terrestrial environment. While the mountain gods rule with a heavy-handed fickle patriarchal authority, the serpent spirits have allegiance to a thin-skinned, hypersensitive female nature, with a formidable armoury at their disposal.

The serpent spirits live in the earth, in the rock, and in the lakes and streams. Their usual form is snake-like. They are black, white or red. They can take human form or shape-shift according to requirement. They guard the mineral wealth of the earth including rock and the soil itself. Precious stones belong to them and the magical power of a coral or turquoise stone is determined as auspicious or inauspicious according to its guardian serpent spirit's satisfaction regarding the manner in which it was mined and the care that has been taken of it. To mine iron or gold is to offend the serpent spirits and is equivalent to stealing from them, unless a pact is agreed upon and propitiation made. The low status of iron-workers in traditional Tibet is due to their subordination to the serpent spirits. Rock is also protected by them and they object to the movement of stones from one place to another, and, of course, the hewing of stone. Propitiation of the serpent spirits precedes any building activity. Even to dig a hole in the ground is to risk offending them, and to plough the soil is to invade their domain and all agriculture is therefore dependant upon a working relationship with them. Trees and plants are also protected by the serpent spirits.

In the manuscripts of Dunhuang²⁰ *lu* is mentioned at two places. On the one hand, in a description of ritual for calling for the rain²¹ and on the

20. The exact age of these manuscripts is not clear, but it is believed that they from the time the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang 786-848 BCE or from the middle of the 10th Century come.

21. Dalton, J. & S. van Schaik 2006. Tibetan Tantric Manuscripts from Dunhuang. A Descriptive Catalogue of the Stein Collection at the British Library. Brill, Leiden – Boston, p-141.

other hand in a text, which concerns itself with control of *lu*.²² The Bön work '*Tsangma klu 'bum*²³ describes six different kinds of *lu*, those from six eggs, those from the golden, cosmic turtle was originally developed. Partly in the work of Nebesky Wojkowitz also describes in details of different appearance of five *lu*.²⁴

In the early of Buddhism the *nāga* is always praised and worshipped; The Buddha was protected by *naga mucalinda* during his enlightenment.²⁵ *Mucalinda* forming over his head as an umbrella for protection from weather. Another legend story is of the great philosopher Nāgārjuna²⁶, Founder of Mādhyamika School in 2nd or 3 Century of our era after a thorough study of Buddhist teachings that are accessible at that time, he did not got satisfied and he went to *Naga loka*, from there he got the teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* and since then Nāgārjuna spent, rest of his life trying to spread the teachings²⁷. However, some others sources says that *Nāgarjuna* got the *sūtra* directly from *Buddha Shakyamuni*.

“Human meanings and understandings do not only reflect or approximate to independently existing world but participation its construction”²⁸.

Most of the anthropologists and historians agree that the Ideas or conceptions of nature are socially constructed. By respective cultural and historical circumstances, these constructed conceptions became different. Thus other societies do not only attribute a human behavior to plants or animals, but they often include things, which do not count

22. Ibid, p-146.

23. Vollständiger Titel (Wylie): 'Tsang ma klu bum dkar po bon rin po che 'phrul dag bden pa theg pa chen po'i mdo

24. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. 1956. Oracles and Demons of Tibet. The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities. SMC Publishing Inc., Taipei, p-290.

25. For this event, there are no reliable traditional sources, there are many different years of data.

26. In Tibetan it is called Ludrub, translated means lu - Accomplished

27. Chattopadhyaya, D. 1990. Tārṇātha's History of Buddhism in India. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, p-384.

