

FURTHER ANNOTATIONS ON THE TIBETAN EXPRESSIONS FOR "DRAGONFLY"

M.A.J.E. KIAUTA

Department of Animal Cytogenetics and Cytotaxonomy,
University of Utrecht, Padualaan 8, Utrecht, The Netherlands

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Three Tibetan expressions for "dragonfly", viz. "*pad.ma.leb.sog*", "*bla.ma.ma.ŋi*" and "*c'u.p'a.leb*", are discussed in the context of the biological features of dragonflies. The first two of them were obtained from autochthonous Tibetan informants, and the third one from Khumbu Sherpas, Nepal. The latter is the only known expression for "dragonfly" in the Sherpa dialect. The method of linguistic field inquiry is briefly described, and a note is appended on the use of dragonfly material in the Tibetan traditional pharmacology.

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of our first note on Tibetan dragonfly nomenclature (KIAUTA-BRINK, 1976), two more Tibetan and one Sherpa expression came to our notice. All of them were mediated by Tibetan and Sherpa informants who had been shown a number of characteristic specimens. If at all, they are apparently but little used in literary texts, judging from the fact that none of them is listed in the twelve Tibetan dictionaries we have consulted (BUCK, 1969; CSOMA DE KÖRÖS, 1975; DAGYAB, 1966; DAS, 1973; DAWASAM-DUP KAZI LAMA, 1973; DHONGTHOG, 1973; GIRAUDEAU, 1916; GIRAUDEAU & GORÉ, 1956; GOLDSTEIN, 1976; JÄSCHKE, 1972; RICHTER, 1966; SCHMIDT, 1969). The same is true of the Sherpa term though, to our knowledge, only four brief vocabularies of the Sherpa language have so far appeared (HALE, 1973; LEHMAN, 1970; PACE, 1960; SCHÖTTELNDREYER

& SCHÖTTELNDREYER, 1971). It seems worthwhile, therefore, to bring them on record.

METHOD OF THE INQUIRY AND BACKGROUND OF THE INFORMANTS

The informants were shown a number of dead (and usually mounted) specimens of different morphological types of dragonflies, along with a collection of more or less similar looking representatives of other insect orders. In order to check the ability of the informant to distinguish between various orders, as well as to avoid any suggestion as to the identity of the taxa shown, morphologically similar forms, pertaining to different orders, were shown in groups, e.g. a hyaline-winged zygopteran along with a transparent-winged large neuropteran, an anisopteran with coloured wings with a butterfly, etc.

The inquiries have been carried out in Nepal and at the Tibetan Monastic Institute (Rikon Gompa), Rikon, Switzerland. As informants served: – (1) the Ven. Champa Lodro (*byams.pa.glo.gros*), a native lama of Lhasa, living at present in Rikon Gompa; – (2) Mr. Kunsang Phenthok, Tibetan doctor, born in southern Tibet not far from the Nepalese border, at present owner of a Tibetan pharmacy at Chhetrapati Tole in Kathmandu and a more than locally famous Tibetan style pharmacologist, having a wide knowledge of traditional medical entomology; – (3) the Sherpas Phu Dorje, Dava Tondup and Kami Tshering, all from the village of Khumjung, Khumbu District (Mt. Everest region), Nepal.

The informants also wrote down the name stated (in Tibetan characters), though in the case of the Sherpas their spelling of Tibetan was erroneous and is given here in the emended form.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERMS

བད་མ་ལེབ་ཤོག་

PAD.MA.LEB.ŚOG

The term has been furnished by Kunsang Phenthok. It is a compositum of *pad.ma* = waterlily, lotus, and *p'ye.(ma).leb.(śog)* = butterfly, moth, Hence, it could be translated as the "butterfly of the lotus".

According to JÄSCHKE (1972), *pad.ma* denotes mostly "the blue species", while *pad.mo* seems to stand for "the white kind". The "waterlily" and the "(sacred) lotus", both denoting the *pad.ma*, are used as synonyms in most dictionaries, therefore a brief botanical comment will be certainly useful in this place (cf. also CHANDRA, 1971, No. 162).

According to HOOKER (1973b) there are two species of the Linnaean genus *Lotus* (order Leguminosae, family *Papilionaceae*) in the flora of the Indian Subcontinent. *L. corniculatus* L. var. *japonicus* Regel is the only one of them occurring in Nepal (cf. e.g. KITAMURA, 1955), but it is so sporadic, that it does not have any folk name in Nepali (SUWAL, 1969). It is a decumbent or ascending herb, with yellow flowers in a long-peduncled umbel. It does not seem very likely that it has any vernacular name in Tibetan.

The perennial aquatic herbs, some of which are commonly called "lotus", belong to the family *Nymphaeaceae* (waterlilies, order Polycarpicaceae), should thus, not be confused with the papilionacean genus *Lotus*. The family is represented in the Indian Subcontinent by a number of genera, e.g. *Nelumbium*, *Nymphaea* and *Victoria*. These include a number of white flowering species (e.g. HOOKER, 1973a). The seeds of *Nelumbium nucifera* Gaertn. are used in Tibetan traditional pharmacy under the name *sa. 'bras* (GAMMERMAN & SEMICHOV, 1963).

