

THE LEPCHA PADIM OF LINGKO,  
DZONGU, NORTH SIKKIM

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INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s, for a couple years, I lived in the Bhutia village of Tingchim in North Sikkim for the purpose of ethnographic fieldwork. From the village, just across the deep river valley of the Teesta, we could see the villages of Hee and Gyathang in the Lepcha reserve of Dzongu. To my surprise, no one from Tingchim had ever set foot in the area except for one or two who did so on government duty. These Lepcha villages, so close yet so mysterious, inspired fear among Tingchim Bhutias. My binoculars only contributed in intensifying the mixed feelings of proximity and mystery.

Some months later, I understood that this fear originated from ancient curses which had allegedly been cast by the Lepchas across the valley. These curses had been sent by some Lepcha shamans—referred to as *bongthing* outside of Dzongu but as *padim* within the reservation—because some of the Bhutia ancestors had failed to pay for cattle they had taken from their Lepcha neighbours. These curses seemed to have spread and affected a large number of households in Tingchim. In fact, many were still performing annual rituals so as to counter their effectiveness at the time of fieldwork. This was my first introduction to the *padims* of Dzongu.

Some seven years later, I had the opportunity to cross the Teesta over to Dzongu when we initiated a visual anthropology project there among the Lepchas of Tingvong village. This finally gave me the opportunity to meet these ritual specialists who had so thoroughly terrified my previous informants. Among them, one proved particularly charming although not so much so initially. Merayk, the Padim of Lingko village, was first opposed to our project, having developed a dislike for enquiring foreigners, particularly would-be anthropologists

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Dawa Lepcha for his comments on an earlier draft, for filming and translating the interviews with the Lingko Padim on which much of this article is based, and for working with me on the last section listing the Padim's ritual repertoire.

wondering around the reserve. Thus, for the first year, I never personally visited his house but only sent the project's cinematographer Dawa Lepcha to film rituals and enquire about their significance. Once used to our style of filming, I joined in to attend a special ritual occasion in February 2004. It then dawned on the Padim that I had been behind Dawa and the project all along, something which amused him and served as a start to our friendship. In the following months, Dawa intensified his filming and captured on video a good portion of his ritual repertoire. On the one hand, the Padim continued to 'protest' our enquiries but on the other, it was clear that he was enjoying the attention and appreciating the purpose of the exercise. He was indeed aware that the only way his own great-grandchildren would probably ever see anything of his disappearing art would be through the films we were putting together. Gradually, his rituals turned into performances where he was no longer only controlling the stage and the audience but actively contributing to the success of the filming project. Dawa being Lepcha undoubtedly made the development of this working relation possible. They laughed at each other jokes and made more at my expense.

Dawa made video recordings of the Padim's ritual repertoire, interviews, family life and agricultural activities, on and off, between 2003 and 2010. By the time we completed our recordings, the Padim was 80 years old and probably the most qualified Lepcha shaman of Dzongu. Dawa followed him in his wonderings across fields, jungles, rivers, mountains and valleys to perform wherever he was called in the villages of Upper Dzongu. Having worked with a number of Bhutia and Lepcha shamans in Sikkim, I have come to view them as very dedicated social workers. The Lingko Padim, like all of them, didn't mind welcoming people in his house or walking over the hills to distant houses at odd hours of the day or night to ritually attend to seriously sick patients.

While healing remains his main ritual practice, the Lingko Padim's calendar is punctuated by a number of rituals which he performs on an annual basis. These may be held for the benefit of the village as a whole, for that of a particular household, clan or individual. Two rituals however, one held in the winter (*sugileot*) and another in the spring (*tokpo bur*), are held in honour of his own personal deities. Before giving a brief description of his ritual repertoire, I shall present the project, the films, and how our Padim became the remarkable person that he is today.

THE PROJECT AND THE FILMS<sup>2</sup>

Dawa Lepcha's video recordings of the Padim's ritual repertoire is part of the first phase of a larger visual anthropology project initiated in 2003 at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, which aims to produce a documented video record of the ritual culture of Sikkim's indigenous Buddhist communities. The video record is produced with and for the indigenous communities and is preserved at the Institute for future generations and research use. From this archival material, a series of films is being edited for viewing both in Sikkim and at ethnographic film festivals worldwide.