28. Rappaport, R.A. 1993. Ecology Meaning and Religion. North Atlantic Books, Berkele, p-156.

after our western understanding into the range of the living organisms²⁹. The people of Ladakh have a very distinct, animistic relationship to their environment. Their belief implies that all phenomena in the Nature, that is mountains, trees, rivers, or even thunder and rainbow non-human beings or deities are interdependent. They are forms of existence and awareness; they have the ability to communicate and are capable of socially engagements. Some authors also believe that these beings who speak natural forces of places, trees, etc. by means of symbolize³⁰. They are for the people, although invisible, but still no less real than people or animals and must be treated with reverence in order to guarantee the health and wellbeing. The religious matrix was spread a combination of nature worship, animism, and belief in demons and not only in Ladakh and Tibet, but probably over the entire Central Asian region. In general, this matrix in Bon³¹, *bön chos* or *lha chos*, “the religion of the spirits or gods³²” It may be called as “nameless folk religion³³”.

This proverb from Hemis states: “In the place [Hemis] there is not even the hoof print of a horse, on which no *lu* lives “formulated Less, there are anywhere *lu* wherever one occurs. All my informants in Hemis knew this saying, and so one can assume that the *lu* play a significant role in the daily lives of people from Ladakh. As a result, that the relationship

29. Descola, P. 1996. *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*. Routledge, London, p-82.

30. Cornu, P. 1997. *Tibetan Astrology*. Shambala, Boston & London, p-245.

31. Presumably, the developed, early Bon ‘for Buddhism and influenced many aspects of the cultural Life. In the academic world there are many discussions and disagreements over the use of the word Bon for the pros or non-Buddhist religion in Tibet. This is partly due to the fact that in the 11th Century, a new Bon religion was (sometimes referred to as, systematized Bon ‘) wishes to Founder Shenrab Mibo is returned. Bon and Nyingmapa Buddhism are similar in many Elements, although Bon followers view themselves as a separate religion. The systematized Bon ‘has continued to this day, while the arrangement of the, early Bon ‘today no longer exist.

32. Handa, O.C. 2001. *Buddhist Western Himalaya*. Part 1. A Politico-Religious History. Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, p-254.

33. End of the 19th Beginning of the 20th Century was very common in the popular literature, but also in scientific treatises, the term shamaniism for the existing prior to Buddhism Form of religion used. But there for this abstract word, neither in the Ladakhi still in the Tibetan Language is a correspondence, there is a turned-up of western scientists category I want to take distance in the present work of the term shamaniism.

between man and *lu* is potentially more vulnerable, because it is not possible to withdraw the habitats of these local deities and their influence associated. When I asked about the habitats of the *lu*, one of the local scholar (Smanla) said:

“Usually we do not know where the lu live, sometimes they will stay in shrubs, sometimes in rocks or in the ground. So we do not know where they are and yet we plow the ground or make the bushes firewood. The lu may also be in the trees that are very old. We do not know whether lu reside there and we burn the wood or make furniture from it. Like that way we disturb the lu and damages their residence without knowing, and in return they give us pain and problems.”

Another respondent explains by showing me a nicely grained stone in his garden, which he pulled from the River near two weeks ago. He tells me now it was an ordinary stone, that perhaps his grandchildren and their children will say that after passing many years, that it a *lu* stone, it was laying there since our great-grandfather was alive and they need to treat this stone with respect. To conclude, that *lu* to settle down it needed a space with undisturbed by human to settle down and get comfortable. People create its environmental cosmological and culturally determined notions according to time and again they reinterpret. Apparently new *lu* be for a cultural pattern by creating places, which then act in return to the people by social prohibition awareness are placed so that they and their habitats remain undisturbed and they do not harm in return. This is the reason why people can approach them only through sacrifices and rituals. It is conceivable, as trees in Ladakh are very rare that they as a rare resource (for firewood, for building houses, etc.) may now be extinct if it were not *lu* residence and would be places with their religious prohibition places. Even water sources can be included in this kind of idea. Without religious prohibition, many rivers and springs would now have been dirty or dry. Here one could speak of an ‘eco-friendly’ interpretation of the society, which is directly related to their subsistence basis. I still remember that our grandparents used say, do not wash your hands in the irrigation canal, don’t throw any garbage, and do not pollute it, which will disturb the *lu* and in return it will harm you. I think that is a good way to teach children

