

The Brokpa and their Social Development: The Work of M/S Dunkarpa Welfare Association at Dirang Circle of West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh, India

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The Monpa is one of the major 26 tribes of Arunachal Pradesh State, India, inhabiting the land at the altitude from 2000 m to 4000 m a.s.l. Monpa people at Dirang Circle are classified into two groups according to their lifestyle, "Unpa (field cultivators at lower altitude)" and "Brokpa (pastoralists at higher altitude)." One of the major characteristics of Brokpa's livelihood is seasonal moving around the grazing land at the altitude from 3000 m to 4500 m with Yak, cow and their cross-breeding, or sheep. Brokpa have close relationship with Unpa in terms of landholding, agricultural production and trading, and marriage. Brokpa owe the land and staple food to Unpa, and Unpa instead obtain the cheese and butter which are important protein source for them. The original culture of Brokpa community and their relationship with Unpa will be influenced by the recent increasing attention on the political, environmental, and socio-economic importance of the high altitude land in Arunachal Pradesh. Dunkarpa Welfare Association was established against such a background, aiming to support the Brokpa community by providing permanent settlement at roadside, school education facilities, and job for gaining regular cash income. However, sudden and compulsory change of the accustomed lifestyle will not be accompanied by mental satisfaction of Brokpa people. Thus, it is a challenge for the action plan of High Altitude Project to support the development of Brokpa's society with ensuring their welfare.

Introduction

At the Tibet-Himalayan Highland with the altitude above 3000 m a.s.l., which ranges from Arunachal Pradesh as the eastern most to Ladakh as the western most, the dominant subsistence is pasturage of sheep, goat, Yak and its cross-breeding. The pastoral people at this region are generally called "Brokpa," "Dakpa," etc., in the Tibetan-originated Languages. As the Tibet-Himalayan Highland has nowadays attracted more and more attention by its increasing political, environmental, and socio-economic importance, the livelihood of Brokpa is also likely to be influenced by the recent government policy in many aspects. The first author, as being the owner of the grazing land of

Brokpa people, has been involved in the practical implementation of the policy imposed on Brokpa's community in Arunachal Pradesh State, India. This paper will report the example of situation which Brokpa people are facing at Dirang Circle of West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh State, with the long experience of the first author as the member of local community, and consider the way of development in line with the local context.

Livelihood of Brokpa: Their Original Culture Different from that of the Lowland Agricultural People

Monpa is one of the major 26 tribes of Arunachal

Pradesh State, India, belonging to Tibet-Burmese Language Family, and generally the follower of Tibetan Buddhism. Monpa people inhabit the western most area of the state at the altitude from 2000 m to 4500 m neighboring to Bhutan and Tibet. At Dirang Circle of West Kameng District, Monpa people can be classified into two groups according to the lifestyle, "Unpa (field cultivators at lower altitude)" and "Brokpa (pastoralists at higher altitude)". Although "Brokpa" are sometimes recognized to be different tribe from Monpa due to their origin, language or culture, they will be included in Monpa tribe in this paper because they get intermarried with agricultural Monpa people. The cultural difference between Brokpa and Unpa, causing such confusion in anthropological viewpoint, results in the reciprocal relationship playing an essential role in the regional livelihood system. The difference and relationship between Brokpa and Unpa will be described below.

Livelihood of Brokpa at the altitude above 3000 m

The Brokpa in this area are originated from the western part of Bhutan, and even now they have relationship with Bhutan side in trading or marriage. One of the major characteristics of Brokpa's livelihood is transhumance at the land above 3000 m a.s.l., namely seasonal moving around the grazing lands with the livestock at the different altitude. In the winter season from the middle of October to March, Brokpa people stay in their permanent village at the altitude of 3000m, engaging trading or weaving as well as milk production. The permanent village consists of 10 to 20 houses, where small children or the elderly who can't bear the hard work at the high altitude land stay all the year round. As the temperature increases in April or May, they start to move to grazing lands at the higher altitude with carrying the luggage on the back of "Dzo (the male cross-breeding of Yak and cow)". For example, Brokpa of Melak Mu village have three places for seasonal grazing, such as the land at 3200 m from April to May and from September to October, at 3500 m from May to June and from August to September, and at 4000m from July to August. During the move in summer season, they formerly stayed in

the temporary tent made of Yak hair, which is recently replaced by small wooden house, engaging in milking and producing cheese and butter. Yak and its cross-breeding play an essential role in Brokpa's livelihood not only as the food source but also as the material for cloth or religious tool, and bride-price. The "Yak Dance," indicating the legend of introducing Yak into this region long time ago, and performed at "Lossar Festival (Monpa's New Year Festival)" in February, is also reflecting such an importance of Yak and its cross-breeding.