The project was conceived and established in consultation with Professor Asen Balikci along with two Sikkimese cinematographers: Dawa Lepcha and later Phurba Tshering Bhutia. Together we have been making systematic video recordings among Sikkim's indigenous Buddhist communities. With Dawa Lepcha and Prof. Balikci, we first worked among the Lepchas of Dzongu, and from 2007 onwards, Phurba Bhutia and myself have made recordings among the Bhutias and more recently among the Bhutias of Lachen, a mixed agricultural and pastoral community located in Sikkim's extreme north along the Tibetan border.

Dawa Lepcha joined the project as a young film-school graduate. He himself originates from Dzongu and has a deep understanding and curiosity for his own traditions and culture. For the purpose of our project, he chose the village of Tingvong in Upper Dzongu as it was still relatively traditional and for practical reasons, was accessible by jeep. We started off in January 2003 with a three week training workshop where Professor Balikci instructed Dawa and myself on the basics of ethnographic filmmaking. Dawa was made to carry out camera exercises in the village which were then viewed and discussed in the evening. This was followed by a second workshop in January 2004 where we screened and discussed classic ethnographic films and where Dawa continued with his filming exercises. For two years, filming continued on a regular basis and meanwhile Dawa took a short computer editing course.

In January 2005, the project's first film was edited under the supervision of Professor Balikci. *Tingvong: A Lepcha Village in Sikkim* (2005) was intended as a village portrait illustrating the economic and

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<sup>2</sup> For a more exhaustive description of this visual anthropology project including its Lepcha and Bhutia phases with a total of eight films, see Balikci (forthcoming) and <http://www.tibetology.net/researchprojects/sikkimvideo/index.html>

religious changes the Lepchas of Dzongu have undergone in recent decades.<sup>3</sup> The film was screened at several ethnographic film festivals around the world and won an award at a documentary film festival in Shillong, in India's north-eastern region. Filming continued and editing on the project's second film *Cham in the Lepcha Village of Lingthem* (2007) was started in February 2006. The film was shot in Dawa's neighbouring village monastery of Lingthem where the lamas performed their annual *cham* or ritual masked dances over a period of six days.<sup>4</sup> *Cham* was also screened at a number of ethnographic film festivals.

Dawa continued to film in Dzongu on a regular basis until the spring of 2007 when he decided to take an indefinite leave from the project. At the time, we had some 170 hours of recorded material on the ritual and social life of the Lepchas. Although incomplete, much of the material focused on the rituals of the Padim of Lingko village. Dawa rejoined the project in the spring of 2010 in order to complete the shaman's portrait as a healer and the recordings of his ritual repertoire together with his shamanic chants. With this material, a third film, *Ritual Journeys*, was completed in the spring of 2011. The film is an intimate portrait of the Padim, presenting his daily life as a healer, father, and farmer together with a selection of interviews and rituals performances. The film was first presented to a village assembly in the Padim's own house and then screened to a packed audience in Gangtok. The film made the rounds of ethnographic film festivals and was awarded a special commendation by the panel of judges

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- <sup>3</sup> *Tingvong: A Lepcha Village in Sikkim* (2005), synopsis: From the 1940s, the Lepcha of Tingvong village gradually abandoned hunting, gathering and the slash and burn cultivation of dry rice, and became settled agriculturalists. Entire mountains sides were converted to cardamom and terraced for the cultivation of irrigated paddy. The irrigated rice and the cardamom cash crop not only brought the Lepcha within Sikkim's market economy but helped create a surplus which could among other things be invested in religion. From the 1940s, the Lepcha of Tingvong gradually embraced Buddhism and all its complex rituals without however abandoning their strong shamanic traditions. Today, both forms of rituals amiably co-exist in the village.
- <sup>4</sup> *Cham in the Lepcha Village of Lingthem* (2007), synopsis: These dramatic ritual masked dances impart elementary Buddhist teachings while providing entertainment to villagers. Their main purpose is to remove obstacles and ward off misfortune for the village, its inhabitants and the monastery. However, for lamas and more serious Buddhist practitioners, these *cham* and their rituals hold deep philosophical meanings. In the course of this village event, the deities who emerge in the period between death and rebirth make their rhythmic appearances followed by the Lord of Death who judges one's good and bad deeds in the after life.

(Intangible Culture Film Prize) at the 12<sup>th</sup> RAI International festival of Ethnographic Film, London, June 2011.