to keep their environment clean. Nowadays, younger generation think reptiles are only *lu*, they do not know that they are gods (higher being). Due to modern technological education and decreasing religious faith and rituals customs, today there are so many unknown diseases diagnosis in Ladakh. The Buddhist principles, such as the “conditional interdependent” are conceptions that can more easily harmonize with ecological principles and holistic considerations, than many other religions. The *lu* belong to the embedded Environmental Protection (“embedded ecology”) of everyday Tibetan Buddhist life.³⁴ The testimony of the of Ladakhis says that, there are different *lu* habitats for inhabiting, local scholars and the religious specialists have sophisticated knowledge of where the *lu* usually reside and form as *lu* habitats. Most of respondents said they inhabit in water, soil, trees and stones, some of the old generation respondent said that, they also reside inside the stoves, as earlier every Ladakhi used have clay mud stove for cooking so considering the mud is symbol of earth it is believed the *lu* even resides inside the mud stove.

WATER

Spring water (Chumig) is the first answer of every respondent, when I ask about the places of *lu*. In this context, *lu* can be held responsible for the water balance, as they can decide whether a spring water dries up or will continue with plenty of water, on the other hand *lu* can decide when to rain at the right time or not, depending on their mood.³⁵ In Ladakh one of village called *Hemis Shukpachan* there are many spring water sources, they say their resides the *lu*. So religious person built a shrine with a ritual vase in it as a gift and residence for the *lu*. Then around the spring water source and around *lu* residence in the village, a fence was erected. The fence was built around the spring water and the shrine to keep clean and not to anger, the *lu*.

34. Nagarajan, V. 2000. Rituals of embedded ecologies: drawing kolams, marrying trees, and generating suspiciousness. In: C.K. Chapple & M.E. Tucker (eds.) *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p-453.

35. In Central Tibet, there are people (Ngagpa), who specialize in, making weather. Call for this purpose it the *lu* to speak certain prayers and bring them.

GROUND OR EARTH

Lu share the earth as a living space with the local earth gods (*sabdag*) with which they are closely related to the earth as a habitat. Where the *lu* like to stay only in fertile, green and warm soil³⁶. The *lu* might be disturbed by the agriculture, in particular of the soil, plowing.

TREES

There are many Juniper trees in the Hemis Shukpachan, the meaning of the village it's self is "Himes with Juniper Tree³⁷" where *lu* live. These are treated by all residents with great respect.³⁸ These are always evergreen tree and use by none of the villager's not even try to break or take branches of these trees. Juniper, which is burnt in Hemis for religious purposes usually comes from Leh or other areas of Ladakh. Because everyone is afraid of *lha* and *lu*. There are two varieties of Juniper tree in Ladakh: *lhashug* and *deshug*. *Lhashug* means juniper tree of *lha* and it has a very pleasant smell and is kept in the chapel of the house and monasteries (*chodkhang*), almost every family owns on the roof of their house, and burned in every house in morning every day for purification of house and cleaning other hand to overcome diseases and keep away of the malevolent beings. In contrast to *lhashug* *deshug* does not have a fragrant scent and therefore it is not used for purification and other ritual purposes.

ROCKS

If you going out of Hemis shugpachan towards Tingmosgang village, one sees a mountain mass of reddish stone called *Dragmar*. This is identified as the residence of *lu*. In addition to the mountain range, there are also

36. Day, S. 1989. *Embodying Spirits: Village Oracles and Possession Ritual in Ladakh, North India*. (Dissertation) School of Economics and Political Science, London University, p-62.