It is perhaps of interest that the Sikkimese compositum *srin. 'bu. pad. ma* means leech, *raktapa* in Sanskrit.

Śog. pa is an equivalent of the Sanskrit *pakṣa*, meaning wing.

It seems that *pad. ma. leb. śog* is one of the most fitting Tibetan appellations for dragonfly, since dragonflies are usually abundant and easily observed on waterlilies and similar plants overgrowing stagnant water. The name combines a characteristic of the dragonfly habitat and the morphological similarity of the insect with the butterfly, expressed also by the term *p'ye. leb. śog. bzi* (KIAUTA-BRINK, 1976) and the Sherpa term discussed below.

བླ་མ་མ་ཎི་

BLA.MA.MA.NI

This expression has been communicated by the Ven. Champa Lodro. It is a local term for aeshnid- and large libellulid-like dragonflies, peculiar to the city of Lhasa. When shown the mounted anisopteran specimens along with various damselflies and similarly looking lace-wings, the lama immediately picked out the former and enthusiastically, very spontaneously exclaimed the name. Two other lamas present, originating from other districts of Tibet, were totally unfamiliar with the term and called the insects by their usual, most widely spread name, *c'u. srin. rgyal. mo*, but the Lhasan lama immediately explained its meaning and stressed that the expression is used generally, it is true, but in Lhasa only. The term is a compositum of *bla. ma* = lama (high Tibetan monk) and *ma. ni* = mani (from Sanskrit *Om. ma. ni. pad. me. hum*).

So there probably is a large dragonfly species that appears in Lhasa suddenly and in large numbers during *sa. ga. zla. ba*, the fourth Tibetan month, i.e. between

April and June.¹ According to the Tibetan belief, during this month the merit gained by prayer is doubled (cf. DUNCAN, 1964), therefore *sa.ga.zla.ba* is a particularly favourable time for pilgrimage and religious exercise. Before the Chinese occupation of Tibet, during this period particularly numerous pilgrims could be seen in the streets and temples of the capital, among them many monks and lamas from far off regions of the country. According to our informant, it is to the coincidence of the sudden appearance, in large numbers, of the lamas and the dragonflies, that the latter owe their Lhasan name.

The background of the appellation is of particular interest for two reasons: (1) the association with the time of the occurrence of the insect, and (2) the reference to the lamas.

Bla.ma.ma.ñi is the only known Tibetan expression for dragonfly that is neither based on the latter's physical appearance and behaviour, nor related to a deity. The name is clearly based solely on the seasonal occurrence of the adult insect. In dragonfly folk nomenclature such appellations seem extremely scarce. The only other term with this background has been recorded in Nepal, where in the Kathmandu Valley *Neurothemis fulvia* (Drury) is known in Nepali as "bhadaurē-kirā", "the bhadaurē insect", *bhadaurē* being the name of the Nepalese month lasting from the middle of September to the middle of October. During this period the species emerges in countless numbers and can be seen everywhere (KIAUTA, 1973). Since the seasonal occurrence of a species is conditioned by the climatological, thus local geographic features of the territory, it is only natural that appellations of this kind are bound to have but a limited local distribution.

Considerations on the biological nature of the apparently very regular sudden massive occurrence of dragonflies in Lhasa during April-May are not a subject of this paper. The possibility should not be excluded that this fact is due to regular long-range migration rather than to local simultaneous massive emergence as is the case in *Neurothemis fulvia* in Kathmandu. Though no migratory flights of dragonflies have ever been recorded from Tibet, these are well known and common elsewhere in Central Asia and in the Himalayan region (cf. BELY-SHEV, 1973; WOJTUSIAK, 1974); therefore their occurrence in the area of Lhasa does not seem unlikely. The few species regularly involved in migrations in Central Asia are all among the largest representatives of the families *Aeshnidae* and *Libellulidae* (*Aeshna juncea* (L.), *Hemianax ephippiger* (Burm.), *Libellula*

¹ The Tibetan months are lunar, and there are several only slightly deviating calendars. New Year most often falls in February, occasionally even in the first week of March (cf. SCHUH, 1973). The fourth month, *sa.ga.zla.ba* (in Sanskrit: *vaiśākhā*), occasionally falls within April-May (ROERICH & PHUNTSHOK LHALUNGPA, 1972, p. 55) but most often in May-June, and not March-April as stated erroneously by JÄSCHKE (1972, p. 570). Given the climatological conditions prevailing in southern Tibet, this period may well be the season when the spring dragonfly migrations occur.

quadrimaculata L. and *Pantala flavescens* (Fabr.)). And it was just three of these that our informant called by this name.