#### THE PADIM

Merayk, the Padim of Lingko, was born around 1931 in the village of Lingko in Upper Dzongu. In those days, the Lepchas were still hunter-gatherers and cultivated different varieties of dry rice, millet, maize, buckwheat and soya beans in patches of jungle that were first cleared, burnt, sowed and harvested for two or three consecutive years before being left to rest for seven or eight years. At the time, Buddhism was making its first serious inroads into the community. Although the nearby Lepcha monastery of Lingthem was built in 1855, it took time for the influence of its lamas to reach Tingvong across the valley. The process gained momentum when, in 1943, Lingthem monastery started performing yearly ritual masked dances, which were well attended by villagers from across Dzongu. By the 1940s, there were five lamas in Tingvong and its surrounding hamlets: they were known as Norden (Tingvong's first lama), Sumbuk Lama (Tingvong), Manang Lama (Tingvong), Lampen Lama (Kusung village), and Naji Lama (Nung village). Although the lamas gradually took over the ritual needs of the community from the 1940s, in those days, the *padim*, the *mun* and even the *pawo* (Tib. *dpa' bo*) and the *nejum* (Tib. *rnal 'byor ma*)<sup>5</sup> were still the ritual specialists of choice of the community.

Both *padim* and *mun* get possessed by various Lepcha spirits and deities and are called to perform healing and other rituals. However, only the *mun* can perform the death ritual and is generally considered far more powerful than the *padim* because of the nature of his helping-spirits. Both men and women can become *mun*, while only men become *padim*. Some begin their shamanic career as *padim* and eventually graduate to *mun* as they inherit new helping-spirits from their ancestors and receive the required training and initiations or *lung*.

Merayk descends from lineages of both *mun* and *padim* from his maternal and paternal sides respectively and says he inherited his ritual powers from the same spirits who possessed his ancestors. Two of his paternal grandfathers of Lingko were *padim* while he received the *mun*-spirit from his mother's lineage from the village of Likngi. From his maternal uncles in Lingthem, he also received *mun*-powers which he

<sup>5</sup> The *pawo* (male) and the *nejum* (female) belong to a Tibetan shamanic tradition prevalent among the neighbouring Sikkimese Bhutia known as Lhopo but they are also found among the Lepcha.

describes as not so positive. His maternal grandfather was known as Thyak Thimbu and is mentioned by Gorer as Gongyop's elder brother (Gorer 1938: 215 fn.1), the latter being Gorer's principle *mun* informant in Lingthem.

When Merayk first received his ancestral-spirits, he was only eighteen years old. He went through the usual stages of initial madness and disassociation, running into people's houses, into the jungle and along cliffs at odd hours irregardless of the weather only to return exhausted without any memory of what had happened. He sought a teacher in the village of Nambongtam (Nampathang) where he stayed for only a week. There he received the first *lung* giving him the necessary qualification to perform, which was done by drinking from a ritual bowl. He was taught some rituals and learnt their corresponding chants by heart. When he was learning the mantras to be performed for the curing of poisoning, he received the news that his son had died. No longer able to concentrate, he returned home, leaving his studies and initiations incomplete, and soon started performing as a *padim*.

Merayk was then married to his first wife who was herself a *mun*. She was much older to him and became *mun* at the age of 40 which is considered very late in life. She inherited her *mun*-spirit from her mother's lineage soon after her mother's death. Her mother was from the village of Ship in Upper Dzongu and Merayk is of the opinion that his wife's *mun*-spirit returned to Ship after his wife died of rabies as he heard there was a new *mun* performing in that village. Her own father had been a *pawo* but she did not inherit helping-spirits from her paternal lineage, otherwise she would not have become a *mun* but a *nejum*. Interestingly, her teacher had also been a *pawo*, and is today remembered as the father of late Apak, the Tingvong hunter. This *pawo* was also known to be a 'lama' and even performed *mun* rituals. As already noted elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> this give and take and fluidity between Lepcha, Sikkimese Bhutia (Lhopo), Limbu and other ritual traditions is not an isolated phenomenon and is widespread in Sikkim.