The grazing lands are created by cutting the forest harboring large coniferous trees of *Abies* sp., splendidly flowering shrubs of *Rhododendron* spp., etc. The tall trees are not cut alive, but firstly killed by laying the aconite poison collected from an herbaceous plant *Aconitum* sp. on the trunk where the bark was removed roundly at the height of 1.5 m from the ground. Then, the created open grazing lands are full of grasses which sheep, Yak and its cross-breeding prefer to eat, and other herbaceous plants with colorful flowers. Although the grasses at the high altitude land are dwarf and less in amount due to the cold weather even in the summer season, they are recognized to be more nutritious than the ones at low altitude land. The vegetation of grazing land surrounded by *Abies* forest provides various kinds of useful resources to local people too. Some kinds of herbs and shrubs produce edible leaves or fruits and medicines, the large leaves of *Rhododendron* sp. are used for wrapping cheese and butter, and the shoot of coniferous shrub *Juniperus* sp. is the material of incense used for Buddhist praying. Thus, the Brokpa in this area are predominantly engaged in pasturage at the high altitude grazing lands without cultivating agricultural crops. Therefore, they have to obtain the grains, most popularly maize and rice, for their staple food as well as salt, chilli, edible oil, or other daily utensils from lowland agricultural people, which will be mentioned below.

Livelihood of Unpa at the altitude of 2000 - 3000 m

The Unpa, believed to be migrated from Tibet long time ago, have settled in the villages of 50 - 150 houses at the altitude of 2000 - 3000 m a.s.l. Although they

used to be engaged in slash-and-burn agriculture, they are nowadays likely to cultivate maize, buckwheat, finger millet, barley, soybean and vegetables, etc., in the permanent fields. Their staple food has long been maize, buckwheat, finger millet, or barley. Those grains are ground into flour, kneaded with hot water and made into soft dough called "bokpe." However, after the government ration system was introduced in 1990s, the younger generation prefers to take the Indian style dishes such as rice with curry or "rotti" made of wheat. The villages have characteristic land-use system, which enables the people to produce various resources in the sustainable way. For example, the permanent agricultural field nearby the village is surrounded by the deciduous oak tree forest, where the fallen leaves are collected in the winter season for using as mulching and fertilizer. Villagers are not allowed to cut the deciduous oak trees in the forest owing to its importance in agricultural practices. Instead, evergreen oak trees are collected as firewood, and blue-pine trees are used as timber. These trees grow in the forest spreading outside the deciduous oak tree forest.

Relationship between Brokpa and Unpa

Beyond the substantial difference in their livelihood between Brokpa and Unpa, they have close relationship in terms of landholding, production and trade, and marriage. The difference plays a complementary role in the regional livelihood system and enhances the reciprocal linkage each other. Although their original languages are different, those who have frequently involved in the interactive activities between Brokpa and Unpa can speak the language of the other.

In terms of landholding, all the grazing lands on which Brokpa and their livestock live belong to the clans of Unpa. Every Brokpa family has to pay tax to the land-owning clan of Unpa every year by cheese and butter, livestock or cash. For example, one Brokpa family of Melak Mu village brings 6 kg of cheese, 6 kg of butter, and 1 yak or Rs. 7000 to Dunkarpa clan as tax in December every year. The average price of cheese and butter is 200 - 250Rs per kg. In the land of Dunkarpa clan which is composed of 48 Unpa families, a total of 26 Brokpa families are settling and grazing

their livestock.

Cheese and butter supplied by Brokpa had been the important protein source to Unpa who seldom took animal meat or fish due to the religious belief. Cheese and butter produced by Brokpa is supplied not only by tax payment but also by periodical trading between Brokpa and Unpa. When Unpa visit the Brokpa village, they bring grains, vegetables, or alcohol on the back of horses and exchange to cheese and butter. Equally, Brokpa visit the Unpa village carrying cheese and butter, or useful plants produced only at the higher altitude. In the case of trade with remote area, the trip takes 10 days including 4 days trekking on the mountain trail for one-way. Brokpa have the regular trading partner called "Natsan" at the Unpa village. "Natsan" provides the food and accommodation to Brokpa's trading partner, and also plays a role of middleman in buying and selling cheese and butter.