Before the Chinese occupation Tibet was an "ecclesiastical state" (STEIN, 1972). Every lay official had a monastic counterpart. The monasteries, the lamas and the monks played an important role in everyday life, even more so than in the medieval Christian world. The European cultural area occasionally associated certain insects, particularly also dragonflies, with priest- and monkhood, and one would expect such associations to be even more common in the Tibetan language. This however, does not seem to be the case. Aside from our *bla.ma.ma. ni,'bu.dge.slon* (= ladybird beetle, in the Tibetan dialect of Dolpo, W. Nepal) is the only other known insect name where a kind of "clerical" overtone can be recognized (cf. JEST, 1976).

ལུ་ཕ་ལེབ་

C'U.P'A.LEB

This is the name used for dragonfly by our Sherpa informants from Khumjung. We had no chance to crosscheck it in the field, but the three Sherpas have assured us that it is used generally in Khumbu to denote the dragonfly.

The compositum contains the elements met with in other dragonfly appellations as well, viz. *c'u* = water, river, and *p'ye.(ma).leb.(sog)* = butterfly. It should be translated as "aquatic butterfly".

"Dragonfly" is one of the terms considered in the vocabularies of LEHMAN (1970), SCHÖTTELNDREYER & SCHÖTTELNDREYER (1971) and HALE (1973). The three publications seem to be based on the same work, and refer to the dialect around the village of Phaphlu in the Solo area (HALE, 1973), located at a three to four days' trek West of Khumjung. The authors were unable to trace any vernacular name for this insect there. This is all the more surprising, since Phaphlu is situated at a relatively low elevation (2364 m); consequently, dragonflies are much more common there than in the surroundings of the "high altitude" village of Khumjung (3790 m). The expression mentioned, therefore, is the only dragonfly term so far known in a Sherpa dialect.

Within the reach of the village of Khumjung there are but two species more or less commonly met with, viz. *Anotogaster nipalensis* Sel. (breeding in a rapid stream in Phunki, 3250 m, at a distance of one hour from the village), and *Pantala flavescens* (often seen patrolling at various spots in the area). It was the latter that was recognized by our Sherpas.

In the spring of 1973 and in the autumn of 1974, we have visited the area and have inquired about dragonfly names with a few villagers, showing them dead specimens of *P. flavescens*. Most of them did not recognize the dragonfly, but some have called it "*bre.byañ.ma*", this being the local name for grasshopper in

the region between Imja Dranka and Thame in the Upper Khumbu. It is interesting to note that for Phaphlu HALE (1973) has published the grasshopper's name as "*cucupeq*", whereas SCHMIDT-THOMÉ & THINGO (1975) have given the term "*ashün tserpa*" for the "Sherpas of Khumbu and Pharak". Our three Sherpa informants knew both terms, *c'u.p'a.leb* and *bre.byañ.ma*, and were very positive as to the difference.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF DRAGONFLY MATERIAL IN THE TIBETAN PHARMACOLOGY

In our first note in this series (KIAUTA-BRINK, 1976) we have made reference to the "aquatic insect" used as one of the eighteen ingredients of the *glañ.c'en.bco.brgyad* medicament against "convulsions, choleric cramps, swellings and lupus", as described by RECHUNG RINPOCHE JAMPAL KUNZANG (1973), and listed in his Index as "dragonfly (?)". The original Tibetan pharmacological recipe has appeared on page 18 of the printed blockprint-form edition, *smān.sbyor.dgos.'dod.kun.'byoñ.bdud.rtsi.bum.bzañ*, published by Mr. D.C. Tashigangpa, B.P.O. Nemo, Leh, Ladakh. With the kind help of Dr. F. Meyer (Strasbourg) we have examined a copy in the possession of Mr. Kunsang Phenthok (Kathmandu), and found no expression that could be translated as "dragonfly". In addition, Mr. Phenthok assured us, that no dragonfly is used as an ingredient in this or any other medicament known to him. It seems likely, therefore, that there are different manuscript (or even blockprint) versions of the *glañ.c'en.bco.brgyad* text, or that the dragonfly is listed erroneously in the Rinpoche's Index.

Recently, KESANG TENZIN (1976) published an English list of the same eighteen ingredients (but in a different sequence) of the same medicament, given in his transcription as "*lenchen chobgya*", and prescribed for "convulsions, choleric cramps, swellings and skin ulcer". In his list the "aquatic insect" stands without any reference to the dragonfly.

The nomenclatural problem could be solved solely by the examination of the two original texts, used by the two Tibetan authors. We did try to contact the Ven. Rechung Rinpoche (Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim) and Mr. Kesang Tenzin (Tibetan Review, New Delhi), but have so far failed to get in touch with either of them. Since, to our knowledge, the Rechung Rinpoche's reference is the only reference to a dragonfly used in the Tibetan materia medica, we mention here the possibility of an incorrect translation in order to avoid the introduction of any misunderstandings into the literature.

Although it does not seem unlikely that the Chinese *Pen Tshao* could have exercised a certain influence on Tibetan pharmacology, any positive evidence to this effect is still lacking. Anyway, there is no evidence that any of its sections has ever been translated into Tibetan.

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