His wife was a very popular healer and was called almost daily to perform curing and other rituals. She could not however perform the

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<sup>6</sup> "...a certain ritual flexibility is common everywhere in Sikkim. I have come across a Lhopo acting as a Limbu *yebā*, a Limbu acting as a Lepcha *bongthing*, a Lepcha acting as a Lhopo *nejum*, a Lhopo performing as a Nepalese *jhākri* and even a Lepcha lama renouncing his robe for that of the *bongthing*. It all depends on the identity of their friends, neighbours and teachers and is a clear reflection of the ritual fluidity found among Sikkimese tribals" (Balikci 2008: 153). Gorer also adds that these foreign spirits were introduced in Dzongu through intermarriage with foreign women (Gorer 1938: 216).

important *mun* ritual in honour of the dead (*Passong tyut*), when their souls are guided to *Rum lyang* where all the dead are thought to reside. Being already 40 when she started to perform, she never had the opportunity to learn or receive its *lung*. Gorer mentions that already in the 1930s, very few *mun* could perform this ritual (1938: 356) perhaps because the *mun*'s death ritual requires the sacrifice of an animal, usually an ox, which runs contrary to Buddhist ethics and by then, the village lamas had already taken over funerary procedures.

For many years, they performed together, Merayk acting as his wife's ritual assistant whenever he was free. Together they performed the *sugileot* in their house, her grand annual ritual in honour of her helping-spirits. She did most of the ritual offerings herself leaving him only a small portion to perform. Eventually, Merayk learnt the *mun*'s chants and now performs the *sugileot* on his own, chanting over a period of three consecutive nights. Owing to his mix-lineage, descending from both *padim* and *mun* ancestors from whom he inherited helping-spirits, his experience and perhaps the close association with his wife, Merayk is considered more than a *padim* but not quite a full *mun* as he never underwent the complete training and received all the required initiations. He can, however, hold a form of death ritual called the *Mari sem*, whereby the soul of the dead is separated from that of the living.

Merayk is now himself a very popular and successful *padim* in his own right. Nearly every day, he receives visits from close and distant villagers seeking his services first and foremost as a healer but also in order to perform rituals held at birth, marriage or death, and also in honour of house, ancestral and hunting deities, and various community rituals. When called to help a sick patient, before holding any ritual, he first establishes which malevolent *mung*-spirit is responsible for the patient's suffering. For this, he uses a rosary while reciting the mantras of the *padim*. In difficult situations, he performs a second divination, reading from rice grains scattered on a plate, hoping that both divinations concur. Once identified, he performs a propitiatory ritual, presenting the ritual offerings corresponding to the offended *mung*-spirit's particular taste with the hope that the latter will now loosen his grip on the patient. If the patient doesn't improve, the process is repeated two or three times in case the wrong *mung* was identified or in order to offer a more elaborate and expensive ritual (sometimes including the sacrifice of an animal such as a chicken, a goat, a pig or even an ox) before the patient is taken to hospital. According to Merayk, the *mun* doesn't require a rosary or rice when divining the

cause of illness; being more prophetic, the *mun* simply chants and reveals the cause of the patient's suffering.

Merayk commented that in order to take control and defeat a particularly virulent class of *mung* known as *mozom*, some *mun* and *padim* will take the help of a powerful spirit by the name of Chiang who requires the sacrificial offerings of blood, usually in the form of a pig or a goat. In lieu of blood, Merayk has been successfully offering old silver coins along with *chang* and a silk scarf to his Chiang helping-spirit at the beginning of every possession ritual so as to request him to stay away when his help is not required. Before a *mun* or *padim* passes away, he must return this most powerful helping-spirit to his abode and instruct him under oath not to return until his successor calls him back. Merayk adds that until his reincarnation or *alet* returns, his Chiang will not come down to create trouble for the living.

#### THE PADIM'S RITUALS

For the sake of reference, I list below the rituals performed by Merayk, the Padim of Lingko, which were, for the most part, filmed by Dawa Lepcha as part of our visual anthropology project. The rituals were recorded on MiniDV video tapes from beginning to end; including preparations, uninterrupted ritual chants and, in many cases, followed by an interview. Where indicated, excerpts from these rituals were edited and included in the film *Ritual Journeys* (2011). The video recordings are archived at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology for posterity and further research use.

Various descriptions of Lepcha rituals are available in the works of Gorer (1938), Siiger (1967) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1951, 1952) where further information about some of these rituals, as they were performed in the 1930s-50s, may be found. Exhaustive recent information about Lepcha rituals in Dzongu will soon be available in Jenny Bentley's forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation (2016). This list is merely intended as a very brief record of the Lingko Padim's particular ritual repertoire.