37. Latin term: *Juniperus macropoda* Boiss. Belonging to the family of the cypress family

38. Even in Nepal (Jomsom) are juniper trees, where it is known that a *lu* in their lives and moreWorshipped environment to the positive relationship to the *lu* not to endanger.

individual boulders or stones, where *lu* live. The presentation of the habitats of the *lu* in this article shows that the residents of *lu* of Ladakh as a guardian or guardians of the purity and integrity of the earth, trees, waters and houses. According to Ortner³⁹, they represent at the same time also the aspect of uncleanness, being on illustrations as half human – half Snake as presented and animals in general are considered unclean. The people aim at the *lu* for purity, but both are susceptible to contamination and embody them together with their own innate purity. This ambivalence and at the same time similarity is the relationship between man, *lu* that constitutes the environment. If an old *lu*- tree is damaged, the man may get sick and this is the curse of the *lu*. Sometimes the curse for the entire village. By proper rituals one must seek forgiveness for his faulty and ignorantly hurting the *lu*, the sick or the injury can cure only through religious ritual only and one can bring back the balance between man and *lu*. The broad dissemination of *lu* leaves no doubt as to their significance and frequency of contact between man and *lu* in everyday life. The villagers come constantly in contact with their habitats. To avoid possible irritation to the *lu*, and to less mitigate, one has to build and offer them their own small shrine *Lubang*.

CONCLUSIONS

The Ladakhi Buddhists have found to orient their environmental discourses and actions by means of a local cosmology, ideas of *Karma* and Buddhist morality, all of which were interlinked elements. The domains of local gods and spirits, and in particular the *lha* and *lu* embodied in mountains, conceptually align with the idea of the sacred. There are strong non-extractive norms and rituals paid towards them, but do not stand in direct opposition to the profane. In fact, gods and spirits exist within the lived experience of local Ladakhis, so that nature is not something external but a part of the social world. Distinctions between the sacred and non-sacred

39. Ortner, S.B. 1978. The White-Black Ones: the Sherpa View of Human Nature. In:

J. Fisher (ed.) Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface. Mouton, The Hague.

also become blurred in several other respects. Boundaries were uncertain and there was differential ritual adherence to particular gods, so that the sacred is constituted by relationships between specific groups of people and supernatural beings. These relationships were dynamic, dependent on social context and linked to social memory of unfortunate events. The result was that protective norms could also be contextual and at times stood in opposition to the practical realities presented in everyday life. Protection of local gods was stated in ritual terms rather than in Western notions of conservation, and environmental governance as religiously orientated.

Religious norms of the laity regarding the local gods were primarily based on worldly concerns regarding the health and fertility of themselves and their community. The concepts of sin and *Karmic* retribution are also intertwined in this model with regards to understandings of misfortune. Given that the outcomes of environmental actions, especially killing animals, from both deity and *Karmic* retribution are indistinguishable in the material world. This further obscures the concept of the sacred as a category related to distinct sets of behaviours. The models can be considered means of retaining moral order in the social world. The distinct connection between sin and *Karmic* retribution, however, suggests that *Karma* is more clearly part of a broader Buddhist ethical framework. The focus on proximate consequences of actions and worldly goals by the laity does not preclude a moral understanding of relations with the natural world. In particular non-violence towards animals did not only hold instrumental significance but was expressed as a moral absolute. Interrelatedness however, was not conceived of as a lack of demarcation between humans and the natural environment. There was instead an anthropomorphic expression of affinity with living organisms within a graduated scheme of value rather than either an eco-centric or human centered ethic.

Finally, what is the influence of environment on the subjective quality of the Ladakhi mind and spirit; what are the nature and intensity of the fears, hopes, desires, predispositions, and aversions, which condition his reaction to the exigencies of life and the requirements of religion? Why

are the Ladakhi, in their religion, so conscious, as evidenced by their receptiveness to ritualistic Buddhism with its alleged demonstrations of magic and supernormal powers in the firsthand scientific investigation in Ladakh is difficult to trace accurately the exact influence of environment on the temperament and character of the Ladakhis. But the Ladakhis provides a substantial eco-model to co-exist with nature and it could be treated as model and example for United Nations recommendation for environment.