The Brokpa people living in the village without Tibetan Buddhism temple called "Gompa" have to go to the other village with Gompa when the necessity occurs. For example, the Brokpa of Melak Mu village visit Baltse village for Buddhist praying, which is the Unpa village 10km far from Melak Mu village. On the other hand, at the Brokpa's village with Gompa, there is one Brokpa family which manages it. That family can avoid paying tax, as a case of the Brokpa family at Lagam village which is free of tax imposed by the land-owning Sharchokpa clan. This relationship between Brokpa and Unpa is strengthened by the intermarriage between them. There are many cases that Unpa male or female gets married with a Brokpa and is engaged in pasturage, and vice versa.

Policy Imposed on the Brokpa's Community and the Role of Dunkarpa Welfare Association

Such original culture of Brokpa community and their relationship with Unpa will be influenced by the recent increasing attention on the political, environmental and socio-economic importance of the high altitude land. Since 1962 when the trouble on the border occurs between India and China, Indian Government has promoted the development of infrastructure in

Arunachal Pradesh State by road construction, establishing schools and local health centers, introduction of ration system, etc. Although this policy contributes to improving social services in some parts of the State, the vast mountainous area still remains to be inaccessible to those infrastructures. Therefore, the remote mountainous area will be targeted for the further development so as to diminish the gap of socio-economic situation within the State.

More recently, Arunachal Pradesh State has been noticed for its remarkable natural environment. The state, being one of the hot spots of biodiversity in the

world, harbors various kinds of useful natural resources such as the materials for medicine, food, or handicraft. The flora and fauna also include rare plants and animals, which attract not only natural scientists but also many domestic and foreign tourists. The natural environment of the State is so valuable and attractive that the government begins to manage it for conservation purpose by establishing protection forests or by prohibiting local people from collecting certain rare plants and animals. This policy toward environmental conservation will also be accelerated by increasing flooding and land slide which damage the local livelihood and infrastructure.

Dunkarpa Welfare Association was established at such political, environmental and socio-economic situation of the State. The activities of the association, supported by the government fund, aim to provide the chance of school education, job for cash income and other social services to the Brokpa community. So far, most Brokpa children do not go to school, because they accompany their parents during the move to high



Photo 1 Brokpa's temporary house and grazing land surrounded by *Abies* tree forest at 3500m a.s.l., Dirang Circle, West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh. July 25, 2007.



Photo 2 A Brokpa woman milking of Dzomo at 3500m a.s.l., Dirang Circle, West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh. September 3, 2008.



Photo 3 A Brokpa couple, Dirang Circle, West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh. September 3, 2008.

altitude grazing land. The income source of Brokpa has only been the periodical trading of cheese, butter or wool products at the cost of trekking on the long mountain trail. In addition, Brokpa live in such a remote place that they can not receive the ration of foods distributed by the government. Moreover, the younger generation of the Brokpa's community prefers salaried jobs or even daily wage earners to hard working of livestock grazing at high altitude land. To cope with these practical problems in Brokpa's livelihood, the association is now constructing the site for permanent settlement, school education, and human and animal health service along the roadside 2 km far from Melak Mu village. The site is called New Melak Mu village, where Brokpa of Melak Mu village are supposed to migrate to live. For their obtaining regular cash income, the association is planning to construct a milk processing factory around the site. It is also supposed that the Brokpa's permanent settlement at the roadside enables them to access marketing network easily, and contributes to environmental conservation through decreasing the human impact on the high altitude forest land.

Toward the Development in Line with the Local Context

Thus, the high altitude land where Brokpa live is subject to various impact from the recent political, environmental, and socio-economic situation in Arunachal Pradesh. The activities of Dunkarpa Welfare Association aim to support the Brokpa community by providing permanent settlement at roadside, school education facilities, human and animal health service, job for gaining regular cash income, and access to marketing network. However, the cases of development projects in the other regions suggest that the livelihood with permanent settlement is not always comfortable for the pastoral people who become accustomed to seasonal moving. Although various materials and social services will be easily available at the roadside permanent settlement, sudden and compulsory change of the accustomed lifestyle may not be accompanied by mental satisfaction of Brokpa people. It should be also considered that the complete change in Brokpa's

livelihood will result in the loss of their own culture which may be essential for the sustainable development in the long-term viewpoint. Thus, it is a challenge for the action plan of High Altitude Project to support the development of Brokpa's society with ensuring their welfare.

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