##### I. *Community rituals held for the benefit of the village as a whole*

Depending on the village and the ritual specialist, the first three rituals below, held for the benefit of the village as a whole, are performed either in a single day or on three separate occasions. In Lingko, the



performances of the first three were held and filmed on the same day but in two different locations on February 18, 2004.

1. *Chirim*: Once a year before the monsoon, the 14 households of Lingko village collectively perform the *Chirim* ritual in honour of their protective mountain deity Kongchen Chyu and his retinue of lesser peaks and sacred lakes. An altar is set up in the forest on a large stone where they are propitiated to prevent illness such as fever and dysentery that are common during the rainy season. Each household is represented by a little basket containing offerings from its fields which is hung on a horizontal bamboo pole set above the altar. Each household contributes a chicken which is sacrificed in the course of the ritual and offered on the altar. Excerpts of the *Chirim* are included in *Ritual Journeys*.<sup>7</sup>

2. *Tsom tsu fat*: offering ritual for the eight Lepcha kings. Performed and recorded at the same time and in the same location as the *Chirim*. A separate smaller altar is set up for the Lepcha kings on a rock with the appropriate offerings.

3. *Satap rum fat*: offerings for protection against hail stones. Every spring, the ripening winter crops are threatened by hail stones. These often destroy entire harvests and are much apprehended by villagers all over Sikkim. This offering ritual was held on the same day in February 2004 but near the school where a separate altar on a bamboo platform was erected for the purpose.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Dawa Lepcha, the *Chirim* ritual was followed by the performance of *Kongchen Chyu rum fat*, or *Kongchen fat*, an offering to the mountain deity Kongchen when his guards go to pay their respect to what he calls the Southern Deity. It is now obsolete but used to be performed for the entire region by the *bongthings* of the Taso family of Nung village. Jenny Bentley who had the chance to interview the last Taso Bongthing before he passed away in October 2011 adds that “the Kóngchen ceremony was part of a larger ritual complex of which the other rituals are still performed in Dzongu today... The Kóngchen ritual was performed to appease the mountain deity Kóngchen and seek protection against disease, natural disaster and other calamities for the entire Sikkimese community... In the Lepcha cosmology prevalent in Dzongu, it is believed that the soldiers of the mighty Kóngchen would accompany the Nung Taso southwards to the palace on their way down to the plains, where the deity Chádóng rázú resides. These soldiers are embodied diseases and, if not appeased, would bring harm and destruction to the villages along the way. So simultaneously with the royal Kóngchen ritual, all other villages in Dzongu conducted rituals to protect their village areas. These rituals are still performed today and presently known as Cirim (ritual against disease) and Sátáp rum fát (ritual against hailstorms).” (Bentley 2011: 3).

4. *Lung zee rum fat*. Offering ritual to appease the deities inhabiting the village's territory. These may reside in large rocks, trees, mountains, etc. This ritual was filmed in Kusung village in November 2005.

5. *Lyang dik rum fat*. Offering ritual for the deities of the low lands in order to appease them, prevent illness during the monsoon and return them back home. This ritual was filmed below Tingvong, at 6<sup>th</sup> Mile, in July 2003. It is included as the opening ritual in *Ritual Journeys*.

## II. Preventive rituals held for the benefit of the household and clan<sup>8</sup>

1. *Putso fat* or *pho lha fat*. Ritual offering for the ancestral gods of the exogamous patrilineal clan known as *putso*. All family members of the same *putso* within the village and surrounding area must gather on this occasion where an ox is sacrificed. Known *putso* members from distant villages may also participate if invited or come to hear about its performance. It is held every three years on a rotation basis for the prosperity, well-being and longevity of the *putso*. Filmed in Panang village in November 2006 and included in *Ritual Journeys*.

2. *Lee rum fat*. Ritual offering for the protecting deities of the household. Held every three years. This ritual is now obsolete and was not filmed. It is often confused with the *Putso fat* which has now largely replaced it.

## III. Optional regular rituals of the household's animals and crops

1. *Sakyu rum fat*. This ritual, now largely obsolete, was performed twice a year for the dry rice and other traditional crops, first when planted, and later when harvested. It is still performed in the remote village of Pentong where the cultivation of dry rice has survived till this day. The ritual was not recorded although the planting and harvesting of the dry rice in Pentong was filmed.

2. *Langee rum fat*. A form of *Sakyu rum fat*, this ritual is an offering performed for the guardian-spirit or 'owner' of the cardamom crop at

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<sup>8</sup> An additional household ritual, the *Pun tsu tsok*, is now an obsolete ritual but mentioned here for the sake of reference. It was held in order to prevent obstacles from affecting the family. If performed once, it had to be held for three consecutive years. The Lingko Padim never performed this ritual as he hadn't received its *lung*. Dawa Lepcha mentions that it was performed until recently by the *padim* of Lingdong village.

the time of harvest. The owner of the field performs it in order to ask for an abundant harvest and avoid the guardian-spirit's displeasure when the fruit of the cardamom is taken away. It was filmed in Kusung in November 2005.

3. *Mut/Fog rum fat*. Hunting offering ritual held in honour of a hunter's personal helping-spirits. It is performed to ensure the continuous success and safety of the hunter. Even if a hunter has abandoned the practice, the ritual must still be annually performed or else the helping-spirit may express his displeasure, withdraw his protection, resulting in illness in the family. In many cases, it is still performed by the descendents of great hunters. Filmed in Kusung village in November 2005 and included in *Ritual Journeys*.

4. *Zung*. Ritual held when an animal is dedicated to a particular protective deity. Later, when the animal is required for butchering, the *zung* must first be transferred to a young animal by the Padim. A goat *zung* ritual was filmed in Kusung in Jan 2005 and a *zung* ritual for a ram was filmed in December 2004.

#### IV. *Curing rituals held for the benefit of the individual*

1. *Tyak dum*. Ritual offering for the *tyak dum* or protector of the house. This ritual is performed whenever the *tyak dum* is divined by the Padim as being responsible for a household member's illness. This may happen when the *tyak dum* was somehow offended. This ritual was filmed in Lingko in June 2004.

2. *Lyang it nikung* (grandmother's birthplace). This protective female deity originates from the birthplace and *putso* of the women of the house. It usually acts as a protector and follows the bride to her new home after marriage. However, it can become troublesome and cause illness to members of the new household and must then be appeased with the appropriate offering ritual when divined by the Padim as the responsible agent. We did not get the chance to film this ritual.

3. *Sum doue* (to collect lost soul). Ritual performed to guide 'lost souls' that are causing trouble after death. The Padim will either destroy the troublesome soul with the help of his powerful Chiang helping-spirit or adopt it as a useful helping-spirit. We did not get the chance to film this ritual.

The Padim performs a variety of curing rituals, each designed for a particular local spirit which may have been identified as responsible for

someone's illness through the Padim's divination. A number of such rituals were filmed over the years, one of which is included in *Ritual Journeys*.

#### V. *The individual's rites of passage*

1. *Ing rum fat* or *Kynet rum fat*. Ritual performed shortly after birth to protect the newborn, introduce him to the clan deities so that they take responsibility for its development into a good human being, and thank them for this new addition to the *putso*. Filmed in Tingvong in the spring of 2004.

2. *Bree*. Rituals performed on the occasion of marriage whereby the recitation of the 'origin story of marriage' is chanted. In order to ensure their long life, the couple is made to drink three times from a ritual bowl. This is the only ritual performed jointly by lamas and *padim*, each sitting on either side of the family altar. The Padim mentioned that before lamas got involved, marriage ceremonies were held outside where the ox brought by the groom's family was sacrificed and offered to the clan's deities. A number of marriage rituals were filmed.

3. The Lingko Padim cannot perform the *mun*'s death ritual (*Passong tyut*) when their souls are guided to *Rum lyang* where all the dead are thought to reside as he did not receive its *lung*. Today, this ritual has been replaced by the funeral procedures of the lamas. However, the Lingko Padim still performs a form of death ritual on the third night after death called *Mari sem*, whereby the soul of the dead is separated from that of the living, the bad aspect of the soul being guided to *suniol bang* at the base of Mount Siniolchu while the positive aspect is guided to its peak. It is thought that the bad aspect may later return to create problem and for this purpose, it is given its share of the deceased possessions and guided to the base of Siniolchu from where it should leave the living in peace.

#### VI. *The Lingko Padim's personal annual rituals*

1. *Sugileot*. This is the Padim's grand annual ritual held in the month of December. It is a village event where food for all is prepared in the courtyard while rituals are held in the altar room of his house over a period of three days. It is attended by Lingko villagers, relatives and sponsors from neighbouring hamlets. Its main purpose is to invite the Padim's personal deities, thank them for their continuous assistance over the year by presenting them with specific offerings, dispense

blessings to the assembly and return the deities to their abode at the beginning of winter. He will call them back in the spring with the *Tokpo bur* ritual.

For the purpose of the ritual, offerings of grain, ginger, dry fish, dry bird, butter lamps together with all the *khadas* and monetary contributions made by the assembly are laid on a banana leaf (*lafit*) before the Padim. A bamboo frame is erected over his head where rows of flowers (mostly marigolds) are strung on 13 to 20 bamboo poles (depending on the availability of flowers) and hung together with specific offerings of rice and puffed rice packed in little parcels. Little bamboo pots filled, some with fermented rice others with millet, are hung at each corner. These flowers are meant, both as a seat for the deities to take when invited, and as offerings to be individually presented to them in the course of the ritual chants. If not given a seat when invited, the deities would instead take possession of the Padim which would become quite unmanageable for him. Other offerings consist of sugar cane, yams, fruit, bananas and medicinal plants which are distributed to all. A chicken is also presented.

The invited deities consist of three groups: the deities of the lowlands, the deities of the highlands, and the Padim's personal deities or *pum rum* inherited from his ancestors. Each are given specific rows of flowers and particular offerings with every single flower being individually offered to his numerous deities, which is the reason why the distribution has to be done over three consecutive nights of ritual chanting. The lowland deities' offerings are taken to them by boat.

The Padim gets possessed by his personal deities during the ritual, particularly on its third night when plates of ginger, medicinal plants and fermented rice are empowered by the deities and distributed to the audience as both a blessing and a healing substance. His personal deities take a seat on the flowers of the Padim's headdress and stick before taking possession of him. In the end, he blows healing mantras on each individual present at the ritual, paying particularly attention to infants who are prone to be taken away by a particular malevolent *mung*. He then goes around the house to drive away malevolent beings. Over the course of the ritual, he often blows on substances to drive the latter away or throws pieces of offerings out the window to chase them out the house. There are specific offerings for the spirits helping him guard the entrance door of the ritual room. A knife lies next to the offerings in order to guard them when the Padim momentarily leaves the room. Once the blessing and healing rituals are over, the Padim continues all night with the *mun*'s ritual chants, individually

distributing the offerings to the low and highland deities and his personal *pum rum*.

The *Sugileot* ritual was filmed in its entirety between 10 and 14 December, 2004, including preparations, uninterrupted ritual chants followed by interviews describing the rituals and its offerings. It is the concluding ritual of *Ritual Journeys*.

2. *Tokpo bur*. This is a one day ritual held in the Padim's house to invite his deities back in the spring. Villagers are again invited and given the deities' blessings through the blowing of healing mantras and the distribution of healing substances. The ritual was filmed in the spring of 2011.

#### CONCLUSION

This concludes our overview of the Padim's ritual repertoire. A number of these rituals were filmed several times, in different locations, for various individuals, households, clans or villages. Over the years, Dawa Lepcha made similar recordings of rituals performed by other *padims*, *muns*, and *nejums* in and around Dzongu, all of which are archived at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

The Padim of Lingko, now 80 years old, does not have any serious students. Some have come and gone but none have shown the necessary sustained interest, diligence and capacity needed to take over his complex ritual tradition though one student now seems to be making progress. The reasons for this are multiple and can be assigned as much to the levelling of culture as a consequence of education and development, as to the lack of candidates due to the availability of new economic opportunities. The Buddhist lamas' role has been equally influential although both traditions have co-existed without conflict for decades except for the practice of animal sacrifice which is gradually being eliminated without, however, introducing fundamental changes to the Padim's ritual tradition. It is for this reason that we have endeavoured to make a record of his dying art with the hope that it may at least survive in digital format and be made available to future Lepcha students, would they be future anthropologists or perhaps *padims* in need of ancestral inspiration.

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The Chirim ritual altar of Lingku village when, once a year, the mountain deity Kongchen Chyu is propitiated to prevent fever and dysentery.



The Lingko Padim at the time of a wedding ritual in Tingvong village